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# Melvin and Vorthos

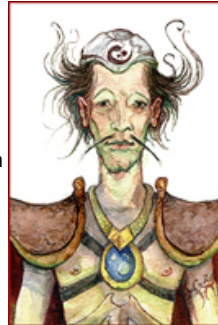
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 Making Magic  
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In Matt Cavotta's second Taste the Magic column, entitled [Snack Time with Vorthos](#), Matt introduced the world to Vorthos, what he believed was the fourth psychographic profile alongside Timmy, Johnny, and Spike. In my column "Timmy, Johnny and Spike Revisited" (click [here](#) for the test that precedes the article and [here](#) for the article itself; "Timmy, Johnny, and Spike Revisited" is my follow-up to "[Timmy, Johnny, and Spike](#)," one of the most-visited columns in all of [magicthegathering.com](#)'s history). I explained that I believed Matt was in error:

The last thing I feel obliged to touch upon is the "fourth" player type introduced by Matt Cavotta in his column on the creative side of **Magic** ("Taste the Magic"). In his column, Matt explained that he felt there was a missing fourth player type who he named Vorthos. Rather than paraphrasing, why don't I just quote Matt:

Vorthos (His name is actually John, but since there's already a "Johnny" in the mix, he opted to go with the name of his 16th level half-elven ranger/warmage.) is the guy who never puts more than one of any legend card in his deck because "it just wouldn't be right." He's the guy who will only play with the **Icy Manipulator** from *Ice Age* because it's the one they call the "Bone Crank." He won't play with the *Fallen Empires* cards with the stinky alternate art. Vorthos is the guy who started collecting cards because he liked the art, then read some **Magic** novels, then saw his favorite characters appear on some cards and decided to learn to play. There are a lot of Vorthoses out there. Some collect cards, but might not even play. Some have a hoot getting artists to sign their cards. Some don't read flavor text 'til after they finish the novel in case it might spoil the ending. Vorthos understands that **Magic can be fun even when you're not playing the game.**



So where does Vorthos fit into all of this? The answer is that he doesn't. Not because Vorthos isn't important, but because he's not actually a psychographic profile. Vorthos is defined by what he cares about, not why he plays (a subtle distinction, I know). In short, Vorthos is examining the players from a different axis. An interesting one, but not the topic of the day.

What this means is that there are Timmy Vorthos, Johnny Vorthos and Spike Vorthos. The first loves to recite the flavor text to **Fodder Cannon** whenever given the chance, the second has his *Weatherlight* Crew deck, and the third has read and remembers the characters from every **Magic** novel ever printed. Perhaps one day I'll explore Vorthos' companion profiles (Wait until you meet Melvin).

It turns out when I say I'm going to "one day" do something, my readers expect me to "one day" actually do it. Then during *Future Sight* previews, Laurie Cheers wrote an article entitled [Meet a Melvin](#) where he took an educated guess at what a Melvin is. (While my definition is broader, he did a pretty good job guessing.) On top of all that, I linked to "Timmy, Johnny and Spike" in a recent column, and a number of new readers encountered the paragraphs above. The end result of all this is that I've gotten a surprising number of letters in the last few weeks that say something along these lines:

Dear Mark,

Who's Melvin? What exactly is Vorthos? You promised us over a year ago you'd tell us. Please, we're dying!

A Dedicated Reader Who Remembers Everything You Promise

P.S. When can we expect Topical Blend #3?

P.P.S. "Extra Helpings," **Magic** art that includes letters. Ring a bell?

So yes, today I am going to finally talk about what exactly Vorthos is, in my opinion at least. (By the way, Topical Blend #3 will happen this summer—bug me in early August if it hasn't happen yet.) And I will finally introduce the world to Melvin. Not to mention, Melthos might make an appearance.

## Psychographic Profiles and You

Since I am claiming that Vorthos isn't a psychographic profile, I guess I should begin by explaining why he isn't and what exactly he is. To do this,

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I guess I need to start by digging a little deeper into what exactly a psychographic profile is. Marketing (or, perhaps I should clarify, good marketing) in its purest sense is the science of connecting a product, be it a tangible item, a service, a person, a philosophy, etc., with the consumers who are interested in such a product. To accomplish this, a marketer has to understand both what their product has to offer and what various consumers are interested in, the better to marry the two. It is the latter half of this that we are currently interested in.

To understand what consumers want, you have to understand their psychological makeup. That is, you need to know their activities, interests and opinions (known in the marketing business, by the way, as AIO). You then match this up with their demographic information (age, gender, income, education level, etc.) and start to form a sense of who each consumer is as an individual. You then group all the like-minded individuals together and create a psychographic profile.

In marketing, psychographic profiles are an invaluable tool because they help you, as a marketer, understand both who to sell your product to and how to sell your product in a way that will make that consumer the most receptive. Why do I, a card designer, care about this? Because essentially a big chunk of what I do is marketing. Say what? Think about this. What makes a **Magic** player buy cards from a specific set? Ads in a magazine? A little, but those are more to make sure he or she knows about an upcoming release. Columns like Making Magic or other [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) articles? Yeah, definitely helps. Preview cards? Sure. But what *really* sells packs? The answer is the cards in the booster.

What makes you buy your second booster of a set? The first booster. What makes you buy the second box? The first box. When I or any designer designs a **Magic** set we know that the thing that markets the set most is the set itself. This is why we do so many different things to help give each set a specific feel. It's why we do things like keyword mechanics and cycles. It's why we have themes and block design. It's why we do most of the things I spend Making **Magic** talking about.

