

## How Kamigawa came to be Worlds of Flavor

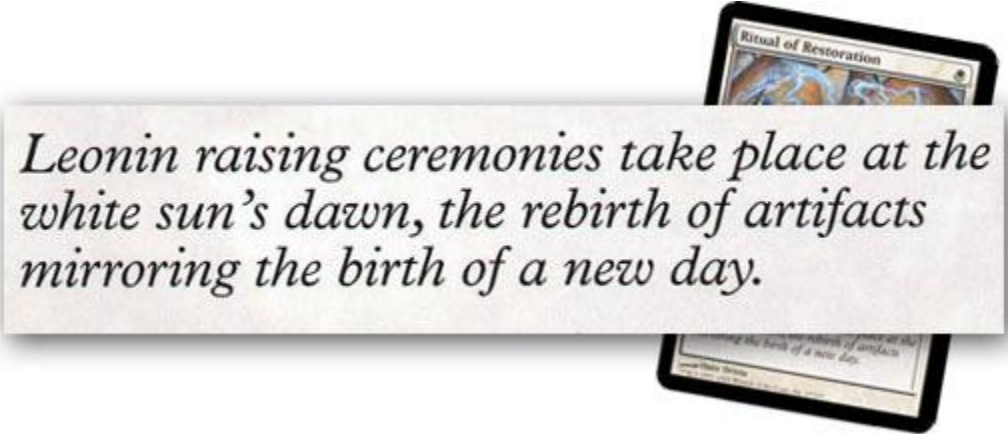
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Did you know that the Leonin of *Mirrodin* are a shamanistic culture, similar to early Native American religion? Did you know that they worship the five suns, especially the white one, and that when the black sun is ascendant, they keep a bonfire burning in [Taj-Nar](#), to keep the light going until the white sun returns?



*Leonin raising ceremonies take place at the white sun's dawn, the rebirth of artifacts mirroring the birth of a new day.*

You may have known some of this (through flavor text such as that on [Ritual of Restoration](#)), but there's a lot of it you probably don't know, that you couldn't possibly know. That's because a lot of planning and detail goes into a **Magic** world, in order to help guide artists and writers. There's so much, in fact, that not all of it could possibly make it into cards or the novel. Let's take a peek behind the curtain and see what goes into the world details you see on cards, and how they may fit together in ways you may not have noticed.

### LET THERE BE LIGHT!

First, though, it'll be useful to take a quick overview of how **Magic** worlds come into being in a larger sense. The setting, of course, is key to **Magic**. It establishes everything from usable creature types to art to even mechanics. The process often starts with a "hook," a large-picture description of what makes this world unique. For *Mirrodin*, the hook would be "all metal." For Kamigawa, it'd be "Japanese." These choices can have influences either way; *Mirrodin* was conceived as metallic because of the decision to put in a lot of artifacts in the block. Kamigawa, as you've [read in other articles](#), did the opposite, influencing mechanics to a great extent.

Another important factor is how the colors divide. How do the environments and species interact? This became even more important, and complex, with the new race/class model. Obviously, with "Human"

as a creature type, we can't let them become too common, or unbalance certain colors with them (especially white). This has led to Creative considering "Human" as belonging in each color by default, then finding a non-human species for each color. This way, it's a lot more likely that the human/non-human ratio will be balanced both within and among the colors. For example, *Mirrodin's* Leonin could've been foxes, or a mix of big cat species (like tigers and pumas), before we settled on lions.

We're careful to try keeping species as appropriate to the color as possible. With the Leonin, for example, the image of lions as fierce fighters, and their organization into prides, both fit white very well. We also look for reusability. After all, having only one really iconic creature type for a color (as goblins are for red) is a little limiting, so we're always looking to expand the stable of creature type for future use, for when we don't feel like using that already iconic type. So don't assume that a species, past or present, is unusable forever just because they're first presented as being native to a certain world. You just may see them again in a different block! That's just one of the reasons the "multiverse" model of the **Magic** universe is so appealing: the potential interactions between worlds and planes. These choices also influence art. The use of light in Leonin-related spells is a direct result of their cultural write-up that I mentioned at the top of the article. Their use of razorgrass as a spell component (as in [Razorgrass Screen](#)) came from considering how the Leonin would interact with this harsh environment.



## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Kamigawa was a very interesting process, even more involved than your typical **Magic** world. The theme of the block, Legends, and the Japanese-flavored setting, presented so many possibilities that it was hard to whittle it all down to even the tapestry presented on the cards.

Kamigawa was conceived as "the land of a thousand stories," quite appropriate for a Legend-heavy block. So, **Magic** Creative paid a lot of attention to prominent individuals right off the bat. This is because there has been a lot of thought put into who **Magic** heroes and villains are, and how they're represented.

One area of concern is to make sure that the two roles are at least somewhat balanced among colors. This opens up a lot of creative space, and makes stories more interesting. [White](#) and [green](#) heroes, for example, are easy, [red](#) heroes only somewhat less so. Blue's lack of emotion makes heroes of that color more complicated, but it's still possible (for example, in my opinion, [Urza](#) is a good example of a blue protagonist in terms of how he worked towards his goals). Black is the hardest, given its characterization and how it's stereotyped by **Magic** players. Thus [Toshi](#) was born as an attempt to show players how black can be "the good guy" while still staying true to its base qualities. Daimyo [Konda](#) was written as the opposite on the villainous side. So what is a green villain like? You may yet find out!

The first document generated for creative writing use had four sample legends for each color and each species, to give an idea of what that color's characters are like, and to offer possible "point of view" characters. (A "point of view" character is a non-story character who is attributed in flavor text, like Noboru, master kitemaker.) Some characters you know now were created (and even named) from the start, like [Toshi](#), [Eight-and-a-Half-Tails](#), and [Isao](#). Others made it mostly intact, but refined. For example, the [Yamazaki twins](#) were, at one point, the Yamazaki triplets.

But there were many others who never made it onto flavor text and cards. Some ideas that ended up in the slush pile were: a twelve year old girl who ekes out a survival in Takenuma aided by an invisible oni, a young yamabushi with wild talent and a grudge against Konda, and an incredibly lucky akki who's unknowingly protected by a kami who's "adopted" him as a pet.

Terrain and culture details sometimes go through a similar process. One writer suggested that large portions of the Jukai Forest be so dense, that only a snake could slither between its trees (a nod to the orochi), and that this area is patrolled by a gigantic, constantly slithering, half-wurm guardian.

## THE THREE R'S: READING, 'RITING, AND REITO

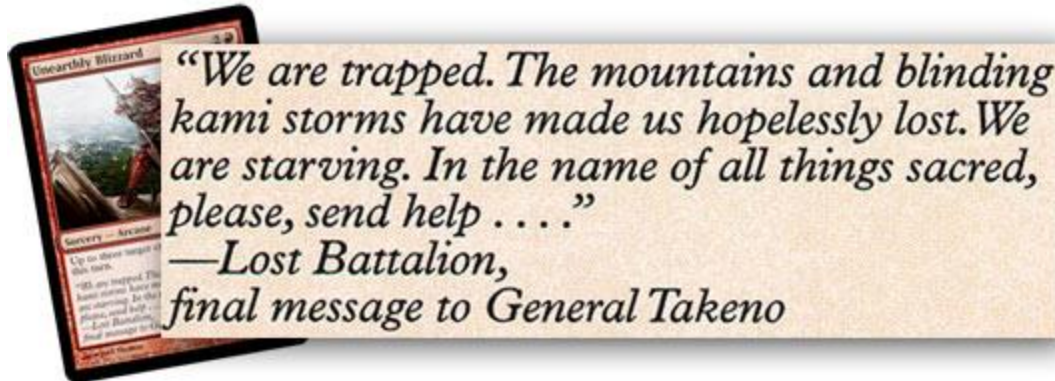
It's important to understand the storytelling goal that Creative was shooting for when putting Kamigawa flavor text together. Surveys have long showed that some of **Magic's** most beloved flavor text came from two sources that may surprise you: *Antiquities* and *Fallen Empires*. Obviously, there's something about these chunks of history that have appeal. Is it the puzzle aspect, the ability to piece together a bigger picture from each individual part? Is it the air of reality given by the historical atmosphere? Perhaps it's the sense of stronger backstory weaving that such flavor text, if done well, can evoke.

