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Printer Friendly 

Making Magic Monday, March 3, 2003

I cc: Dead People

Letters from beyond the grave



Mark Rosewater

Welcome to Zombie Week. This week we'll be exploring the zombie. Mindless brain eaters or misunderstood undead Americans? Let's take a closer look.

They Won't Let It Die

As I explained [last week](#), I'm the flavor guy of the designers and developers. Also, I'm one of the more public faces in R&D. As such, years ago, I became the liaison between R&D and the various creature races. We don't talk about this much, but each of the creature types has a union to make sure that they're properly represented on cards.

You have to understand that the unions don't necessarily care if they're presented in a negative light (although a few, like soldiers, throw a fit whenever you do), they just want to make sure that they're not misrepresented. Different races care about very different issues. The angels, for example, are constantly bugging me about what artist are being used. (They think Matt Wilson lives to do nothing but illustrate them.) The dwarves are sensitive about height jokes. And the merfolk? Don't get me started. I have a pile of letters I haven't even gotten to yet.



But the biggest pain in the behind is the zombies. Why the zombies? Because the zombies feel they have an image problem. They're constantly feeling misrepresented, and thus their union lead, Ga'Aark, is constantly sending me letters. Today, I thought I'd share with you a few of these letters to show you the kinds of stuff I have to deal with every day. Note that I get letters from the creature reps after they see the preview of each set.

The first few letters, incidentally, were mailed to Richard Garfield as Richard had this lovely job before I joined Wizards of the Coast.

(For those of you that want to see the history of the zombies in a less colorful fashion, click [here](#).)



Alpha

Dear Mr. Garfield,

I would like to start by introducing myself. My name is Ga'Aark (accent on the second syllable). I am the leader of Union for the Reanimated Undead, aka "The Zombies." It is my responsibility to make sure that my people are fairly represented in your new game.

I have a number of issues that I strongly feel need to be addressed.

1. The term "zombie" – This is a very contentious point among my people. While a majority are okay with the term, a fervent minority feel that it connotes many of the negative stereotypes that we have worked so hard to overcome. When the average person hears "zombie," they equate it with mindless zombie. A creature solely at the whim of its reanimator. Admittedly, this is common among my people, but it is far from an absolute. Anyway, I'm officially okay with the term "zombie," but I wanted you to know that it's an issue.
2. The ability of **Scathe Zombies** – Alpha has one zombie (I'll get to this point in a moment). One zombie! What do we get? Scathe Freakin' Zombie? For three mana, you get a 2/2. What does he do? Nothing. That's right, for three mana you get a vanilla 2/2. This isn't even one zombie. The title's plural. The artwork shows six zombies. Six zombies are 2/2? Have you not seen *Dawn of the Dead*?! Green has the exact same stats on a creature that costs one fewer mana. For two stupid grizzly bears. Do you know how fast six zombies would gut two grizzly bears? You do know that we're inhumanly strong?
3. The zombie lord – There are three lords in the set: the goblin lord, the merfolk lord and the zombie lord. All three give landwalking of the appropriate type. Fine. The goblin and merfolk lord both give +1/+1 to all their people. The zombie lord? Oh, he gives everyone regeneration. Your vanilla 2/2 can now regenerate. Lovely. Nice work, Garfield.
4. **Scavenging Ghoul** – Ghouls are undead creatures that eat the living. That would make them zombies. If you could just change the creature type of this fellow to zombie that would be much appreciated.
5. The number of zombies – Our people have a long history in the horror, science fiction, and most importantly, fantasy genres. For these years of dedication, how are we represented in **Magic**? We get three cards, only one of which is even labeled a zombie. And that card? See point number one above.

My reason for writing is that you seem like a good man. I'm sure these injustices were simply an oversight, one that can be corrected in upcoming sets.

Sincerely yours,



Arabian Nights

Dear Mr. Garfield,

Perhaps my tone was unnecessarily harsh in my last letter. I'm a simple undead man who is just looking out for his people. Imagine my surprise when I got a chance to see a preview of **Magic**'s first expansion, *Arabian Nights*. I saw witches and sorceresses. Very dark. Djinns and efreet? That goes with the flavor of the set. Raiders? Ogres? Guardians? Someone has to start looking at the color wheel. That's all I have to say.

