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Mythbashing

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Taste the Magic
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As the weeks go by and the articles pile up, so it seems, do the interesting interpretations of my words. With an audience comprised of many different types of peeps, it is not surprising to me that what I write is not absorbed the same way by everybody. This is totally cool with me. But, in some cases, one particular interpretation gains momentum and a life of its own. I have decided to play Mythbasher today and give you the "real" on few untruths that have been bouncing around for a while. Just so Mythbashing itself does not end up spawning a myth of its own, I'll have you know that I do not think ALL of you are buying into the myths. Still, I'll address some of this stuff before it gets more momentum than it already has. Truth be told, I rather enjoy the heated banter that often spins out of control, and the emails messages fraught with passion. These are proof positive that, on the mark or completely off-track, people care a great deal about **Magic**. But, in some cases, it is better to fuel the right fires with the truth rather than let wildfires burn free. Anyway, let's start out light:



Myth #1. Matt Thumbed His Nose At MTG.Com

A well-timed myth. If you happened to sniff out the fishyness in the Dimir's attempt at misdirection in "[The House That Lies Built](#)" a few weeks ago, then this one is no news to you. Some of you, however, may have been deceived by the **Dimir Doppelganger** into thinking that I got salty with the editors and went on journalistic strike for a week. It's a good thing the Dimir are not up on techy html stuff or they might have pulled it off. There were a few holes in their "hacking." If you didn't catch any of them, take a peek at my "[real article](#)". I am quite proud of it and I want to make sure those of you who missed it get a chance to read it. Also, know that, though I do have a bit of a rebellious streak left over from my younger days, I would not use the Taste The **Magic** forum to voice my opinion against the Man. (Instead I would probably contact my angst-driven boys in the Gruul and bring some bald-faced ruckus straight to him. Dimir-ish subterfuge is not my style.)

Now let's move onto something that I've been wanting to work into a column for a while. It's a dangerous myth that has created an unfriendly environment.

Myth #2. Magic Artists Are "Fired" By The Art Director

This one is untrue on many, many levels. First of all, **Magic** artists are not "Hired" in the first place. They are independent contractors working from their homes and studios far from the offices of Wizards of the Coast. Each **Magic** set is a brand new scenario and will use a new set of artists to illustrate its cards. An artist who works on one set does NOT automatically work on the next, or any other **Magic** set. If the art director chooses not to contract that artist again, it does not mean he or she was fired. Plain and simple.

Not so plain and simple is why Artist A. is no longer working for **Magic**. The first inclination is to let your blood boil and acid to leak into your heart at the mention of the art director's name. "Evil Art Director X has fir- er... chosen not to give Artist A. work anymore. AD X doesn't know good art from skid marks! AD X is the devil! Bring back Artist A!" Cool down, my friend. There are plenty of reasons that have nothing to do with AD X's idea of good art. I will list them:

- Artist A. is consistently late in turning in work.
- Artist A. has an abrasive, difficult personality and is hard to work with.
- Artist A. is no longer interested in doing work for **Magic**.
- Artist A. is too busy with a full-time job work to fit in **Magic**



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work.

Artist A. has hung up the pencils and paints and is onto another career.

Artist A. is working for a competitor and is contractually unable to work on **Magic**.

Artist A. is delivering work of inferior quality to work of the past.

Artist A. has moved on to try illustration work of other sorts.

Artist A. has broken terms of the **Magic** art contract.

Artist A. is burnt out on **Magic** art.

Artist A. is taking a break to resolve personal issues.

Artist A. has moved and can no longer be reached.

Artist A. has health issues that make art work impossible.

These sorts of things come up all the time. So please consider this stuff before you decide to besmirch the name of the art director on message boards, in conversation at the game shop, or even worse, to the AD him or herself. There are plenty of things beyond the AD's control that could be keeping your favorite scribbler from illustrating cards. For example, I have been a little saddened that one of my all-time faves, Adam Rex, has not been in any of the last 3 **Magic** sets we're working on. This may bum you out as well. But, it is absolutely NOT because the art director has canned him, it's because he is working on writing and illustrating his own children's books and a novel.

