

Barrin's Tall Tale

Adam Lee

From set *Dragon's Maze*

There he was again.

Barrin Grevik wondered why that strange man in the hooded cloak had taken such an interest in the cornerstone with the odd etching that marked the edge of his shop and the intersecting alley off of Tin Street.

Barrin remembered seeing the strange symbols carved into that stone as a young child, when he accompanied his grandfather to the market to sell their floor coverings, brasswork, and craft-goods. The Greviks had been market people for generations and had run the same spot on Tin Street for as long as the family could remember.

The cornerstone had always been there, but it was often covered up with rolls of carpeting or stacks of boxes containing trinkets and sundries for sale. Occasionally, the odd passerby remarked on it or an outsider wondered at its significance or meaning, but no one really knew. Barrin's mother said it was commemorating the opening of Tin Street—which would have made the stone frightfully old—and that explanation suited Barrin just fine. Barrin was not interested in the ancient history of Ravnica or the weird, magical rituals of the guilds; he just wanted to make a tidy profit, feel superior to others, eat well, and ignore the general plight of the less fortunate.

That's why there was something about this stranger that chafed his well-groomed hide and gave him the unsettling feeling—this hooded man reeked of a certain kind of trouble that threatened the structured bliss of his shop.

"Can I help you?" Barrin felt a slight bit of irritation in his voice and decided he liked it. He was, after all, irritated.

As soon as the man looked up at Barrin, he felt less irritated and more uneasy.

It was Barrin's experience that most people in the market rarely made eye contact and talked behind a wall of feigned decorum—like Barrin himself did—but this cloaked stranger looked directly at him with eyes that held him like a vise. Barrin did not have the vocabulary to describe what he felt, so the streams of emotions and thoughts were relegated to something that landed between confusion and fear.

"Yes," the stranger said. "That stone. Do you know anything about the markings on it?"

