

A feature article so powerful that someone will die in order that it might live.

The Italicized World of *Coldsnap*: Interviewing Cavotta and a Continent

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I've got a Monday feature article all to myself—a dedicated chunk of time to soapbox about being on the Coldsnap creative text team. So what do I do but go and interview somebody else. Clearly I need lessons in spotlight-hogging. However, as you'll see, I end up sharing the Flavor Podium not only with flavor writer coordinator and creative text honcho himself, Matt Cavotta, but also with a cast of characters from throughout Terisiare. Read on to see how flavor comes alive—and also occasionally dies (that's what we writers call foreshadowing, kids)—in those italicized words on cards and beyond.

Doug: My guest today is Matt Cavotta, the man who coordinates the flavor text writers and is the go-to man for all creative text on cards. Today we're talking *Coldsnap*. Matt, let's jump right in. If the storyline for *Ice Age* was already set, and in *Alliances* everything started to melt, why did *Coldsnap* come out a cold set?

Heidar, Rimewind Master :: Move over Cavotta, I'll take this one. The reason is because *Alliances* was filled with mud and plague and gorillas – and nobody wants to see more of that. It's like seeing a fabulously dressed emperor, clad in silver and ivory and December ermine, stripped bare with his blotchy skin, sagging flab, warts and matted body hair. In *Coldsnap* we did *not* want to see the emperor's new clothes, we wanted to see more of his old ones - his wondrous, wintry old ones.

Doug: What an opportunity! So Heidar, I take it you had something to do with dressing up Terisiare in its chilly finest? So what was your beef with Freyalise's World Spell, the event that triggered the Thaw and eventually ended two thousand years of bitter winter? What's wrong with muddy gorillas?



Matt: What!?! You're bailing on me and directing your questions to the crazy popsicle wizard? Hey, I'm the one that put this guy's maniacal words on cards in the first place.

Doug: You're right – I need to stick with the source. Matt, tell me about storyline on cards. Is it hard to convey storyline events, such as the march of Heidar's frozen army, in flavor text?

Matt: Actually, there is very little storyline on cards anymore. The *Tempest* block tried storyboarding the novel storyline in card illustrations and in flavor text. I think we have found, in the time since *Tempest*, that the storyboard technique is nice when looking at the whole panorama, but is detrimental to the cards individually. Where we are right now is a place where the cards care about the story and support it, but do not bear the burden of delivering it. You never know in what order folks will see cards, so it does not make sense to use them to deliver plot.

As for Heidar's army marching across refrozen Adarkar, it is not described on cards. Instead, the cards set the scene for the march and provide extra bits of character development for Heidar and the other major players in the story. This allows players who are less concerned with our story to "feel" the setting and, if they choose, create a story for themselves.

Doug: There are some obvious themes there—the power-lust of Heidar, the artificiality of the oncoming cold, the desperation of heroic characters rising to fight. Did you prepare the flavor text writers to incorporate these themes in their submissions, or did they arise as part of the creative process?

Heidar: You speak as if the lust for power is a negative. Fool. And the "artificiality" of the cold? Nothing is more real than the cold. Anyone who knows anything about nature knows that all things from beast to molecule come to rest in a state of immobile cold. Just look at the **Woolly Razorback**, or even **Marit Lage**. It takes effort to be warm, to move. The world *wants to be cold*.

Matt: Heidar, I know your title is "Rimewind Master," but we are running this show. Sit back or I'll bust out some dirt on you that is quite embarrassing.



Anyway... I think most of these ideas came about organically, as a product of the creative problem we had to solve - How does Terisiare get cold again? Heidar was created as the catalyst (sorry pal, you were only a figment of Brandon Bozzi's mind) and the rest of the pieces started to fall into place. It's all sort of summed up in the flavor text for **Frost Raptor**:

The Rimewind wizards strove to perpetuate a magical winter. Their unnatural snows birthed unnatural beasts.

The return of the cold makes things happen, in Terisiare as well as here at Wizards.

Doug: The idea of the creative team's work and the flavor text writers' work as *problem-solving* is of great interest to me. For any **Magic** set—and particularly one designed to fit into a decade-old block—there must be a number of creative problems to solve. Are there specific card names that call out to you as problem-solvers?