This style of flavor text seemed to fit well with the Kamigawa block, given the complex web of stories offered by so many Legends. Much of what Creative did with the block's flavor was carefully done with this goal in mind. For example, did you notice that almost all of the flavor text is in past tense? This was done to feed into the image of the block's events as something that happened long ago. The heavy use of quotes from fictional written text is for the same reason; note that this method was used to great effect in *Fallen Empires*.

Flavor text writers were told from the start to use this convention, so Creative would have these fictional books and writers to draw on for future pieces, and to give more detail to the Kamigawan world. The missives from the Lost Battalion, for example, grew out of a single piece of flavor text, and offers both an insight into Konda's rank-and-file, and a glimpse of just how badly the war is going for mortals.



*Noboru, master kitemaker appears only in the flavor text of [Journeyer's Kite](#) and [Terashi's Grasp](#).*



The Reito massacre, whose flavor text was briefly examined by Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar in a [past feature](#), is a good example of how we wanted individual piece of flavor text to fit together into a larger picture. [Ghostly Prison](#) tells you that it was the first casualty of the war. [Kami of Fire's Roar](#) adds the fact that no one really knew the true seriousness of the problem at first, given the hiring of shamans who probably weren't yamabushi. Letters written by Azami and Hisoka show that there was disagreement on whether to fight against the kami or pursue more peaceful means of resolving the conflict. And, of course, *Observations of the Kami War* was a very useful document for flavor text that gave an overall perspective of major events. Some pieces, like that on [Mannichi, the Fevered Dream](#), have significance story-wise that won't become truly apparent until later, while flavor text like [Yomiji's](#) offers new insight to cards already seen. This is just one of the reasons why card flavor text is such an interesting creative tool.

Flavor text writing may seem pretty simple. But with a constantly changing cardset and a wealth of background information, it's a lot harder than it looks to bring it all together into a unified picture. So, next time you see that wizard wandering Takenuma who was booted out of Minamo for his curiosity about the oni (whoops – you *haven't* seen him yet... ignore that!), remember that you're seeing only a small piece of a much, much larger landscape.

## Addendum: Collected Flavor Text Attributed to *Observations of the Kami War*

### **Champions of Kamigawa cards**

[Akki Underminer](#) *"Deep inside the Sokenzan Mountains, a band of akki discovered a cache of ancient items of power. Their ensuing spree of destruction became known as 'The Three Days of Fun.'"*

[Blood Rites](#) *"The threat of the kami was made worse by the blood rituals of the ogres, who freed terrifying oni to wander Kamigawa unhindered."*

[Field of Reality](#) *"The scholars of the Minamo School understood the veil between their world and that of the kami. Moreover, they knew how to exploit it."*

[Kabuto Moth](#) *"Many great warriors died in the first days of the war, as the*

*spirits of their weaponry turned against them with terrifying rage."*

Kumano's Pupils *"Long before he reluctantly joined the war, stories spread of Kumano's followers winning victories against the kami."*

Pull Under *"Although nowhere on Kamigawa was safe during the war, the Takenuma Swamp was the most horrifying. The rotting bamboo itself rebelled against its mortal inhabitants, pulling them into unmarked graves."*

Thoughtbind *"As the rest of the mortal world waged war, Lady Azami and her students invaded tomes of knowledge. Their search yielded spells critical in the fight."*

Villainous Ogre *"The war saw the ogres emerge from their caves, reeking of blood, with the power of oni in their veins."*

Waking Nightmare *"Once each year, the oni and other evil spirits paraded through villages to disturb mortals' sleep. During the war, this parade became a nightly event."*

#### **Betrayers of Kamigawa cards**

Crack the Earth *"As the war progressed, the destruction the kami caused became more widespread and less predictable."*

In the Web of War *"In desperation, Konda sent warriors to parley with the ogre-magi. No one knows whether they were slaughtered at Shinka or if they even reached its bloodstained walls."*

Psychic Spear *"The wizards of Takenuma Swamp faced the horrors of humanity every day. It's no wonder they fared so well against the kami."*

Three Tragedies *"As the kami passed over the village of Mita, the inhabitants relived their three most grievous tragedies. Some cried. Some raged. Some were driven to madness. But the next morning, none possessed the will to fight."*

Toils of Night and Day *"The war sent Kamigawa into turmoil. Here it was spring and there winter. For some, time stood still, while for others, moments flashed past like minnows in a pond."*