

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# Ravnica Guild Bake-Off

Matt Cavotta  
Taste the Magic  
Wednesday, July 12, 2006



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

**C**oldsnap is right around the corner, and *Time Spiral* is just around the bend. But you know what, I am not ready to pack my bags and leave *Ravnica* yet. We do still have Rakdos week coming up soon, but it's sandwiched in between *Coldsnap*'s release and *Time Spiral* previews. So today we're going to pay some much deserved respect to one of **Magic's** greatest blocks ever.



Since my first guild week article, I have wanted to do an article like this one, an article in which we pit the flavor of each guild against the other. I would write something about how cool I thought a particular guildmage illustration was, but could not weigh it against other cool ones that had not yet been released. It just has not seemed right to do, until now. At this point, we have all had time to come to know and love all of the guilds—so the *Ravnica* guilds do not have any measurable advantage over the more recent *Guildpact* or *Dissension* guilds.

As I run through what I believe to be the coolest X, Y, or Z of all the guilds, remember that it's all just my educated, insider's opinion. I'll give my reasons for my choices, but it's all really there to stir up thought and conversation about the best

**Magic** theme since...well, ever: The guilds. *Ravnica* was a joy

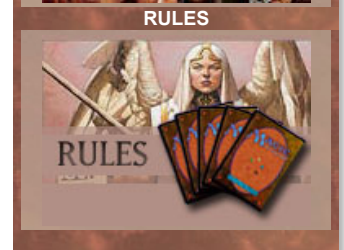
to work on, is a ball to play, and inspiring just to talk about. So do not let it go gently into that Cold night. "Rage, rage," howls the **Gruul Guildmage**. Speaking of guildmages...

## Ravnica's Best Guildmage

Since we're not here to talk about mechanics, and all the guildmages have no flavor text and basically the same name, we're going to look to the art for their coolness.

10. **Boros Guildmage** - Somehow I just can't buy the slouching Goth girl as a powerhouse of military magic.
9. **Azorius Guildmage** - I also have a hard time believing that an uptight, follow-the-protocol, Azorius lawmage would walk the halls of Prahv in a tube top. It's a bummer, because outside of the Azorius guild, this is a really cool piece of art. But here we are.
8. **Gruul Guildmage** - I was unsure whether this guy or the **Simic Guildmage** belonged at number 8. Neither one really exemplifies the feel of its guild. **Gruul Guildmage** is not the raging savage I wanted to see, and the **Simic Guildmage** seems a little too much tech for a biomancer.
7. **Simic Guildmage** - This guy gets the nod over the Gruul because the art, on its own, is darn cool.
6. **Golgari Guildmage** - This is a great example of the Golgari life/death dichotomy as well as a wonderful example of *Ravnica*'s city world. It's bumped to 6 because it lacks contrast and clarity—at card size it's a bit hard to make out.
5. **Orzhov Guildmage** - I am probably ruffling some feathers by putting this guy down at number 5. Most folks really like the art for **Orzhov Guildmage**, but this is as high as I can put it. The image is compelling, but it just does not exemplify the ostentation or conflict nature of the guild. If this were used as the **Dimir Guildmage** art, we would not skip a beat—and that means something is amiss. Cool image, but not for the Orzhov.
4. **Selesnya Guildmage** - Nicely painted and composed, set in the city-world, and right in line with Selesnya's look and feel. With a little more color it might have bumped up to 3.
3. **Rakdos Guildmage** - This fiery, screaming freak looks like he's almost smiling—and that's what earns him the number 3 spot. It looks like one of two things: 1) He's about to have an arson party (very Rakdos), or 2) He's enjoying the pain of his burning arm (very, very Rakdos).
2. **Dimir Guildmage** - The thing I love about this one is that it is not only painted and composed with skill, it also tells a little Dimir story. There he is, in the back alleys of *Ravnica*, with his cape billowing behind him as he silently breezes away from...who? We don't know, but we can see the shadow of someone behind him. The Guildmage looks to be hiding something as well, holding it close to his chest with magically lit hands. Is he being followed? Did he steal the

Final Wrap-up  
[Top 8 Video Archives](#)



thing he hides? Who knows—the Dimir do not reveal their secrets. Awesome!



