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# Name Dropping

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 Making Magic  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

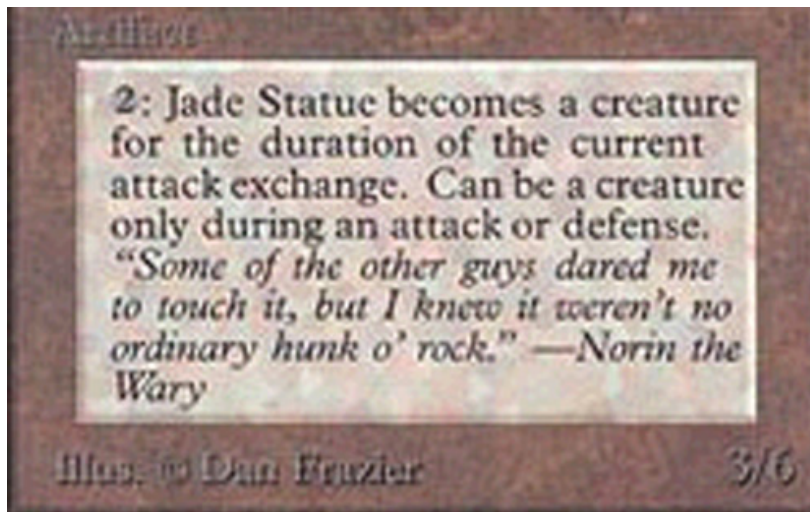
Welcome to Legends of *Time Spiral* Week! This week we're going to be taking a look at some of the memorable characters from the past who ended up as legendary creatures in *Time Spiral*. For my part, I'm going to tell you the story from the very beginning. How did *Time Spiral* come to use famous but as-yet unprinted legends from **Magic's** past? And how did we choose some of the characters we did? Plus, what about the characters that we thought about doing but that didn't make the cut? All this and more if you keep on reading.

## People Who Need People

While *Time Spiral* was fun to design, it did present a number of interesting problems to solve. One of the biggest was this: how can the set be both reminiscent of the past and new? Nostalgia was a great theme, but the set did have to do what every **Magic** set does: produce lots of new material. How do you turn the old into new?

This issue was even more problematic when we got to the legendary creatures. Every set has legendary creatures, so we knew we would have to make some. The "timeshifted" cards would have some repeated legendary creatures, but what could the main set do? We thought redoing old legends as new cards would feel weird. If you change a card then it isn't what you remember. How could we revisit old characters without fundamentally needing to change them? The answer was right in front of us.

While doing research to find ideas for nostalgia, the entire team went back and studied the old cards. We looked over the mechanics. We checked out the art. We studied the names. And most importantly (well, for this story anyways), we read flavor text. While looking back at Alpha, I stumbled upon one of my favorites from when I first started playing:



"Some of the other guys dared me to touch it, but I knew it weren't no ordinary hunk o' rock." -Norin the Wary

For some reason I was quite tickled by this piece of flavor text. I think what I liked most about it was how much flavor **Norin the Wary** had with just a single quote. For starters, I figured out Norin pretty fast. He's a smarter-than-average adventurer - which, to be fair, is a horrible liability. Norin basically understands that he will die a gruesome death, and it doesn't sit well with him. So he made a conscious effort to change his behavior to lessen the chance of this happening. And just so everyone got what his thing was, he added "the Wary" to his name. This made perfect sense to me, because if you're as paranoid as Norin, you really don't want it surprising anyone. You want to be pretty up front. This way when you start running at the first sight of trouble, your fellow adventurers understand why. I mean, they did choose to travel with a guy who chose "the Wary" as a moniker.

The point is, I could relate to Norin. And as a flavor text writer, I appreciated having a voice like his that I could turn to when needed. Anyway, I was looking through Alpha flavor text when I stumbled upon Norin, and it got me thinking. Why didn't Norin ever get a card? Okay, **Magic** cards do represent creatures that fight in a magical duel and there's little chance of Norin willing to get involved in that, but still, the idea of making a card for Norin seemed awesome to me, and I figured I wouldn't be the only one with a bone it would tickle.

