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# Inspiration

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Taste the Magic  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

**T**ime Spiral has got us all thinking about the old days. For some of us, those days were just a few sets ago. But for others, like me, the old days were before some of you were born. For the newer folks out there, Time Spiral can make you feel "on the outside." While everyone is slinging references to cards you've never seen, making puns with words you've never heard, and riffing on combos with cards you've never used, you're out in the cold, not getting any of the jokes. You're in a nostalgia blackout. There are two ways we can address this. 1) Not talk about old cards at all, or 2) Look at old cards, but talk about them as if they're new to us. Since you're going to be hit with nostalgia all through Time Spiral, I think it's wiser to choose #2.

Just the other day, I was conducting an interview for an upcoming installment of [Milk and Cookies](#) when I found myself thinking about a particular question I ask: "What inspired you to become a fantasy artist?" It got me thinking back to the art that pointed my compass toward the kind of art I am doing now. I am not going to get into the stuff from way back when I was 13 years old, but I do want to talk about the **Magic** art from "the old days" that kicked me in the ass and shouted, "Get your act together, scribbler, and get in the game!" Since we're trying to deal with some nostalgia blackout, and I always love to talk about art, I think it would be cool to have a look back at some of the awesome illustration work that you may have never seen, but that changed my life completely. (Wow, that's a big, fat statement—but it's the truth.) While I cannot speak for other artists who broke onto the scene after **Magic** had already become a thing, surely I am not the only one who was moved by **Magic** art enough to kick it into high gear.



Before I started writing this, I took a look back through old card sets to see which art popped out to me. As I did this, I realized I was not responding to the same art like I did back in the day. I think I was applying everything I know about **Magic** art today to the **Magic** art of yesterday. So, instead of looking back at art and letting my evolved art sense tell me what is standing out, I decided to look into my own skull. I said to myself, "Which art made you stop and say 'Ooh!'"? Then I just started writing down card names.

## Ivory Gargoyle

Even though this was not one of the first illustrations that caught my eye, it was the first one I thought of—and I think that's a big deal. When I look at **Ivory Gargoyle**, I see two things of significance. 1) Quinton Hoover's unique style, and 2) A ballsy, minimalist illustration that impressed me then and still impresses me now.

Quinton's beautiful, fluid line work grabbed me in his earlier work as well, but it was the Gargoyle's total package that burned it into my memory and inspired me to improve my own work.

Look at the white space in the top right and lower left corners. That is a courageous move. Not only is it without detail, but it's without color too—completely white! It might seem like a cop out, but believe me, it takes skill to pull this off. Without the strong composition, the white space would seem empty, but instead it just feels right, focusing our attention on the goods—the gargoyle. And what about that gargoyle? The drawing is rock solid (pardon the pun), and that is a bigger deal it might appear to be. Back in **Magic's** infancy, its artwork had a wonderful variety of styles and themes, but one thing it sorely lacked was strong draftsmanship. Quinton, and a couple other folks on my list today, stand out, over the rest of the gang. Try to find, in the first few **Magic** sets, any other illustration that pulls off foreshortening like this bad boy. It's over ten years later and I still absolutely love this piece.

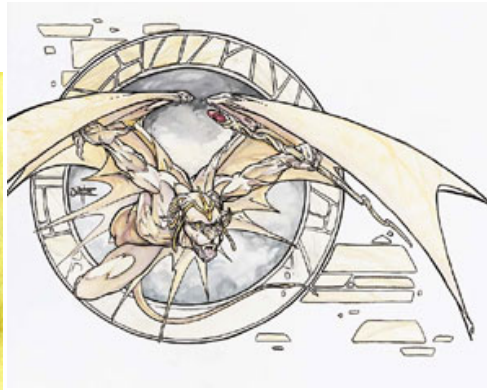
One sad item not about **Magic** is that this sort of art is not really part of the scene anymore. While I do wish it were, I understand why it is not. Though we, as flavor enthusiasts, can tell that this is a mature, sophisticated illustration, other folks might see it as too "cartoony." This is a problem because **Magic** is continually trying to set itself apart from the kiddie games that spoil the image of CCGs. In order to ensure the player, the parent, the store owner, the general public that **Magic** is a game for people who use the word "Autochthon," and not "Xtreme!," the look and feel must reinforce that as well. Sad, but it is the way it is. The good news is, **Ivory Gargoyle** is already out there for us to cherish.

