

The Ascension of Reza

Nicky Drayden

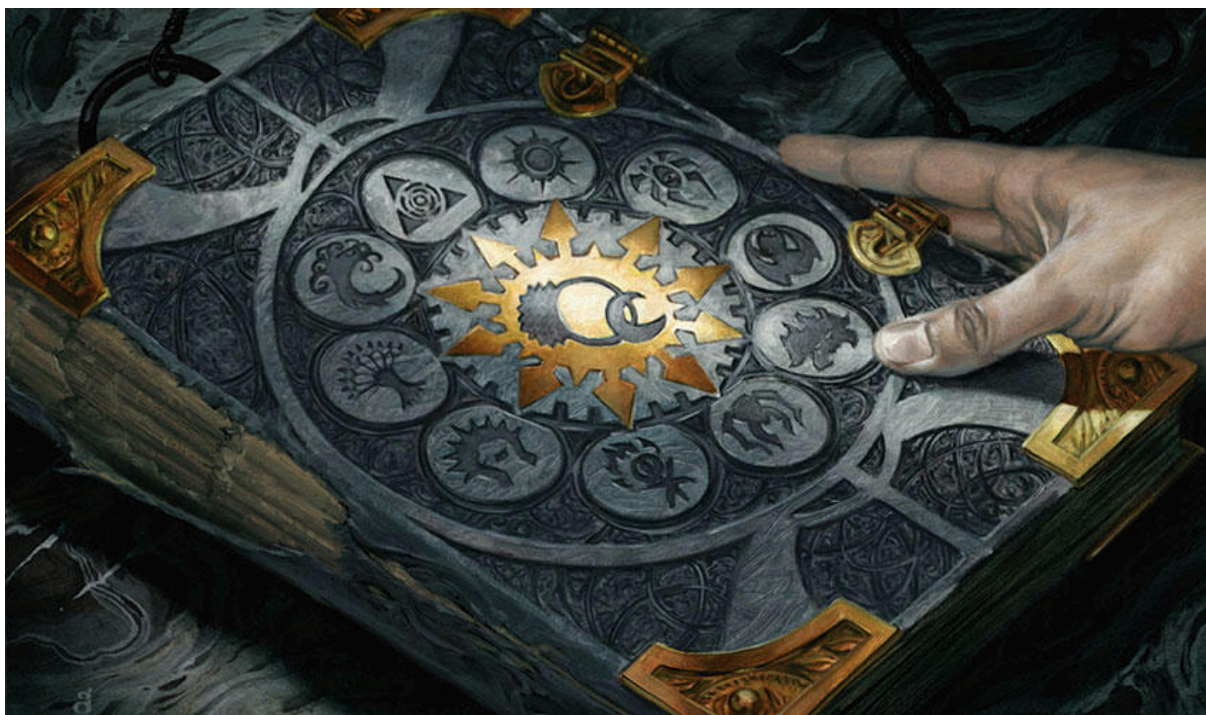
From set *Guilds of Ravnica*

Quiet mind, quiet steps.

I ascend the staircase to the Old Laws Library. I've practically memorized the route now—one hundred twelve steps across the Verity Promenade, two hundred twelve steps up to reach the Pavilion of Justice, eighty-seven steps through the stoic Halls of Reason. And now, I've only thirty-three steps left to climb, through the mists from the Cascades of Justice. Water droplets dapple my robes as the fifteen-story waterfall turns to vapor right before it reaches the main floor of the Jeleenn Column complex. If I looked down, I would see hundreds of Azorius bureaucrats and legislative members walking across the atrium in orderly lines, but I dare not look. That's the surest way to lose my footing, and with no handrails to steady me if I stumble

Quiet mind, quiet steps. Quiet mind, quiet steps.

The sprawling archway of the law library finally greets me, and I exhale the softest sigh of relief to be on level ground. I'm immediately enveloped in the aroma of dusty law books, leather-bound treasures of order and righteousness. Most lawmages in my cohort do their research in the runes library, but with histories that run as deeply as Ravnica's, it is prudent to study the origins upon which our laws were built. Here, I can see the first draft of the Guildpact—pressed under three inches of magic-treated glass and authored by Azor himself. If you look hard enough, you'll even see a fine strand of blue fur from his mane on the fifth page. The original draft had been plagued with loopholes large enough to run a fully grown worm through, but slowly and methodically, Azor had scratched them out, red notes in the margins the color of old blood. In my own quest toward finding perfection through law, I have come to appreciate this process of rooting through the past to find weak spots so we can afford ourselves the most orderly of futures.



Tome of the Guildpact | Art by: Randy Gallegos

“Pull these for me,” I whisper to the homunculus who tends to the library. I hand him a list of the texts I’ll be working from today. As he scampers off, I crane my neck, peeking over the walls of the study hutches in search of Tagan. She hadn’t been in her chambers when I’d checked, and my impatience was too thin to wait for her return. The inaccessibility of the Old Laws Library makes it a favorite place for sphinxes, so chances are I’ll find her here. Finally, I spot my mentor’s blue and brown brindle fur, then surreptitiously enter the adjacent hutch.

The homunculus lays the books upon my desk along with a translation sigil to sort out antiquated terms. He signs to ask me whether I’d like page-turning service as well, but I wave him away and pour myself into the section where I’d left off during my last visit. It’s hard to concentrate with Tagan so close, knowing she knows how my latest law rune was received by the Senate. The loophole I’d closed was a major one, and the new law I’d drafted consisted of three pages of the most judiciously convoluted legalese, including fifteen double negatives, twelve triple negatives, seven footnotes, and twenty-eight qualifications, all fitting into a single, perfect sentence.

