

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Parlez Vous Vorthos?

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

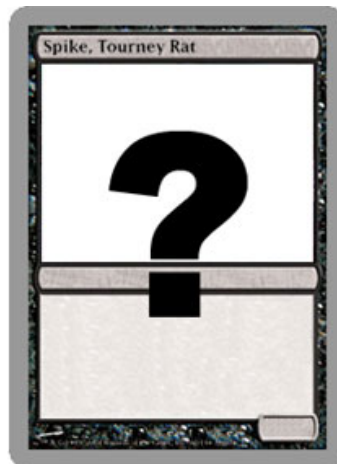
Welcome to "End of Turn Week!" I have been waiting for a theme week like this to really dig into some truly flavorful stuff. The impact that the end of turn has on art, flavor text, and **Magic** world-building in general is as far-reaching as any other facet of the game. Only slightly more powerful than that is the stench of the viscous sarcasm that drips off of the first three sentences of this article!

When I found out about "End of Turn" week, I felt a little Gruul. I felt like you all, my peeps, were being completely ignored. "End of Turn Week" has even less significance to Vorthos than "[Tempo Week](#)" did. At least tempo provided a springboard to a fun little story about a young and defiant Vorthos, capped off by his immortal quote "Vorthos doesn't care about Tempo!" Well, Vorthos doesn't care about the end of anybody's turn either. Yet here we are, in "End of Turn Week."

So how do we make something of the fact that our theme offers us no meat, no cheese, no spice to cook with? I have decided to do something that, way back at the beginning, I said I'd never do: talk about design and mechanics. But fear not, flavorphiliac faithful! I am not buckling under the pressure, flip-flopping, or bailing out. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" is a defeatist's mantra that I will leave to shapeshifters and 'net-deckers. No, I am not going to join the Stale Parade and talk plain numbers and optimal plays. Instead, we're going to throw up a flag in the name of Vorthoses everywhere, so that the Man will know that we are here! The important thing in getting the attention of game-minded folks is to speak their language. So we must, for a moment, shelve the talk of aesthetics and poetics and talk card design.

Timmy, Johnny, and Spike are all well represented here at magicthegathering.com. Timmy and Johnny each have their own cards, for goodness sake. When the next "Un" set comes out, we're sure to see a Spike card as well. Well move over three stooges, 'cause Shemp wants some of the limelight too!

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Let's start at the top—literally, with the card name. We do not necessarily have carte blanche to go flava crazy here, since this card is actually part of a cycle. All the "player" cards have the pattern of "[playertype]", as in **Timmy, Power Gamer**. Getting really nit-picky, one could say that the last word in the card name must end with "er," as Gamer and Player do. Since the Spike card does not yet exist to settle that score, I will try to adhere to the "er" scheme, but not sacrifice quality to do it. This leaves us with "Vorthos, [playertype]er."

So what sort of player is Vorthos? Here's an even deeper question: Is Vorthos a "player" at all? I have known plenty of Vorthoses who have never played or no longer play **Magic** at all, but they collect the cards to admire the art and follow the storylines in flavor text. Still, the majority of Vorthoses out there do play, though their style of play is largely irrelevant to their love of the flavor of **Magic**. How do we describe a player whose play type has nothing to do with his identity? That's a tough one, but I believe I have found the answer, and it lies at the very creative root of the game.

Magic is a battle of wits and wiles between powerful world-hopping mages called Planeswalkers. Each player (whether he or she chooses to recognize it or not) is a Planeswalker, dueling against other mages with the magic (cards) collected from all the worlds (sets) that Planeswalker has seen. The mage battle flavor of the game is a non-negotiable for Vorthos. So, it is safe to say that the [playertype] for Vorthos is not "how" the game is played, but "who" he is when playing it. Vorthos is a Planeswalker.

The card name could be Vorthos, Planeswalker.

But wait, it's not that easy. The down and dirty Vorthoses out there know that we can't use that name. Planeswalkers are all-powerful beings, too omnipotent to be represented on cards as mere creatures. This is why we've never seen any Teferi, Freyalise, or Leshrac cards. It's just too much of a stretch. I don't want to jump ahead, but we're making a creature card here – just like Timmy and Johnny (and eventually Spike.) So we can't call Vorthos a Planeswalker. But that does not mean he could not ultimately become one. **Magic** has seen characters become Planeswalkers before, like Jaya Ballard, **Nicol Bolas**, and Jeska. We can give Vorthos a name that hints at a bright future as a plane-skipper.