But the one that caused me to write to you today was a card called **Khabal Ghoul**. Remember **Scavenging Ghoul**? Yeah, well ghouls are still zombies. In two sets so far, zombies getting credit on the card is 1 for 4. Now, the ghouls are having a great time, but, to be frank, it's pissing the rank and file off. So please. Just make some zombies. And when you do make them, call them zombies.

Please.

Sincerely,



Antiquities

Dear Mr. Garfield,

Let me start by apologizing. Here I am--some unknown reanimated creature--bothering the creator of what is looking to be a classic game. It is clear by *Antiquities* that you (through the *Antiquities* design team) wanted to send me a message. I got it loud and clear. I mess with you, you mess with me.

I got it. From here on out, I'll be much nicer. So please, I am asking you as a poor cadaver to an influential designer, please, please can the zombies get some representation?

Sincerely,



Legends

Dear Mr. Garfield,

Come on. I mean really. Come on. **Mummies?** **Lost Souls?** **Walking Dead?** **Night Stalker?** **Wretched?** **Hell's Caretaker?** My people are out for blood. I mean, more than normal.

I'll take anything. I'm not picky. I'll take another **Scathe Zombies**--and I don't mean **Headless Horseman**. Just please give me a zombie.

Anything.

Sincerely,



The Dark

Dear Mr. Garfield,

You answer to your players. I have to answer to a bunch of flesh eating constituents. If I don't get them representation, I'll be soon missing what's left of my internal organs.

For starters, thank you for making a second zombie. That said, **The Drowned** is not exactly the card my people were looking for. It's blue and its

special ability is the exact thing the Zombie Lord gives to zombies. Not exactly advancing the zombie cause.

Have you ever read *Frankenstein*? **The monster** is an undead creature made up of parts of cadavers. I don't want to be presumptuous, but he sure sounds like a zombie.

And **Eater of the Dead**? Eater of the freakin' Dead?! He eats the dead. How the hell is he not a zombie?

Okay, I'm calm again. I'm not trying to cause problems. I just want some representation for my people.

I'm not kidding. They will eat me.

Sincerely,



Fallen Empires

Dear Mr. Garfield,

I now have no right foot. You know why? They ate it. Why did they do that? Because they're pissed. A whole expansion and the only black creatures are thrulls and clerics with **one lone bunny-looking avatar** thrown in.

Throw me a bone. I won't even ask for a bit of flesh to be attached.

Sincerely,



Ice Age

Dear Richard,

Thank you. Thank you. I still have the remainder of my left leg. I'm grateful for you to bless us with three zombies (**Gangrenous Zombies, Legions of Lim-Dul, Lim-Dul's Cohort**). You've more than doubled the amount in existence. So please when I continue with my letter, just remember how happy you've made me.

I like this Lim-Dul guy. I hope he'll be around for years to come.

Sincerely,



Homelands

Dear Richard,

I'm not sure whether I'm supposed to yell at you or thank you.

Eight sets and we still only have five zombies. You have to start working with me. My people are eying my leg again.

And where's Lim-Dul?

Sincerely,



Alliances

Dear Mr. Rosewater,

Richard has informed me that you're my new liaison. Welcome.

Why don't I start on a positive note? Thank you for the sixth and seventh representative of my people (**Balduvian Dead** and **Feast or Famine**). **Balduvian Dead** is by far the best zombie we've had to date. So, thank you.

That said, when *Ice Age* was released, I had hope. Lim-Dul the Necromancer. Three zombies in one set. Perhaps this could be a trend. Two sets later and we have a single extra zombie. The only zombie deck in existence needs to play three colors.

Help my people.

Sincerely,



Mirage

Dear Mr. Rosewater,

I'm glad my last letter didn't fall on deaf ears. Three more (**Gravebane Zombie**, **Tombstone Stairwell** and **Zombie Mob**)!

That said, I have issue with one of the cards. **Zombie Mob**. First off, I understand that my people have been known to eat a dead body or two, but this eat creatures out of the graveyard as a mechanic is getting a little offensive. I mean, we do eat other things. Like living creatures, for example.