Matt: This problem was really not that hard to solve. There are certain words that carry the weight of *Ice Age* on their backs – like Kjeldoran, Adarkar, Balduvian and Stromgald. These words mean *Ice Age*, they mean Terisiare. New cards like **Kjeldoran Javelineer** and **Balduvian Warlord** immediately take us back there.

On another level, there was the job of building upon the cold Nordic-esque setting that was created in *Ice Age*. This took a little more doing. We definitely plumbed Scandinavian language dictionaries and other sources for words that carried the Nordic vibe. This led us to names like **Jokulmorder**, **Skred**, **Adarkar Valkyrie**, and **Jotun Grunt**.

Then, of course, there was the basic task of communicating "cold." We busted out just about every word for cold, ice, or snow that work in the English (and sometimes other) language. Snow, Ice, Gelid, Cryo-, Rime, Blizzard, Boreal, Glacial, Frost, Cold, Frigid, Chilling, Winter, Frozen, Freeze, North, and Squall all appear at least once in card names. Gives me shivers just reading them.

Doug: Brrr. **Jokulmorder!** Judging by the etymology, that must be a "giant glacial killer whale-wurm"—okay, that's just judging by the picture. Does that creature exist in Scandinavian mythology?

Aear Borg, Northern Guide: I don't know what Scandinavian means, but that thing's no myth! I've seen it myself, seen it eat whole expedition teams in one gulp. I don't care what it means or where it's from—I just don't want to see one ever again.

Matt: Why do you guys keep interrupting the flow here? Isn't it enough that your name and words appear on **Magic** cards? My name and words are not on... Actually, now that I think about it, they are. But anyway. Let's keep it down back there in the peanut gallery. You know, Doug, we work with a good crop of quotable characters when doing **Magic** flavor text—good people, generally. But then they see their names in print and they get all crazy.



Back to **Jokulmorder**. The name is based on the Swedish words jökul(glacier) and morder(killer). The "jökul" part may seem familiar—it was seen way back when on the popular card **Jokulhaups** (which is a volcanic eruption under a glacier - sending tons of melted snow, chunks of ice, and mud rolling down in a deadly slide.) The "killer" part fits both thematically and visually—as this thing kills stuff and resembles the mighty killer whale. As far as I know, this creature does not exist in Scandinavian mythology, but tales of its awesome power should live on in Dominarian history for a long time.

Heidar: A **Jokulhaups** is a beautiful thing. All that ice and snow skidding down the mount in a great, glittering doom sled. It's one of the rare cases where heat is actually useful.

Sek'Kuar, Deathkeeper : Why does *he* get to talk? I thought we were supposed to be quiet. All he does is talk. He's on more flavor text than any of us. I was only quoted on one card! Can't he shut up now?

Heidar: You-

Matt: Okay, people. Quiet down or I'll have Doug **Sunscour** your asses!

Doug: Now I'd like to do a "Flavor Text Lightning Round." I'll call out a piece of flavor text from *Coldsnap*, and you let our readers in on all the delicious tidbits of story going on there, in one sentence. Ready?

Boreal Shelf

*"Who will stay the Tyrant's hand,
As ice and woe both grip our land?
The helpless feel his frozen brand."
—The Dynasty of Winter Kings*

Matt: It is an epic poem in which cold is personified that stretches across all 5 dual lands. **Boreal Shelf, Frost Marsh, Arctic Flats, Highland Weald, and Tresserhorn Sinks**.

Doug: **Darien, King of Kjeldor**

"With his dream of unification fulfilled, Darien became the last king of Kjeldor. Those who followed were known as the kings of New Argive."

—Kjeldor: Ice Civilization

Matt: New Argive is the nation created by the union of Kjeldor and Balduvia.

Doug: **Mishra's Bauble**

"Arcum is a babbling fool! Phyrexian technology is our greatest blessing. Take this delightful trinket for instance . . ."

—Heidar, Rimewind master

Matt: A telltale sign of a crazy person is a person with no fear (and no fear of Phyrexia at that!)

Heidar: What do you mean by "crazy person?"

Matt: Doug, get a **Deathmark** ready!



