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Show me the Blubber

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Taste the Magic
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Ah, yes... Fatty Week. You know what's true about many, many fatty foods – they *taste* good. French fries... tasty. Ben & Jerry's... very tasty. Pepperoni... a reason to live. But all of these, in spite of their wondrous flavor, will add to your pants size.

You see, good flavor and pants size go hand in hand. At this point, I am speaking metaphorically. What I am talking about is mondo–power and toughness Magic creatures. More specifically, I am talking about the art for the big bruisers that the Magic community has so lovingly dubbed "Fatties."

For me, and this is just my own little opinion, a true "Fatty," in the Vorthosian sense of the word, has to BE FAT, large and in charge...not just lucky enough to have big numbers in the lower right corner of the card. For example, let's just imagine that you have never seen any Magic cards. We're going to play a little game called Find the Fat. Having no idea what power and toughness are, you see these illustrations:



Myojin of Infinite Rage art by Kev Walker.

Cool. Angry dude in a whorl of flame.

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Rakdos the Defiler art by Zoltan Boros & Gabor Szikszai.

Cool. Another angry dude in a whirl of flame. But...*this* dude is *bigger*. We have Found the Fat. Well, the art aficionado in you has Found the Fat, but the truth is that Myojin of Infinite Rage and **Rakdos the Defiler** are both 7/7 fatties. Spikily speaking, they are both Fatties. But, as I said before, this Vorthos likes his fat to look like fat, smell like fat, and *taste* like fat. Some cards, like the Myojin or **Excruciator** or **Nicol Bolas**, are taco salads, not properly representing their fat in their art (a Taco Bell taco salad has more fat than almost anything else on the menu. The "fat" is hidden behind the nefarious word "salad.")

What I look for in my Fatty illustrations are the trappings of a plus-sized existence. Since Magic art is all very small, size, ironically, is not a factor. I have found three things that really make the fat taste fatty.

Elements of scale. These are recognizable elements of a known size that, commingled with the Fatty in the frame, set up a sense of scale. People, buildings, and trees are popular scale-setting elements in Magic cards. You can see the people dancing about, having a raging Bumbat-fest at the feet of Rakdos. Not only does this show us what a party animal he is, it also shows us that he... is... huge.



Thorn Elemental art by rk post.

You may have missed 'em at card size, but the three happy geese flying around Thorny's thigh set him up as one towering pricker bush. Birds, interestingly, seem to be a popular scale element for Magic artists. They say, "This monster right here is so big that it's way up in the sky where the only scale elements available are, well, birds."



Fruitcake Elemental art by Darrell Riche.

And here we see the ever-popular polar bear, setting the scene once again. They did so for us way back in the day when it was their solemn duty to set the scale for the fattest fatty in the game.



Polar Kraken art by Mark Tedin.

Here are some other examples of size shown through scale:



Tidal Kraken art by Christopher Moeller.

Tiny Elvis says, "Hey, look at that Kraken, man. That Kraken's huge!"



Patron of the Akki art by Jim Nelson.

Open up and say "Aaaaaawesome!"



Phyrexian Snowcrusher art by Dave Allsop.

That was a lot of fat, real fat. No hidden fat, like an avocado. Brazen, glistening gristle, like the old 96er! Using scale elements to show size is the easiest of the three ways, like throwing on a yellow and black "Wide Load" sign. This is not to say that it is not a valid or respectable technique. It is, and its effectiveness is why so many artists have it in their toolbox when they get the assignment for the 8/8 colosso-monster.

Subordinated viewpoint. This is when the giant subject of an illustration is shown from the subordinated viewpoint of a tiny and insignificant onlooker – you. When this technique is delivered well, there is not just a sense of the great size of the creature, but also a sense of drama. Here are a few dandy illustrations using this technique:



Hunted Troll art by Greg Staples.

I like to think that this is the viewpoint of the fading little faerie who was dashed to the earth just moments ago, a bitter final vision of the winged compatriots about to join him in his doom.



Sliver Queen art by Ron Spencer.



