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Digging Into The Conclave

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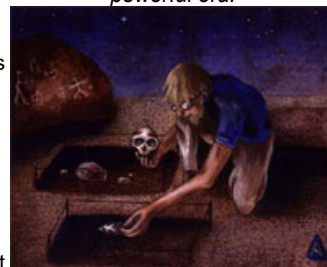


PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Greetings friends. This week marks Taste The Magic's first whack at tackling **magicthegathering.com's** weekly theme. It's a good time too, since the theme is pretty much driven by flavor anyway. It's Selesnya week, our first official trip into the world of *Ravnica's* guilds. While the guilds have plenty of effect on the mechanics of *Ravnica* cards, they have even more impact on the creative aspects, and you know what that means- sweet juicy flavor!

The Creative Team, as well as the rest of R&D, has been living and breathing the Guilds for over a year now. When this week's theme was announced, I was excited to start dishing out all sorts of delicious Selesnya Conclave slop. The thing is, there's so much stuff that I did not know where to begin. I think I am just too close to it all to deliver a concise article on the subject. So I have brought in an expert to do it for me. This fellow is experienced at digging up information on ancient cultures, processing it, and extrapolating from what is found. He is an archaeologist, complete with nerdy shirt and glasses, and he is ready to dig into the lore of the Selesnya Conclave. Professor Tad, take it away.

Fascinated by the lore of ancient struggles, the Archaeologist searches incessantly for remnants of an earlier, more powerful era.



Professor Tad, Archaeologist

Digging In To The Conclave

Let us jump right into my findings. Mr. Cavotta was kind enough to advise me on where to begin my dig, and his advice proved very fruitful. He pointed me at a burgeoning cultural site called "Flavor Text." In digging through these grounds I have unearthed a wondrous Green and White tapestry of the culture of the Selesnya Conclave. Without further ado, let's have a gander at some of the relics I have dusted off.

All for One and One For All

The first find included three different specimens, the **Loxodon Hierarch**, the **Watchwolf**, and the **Centaur Safeguard**. They were each unearthed at different locations, but they were found at the same depth and their similarities led me to grouping them together.

Loxodon Hierarch • *I have lived long, and I remember how this city once was. If my death serves to bring back the Ravnica in my memory, then so be it*

Watchwolf • *Only in Ravnica do the wolves watch the flock.*

Centaur Safeguard • *Swift, strong, and selfless, the centaurs are the shields of the Conclave.*



Though each one has its own little story to tell, together they really hit upon the Selesnyans' high regard for unity, selflessness, and protectiveness of the rest of the guild. The first passage comes from a species I was surprised to find on this dig, a Loxo Sapiens! Wow, the boys back at the lab would have given their prized bone brushes to see such a thing. Anyway, the Loxodon mentions a "Ravnica of memory." We do not see anything at this site to hint at what this ancient Ravnica was like. Perhaps we'll find out what that is from some of the other Selesnyans we dug up.

One other interesting finding at this location was a mummified head of one of the Safeguards. It gives us a glimpse at a hairstyle that may be a cultural trademark of the great City-Plane. The closest modern-day analog would be the ever-popular "mullet." Fascinating!

Whether it's swift centaurs, loyal canines, or elephant-headed martyrs, the Conclave seems to value the lives of its members and is bent on protecting them. This is significant, as we have found some evidence that suggests other guilds do not necessarily share this perspective. (Mr. Cavotta has asked me not to elaborate, as he'll be covering that more in the weeks to come.)

The deeper we went, the more we found that supports my theory that the Conclave was a cooperative culture.

Chorus of the Conclave • *"We are many, yet one. We are separate in body, yet speak with a single voice. Join us in our chorus."*

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Selesnya Evangel • *The clamor of the city drowns all voices. But together we can sing a harmony that will resonate from Ravnica's tallest spires to her deepest wells.*

Selesnya Signet • *The symbol of the Conclave is one of unity, with tree supporting sun and sun feeding tree.*



Each of these findings strikes a similar chord. It is a plain-as-day statement about the guild's vision of unity. Can evidence get any harder than this? I think not, especially given the fact that this information comes to us from the guild leader, guild symbol, and the guild's own preachers. Yes, science demands separating facts from assumptions, and I am confident in recording this as fact: The Conclave was a culture of unity.