I fight back my nerves and my desires to pry Tagan for answers, and then lose myself in an old map of the Tenth District as I wait for my mentor to notice me. I trace my finger along the Transguild Promenade noting the difference five hundred years has made. Many of the neighborhoods featured on the map have now fallen at the hands of the Gruul. The Ghost Quarter was three times the size it is now. Zonot Seven was but an unassuming lake. And further upstream is a fully functioning Azorius enclave—a once-thriving community that now sits in ruins, thanks to a thirty-block tract of land run by rogue Izzet chemisters called the Thinktank.

The Thinktank Jurisdictional Fallacy was a favorite problem set given to first-year lawmages. No one in my cohort had solved it, and no one has in the many years since. Four guilds have expressed their claim to the area the Thinktank rests upon:

It’s a fruitless exercise. There will never be an agreement on who has proper jurisdiction. The last time someone tried to lay a lawful claim to it, a war had nearly broken out. So now it sits, largely ungoverned, unpoliced, and unserved through a series of unmendable loopholes.

I turn the page, and as if to spite me, the edge of the paper rips through my skin—one of the many hazards of being a lawmage. “By Azor’s immaculate mane!” I curse, a whole two levels above a whisper. Practically shouting in library tones.

“Reza?” comes Tagan’s voice from the hutch over. She pops her head up, hangs her paws over the divider and looks down at me. “Peace and order to you,” she whispers in greeting.

“Tranquil tidings to you as well,” I say, and then we leave a moment for the silence to stir so we can order our thoughts. The rules of etiquette dictate that during a non-arranged meeting within an institution of learning between lawmages of disparate rankings, the inferior should be the first to engage the conversation after greetings, but from the way Tagan’s tail is whipping, I can tell she is eager to bestow news upon me, so I defer to her with a nod of my head.

“The Senate has ruled upon your law rune concerning the closure of the identity loophole,” she says.

“And?” I ask, my heart beating so loudly in my chest, I think the homunculus will come over and shush me.

“They adored it. So intricate. So comprehensive. Master Baan said it was the most brilliant law he’s seen this month. It’s being sent to the sky scribes as we speak.”



Dovin’s Acuity | Art by: Bastien L. Deharme

“He said those words? Those exact words?” I can feel my cheeks warming, the blue of my skin flushing purple with humbled honor.

“I wouldn’t dare paraphrase Master Baan without qualifying it first.”

A wave of nausea overcomes me. This is my first law to be written in the skies above New Prahv. It was my most complicated find, and the one of which I was most proud. I knew from the moment I found the loophole that it’d get attention, but a skyscribing? So quickly? Adulations from my cohort will be forthcoming. Thanks to all the hours I’d put into writing that law, the streets would become more orderly. Citizens would feel safer walking the streets of Ravnica, even at night. Perfection would be one step closer.

“You’ve got Baan’s attention.” She hops over the wall and lands, perfectly silent. Then she draws up a privacy spell around us. If I weren’t her mentee, I wouldn’t have noticed her casting it—an ever so slight twitch in her front right paw. “Now’s the time to follow up with something equally impressive. What else are you working on?”

I’d given so much of myself getting the last law written, I hadn’t had time to spare a thought about what was next. “Well,” I say grasping for ideas. “There’s always the Thinktank Jurisdictional Fallacy “

She arches her back in a stretch, looking bored. “First-year riddles aren’t going to impress Baan,” she says. “What else?”

I rattle off some ideas to her, but I’ve already lost her attention. She’s more taken with the translation sigil sitting on the edge of my desk. She bats at it with her paw until it slides over the edge. I catch it before it hits the floor. I keep the sigil clenched in my fist. If I put it back, she’d just swat it off again, but that thought nudges an idea forth about repeat offenders.

“I noticed a possible loophole when I was researching last week a clause that ties the average length of prison sentences to recidivism rates. Theoretically, we could end up having negative-term sentences should the rate fall low enough. I would have followed up earlier, but it referenced an ancient Azorius Law, 394-H, and I’d need to have someone fetch the corresponding scrolls from the Historical Archives to confirm.”

Tagan perks at this. “Theoretical loopholes are easy to sensationalize. We can get the populous riled up about how we averted near disaster within the prison system, and it’ll be easier to justify our salaries. It’ll take days for the librarians to approve the interlibrary transfer, though. You should visit the Historical Archives yourself, while your rune is still new in the sky.”

She sees my hesitation. Not the reaction she was expecting.

“Don’t tell me you’ve never been outside of New Prahv,” Tagan says.

“Of course, I have!” I say. It’s been several years. Eight, to be exact, but sometimes I get so entrenched in the pressings of order, I forget that Ravnica exists as more than a theoretical world on which I enact laws.

The Historical Archives aren’t far. And it would be spectacular to see the lumbering archive golems that haunt those long-abandoned stacks. Talk about walking law history. But then numbers start spinning in my head: two laws in the sky in the same week. Twenty minutes’ ride by griffin. Two-hundred feet above the ground. Flying over the heads of thousands and thousands of Ravnicans.

Quiet mind. Quiet mind.

No need to panic. Everything will be fine.

The flight requisitions officer takes my paperwork, verifies my identity rune, and then escorts me to the griffin stable located in one of the highest domes in New Prahv. Seven open bays lead out to the city, serving as an aerohub for archons, sphinxes, and the sliver and blue surveillance thopters whooshing in and out, soundlessly flapping wings of pulsating rune light.

