

Breaking News By Reverie Quist



“Mr. Vincent, Mayor Conrad isn’t in right now, could you come back another ti—”

“It’s *Doctor*,” I sneer through gritted teeth, narrowing my eyes at the table of town officials. “And good. I might as well be waiting to have a conversation with a giraffe. I’m asking *you*. What is the meaning of this tomfoolery?”

“That’s...” the plump official glances at the bald-headed official across the table and swallows, “...inexplicable and also classified information, *Doctor* Vincent. We suggest you return to the hospital.”

The bald-headed official nods at the plump official, then folds his hands on the sleek stretch of mahogany and turns his nose up to me. “Yes, there’s nothing we can do to help you. Good luck, though, on the...the cosmos and the kidneys and such.”

I slam my hand down on the table, turn on my heel and storm out of Juncturetown’s Town Hall with the satisfaction of having accomplished absolutely nothing.

I pull my jacket tighter around me and adjust my nose clip glasses against the blast of outside air, scowling at the trolley as it goes rattling by on luminescent rails in the street.

I’m a scholar, not a medical doctor. A doctor of thinking. A doctor of experimenting. A doctor of reading great books and conducting great staring contests with my next door neighbor’s pet penguins.

And this means that I am a rational man.

I know more about astronomy than anyone. I know the worlds beyond our own so intimately they may as well be friends I take tea with every Sunday. What right do those cottonheads have to disrespect my intellect and deny me answers? All I’m asking for is information on this town’s blasted number one restriction. The only possible thing that could ruin my career.

Why is no one allowed to look at the sky?

And why is it that every time I attempt to rebel and carry on with my studies – perform the one act that comes most naturally to me – something always gets in the way?

Well. Not anymore. I’m getting to the bottom of this with or without their involvement.

Clenching my fists, I run across the street to the park, turn my head to the heavens, and open my eyes as wide as I can.

A child’s frisbee slams into my face, and I stumble backward, my vision blurring.

Rubbing my chin, I fling the frisbee back where it came from, and try again.

A conglomeration of dead leaves, suddenly lifted by the wind, flurries around me like a flock of crazed sparrows.

Sorcery. Absolute sorcery. That’s my scientific opinion.

“Daddy?”

I stiffen, and turn around. The leaves fall again around me – slow and noncommittal, as if they’re dangling by puppet strings.

There’s ... no one there.

I ... I could have sworn I knew that voice. Who was it? It sounded like someone ... someone important.

Wait. What was I thinking about?

Oh, forget it.

I walk begrudgingly along the winding sidewalks of Main Street. Glancing ahead at the nearest lamp post, I notice our town's young newsboy, Blazek.

Ah, a newsboy. He might have an answer for me.

He holds his paper in his hand and waves about with much enthusiasm, pointing and gesturing and smiling ... but not speaking a word. That's only natural, of course. Blazek is a mute.

I walk up to him and clear my throat. "Ah, Blazek, good afternoon."

Blazek turns to me, grins, and tips his cap.

I take a paper from him and read the headline.

RIP IN THE SKY DISCOVERED (DON'T ASK HOW AND DON'T LOOK UP).

Is that so?

Showing the paper to the boy, I get right to business. "Say, Blazek, you know about this?"

Blazek glances at the paper, then up at me, and nods.

"What does it mean 'rip in the sky'? What is that supposed to imply?"

Blazek pauses for a minute and folds his arms. He scrunches his face up and taps his foot. Then, he looks back up at me and shrugs.

It almost seems contrived. As if he's been instructed to respond that way.

"Alright, well, it can't be good, right?" I shiver against the cold autumn air and raise my voice above the traffic noise ... and the noises in the back of my mind I can't quite comprehend. "That's not natural. Someone needs to investigate. Someone needs to study this in detail and let the public know about it. We could very well be in danger."

At that, Blazek's gaze wanders behind me. Eyes widening, he points up to the sky, and starts frantically tapping me on the shoulder.

Wait. How is he able to—

I try to turn around and look up, but Blazek's paper wacks me upside the head.

"Oh for heaven's sake, don't make a fuss, boy, we still need to be rational about it." I shove the paper out of my face and try to bring Blazek back down to Earth, forcing myself to ignore my own heartbeat's steadily quickening pace. "What could we learn from this so-called 'rip in the sky' to explain the overall, uh, *weirdness* occurring in our town? Do you think it's connected? What could we – now Blazek, unhand me, stop pointing, and control yourself – possibly extract from the stratosphere to analyze its composition and study its nature to best prepare ourselves for what it might unleash on us? These are the scientific questions we need to be asking, Blazek."

The panicked newsboy grabs my shoulders, shakes me back and forth, then gestures and points and leaps up toward the rip in the sky, waving about like a wild man.

I shove him off of me and straighten my coat with a huff. "Oh for heaven's sake, Blazek! Will you not listen to reason? I'm trying to have a civil, scientific conversation with you about a very serious matter, and all you seem to be able to do is panic about it, and point at that wretched—!"

I trail off as Blazek stares right above me, then cowers against the lamp post, holding his cap over his face.

This must be why it's restricted. People lose their minds when they look at the ... "rip in the sky." Somehow, though, it makes me all the more curious.

I shake my head at Blazek, and give a pitying sigh. “I urge you, Blazek, stop convulsing under its cosmic gaze, throw away all ideas of superstition, and for all that’s still good and right in the world, think about this rationally,” I say, taking a step toward him as the whispers in my head begin to destroy my ability to think clearly. “Like *I* do.”

In an instant, a single rocky orb shoots out of the sky, tears through the air not an inch away from my ear, then, passing me, crashes through the glass of a very expensive looking ornamental mirror two delivery men are carrying a few feet away from us.

What in the name of ...

Legs trembling, I stumble over to Blazek, who’s come out from behind his cap, and we watch the hole in the shattered glass suddenly fade from empty air into a faintly screeching indigo blue void that looks as if it was cut right out of the dead heart of space.

The two delivery men stare at it for a minute, then blink at each other, turn back to the road ahead, and keep walking, visibly refusing to look at where the orb came from.

“Oh dear,” I mutter, leaning over to the newsboy. “You know, Blazek, scientifically speaking ... that’s bad luck.”