Meanwhile, every other member of the *Time Spiral* design team (Brian Tinsman - lead, Aaron Forsythe, Devin Low, and myself) had the same experience. Each one of us looked through old cards and found characters who

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we were fond of yet somehow had never gotten a card to call their very own. We all knew what had to be done. *Time Spiral's* legendary creatures we're going to be the missing-in-action characters. We were going to pick all our favorite characters who we had always wished we had made as cards, and then actually make them.

With this assignment in hand, each of the designers went out in search of long lost characters who deserved their time in the sun. My column today is going to be a look at a number of characters who appeared on my list. Some made it; some didn't. Today we shall hear their stories.

## Norin the Wary

Let's start with good 'ol Norin. When we started making the lists, he was the first one on mine. He was dripping with flavor, and while he wasn't in all that many pieces of flavor text, the few he was in had a bit of a cult following. I think he was the first character to have a continued joke on his flavor text. By that I mean that it was the first time that understanding a piece of flavor text required knowing an earlier piece of flavor text (it might not be the first and my faithful readers will let me know, but it was mighty early - the piece in question is on [Goblin Shrine](#)). Anyway, I was so excited to include him that I created a card and submitted it. Here's my original version:

### Norin the Wary (version 0.0)

Legendary Creature - Human Warrior  
1/1  
Haste

Whenever a player plays a spell, remove CARDNAME from the game. Return CARDNAME to play under its owner's control at end of turn.

My original version was basically a [Raging Goblin](#) with a bonus/drawback. The idea was that he'd come and hit your opponent if there wasn't any danger, but at the first sign of trouble, he'd be out of there. During development, it was decided that he would be even more flavorful if he just never put himself in harm's way. After all, being able to get into combat can't be good for a creature's health. I liked the change as I felt it made the card both more flavorful, more unique, and a little more Johnny-licious. (If that somehow isn't a word yet, dibs on trademarking it.)

With the extra text, Norin was bumped up to a 2/1 because, well, why not? 2/1 creatures that can't attack don't tend to be problematic in beatdown decks. Unlike some other cards coming up, Norin was in very early, and there was never any serious discussion about removing him.



## Saffi Eriksdotter

Saffi was another early addition to my list. She too owed what fame she had to flavor text. The big difference between Norin and her is that Saffi was mentioned once in the history of **Magic**. Now, she had the good fortune to be on one of the most famous pieces of flavor text in **Magic** history, but here's the funny part. No one remembers the section that mentions her. The flavor text is, of course, from the card [Lhurgoyf](#).

Hans is pretty well known. He even showed up on another piece of flavor text ([Revenant](#)) and got his name in a title (okay it wasn't a legendary creature and it was an [Unhinged card](#), but still better than Saffi). Saffi, on the other hand, was in the attribution line, and frankly, people seldom remember the attribution. Luckily, I remembered her, and she seemed like the best obscure but relevant character I could think of. Everyone knew her [Last Words](#) even if her name wasn't all that familiar.

So, I set about making a card for her. Trying to be flavorful, here was my first attempt:

### Saffi Eriksdotter

Legendary Creature - Human Scout  
1/1  
CARDNAME must be blocked if able.  
Other creatures you control can't be the targets of spells or abilities.

The idea was that when Saffi's around she's basically destined to die (sort of an anti-Norin if you think of it). The first ability made her prone to dying in combat and the second ability forced the opponent to get rid of her first. I liked this version and thought it was very flavorful. The only thing standing in its way? It played poorly during playtesting.