“There’s a lot of chaos out there,” the requisitions officer says to me when she notices I’ve stopped walking forward, stunned by the sheer vastness of the city below. “Is this your first time flying?”

I nod.

“You’ll do fine. It is a solemn duty we must uphold, but it is one worthy of our time and our efforts.”

At the mention of duty, my legs stop wobbling, and I'm able to climb upon the griffin. I'm unsteady at first, but the officer assures me that this beast does well with inexperienced handlers. I find my confidence and my balance as I make sure both of my satchels sit perfectly aligned, containing the necessary reference texts that Tagan let me borrow from her personal library. Now I'm ready to strike out for the Archive and make a name for myself in this guild. Seconds later, I'm whipping out of the bay and into the sky. The griffin dips sharply, then banks left and rises. It cuts right through one of the new law runes above the Guildhall. There are so many, it'd be impossible to avoid them all. I look around for mine and shiver when I see it.

Azorius Law 3455-J

Failure to submit proper identity

And then the runes thin, and Ravnica comes into view, taking my breath away. The city stretches as far as the eye can see, a patchwork of color and styles, buildings ranging from massive and bulky to thin and stately and everything in between. But as diverse as its people are, they are all bound together by the same laws under the same sky. Yes, the Azorius Senate hasn't many friends among the other guilds, but it is not our duty to nurture friendships. Instead, we must focus upon preserving order, lest the entire city fall victim to disarray.



Mountain | Art by: Jonas de Ro

Ten minutes into the flight, my path is blocked by an odd swarm of thopters hanging in the air like a cloud. The griffin maneuvers around them, but then a bolt of purple electricity erupts from the ground and cuts through the sky, striking the thopter closest to us. Another thopter goes down, and now my griffin is spooked. It swerves left, right, rears back. I try to compensate so I can steady it, but my efforts make things worse, and I lose my grip.

And then I'm falling.

Frantic and running on sheer instinct, I reach for one of the thopters as I fall past it, grabbing it on the side. It slows my fall some, but not enough. It struggles with my weight, one magic-fueled wing giving out after the next, until we're both free falling.

But instead of pavement breaking my descent, my landing is cushioned—oh, I still hurt all over, and my mind is pounding, but I’m alive. The first clear thought I have is that my robes are stained. The second thought is that they’re stained with my blood. Those two bits of awful news are dwarfed when I realize exactly *what* I’ve landed in. A pile of trash. A giant pile of trash.

I feel the collective horror of all my vedalken ancestors screaming out in unison. I’ll have my bathers scrub my skin raw. I’ll incinerate these clothes and have the ashes bundled up and tossed into the deepest zonot. But I’m quite sure I’ll never be able to wipe clean this memory from my mind.

“Help!” I cry out, but it is a library whisper. “Help!” I try again, and the word breaks through my throat as I thrash about.

“You’re okay,” rumbles a deep, reassuring voice. I look up and see a large face—all scraggly red beard and oversized brass goggles—human, though if he told me he had a giant somewhere in his family tree, I’d believe him. “That was a mighty fall you took. You’re lucky to be alive.” He offers a grease-covered hand. At least I *hope* it’s grease. I reluctantly take it.

“It doesn’t feel much like luck,” I say, peeling a strip of gelatinous ooze from my cheek.

“Ah, you’re right. Seems we’ve got a mad genius around here who’s been shooting thopters out of the sky. Didn’t hurt anything, did you?”

“Just my pride, I suspect. Where am I?” I ask.

“Thinktank,” the guy says. “I’m Hendrik. My friends call me Hennie. Or Big Hen. Or B.H. Or Benny Two-Clocks on account of an incident with a fuzzy-headed blastseeker with a flair for misreading dials. Stopped my heart dead.” He pounds his chest. “But Ol’ Doc jiggered me a new one. Keeps time better than a clock in the Continuism lab!”

“I’m Reza,” I say slowly, not sure if it’s this guy that’s running my mind in circles, or just a concussion. “My associates call me Reza.” I look around beyond the pile of trash. *This* is the Thinktank? Mizzium-plated boilers coil up and down the streets, like a never-ending maze of intestines. They haven’t weathered well, and layers upon layers of metal patches are welded to each building. Dozens of pressure valves release steam and other, more nefarious, vapors into the streets, covering the neighborhood with an awful yellow haze. I can’t understand why any guild would fight over this.

“All right, Reeze. Why don’t you come home with me? We’ll get you all cleaned up and back in the sky in no time.”

“It’s Reza. And no offense, but I think it’d be more prudent if I returned to New Prahv immediately, seeing as I have no idea of your intentions toward me.”

“Suit yourself,” Hendrik says, then shuffles off down the trash pile. “You might want to mind the compost wurms, though.”

I jump up. “Compost wurms?”

“No trash service here, so we find ways to make do.”