Second, I'm concerned that zombies are always illustrated as part of a larger group. This reinforces the mindless label many people put on zombies and makes it seem like zombies are incapable of functioning on their own.

Food for thought.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Visions

Dear Mr. Rosewater,

To explain my concern with the newest set, let me use a metaphor. You know how you drink some blood and then your adrenaline starts pumping and you just need more blood? Well, zombie cards are kind of like that. See, my people have gotten used to a certain standard in the last few expansions. And well, they didn't take kindly to you stiffing them. (Little tip – never stiff stiffs.)

My right leg now stops at my knee. A set or two more like this and you'll be dealing with a new representative. And mind you, one that might do a little more than write nasty letters.

For your own good (and mine), let's have some more zombies.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Weatherlight

Dear Mark,

I hope my last letter wasn't perceived as a threat. I'm assuming the three zombies in *Weatherlight* (*Barrow Ghoul*, *Bone Dancer*, *Zombie Scavengers*) were an attempt on your part to make up for past injustices.

My only complaint is that once again all the zombie cards eat creatures out of the graveyard. Yeah, we eat the dead. I get it. Ha, ha. Why don't you just illustrate us all with our arms stretched out groaning "Brains... brains...?"

It's called species sensitivity. Look into it.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Tempest

Dear Mark,

Bravo. Only three (*Dauthi Ghoul*, *Gravedigger*, and *Sarcomancy*), but they're getting better. Heck, *Sarcomancy* even seems—gasp!—tournament worthy.

One last thing... "sarcomancy" isn't a real word.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Stronghold

Dear Mark,

I'm not sure you're aware of this, but there's a graveyard just a mile and a half from your house.

I thought since you weren't too busy designing zombies that you might want to contemplate that little factoid.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Exodus

Dear Mark,

Thank you for **Carnophage** and **Plaguebearer**. Between **Sarcomancy** and **Carnophage**, there is finally a competitive deck that might be loosely called a "zombie deck." So thank you.

That said, I have an issue with **Plaguebearer**. Several people in my group asked me to stress that we're uncomfortable with the fact that some of our kind carry disease. It's one of the many reasons we are socially shunned. If you could play that down on future cards it would be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

P.S. The graveyard's still there.

Urza's Saga

Dear Mark,

That's more like it. (**Bog Raiders**, **Cackling Fiend**, and **Phyrexian Ghoul**.)
Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Urza's Legacy

Dear Mark,

What exactly does calling a zombie "Rank and File" mean? Are you trying to say we stink? Have you ever had to deal with rotting flesh? It's not easy. The last thing we need is to rip open the latest **Magic** expansion and see ourselves mocked about it.

Sincerely,



Starter '99

Dear Mark,

I don't normally write to you about *Starter* sets, but I had to respond to the new flavor text for Scathe Zombies (and by the way, you can't find a better zombie for the basic set?): "Luckily for them, it doesn't make much brains to slaughter and maim."

I don't know where to begin. Are you calling us stupid? Do you think it's easy to slaughter and maim? Slaughtering and maiming takes a lot of mental energy. And what's with the brains crack? Don't you be showing us eating brains.

Sincerely,



Urza's Destiny

Dear Mark,

Do me a favor. Rent *Night of the Living Dead*. While you're staying up because you can't sleep, design some freakin' zombies!

Sincerely,



Unglued

Dear Mark,

I understand that this is a joke set, but **Deadhead** has upset a number of our members, especially Jerry. And **Temp of the Damned**? Do you know how hard it is for zombies to get part-time work? Really, you should be ashamed of yourself.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Mercadian Masques

Dear Mark,

Three hundred and thirty cards and only two zombie cards (**Deepwood Ghoul** and **Midnight Ritual**). The sad thing is this is better than average for us. But, I'd like to dream of a day in **Magic** where the streets run wild with zombies (you know, like the real world).

Mark, work with me here. I know you're a fine designer. Make us some zombies we can be proud of.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Nemesis

Dear Mark,

Do you even understand who I represent? These are not creatures you want to piss off. And they're not exactly that easy to reason with.