Meanwhile, there was another problem going on. We decided that we were going to have a cycle of allied-color legendary creatures and at least one monocolored legendary creature in each color. Most legendary creatures had a pretty defined color. Saffi's character was defined by one thing - she had been killed by a [Lhurgoyf](#). That didn't really force our hand as far as color definition. After some thinking I decided that it might be cool to make her the same color as the thing that killed her. Once I chose green and the flavor I wanted, I ended up with the abilities



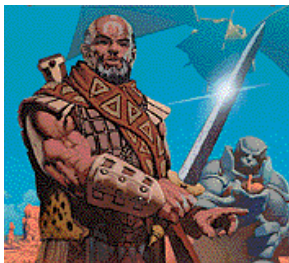
listed above. How did she get to be green/white? Because of a character named Sidar Kondo. Who? I'll get there in a moment.

The development team, for reasons I'll explain shortly, had to move Saffi to green/white. They weren't in love with the current version, so they decided to try and make the existing ability better. They had a couple of versions, but each one basically did the same thing. Saffi died in place of something else. Saffi died so that creatures like Hans could live. The earlier versions had text that tried to replace a killed creature with Saffi. The rules didn't like that (or more accurately didn't work the way people would have assumed) so it was changed to this version that allowed her to sacrifice herself to save (aka bring back) another. Other than being shuffled around in color and enduring some ability-tweaking, Saffi stayed in the set all through development.

## Sidar Kondo

Who? For those of you that might not be up on **Magic** story, Sidar Kondo is Gerard's adoptive father and Volrath's natural father. See, Gerard was kind of like Moses and was sent away when he was a baby to try and save him. Gerard's parents sent him to their old friend Sidar Kondo who was tribal leader in Jamuraa (home of *Mirage* block). Kondo made it into design because the team was scouring the past to find a good green/white legend. Kondo had the right mix of tribalness and structure that made a perfect fit for green/white. Only one problem: No one other than me (well, and the creative guys) knew who he was.

I'm sure only the old timers remember this, but I was one of the creators of the *Weatherlight* Saga, the story that ran from *Weatherlight* through *Apocalypse* (although my involvement stopped somewhere in the middle of *Exodus* - a story for another time). Because of this, I am well versed in the crew members of the *Weatherlight*. So to me, Sidar Kondo was a lesser-known but interesting choice for *Time Spiral*. Here's the problem. While the books talk about him a bit, the cards do not. Yes, he did have a Vanguard card (a point I would constantly bring up), but other than that he is not mentioned once on a **Magic** card. Not in a title, not in flavor text, nowhere. Sidar Kondo, it turns out, is pretty obscure. (This point had come up a year earlier, by the way, when I tried to get **Lord Konda** - the bad guy from the *Champions of Kamigawa* block - to have his name changed because it was too close to Kondo.)



I bring Kondo up because I often tell stories about my victories, but not as much about my defeats (and there's plenty to talk about - another topic for another column). I tried my hardest to keep Kondo in the set, but I couldn't even get the creative guys to back me. **Norin the Wary** and **Saffi Eriksdotter** were acceptable, but Kondo was not. (They had appeared on **Magic** cards.) My last line of defense was that there wasn't a good replacement for green/white. We had looked hard, and finding legends for that color combination was tough. In fact, it was so hard that it almost won me the Kondo argument. But then one day I had the following conversation with Brady Dommermuth (**Magic** Creative Director) and Matt Place (Developer on the *Time Spiral* development team).

