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# Most Evil and Most Fun-Loving

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Latest Developments  
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This, finally, is the last of ten articles about the development of *Ravnica*-block guilds. You can read up on the other two from *Dissension* here ([Azorius](#) and [Simic](#)), and the previous seven guilds are linked from there.

Everyone working on the block knew how *Rakdos* was supposed to feel going in. We even had a card to go off of—[Fiery Conclusion](#) from *Ravnica*.

You see, back when *Ravnica* proper was in development, before we had a firm grasp of exactly how the entirety of the block was going to be implemented, the creative team had planned on using guild names on cards that weren't tied to any guild mechanically, only flavorfully. [Remand](#), as a made-up example, might have been named "Azorius Veto" under that system. That initial creative vision had all ten guild names peppered throughout every set on vanilla-ish cards that showed off guild philosophies.

But as we finalized the execution of the guild watermarks as indicators of what cards were associated with what guilds, development urged creative not to use guild names on cards that wouldn't be getting guild watermarks. (As a reminder, guild watermarks go only on cards that are two colors, have off-colored mana symbols in their text boxes, or have a guild keyword or ability word.)

What I'm getting at is that creative felt the card [Fiery Conclusion](#) embodied the recklessly destructive *Rakdos* guild so well that they planned to call it "Rakdos XXXXX." When it came time to design and develop actual *Rakdos* cards months later, [Fiery Conclusion](#) stuck in our heads.

## Evil Is As Evil Does

*Rakdos* wanted to destroy any and everything (except enchantments—the bane of the black/red player), including creatures, artifacts, lands, hands, and life totals. On top of that, they needed to have fun destroying things, which translates in game terms to cards that reward you for destroying things—either yours or your opponents.

There are many great examples of these "reward" cards, including [Lyzolda](#), the [Blood Witch](#) (who rewards you for sacrificing your own creatures with cards or damage), [Rakdos Riteknife](#) (which rewards you for sacrificing creatures with power bonuses or the ability to make your opponent sacrifice creatures), and [Rakdos Ickspitter](#) (which turns damage to creatures into life loss for opponents). There is also a group of cards that turn discard into damage and vice versa—perfect for *Rakdos*'s philosophy of kicking a man while he's down: [Jagget Poppet](#) turns damage into discard, as does [Pain Magnification](#), and [Hellhole Rats](#) turns discard into damage.



## Bending Hell

With the thrill-kill philosophy came the hellbent mechanic—one that rewards the player for letting it all hang out in true fun-loving crazy-man style.

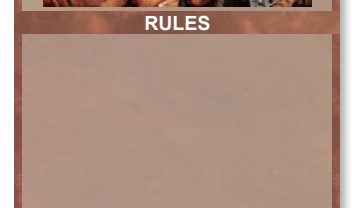
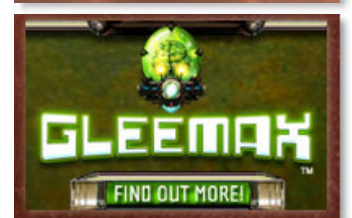
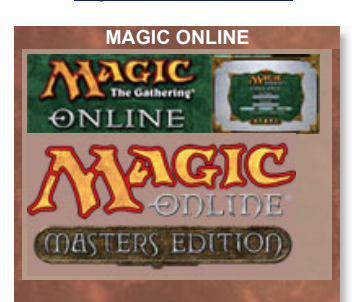
The first question that development had to answer was "Is hellbent fun enough to actually do?" After all, the hidden aspect of the hand is such a crucial part of what separates strategy games like *Magic* from tactical games like chess that we were a little wary of rewarding play styles that sought to eliminate that element. On average, the game just isn't as fun when all players have the same information—no one can bluff, force an opponent to overextend, or sandbag anything. Luckily, the fact that the "normal" way to play (holding at least one card in your hand whenever possible) is adhered to by just about anyone worth his salt makes playing differently (no cards in hand) an intriguing strategy, at least for one guild in one small set. Development found that having no hand can be both exhilarating and liberating if it powers up enough of your cards.

The second big question was what level of enabling to have for emptying your hand apart from just casting spells. *Odyssey* taught us a lot about this kind of problem. Make it too easy, and you end up with cards that were much more powerful than you bargained for, like [Wild Mongrel](#) and [Aquamoeba](#). Make it too hard and you end up with cards that play like garbage outside of their very specific home block, like [Krosan Archer](#) and [Face of Fear](#).

In the end, we went with a handful of discard outlets, none of which can be activated for free multiple times in a turn. In other words, you have to work for it. [Avatar of Discord](#), [Drekavac](#), [Rakdos Guildmage](#), [Skullmead](#)



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Cauldron, Stormscale Anarch, and Nihilistic Glee are the most obvious outlets. **Kindle the Carnage** can empty your hand immediately, but most likely at the cost of all your in-play creatures. **Macabre Waltz** can be played choosing zero targets, just to get two cards out of your hand. **Rakdos Augermage** will empty your hand quickly, although probably not in the order you want. And my favorite of them all is **Ignorant Bliss**, as it acts as a discard hoser as well as a one-shot hellbent enabler. Of course, traditional discard spells like **Delirium Skeins** and even **Wit's End** can turn on the hellbent cards in one swoop.



