

Rei introduces you to the stunning city-world of Ravnica. Life in the Big City

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In the real world, big cities are synonymous with excitement and interesting dealings. **Magic** is no different. My jaw has been dropping regularly ever since I got my first glimpse into this block over a year ago. A lot of new stuff is going on in *Ravnica*, both mechanically and creatively, boasting just as much space for story as the *Kamigawa* block before it. I'm proud to be one of the first to show off what this world has to offer.



We've got a lot to discuss, so let's get to it. Ravnica is a world where civilization has utterly tamed nature. It is built with acre upon acre of buildings, streets, and bridges. Towers are the mountains, aqueducts the rivers, with only spotty parks and gardens to serve as meager forests. Though there may be occasional "vacant lots" or stretches of war-torn wasteland, Ravnica is otherwise a planet overflowing with the civilized masses. Its divisions are not so much nations, but towns and districts, defined by geography, culture, race (which include everything from ogres to Vedalken), and the ten guilds that run the world.

The guilds, the main power on Ravnica, constantly struggle to gain dominance. This "cold war" is still better than the state of things ten thousand years ago, when constant open warfare was the order of the day. Finally, the Paruns, the ten original guild founders, decided to put aside their differences for

their own survival, and created the Guildpact, a great treaty that defined the role of each guild in society, and set the stage for a harmonious coexistence. Of course, a mere piece of paper is rarely enough to stop ambition. While the guilds pay lip service to honoring the Guildpact, it's only because they must, or the other guilds would seize on the excuse to destroy them. Most, in their own way, work to undermine the others in order to become the sole power on Ravnica. The common citizen, most of whom are not guild members, are usually ignored by the guilds, if not treated with outright contempt. They make up the majority of casualties in this struggle. But no one outside the guilds has the power to make a difference... At least, not yet.

As for the guilds themselves, the focus will be a little different than normal. Only four will have representative cards in *Ravnica*, so let's start with the other six. While their cards won't be out until the later sets, they'll be mentioned in art and flavor text, so I'm going to give each a very brief introduction. Get to know them, because they'll be shining soon enough.

We start with the guild that's not quite a guild, **the Gruul Clans**. While they had a purpose when the Guildpact was first signed, no one really cares what it was anymore, not even the Gruul themselves. You see, time has not treated the Gruul kindly. The other guilds have run roughshod over them, splintering the Gruul into a loose confederation of warclans. But with the savage cyclops Borborgymos leading its largest clan, they've found a new purpose: to destroy Ravnican civilization, and most especially the guilds, which they blame for their fall from grace. They're not yet a big enough threat for the other guilds to unite and destroy the Gruul once and for all, but they're getting there.

Next is **the Cult of Rakdos**, named after its demon leader. They are completely self-absorbed, out only for a good time. However, their idea of a "good time" usually involves murder and mayhem – the more bloody and depraved, the better. The cult would love to rule Ravnica and turn it into one big slaughter-fest, but to them, it's the process of random death and destruction that is fulfilling, not the goal. Fortunately for the Rakdos, their interest in the dark art of death has made them into top-notch mercenaries and assassins, which the other guilds are more than happy to take advantage of.





The Simic Combine were originally charged with preserving what was left of nature, but the march of civilization overcame even their immense power. Thus the guild has turned itself towards another goal: not only reviving nature, but *improving* what's left of it. They continually tinker with the very fabric of life itself, coming up with new lifeforms, strong yet hideous, parodies of existing beings. Momir Vig, the elvish biomancer who leads their efforts, is cool and distant, yet intense in his research, just like the rest of his guild.

The Izzet are also seekers of knowledge, but their methods may be best described as "unorthodox." They pursue their research with reckless abandon, often taking on too much at once, quickly discarding old ideas for bright shiny ones that suddenly get their attention. Though they're responsible for most of the beneficial civic works on Ravnica, their behavior has also led to



some spectacular and destructive failures. This reflects the personality of their guildmaster, the brilliant, but short-tempered, dragon wizard Niv-Mizzet.

The Orzhov Syndicate may cloak themselves in a veneer of religion, but it's all a sham. This false piety is only a smokescreen, and a means of control. Their real business is business: there's no financial dealing or trade that the Orzhov do not know about, if not outright manipulate. The Ghost Council, made up of the immortal spirits of past Orzhov leaders, make sure that nothing stands in the way of the Syndicate ruling Ravnica through gold and greed.

Finally, we have **the Azorius Senate**. Cold and calculating, they create the laws in Ravnica. Their bureaucracy is designed to keep the status quo as strong as possible. Its leader, Grand Arbiter Augustin, believes that change only brings chaos and trouble. In his arrogance, he has decided that the best way to serve Ravnica is to keep everyone else from acting in any way, shape, or form. Unfortunately, the Azorius have the magic and muscle to back it up.

