



Reinforcing the Structure

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Latest Developments
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Because the *Ravnica* block is divided by guilds in a unique 4/3/3 split, the design team was quite wary of giving away too much information about the latter two sets in the block via the structure of the first. In other words, they didn't want too many cycles that stretched across the block that would be too predictable in *Guildpact* and *Dissension*.

In fact, the only hard-and-fast cycles handed over to development were the rare lands—which were printed exactly as they were designed—and a cycle of common lands meant to facilitate multicolored play in Limited. The rest of the design cycles were very, very loose, and many of them made it through development that way.



For instance, there is a "cycle" of what we call "enhanced spells"—spells that have an additional effect if a specific color of mana was spent to play them. (Examples are *Vigor Mortis* and *Boros Fury-Shield*.) The cycle spans the four guilds in the set and is very, very unstructured. Their costs range from anywhere between three mana and six. Three of them are sorceries and five are instants. Three are common and the other five are uncommon. Not exactly the level of structure you may be used to in our cycles. This lack of structure was intentional, to allow the designers of the small sets maximum freedom, and to make the contents of those sets more difficult to deduce ahead of time.

Another very loose cycle is the common creatures with off-colored mana symbols in their text boxes. Again, this is an eight-card cycle through the four guilds, and it includes cards as different as *Elves of Deep Shadow*, *Screaching Griffin*, and *Mortipede*. Very loose indeed.

Not all of design's loose cycles made it through intact. The original attempts at the guildmages were all wildly varying—they had different sizes and costs to reduce predictability. There were eight—all common—and each had an on-color ability and a stronger off-color ability. Some examples:

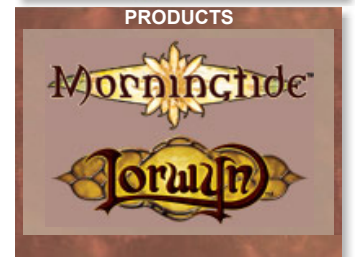
```
CG01_CON
Greenwhite Guildmage
1G
Creature - Human Druid
1/2
G, T: Add one mana of any color to your mana pool.
W, T: Target creature gains protection from the color of your choice
until end of turn.

CB01_CON
Blackblue Guildmage
6B
Creature - Zombie Wizard
3/2
B, T: Target player discards a card. Play this ability only when you can
play a sorcery.
U, T: Target player draws a card. Play this ability only when you can
play a sorcery.
```

When development started going over the set, we got the feeling that some level of structure was missing. Granted, the idea of loosening up and disguising cycles had merit, but we liked the idea of giving the guilds a little more common ground so that comparing and contrasting them would be easier. It was creative director Brady Dommermuth that really hammered home the point that ten guildmages across the block all with identical stats and costs would really give the guilds a focal point for comparison to one another that you just couldn't get with wildly disparate cards like the guildmages from design. We took Brady's words to heart and added lots of cycles.

Guildmages

For a brief moment prior to Brady's sage advice, we toyed with the idea of scrapping the idea of guildmages altogether, instead opting for uncommon artifacts—"guildstones," if you will—that each had two different activations. I liked the idea of these stones because I really wanted to find a place to portray each of the guilds' emblems in card art; design had submitted some enchant lands that I thought would make good homes for the guilds art, but they were killed in development, so the guildstones seemed like a good fit.



But as I mentioned earlier, Brady and the creative team were hoping we would use the concept of a guildmage cycle somehow as they wanted a place to put the visual of ten “typical” guild members on cards. We came up with gold uncommon 2/2s that cost CD and had poly-activated abilities—a great solution in my mind because they are so different from the *Mirage* guildmages (and Invasion apprentices) that predated them. We were okay with a “predictable” cycle of 2/2 gold creatures, but gave ourselves leeway on how much the abilities would cost to use or whether or not they would involve an additional cost (see *Boros Guildmage* and *Golgari Guildmage* for extreme examples). Because the variations in cost allow for variations in power, we’re confident that future guildmages will still be very exciting.

As I stated in [my article on hybrid cards](#), the guildmages eventually made the leap to the split-colored frames, making them even more cool and more powerful.

The Guildhouses

Each guild had a rare land and a common land (which I’ll discuss in a bit). What about uncommon? The creative team originally wanted to name the dual lands after the guilds (so, for instance, *Sacred Foundry* would have been called *Sunhome, Fortress of the Legion*) but development really disliked that idea as we wanted to keep these dual lands in our back pockets for potential future re-use (and Sunhome would not be a suitable name for a land in most of our other settings). Creative continued to push us to come up with a way to put the guildhouses on cards. They didn’t make sense on the common lands, and we didn’t want them to tie the rares to the *Ravnica* setting. So our only answer was to create a third cycle of lands.

Green-white was the easiest—the Conclave were all but begging for a *Kjeldoran Outpost*-style card—and that was the first one we made. We settled on abilities for the other three after some amount of discussion. The oddest of them all is *Svogthos, the Restless Tomb*. The development team was in love with the idea of a “Ihurgoyf land” (probably irrationally so), but the creative team was having a hard time reconciling the idea of a guildhall turning into a giant Plant Zombie and attacking. Maybe we should have compromised, but we didn’t back down. Luckily some creative naming—“Restless Tomb” indeed!—was implemented to try and make sense of the whole mess.



We were a bit worried about having so many slots in the set taken up by land, especially on the heels of *Kamigawa*, which was chock full of somewhat underwhelming lands, especially at rare (Untaidake, anyone?). But we felt each cycle was good enough at its job and significantly cool to be worth making. I hope you agree.