Finally, development had to tackle the issue of just how much of a bonus each card should get for being hellbent. The design file came in at a fairly aggressive level, with cheap hellbent creatures and removal that got really good really quickly. But development initially didn't like that implementation, feeling it was way too swingy in both Limited and Constructed. If one player missed a land drop and the Rakdos player drew the right mix of cheap spells and land, the game was over in four turns. It felt like madness or affinity all over again.

So development pulled back—way back. Existing hellbent cards got worse—**Demon's Jester's** bonus changed from +2/+1 to +1/+1, and

**Cackling Flames** went from three mana to four. Additionally, all the one- and two-mana hellbent creatures were cut from the set.

As development dragged on, we needed to choose a common card to be given away at retail stores as a *Dissension* preview. **Guardian of Vitu-Ghazi** and **Blind Hunter** were the giveaways for the block's earlier two sets, and I wanted to use a hellbent Rakdos card this time, as the Arena League card was **Simic (Coiling Oracle)** and the Release Event card was **Azorius (Azorius Guildmage)**. But there was no decent hellbent common creature, so **Gobhobbler Rats** was created specifically to be a giveaway preview. And it gave hellbent back the two-drop it so desperately needed.

In the end, hellbent got some of its power back, but the fear of swingy draws kept some cards in check, making hellbent a longshot to be a major Constructed player. I'm happy that the mechanic is still quite fun, relevant in Limited, and probably a big hit in casual play (considering how well cards like **Avatar of Discord** are doing on the secondary market).

## Multiverse Comments!

Included below are comments from our internal database regarding the design and development of some of the more interesting Rakdos-affiliated cards.

**Rakdos Augermage** went through a ton of changes. There were two strikes against the version Terry Soh submitted at the [Invitational](#). One, the card was ridiculously powerful in that it tore any kind of slow or clever deck to shreds. Two, Bob Maher's card from the previous Invitational (**Dark Confidant**) was already in the block and was a two-mana black creature. In order to make him gold, we had to give him an ability that felt red, and went back and forth on haste and first strike before settling on the latter.



Del 7/8: Any reason for going back to the ickyness of Soh's untemplated card rather than something more along the lines of what went up on our website? ([cost]: Reveal your hand. Target player chooses a card from it and you discard that card. If you do, that player reveals his or her hand. Choose a card from it. The player discards that card. Play this ability only any time you could play a sorcery and only once each turn.)

ps 7/19: just noting that this was submitted at 2/2 and no mana to activate. we should probably at least give it a chance at those numbers (not that i expect it to survive).

ps 7/19: on second thought maybe we should just try doing this as an upkeep trigger without a mana cost...that way we get the once per turn for free, and you can't steal their second land.

MP 7/20: Old version "B, Opponent looks at your hand and chooses a card for you to discard: Look at that opponent's hand, choose a card, he or she discards the chosen card."

MT 7/20: I think people will be confused as to whether or not they draw before or after Soh's ability.


DAL 7/20: MT is right - needs to change.

AF 7/22: I'd like to open up the idea of him being RB to distance him from Bobby.

RB 7/22: I like the idea of making him gold.

MP 7/27: Now gold, old version was At the beginning of your draw step you may reveal your hand and have an opponent choose a card for you to discard, if you do, target opponent reveals their hand, choose a card and

they discard that card."  
Del 8/2: Made this targeted, opponent's hand is also revealed. Okay?  
bs 8/10: what should this card's cc be? 2BR? with first strike?  
MP 8/11: Del, sounds good.  
MP 8/11: Now 2BR instead of 1BR, has Haste and no longer requires you have cards in your hand to use.  
MP 8/15: Was 2BR 2/2 and had haste/FS.  
MP 8/18: Put back FS.  
Del 9/22: Somebody needs to tell Terry Soh to start working out now . . .

**Wrecking Ball** began life as the third member of the **Putrefy/Mortify** family. Yes, it was an instant **Stone Rain** or **Terminate** for . That version didn't even make it out of design. A land destruction spell was submitted to development, but it was eventually changed to **Terminate**, a move several developers (myself included) didn't like.

AF 5/19: New card... flashy BR spell... want to find the right place for our one remaining 3-mana LD slot, and it shouldn't be anywhere near green.  
MT 5/22: Vicious.  
MP 6/10: Was destroy and land and opponent discards for 1BR.  
AF 6/13: I can't get behind this... we've avoided Invasion gold cards on purpose for this whole block. And is it even exciting on the heels of Putrefy and Wilt [Mortify]? Feels like a cop-out.  
6/22: Agree with AF, we can do better than this. So much spot removal running around as is...  
MT 6/28: Agree with above comments by AF and mystery person!  
MT 6/29: Heard this was dead. Anyone know?  
MP 7/6: Was terminate.  
DAL 7/7: Wilt and Putrefy are already sooo many unconditional terrors...we really want more?? I don't. It feels like BR should get them if anyone gets them...but there are just too such terrors already, plus fetters, and we all hate them. Having maindeck cards that randomly also kill lands randomly ruins games, in limited and constructed, in a swingy unfun way.  
MP 8/11: Swapped with Duel Daggers [Twinstrike].