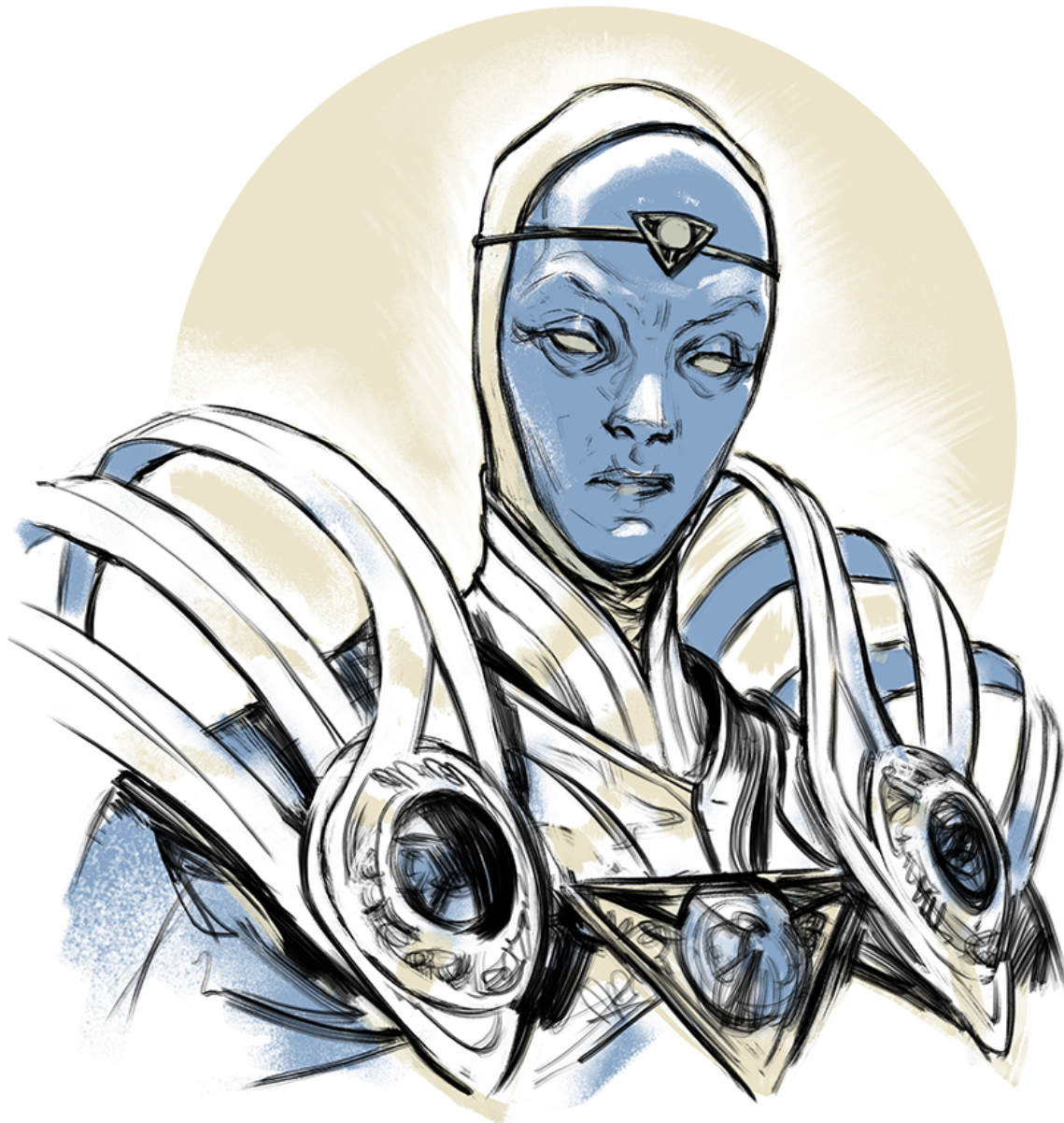
I scuttle down the trash hill, then scrutinize my thoroughly soiled robes. I can’t exactly return to New Prahv looking like this. If my associates ever caught wind that I’d fouled myself in such a manner, I’d never regain their respect. “Can you guarantee me your intentions are virtuous?” I ask Hendrik, masking the desperation in my voice with formal airs. “I won’t consent to being the test subject to any sort of mad experiment.”

“I promise no additional misfortunes will fall upon you.”

He seems like a man of honor, and I’m running low on options, so I follow him home.

For some reason, I thought the industrial boilerworks design of the Thinktank was just a poorly conceived facade, and that Hendrik's apartment would boast comfortable living and dining quarters and all the comforts of home. But it's worse inside. Brass piping and valve wheels jut out into every conceivable space, creating trip hazards and burn hazards wherever I turn. Their entire home is so engulfed in steam that it's taken the wrinkles out of my robes. I start sweating profusely, and Hendrik motions me over to a slightly less steamy corner.

"B.H.? Is that you?" comes a voice from beyond the clanking of metal and the grinding of worn gears. "Me and a guest!" Hendrik cries. "Apparently, it's raining men. That maniac with the ball lightning generator is shooting thopters out of the sky again." He nudges me in the ribs. "Reezey here was the latest casualty."



Art by: Wesley Burt

"Reza," I correct him again as a lithe human walks out, so thin and graceful, he could be vedalken, if it weren't for the hue of his skin and the thick mound of curls on his head.

"B.H.'s given you a nickname already. Means you're in trouble. He likes you." He smiles. "I'm Janin. I keep the gears from falling off in this little hovel. Master Chemister, if you're the sort that likes respectable titles."

"Get him cleaned up and fed, eh, Moonie?" Hendrik says to Janin as he slings a tool satchel over his shoulder. "I'll arrange a way for him to get back home."

"Moonie?" I ask Janin once Hendrik is gone.

"He says my eyes glow like the moons," Janin says with a shrug. "No one else calls me that. B.H. is a bit eccentric. Even for a scatterbrained chemister with a slight death wish. So Reza is that short for Rezajaelis?"