Body of Jukai art by Luca Zontin.



Crater Hellion art by Daren Bader.

I have always felt like this excellent illustration was a subtle homage to the first fatty I ever opened in a booster pack:



Shivan Dragon art by Melissa Benson.

Colors are similar, composition is similar, but the most glaring similarity is the extremely subordinated viewpoint. This is definitely the last thing we see before we join the choir invisible.

Atmospheric effects. This technique is definitely the most difficult for the artist to deploy and the most difficult for me to explain. I'll do my best to make what's swirling obscurely around in my head clear to you here. First, let's just imagine a pile of rocks in your back yard. Look at the pile – it has a full range of lights and darks going from the bright glint off of the smooth stone atop the pile down to the black shadows beneath the large chunks at the bottom of the pile. You can clearly read the words on a torn bit of Doritos wrapper on the front of the pile, and you can also see clearly the multicolored striations on a large stone at the other end of the pile. It's all right there for you.



Mountain art by John Avon.

Now imagine a mountain. Is there a full range of value from light to dark- from the snow-capped peak to the shadow side? Nope. In fact, the snow is pretty much just white in the light and blue in the shadows, while the mountain itself is light purplish and slightly less light purple. What's the deal with that? "The deal with that" is that the farther something is from you, the more likely it is to succumb to the effects of the atmosphere between you and it. In this case, focus and value are lost to distance, dust in the air, fog, and ambient blue light from the sky. As things get farther away, they simplify and flatten, and sometimes get fuzzy and obscured. Notice the difference between the mountain above and the bushes in the foreground. The mountain is soft and low in contrast compared to the crisp foreground.

So what does this have to do with fatties? Well, if you apply this sort of foreground/background logic to monsters, they are going to start looking big. Not just F150 big, or bulldozer big, but *landscape big*. In order to show that a monster is large enough to be in your face and in the distant background, an illustration may have to unload a little atmosphere on it.



Patron of the Orochi art by Christopher Moeller.

Here you can see how the Patron of the Orochi is doing just that – sitting right here and waaaaay back there at the same time. You can see how it (and the terrain around it) begin to fade into the misty distance. Color loses intensity, contrast goes down, and focus gets a little fuzzy. That thing is huge! Oh, and the artist has thrown in some scale elements for good measure.



Craw Wurm art by Richard Sardinha.



Roar of Jukai art by Ron Spencer.

This guy is so fat that we can only see it by pulling back a block or two into the next kitsune neighborhood. You can see how it is reduced to a hazy green as it gets farther away, compared to the crisp, dark detail of its humungous leg thingy in the foreground. Throw in a bunch of panicking kitsune and you have got a really big problem in your town.



Sky Swallower art by rk post.

This thing is a poster-boy for the three Fatty techniques, using the subordinated viewpoint of a lowly ground-dweller, the scale references of spires and dragons, and the increasing atmospheric effect of city smog as the creature recedes into the distance.



Colossus of Sardia art by Hannibal King.

This one uses all three techniques as well. I really like how this illustration goes to the extreme to really express to us how awe-strikingly large the Colossus is. The viewpoint from below is dramatic, with the sunlight from high above lighting the figure with the light/shadow simplicity of a distant mountain view like I discussed earlier. Details are lost to distance and we are left with just the basic shapes that we are used to seeing in land masses, not creatures. The ever-popular birds are deployed as scale references. Do not be misled by the birds flapping about in our faces – trace the trail of birds up from the foreground and you'll just see the tiny black V's getting lost in the great shadows of the Colossus's head. "That's no moon. It's a space station."

There are tons of other great examples of these techniques. Hop on over to Gatherer and search for anything with power or toughness of 6 or greater – you're bound to find some art that appropriately supports the big P/T numbers. Of course, you're also going to find some taco salads as well – not bad art, but definitely not FAT art. For me, and for the purposes of this article, I need my fatties to have fat art. I need to see it.

"Yo, Ding-Dong. Ding-Dong, man. Ding-Dong, yo!"

*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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