Common lands and Signets

As we played sealed deck and draft during development, one thing became quite clear—the file was lacking in mana fixing, especially at common. The common lands that were there did not do enough:

```
CL04_CON
R/W Filter Land
Land
T: Add 1 to your mana pool.
2: Add R or W to your mana pool.
```

The problem with these was that you never wanted more than one in play, as the second one did nothing for you. For that reason, these were never drafted highly, and most people left them out of their decks entirely.

We had two goals in my design as we searched for replacements for these lands. One, we wanted them to be very helpful in fixing colors in limited, so much so that players that understood them would actively seek them out—in multiples—while drafting. Two, we wanted them to be playable in constructed to give budget deckbuilders a taste of the good life (we had never done decent dual lands at common before). All this, yet they still had to feel common. Quite a task!

It took us about twenty tries at dual lands before we came up with what we affectionately called the “Karoos” (names after a little-known number from *Visions*). I’m very pleased with the results—they are very powerful, generating a form of card advantage by counting as two lands rolled up into one card—but their drawback is significant enough that you have to think about how many to play and on what turn to drop them. I do feel that they are perfectly viable in Standard (as long as you aren’t facing too many decks with *Annex* and/or *Stone Rain*), block constructed, and especially casual play. There have never been dual lands this good that have been this easy to acquire before.



The signets were suggested by Brian Schneider and, again, I fell in love with the idea because they seemed like the perfect place to showcase the guild insignias (and I still think so, don't you agree?). Like the Karoos, the Signets are very valuable in limited and are at just the right power level to be common, yet still have some constructed applications. And who says we don't make tournament-quality common mana fixers? Don't even get me started on **Terrarion**—another constructed gem!



The Legends

As I mentioned previously, design handed over the file with varying numbers of legends in each guild, usually two or three. (For example, in black-green, the card that would become **Vulturous Zombie** was originally legendary along with Savra and the Sisters.)

Development decided to go with two distinct cycles of legends. The first would require a heavy color commitment mana-wise to be able to play them; one legend in each guild would cost "CCDD" (two mana of one color and two mana of another) to play. The second cycle would have less restrictive mana costs, but would reward players for playing cards of its colors, and doubly so for using *multicolored* cards of its colors with the intent that they would be lynchpins of guild decks.

Many cards from the first cycle were already in the file; we simply had to update the mana costs of Szadek, Razia, and the Sisters from 3C (he was only a 3/3), 4C , and 6C respectively. For the other cycle, development had some work to do.



Agrus Kos was made from whole cloth, as there was nothing in the design file that lent itself easily to a card that would help red and white creatures in combat. Savra and Circu evolved from the following cards:

```
RZ20_CON
Hermie, Dark Elf
1BG
Legendary Creature - Elf Rogue
2/2
Whenever a permanent you control is sacrificed, you may pay 1 life to
draw a card.
"Stop my dental aspirations, will you?"
```

```
RZ02_CON
Dark Pikula
UB
Creature - Human Wizard
2/2
When CARDNAME comes into play, remove the top 4 cards of target player's
library from the game.
Nonland cards with the same name as a card removed in this way cannot be
played.
```

And **Tolsimir Wolfblood** (perhaps my favorite card in the set) was a fusion of the following two cards, the first of which was from design—a giant rare version of **Selesnya Evangel**, and the second was created by development when creative told us they were considering a "giant pacifist wolf" as one of the leaders of the Conclave.

RZ12_CON
 Venus, Super Lover
 4GW
 Legendary Creature - Lover
 4/4
 T, Tap an untapped creature you control: Put a green 4/4 creature token into play.

RZ10_CON
 Giant Wolf
 2GW
 Legendary Creature - Wolf
 5/5
 Defender
 Other green creatures you control get +1/+1.
 Other white creatures you control get +1/+1.

Guild Artifacts

In design's defense, there was a pretty rigid cycle of equipment in the file. Each guild had a piece of equipment that cost 2 to play and could be equipped for either 5 or "CD." The cycle was doomed from the start, however, as the cards were neither compelling nor very good (I can say this as I designed them in the first place), and development wanted to back off on equipment in general in this block.

Development tried and tried to come up with a decent cycle of artifacts, but none of them seemed worth it, so the idea was abandoned. The idea of each guild having a rare artifact that would still be of use in non-guild decks was still appealing to many members of R&D, and many comments were put into the file requesting that we keep looking for a way to do them.

I believe it was Mark Gottlieb that eventually came up with the solution, simply by tacking guild abilities onto artifacts that were already in the file. **Crown of Convergence** didn't have the "GW" ability at all before Mark suggested it. Similarly, **Bloodletter Quill** had no way of removing the blood counters. And **Sunforger** could unattach for a colorless cost to search for a cheap red instant or sorcery; it wasn't too difficult to adapt that card for the Boros guild. The only artifact that was actually created to be guild-affiliated was **Plague Boiler**.



As you can see, development really upped the structure within the guild system, but did so in a way that would not give away too much about cards in later sets. Sure, many of you can presume whether a card called Gruul Signet will be in *Guildpact* and what that card will do, but what Gruul's rare artifact—assuming it has one—costs or does is anyone's guess. But whatever it is, it will fit snugly into the overall structure of the guild model.

Last Week's Poll

Did you play in Champs (States, Provincials, etc.?)		
No, I have never played in these events.	5660	79.9%
No, but I have played in Champs in the past.	615	8.7%
Yes, and this was my first time doing so.	416	5.9%
Yes, and I have done so in previous years.	389	5.5%
Total	7080	100.0%

This Week's Poll

What was your initial impression of the idea of *Coldsnap*?

- Awesome!
- Pretty cool.
- Whatever.
- I don't like it.
- I really don't like it.

Submit my Vote

Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.



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