

A Grateful Consulate

James Wyatt

From set *Kaladesh*

The metal-mage Tezzeret intended to make an example of Pia Nalaar by facing her in a public contest. But the Planeswalkers of the Gatewatch, drawn to Kaladesh by Tezzeret's presence here, interrupted the contest and freed Pia Nalaar from Consulate custody. But Tezzeret's schemes are never straightforward, and even the public spectacle had another purpose—as Dovin Baan is learning now.

Dovin Baan shook his head, annoyed. All around him, a deeply flawed plan was unfolding in utter chaos.

Throughout the fairgrounds, Enforcer-Chief Ranaj's soldiers were seizing inventions in their characteristically clumsy fashion, with automatons lending an unsubtle threat to back up the enforcers' legal authority. Arguments had erupted on every side, scuffles were breaking out here and there, and inventors were loudly expressing the expected range of emotions, from outraged fury to crushing despair. And through it all was an undercurrent of panic, a press of the crowd away from the arena, where Tezzeret should have been holding his demonstration against the renegade, Pia Nalaar. But Tezzeret had been carried off to the Aether Spire on a Consulate flagship, so that was where Dovin had to make his way—through all this chaos.

If Tezzeret had just consulted me before setting the enforcers to work, Dovin thought, everything would be going so much more smoothly.

"You!" he barked at a nearby enforcer whose sash identified her as an officer. "It is necessary to disperse that cluster of citizens before they opt for a more violent expression of their frustration." The officer followed his pointing hand and nodded in acknowledgement. She opened her mouth to repeat his instructions, but he wasn't finished.

"In addition, that man must exercise more caution in handling that sword, or he will sever a limb—his own or one belonging to another citizen. That cart cannot support the weight of the so-called 'mana vault' that is being loaded into it, and you must ensure that none of your enforcers are inspired to set foot inside it." He had been the one who ensured that the device, a product of the Aetherological Society, had been surrounded by a fence at the fair, for the safety of all observers. He winced as an axle broke under its weight and six strong soldiers staggered around, trying to keep it from tipping over onto any of them.

The officer ran toward that disaster, forgetting all his other warnings in her haste, and Dovin sighed. It was up to him, then, to prevent the next disaster. He hurried toward the knot of restive inventors, grabbing two enforcers by the elbow as he drew near.

"Move along your way, citizens," he said. "For your own safety." He shoved the two soldiers ahead of him, and they started guiding people away. Good. Next.

Ah, too late again! The oaf with the sword had already cut himself. Fortunately, the wound was much less serious than it could have been, and someone was already kneeling beside him, tying a tourniquet

above the wound on his arm. Dovin nodded, satisfied that the care was sufficient—but still irritated that it was necessary.

Nearby, an inventor cradled an elegant thopter device in her arms as if it were a child. As an enforcer stepped toward her, Dovin saw immediately how it would all play out: the enforcer would wrest it from her arms, the inventor would shriek her anger and try to grab it back, and the Bastion automaton that lumbered up behind the enforcer would have to restrain her. Would it take that much longer to do it right? Show your badge, explain your purpose, promise to treat it with the greatest care, ensure that the inventor's name was attached to it.

But apparently that was too much to ask. Before he could make his way there, the scene played out exactly as Dovin had known it would, and the automaton had to hold the inventor at bay until she pulled away and stormed off in the other direction, clearly prepared to take action.



Confiscation Coup | Art by Joseph Meehan

It was a flawed plan, poorly executed. He had come to expect better from the Consulate he loved. But then, he had also grown accustomed to being consulted, to having the opportunity to refine such plans before they were put into place, instead of scrambling to clean up the mess left behind. The Consulate had recognized his talents, which accounted for his rise to the position of senior inspector, overseeing new designs and setting safety standards. And Tezzeret had seen his potential as well, his ability to spot flaws not just in inventions but in the intricate complexities of the Consulate bureaucracy, the Inventors' Fair, and Tezzeret's own rise to power. Yes, Dovin had seen that, too, and subtly helped the metal-mage correct a flaw or two in his schemes. And Tezzeret rewarded him for it.

What happened? he wondered.

Had he lost Tezzeret's favor, somehow? Did Tezzeret hold the arrival of these other Planeswalkers against him? Dovin felt himself growing defensive. Contacting these Planeswalkers—this “Gate-watch”—had been the best possible course of action under the circumstances, given the information available to him at the time. Tezzeret could not blame him for that.

Well, the damage was done. The Planeswalkers were here and the enforcers were doing what Tezzeret told them to do, and it fell to Dovin Baan to fix it—as indeed he struggled to fix everything he could,

throughout the city, within the limits of his ability. His talents had their negative aspects, given how difficult it was for him to leave uncorrected the flaws that he saw. He could not stand by and watch his city, his Consulate, descend into chaos.