Doug: I have one ready, but it won't work on him.

Heidar: Ha!

Doug: Speaking of **Deathmark**—

"I hope it's true that every snowflake is unique, because I never want to see one like this again. Now clean up that body."

—Thangbrand Gyrðsson, Kjeldoran patrol

Matt: That Thangbrand, he's such a cut-up!

Doug: **Rimebound Dead**

"Tresserhorn is ours now. Dredge the lake and bring me all the bones you find. We'll build you a new army, the likes of which Terisiare has never seen."

—Heidar, Rimewind master, to Haakon

Matt: Rimewind and the undead gives me thoughts of Walt Disney, and that really dumb movie with Mel Gibson and Jamie Lee Curtis.

Doug: **Sek'Kuar, Deathkeeper**

Karplusan legend told of an orc so cruel that he burned his own followers in rage—yet so revered that they rose from their pyres to serve him.

Sek'Kuar: Ha! Now we're talkin'!

Matt : Fine, orc. You have one sentence to toot your horn.

Sek'Kuar: Um...it was fun to burn my own followers.

Matt: Wow, very eloquent. And you complained about only being on one card.

Doug: An orc finds his voice—it's a beautiful thing, really. We should give more mike-time to Terisians—karaoke, anyone? I heard **Arkin Egilsson, skycaptain** of Kjeldor, does a mean "Girl, You'll Be a Woman Soon." So, let's wrap this thing up. Last question:

At this point, I was under the mistaken impression that the interview was almost over. As it turned out, it had just started getting truly interesting.

Who's **Lovisa Coldeyes** talking to in the flavor text of **Karplusan Wolverine**? I mean, she should probably have known not to try training wolverines. Put that on the list of "poorly-conceived projects for the barbarian horde."

"They're not easily trained. Fortunately, they already know how to kill."

—Lovisa Coldeyes, Balduvian chieftain

Matt: Well, actually...

Lovisa Coldeyes : That's a dumb question! And a couple dumb statements following it. If you knew anything about anything, pencil-pusher, you'd know that we Balduvians have been handling **wolverines** for generations.

Matt: Whoa, Lovisa. No need to get sal-

Lovisa: You shut up, paint-pusher.

Blucharth, Orcish Bloodpainter: Hey, there's nothing wrong with pushing paint!

Lovisa: Typical dumb orc. Don't you see that they're hosing us here. I was on 20 *Ice Age* and *Alliances* cards and now I get just one! No respect.

Sek'Kuar: Dumb orc?! Hear this now – you and your kind will roast slowly on the spit, Balduvian, over my tribe's victory-blaze. ...But you're right, they did hose us.

Taaveti of Kelsinko : They didn't hose you, orc. Your one dumb card is more than you had before. I, on the other hand, got busted down from 13 cards to just three. What's with that, Cavotta?

Matt: I would rather not say. You're all important to me and I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings.

Garza Zol, Plague Queen : Spare us your pity, bleeder.

Doug: Oooh, "bleeder." That's good stuff. I should save that one for flavor text in the future.

Garza Zol: You should have used it on me in *Coldsnap*, bloodsack.

Thangbrand Gyrdsson : Ha! "Bloodsack." That was funny.

Heidar: Enough with all this bickering. Hot tempers are for barbarians and fools. I am sure the Creative Team knew just what they were doing when they quoted all of us on the cards. And this is why I was given twice as many quotes as any of you.

Lovisa: If there were any other warriors, barbarians, or berserkers quoted in this interview, I'd have them kick you straight in the icicles!

Lothar Lovisason : Uh,...Mom.

Lovisa: Well, then do something.

Lothar: I can't.

Lovisa: Why? What kind of barbarian did I raise?



Lothar: They won't write it in.

Doug: That's right, everybody. You guys may have a lot to say or do, but nothing truly goes down unless we write it down somewhere.

Matt: Aahh! The feeling of power ...it's quite a rush.

Doug: Heidar just said something that I am not going to write down. So did Lovisa...and Garza Zol.

Matt: I actually think this a good time for a little lesson for everybody. Just because something is not specifically stated on cards doesn't mean that it does not happen at all. For example, nowhere on the cards does it say that Garza Zol rules the plague-ridden husk of a town called Krov.