**Matt:** The whole team agrees, Kondo should go. We just need a new green/white guy.

**Brady:** We're looking. It's not something our stories have done much of.

**Me:** I think you guys are overreacting. People know Gerrard and Volrath. It's their dad. How hard is that?

**Brady:** Mark, I know you know him. You wrote the story. No one else does.

**Me:** He was a Vanguard card.

**Brady:** Yes, you keep bringing that up. How many Vanguard cards were made?

**Matt:** I asked around. No one knows him. No one!

**Brady:** And we still might use him because we have no one else.

**Me:** You don't have to use him. I think we *should* because it will reward the players who really know the story.

**Matt:** What do you mean "we don't have to use him"?

**Me:** Saffi could be green/white. She's the most undefined character ever.

**Matt:** Is that right?

**Brady:** She gets eaten by a **Lhurgoyf**. That fits into just about any color.

**Matt:** Then we'd just have to find a monogreen character to fit in her spot.

**Brady:** Yeah.

**Me:** I wasn't saying to replace Kondo. I was just pointing out that...

**Matt:** Thanks Mark.

Yes, me and my big mouth found Kondo a way out of the set. But everything happens for a reason, and this cloud did have a silver lining. Before we move on, for those that wonder what might have been, here was my design for Kondo:

### Sidar Kondo

2GG

Legendary Creature - Human Lord (the Lord was for flavor, as he led his people)

3/3

1GG, Discard a creature card: Until end of turn, creatures you control gain any activated abilities of the discarded creature card until end of turn

## Thelon of Havenwood

Removing Kondo and adding Saffi to green/white left us a whole in green. A little research found us a number of options, but one choice stood above the others. In black, we had decided to put Endrek Sahr, the creator of the thrulls. But the thrulls weren't the only throwback to *Fallen Empires*. *Time Spiral* green was crawling with thallids, and they too had a creator. His name was **Thelon of Havenwood**.

There was one small problem. Thelon, flavorwise, had a touch of black in him. Yes, he was more green than anything else but not hinting at his dark side seemed wrong. We came up with what I thought was an elegant solution: We gave him two abilities. The first was useful unto itself and could be played in a monogreen thalid deck. But the second ability, which made him stronger, required the player to have access to black. This gave him the flavor we wanted but didn't force players into having to play a black/green thalid deck (unless, of course, they wanted to - and then, have at it!).



## Lim-Dul, Jaya Ballard, and Lovisa Coldeyes

*Ice Age* block had the distinction of having a lot of cool characters and not all that many legends. This made it one of the richest sources for legendary characters. This was great except for one small problem: the set before *Time Spiral* was *Coldsnap*, also a throwback set, specifically dedicated to the *Ice Age* block. This meant that *Coldsnap* had first dibs on any *Ice Age* characters it wanted. Lovisa was taken almost immediately, but neither Lim-Dul nor Jaya was taken.



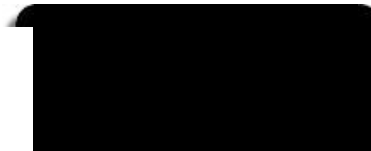
I didn't understand why so I went to Brandon Bozzi, the creative team member overseeing *Coldsnap's* creative. I explained to him that *Time Spiral* was excited to have Lim-Dul and Jaya but that I didn't understand why *Coldsnap* didn't want them. These were two of the most popular story characters of all time. What was the problem? The answer was that each violated a different rule the creative team had. One, characters that are dead as of the story can't be used. (Unless, of course, they're undead.) Lim-Dul, as of *Coldsnap*, was dead. There was talk of having a Zombie Lim-Dul (it did fit in with his character after all), but it was decided that just having a straight-forward version in *Time Spiral* would be better.

Jaya's problem was that as of the *Coldsnap* story she was a planeswalker, and we don't put planeswalkers on cards (before and after yes, during no), *Time Spiral* with its temporal chaos had the freedom to pluck things from wherever and whenever, such as before Lim-Dul's death and before Jaya's rise to planewalkerhood. And that is why two famous *Ice Age* characters ended up in *Time Spiral* and not *Coldsnap*.


## Vuel

Kondo wasn't my only miss. Vuel was my other attempt to bring the *Weatherlight* Saga to *Time Spiral*. Who is Vuel? You might know him better by his adult name, Volrath (Vuel of Rath - that's where Volrath comes from). Vuel is the name Volrath had as a boy when he was raised by Sidar Kondo and grew up alongside Gerrard.