**Rakdos the Defiler** is a funny card because of that wacky "non-Demon permanents" clause. It started out needing to be there. Originally his drawback happened at the beginning of each of your upkeep, not when he attacked, so it said "non-Demon" to make sure you didn't just sacrifice himself to his own ability (and giving him a slight bit of build-around potential). When his drawback became an attack-trigger, the non-Demon part stayed just because it was amusing.

BB 4/26: :o)  
AF 4/29: Made 6 mana; changed round down to round up.  
SW 6/28: Goryo loves this guy. We could actually hurt him by either making him non-legend, or making it so that you lose half the cards when he attacks.  
AF 6/28: Or could CIP tapped. He is quite absurd.  
MP 7/6: Going to try paying the cost on attack. Was an upkeep cost.  
DAL 7/7: "half your non-Demon permanents" always makes me smile. =D  
AF 7/13: Great fix for power. But the "non-demon" clause isn't necessary anymore... it was there to keep you from sacking him if your opponent Fetters or tapped him, etc., forcing you to keep paying the price. That no longer applies.  
ps 7/25: i think it should stay anyway. it's cool.  
Del 8/17: Ebonblade Reaper's long-lost cousin?

**Squealing Devil** had the coolest mana cost for a while... XR. But Mark Gottlieb had to butt in and tell all of us that he comes-into-play ability can't remember the amount of mana spent on X in the mana cost. So we had to move the X cost into the ability, which weakened the card significantly.

WW 6/16: I had a little trouble parsing this guy at first.  
bs 7/12: this guy seems like he should be a player in const.  
MLG 9/22: Doesn't work. While the creature is in play, X is 0. The CIP ability doesn't remember the value of X on the stack. There are various hacking possibilities...  
Del 9/28: Now howls for one less so we don't need to use an ugly, ugly template.

In design, Brandon Bozzi said he wanted to make some kind of "fire rats" for the Rakdos guild, and the result was **Hellhole Rats**. They didn't end up with haste until the very end of development, once we determined **Rakdos Augermage** would have first strike instead.

BB 4/26: I'm a fan.  
AF 5/19: Changed numbers to distance from WB gargoyle [Shrieking Grotesque]. Now uncommon.  
MP 8/17: Gave it haste.

Almost every guildmage in the block went through multiple iterations before we settled on final versions. Dimir was the easiest one to settle on, but **Rakdos Guildmage** gave us fits for a long time, most likely because all the cool abilities had already appeared on other cards in the block. We tried variants on **Innocent Blood**, **Raze**,

**Threaten**, and all sorts of other re and black cards. It took until the very last weeks of development to finalize both of his abilities.



MP 4/18: Goodness. NH 6/24: Worried about reusable landkill. You cant go below 3, but still worrisome.

MT 6/28: With eggs [Signets] you can! SW 7/1: This guy can lock someone out of playing all together. It becomes a very boring game to know that any land they play they have to get rid of (unlike spells that go away).

MP 7/6: Both abilities went up by 1. Red ability was "each player sacs a land".

Del 7/8: Is the last ability missing ueot x 2, or is the effect meant to be permanent?

bs 7/12: intent is EOT.

MP 7/19: The red ability prevents opponent from attacking frequently, so made it sorcery and gave it an untap.

AF 7/27: Is the red ability only supposed to target tapped guys?

DAL 8/3: These abilities seem fine to me. Have people been complaining?

MP 8/19: New red ability, was " Untap target tapped creature and gain control of it until end of turn. That creature gains haste until end of turn. Play this ability any time you could play a sorcery."

MT 8/20: If you made it 3/1 could it just use the same token as Research? Also red always seems to make baby Ball Lightnings.

Del 8/22: Yeah, I was just going to comment that the RAV Goblin token was only 1/1.

BD 8/29/05: Changed to Zombie after seeing Jarvis's final painting. :)

Del 8/31: As Tahngarth said, nothing ruins your day like a blazing zombie.

Del 9/2: Dev changes activation cost of second ability from 4R. First ability was "{o4oB}: Each player sacrifices a creature."

## Last Time's Poll:

What do you think of the "slowtrips" (cantrips that give you the card a turn later) in <i>Coldsnap</i> ?		
Cute, but don't do it again.	4406	44.3%
A great throwback to the past.	3233	32.5%
A bad reminder of a bad mechanic.	1248	12.5%
A stunt that was probably not worth the effort.	847	8.5%
What are you talking about?	219	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9953</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Personally, I have mixed feelings about the slowtrips. I chuckle every time I read one, but I get annoyed every time I play one. If we did the set over I'm not sure they'd be there again.

## This Week's Poll:

**How did you feel about the Selecting *Tenth Edition* promotion?**

- Better than previous Selection Core Set promotions.
- About the same as previous Selection Core Set promotions.
- Worse than previous Selection Core Set promotions.
- I'm not qualified to compare.
- I didn't pay attention to it.

*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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