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Parlez Vous, Part Deux

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Taste the Magic
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

It's been two weeks since "Parlez Vous Vorthos" and the beginning of our Vorthos card design exercise. In that time, there has been a great response via email and the message boards, with lots of agreement, disagreement, and new ideas for Vorthos's cardboard debut. One thing that there definitely was not is consensus. I did not expect it, but I had a faint glimmer of hope for it. Consensus on any facet of the card would make its creation so much easier. But if anything is true about you guys—the real Vorthoses out there - it's that your opinions are many and they are strong. After all, you are flavor lovers, and not everybody likes the same kind of ice cream.

Let's run down the list of all the parts of the card and I'll try to summarize the general sentiment of those who emailed or posted on the boards. Let me just say that the response was overwhelmingly positive. Of course, there were a few spikes in Vorthos clothing who were too worried about how this card would fare in duel or who would ever bother drafting it. I have two things to say about that: 1. The Timmy, Johnny....Vorthos cards are (would be) in "Un" sets. We play with these cards for kicks, not for clams. 2. *Vorthos doesn't care about drafting!* Pointy comments aside, let's just remember what we're trying to do here; we're trying to make a card that will not win games, but will act as a great 2.5" x 3.5" coat of arms for the gooberdom of **Magic**. With that in mind, let's plow forth...



So what shall we call Vorthos? I suggested the lengthy, but continuity-safe Vorthos, Planeswalker's Apprentice. As you can see from the image on the left, I have whited it out. There were a lot of people who thought that this name was clearly inferior to Vorthos, Apprentice Planeswalker, a name ending in "er" as the Timmy and Johnny cards do. While that sounds all peachy, it's actually not an option at all. An "Apprentice Planeswalker" is still a Planeswalker—and that's a no-go for Magic Creative. Even though this would be an Un card, I think it would be a really bad idea to claim that this nifty, but not so mighty, human gamer has the power to collapse galaxies and erase time itself (things that Planeswalkers can do). So, to avoid this sticky territory completely, I whited out the name. It's really not such a big loss. The more I thought about it, and the more feedback I got urging me to consider stuff like Vorthos, Flavor Lover and Vorthos, Gaming Goober, the more I realized a flaw in my thinking with regard to Vorthos's name. My original thought was that the thing that defines Vorthos, as combos define Johnny, was the fact that Vorthos pays mind to the creative intent of the game. This intent is that we, as players, are mighty wizards called Planeswalkers and we battle each other with spells and monsters from across the multiverse. But this is not actually true. Some Vorthoses pay mind to this, but a huge portion just has an eye for well deployed language, or scintillating color, or compelling story, or a potpourri of all of this.

Frickin' swords, people! Dragons—breathing fire and smoke and ice and lava! Wizards whipping deadly winds and black strands of nightmare! These things are the root of Vorthos's passion.

Vorthos nothing but an aesthete? I don't think so, because there is one factor that connects these arts to Vorthos's heart like nothing else—that fantasy genre. After 14+ years or spells, dragons, and swords, Magic, in my opinion, takes "fantasy" for granted. For me, and many others, the trappings of fantasy are what attract me to *this* game. Great mechanics, organized play, high quality materials, blah, blah, blah. If **Magic** was about aliens or cowboys or spies or anything else, I would probably not be a 13 year vet of the game and still going strong. Frickin' swords, people! Dragons—breathing fire and smoke and ice and lava! Wizards whipping deadly winds and black strands of nightmare! These things are the root of Vorthos's passion. (Can you tell I am getting heated up just writing about it?) Taking this into consideration, as well as comments on ending the name in "er," and avoiding the Planeswalker thing, I think the name Vorthos, Fantasy Goober hits the nail on the head.

Final Wrap-up

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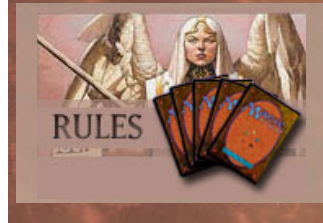
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I like the idea of using “Goober” because it implies a commitment to things not mainstream, and it shows that we like to have fun and do not take things too seriously (unless it’s **Magic** storyline continuity, of course) Oh, and it also ends in “er.” Smooth!