If the next expansion doesn't have a zombie, you might want to start worrying about your right foot.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Prophecy

Dear Mark,

My people are hungry. For more zombie cards that is. While the two zombies in this set (**Coffin Puppets** and **Whipstitched Zombie**) will satiate them for a little while, I can tell you that some major changes need to be made soon. Our ranks grow every day. We will no longer sit idly by while we get dismissed set after set.

For both our sakes, talk to the powers that be. We need zombies and we need them now. Not one or two here or there. I'm talking about a real commitment.

Think about your lovely wife.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Invasion

Isn't it great what motivation can do? Six zombies in one set (**Metathran Zombie**, **Phyrexian Delver**, **Phyrexian Reaper**, **Pyre Zombie**, **Shivan Zombie** and **Vodalian Zombie**). I don't even mind that one of them is a reprint of **The Drowned**. A new record. And three of them (the last three) are showing up in constructed decks.

That said, the boys have been talking about us getting a new lord. As I've mentioned in the past, the old Zombie Lord doesn't exactly put zombies in a good light.

Oh, and congratulations on your brand new baby daughter.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Planeshift

Dear Mark,

My people are beside themselves. Five zombies (**Lava Zombie**, **Maggot Carrier**, **Nightscape Familiar**, **Phyrexian Bloodstock**, **Phyrexian Scuta**), two relevant enchantments (**Deadapult** and **Dralnu's Crusade**) and an amazing new lord (**Lord of the Undead**). A number of which are tournament worthy cards.

Keep up the good work. And by that I mean, well, you know.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Apocalypse

Dear Mark,

Six more zombies (**Grave Defiler**, **Llanowar Dead**, **Mournful Zombie**, **Putrid Warrior**, **Quagmire Druid** and **Zombie Boa**) and a zombie-helping spell (**Strength of Night**). You've put a smile on my decomposing face.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Odyssey

Dear Mark,

Seven or more zombie-related cards for three sets straight (*Crypt Creeper*, *Famished Ghoul*, *Gravedigger*, *Rotting Giant*, *Zombie Assassin*, *Zombie Cannibal*, and *Zombie Infestation*). Applause, applause.

By the way, a block built around the graveyard? Bravo!

That said, I think its time to up the ante. The boys and I feel like you are capable of more than what you're currently delivering.

Think about it.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Torment

Dear Mark,

I do admire your moxie. A set titled towards black. Very clever. Yet with all the shifting, you only managed to get five zombies (*Carrion Wurm*, *Grotesque Hybrid*, *Organ Grinder*, *Putrid Imp*, *Zombie Trailblazer*) in the set. Several years ago, we would have danced on our graves. But today, we're a little pickier. That *Faceless Butcher* fellow would have made a fine zombie!

We need more.

Sincerely,

Ga'Aark

Judgment

Dear Mark,

Mark. Mark. Mark.

Two zombies (*Balthor the Defiled*, *Sutured Ghoul*)? Are we back to the days of *Alliances*? I understand that this was the white and green set, but still.

One of the things you learn as a zombie is that when you dig long enough, you begin unearthing interesting things. For example, please see the photo I've included with this letter. Now, I'm curious what would happen if this photo found its way onto one of the many **Magic** fan sites. I could already see some of the captions.

But this needed happen because I know that down deep, you have some great ideas for how to increase the zombie presence in **Magic**. At least for your sake, I hope you do.

Sincerely,

Onslaught

Dear Mark,

Thank you. Now, was that so hard?

Ah, twenty-one zombies (Accursed Centaur, Anurid Murkdiver, Aphetto Vulture, Bonekintter, Entrails Feaster, Fallen Cleric, Festering Goblin, Frightshroud Courier, Gangrenous Goliath, Gluttonous Zombie, Gravespaw Sovereign, Haunted Cadaver, Nantuko Husk, Rotlung Reanimator, Severed Legion, Shepherd of Rot, Soulless One, Spined Basher, Undead Gladiator, Walking Desecration, and Wretched Anurid).

But the fun doesn't stop there. There are four more cards that encourage zombies (Cruel Revival, Feeding Frenzy, Tribal Golem, and Unholy Grotto) and numerous cards that make you want to build tribal themed decks.