As he made his way closer to the spire, a blast like a trumpet sounded over the plaza. Just ahead, an exquisite lifecraft construct in the likeness of an elephant—the inventor had even gone to the trouble of reproducing its blaring sound—swung its head from side to side, knocking enforcers to the ground with its huge, spiraling tusks. The soldiers tried to duck out of the way or prod the lifecraft beast with their own spears, but the metal spearheads clanked uselessly against its metal plating. Dovin pursed his lips as he hurried toward the commotion.

I cannot be in all the places required, he thought, to ameliorate the repercussions of this inadequate decision-making.

He grabbed the arm of an enforcer and yanked him backward just in time to avoid the elephant's lashing trunk. "Listen," he said.

"I'm a little busy!" the enforcer snapped.

"If you are busy with no plan, you might as well be idle," Dovin said. "Listen and watch."

The enforcer blinked at him, confused, and Dovin took the opportunity to explain. "Watch. When a spear is thrust toward the lifecraft animal's throat, it rears up on its hind legs. Without fail. It then kicks out with its front feet. Here, tell them."

"Go for the throat!" the enforcer yelled, and one of his fellows obeyed.

With a trumpet, the elephant reared up and lashed out with both front feet, sending the obedient enforcer sprawling on the pavement. Dovin sighed.

"Look there," he said, pointing at its belly. "The quality of the work is shoddy, typical for renegade construction. A cable near the hips is exposed whenever it rears up in that fashion. All that is required is to sever the cable, and the entire automaton will collapse."



Bastion Mastodon | Art by Victor Adame Minguez

The enforcer nodded and inched back into the fray, trying to get close enough to do as Dovin had instructed. Dovin crossed his arms, keeping one eye on the elephant as he scanned the crowd for the renegade lifecrafter responsible for this untidiness.

“Ah,” he said, spotting an elf in the crowd.

He stepped forward and took hold of a different enforcer’s shoulders. “The task of severing the cable falls to you,” he said in her ears. He shifted her a little to the left, just as his most recent pupil provoked the elephant into rearing up again.

“Go now,” he said, gently pushing her forward.

The elephant turned slightly at her approach, lashing out with its trunk. She dodged it—*well done*, Dovin thought—and managed to catch the exposed cable on her polearm. Shifting her grip, she yanked, the blade cut the cable, the elephant fell—

And its trunk sent the elf lifecrafter sprawling to the ground.

Dovin pointed him out to the enforcers. “Take the elf into custody to answer for this disturbance.” And he strode on—*No more distractions!*—to the Aether Spire, to find Tezzeret.

Dovin reached the spire and saw Tezzeret striding down a hall, barking orders. He hurried to catch up with the head judge and put a hand on Tezzeret’s arm.

He yanked his hand back from the feel of jagged metal under the sleeve. Of course: he had previously assumed that the glowing claw at the end of the sleeve was a distinct device, perhaps mounted to Tezzeret’s arm, but now he realized it was *part* of the arm—based on his brief touch, he could extrapolate the shape of it under the loose cloth. A *replacement* limb? And far from elegant in its aesthetics, though it appeared highly functional. Interesting, and odd that Dovin had not noticed it before. Had Tezzeret been hiding it?

“What is it, Baan?” Tezzeret said. His posture shouted impatience, even as his face attempted to project an unshakable calm.

“What is *this*?” Dovin countered, sweeping his arm behind him, to encompass all the chaos of the Inventors’ Fair being dismantled. “What possible circumstances could render these draconian measures necessary?”

Tezzeret pointed over Dovin’s shoulder with his metal hand. “I take it you didn’t see what happened in the arena,” he said.

“Your invention contest with the renegade? An overdramatic move with endless potential for disaster, which I believe I brought to your attention as soon as you made your intention known to me.”

“I was referring specifically to the gang of six Planeswalkers who *interrupted* that duel and disappeared with the renegade.” Tezzeret’s face clearly showed his frustration now. “I don’t remember you outlining that possible disaster.”

Dovin counted on his fingers—there was the younger Nalaar, of course, who had been complicating the range of potential outcomes since her arrival on the plane. The telepath, the elf, the warrior, the necromancer...he held his smallest finger. Who was the sixth?



Dramatic Reversal | Art by Eric Deschamps

“They have emboldened the renegades,” Tezzeret said. “The situation is getting out of control.”

“But was all this necessary? Why confiscate their inventions, and in such a clumsy and heavy-handed manner? A quick survey of the square should make it clear that these actions serve only to further provoke and, as you say, embolden those who would resist Consulate authority.”

