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Rage Against the Machine

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

The Gruul will kick you in the face. That's no news. Red/Green has been the face-booter for years before the Gruul came along. But, and this is a big but, the *reason* the Gruul smash face is not the same as all the rest of the random mindless beaters in **Magic's** history.

The Gruul will kick you in the face because they are angry. They will kick you in the face because they've had enough. They will kick you in the face because they are sick of it all.

The Gruul are not a gang of thick-headed fools with nothing better to do than to beat people up. They are also not a pack of wild animals with running on attack instinct. They are exploited, downtrodden, disenfranchised and brushed aside. They have an axe to grind and they choose to do it on your skull.

Let's rewind 10,000 years to when the Guildpact was signed. The Gruul were a different story then. They were the guild of the wild, a noble guild charged with keeping civilization in check and maintaining the wilderness spaces where many of the (then) Ravnican races made their homes. Well, we all know how that ended.



Over the next 10 millennia, the unstoppable inertia of civilization, progress, and nine greedy guilds pushed the Gruul aside and mowed down the wilds. The other Green guilds began to scavenge on the Gruul's piece of the Guildpact pie, claiming bits of "nature" as their own. The Simic claimed to be stewards of nature's future, while the Selesnya preached about nature in attempts to pull the last remnants of the wilds into their fold. The old Gruul identity was slowly wrested from their hands- leaving them with no official duty to the Guildpact. Without a part to play, they were seen only as outlanders and savages by the other nine. The Azorius began to exclude them from written law and official guild conventions, and the Boros began to see them as rabble-rousers to be put in their place. The worst came from the Orzhov, who took advantage of their falling status and put many to labor and others into slavery. The new laws did not include them, and therefore could not protect them. They were ostracized.

With their official guild leadership no longer recognized, the guild decentralized. Leaders were built up and torn down often, as power struggles ravaged the guild. The somewhat "recognized" leader of the guild is usually the biggest, angriest, most vocal badass on the block – or the latest one to rally interclan support by smashing down an Azorius courthouse or newly-built Izzet foundry. In most respects, the Gruul have fallen apart, hardly a guild at all. But, through all the years of pain, oppression, and ostracism, there is one thing that binds this guild together like no other. Revenge!

After thousands of years as the red-headed stepchild of the Guildpact, the Gruul have acquired a universal taste for revenge. They may not have a strict code to follow, or a regimented chain of leadership, but they've all got payback on their minds. Nothing brings people together more effectively than a common enemy. When *everybody* is the enemy, you've got yourself a bloodthirsty band of raging red-heads.

I love the Gruul. I am a big fan of the underdog, and these guys are the ultimate example of the underdog. I truly believe that one's greatest feats are performed when one's abilities are doubted (or worse, scoffed at) by the rest of the world. What is it the football coach tells his team before they take the field? "They think they're better than us. They think we can't stop their running game. Sure, they beat us last time around, but, you know what? I think we're going to kick them in the face!" And all the bloodthirsty red-heads (I envision the Cleveland Browns - perennial underdogs) rage in unison and start smacking their helmeted skulls together chanting and barking like rabid dogs (or is it dawgs. Sorry, I could not resist that one.) Not into football? Try on this analogy: In the movie *Rocky*, and in all four of its sequels, the only fighter who ever wins is the underdog. Clubber Lang (now there's a Gruul name) beats Rocky down when the "champ" is the favorite. But then Rocky seeks revenge (notice the theme emerging), he clubs the Clubber in the rematch. The only fights that Rocky wins as the champion are the ones that Mickey fixed (the little Orzhov bastard). The underdog is hungry. The



... And the last known survivor stalks his prey in the night, And he's watchin' us all with the eye of the Cyclops

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underdog gets to be the giant-killer. In the movies, he always wins - just ask William Wallace.

That one was good for a gag, but the Gruul would have nothing to do with such a naïve, commercial, limp-beat band like Survivor. Try these Rage Against the Machine lyrics for a taste of true **Gruul rock and roar**:

*They want us to allege and pledge
And bow down to their God
Lost the culture, the culture lost
Spun our minds and through time
Ignorance has taken over
Yo, we gotta take the power back!*

How perfect is that! Who are "they," the spineless chumps heeding the Guildpact? Whose "God," the Orzhov, the Selesnya, the whole lot of 'em? It practically spells out the ten thousand years of suffering and loss of identity and homeland...and the savage cry to "take the power back!" Zack de la Rocha might as well be a Gruul Guildmage. Get yourself into the Gruul mindset, pop in a Rage CD while you read the rest of this article- and crank it up, regardless of what your sell-out Orzhov boss says!

Send In The Torch-Pigs!

Now that we're starting to feel the buzzing, angry groove of the Gruul, let's take a look at where it starts to show up on the Guildpact cardboard. A good place to start is with the ones who pass on the lore and the tradition of rage to the downtrodden masses. In this guild it's not the leader (he's just the big bludgeon du jour), it's the Gruul guildmage. The guildmage's focused anger and charismatic fire whip the guild into a frenzy and point it at the right things to smash. Let's see what the guildmage Ghut Rak has to say:

"This palace will be our fire-spit, and roasted prince our victory meal. Send in the torch-pigs!"

"The other guilds think they're untouchable. It's time we brought them back down to earth."