I stare at him, marveling at how he knew that, and how he'd pronounced it so effortlessly. "Yes how—"

"I was raised by vedalken. My biological parents were killed in a lab explosion a few blocks from here. Mum and Pap felt partially responsible for the faulty blistercoils."

"I'm sorry," I say, though in the back of my mind, I can't help but think that if only they'd had proper oversight, perhaps the accident wouldn't have occurred at all.

"That's just how it works in the Thinktank. If your inventions hurt someone, you do your best to make it right. They took me in without a moment of hesitation. We can't count on anyone else, so we have to rely on each other." He gestures to an opening between copper pipes. "Let me show you to the bath."

I grit my teeth and follow along, hoping the tub won't leave me dirtier than I am already. But when Janin opens the door, it's a little oasis inside. The porcelain gleams. He hands me a washcloth, towel, and a vial of vedalken cleansing oils. "I was going to give these to Mum to celebrate her purification rites but seems like you need them more."

I must have a confused look on my face, because he smiles his disarming smile at me again. "I forgot, you're from New Prahv. Probably used to your own personal bathers and all that? Here, I'll get you started." He pulls a brass knob and water starts flowing. Then he opens the vial and lets a few drops of oil fall into the tub. A light blue mist coils upon the water's surface. "You can leave your robes outside the door. I can make those stains disappear."

He practically disappears as well, quickly slamming the door shut behind him. The cleansing oils are potent, bordering on toxic, especially to humans and others with less refined senses. But to vedalken, the astringent smell is next to godliness.

I tuck the vial in my satchel, then place my robes outside. Janin wasn't wrong about the bathers. Nevertheless, I don't intend for this excursion to get the best of me, so I render my skin clean the best I can, then submerge myself under the water, and spend several minutes in deep thought.

When I come up, the air hits my face, and I rest for a moment, letting my body reacclimate to breathing through my lungs.

Janin's still scrubbing at stains when I rejoin him in what passes for the living quarters. He holds the robes up, and sure enough, the fabric is nearly pristine. Most humans would stop now and call it clean, but Janin gets back to work until there's nary a sign of imperfection.

"Your parents raised you well," I say. He laughs, and we chat about our favorite vedalken customs, and time just slips away from us. But as the light from outside starts to change, Janin's posture does, too.

"B.H. should be back by now," he says. "It's getting dark." The way he said "dark" definitely made it sound like something undesirable. "We should go check the workshop. He's got an obsession with that place."

So, we venture off a couple streets over, where the machination that is the Thinktank doubles in size and complexity. The mizzium is so dense here, I can feel it in my teeth. We enter through a big brass hatch, and inside, hundreds of tinkers gather, showing off their inventions. A swarm of ratchet faeries cuts in front of us, each carrying a gleaming bolt. Sparks fly from all directions. Captive elementals peer out from a collection of glass globes. A crowd forms around a woman who claims she's able to conjure rifts from tainted electrical magic. I stop and watch, safety violations ticking away in my head. She's broken twenty-eight laws in the three minutes I've watched her. Purple electricity gathers in the glass retaining bell of her invention and then blazes down a long rod. A warbling hum fills my ears, and sure enough, a small rift opens in front of her, so dark, it hurts my eyes.

"She's going to hurt someone with that," I say to Janin.

He just shrugs and says, "Probably."

"But shouldn't we—"

"We shouldn't. Come on. Stick close." But the crowd is thick. Too thick. I start to feel queasy and need to calm myself. I make a run for the exit, and Janin calls after me, but I need silence like I need air.

Quiet mind, quiet steps.

The streets are better, wide and open, and I'm able to breathe again. A long, thin shadow falls on the ground beside me. I think that Janin's found me, but when I look up, I see a vedalken. He comes closer, and I try to smile through my nervousness, but then he's lunging at me. He swipes at the strap of one of my satchels. It comes free, and then he's running off with my precious reference texts. I can't imagine how disappointed Tagan will be with me if I return to New Prahv without them, so I give chase, running nearly the whole length of the Thinktank before I lose him in a tangle of brass piping. Exhausted, I take a moment to claim my breath, then realize I'll need help to get those books back. Slowly, steadily, I climb over the piping, venturing into non-disputed territory, where Azorius law is undeniable.

Three arresters approach me, and I breathe a sigh of relief when I see them. From the crinkle on their brows, I suspect they're not quite as happy to see me.

"You there," one of the arresters says to me. "What's your purpose here?"

My purpose? "I'm sorry I was seeking you out for—"

"What's your name? Do you live around here?" The questions keep coming, and I'm stunned by their brusque demeanor. The arresters I've encountered at New Prahv are nothing but pleasant.

"We've got reports of a mugger who's been wreaking havoc around here," he says, and finally, I think we're getting somewhere, but then he says, "You fit the description. Tall. Blue. Bald."



High Alert | Art by: Daarken

“So basically vedalken?” I say. “That could be anyone!”

“He was last seen with a satchel just like that one. Let’s have a look, shall we? What’s inside?”

“My personal property!” I know there are laws to protect me, but all that knowledge drains out of my head when a sense of raw vulnerability overcomes me. I fight back against those feelings, steadying my logic and my nerves. “I’m Rezajaelis Agnaus, lawmage at New Prahv. I had an accident with my griffin and had the extreme misfortune of being stranded in the Thinktank where I was mugged by some hooligan, and now I’m trying to recover my lawful property, so I can return home. I’d hoped for your assistance, but you’ve done nothing but harass me from the moment you saw me. Now, let me get *your* names, so that I can pass them along to my superiors as soon as I’m back at the Jelenn Column complex.”

