

Ruric Thar

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"Why do guards always look surprised when we bash them?" asked Ruric. "I think they expect a bribe," said Thar.

Ruric swatted away a volley of flaming arrows with a ham fist. "You said this would be easy."

"No, *you* did. You always say they're easy." Thar grunted with effort as he heaved over a charging chariot.

"Well, these guys must not have heard, 'cause they're fighting really hard."

"Really? I didn't notice. So do you have a plan?"

"Why me? You were always Mom's favorite, with her storytellin' and mumblin' and such. Didn't the Old Ones have an answer for everything?"

"You leave Mom out of this. Anyway, didn't Dad teach you any fightin' tricks? Or is his Scab Clan not so tough after all?"



Ruric Thar, the Unbowed | Art by Tyler Jacobson

A cluster of javelins bounced off the huge ogre's chest, one just missing the larger head.

"Oi! That was too close. We need to smash our way outta here," shouted Ruric.

"Oh, sure, that's your answer to everything. We need a strategy."

"Oooh, what a big word. Did Mom teach you that?"

A wave of armored infantry slammed into Ruric Thar's towering form with a crash. For a few moments, the air was filled with hammering, yelling, and harsh breathing. Then a moment oddly silent.

"There's just too many of these Boros guys for us to get through."

"We can take 'em. What are you, chicken?"

"Did someone say chicken?"

"Did you say that?"

"Why would I say that?"

"I said that. Over here."

Ruric and Thar each looked to one side. Then one head swiveled to search behind while the other bent down.

"Hey! There's a little guy behind us. What're you doing down there, little guy?" asked Thar.

"Sneaking up on us, eh? We'll stomp you into jam!" shouted Ruric.

"You have jam, too? Mebbe we can make a deal," squeaked the ragged goblin. A few plates of dented, scorched metal clung to its battered-looking form.

"Ha!" Ruric guffawed, smashing aside another infantry strike with a massive hand-axe. "A little squirt like you? What are you gonna do that we can't do better?"

"I might be little, but I got big ideas. Big." The runt puffed out its scrawny chest and spat a bloody gob. "Anyway, doesn't look like you're winning."

Thar grimaced. "And you are? What sort of war plans do you cobble rats come up with? Overpower the enemy with stink?"

"Funny," snorted the goblin. "Anyway, I know stuff. More'n you, I bet."

"Yeah?" huffed Ruric. "So why are you stuck here instead of winning everything?"

"Shut up," said Thar, punching a pair of war mastiffs. Yelps echoed through the plaza. "Maybe this fella can help."

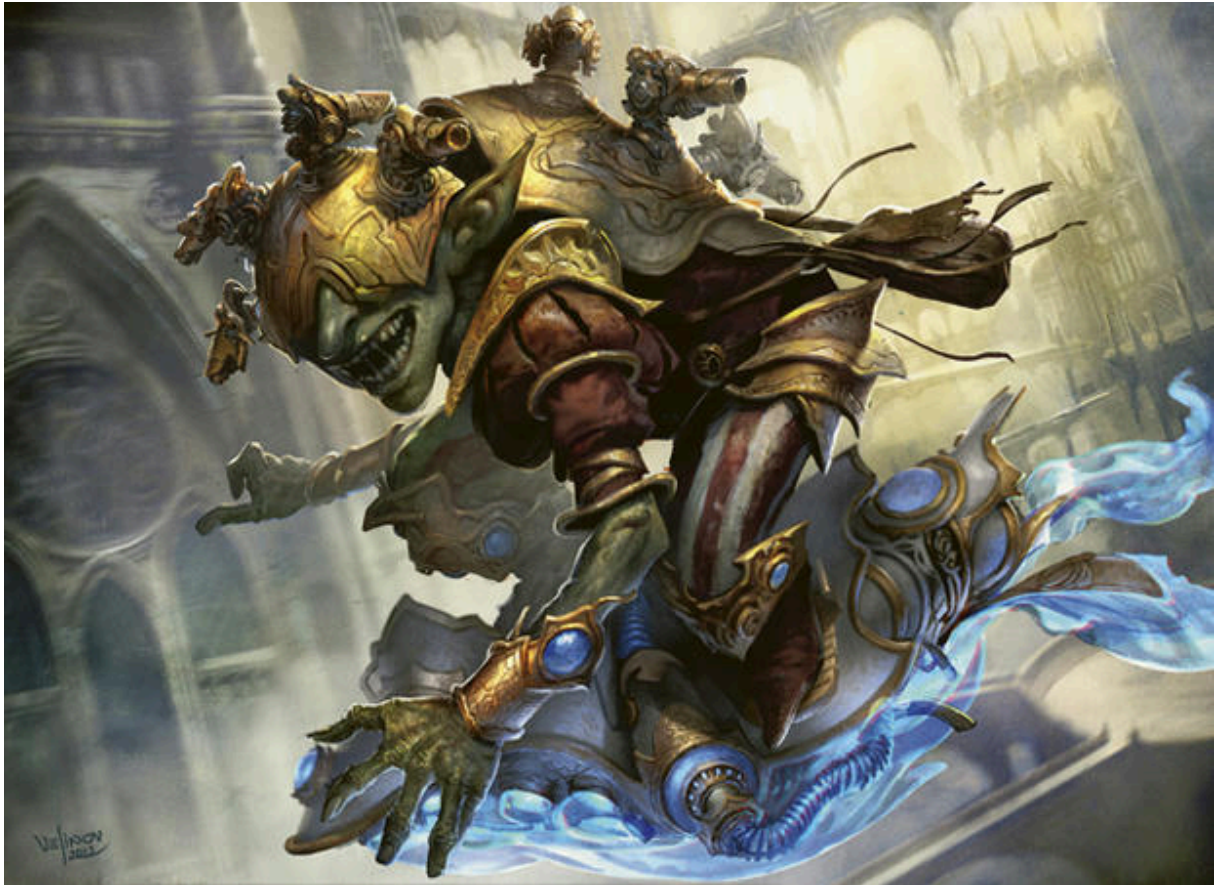
"Yeah, that's right! You should have more respect. We Izzet discovered the Maze, after all." The goblin crossed its arms, looking as formidable as a four-foot-tall, green, scrawny stinker can.

