

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# Breathe Deep, Smell the Words

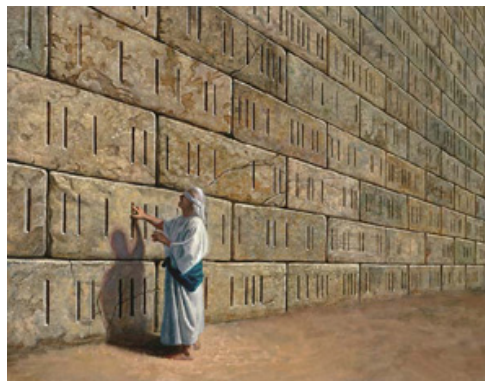
Matt Cavotta  
Taste the Magic  
Thursday, March 8, 2007



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. This must be why Wizards of the Coast decided to hire me, an artist, to be the **Magic** Creative Writer. I've illustrated over a hundred **Magic** cards, so that means I must have at least a hundred thousand words of awesomeness to contribute as well. Of course, it is foolish to equate these two completely different things (and to completely butcher the meaning of a fine little piece of old wisdom). One thing's for sure, they did not hire me to do equations, though I was, as a 6th grader, on the Math Decathlon team. But, in the many, many years hence, I discovered how much more fun pictures are than plain ol' numbers.

It was not until a few years ago, when I saw the posting for the **Magic** Creative Writer job right here at [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com), that I really started to discover my love for words. As an artist and the brother of an artist and the son of an artist, my attention had always been on images rather than the words that describe them. But slowly I started to notice little things, my love of the letter G and its rolling onomatopoeic power, alliteration just for the fun of it, punnery, the influence an accented syllable has on a phrase, the might of a sentence's last word, and other completely non-art-related wonders. This is why I find myself a pig in a whole new pile of slop as a **Magic** creative writer.



Sometimes I look over a card file and end up cracking little smiles at this card or that one, taking note of wry turns of phrase or witty word combinations. Sometimes I am even moved by the power or depth of a piece of flavor text. I also find myself beaming with pride over a card name that came to be under my stewardship as Name and Flavor Text Honcho. Well, today I am going to crack and move and beam right here in this article. Not only is a picture worth a thousand words, but the right 3 words can be worth a thousand words too. I may not be on staff to perform equations, but I think  $3=1000$  is some pretty powerful math.

I am going to perform a carefree scan of the *Planar Chaos* player's guide and stop to smell the roses whenever I happen to see one.

## Ghost Tactician

*Its ethereal hand confers a lifetime of experience with combat and steel.*

I think this bit of juxtaposition could have been more deftly delivered, but I enjoy the interplay of the hard, tactile words, "combat" and "steel" with the "ethereal." Fits the art, too, if you think about it. Is this worth a thousand words? Nah, but it's a flower worth sniffing for a moment.

## Magus of the Tabernacle

*The Tabernacle's disciples channel the emanations from Pendrell Vale, spreading its paradoxical demand to be both worshipped and left alone.*

"The paradoxical demand to be both worshipped and left alone..." That's some thought-provoking stuff right there. It makes me think of the emperor, too grand to be seen with the lowly, but also too grand to feed himself grapes. What to do, what to do? I know, go mad and declare yourself a god, then do crazy things until the people work up enough gumption to stab you in the night.

## Retether

This card name is a victory. I can't remember who busted this one out, but whoever you are, thank you. It does exactly what we wanted *Time Spiral* block names to do: fit the card it's presently on while paying homage to a sister card of the past. **Retether** retains the visual look (similar length and key letterforms) as Replenish, retains the same cadence (accent on syllable two), and describes perfectly the "re-attaching" of Aura cards from the graveyard. Nice math...  $1 = a \text{ lot}$ .