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Let’s move on to the also hotly contested subject of card color. I think the card snippet above tells you where the chips have fallen. Even though there were a lot of opinions bandied on how Vorthos is White (or Green or Blue), and even more on how he is some combination of colors, the majority of folks agreed with me in two ways; 1) Vorthos is mostly Red. 2) Vorthos is definitely not Black. I was pleased that people agreed, not because I want people to think the same way I do, but because this debate could go on forever otherwise. Part of the reason it could go on forever is because there are some good points to be made. One person stressed Vorthos’s entrenchment in the community of **Magic**, and that this is patently White. True. Another emailer cited Vorthos’s Blue-tinted depth of knowledge with regard to story, etc. Also true. And a whole bucketload of people suggested a Gold or hybrid color combination of Red, White, Blue, and sometimes Green. There was a little groundswell for WUBRG, but in the end, people always seemed to come back to Red. I think it’s fitting, since (in my mind) the reason for community and the drive to know more all stem from Vorthos’s passion for the fantasy world, and that, ladies and gents, is Red.

I was intrigued by the amount of people who suggested many varied multi-color combinations. Was it just that people love Gold cards? Were people smitten with the new hybrid mana and all the wacky stuff it can do? I tend to believe so. I think there are so many qualities that Vorthos has, it’s hard to exclude any of the colors from his mana cost/character. I remember reading one message that said “Gold cards have more flavor.” If there are more colors, then there is more complexity, and therefore more flavor. Right? Actually, I think it’s the opposite. As you add more colors to the mix, you end up adding conflicting characteristics. Then you have to sort out which characteristics from each color this particular card actually possesses. Take the Orzhov, for example. As a White/Black guild, they could have been a group that will stop at nothing to protect their own kind (white goal with black means), or a tight-knit community of organized criminals (black goal with white means.) In essence, multicolor does not have more flavor, just ambiguous flavor, flavor that needs to be figured out. Consider this art-nerd analogy. Colors of paint have differing levels of chroma (color intensity). Red, what a coincidence, has the most chroma of all the colors. Mixing it with yellow, also highly chromatic, makes orange—my favorite color. Red (most chroma) plus yellow (lots of chroma) equals the even mostest chroma, right? Nope. The yellow just drags the red halfway down to where it is. Mix too many colors and you know what you get? Low chroma mud. For me, **Magic** colors work similarly. The more you add, the less color identity you have left. What is a Nephilim like? Who knows, it’s all just mud. (I am not knocking them, they’re *meant* to be a mystery). When you see a Red card, you immediately know exactly what it means. It’s an undiluted, known quantity. So anyway, let’s not dilute Vorthos. Let’s make a strong statement, and it doesn’t get any stronger than Red!

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Let’s move on to the type line now. Legendary Creature—Human Gamer is almost a non-negotiable. It’s the part of the card that says “this is a representation of you, the human gamer who plays this game, the game of **Magic**.” Some folks wanted the “Goober” to go down there in the type line too. While that may be a cool way to set Vorthos apart from the other types, I don’t know if this is the place to break the cycle. But maybe it is. When Mark Rosewater created Timmy, Johnny, and Spike, he was thinking of the different ways in which players choose to play/win games of **Magic**. What he was not considering is the way people play/interact with **Magic** as a whole. That’s where you come in, Vorthos. You see, Vorthos is not all about winning duels. He or she also enjoys the idea of magic. He or she plays **Magic** on two levels, in-game and in-world. Timmy, Johnny, and Spike are all about the in-game. They don’t care about the implications of putting two different Kamahls in the same deck, as long as the combo leads to a victory or otherwise huge in-game moment. So I guess this means Vorthos is more than just a Human Gamer. The game is not everything to him or her. Perhaps Goober is the way to go. I am not ready to etch it in stone, but I am ready to categorically rule out Gamer, just to set Vorthos apart from the other 3.

Vorthos is not all about winning duels. He or she also enjoys the idea of magic. He or she plays Magic on two levels, in-game and in-world.



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And that brings us to the part that seemed to inspire the lot of you—the card mechanic. I enjoyed reading all the fun suggestions and, in the end, went with a version inspired by you. There were, however, a whole lot of suggestions that were left on the cutting room floor for the same reason; they were not created with the spirit of Vorthos in mind. As I mentioned earlier, this card is not meant to be a tournament staple. It’s not even meant to be “good.” It’s meant to be *right*.