Garza Zol: But I do.

Matt: Yes, and that's why I just wrote that down after your name.

Taaveti: That's not fair. Some of us might have done a lot of important things that you just leave right out of existence.

Lovisa: Yeah. It's like on Survivor, where they edit people's footage so they end up looking like bastards when all their good stuff is on the cutting room floor. I bet that's what happened to me.



Heidar: I doubt it (*snickering.*)

Garza Zol: Look who's talking.

Doug: Garza, do you know something that was not on the cards that you want to share with us?

* * *

Matt: Okay, I had to edit that out. As I said, I don't want anyone's feeling to be hurt.

Lovisa: You've already done enough damage—cutting out all the important stuff about me and my barbarian horde.

Taaveti: And about me and all my travels in and around the location of the World Spell.

Sek'Kuar: Who cares about that—it's old news. What about me and how I burn my own pals?

Thangbrand: I would have liked to hear about that—the burning of his pals. If it's not on cards, but it happened, where is it?

Lothar: Yeah, I'd like to know who, other than you two bozos (*pointing at Matt and Doug*) I can hit up for some word count. I mean, you completely screwed up my whole family tree in your Taste The Magic article, "Hot Temper, Cold Eyes".

Matt: This is a fine question, I am glad we had you bring that up. Actually, there are a lot of places where your words and deeds can be actualized in print. Taste The Magic is a good example (except for in Hot Temper, Cold Eyes, when I completely butchered the pub Lothar had already gotten in Jeff Grubb's novel, "Shattered Alliances." Pretend I never wrote that stuff). Hey, there's another one—novels. And Jeff's story in the *Coldsnap Player's Guide*. And then there are comics and short stories, like "The Horror at Ronom Glacier", "The Battle of Kjeldor", and "Vannemir's Choice".

Aevar: That one story was great. You know—the one about me.

Doug: Oh I happen to agree, Aevar - it's excellent. (*Doug and Aevar high-five.*) It's places like the web fiction, novels, Taste The Magic and other fiction venues that we get to provide further background on what we can't cover on the cards. Cards generally only allow for pithy one-liners about the setting or, at best, an extended quote from a character - which makes an article like this particularly powerful.

Lothar: What are you talking about?

Doug: Well, this is **Magic** world-building happening literally as we speak. That's the power that a novelist, creative text writer or flavor article author wields.

Lothar: You're wrong. We're living, breathing people who do what we want.

Matt: That's true to some degree - it's our job to flesh you out and build on your past literary experiences in whatever media you had them, so we can't really make you do something ludicrously out of character. But when it comes right down to it, *character* is exactly what you are. Try breathing now, as I type these words:



(*Lothar grasps at his throat, turning blue, unable to fill his lungs.*)

Lovisa: Stop that!

Matt: Okay. I was just trying to make a point. The big deal is that **Magic** is about more than just the cards. You guys should not feel bad when your words or deeds are cut from cards because the reminder text got too long. You should just sit back and rest assured that we will show you off to the public if we feel you have anything to offer.

Lovisa: Anything to offer! So you two twig-necks have sole power over what we do?!

Doug: Lovisa, Lovisa. Haven't you been listening? We are not the sole power. There are many people involved in telling the tales of great battles won and enemies slain. Take Jeff Grubb, for example. He wrote the story in the *Coldsnap* Player's Guide. He talks about you quite a bit in there.

Lovisa: Well then I will seek out this Grubb and have him write my axe straight into your sternum!

Matt: Again, she does not get it. You see, people, Lovisa actually said "write my axe into your chest," but I swapped in "straight" and "sternum" for some alliterative good times. Oh, and by the way, in Grubb's story Lovisa dies. *(everybody gasps, except for Heidar, as Lovisa ceases to exist. Lothar falls to his knees and weeps for a few seconds, then stops as he realizes that he is now the Balduvian Chieftain.)*

Heidar: Ha! I love this Grubb man. I think I was the one that Grubb used to kill her. Yes, it's all coming back to me now. Grubb is the man.

Garza Zol: *(laughing)* He sure is. Why don't you ask the bloodsacks what else Grubb had to say about you?