## Auramancer's Guise

*"Consider not what the mask hides, but what it can reveal."*

I like this whole package for a number of reasons. First of all, "Auramancer's Guise" works for me on two levels. We can read "**Auramancer's Guise**" as a spell created by an auramancer, a magical mask which confers some power related to the auramancer's province, enchantments. It can also be read as the look of the auramancer himself. "Use this **Magic** and you will be like me, an auramancer, thriving with the power of enchantments."

I also like the way the flavor text spins the mask not as a tool of disguise, but rather as a sort of lens, worn on the face to provide a permanent, hands-free new perspective on the world.

Final Wrap-up  
[Top 8 Video Archives](#)



MESSAGE BOARDS



RULES



### Body Double

*Where the dead outnumbered the living, mimics scavenged faces from the fallen.*

This one does a nice job at sneaking in a little bit of post-apocalyptic commentary, but its real gems are the words "scavenged faces." So much of what we read is language using word patterns with which we are familiar, words in comfortable connection to other words they commonly accompany. "Scavenged" and "faces" are not best friends. These two words make a powerful pair, and that pretty much commanded us to take this piece of flavor text over the others. If it did not make any sense, or was a grammatical train wreck, we would have found a way to polish it up, just to deploy those two awesome words. Scavenged. Faces.



### Dreamscape Artist

*He's mastered the art of sleight of land.*

Ha! This is not the sort of piece of which I am overly proud, but it's a pun that fits like a grove... er, I mean glove. This sort of flavor text is like a pop song - catchy, but devoid of substance. Still, it'll sell a lot of albums. Occasionally, we indulge our inner Timberlake and let one of these dance onto a card.

### Dichotomancy

One word names are near and dear to my heart. This is because no matter how convoluted the card is, they find a way to sum it all up in one perfectly chosen, or in this case, crafted, word. So much is accomplished by adding just 3 letters to "dichotomy."

### Pongify

This is one of the words that I immediately love and finalize before it even gets to the name and flavor text writers. Sometimes the unfathomable mind of Brady Dommermuth plants a rose bush whose fragrance just cannot be ignored. Pongidae is an old biological term used for the great ape family. For me, this little bit of encyclopedic lore was just gravy - since I was sold on **Pongify** the moment I say it. Remember what I said about the letter G? **Pongify** sounds hilarious, and hilarious is what turning people into monkeys is all about.



### Reality Acid

Handle with care. A spill could cause the end of the world as we know it... I worked with Doug Beyer to polish this set. As with "scavenged faces," we were both smitten by the simple power of this word pair. If I remember correctly, we changed a couple other names just to make sure we got to use the word "reality" on this baby.

### Magus of the Bazaar

*"Some trade in goods, some in secrets. My soul has walked the futures, and I offer the rare coin of possibility."*

"The rare coin of possibility..." I can't really wrap my mind around what it means, but it sounds cool. It probably means nothing, just the line of hooley he uses to get people to pay 3 coins for his 2.

### Venarian Glimmer

*Dream of nothing, and wake to a dream come true.*

AAAaaaaahhhhh!!!! That's madness. If this happens, are you really waking up at all? This flavor text uses simple words and a matter of fact tone to deliver a horrible curse. The rhythm of the sentence is haunting too, like a madman's mantra.

### Gossamer Phantasm

*"Belief matters more than truth. Every moment, belief in imaginary things alters lives while truth sits unnoticed and waits." -Hakim, Loreweaver*

Ain't that the truth! Perception is reality, bro. Take that to the bank.

### Brain Gorgers

*In spite of their hunger, they're slow eaters.*

I get a chuckle out of this every time. If you're a glass half full sort of person, then this flavor text probably seems really lame to you. "So they eat slow, who cares..." But if you're like me, what you see is "first they'll tie on their bibs, then say a prayer to some dark god, then take turns reaching through your eye socket to fish for some frontal lobe. Together, they'll all enjoy their finger food appetizer while you watch, howling in pain, through your one good eye. It's funny, because they don't actually know anything about human brains, yet they leave the sight center of the brain, located at the back, for last. I guess when they invite you to dinner, they expect you to stay for the whole meal. The whole... long... slow... meal.

