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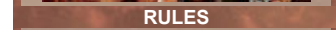
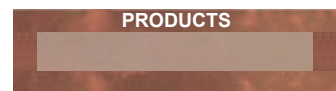


# The Flavor of Magic

Matt Cavotta  
Taste the Magic  
Wednesday, August 24, 2005



Welcome to the inaugural installment of **Taste the Magic**. Before I get into what this column is all about, we are going to perform a little...taste test. I am going to give you a sampling of two card games. Enjoy these two snippets of play from Game A and Game B, and then we will discuss what we have consumed and decide which one is more delicious. Feel free to stop eating the one that doesn't please your palette- it will leave more room for the good stuff.



## Game A

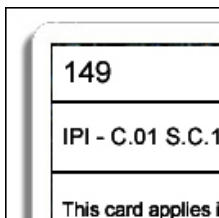
It is my turn, and I attempt to take points away from you with **Card 43.9**. It is one of many cards that are In-Play Interactive (henceforth IPI). **Card 43.9** has a special quality that allows it to maintain a defensive position even after taking points, while most IPI cards must be tilted sideways and remain inactive until their controller's next turn. Strong! This makes it an easy decision to utilize **43.9** in this way. You have an IPI card, **Card 141.9**, in play that can prevent **Card 43.9** from reducing your points.

$$4 - 2 = -2$$

However, **43.9** has numerical interplay statistics of 4 and 4 - superior to **Card 141.9's**

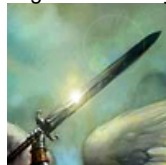
2 and 2. **Card 43.9** would overmatch **141.9** and you would have to put it into your discard pile. **Card 141.9** has a powerful ability to force an opponent to discard a card at random when it reduces that opponent's points. It would be a waste to sacrifice this potent card, so you choose to allow **43.9** to take away 4 of your 20 points. **Card 43.9** remains upright and I pass the turn to you.

We each have one IPI card in play, along with some resource cards, and one more card in hand. **Card 43.9** clearly gives me the advantage with regard to the cards in play, and I have another one in my hand. Undaunted, you confidently tilt 4 of your resource cards sideways and play the dreaded IPI **Card 149.9!** **Card 149.9**, like **141.9**, has inferior interplay statistics to **Card 43.9**- but it has a powerful strategic affect when it is played - it forces me to put one of my IPI cards into my discard pile! Wow, that's a beating.



## Game B

I give my angelic guardian the order to attack. Always at the ready, she bolts across the sky with sword drawn and shield held strong- a vision of might and beauty. Wisely, you choose not to have your dark minion intercept her. Your **Hypnotic Specter** is a worthy foe, but no match for a **Serra Angel** in combat. She hears my command and swoops in. In a single fluid motion she slashes you with her sword, flicks the blood off its gleaming blade, and assumes a defensive stance. The Specter's draconic mount shrieks and glares, lashing its skeletal tail and gnashing its jagged teeth. Its master has been hurt, but it has no opening to make a counter-attack.



Though you are clearly overmatched, you crack a devious smile. A mumbled incantation and an arcane motion of your clawed, sooty hand yield a puff of sickly smoke. As it clears I can see a vague outline of a humanoid form. It bursts to life with a horrible hiss, scattering the dark cloud and revealing its horrid identity- the dreaded **Nekrataa!** Death magic pulses out from its throat toward the angel. The magic of light and life offers me many protective spells, but at this time I have but one spell ready and it cannot save her. The **Nekrataa's** death spell hits the angel, she hangs in the air for a moment, then falls from the sky to earth with a strange silence. I do not mourn long... I will summon another angel to avenge her!



I lift my head just in time to see the gaping maw of the specter's draconic mount swoop by me. I feel the twinge of the specter's blade, hear its muffled laughter, and go mind numb. All I see now is the fading remains of my angelic guardian. I know I meant to avenge her, but I cannot remember how...



If you made it through the whole Game A piece, I am impressed at your perseverance and tolerance for the uninteresting. So which one tastes better? I am sure it didn't take you long to realize this is a trick question. Game A and Game B are both the same game: **Magic**! But then why is it that I would not bother to take another bite of Game A (bland **Magic**), but have been chewing on Game B (real **Magic**) for ten years? The answer is *flavor*! The exact same game was played out in each case, but real **Magic** packs the rich delicious fantasy world flavor that attracted us all to the game and that continues to bring us back to the table for more helpings.

What is cool about taking 4 points from an opponent by affecting him or her with a card that has a particular numerical statistic of 4 and an ability that deters some other cards from interacting with it? Crickets chirping. Not a lot. This stuff is too boiled down. If we reduce our concepts of **Magic** cards to numbers and comparative power levels and draft-worthy ratings, then we're playin' game A, and that taste gets old fast.