Final Wrap-up  
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## Fallen Angel

Anson Maddocks is definitely one of the artists who could really draw. In fact, I was recently chatting about Anson's art with **Magic** creative



heavyweight, Brady Dommermuth. It was his learned opinion that Anson's work (along with that of Mark Tedin) helped set the direction for **Magic's** look and feel even as it is today. Why these two? Other than the fact that each one has an imagination as fertile as **Eladamri's Vineyard** during the **Summer Bloom**, these two were just about the only folks whose work was strong enough in concept and execution to serve as an example to the future. Anyhoo, back to **Fallen Angel**. Not only does it have strong execution of drawing and painting, but its concept is also captivating. I am still sucked in by the mood of this piece. While many other artists of the time were struggling with light, color, and drawing, Anson was kicking ass with *nuance*! The angel's pose, with head bowed and blade hiding, suggests a hint of shame or remorse. It also puts my favorite part in plain view—the wing scars. This is not just some run of the mill dark angel, this lady used to be the haloed kind. Check out the lone white feather, still floating above her. Was she cast down just moments ago? Or does this magical feather follow her around as a symbol of what she once was? Whatever it is, it being there is the kind of thinking that really inspired me, not just to draw pretty pictures, but to communicate complex ideas through *art*.

## Orcish Squatters

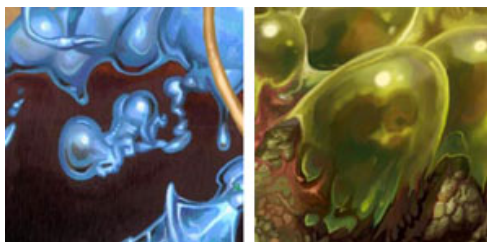
Ah, yes. For any **Magic** flavor fan from back in the day, Richard Kane Ferguson is a huge source of inspiration. His art was genius, paradoxically detailed and abstract all at once. It flowed. It sang. It pulled the viewer in to dig around in all his swirls of paint to find the hidden nuggets of detail. **Orcish Squatters**, for some reason I have not identified, called out to me more than his other pieces. Perhaps it is the fluidity and similarity of the shapes, bundling the image up into a wintry mosaic. (Wow, is that artsy-fartsy talk or what?) Speaking of "wintry," **Orcish Squatters**, along with other Ferguson classics like **Icequake** and **Essence Flare**, feels icy and cold the way **Ice Age** cards should. If you are a relative newcomer to **Magic**, getting into it within the last 5 years, do yourself a huge favor and check out Ferguson's work. It'll inspire you too. (Click [here](#) to see all of his goodies in Gatherer.)

## Living Wall



Here's another Anson Maddocks gem. The thing that grabbed me immediately with this illustration is the amazing communication of gooey, membranous wetness. It's a giant pile of skinless tissue, teeth, and organs! To the long time **Magic** player, this may not seem like a big deal. We've had plenty of grotesque art. But this art was in Alpha! This graphic, anything-goes image spoke to me, and it said, "No ideas are too weird for **Magic** art. Nope, not even that one." That was a really big deal for me. It was one of the things that lured me out of the world of graphic design and advertising—industries then dominated by slick, snooty presentation and uber-conservative subject matter. I took the bait easy. Oh, and then there's the fetus. Yup, if you thought it wasn't gross enough, a towering heap of flesh, there's a

masterfully handled shiny membrane right smack-dab in the middle of the art that holds a little human fetus. I don't know if it was conscious, but the whole fetus thing must have rubbed off on me. (Details from *Chisei*, *Heart of Oceans* and *Protean Hulk* to the right.)



## Pacifism

The art that I was looking at most when I actually started my quest to break into the **Magic** art biz was undoubtedly that of Robert Bliss. A downright killer, that guy. I think, even after all these years of thousands of **Magic** illustrations, this one might be my favorite. It is at once calming and disturbing. It is both tightly rendered and loosely painted. It is both immediately striking and rich in detail. If I ever get close to painting something this good, you poor folks will never hear the end of it. Wow, where do I even start in the props parade that this painting deserves? How about right in the middle. Check out that awesome looking troll thing. The dark shadows are bold, giving it a skull-like appearance, and fade toward its face as if in a spotlight. This gruesome creature stands in stark contrast to the rest of the art—and this is where the money is. Little woodland fauna drape this hideous creature with flowers, and it is tamed. Look at its right arm—it's shriveled and shrunk, rendered weak and ineffective by the floral vine wrapped around it. That is awesome storytelling in such a simple visual. The creature is contained, both visually and conceptually, in beauty. The fact that these little critters seem like they are straight out of a child's storybook makes the "pacifism" statement all the more strong. And if a superbly drawn and rendered bad-ass troll was not enough, and the happy animals didn't do it for you, how about the wonderful background thrown down in bold strokes of thick paint! The eight quick brushstrokes that make the floral shape in the upper right still make me smile to this day. It ties the background in with the floral motif in the foreground, and it keeps the piece from feeling too symmetrical. I can hardly continue to sit here typing because my ass is kicked hard by this painting every time I see it. And it was kicked hard back in 1996 too. I could not sit then either, so I got up off of my bruised butt and got to work. It took me a couple of years to build a body of work strong enough to open some Wizardly eyes. And in those two years, **Magic** kept pumping out art that wowed me and motivated me and kept me from sitting back down.



I am going to stop looking at **Magic** art for an hour or so. This way, I'll be able to go downstairs, sit my booty on the couch, and watch my Cleveland Browns get their asses kicked.

*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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