### Muck Drubb

I smile when I read the word "Drubb." It sounds lowly, slovenly, slow, like drab or shlub. Is it the guy who takes a drubbing? Why yes it is. Wait a minute, were the ancient Drubbs the real root to the word "drub," (1. to beat with a

stick or the like; cudgel; flog; thrash. 2. to defeat decisively, as in a game or contest. 3. to drive as if by flogging.) No, actually drub comes from an ancient Arabic word, but it *sounds* possible. This one little word holds so much in its one sad syllable. You may not consciously think of "shlub" or "drub" or "drab," but the connotations are there, making this word feel like a slimy, fat, little scapegoat of the swamps.

#### Null Profusion

What's the deal in *Planar Chaos* and the words that aim to throw me into a paradoxical brain void. "Null Profusion," not only does it sound really cool, but the thought of an abundance of nothingness is pretty meaty too.



#### Akroma, Angel of Fury

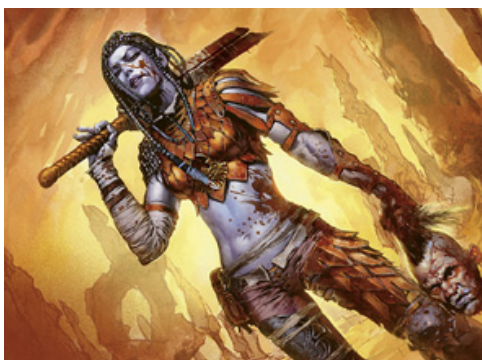
Sometimes words have weight because of what's on the surface. A lot of the words I've been talking about are like icebergs, with the preponderance of their weight hiding under the surface. This one is not that way (unless you're not a **Magic** player.) For us, all we have to do is see the word "Akroma" and we instantly know what the deal is. Big. Mighty. Angel. The rest is almost irrelevant. Akroma. Bam!

Just so you know, I don't really consider this name to be a rose worth regarding, but I stopped on it because I hooked my left nostril on a thorn. There's power here, just not the sort that makes me smile.

#### Fatal Frenzy

*"I hope to have such a death-lying in triumph upon the broken bodies of those who slew me." -Radha, Keldon warlord*

I will follow you, Radha, to my own glorious death! This sort of quote always gets me going. There is pride in these words, such courage. "We will all fight bravely and kill each other and die well. I am not afraid to think about my death, nor am I afraid to risk it."



#### Brute Force

*Blood, bone, and sinew are magnified, as is the rage that drives them. The brain, however, remains unchanged-a little bean, swinging by a strand in a cavernous, raving head.*

Can you tell that I am smiling right now? The image of that tiny little brain swinging like a lonely lightbulb in a big, dark basement - awesome. And for some reason I am also entertained by the use of the word "bean." It could be because beans are small, and that really hammers home how lonely that little brain is. Or it could be because beans are funny.

#### Harmonize

*"Life's greatest lessons don't come from focus or concentration. They come from breathing and simply noticing." - Seton, centaur druid*

I love this little piece of Eastern-style wisdom. So much of **Magic**, in both reality and in flavor, is about study, intensity, and intelligence. I find it a refreshing oasis of words, "breathing and simply noticing." Don't just pore over the information you have. Chill out, brother, and clear your mind. Make room for the revelations you've not yet had. Nice stuff.

Moving On...

Have you ever been to a department store where all those ladies spray perfume around? After a while, all those scents, no matter how pleasant they are individually, become a headache-inducing needle up the nose. So that's where I am right now. I am sure there are some smiles to be had courtesy of other *Planar Chaos* cards, but I am all sniffed out.

Thanks for taking the time to read about me taking the time to smell the roses.

*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.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Matt Cavotta](#) archive