However, there is plenty cool about a mighty winged warrior angel clad in armor, whose swordsmanship and combat skill allow her to make deadly airborne attacks while never giving up her defensive position. Sweet. And it doesn't hurt that the artwork depicting this glorious creature is dynamic, emotional, and well-crafted. (And if that one doesn't float your boat, you can look back at one of the other interpretations of **Serra Angel** from **Magic's** history.) And it doesn't stop there. The name, **Serra Angel**, is just the tip of an Iceberg.

"Serra" is the name of a powerful planeswalker who poured her vision of benevolence and light into "Serra's Realm," a utopian plane from which magic and angels of great power originate. (Scads more to be told about that, but another time...) The flavor text continues adding spice to the pot. "*When she flies above the good, they consider themselves blessed. When she flies above the wicked, they consider themselves dead.*" It hints at the classic clash between good and evil, and the side on which she fights. (And this is just one of three different flavor texts she has. Flavor text offers gobs

of goodness for us to talk about in the weeks to come.) I could ramble for quite a while, and not just about everybody's darling, **Serra Angel**. There is plenty of salt and pepper on every **Magic** card out there – and that's a good thing, because that's what **Taste the Magic** is all about.

## Taste The Magic

I would hope that all of you recognized that B is the far tastier treat. For those of you who did, **Taste the Magic** is going to be your cup of tea. We will have good times exploring all of the facets of **Magic** that give it such wonderful fantasy flavor. (We will also make fun of the sort of people who would choose A ;)

The fruit of this fabled tree takes on the **flavor** of whatever food you love most.

Ah, yes. The flavor is everywhere. I've outlined in red the parts of a **Magic** card where you can find it. It's hard to find a part of the yum-yum tree that is not circled. If you have any interest in **Magic** art, or have been tickled by flavor text, or enjoy **Magic** storylines, then you are in for a weekly treat. These things, along with world-building, artists, card frames, packaging, cosmology, expansion symbols, creature types, card names, and many others will all have their moment in the sun in this column.



Can you find the skull, swan, fish, sword, lantern, and human fetus in the art of **Chisei, Heart of Oceans**?



**Magic** art fan? You're in luck. You can plan on hearing about the process of art commissioning, the connection between card art and card mechanics, **Magic** artists, concept-to-final art process, choosing art for packaging, **Magic Easter Eggs**, and the most important art topic of all; the **Magic** art that I think is cool.

So art is not your bag, but you're a big storyline junky. You, too, have hit the jackpot. We'll explore the storyline as it is portrayed in flavor text, novels, and other media. We'll bore down into character profiles of villains, heroes, and zeroes from the ancient days all the way up through the stuff I can't talk about 'til next year.

OK, I hear ya. You're a fan of flavor text, but don't really follow the storyline. You, too, are invited to the party. We'll zoom in on the quips, quotations, puns and poetry that spice up the bottoms of most **Magic** cards.



**Thermokarst**

Flavor text too much to digest? Novels waaaaay too much to digest? Join us for an hors d'ouvres party as we discuss the delectable little snacks called card names. We can talk about the good, the bad, and the comical ones, the too-long, the too-strange, and the too hard to pronounce. We'll peel back the top layer of card names to reveal the sometimes hidden, sometimes ancient, other times pun-slingin' meanings behind our titular treats.

**Karstoderm**

Interested in the average pointing score of *Saviors of Kamigawa* limited? Trick question! None of that numbers mumbo-jumbo here. If things go the way I plan, there will be very, very little math in this column.

**Dermoplasm**

Anyway, all this cool non-numerical stuff is kept fun and fresh under the vigilant care of **Magic's** Creative Team. I am lucky enough to be part of this talented team, and happy to finally bring its hard work into the [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) limelight. Though my voice and overextended food metaphors will be heard most often, I will bring my Team cohorts onto the scene quite often. Brandon Bozzi, Jeremy Cranford, Brady Dommernuth, Jeremy Jarvis, and Mark Rosewater will all, in some form or another, make their voices heard as well.

**Plasmotherm?**

One important thing you should know is that **Taste the Magic** is NOT just for the Creative Team to dish out goods to you – it's also here so we can hear how you feel about **Magic** art, card names, storyline, etc. I think it's about time that the [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) conversation went beyond deck lists and combos and started addressing some of the other things we love about **Magic**. Let's start hearing from you right now.

Which words best describe the sort of player who would choose **Magic A** over **Magic B**?

- Lost Soul
- Dead Inside
- Party Pooper
- Robot
- Mr. Drearypants
- All of the above
- All of the above-And then some!

Submit my Vote



Ah, yes! Fun at the expense of Mr. Dullpants. We'd also like to hear from you with topics you'd like us to address in the weeks to come. Feel free to email [Taste the Magic](mailto:Taste the Magic) with suggestions. Oh, and when we really start cutting into the meat of this column, I promise to pare down on all the sugar-coating and back-burner all of the cheesy references to food.

*Matt has played **Magic**, painted **Magic** art, and he works at Wizards in the **Magic** R&D department. Now he is writing this very column. He is determined to sneak his handiwork into all facets of **Magic**, and he will not stop until he has poured the inks at the print shop and tucked cards into booster packs by hand!*

*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.*



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