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The Long And Winding Road

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Taste the Magic
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As a person graduates from one phase of life to another; be it high school, college, pee wee league soccer, or the Jelly of the Month Club, nostalgic feelings well up, time is taken to reflect, and really cheesy sayings end up defining the moment. When approaching my high school graduation, so many cornball folks were saying things like "what a long strange trip it's been" or "it's a long and winding road." Song quotes were big for the young doofs of Orange High who could not craft for themselves a thought that summed up their bittersweet feelings about the end of an era. I scoffed at them, and their lame need for the Beatles or Led Zeppelin to speak for them.



(Art shown only because the word "Zeppelin" appears to the left.)

But now I sort of understand. The *Dissension* cat is out of the bag now. There are no more *Ravnica* tidbits waiting behind the velvet purple curtain. Sure, there are some little secrets I can divulge, but the meat is on the plate and there is no *Ravnica* dessert. This makes me feel like the Orange High School cornballs back in 1989. I get it now. They were bummed - as I am a bit bummed now. The *Ravnica* block was my first experience as a member of **Magic's** Creative Team. In a way, this marks the coming of the end of an era for me. But I will not wallow. I will not quote Billy Squier or Journey or the Stones. Instead, I choose to celebrate this third and final installment of *Ravnica* goodness by quoting Josuri and Chagrach, Mathvan and Uzric. That's right, I am going to brighten my mood by taking a stroll down the Gnat Alley of *Dissension* flavor text. What does this mean? I will let you know by kicking off the flavor text nostalgi-o-rama right now:

Despite its diminutive name, Gnat Alley is the longest street in Ravnica. Mile after twisting mile, it threads its way among the broader, safer thoroughfares like a parasite.

This is not exactly the most thought provoking or colorful or well-crafted piece of flavor text in the set, but gave me a chuckle when I thought about it in relation to the Beatles's "The Long and Winding Road." I choose to hear this flavor text in my head as if it were being read by Paul McCartney. Anyway, that's the sort of cheese that we'll try to avoid as we look at the *Dissension* flavor text that is really cool.

Let's have a look at another expository piece of flavor text. This one comes from *Guardian of the Guildpact*.

The magic of the Guildpact gives aegis to the spirits pressed into its service. Upon entering the afterlife, they find new focus and are charged with defending the Guildpact against those who would see it broken.

Again, not a Shakespearean piece, but one with a lot of meat. This particular meat is ironic. This does not mean it is fortified with vitamins and minerals. It means that it is funny to me that this card appears in *Dissension*, of all places - and not just because "Guildpact" is in the name and it's not in *Guildpact*. I will not give away any specifics, but those who read the *Dissension* novel (or even just the name of a booster pack) may share my feeling on this. For all of us, however, it gives us a better understanding of the scope of the *Guildpact*. It's not just a handshake between super-powered vampires, dragons, and angles. It's not just a piece of paper with ten signet stamps at the bottom. It's a powerful spell that binds the guilds and the world to the terms of the agreement. That's heavy stuff.

Let's switch gears a bit (I am bumping around the set randomly, citing the goodies as I am struck by them). Here's what we read on the punslingin' **Bronze Bombshell**:

*"Ooh, shiny! Let's pull off the chain and take her with us."
—Ukl, Gruul raider, last words*

This seems like the place to hear from Ukl, since he's dead now and we're sort of looking back. Well, actually, we're not going to be lauding Ukl at all - he's an idiot. Elye Alexander, the fellow who penned this one, deserves the credit. I like how he captured the fun vibe of the card and drew attention to the grenade-pin chain that detonates the "bombshell." Fun flavor for a fun Johnny card.

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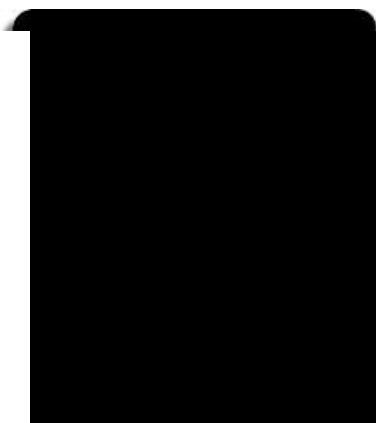
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Here's one that'll make the guilded smile:

"I must speak with Momir Vig about creating a water-spouting watchdog."
 —Mathvan, Prahv scrollwarden

That's a doozy by our pal Elye that packs all three *Dissension* guilds into a little one-liner! Elye sure knows how to kill multiple bird tokens with one stone - and his wit is as sharp as his aim.



The Rakdos make sure their victims remember their pain—or at least give up a little bit of their sanity in order to forget.

This gem by Doug Beyer dishes out some dark flavor on the Rakdos, illustrating how deep their relationship with pain really is. It's interesting in and of itself, but it also happens to mirror the card's mechanics perfectly. Often, the flavor text that seems to reiterate the mechanic of the spell ends up falling flat. This time, Doug makes it an added bonus.

Speaking of the Rakdos, here's another winner that lets us know just what sort of wacko finds fraternity in the Demon Cult:

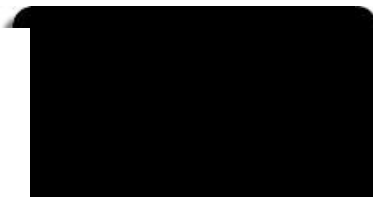
Rakdos festivals almost leave enough rubble in their wake to hide the bodies.