1. **Izzet Guildmage** – I already tooted Izzy's horn a while back when it won the Parun's Trophy at the [Tournament of Signets Parade](#). This guildmage does two very important things: 1) Exemplify in every way what it is to be a member of the Izzet. (He's got the crazy hairdo, mage-tech gizmometry, blazing blue magic, and funky costume of the Izzet.) And 2) The painting blows me away not only as a flavor goob, but also as an artist. The facility with which this gem is delivered makes me want to stab myself in the neck with the blunt end of a paintbrush. The drawing is so solid, and yet it does not kill the motion (or emotion) of the piece. Jim Murray is sick. Izzy wins...again.



## Ravnica's Best Guildhall

Now that we know how the guildmages stack up against each other, let's see how their digs shake out. To be clear, a guild's "guildhall" is the land that begins with a proper name, like Nivix or Rix Maadi. The dual lands and bouncy lands are not under the spotlight. They're cool and all, but they don't have flavor text or proper names and, well, they're not the guildhalls.

This is going to be a tough one, with name, flavor text, and art to consider. Let's see what goes down.

10. **Svogthos, the Restless Tomb** – Though I really like the sound of this name and the fact that it ties into the history of the Guild's parun, Svogthir, I cannot help but think the art dropped the ball a bit. This place becomes a giant plant zombie and we do not really see any hints of that at all. Also, it has no flavor text (through no fault of its own, but someone has to bring up the rear.)

9. **Sunhome, Fortress of the Legion** – Sunhome, contrary to what its name suggests, does not shine. The art depicts a clunky building and its flavor text doesn't add much. The name is not bad, tying into the sun symbol in the **Boros Signet** as well as the guild name, **Boros Legion**. But it's not enough to raise it past 9.

Wow, this one is really difficult. These guildhalls are all really cool.

8. **Novijen, Heart of Progress** – There are a lot of things I like about this one. I like how "Heart of Progress" hits both sides of the Simic's knowledge vs. nature tension. I also enjoy the quote from Momir Vig and how it ties to the ability of the card.

*"The unnatural pressures of life in this city are best withstood by lifeforms that adapt with unnatural swiftness."—Momir Vig*

But it's not enough to redeem the art. For me, Novijen seems like it should have been aglow with bioluminescence.

7. **Rix Maadi, Dungeon Palace** – I think "Rix Maadi" is my favorite of all the guildhall proper names. It sounds so mysteriously gross and sinister. But the art and flavor text are just okay for me. Neither really captures the Rakdos Death Party vibe any more than the name "Dungeon Palace" does.

6. **Duskmantle, House of Shadow** – This place definitely has the Gothy-cool vibe of the Dimir, and its flavor text is the root of all the rumors -

*In a space where there is no room, in a structure that was never built, meets the guild that doesn't exist.*

5. **Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree** – Everything about this place is solid. Its flavor text earns it a top 5 spot. I love the image it paints of leaves fluttering to the earth, and then rising up as followers of the Conclave. Very cool.

4. **Nivix, Aerie of the Firemind** – This one is up here at number 4 on goober points alone. The fact that "Nivix" was named in honor of the egotistical guild leader, Niv-Mizzet hits home the point made by the flavor text:

*Niv-Mizzet's genius and vanity reverberate throughout the mirrored halls of Nivix.*

"Mirrored halls?" Hey, the dragon likes to preen.

3. **Prahv, Spires of Order** – Prahv is good in all three areas. The art shows a stately, towering structure in hard, clean lines. The name is austere and to the point. And the flavor text tickles me to no end.

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

2. **Skarrg, the Rage Pits** – Skarrg is in the top two not because of skill or artistry or panache, but because of the 'tude. This card has some serious attitude, starting with the name. You can't help but growl it, "Skarrg!" And the "Rage Pits" sums up the Gruul so well: lowly and pissed off. The flavor text is my favorite of all the guildhalls:

*"This palace will be our fire-spit, and roasted prince our victory meal. Send in the torch-pigs!"—Ghut Rak, Gruul guildmage*

That's some 'tude, ladies and gentlemen!