Heidar: What are you talking about?

Matt: Sorry man, but one of **Garza's Assassins** did you in too. *(Much less gasping. A little chuckling.)*

Thangbrand: Why aren't there any bodies to look at? You know, for evidence and stuff.

Matt: That's a good question, and it brings up an important point about **MagicCreative**. One interesting, yet extremely hard to control aspect of **Magic Creative** is that it cannot unravel chronologically. Most often, players get their cards in random order and learn of events equally out of order. That player might read a short story and learn of the death of a character, like Lovisa, before cracking a booster pack and staring her in the face, reading her mighty words, and summoning her to battle in a duel. Because of this, **Magic creative** tends to leave the chronological telling of story off of the cards in lieu of building on setting and character, with a few plot points thrown in for titillation. This being the case, we all have to be open to processing the story out of order, as we just did with Heidar and Lovisa. You see, now that we know they died out on the frozen fields of Terisiare, there's no way they could have been here with us at Starbuck's.



Garza Zol: Interesting. Are any of the rest of us dead? Well... other than me.

Sek'Kuar: If she's dead, how is she still talking?

Doug: She's *undead*, doofus. She's a vampire.

Sek'Kuar: So none of us is dead? That's good news.

Matt: It is. But it is also anti-climactic.

Doug: Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?

Matt: I asked you to get it ready...

Doug: Do you really think it's necessary? You don't think they got the point?

Matt: I'm feeling a little Palpatine coming on...

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Doug: At who? Taaveti?

Taaveti: What! Why me?

Matt: Because you're Green and White. And because I have never liked the sound of the word "Kelsinko."

Ken Troop, Wizards of the Coast Creative Team Manager: Wait! You can't kill Taaveti! *(Matt, Doug, and Ken huddle up for a quick chat.)*

Taaveti of Kelsinko: Yeah, you can't kill me! Ken is your boss and he says so.

Ken Troop: Sorry Taaveti. I guess you're going to have to take one for the team. It's important that everyone understands the power of the written word.

Matt: Look man, no hard feelings. It's a lesson that the readers need to understand. When we print it, it happens. Even in this very article. Fire at will, Doug Beyer!

Taaveti: You guys are sick!

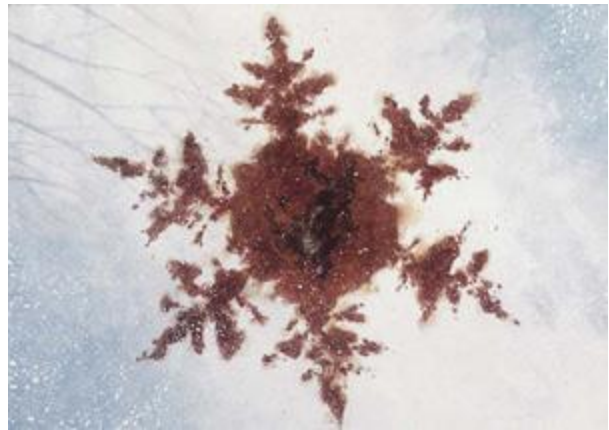
Aevar: I can't watch.

Garza Zol, Sek'Kuar and Thangbrand: *(in unison)* I can.

Matt: Actually, Thangbrand, you already did.

Thangbrand: What?

Matt: Look at Taaveti. Doesn't he look a bit familiar? *(Doug waves his arms and mumbles a bit, unleashing a deadly pulse of power from directly above Taaveti's head. The gore radiates out from his body, and then it disappears.)*



Thangbrand: Aha! It's the snowflake!

Matt: That's right, sir. Let it be known to all that on this day, we decided that the art and flavor text on **Deathmark** describe the death of Taaveti of Kelsinko.

Sek'Kuar: Wow, you can do that? Cool.

Matt: Thanks for paying attention.

I should have known what I was in for, doing an interview with Matt "Vorthos" Cavotta. I learned a lot and killed a guy—not bad for a Monday feature. There are a thousand voices inside a flavor text writer, and dozens of writers behind the cards. Occasionally some of those stories get told in brief, italicized flashes. The rest get played out game after game.

Doug Beyer