You obviously didn't want that picture falling into the wrong hands.

All is good. The zombies are happy.

Sincerely,

Legions

Dear Mark,

A small set with eleven zombies (Corpse Harvester, Dripping Dead, Embalmed Brawler, Gempalm Polluter, Ghastly Remains, Graveborn Muse, Noxious Ghoul, Skint thinner, Spokespew Invoker, Withered Wretch, and Zombie Brute) and two zombie helpers (Deathmark Prelate and Infernal Caretaker). I never thought I'd stay dead to see the day.

I can't wait to see *Scourge*.

Sincerely,

P.S. I'm keeping the photo in a safe spot.

Dead & Buried

As you can see, the zombies have managed to assert themselves over the years. I guess it's only appropriate that their number grows with time. Here in a handy chart is the zombies' presence in all of **Magic's** sets:

Expansion	Zombies and Zombie-Related Cards
Alpha	Scathe Zombies, Zombie Master
Arabian Nights	NONE
Antiquities	NONE
Legends	NONE
The Dark	The Drowned
Fallen Empires	NONE
Ice Age	Gangrenous Zombies, Legions of Lim-Dul, Lim-Dul's Cohort
Homelands	NONE
Alliances	Balduvian Dead, Feast or Famine
Mirage	Gravebane Zombie, Tombstone Stairwell, Zombie Mob
Visions	NONE
Weatherlight	Barrow Ghoul, Bone Dancer, Zombie Scavengers
Tempest	Dauthi Ghoul, Gravedigger, Sarcomancy
Stronghold	NONE
Exodus	Carnophage, Plaguebearer
Urza's Saga	Bog Raiders, Cackling Fiend, Phyrexian Ghoul
Urza's Legacy	Rank and File
Urza's Destiny	NONE
Unglued	Deadhead, Temp of the Damned
Mercadian Masques	Deepwood Ghoul, Midnight Ritual
Nemesis	NONE
Prophecy	Coffin Puppets, Whipstitched Zombie
Invasion	Metathran Zombie, Phyrexian Delver, Phyrexian Reaper, Pyre Zombie, Shivan Zombie, Vodalian Zombie
Planeshift	Deadapult, Dralnu's Crusade, Lava Zombie, Lord of the Undead, Maggot Carrier, Nightscape Familiar, Phyrexian Bloodstock, Phyrexian Scuta
Apocalypse	Grave Defiler, Llanowar Dead, Mournful Zombie, Putrid Warrior, Quagmire Druid, Strength of Night, Zombie Boa
Odyssey	Crypt Creeper, Famished Ghoul, Gravedigger, Rotting Giant, Zombie Assassin, Zombie Cannibal, Zombie Infestation
Torment	Carion Wurm, Grottesque Hybrid, Organ Grinder, Putrid Imp, Zombie Trailblazer
Judgment	Balthor the Defiled, Sutured Ghoul
Onslaught	Accursed Centaur, Anurid Murkdiver, Aphetto Vulture, Bonekintter, Cruel Revival, Entrails Feaster, Fallen Cleric, Feeding Frenzy, Festering Goblin, Frightshroud Courier, Gangrenous Goliath, Gluttonous Zombie, Gravespawn Sovereign, Haunted Cadaver, Nantuko Husk, Rotlung Reanimator, Severed Legion, Shepherd of Rot, Soulless One, Spined Basher, Tribal Golem, Undead Gladiator, Unholy Grotto, Walking Desecration, Wretched Anurid
Legions	Corpse Harvester, Deathmark Prelate, Dripping Dead, Embalmed Brawler, Gempalm Polluter, Ghastly Remains, Graveborn Muse, Infernal Caretaker, Noxious Ghoul, Skintinner, Smokespew Invoker, Withered Wretch, and Zombie Brute


I hope this has given you a little better insight into the world of zombies.

Join me next week when I get interviewed by all of you. Remember if you have a question for that interview, send it to me at makingmagic@wizards.com. I have gotten a great response so far and expect next week's column to be quite interesting.

Until then, may you never be threatened by the undead,

Mark Rosewater

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