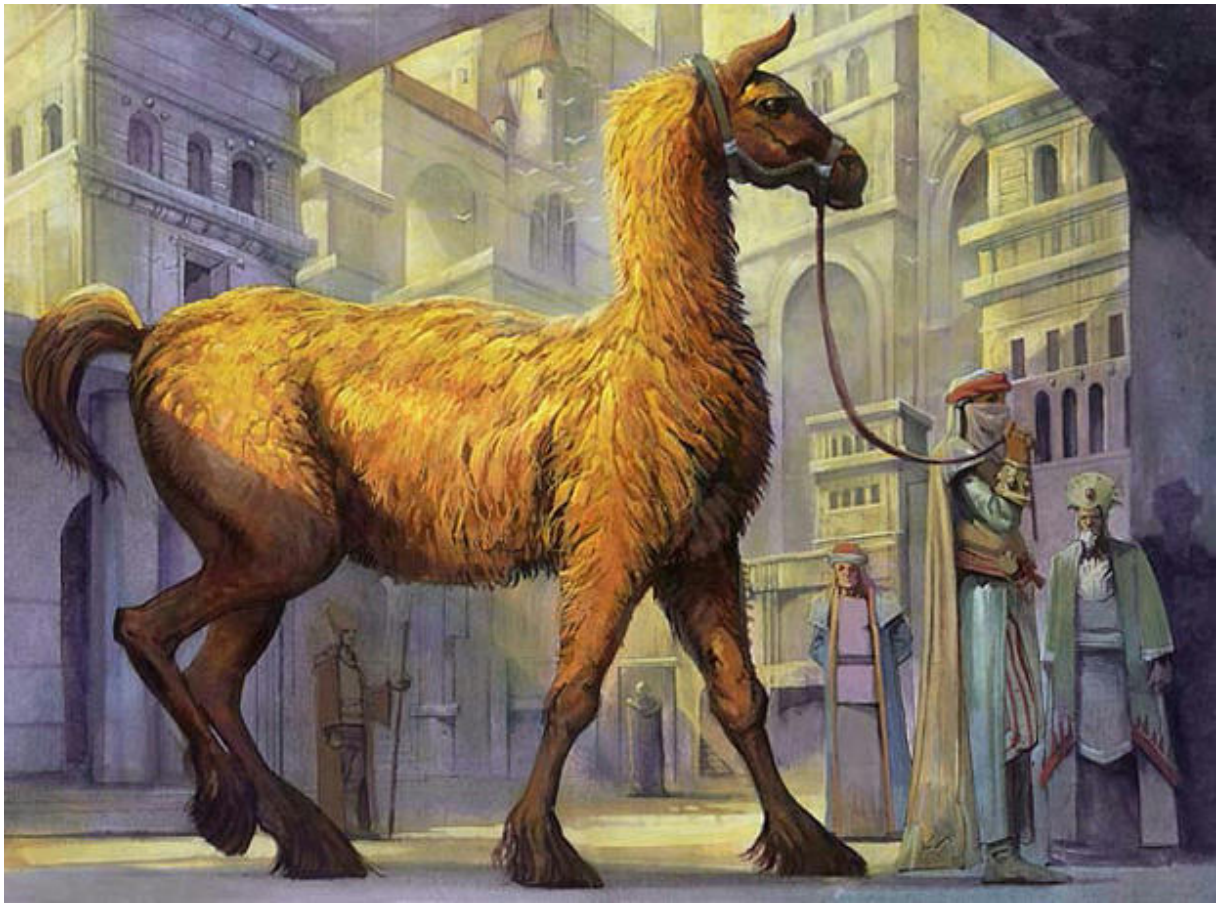
Barrin intended to tell the young man to go take a long walk down a short street when he found himself talking all about the history of the stone, not leaving out a single detail of the family speculation about its origins and possible meanings. Barrin even told the man about his great uncle Estovar's theory that it was put there by the Azorius soon after the signing of the first Guildpact. Of course, Uncle Estovar was as crazy as an Izzet magister, but that didn't stop Barrin from sharing that bit of family lore. He felt compelled to leave nothing out and after a good while, Barrin had disgorged the entire known history of the stone to the stranger, who listened with calm intent.

"Thank you so much," the stranger said, a hint of a smile playing across his face. He left.

After a timeless moment, Barrin's wife put her face in front of his and said, "Hey! I'm talking to you! What was that all about?"

"You're welcome?" Barrin said.

Barrin was no Boros wojek, but after that odd and somewhat unnerving encounter, he wanted to know more about the young man in the blue cloak, and he was determined to get some answers. His wife, Nila, noticed that Barrin had "that look" in his eyes and she knew something was stuck in his craw. Barrin was a determined man. His whole family was a determined lot, but Barrin was especially hard-headed. His wife called them "the dromads" when referring to her in-laws, and she lumped Barrin in with them as well. Stubborn and ornery.



Dromad Purebred | Art by Carl Critchlow

"I'm going to find out what he's up to, blasted snoop. I can't believe I told him everything about that stone. I hadn't even had a drop of bumbat all day and I was blathering on like Old Scrumpy at the tavern." Barrin was in a fine mood. His illusion of control over all his affairs had been shaken and that brought out the fight in him.

"What's got into you? He didn't steal anything." His wife put her hands on his shoulders as he sat at their kitchen table and made his lunch for the day at the shop.

"He's a Dimir, Nila. I just know it." Barrin sliced an onion with extra irritation. "I'm going to follow him to his rat's nest and find out his game." A surge of self-righteous condemnation flooded over him to help justify his witch-hunt. If someone was "a Dimir," Barrin had no problem in violating that person's basic right to privacy.

"He's not a Dimir," Nila said, and fetched a basket for Barrin's lunch. "That guild is on the up-and-up. All those rumors have got you and the rest of Tin Street in a hoopla. 'Blame the Dimir!' That's what they all say about every little thing that goes wrong around here."