But these three specimens tell us more than just that. The second and third passages hint at something new to our cultural puzzle- an antagonist. It looks to me like the **Selesnya Evangel** has a bit of an axe to grind against the crowded city itself. And then the Signet mentions the tree and the sun in its own symbology. I am starting to detect an interesting cultural clash at play with this guild; that of nature versus civilization. Perhaps we'll find more of this as we go deeper.

Growing Their Membership

We did not have to go much deeper to find more evidence supporting the thought that the Conclave identified itself with the natural world. Perhaps the mysterious "Ravnica of memory" cited by the Loxodon referred to a day when nature was not beaten back by the juggernaut of civilization. I cannot say for sure, but it seems plausible given how many signs of nature's influence we have found.

Here's a big one, petrified remains of a huge tree-being, the Guardian of Vitu-Ghazi.

Guardian of Vitu-Ghazi • *It stands sentinel to the great City-Tree, home of the Selesnya Conclave.*

It says a lot that the guild employs tree-beings to guard their "home," a great city-tree. Trees, trees, trees-in a world covered by a city. A little tension there? Let's keep that in mind as we go on.

So, what have we found on the great city-tree itself?

Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree • *In the autumn, she casts her seeds across the streets below, and come spring, her children rise in service to the Conclave.*

Seeds of Strength • *Beneath the beauty of light and seed is the might of Vitu-Ghazi.*

Sounds to me like Selesnyans grow on trees. OK, that was bad, but it was such low-hanging fruit I could not avoid it. Ha! "Low-hanging fruit." I bet they really miss me back at the lab. Anyway, this community sees itself as *part* of nature- living among it, growing like it. In fact, we discovered quite a bit more that sprouts from this whole "seed" theme.

Conclave Equenaut • *Equenauts are the seeds of the Conclave, scattered on the four winds, searching for new places to take root.*

Scatter the Seeds • *From the seeds of faith, great forests grow.*

That's a lot of seeds. I think there's a little something here that is doing more than just throwing more nature metaphors at us. If we look back to what we found with the **Chorus of the Conclave** and the **Selesnya Evangel** and combine it with all this scattering seed stuff, we get a picture of a culture that was very much concerned with growing its numbers. Whether it was by initiation or by literally "growing" members, the guild was interested in bolstering its membership. From what I have heard from the folks at the other guild dig sites, we seem to be unearthing far more specimens than they are. Perhaps this is a little more proof that this guild was a numerous bunch.

A Little Less Flower, A Little More Power

Well, from all this unity and seeds and trees stuff, I was beginning to paint a mental picture of this guild that seemed familiar. I was getting the idea that this was a culture similar to ones I have dug up wherein whole societies are found petrified in relaxed, lounging, or hugging positions near trees or fossilized plant forms known to have considerable hallucinogenic properties. Thankfully, this flavor text dig started to reveal some things that were not so old news.

Siege Wurm • *The Rubblefield was once among the wealthiest districts in Ravnica. All it took was a single wurm to reduce it to ruins.*

Sundering Vitae • *Centuries of wind, rain, and roots compressed into an instant of destruction: such is the power of Selesnya.*

Overwhelm • *Let the song of Selesnya be heard above the rhythm of our thundering hordes!*

Glare of Subdual • *The righteous light of Selesnya is channeled through the devout, striking out to blind the nonbelievers.*



Whoa! Not so much about hugging people here. There are little bits in here supporting our “anti city” findings, nature themes, and the whole song/chorus thing. I cannot help but brush this stuff aside to look closer at all the evidence of a Selesnyan aggressiveness that we have not seen before. Up until we dug up the war rhinos and armored siege wurms, the whole “We are many” theme seemed to be a big love-fest. Well that's all changed now. It looks like the Selesnyan seeds might also grow big, well...“thundering hordes”!