"So you're their maze runner?"

The goblin drooped. "They picked someone else." It looked up defiantly. "But I can find the way as good as anyone. I just got sorta... stuck here."

"And you need us to get you out. What's in it for us?" Ruric scowled, then swatted away a flying wedge of shouting skyjeks, punctuating a nearby wall with bloody asterisks. "Ow! One o' 'em got me."

"Squelch is the name. I was trying out this—my latest invention," the goblin jabbed a thumb at one of the larger metal slabs, which clattered to the cobbles and rocked there gently. "An' it worked, too! I just had a little trouble with the landing."



Art by Svetlin Velinov

“So, how’s that supposed to help us?” Thar curled a lip. The expression was difficult to discern in his gnarled, scarred face.

“Ho, brother! What’s that thing they’re wheelin’ up now?” Ruric jerked his huge head toward the Boros lines.

“Oh, boulders. It’s a ballista.”

“A bally-what now?”

“A war machine. Throws big spears,” said Thar. “Big as trees.”

“I’m not afraid o’ trees.”

“Well, these trees bite. We gotta stop that thing before it stops us.”

“I got just the ticket for that, big fellas,” piped the goblin. “I help you out, you help me out. Whaddy say? Do we have a deal?”

Ruric and Thar both laughed, loud and bitter. “Oh, sure, we’ll be ever so grateful when—” Thar started, “—you save our hide,” finished Ruric.

“You gotta do me a favor in return. Anything I ask. Whenever I want. And a chicken. No, two. Okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, go ahead and work that powerful goblin magic.”

The little Izzet spat on one palm and rubbed its skinny hands together. “Just watch me.”

Squelch dashed between the ogre’s tree-trunk legs and under the shields of the approaching battalion of soldiers, who were intent on Ruric Thar. Scrambling up a crumbling wall, Squelch hurled itself onto

the back of an armored war beast. Then the goblin pulled a metal spike from an unseen pocket and jammed it into the top of the creature's head before jumping away.



Art by Kev Walker

Sparks flew. The war beast staggered, trumpeting, then turned on its yokemate. More anguished bel-lows followed, along with cracking wood and the screech of iron-bound rims on steel. Human soldiers scattered as the crazed behemoths broke free of their traces, stamped past, and disappeared down the alleys.

The massive engine of war began to topple with a strange grace, slowly falling onto its side. Several wheels turned slowly, squeaking. Moments passed. Then the entire contraption exploded in a whoosh of flame.



Art by Ryan Barger

“How’d that happen?” exclaimed Thar, squinting his eyes.

“Who cares?” yelled Ruric. “Let’s go!”

The ogre’s huge bulk lumbered toward the guildgate across the plaza, trampling over the flaming wreckage and the armored bodies sprawled across the paving stones.



Art by Karl Kopinski

"Where'd that little guy go, anyway?" Ruric swiveled his gaze about until his tusks bounced off the back of Thar's skull.

"Right here!" came a voice from behind. The goblin hopped up on the ogre's shoulders, between the two heads, and grabbed Ruric's tusk for support. "Told ya I could fix it."

"Hey! Leggo!" bellowed Ruric, shaking himself violently.

The goblin squeaked but held on tight. "We had a d-d-deal. You promised."

"Yeah, we did," said Thar. "And you held up your end. Now we can check out this gate. You too, if you want."

"Sure! But that doesn't count as my favor. You got that for free. You still owe me."

"Yeah, yeah," both heads muttered.

"Where we gonna find a chicken 'round here?" Ruric grumbled.

"How many does that make now?"

"Lessee." Ruric counted off on meaty fingers. "Three... plus, uh, two?... an' another one." He lifted his hand-axe.

"So, eight?"

"Somethin' like that."

"Six," came a high-pitched voice.

"Gotta hit the right one soon."

"Then what are we gonna do?"

"Same thing we always do."

"Smash! Then get the goodies." Ruric made a bashing motion.

"This is so much fun, you guys!" Squelch piped up from his brand-new riding basket, slung over the ogre's back. "We're totally gonna beat all the other runners."

"How long we gotta carry this thing around with us?" whined Ruric.

"Till we win, of course," retorted Thar.

"Hey, fellas, I was thinkin'—you could really use some improvements to that axe of yours. I got some ideas. Auto-chopping action. Maybe some different heads."

"Don't pay attention. Maybe it'll go away on its own." Ruric Thar trudged on.

"Hey guys? You know, we make a really great team."

"Guys?"