The arresters’ body language changes immediately. They look me over once, and one of them starts to speak, but then a blood curdling scream comes from down the street. Two of the arresters take off in response, and one remains. “Sorry for bothering you,” she says. “If you’ll just present your identity rune, we’ll wrap this up, and you’ll be free to go.”

“Free to go!” I say reaching into my satchel for my identification. “Aren’t you going to help me find who did this?”

“If it happened in the Thinktank, I’m afraid we have no jurisdiction there.”

I growl as I continue to fish around in my satchel for my identity rune, but then slowly realize that it was packed in my other satchel. My eyes lock with the arrester’s.

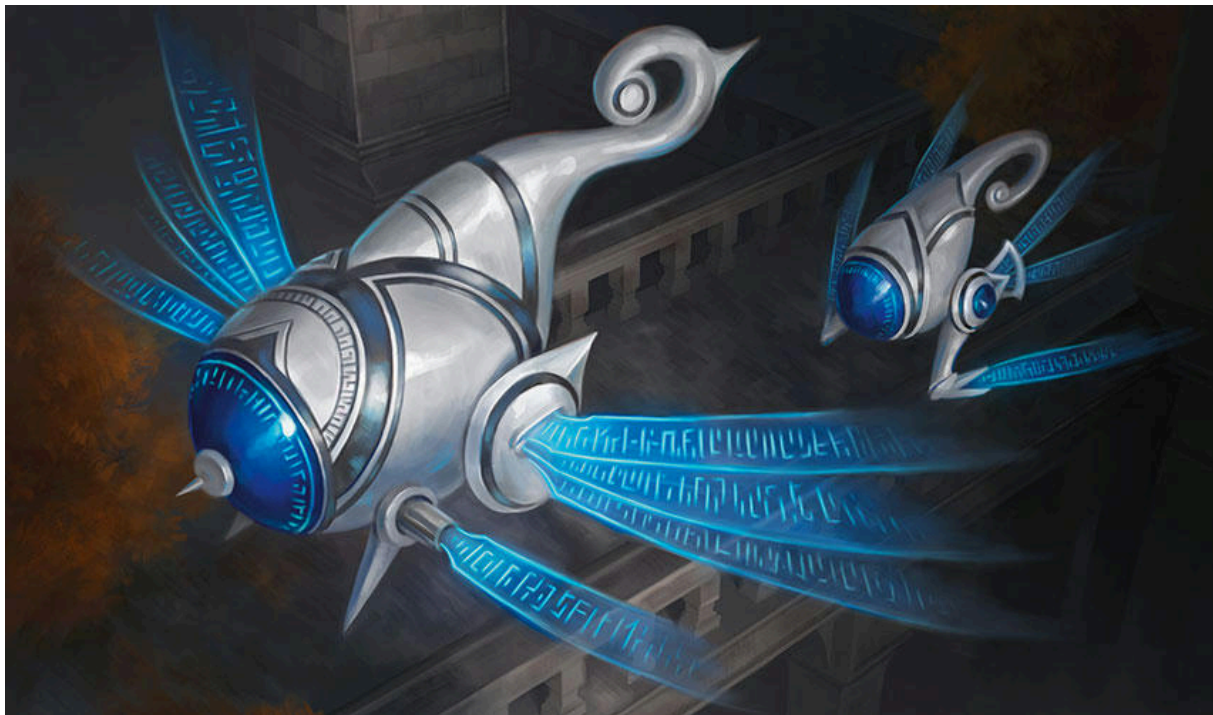
“Problem?” she asks, her posture shifting back to the offensive.

“No. No problem,” I mutter. That new law I’d put in the sky enters my mind. Failure to produce proper identification will result in detention for an indefinite amount of time—as long as it takes for some overworked public servant to determine if I am who I say I am. In other words, I’d be sitting in an Azorius jail for a long, long time. I couldn’t let an arrest tarnish my reputation at New Prahv. It’d be like letting everything I’ve worked so hard for wash right into an open sewer.

My hand touches the vial of cleansing oils Janin had given me. I retrieve it from the satchel, then throw it down at the arrester's feet. Glass breaks, and a caustic odor fills the air. The arrester begins coughing and wheezing, and then I'm running, running. The arrester hails her partners, and then they're all after me, eyes bleary and red from the oil, snot trickling from their noses like busted faucets. It slows them down, but not by much. At every street, I keep looking for nooks and crannies that will take me back into the relative safety of the Thinktank, trying to ignore the fact that I've made things a million times worse for myself. There's no escape. I'd have to climb back inside, and I couldn't get up fast enough.

I'm cornered, caught at the end of an alleyway. I turn, watching my pursuers as they close in. They stop in their tracks as an ominous blue light cuts through the steam. Their jaws drop.

I turn and see it too, an unwieldy flying contraption that looks like it's held together with a combination of a little bit of piping tape and a whole lot of sheer will. Hendrik peeps his head out. "Come on, Reezemeister," he says, motioning to the back of the vehicle with his thumb. Janin leans out to give me a hand up. Then something familiar strikes me—the vehicle consists of sleek white metal interspersed with blue glass domes. I squint harder and see that dozens of Azorius Senate emblems have been filed away. The rune magic has been tampered with and now glows purple, but the truth is undeniable. My honorable savior is not so honorable after all.