Just a little 411; there was a time when there were **Magic** artists on staff at WotC. They are not on staff anymore. They were not "fired" either. WotC moved to using freelance artists exclusively. There are some people who illustrate **Magic** cards on staff at WotC right now, but illustrating cards is not part of their job. Jeremy Jarvis is a concept illustrator and I am a writer. Jen Page and Mark Rosewater have each illustrated a card but they have jobs completely unrelated to **Magic** art. (It has been a while since Rosewater illustrated **Look At Me, I'm The DCI**. He has not done any art since. We've all seen his handiwork. (Secretly, I think he was fired ;)

Myth #3.

The Creative Team Demands Scantily Clad Women In Magic Art

Ever since the Style Guide articles, a conversation has spun off into distant reaches of bizarre land. This conversation was spawned by attaching one sentence to another sentence that is not even on the same page as the first one. Here it is, right from the Style Guide:

- Remember, your audience is BOYS 14 and up.

Seems innocent enough. It's in a paragraph about **Magic's** aggressive, high-action attitude. But somehow it has been smashed together with another sentence to result in an ongoing outcry wherein we, the Creative Team, are said to demand that all female characters are depicted as scantily clad sex kittens. The irony is that the second ingredient in this myth-storm tries to say exactly the opposite:

- Feel free to paint beautiful women, as long as they're shown kicking ass. No damsels in distress. No ridiculously exaggerated breasts. No nudity.

Somehow these two sentences have twisted together to become "All female characters must be maximized for the titillation of 14 year old boys." I have not gotten around to it yet, so let's get it in black right now:

FALSE!

The whole 14 year old thing was to make sure there's enough action and a lid on sex and gore. The mention of women in art is to make sure they are NOT objectified or shown as dependent/weak.

Let's look at an example, **Perilous Forays** from *Ravnica*:

"That skimpy top hardly covers her. Did the art description have to play the boob card? Wouldn't this concept work better with a "regular" woman in conservative garb?"

Let's take a look at the art description before we jump to any conclusions:

Color: Green Spell (no guild affiliation)
Location: labyrinthine city alleys
Action: Show the moment when a flustered urban ranger, map in hand, in a complex maze of dark, ominous alleyways. The look on his/her face should be "THIS is the place? This map has got to be wrong..." Glowing eyes and long shadows closing in indicate that he may soon be a late night snack for something wicked.
Focus: the doomed ranger
Mood: ominous



No mention of skimpy tops. No mention of unskimpy bosom. Indeed no mention of even a female subject. In fact, there is a sneaky little "he" in there that reveals the true intention of the art description. What do we learn from all of this?

Blame the Artist! Well, actually, there's really no blame to be assigned. What I see is the same thing I have seen since I started studying art history back in college. Artists have always been fascinated with human anatomy and the ideal human form. It's not my business to say which form is actually the ideal, but I have a pretty good idea

what Chris Dien thinks. The artist diverged from the art description to include a female subject. It is not surprising to see that the female form depicted is consistent with modern notions of beauty. As for the revealing garb, I could give you some mumbo jumbo about the areas of *Ravnica's* undercity that are close to the lava furnaces and how it's really really hot there. But I won't, because that would be hokey. We don't know (though I'm sure we all have our suspicions) why Chris clothed her this way. What we do know is that this, and other situations like this one, has nothing to do with any Creative Team mandate for sexy women. This illustration follows the spirit of the art description, shown no nudity, and depicts an independent female character that is not looking for a knight in shining armor to save her. She is doomed, but not crying out for the shiny tin can. This is why we did not kill the illustration when it came in. We let Svania Trul live, if only until that snorkel-nosed creature does her in on its own.