What a hoot! You may be interested to know that that one was the creation of your [Saturday School](#) teacher, John Carter. I'd cite the flavor text of *Slaughterhouse Bouncer* as well (oops, I think I already did) if it was as snappy as *Wrecking Ball*, and if I did not want to save enough for the Demon Cult Death-dance Fiesta that could be described in my Rakdos week article.

How's this for the opposite of a Rakdos party?

When it takes forever to learn all the rules, no time is left for breaking them.

Somehow this one reminds me more of high school than **Magic**.



The Azorius are not all stuffy. Sometimes they are righteous ass-kickers. This one's a personal fave, another winner written by mtg.com's own Doug Beyer:

"As my father taught, 'Training will raise your shield to the blow, but courage fills the gaps the shield leaves open.'"



Courage. A vastly undervalued quality in modern society. But, in Ravnica- where demons and Drekvacs drool outside the coffee shops, courage is a key to survival.

The flavor text for **Mistral Charger** may not seem like a big deal (because it's not). But it is a nifty little link back to the **Guildpact** card, **Storm Herd**.

"When you hear thunder on a cloudless day, take cover and brace for the coming of the storm herd."
—Skotov, Tin Street basket vendor

Some sky steeds break from the thundering herd to ride free on the open winds.

Dissension, being the clincher set of the block, ties in stuff from all three sets and wraps up some unfinished business.

Here's one that ties together two cards from this set:



Here's the flavor text from **Kindle the Carnage**:

"Start knockin' heads, boys, and don't stop 'til the ragamuffyn sings!"

This piece was a bit of collaboration between Elye Alexander and me. I liked Elye's idea of having the flavor text be the command to fight (and to keep on fighting for a long time). I imagine that this is what the Rakdos wizard yells as he is casting **Kindle the Carnage**. The coolness factor, for me at least, is that you read this flavor text and immediately think of the old saying "It ain't over 'til the fat lady sings." In this regard, the flavor text seems to mean this same thing. But later, when you run across a **Ragamuffyn** card, you realize that her mouth is sewn shut and she can't sing. Ever. Ha! They're still knockin' heads down there at the Hob-goblet Tavern to this day.

And then there's this one- a big, fat, three card package. The card **Protean Hulk** ties up a loose end that was born of the card **Borborygmos**. It all started when the snooty Teysa had this to say about Ol' One Eye:

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

And that led to (or did it follow?) **Wreak Havoc**:

"Crush them!"
—Borborygmos

I thought it would be cool to give a little nod to one of my favorite pieces of *Guildpact* flavor text, but decided to leave it at just one card - **Wreak Havoc**. But then my editor, Del, crept over to my desk and asked where the rest of the **Borborygmos** quote was. I was surprised and pleased that she noticed and wanted to finish up the "Crush them!" and "We eat!" triptych. But it was late in the game and I could not find a place for it. I considered swapping it in on **Gristleback**, but I liked its flavor too much. So we resolved to find a home for it in *Dissension*. It was not

easy. I had almost given up, and then I saw it. I saw it, in fact, for many many hours. I was staring at the burly chunk of green eggs and ham for days as I painted the **Protean Hulk**. I had found my "We eat!" card.

"Meat and eggs. We eat!"
—*Borborygmos*

Speaking of tying up loose ends - there was an old article of mine in which I was eating something else entirely: my own words. In [my Mythbashing article](#) I previewed a piece of "Guildpact" art. "...see if you can figure out which guild lays claim to this crazy monster," I said. Well, now you know that it was in fact *Dissension* art, and you know that green eggs and ham do not belong to any guild.



In addition to the wordslingers I have already mentioned, *Dissension* also shines with the work of four other fine fellows. Their work in the set is equally good, but did not fit into the flow of my babbling. Here they are, each with a piece of flavor text that I dig:

Rei Nakazawa - **Brain Pry**:

To the Rakdos, the fun is in the shakedown. The loot is usually discarded.

This is a nifty one. It delivers the devilish nature of the Rakdos, and also contains a clever nod to card itself. This sort of humor is usually bad, but when delivered with wit and restraint, as it is here, it can be really cool.

Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar-Voidslime:

"It is technically an ooze, but its lifespan measures only seconds. In that short time, its appetite for magic is extraordinary."
—*Simic research notes*

This may be my favorite in the set. I don't know why I did not notice it before. Anyway, here it is now, in all its gooey glory. This flavor text is both creative *and* inspiring - all you Vorthoses out there with Ooze decks built can now add in another honorary ooze card!

Jake Theis - **Prahv, Spires of Order**:

Prahv, where much work is done to make sure nothing is accomplished.

Strong! I almost wanted to save this one for Azorius week, but then I decided to tip the cap to Jake and show his best work.

Garrett Baumgartner - **Soulsworn Jury**:

In death, as in life, they protect the Grand Arbiter from exposure to contrary points of view.

If you don't want to hear them jabber, don't let them come to the party. Nice!

You know what? I don't feel so bummed anymore. All it takes to liven the spirits is a little trip down Gnat Alley. In fact, *Dissension* cards, as well as all *Ravnica* block cards, are Standard legal 'til September of 2007. That leaves us a lot of time to weave back and forth through the seedy alleyways of Ravnica. This would be a perfect place for a Skid Row quote - but I don't know any lyrics. (Actually, that's a lie. I just don't know any good ones. Mostly, they had no good ones. But that dude had some sweet hair.) Rock on, Vorthos!

*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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