Deploy | Art by: Sara Winters

"It's you!" I say to Hendrik. "You're the 'mad genius' who's been shooting down thopters! I almost died because of you!"

"Yeah, sorry about that. Not the thopter part, just the part where you fell out of the sky. Now get in before these rule sniffers lay some spells on us."

"This is stolen property!" I scream. I can't. I can't. I look back at the arresters, gaining steadily on me now. Violations keep stacking up in my mind:

Azorius Law 2795-V, Non-compliance with arresters

Azorius Law 3343-J, Traveling in a stolen vehicle

Azorius Law—

"You've got about three seconds before those rule sniffers are here," Hendrik warns.

My survival instincts finally kick in. I grab Janin's hand and lunge for my life. Hendrik flies up and over the heads of the arresters, and soon they're nothing but specks below us. "Where are we headed?" Hendrik asks. "Back to New Prahv? Can't take you all the way there, of course, but I can get you close enough to walk."

I ignore his question, too anxious to deal with it right now. "Why?" I ask him. "Why would anyone want to live like this? Breaking laws. Shooting down thopters?"

"Whose laws? And whose thopters?" Hendrik asks.

"I get your reluctance to trust the Azorius," I say, remembering the predatory look in those arresters' eyes. "But wouldn't the Thinktank be better off if you conceded to oversight? We could make the streets safer, establish utility services so you wouldn't have to rely on man-eating wurms to get rid of your garbage. And you'd be able to petition the Izzet League for real funding for your workshop."

Hendrik shakes his head. "We'll manage on our own. We always have. It might not be perfect, but it's home."

"At least promise me no more shooting down thopters," I say.

"Sure, if you can get Azorius to quit sending them to spy on us," Hendrik says.

The inside of the thopter-vehicle goes quiet with awkward tension, but it's soon broken by a deep warbling noise that rattles the bolts on this flying heap. The sound rises in pitch, and then lightning flashes, turning the entire sky bright purple. I look down and see an enormous rift throbbing, blacker than black. It sizzles, blue-white light twisting along its mouth, right where the Thinktank workshop used to be. "Hendrik!" I shout. "The Thinktank is under siege by some some kind of electrical elemental." More lightning lashes out of the rift as the elemental starts to take on a distinct form, looking less like a collection of electricity and more a monstrous beast—arms, claws, teeth. It swings at a building, but its touch is so hot, it melts everything in its path. Static saturates the air. If I had any hair on my body, it'd be standing straight right now.

Azorius archons are on alert and sweep toward the Thinktank, stopping just short of attacking. They'll have to wait until the elemental crosses over the boundary before they can attempt to subdue it, but the whole of the Thinktank might be destroyed before that can happen.

"Please tell me you have some invention powerful enough to fend that thing off," I say to Hendrik.

"We do," Hendrik says. "A manifestation matrix converter with a dually optimized cascade link."

"Oh, thank Azor's infinite foresight!" I exclaim.

"But " Hendrik continues. *Buts* are never good in these sorts of situations. " it's down there, sitting under about ten feet of molten mizzium."

The citizens of the Thinktank are doing what they can to defend themselves, but it's a losing battle. Help is *right there* if it weren't for the Thinktank Jurisdictional Fallacy, hundreds of lives could be saved. But if the problem was impossible to solve in the quiet sanctum of the Jelenn Column complex with every resource I could want at my fingertips, how could I possibly hope to solve it now—in the company of these lawless people, in emergency conditions, with about forty-five seconds left before the elemental notices us and swats us out of the sky?

I sit bolt upright and start conjuring. I realize I do have something all those other lawmages didn't. I've seen the Thinktank. I've talked to its residents. And now, with this elemental wreaking havoc, I can call upon emergency law to make a declaration. I may not have the authority to resolve the jurisdiction

dispute—that part of the fallacy is unsolvable—but if I grant the Thinktank sovereignty, making it its own little city within the city, they’d have the authority to contract with other entities, namely the growing Azorius army standing at the ready.

“How’d you like to be Grand Arbiter of the Thinktank?” I say to Hendrik.

He opens his mouth, but there’s no time to answer, so I continue. “All Thinktank citizens in favor of declaring Hendrik what’s your surname?”