“Relax, Baan. It’s not as though we’re stealing their inventions. We’re safeguarding them. We wouldn’t want such priceless inventions damaged in a renegade attack.”

“There’s no need to sway my opinion on the matter, of course, but—”

“And these devices aren’t thoroughly tested, as you well know. They’re not safe. We can’t leave that much unlicensed technology just lying around the city.”

“Such a thing would be irresponsible, of course,” Dovin said. “But it would have been more productive to explain that rationale. Instead of sending Ranaj’s enforcers to wrest devices from the hands of their grief-stricken owners, we could have sent bureaucrats with forms to complete, complicated assurances, soothing nonsense words.”

“There’s no *time*,” Tezzeret snarled under his breath.

Interesting, Dovin thought. Tezzeret’s whole posture changed, just for a moment—as if a fit of rage had seized him, squeezed his body, and as quickly released him.

Dovin adopted a soothing tone. “I’m sure that taking extra time to preserve to peace and public safety is entirely worthwhile. It is certainly true that some of these devices have enormous potential to damage person and property—”

“Yes, tremendous potential. Don’t you see? It’s far better that Consulate inquiries take this technology and explore its potential, rather than leaving that work in the hands of who-knows-who. We can develop it, refine it, perfect it.”

Dovin paused for a moment. “Yes, of course. Such development was essential to the plan for the Inventors’ Fair from the beginning. The advancement of technology for the betterment of society, under careful Consulate supervision. So why—”

“And who better than you to lead that effort?”

Dovin blinked, momentarily speechless. “Me?” Of course that was the logical choice. But a moment ago, he had been thinking that he’d fallen out of Tezzeret’s favor somehow. Now Tezzeret was offering him a position of tremendous importance.

“But before I can entrust you with such a momentous task, you need to clear something up. These other Planeswalkers. You brought them here?”

“Well, in a strictly technical sense, I did not, no. I invited some of them here as a safeguard against a potential fault I identified in the plans for the Inventors’ Fair—specifically the renegade danger, embodied in Pia Nalaar. But the Planeswalkers refused my invitation. Only then did the young Nalaar get wind of my invitation and come here on her own. I brought only one—the elf, Nissa.”

“And here is my cause for concern, Baan,” Tezzeret said, putting his hand of flesh and bone on Dovin’s shoulder. “I value your foresight. Your interaction with these Planeswalkers seems like an uncharacteristic mistake.”

A mistake? Dovin bristled. “In fact, my decision was optimal, given the information you opted to share with me. Presented with the danger of a renegade threat, who better to confront such a danger than a group of self-professed heroes with such monumental power at their disposal? The odds that they would actually side with the renegades were infinitesimal—were it not for the existence of what appear to be personal grudges, of which I had no foreknowledge.”

“And this is the result,” Tezzeret said. “They challenge me in the arena. I am forced to move more quickly—so clumsily, as you rightly said. They forced my hand.” He flexed his metal hand, and Dovin took an involuntary step back.

“You need to fix this, Baan. You’re right that these events will stir up the renegades. So stop them. I need a secure inquirium where I can work without fear of renegade attack. You need the confiscated inventions stored and safely catalogued for your own explorations. We need the Bastion on high alert, ready to face any threat that arises. We need to remind them who is in charge here.”

“You need an inquirium?” Dovin asked. “What for?”



Rashmi, Eternities Crafter | Art by Magali Villeneuve

“I have my own research to pursue,” Tezzeret said, continuing down the hall. Dovin hurried to catch up. “Rashmi’s work for the fair had staggering implications. Larger than this little rebellion, larger even than Kaladesh. That will be my focus. The rest of the inventions are yours.”

Really? Dovin thought. He had not seen anything else at the fair capture Tezzeret’s attention in this way. “Very well,” he said.

“After you clean up the rest of this mess.”

“Of course.” *First*, he thought, *the Planeswalkers*.

Tezzeret turned and strode off without another word, and Dovin beckoned to the nearest enforcer officer.

“Assemble a veteran squad of soldiers,” he instructed, “with a measure of skill, if you please, and pursue the...the strangers, the renegades from the arena. Heed me: they have flaws that will ensure their failure if properly exploited.” He counted them off on his fingers. “They lack a clear leader, so they can be pulled in different directions. The young Nalaar is volatile and easily provoked into reckless action. The black-haired woman is not fully trusted by some of the others, especially the soldier. They have a sad belief that they’re heroes, and can be counted on to act as such. They will try to protect their weaker associates, such as Oviya Pashiri. And they expect that they will win with a minimum of cost or sacrifice. Exploit those weaknesses in every way you can. Go!”