1. **Orzhova, the Church of Deals** – Whatever Orzhov flavor the guildmage lacked, the guildhall packs in bulk. Right from the first two syllables the flavor starts seeping out. "Orzhova" tells us from where the guild name originates. "Church of Deals" lays out the conflicted goals of the guild in three words. The flavor text is a winner as well;

*Unlike most churches, at Orzhova it's best to pray before you arrive.*

The art is the best of all the guildhalls. It's executed with more skill and captures the mood better than all the rest. Chalk one up for the Church of Deals. (I assure you I was not bribed, threatened, or offered any sort of compensation for tipping the scale toward the Orzhov.)



## Ravnica's Best Guild Signets

When I looked at the guild Signets, there were two things I focused on; the art for each Signet card, and the design of the Signet symbols themselves. (I looked to the flavor text to break any ties.)



10. **Rakdos Signet** – The symbol and the signet art are a bit clunky.



9. **Simic Signet** – The design of the symbol seems more about traditional Blue/Green philosophy than Simic philosophy. And the art looks like a bar of soap.



Why is number 8 always so hard? This is another toughie, as the rest of them are pretty cool.

8. **Gruul Signet** - The symbol design delivers some real coolness in a very subtle way. If you look inside the burning tree, there is a target-like circle. It's as if the Gruul use their Signet to mark "smash here!" Very cool, but the art does not really deliver it with the punch that a true Gruul vandal would.



7. **Orzhov Signet** – The symbol itself is simple and elegant. This would be really cool if it were not for the guild of ostentatious wealth. The art does a decent job of sprucing it up, but not enough to reach past #7.



6. **Boros Signet** – Solid design and art, but not much more than what meets the eye.

5. **Golgari Signet** – There is a subtle suggestion of the life/death cycle in the downward and upward pointing marks on the left and right of the symbol.



4. **Selesnya Signet** – The art for this Signet is one of the best—very solidly done. The symbol is calm and symmetrical, tying nature and the sun together very gracefully. Nice.

3. **Dimir Signet** – My favorite of the Signet art. The mysterious cloud obscuring our vision is a nice touch. I also like the eye that is worked into the symbol. “They’re watching you.”

2. **Izzet Signet** – What I like about this one is that the symbol has nothing to do with typical blue or red **Magic** themes. It’s all flavor, pal. Niv-Mizzet demands that his guild pay him tribute in all sorts of ways, as the Signet’s design and flavor text would attest. (Check out the little crown on the dragon. The Izzet designer totally had a brown nose.)



1. **Azorius Signet** – The genius of this symbol is in its frame of rigid simplicity—the equilateral triangle—that houses a complex, non-symmetrical maze of lines within. The art is executed with Azorius-like precision (compare with the **Rakdos Signet**). I think the flavor text sums it up nicely:

*The maze-like design embodies the core of Azorius law—strict structure designed to test wills and stall change.*

## Ravnica's Best Guildmaster

This category is a little harder to define than the others. Each guild has two legendary characters (or groups of characters), and there is no rule of thumb that will tell us which of the two is the guild leader. Since this is the case, you will have to just take my word for it. For those of you out there who are big fans of the **Sisters of Stone Death**, (myself included), you'll be saddened to find out that they are not in the running here. If this list were compiled a couple hundred years ago, they would have been in it. But for now, they're out there in the peanut gallery with all of you.

10. **Chorus of the Conclave** – The Chorus has a real uphill battle. It's not a single character, it's in one of the less colorful guilds, and it's basically a troupe of singing girls. Though the art is skillfully done, it's still looking up at the rest of 'em.

9. **Szadek, Lord of Secrets** – I expect to take a little flak for the Dimir vampire's low spot on the totem pole. But, I stand by my assessment. Though I really like the idea of Szadek, I am a tad underwhelmed by his actual look. The slicked-back hair, classic red garb, and George Hamilton looks are a bit too Hollywood for me

Before we continue, I just want to say how excruciating this list was to do. All of the art is top notch and all of the characters (well, most of them) are near and dear to all of us. But someone has to be #10 and #9 and so on. I reserve the right to go with my gut, since I cannot honestly claim that any of the art is bad or that any of the characters are not cool.