Myth #4. Matt Hates Dwarves and is Keeping Them Down

Doubly untrue! While I did spit some acid at the little buggers in "[Metadwarfosis](#)," it was really just to sell the gag. Dwarves are tough, so I knew they could take a little ribbing and still stand...er, tall. I thought it would be an interesting and thought-provoking exercise to try and use color pie philosophizing to work a Brundle-esque transformation on dwarves. I think my loaded Inbox proves that "[Metadwarfosis](#)" was rousing thought-provoking. Also, you greatly overestimate my power to keep dwarves off the cardboard. My job is not to decide if they see print, it is to give them names and flavor and, in some cases, a face (see [Bash to Bits](#) illustration above.)

Sure, there are some things about the dwarf mythology that I don't like, but it does not make me want to pitch dwarves to the trash-pile. It just makes me want to shift the focus. It is my opinion that many fantasy fans seem to focus on the aspects of dwarfdom that I find least interesting. Take beards for example; beards can be cool if dealt with as a characteristic of dwarven culture; length denotes rank, painted or dyed during wartime, braided or dreadlocked to denote tribal membership. This is all cool stuff. What really stinks up the place is when the dwarf goes all Fonzie about his beard, coddling it and demanding that nobody messes with it. That is comic relief cornball stuff and we get enough of that with the goblins. Then there's the drunken tavern dwarf. This is one of those things that, in specific cases, could be seen as an interesting characteristic. But, spread across an entire race it seems to me a heavy-handed stretch. Binging and feasting after a victorious battle is cool. Waddling around drunk all the time seems more like a recipe for extinction.

My seemingly biased take on the dwarves was just to sell the metamorphosis. Look at those dorky drawings- not exactly the most serious play for widespread buy-in. As I scribbled them out, I could not keep from thinking they looked like Frankenstein's monster.

The inactive radio buttons were an editorial oversight, not a sneaky way to avoid hearing how you feel about the absence of dwarves. (Our apologies. The buttons have been active since last Thursday.) This whole gag was made to stir the pot **SO** I could hear how you feel.

In the name of all that is short and husky, I encourage you all to take a second look at [Metadwarfosis](#) and submit your opinions. While I do not have the power to bring back dwarves on my own, significant consensus from the fan base can go a long way in kindling conversation within the Creative Team.



Me, hate the dwarves? For goodness sake I built them a Shrine!

While we're on the topic of my relative powerlessness, we glide smoothly into

Myth #5. Matt's Words are Equal to Those of Wizards of the Coast

This one is a laugher. I am flattered that many of you think this company falls in line behind my whims and opinions, that I am a mover and shaker, that the decisions to do or not do things are mine to make. Unfortunately, fellow flavorphiles, I'm just a token insect buzzin' about [The Hive](#).

Some of the columns on [mtg.com](#) are here to disseminate official information on what WotC is doing, how we're doing it, and how we came to these decisions. Taste The **Magic** is really not one of them. This column is for the fun and appreciation of **Magic's** non-game-related wonders. The editors have left it up to me to decide how to do this, whether it's theories of my own ([Honeymoon In Dominaria](#)), sneaky shenanigans (The House That Lies Built), flavor appreciation ([Going, Going, Gone...](#)), or a little nettling gag ([Metadwarfosis](#).) The common thread is that it's all my own personal take on this stuff we all love. When I spotlight a particular piece of art or flavor text, I am NOT trying to jock the cards the company is pushing, I am just trying to get you into the swing of actively appreciating the creative aspects of the cards.

There will be cases when I do present some official info, like the [Magic Style Guide articles](#), but the official stuff will be quoted and separate from my own ramblings. Don't come to TTM for the official word, come here for a [Cheese](#) sandwich and some energetic talk of swords and Arthur Fonzarelli.

It's completely possible that you have read this far and have not been a believer in any of the myths so far. That being the case, the only news you've heard is that Adam Rex is writing a novel and that Svania Trul was wearing a Chris Dien ensemble to her **Magic** card debut. That's not enough to chew on for this week. SO I have decided to pull back the curtain a tad and let you see the sketch for one of my *Guildpact* illustrations. Have a look-see here and see if you can figure out which guild lays claim to this crazy monster:



Crazy, huh? The finished version packs a few surprises too. Anyhoo, polish your armor, spit-shine that signet, and report back next week for show of Boros firepower.

*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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