Rak's words are not so different from those of guildmage de la Rocha. Both pieces are about giving "The Man" a taste of his own medicine. He channels his inner football coach in both statements, whipping his followers into a violent frenzy. In neither piece does the focus of their rage seem random. These are not acts of mindless thuggery. Whether from the guilds or oppressive royalty, the Gruul aim to "take the power back!"

The guildmages are not the only source of Gruul fanaticism. The Burning-Tree Clan is one of the most influential in the guild. These are the proud and angry zealots who make sure no one forgets the old heritage of the guild. Tattooed with the guild insignia, they talk of what the Gruul has lost and who must be crushed for taking it away.

Gruul shamans are bent on punishing the civilized. Any act more complex than rubbing sticks together or eating with utensils is met with the stinging burn of their magic.

Now that the wilds are run over with city sprawl, the only places the Gruul can call their own are the rubble fields and blasted out slum districts. Do not feel too bad for them - they often create these districts for themselves by overrunning an area with a great location and a sweet waterfall view. The guild has become the unofficial squatter-chief of the slum districts of Ravnica. In a uncharacteristic twist of humor and irony, the Gruul began "claiming" fresh new lands by using the discarded ghettolands of the privileged:

The Orzhov contract the Izzet to animate slum districts and banish them to the wastes. The Gruul adopt them and send them back to the city for vengeance.



(A little aside here - this is the finest depiction of a viashino evaaar. They should all look this vicious.)

The whole **Rumbling Slum** situation fell right into the Gruul's lap - given that "the wastes" is synonymous with the grungy place where Gruul live. It's not the barren waste you may have envisioned. In Ravnica, wasteland is a place just as congested with buildings as the thriving center of downtown Rav, it's just that it is crumbling and devoid of any civilized life (other than the Gruul - if you call them civilized). That the citizenry of Ravnica consider Gruul territory a wasteland and a public dumpster is just another kick in the crotch that ultimately fuels the Gruul bloodthirst (see how I keep sneaking that in?).

Perhaps nothing typifies the essence of the Gruul more than the Scab Clan. This is not a clan that angles for guild power. It is not a clan that needs to hear the fervent rhetoric of the Burning-Tree clan. This clan does not need to hear about the history of the downfall of the Gruul to get hyped up for revenge. The Scab Clan is the most vengeful and violent of them all because their rage is born of *their own* suffering. The Scabs are the aptly named clan of mutilated, tortured, crippled, blinded, and enraged victims of the other nine guilds. While most of them were maimed by Orzhov hands, there are those who have been broken by the serene Selesnya and the law-abiding Azorius. No, the ragged, rancorous Scabs do not need to hear about 10,000 years ago. Their hatred is as fresh as the lashes on their shredded backs, as blinding as their burnt-out eyes.

Many Scab Clan enemies have learned the hard way not to underestimate them. Yes, they are all physically

deficient, but they make up for this with a cooperation born of necessity and rage against a common enemy.

Present guild leadership is on board with all this stuff, though not quite as fanatical about it. In fact, **Borborygmus** is not so much interested in the way things were or the way they should be. What he is interested in is uniting his people (under his rule of course), and nothing seems to bind the Gruul like smashing the homes and faces of enemies. He's a growing power, dangerous in the eyes of the other guilds. They see that his "modern" method of leadership does not turn off the more savage guild member with talk of the old days, the Guildpact, and responsibilities. He's rallying Gruul with just the fun parts of revenge. We can hear the concern about his mounting influence in the words of Teysa, a high ranking Orzhov aristocrat:

"It's easy to see why those Gruul dirtbags follow him—the only orders he gives are 'Crush them!' and 'We eat!'"

It is also easy to see why Borborygmus has little trouble whipping his peeps into a frenzy- "They call us dirtbags! Crush them!" As you can see from the art of **Wreak Havoc** (above) and in the flavor text of **Gruul Scrapper**, these guys need very little convincing to start breakin' stuff.

The Gruul aren't satisfied with just smashing things. They continue smashing other things with the things they just smashed.

Borborygmus has a pretty easy time keeping his clan "inspired." Guildmages do most of the heavy lifting, inspiring the disenfranchised, informing those hungry for purpose. For the rest, all it takes is "Crush them!" or "We eat!" or a little old tradition called Rauck-Chauv. Here's what the **Tin Street Hooligan** has to say about it:

"Rauck-Chauv's like a holiday! Only it isn't on the calendars, and instead of dancing you knock people flat, and instead of giving gifts you break stuff."

While it sounds like a feeble excuse to wreck things, it's really a very effective Gruul method of lifting their own spirits while crushing those of the other guilds. Rauck-Chauv, named after a two-headed leader of the first Ghor clan, is a Gruul holiday that occurs, wow - what a coincidence - on the same day as other guild holidays. Today is the Azorius sponsored **Festival of the Guildpact**? Rauck-Chauv! It's **Congregation** day at Vitu-Ghazi? Rauck-Chauv! All one has to do is shout the words and the Gruul begin the "festivities," disrupting ceremonies, crashing feasts, burning the place down. It's really quite a riot. A truly successful Rauck-Chauv cannot be fully appreciated until one year later, when the enemy holiday ends up scaled down, held in secret, or canceled altogether. Aaah, the memories.

*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.*



They inflict pain to forget their own and break foes to feel whole.



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