"We'll see if he's on the 'up-and-up,' my little sugardove," Barrin muttered, lost in thoughts of shadowy thieves and cutthroats. "We'll see."

Barrin followed the hooded figure at a distance. He had a wojek friend and had learned a thing or two about tailing fugitives through Tin Street over their years of talking about ruffians, pickpockets, and the decline of social decency.

The hooded figure ducked into a dark alley.

Just like a Dimir miscreant, Barrin thought.

He reached into his tunic and felt the handle of an old Boros pendrek, another gift from his wojek friend. It still had a few mana charges in it and could stun a loxodon—let alone a skulking Dimir thief. He felt a rush of adrenaline surge through him. Finally, he was about to catch one of these louts and bring him to justice.

"You'll trouble Tin Street no more," Barrin muttered as he ducked into the alley.

It took a little time before Barrin's eyes grew accustomed to the dark of the alley. Scrawny cats chewed on fish heads. As Barrin moved deeper along the wet cobblestones, a Rakdos goblin jumped out from behind a pile of garbage and hissed at him with teeth filed to points.

Barrin brandished his *pendrek* and the goblin scampered off into the dark, cackling obscenities.

"Rakdos filth," Barrin said under his breath. His heart thumped within his chest.

The alley wound and twisted and Barrin thought about going back when he heard a buzzing sound followed by a flash of blue light coming from a basement window. He crept down the slick stairs that led to a stout wooden door. Carefully, he tested the latch. It wasn't locked. He slowly opened it to reveal the hooded stranger staring at a ghostlike image of the Tenth District, spread out before him like an exquisite model. A bright beam of red energy traced a series of angular lines that led along Tin Street, up several causeways, and eventually leading up the tall tower of—

"The old Azorius legislative archives," Barrin heard himself whisper.

"Exactly," the man in the cloak said, not turning to face Barrin.



Art by Jaime Jones

Barrin had completely forgotten his *pendrek* and his bluster. He could only look at the crackling image of the Tenth District and this mage who pondered it. The other end of the bright red line originated at —

“My shop.” Barrin pointed at the glowing map.

The hooded man turned his head and looked at him. “The cornerstone by your shop is actually an Azorius waypoint, an ancient series of clues left by the Azorius guildmages. They are points along the Implicit Maze, and I have to find all of them.”

“Implicit Maze?” Barrin said. “What is all this... this map, waypoints? Why haven’t I heard of this?” Barrin didn’t like to not be in “the know.”

“It’s complicated, Barrin.” The man said his name as if they were old friends. “I’m not sure what the maze is myself. I would have liked more time to study and gather knowledge on its exact function and power, but the Dimir are forcing my hand to act fast.”

“Ah! Dimir! I knew it!” Barrin pulled out his *pendrek*. Finally, something he could grab on to.

“Yes, but they are just the catalyst.” The mage seemed unfazed by Barrin and his *wojek* weapon. “The other guilds are going to destroy one another unless I can run the maze in the right sequence.” The blue-robed mage got up and put his palms together. His glowing map blinked out like a glow-bug.

“You aren’t a Dimir?” Barrin said.

“No.” The mage smiled at him as he gathered up some scattered papers. “Sorry.”

“Who are you, then?” Barrin pointed his *pendrek*, but some instinct told him it was like pointing a stick at a Boros blaze commando.



Art by James Ryman

“My name is Jace Beleren,” the mage said from under the hood of his cloak. Then, from within the shadow of the cowl, the mage’s eyes glowed a baleful blue, lighting his grin. “And you are not going to remember a single moment of this, my foolish friend.”

Barrin woke the next day.

“You must have had a good chat with Old Scrumpy,” Nila said. “You came in like a Golgari shambler and headed straight for bed.”

“Was I out with Scrump?” Barrin couldn’t remember a thing. “Guess I must’ve been. But one thing’s for sure, I’m never drinking bumbat again.”