Vorthos, Planeswalker Trainee
Vorthos, Planeswalker Aspirant
Vorthos, Planeswalker's Apprentice



I think "Planeswalker's Apprentice" is the best one. The other two sound like wanting to be a planeswalker, or just training really hard can make you one. We know that the "Spark" is not something that you can try to get—you either have it, or you don't, like the X Factor. Planeswalker's Apprentice says that there's a real planeswalker on the scene somewhere, perhaps a powerful one who has sensed the potential waiting dormant inside Vorthos. Maybe the Planeswalker took note of Vorthos's [entrance into the Firemind](#). Plus, "apprentice" is a word often used in **Magic** in reference to mages—and Vorthos is most definitely a mage. To the left is an example of where we are so far.

The name is technically longer than would normally be allowed, but since this cycle is an "Un" cycle, pretty much anything goes. There is still a bit of room to the right of the name, but remember, we need to leave room for 3 mana symbols (both Timmy and Johnny cards use 3, so we should follow suit.)

You can see that I have also included the word Creature, since that is also a known commodity. We'll be expanding on that.

But for now let's deal with the next item down the line—the mana symbols. This is a huge deal, since it also requires that we decide what color Vorthos is!

Wow, what color is Vorthos? In my head I have made quick arguments for all the colors except for black—we'll leave the skull for Spike.

Could White be the color of Vorthos? It is possible. Vorthos convenes with others to play **Magic**, discuss **Magic**, and spread his or her views on the best themes, races, stories, artists, and concepts in **Magic**. This communal, almost evangelical approach is very White. But I am not convinced. Many Vorthoses out there pursue their passion for **Magic** solo. This makes me think Vorthos is not (wholly) White.

Could Vorthos be green? I think there is an element of nature that comes into play. People do not decide on beauty, it is an innate feeling. Admiring beautiful color or an evocative phrase involves feelings deep in the gut. It's the kind of admiration that cannot be explained. This is the sort of thing that elicits a response like, "Wow, I really like the art on [Somnophore](#). I don't know what it is, but I just like it!" (That was just a fictitious example. I actually do know why I love [Somnophore](#) - because of its wonderful push and pull between hot red and cool turquoise, and the facility with which the color and drawing were laid down, and the little story that plays out right there in the art.)



And that leads me to how Vorthos can be Blue. A trained eye can see art differently, appreciate nuances that may go unnoticed to the Green viewer. A trained ear can detect a subtle staccato in a poetic piece of flavor text and appreciate its relationship to the subject of the poem. Digging deeper, learning more, is quintessentially Blue. Vorthos loves to love art and writing and story, and so he learns more about it so that he may appreciate it more. Subsequently, he seeks to apply this newfound perspective to every little piece of information he can find in flavor text, in the background of card art, in novels, etc. Vorthos could very well be blue.

But Blue seeks knowledge at the expense of other things, like emotion—something that Vorthos does not brush aside in his quest for knowledge. In fact, I believe emotion is the reason why he seeks it. To be awed by beauty, moved by tales of heroism, and inspired to laugh and discover *all facets* of **Magic** wherein *fun* may lurk. Red, my friends! Red may be the answer. But could Vorthos be a combination of all these colors? Of course he *could*. But should he? Vorthos appreciates attention to detail, and breaking the color pattern set forth by Timmy and Johnny might be a downer for some. Or would breaking the pattern be perfect for Vorthos. After all, [Vorthos Breaks Free!](#) But that would make him 🌟🔥👹, the same as the only other card to have that cost—Ink-treader Nephilim. This seems like an odd pairing. Breaking the "player" card cycle to join up with one of the wackiest cycles in all of Magic seems altogether wrong. I think it would be best to stick with the 🌟XX scheme. Based on my own level of passion as I wrote about each color, I can say with absolute certainty that Vorthos should not be Black, and should probably be Red.



Let's deal with that dangling "Creature" issue. The Johnny template is more recent than Timmy, so it should take precedence. That makes Vorthos a Legendary Creature instead of a Summon Legend. But what comes after the dash? Both Timmy and Johnny are "gamers." Considering what I said earlier about some Vorthoses not even playing **Magic**, can we call him a gamer? I think we can. After all, it is the game of **Magic** into which he delves, whether he plays by the rules or not. Part of me wants to call him a Legendary Creature—Human Wizard, since that is where all of his flavor is focused. But, again, I think holding the line with the rest of the cycle is important. Pulling back for a moment, "Vorthos" is not actually a wizard. He is the amalgamated collection of all of our fantasy world fancies about being mages, wielding spells, and walking the worlds of **Magic**. In truth, Vorthos is the bard's spirit in a gamer, with an eye for artistry, a love of a well-spun yarn, and the willingness to sink into the theatre of **Magic**. Legendary Creature—Human Gamer it is.