The right thing to do for Vorthos’s ability would be something that affects play *in-world*. It does not have to be completely ineffective in-game, but that would be just a bonus. This card needs to facilitate play the way Vorthos

likes to do it.

Here are some tasty suggestions:

4: Search target player's library for all copies of a legendary card and remove all but one from the game.

I like the intent here: to respect the legendary cards as being one of a kind. Not bad.

4: Rather than play this card from your hand, during your main phase if you control four foil permanents, play it without paying its casting cost.

It's like the *Rimewind*, but for foil. Interesting, but foil is not as much flavor as it is bling.

4: destroy target spell or permanent without flavor text.

Flavor text is a great place to focus attention—since it and art are clearly not *in-game* parts of **Magic**. But this execution is too *in-game*, and potentially hoses out some really flavorful cards (Like [Jaya Ballard, Task Mage](#), for example.)

4: Gain control of target permanent with flavour text until end of turn.

Again, way too in-game.

Cards with flavor text can't be countered.

Cards cost 1 less to play for each artist signature on it. (They have to be Magic(c) artists.)

This one is an interesting departure from the "4: Do something" scheme. While I think it's a great fit for the card, I think we should mind the Rosewater tradition of restrictions breeding creativity. We should stick to "4: Do something."

I ended up going with a mechanic with a spirit that is 100% in-world. Sure, it might have some crazy combo somewhere, but Vorthos and Johnny are pals. Sometimes they even play **Magic** together. I know that this is going to cause some grumbling, choosing a "useless" mechanic. Why would anyone play with a card that doesn't do anything? Shush, Spike. It does plenty, *in-world*.



Ha! When Vorthos, Fantasy Goober is played, the game will automatically have more flavor, literally! I jumped at this suggestion because flavor text, aptly named, adds spice to the game.

I have seen many a game of **Magic** plod by without the slightest hint of, well, magic. There's a lot of tilting cardboard and declaring of phases and asking "how many cards in hand?" Bleh.

With Vorthos, the game will have a chance at transcending the smelly convention hall or dank basement. It will have a chance at seeming, if only for the time it takes to read a few sentences, like another world. If that is not a truly Vorthosian goal, then I have complete playsets of all *Ravnica* block dual lands!

You've probably already taken note of the fact that the flavor text on this card has remained the same as it was two weeks ago. This is because not a lot of people agreed with me on it. What! If nobody agreed with you, why is it staying the same? Exactly! Since everybody had their own colorful, jocular, or flavorful words to wedge in, I've decided to let them all have their fun by leaving it open. If I played with this card, I would be torn between having only 1 in my deck (it's a legend) and playing with 4, just so I could write more wacky flavor text.

Just wait 'til I play my other Vorthos with the flavor text about your mom!

And that brings us to the art conundrum. Given that we've pulled back the whole Planeswalker thing, and that we've accepted that this is a card representing you, not the wizard of your imagination, the art should fall in line with the Timmy and Johnny cards. Like they do, Vorthos should show a real word character (as opposed to an in-world character) doing his best to hide the baggie of Funyuns behind his flowing purple felt wizard costume. People were pretty excited about the idea of multiple versions of the art, as well as the idea of an empty art box. Since I have nothing concrete to provide right now, I'll say "let's do it all!" We'll have 3 or 4 different illustrations done by artists of differing styles (Vorthos likes many kinds of art), like Drew Tucker and Jeff Laubenstein, Justin Sweet and Donato Giancola. Then we'll have another one with an empty art box. Then, maybe, we'll have one with a peel-off cover so that the art box is stick-um—so you can put your own photo in there.

For now, I'll leave you with two final tweaks to the card, each suggested by one or more of you. First of all, it's an Un-set, and Un sets have silver border. Second, someone suggested that we use a picture of me, the paragon of flavorphiliacs. Great idea! Not to put me on the card, but for me to put on the card the image of the person who first inspired me to put a name to Vorthos, the person from whom Vorthos has taken shape. [Click to reveal the final version](#):



Magic Creative team member, [Brandon Bozzi](#). All bow down!

*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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