

The evolution of legend cards and stories

Character Study

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Warning: This article contains rather large spoilers for the *Judgment* novel. If you're intending to read it (and you should), don't read this article until you finish!

Now that that's out of the way, we can take a look at the card type that really help to drive the **Magic** backstory home: the legends. From the earliest days of legends (that being, of course, *Legends*), players have wanted to know the stories behind their favorite figures. While some were pretty flavorless (such as **Barktooth Warbeard**), other legends had tantalizing glimpses of potentially fascinating stories behind them, such as **Jerrard of the Closed Fist** and **Kasimir the Lone Wolf**. A lucky few, like **Dakkon Blackblade** and **The Lady of the Mountain**, even got stories written for them long after the *Legends* set came and went. *Homelands* was one of the first serious attempts to work characters from the backstory into the card set itself. **Ihsan's Shade** and **Autumn Willow** are generally considered to be the best attempts here to combine the story and the mechanics of a character into a playable card.

Then came the *Weatherlight* Saga, and all the rules changed. Suddenly, there was a bigger connection between card set and story than ever before. This meant that the story's characters could become legends with a lot more meat behind them, legends that could grow and evolve as the story progressed, legends with enough story support that the connection between mechanic and story background could be very strong. For example, compare the *Weatherlight* set's **Master of Arms** (which depicts Gerrard as an example of that specific type of soldier) and **Gerrard Capashen** from *Apocalypse*. Both are white creatures with an activated ability that could discourage or prevent creatures from blocking (remember that at the time **Master of Arms** was printed, tapped creatures couldn't deal combat damage). **Gerrard**, however, is larger, which befits his legendary status, his activated ability is more powerful, and he has an extra ability that echoes one of his other cards from *Weatherlight*, **Gerrard's Wisdom**.

Now take a look at **Talruum Champion** and **Tahngarth, Talruum Hero**. The Champion's ability often means that it will take out a blocking creature without any damage to itself. Tahngarth takes that potential, and ups it several notches. With both Gerrard and Tahngarth, you can easily see how existing cards developed into abilities that reflect what you find out about the character in the novels and backstory. Gerrard is a brave soldier whose wisdom allows you to gain life, while Tahngarth, who's been mutated by the Phyrexians, is rough, tough, and ready to fight at a moment's notice. Starting with *Nemesis*, though, a new twist was introduced to the legend creation process: the evolving legend. **Crovax the Cursed** was the first to change. In *Stronghold*, he had an ability that reflected his self-loathing (over having to kill his love **Selenia**), and his vampiric nature. When the Phyrexians changed him into an **Ascendant Evincar**, they removed his guilt and self-destructive

tendencies, making him much more ruthless and powerful. As you can see, his new abilities are certainly both! (By the way, in case you're wondering why **Ascendant Evincar** doesn't have Crovax's name on it, back when *Nemesis* was being named, the team was a little skittish about the potential for confusion if both **Crovax the Cursed** and Crovax, **Ascendant Evincar** existed. They changed their minds by the time this next card was printed...)

Then came Ertai. Once an arrogant human wizard in *Exodus* -- **Ertai, Wizard Adept** -- he was twisted by the side effects of a Phyrexian **rejuvenation chamber**, and became **Ertai the Corrupted**, servant of Crovax. His power and toughness are higher, to reflect his mutations, and black has been added to his mana cost for the same reason. The new sacrifice requirement to counter a spell not only balances the lower mana activation, but also puts a little more Phyrexian into Ertai. So how does *Judgment* continue this process? (Spoilers ahoy!)

Poor **Balthor the Stout**. Killed by **Laquatus's Champion** in battle, he was resurrected by **Braids** as **Balthor the Defiled** and made into an instrument of revenge against **Laquatus**. His former ability to increase the size of barbarians now helps minions, to demonstrate his enforced loyalty switch. He still retains some memories of his life, which is reflected in his ability to get red creatures out of the graveyard, but he also revives black creatures, to emphasize that he's no longer the dwarf he once was.

Even though **Magic** cards may not tie in as closely to the story as they used to, as long as there are characters and legends to go with them, this trend of developing and evolving cards into new, different legends will continue. So the next time a character undergoes a radical change in the **Magic** backstory, pay attention; that just might be the sign of a new legend coming in the near future!

Send questions and comments to editor@wizards.com.