One of the rules that had been set up by the creative team was that we wanted to avoid using characters who had died "on stage." That is, some deaths had been very significant moments, and we felt that we would undercut them by bringing them back even though we could fudge it with temporal chaos. (We're not like comic books, which recently seem willing to bring any and every character ever killed back to life - for those that



care, if I had my way, Bucky, Jason Todd, and Jean Grey would have died once and stayed that way.) Vuel was a special case to them as it didn't really feel like Volrath. Vuel looked completely different and would have a very different feel. The creative team gave me their thumbs up.

The record has been purged from Multiverse, so I cannot find the text for Vuel. I know he was designed to seem like an earlier version of Volrath. I remember that he was a 1/1 for . He had an ability to discard creature cards and somehow gain some of their abilities temporarily. All I remember was that it was cool but in a very subtle way. So what happened? **Endrek Sahr** got put into the set and Lim-Dul came back after *Coldsnap* passed on him. In the end, it was decided that black had room for two legendary creatures, and it came down to one of the baddest bad asses of **Magic's** history, the creator of the thrulls, and a little boy that kept making people go, "Why do we have a little boy in the set?"

Guess who lost out? (And, to be fair, rightfully so.)

## Dralnu, Lich Lord

For those of you following [The Great Designer Search](#), you might think that I'm just making up challenges to put the applicants through the wringer, but the reality is that design gets challenges like these (okay, usually *slightly* easier) all the time. Dralnu was one such challenge. He was put in the set and art was commissioned. During development it was decided that no one liked the card as it was, so they put out a challenge to the designers: Design Dralnu. We had the art, so we weren't going to change who the card was. The Development team (with help from Creative) gave us a small blurb on who he was (the short version is, Lich Lord). We were to design the card to match.

Maybe one of the reasons that I have such fun creating the challenges for The Great Designer Search is that I love these kinds of challenges. I call it straightjacket design. Tell me as many restrictions as you can and I'll design a card to fit. It's a skill I enjoy and have gotten pretty good at.

When I sat down to design Dralnu I had two goals in mind: (1) I wanted him to have a **Lich** feeling, and (2) I wanted him to feel like someone who plays with the dead. The first part was hard because liches have historically proven hard to do. Usually liches turn life into permanents such that the player is only vanquished when he is at zero permanents. Meanwhile, the problem with the second part was that every design ever dealing with necromancy always animated or raised dead creatures. I wanted Dralnu to be different.

Not wanting to raise dead creatures, I turned my eye to "raising" dead spells. What if Dralnu could comb through a graveyard for spells? That seemed very novel. As I explored the idea, I quickly realized I had a strong tool at my disposal. This was *Time Spiral*; I had access to most of the coolest keywords in **Magic's** history. One of them, flashback, was all about playing spells out of the graveyard. It seemed like a perfect fit.

The second ability was the first one I designed. Because I wanted to use flashback, I had to limit the ability to only affect instants and sorceries. Next came the lich feel. Because I already had a cool card, I realized that I could use the lich half as a drawback for the card. This would allow me to make this powerful card much cheaper. The drawback worked well because it added an important flavor to the card.

And that is how **Dralnu, Lich Lord** came to be.

## Legends In their Own Mind

That's all I got for today. I hope my jaunt through *Time Spiral's* legendary creatures was interesting. And for the Kondo lovers out there (both of you), I'm sorry I failed you.

Join me next week when I talk about the stack and talk about not talking about the stack.

Until then, may you enjoy the fun of obscurity.

Mark Rosewater

*Mark Rosewater is Head **Magic** Designer. What this fancy title means is that he's in charge of **Magic** design. This gets him a lot of mail (which he actually reads). When not alternatively destroying and saving **Magic**, he likes to spend time with his family, do stereotypically geeky things (play games, read comics, watch a lot of science fiction, etc.) and write about himself in third person.*



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