Just as our evidence concerning the guild's aggressiveness was starting to coalesce, we hit upon something really big. Literally. Six different teams of archaeologists each discovered a separate part of one impossibly large creature- the **Autochthon Wurm**. A wonderful specimen. Very thick bones, lots of undecayed material- very easy to carbon date. Anyway, here's what we found:

Autochthon Wurm • *The trainer awoke to begin the journey from the wurm's tail to its head. The sun was setting when she arrived.*

Wow! I believe it. This statement may seem to be just an account of the beast's great size, but there is a bit more in there than that. Sure, as I said before, it's a big specimen. But this is not just some wild beast from the order Diplodocidae. This great creature was *trained*. What does that mean? It means that the Selesnya did not just welcome the beast into the happy chorus, they taught it to crush people. Sure, they might have taught it to sing too, but the armor plating we found buried with it proves this creature was meant for more than humming the bass line.

I must admit, I am more interested in this bunch now than I was in the first days of the dig. There's a strange cultural dichotomy here that is truly intriguing. Their message of unity and nature is all well documented now, but I think I am seeing a little mean streak too. Rubblefields, instants of destruction, thundering hordes! Sounds like the Chorus might be singing out of both sides of their mouths. Let's see if there's any other dirt to be found.

Hour of Reckoning • *Ravnica, like a hedge, must be pruned, leaving only leaves of verdant uniformity.*
—Niszka, *Selesnya evangel*

Transluminant • *Forget yourself. Forget your city. Forget your homes, your families, the debts and obligations that hold you to this world.*

Well if that doesn't sound a bit like brainwashing, then I am an uncle of a Colobus angolensis. This is no nature commune, it's a cult! On the surface was a welcoming voice, “join us in our chorus.” Next you'd hear is “Forget home and family,” and “abandon individuality.” Then, once you're sucked in, you hear the war horns and the rhythm of thunderous footsteps and the sounds of Ravnica squishing beneath your feet. I must say that this culture scares me. I would imagine that they were a successful bunch, with a benevolent façade wrapped around some serious muscle.

We continued digging for days and days, finding more and more specimens just like the ones I've already mentioned. The dig crews from the other guild sites are visibly annoyed with us, as their digs have proven far less bounteous. To make things worse, many of the specimens found at the other sites have turned out to be Selesnyan! Well that really gets their goats, especially the worn-out bunch at the Dimir dig site. They've been at it for weeks and have yet to find anything.

Many thanks to Professor Tad for his effort and insight. With the exception of the theory about the **Centaur Safeguard's** hair style, the Professor's observations were right-on. There may be some question about his assessment of the Conclave as a “cult.” Those of you who read Mark Rosewater's column, “[Group Think](#),” may have wondered why he said green/white is not a cult and Professor Tad says it is. Two things; 1. Mark was referring to the vast scope of green/white philosophy as it applies to cards throughout **Magic's** history as well as to people and characters outside of the game. The Professor was talking about just this guild, the Selesnya Conclave. A wonderful thing about the guilds is that they are not exact photocopies of **Magic's** color philosophies. We get to explore the unique paths they have chosen to take within their color pairs. 2. Professor Tad may be prone to extreme theories, since they definitely sell more books.

I am glad that I asked the Professor to do this. It would have been easy for me to come out and tell you all the stuff that Professor Tad found. But what is important here is that everything he discovered was right there on the cards. They're your own personal dig site, a little anthropology study that you get to interpret on your own. You don't have to listen to me to know everything you need to know about the Selesnya Conclave. All you need to do is look at the cards!

Oh, there is one thing you might not be able to get from the cards, and for that we welcome back our pal Sekki, Pronunciation's Guide. There are a few words upon Selesnya cards, including the guild name itself, that may be tricky on the tongue.

Selesnya - suh•LES•nee•ah. Yup, it's pretty important that we know how to say this word, since it appears on 15 cards in the set!

Vitu-Ghazi - VEE•too GAH•zee. This one turns out to be a piece of cake.

Autochthon - aw•TOK•thun. Four consonants in a row can be daunting, but this bulky word rolls pretty easily off the tongue.

Segue - SEG•way. This word has nothing to do with anything, but Matt uses it at the bottom of the page and it looks really strange in print.

The Golgari expand, yes, but I refuse to call their tainted creations ‘growth.’
—Veszka, *Selesnya evangel*

Oooh! Check out Veszka with the sweet segue. We'll be venturing deep into the dark heart of the wood in two weeks. All Gulgari, all the time.



*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own **D&D** characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; **D&D** and **Magic**. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



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