The moment he stepped back outside, Dovin’s head swam. The plaza was even more crowded now, presumably with members of the arena audience—many of whom were inventors who were now discovering that the enforcers were laying claim to their precious inventions, or had already removed them. Dovin again shook his head at the clumsiness of it all. He didn’t even need to look around the plaza to sense all the things that were going wrong—or were about to. It was a mess, as Tezzeret had said, and through no fault of his own. But Tezzeret had entrusted the task of cleaning it up to him, and nobody—in his humble but precise estimation—was better suited to the job.

He wound his way through the plaza again, this time in no hurry, gathering a handful of Bastion officers around him as he went. After all that had already been done, the most likely point of failure now was the turning of public opinion against the Consulate, and that was not a single potential point of failure but dozens, threatening the integrity of the whole delicate machine that was Ghirapur. Scattered clumps of discontented inventors registered on his attention like biting flies—a problem for the enforcers to handle, under his guidance. Gently dispersing them with pleasant reassurances was probably enough at this point, but a few strategic arrests would also be necessary. He sent officers off to each problem spot.

Other issues were better suited to individual intervention. He made his way to the scene of an emotional flare-up, a hot-headed human inventor loudly making his displeasure known to a dwarf enforcer while a pair of Bastion automatons tried to lift an elaborate device whose purpose was not immediately apparent.

“Perhaps I may be of assistance,” he said, interposing himself between the inventor and the enforcer. In such situations, Dovin had found, the characteristic vedalken calm could defuse the powerful emotions displayed so prominently by other races.

“You have no *right* !” the inventor yelled, bringing his reddened face entirely too close to Dovin’s and jabbing a finger into his sternum.

“I can certainly understand your attachment to this marvelous device,” Dovin said, running a hand over the invention’s intricate metalwork. He understood its purpose now—it was designed to fabricate thopters. Clever. Of course, its many flaws also became immediately apparent, but this was not the time to enumerate them. “Truly amazing work. Your application of Dujari’s principle here is ingenious.” It was; he made a mental note to examine the device further once it was safely stored in a laboratory. *After* the dangerous aether leak, sure to attract gremlins, was closed. “Tremendous potential.”

The inventor’s scowl softened, and his shoulders straightened with pride. “Thank you.”

“I do assure you, sir, that your device will be treated with the utmost care while it remains in Consulate hands.”

“But—”

“Of course you are familiar with the process of submitting inventions to the Consulate for safety review and careful inspection. And surely you recognize that under such extraordinary circumstances as these”—he made a vague but sweeping gesture that could be taken to mean anything from the Inventors’ Fair itself to this moment of Consulate confiscation—“the process must be altered somewhat. But the result will be the same. And your work might very well be the foundation for the next breakthrough in fabrication technology. The Consulate is grateful.”



Whirlmaker | Art by Victor Adame Minguez

Without waiting for a response from the inventor, Dovin turned to the enforcer, who had been watching the exchange with a scowl. “Now, I recommend that you secure the services of at least one more automaton to move this device with the care it deserves. If you wait, I will send them to you.”

The dwarf enforcer looked as though waiting were absolutely the last thing she wanted to do, but Dovin fixed her with a stern eye to clarify that his polite phrasing should not be taken as permission to refuse.

This was the kind of finesse that Ranaj’s enforcers lacked, and Dovin very much feared that the result could be disastrous.

Similar exchanges slowed his journey from the Aether Spire all the way to the storage facility where the inventions were being taken. He calmed a half-dozen inventors, dispersed another three groups of renegades-in-the-making, and helped a containment team deal with a clutch of gremlins that had descended on the lifecraft elephant when it started leaking aether from its severed cable.

In contrast to the anxiety and tension of the city, though, a very different sort of energy filled the storage facility, and it immediately quickened Dovin’s pulse. Top scientists and inventors from every Consulate inquirium in the city had been sent here with a single purpose: to undertake the monumental task of cataloging, safely storing, and investigating all of these inventions. Contained in these walls was the potential for a forward leap in technology on the same scale as the Great Aether Boom that had launched the current age of innovation, six decades ago.

And he was in charge of it all. Any doubts he had harbored about Tezzeret’s good will vanished.

He could hardly wait to get started. As soon as the Planeswalkers were taken into custody and the renegades quieted. *Soon*.

Increased Bastion presence. Curfews, perhaps. If necessary, a constraining of the aether supply to curtail renegade activity. And given the flaws of the Gatewatch as a group, they would be captured and confined in no time. Security and order would be restored.

And then all this would be his to explore.



Dovin Baan | Art by Tyler Jacobson