8. **Razia, Boros Archangel** – I love the Boros, and I love the idea of a 4-winged angel of military might. But somehow I cannot put her higher than 8. Maybe it's her very, very subtle awkwardness with the drawing of her torso. Maybe it's the way the bottom of her wings touch her feet. I don't know. I am grasping at straws here, but it's all I could think of.

7. **Ghost Council of Orzhova** – Possibly the best card of the bunch, but that's not what we're here for. My beef with the Council is that they ended up looking a little too zombie and not quite enough extremely wealthy dead

guy. The execution of the art is superb, and the mood is appropriately creepy, but here they are at #7.

6. **Borborygmus** – I think this guy is awesome. And yet, somehow he tops out at 6. His name is a riot (look up borborygmus in the dictionary) and his art is great too. Check out his armored bracer on his left hand—those are the shields of his fallen foes, some of them with guild signets upon them! This, plus some dandy flavor text, still only earns Ol' One-Eye a top 6 finish.



5. **Rakdos the Defiler** – Rakdos is what you call a lob. We pitched the artists a nice slow one and they did what great artists do with it - they smashed it. Rakdos is the demon we all want to see when we think of demons. (We all think of demons, right?) If only Rakdos was a bit more than the demon we all want to see—then it could have cracked the top 2. If only there was a little hint of carnival or theatre in there...

4. **Grand Arbiter Augustin IV** – What's not to love about a legless blind man dispensing justice from atop his magical hover-throne? The tight, smooth style of the art fits the Azorius perfectly, and it has captured the austerity of the Grand Arbiter, his aides, and the halls of Prahv perfectly.



3. **Momir Vig, Simic Visionary** – The old elf makes an awesome *Magic Online* avatar, but it does not help him here. What does help him is his art. Boros & Szikszai hit this nail right on the head. From the stern, intelligent look of Vig himself to the soupy bio-broth into which he dips his hand, to the glowing intestine-mechanus behind him. Great stuff.



2. **Savra, Queen of the Golgari** – It's hard not to become smitten with the wonderful and unique style of Scott Fischer's art. In this case, his amazing art also happens to fit its character and guild perfectly. It's haunting, rich, dark, and fecund with symbols and shapes reflecting both life and death. As I mentioned once before, in my [Golgari Week article](#), this card represents the serendipity of artist and writer aiming at the same target without even knowing it. Check out the art to the right, and consider this flavor text:

*"Nature's most raw beauty is the circle: perfect in its continuance, with no break between death and life."*

1. **Niv-Mizzet, the Firemind** – Greatest *Magic* dragon art ever (though *Planar Chaos* has one that could possibly unseat it). Even without the power of the art, this guy just has that undefinable "it." Like a rock star, his coolness seems to precede him. And he knows it too. His flavor text gives him extra mojo as well, at once being riddle, equation, and guildmaster's decree. I suppose it would have been more responsible of me to put him down at 4 or 5, just to keep it from going to his head. But then I thought, you can't get much more vain than he already is—so I went with the real deal.



I thought that would do it for this week—but then I decided to add up the number of each guild's finish in each category, to see which guild had the overall best deployment of flavor. The number in parentheses is the total of all four categories. Here's how it shook out:

1. Izzet (8)
2. Azorius (17)
3. Orzhov  
Dimir (20)
5. Golgari  
Selesnya (23)
7. Gruul (24)
8. Rakdos (25)
9. Simic (27)
10. Boros (33)

I guess all the creative peeps from writers to artists to our internal Creative Team really felt the Izzet vibe. They ran away with the show. It does not surprise me, since blue and red most accurately describe the creative mind itself. What does surprise me is the strong showing from the anti-creative Azorius. Maybe the creative minds have an understanding of their nemeses.

Anyway, number 1 or number 10, I do believe that all of Ravnic's guilds made a great showing, and will continue to do so as they mingle with the frozen folks of *Coldsnap* and the timetwisted peeps of *Time Spiral*. Keep on enjoying what *Ravnica* dishes out. Do not go gently...

*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.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Matt Cavotta](#) archive