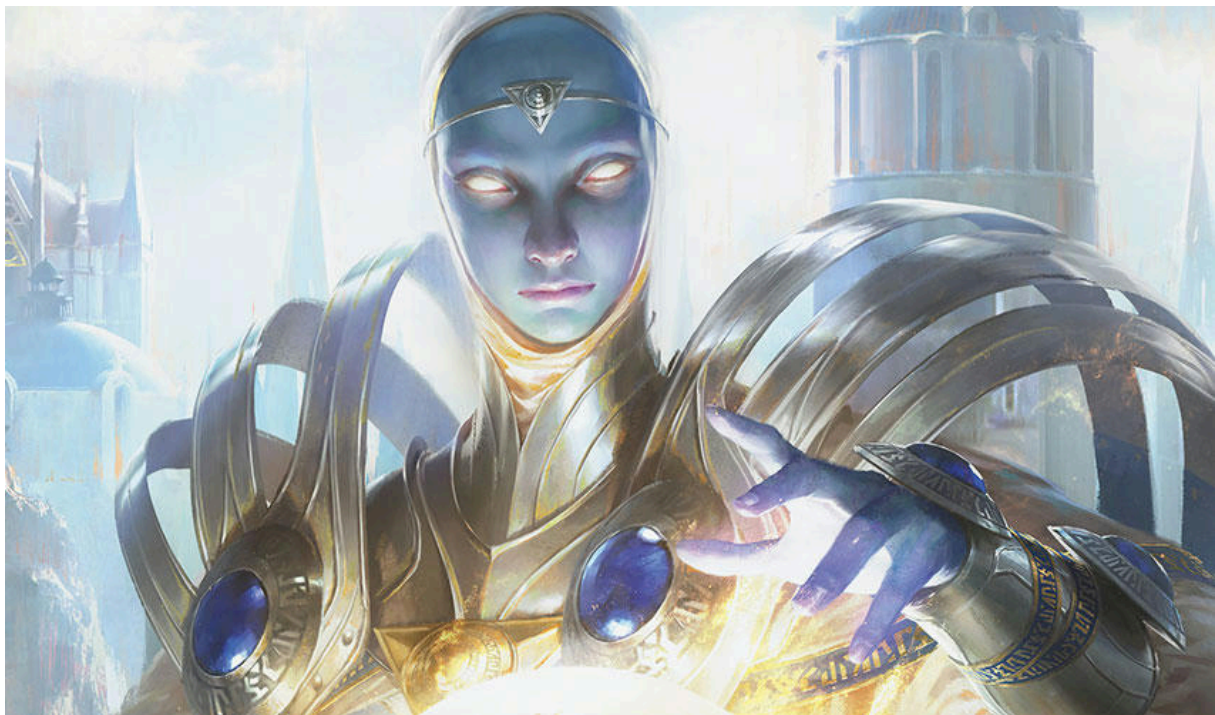
“Azmerak,” Hendrik says.

“declaring Hendrik Azmerak as Grand Arbiter *pro tem*, raise their hands.” I nudge Janin, and his hand shoots straight up. “Against?”

I keep conjuring as I talk, forming the law rune that will hopefully save the day. I explain my law to Hendrik and Janin. It’s not efficient at seven sentences long. It’s not convoluted. There are no double negatives, footnotes, or extensive qualifications. It’s by no means perfect, but it is perfectly clear. Instead of trying to solve the problem of five adversaries squabbling over a stretch of land, we’ll have five neighbors, helping to protect each other’s best interests.

“By the prerogative writ of emergency, and by a unanimous vote, I hereby declare Hendrik Azmerak Grand Arbiter *pro tem* of the Thinktank Enclave. As the leader of your people, do I have your permission to put the following law into effect?”

He looks the law rune over, taking his time. It’s wonderful he’s being so thorough, the sign of a competent leader, but we’ve only got seconds left to act.



Deputy of Detention | Art by: G-Host Lee

“Yes!” Hendrik finally says, and then I release the rune, and it shoots up into the sky, shining more brightly than any law rune ought to. Maybe I’d overdone the magic, but I couldn’t risk it going unnoticed or unread. The request for help is immediately acted upon, and archons and knights file over the borders, slashing their swords and staffs through the elemental. The bolts of electricity sever from the blows, but seconds later, they regenerate, becoming thicker and brighter. The elemental shrieks, then strikes three archons from the sky. But reinforcements have finally arrived, two dozen nullmages on

griffinback. They work together to cast a blue dome of magic over the elemental, and in a coordinated effort, they tighten it down, bit by bit, until it is subdued.

The static slowly fades from the air, as does any remaining tension between Hendrik, Janin, and myself. There is no formal writ that binds us together, but the connection between us goes deeper than mere acquaintances.

“You did good, Reza,” Hendrik says, slapping me on my back.

“Thanks, B.H.,” I say, trying the nickname out. Nope, nope, nope. It just doesn’t feel right in my mouth—grating against my palate like a mouthful of sand, but that doesn’t mean I feel Hendrik is any less of a friend to me.

“You’re sure you want to go through with this?” my mentor asks, looking at the draft of my proposed law: fifty-seven pages of concessions and sanctions and easements. I’d solved the Fallacy. For real this time. It took months of negotiations between the Thinktank Enclave and the guilds, but it’s done. “It’s unprecedented. It’s reckless. And I’m sure Master Baan won’t be happy.”

“It’s what’s right and just. The Thinktank deserves more than a temporary writ. It wouldn’t be fair to offer them that taste of freedom, only to take it back.”

Maybe the Thinktank was just a nuisance in the margins to Azorius before, but as it turns out, people start paying attention when an eighty-foot tall electrical elemental threatens to consume several city blocks. I expect Tagan to reprimand me or lecture me on how putting this law in front of the Senate will ruin my career, but her tail just swishes back and forth. Back and forth.

“I don’t think I can be your mentor anymore,” Tagan finally says.

“What? Why?” I ask, eager to do whatever I can to stay under her supervision. I plead my case. “You have to believe in me. I know I can make a difference. I’ve been so focused on burying myself in the laws of the past, but I’m just now learning how to reach out to citizens so we can create new laws that are relevant to the current needs of Ravnica. You can’t give up on me now!”

She smiles. “I’m not giving up on you. I can’t be your mentor anymore, because I think it’s time you become a mentor yourself. I believe in you, but what you want, it’s going to be a hard sell to people like Baan. But if you can start changing the minds of those who’ll come after us, maybe we can get more people on our side. And who knows?”

She leaves the thought open, letting the silence stir. Getting four guilds and an enclave to agree on a small plot of land was an enormous amount of work, but it pales in comparison to the larger issues plaguing Ravnica. But with justice on our side, *true justice* who knows? Maybe one of the lawmages I’ll mentor will be the author of the next Guildpact.