Now for the guilds that are the focal point of this first set. The **Selesnyan Conclave** is best described as a nature-lover's commune, though one populated with gigantic beasts and powerful druids in the hundreds of thousands. Their way of life is a simple one, based on harmony with each other and (what's left of) nature, and they do whatever they can to spread this message across the globe. Directed by the Chorus, a group of ancient dryads, Selesnyans make it their mission in life to sow the seeds of their beliefs wherever they can. However, this also involves defending these seeds wherever they take root, the main reason why they have conflicts with the other guilds.

Though they may seem to be all sweetness and light, a deeper look suggests otherwise. Some citizens think the Conclave is as much of a cult as the Rakdos, and they may not be all that wrong. Every member is a fanatic to the cause, and conformity is not demanded - it's *expected* as a matter of course. No one is sure whether the Conclave actually brainwashes anyone or not, but many members certainly act like they do.



The Golgari preach that death is part of the natural cycle, which seems like a harmless and logical belief. However, they take it one step further, actually embracing death, and *encouraging* it to enhance and strengthen life. So their guildmaster, the elvish shaman Savra, doesn't mind letting loose

virulent plagues. After all, all they're doing is speeding up the natural cycle so that Ravnica can be reborn after death into something better. It's not so much death itself that they like, but the rebuilding that comes afterwards.



Of course, Golgari necromancy is some of the most potent ever seen. They don't even believe that their creations are anything hideous or unnatural. Their favored pets are not only undead, but natural forces of death and decay, like fungi, insects, and saprolings. And they have a lot to work with, for Ravnica is teeming with ghosts and zombies in unusual numbers. Whether that's the Golgari's doing is something they never divulge.

If the Azorius are the lawmakers of Ravnica, then **the Boros Legion** are the law's enforcers. They are supposed to keep order



and uphold the laws made by both the Guildpact and Azorius. In practice, though, they tend to enforce whatever laws they feel like enforcing, not to mention a few that don't exist, except in their own hearts and minds. The Wojek, a special division of the Boros, are the main foot soldiers in this cause; every district has a permanent garrison of Wojek to protect it. The archangel Razia sends the rest of her massive forces to wherever she deems it necessary – and of course, her standards may differ greatly from that of the locals.

The Boros are all about controlled rage. Their soldiers, which include humans, goblins, and Ordrun minotaurs, are so determined to keep the peace that they will apply any warlike means they deem necessary. They tend to swing swords first and ask questions later, since they're almost always sure that whatever action they take to keep order is right. Those who oppose them, by definition, must then be wrong at best, criminal at worst.

Finally, we have the most hidden of guilds, so secretive that most Ravnican citizens believe that it died out ages ago: **House Dimir**. Only the other guilds know of the continued existence of the Dimir, who are most often seen (if they are seen at all) lurking in the shadowy alleys and sewers of Ravnica. Appropriately enough, their stock in trade is secrets: no dark knowledge or carefully guarded plan is safe from Dimir agents. So far, the guild is content to stay behind the scenes; their most overt agents are bandits and spies who keep to Ravnica's vast underworld. Spirits are one of their favorite types of agent, being untouchable, completely loyal, and able to drift through walls effortlessly.

But, of course, Szadek, their psionic vampire guildmaster, has much bigger plans for his group. Knowledge is, after all, power, especially in a place like Ravnica. Once the other guilds become dependent on their information, or they've gathered enough, who else will be better suited to strike against the others when the time is right?



This is a complex power struggle, which demands a novel or three. **The first book** of the trilogy is also a bit of a murder mystery, and who better to investigate a murder than a Boros? Agrus Kos is a Wojek veteran of many years in a guild where the best and brightest tend to die in police campaigns. He's determined and loyal to Razia, but a little world-weary, having seen much too much politicking and suffering in his day. He starts the novel investigating the death of a former partner, but you can be

sure he'll be doing much more as the books continue. With that in mind, here he is in all his cardboard glory:



This card is a perfect example of how this block promotes multicolored cards and interactions. Though Agrus is perfectly good in a deck with predominantly red or white creatures, he shines best when he's with his fellow Boros, or any other red/white creature of the past. Not only does he himself become a 5/5 attacker, but the +2/+2 bonus he offers to other attacking red/white creatures is nothing to sneeze at. He nicely sums up the Boros (and red/white) idea of aggression and power.

Of course, there's more, a lot more, to Ravnica than I've been able to cover here. What does the common citizen think of the guilds? What's with all the ghosts? What about the non-human wildlife? All those questions, and more, will have to wait for my next articles. For now, enjoy the first set of the block, and don't go down any dark alleys without a lot of protection...