Here's the point where I reiterate something I said in last week's article, [The Great and Powerful Oz](#). I am not the final word on the flavor of **Magic**. I am a goob just like you who happens to have used his magical wiles to trick Wizards into letting me write this column. I do not want to be the final word, I just want to grease the wheels of conversation. I encourage all of you to voice your own opinions on all facets of the Vorthos card on the [message boards](#) for this article. I follow the reactions of my readers, and this article will be no

exception. If points are raised or ideas brought out that fit the Vorthos card better than my own, I will surely apply them and show an updated version of the card in the weeks to come.

Back to biz. We've come to a tricky part (other than the art, which is really tricky and therefore left for last), the rules text. I really wanted to have Vorthos's rules text be no longer than one line—to allow the most possible room for flavor text without being a vanilla creature. Unfortunately, this may not be an option. Again, the cycle of cards comes with a little baggage:

- ④: [Do something.] It is possible to come up with a Vorthos-appropriate ability that fits this scheme and only takes up one line, but I have not identified one that befits the "bard's spirit in a gamer." My favorite one so far (though a tad wordy) is:
- ④: Remove a card from the game and replace it with a card of the same name, but with superior art or flavor text.

Don't like the art on the *9th Edition Icy Manipulator*? Switch it with the Mark Zug version. Not a fan of the *7th Edition Goblin Spelunkers*? Kick 'em out and bring in the ones from *Ravnica*! Zero impact on the game, big time power in affecting the beauty of the board and in publicizing your own artistic opinions. Can it get any more Vorthos than that? Well, it could... if it left more room for flavor text.



Let's talk about the flavor text. I mean, really, let's talk about it—because I cannot think of how to sum up Vorthos in a couple of lines. Do we adhere to the "Just wait 'til I..." scheme set up by Timmy and Johnny? It doesn't really seem Vorthosian at all. "Just wait 'til I find my *Ravnica* novel so I can read aloud the part where Svogthir comes popping and snapping back to life. It's awesome!" I guess it works, but it doesn't really do it for me. Since we're in "Un" land, I suppose we can just print a bunch of lines on which you, the real Vorthos, may write in whatever you wish. Hey, that idea was meant to be a bit of a joke, but now that I think about it, it might just be the way to go. Putting the quill in your hands makes me happy. It fosters the kind of creativity that **Magic** is all about. (And it lets you publicize more of your artistic opinions.)

As you can see, I have also added in the 1/1 power and toughness, since that's what Timmy and Johnny have, and I could not find a reason for Vorthos to be a bigger fella'. (Spike, on the other hand, will probably be bigger, since he's the bully of the bunch.)

That brings me to the touchy subject of the art. The Timmy and Johnny cards had it easy because Timmy and Johnny are not all that concerned with the art. They show a couple of somewhat nondescript dudes, nothing to really latch on to. Vorthos, however, cares about the art. How do we represent him in a way that makes Vorthos proud? Do we show a regular Earth guy dressed up as a wizard? That seems like a

mockery. Can we just show a sweet painting of a **Magic** world wizard, the wizard of Vorthos's imagination? That seems cool, but goes against the spirit of the card cycle.

I had a few gimmicky ideas that skirt the issue. 1) Get all "Fallen Empires" and do a series of alternate art by a handful of Vorthosian favorites (like Walker, Post, Fischer, Zug, Giancola, and the like.) This, too, seems pretty cool now that I look at it all typed out. 2) Stamp the art bod with a piece of reflective mylar (it's like paper, but with the reflective quality of chrome.) This way, you could hold the card out in front of you and see yourself in the art box. Or, more simple and cost-effective—leave the box blank so you can have your favorite artist (this includes yourself) do a drawing of Vorthos for you. The jury is out on this one. I'd like to hear what you guys think, so bash the message boards or shoot me an email.

The stinky part about this is that Taste The Magic has no budget for art. Even if I had a super perfect idea for how Vorthos should be depicted, I would not be able to get Jim Murray (my current fave) to paint it for us. Yeah, yeah, I know what you're thinking. "Why don't you do it Matt?" Um... I'll tell you what. As soon as I hear from our time-bending friend **Quyzi** again, I'll have him "make some time" for me and I'll paint us up a proper Vorthos. Until then, we'll have to use our vast Vorthosian imaginations. And if last night's **Rauck Chauv** took too much out of you, you can fall back on the little scribble that I have been using for Vorthos since the beginning.

We're well on our way to having a solid representation of our flavor totem, our spirit guide, our banner of all things tasty. At least now there will be something that the Man can understand. Perhaps now he will not overlook us so easily with cornball ideas like "End of Turn Week."



By the way, this week's article marks Taste The Magic's one year anniversary. I am proud to be the one who has been bringin' you the grub for the last 365, and I am happy to announce that I am all the fatter for it.

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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