What does this have to do with psychographic profiles? Everything. If the designer is the marketer, then it is his responsibility to understand his product and his consumer. If I want players to buy the first pack and then want to buy the second, I have to understand what I can create in that first pack that will inspire the desire to buy the second. This is where Timmy, Johnny and Spike came from. I wanted to understand who **Magic's** consumers were. Once I figured it out, I gave them names so that R&D could talk about them.

All of this is wonderful, but I still haven't addressed the issue at hand. Why isn't Vorthos a psychographic profile? Because at his heart, Vorthos isn't about motivation. He's about appreciation. Vorthos' profile doesn't focus on what psychologically drives him to play; it focuses on what he likes about the game. This is a subtle distinction, but it's an important one. Perhaps this an easier way to think about it. Let's say I have a Timmy card (or a Johnny card or a Spike card—I'm just using Timmy as my example but what I'm saying holds true for any psychographic). I can tune the card for Vorthos without affecting the Timmy-ness of the card. The Vorthos-ness works on a completely different level. I can sharpen the name, I can hone the card concept, I can ask for more dynamic art, I can even fiddle around the edges of the mechanic. And it doesn't have to affect the dial on the Timmy meter. I can't make the card more Johnny with any such assurance.

Vorthos is not a separation from Timmy, Johnny and Spike. It's a layer that can be added on top of any of the three psychographics. There is not a plain Vorthos. There are Vorthos Timmies, Vorthos Johnnies and Vorthos Spikes (although I do believe Vorthos Timmy is the largest contingent). Vorthos is a segment of the audience that derives their satisfaction from a particular aspect of the game. Melvin is a different segment that appreciates a different aspect. During the rest of my column today I am going to look at these two distinct vantage points to explain what exactly they are and what defines the subsets that like them.

## The Road To Discovery

The reason that this column took so long to write is that I needed time to think through how I felt Vorthos and Melvin worked. Figuring out the Timmy, Johnny and Spike psychographics didn't happen overnight. I actually took several years to slowly work through the different factors I was noticing in how players reacted to the game and how they wrote and spoke about it.

When Matt introduced the idea of Vorthos I spent many months trying to understand what part of the game he felt the current model was missing. Ultimately what I realized was that the gap wasn't a hole in the psychographic but in what I had chosen to focus the psychographics on. You see, I created Timmy, Johnny and Spike to help card design and development. As such, I explained the psychographics in a way that helped foster design and development. I didn't talk about why and how creative was received by the psychographics because it wasn't my focus.

Timmy, Johnny and Spike, for example, all value different things in a name. Timmy tends to focus on the impact of the name. Johnny focuses on the interconnectivity. And Spike focuses on the information provided by the name. There are Timmy, Johnny, and Spike collectors, traders, judges, forum posters, etc. The psychographics can move beyond the mechanics and the gameplay. I believe Vorthos was first thought up by Matt because he didn't see the psychographics addressing the metagame (I'm using the R&D meaning here and not what decks



are relevant at the next PTQ), that is all the aspects about the game outside of the game itself. I believe Vorthos was originally Matt's way to show that these aspects of the game are relevant to many players.

Matt's introduction of Vorthos impacted the way I think about the game in two ways. One, it stressed the need to talk about Timmy, Johnny and Spike in contexts that extend beyond the focus of the game itself and talk about how they function in the metagame (once again the R&D definition). Two, it made me realize that there was a new axis that we could look at. Vorthos and Melvin focus on how different people enjoy the game. If design's goal is to make the **Magic** playing experience as rich as possible, understanding what players appreciate is as important as understanding what drives them to play.

## For Your Appreciation

The reason I believe there are just two profiles for appreciation stems from how people experience things. I've talked before about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test. The test uses basic Jungian psychological types to explain how different people function. The test has four sliding scales. One of them is called **Sensing/Intuition**. This scale talks about how you perceive the world. Do you base it off hard empirical objective evidence such as your senses or do you base it off of more subjective criteria such as how something made you feel or what instinctual response it created.

The best way I heard to describe these two types is to imagine a day at the beach. You come back from a long day and your friend wants to hear about the beach. Do you describe it in terms of the physical qualities of the beach? Do you talk about the heat of the sand or the saltiness of the water? Or do you talk about what emotions the beach prompted? How the children running around made you smile or how the sun made you more feel more cheerful? In short, what filter do you use to perceive the world (and yes, as this is a scale people can fall somewhere in between)? Intellect or instinct? Your head or your heart? What you know or what you think?

***"Intellect or instinct?  
Your head or your heart?  
What you know or what  
you think?"***

The reason I bring this up is that I believe Vorthos and Melvin are the two ends of this spectrum.

## Vorthos

It seems only appropriate to begin with Vorthos. Before I jump in, be aware that for each type I am going to talk about the extreme. Yes, many people fall somewhere in the middle, but to explain the scale I need to examine the ends. This means that I will be focusing on the contrasting elements of the two profiles. That said, let's talk about Vorthos.

Vorthos is the intuitive side of perception. What does this mean? It means that Vorthos's appreciation comes from how a subject makes him feel. This has two important elements. First, it means that the judging criteria he has are very subjective to an outside observer. What emotionally resonates with one Vorthos may or may not resonate with another. Second, criteria are not broken down in any way. Judgment comes not from evaluation of components but rather from an overall feel of all those components together.

When Vorthos evaluates something, in this case a **Magic** card, he isn't isolating any piece. Rather he is judging based on how every piece interacts with one another. Yes, the mechanic matters, but in conjunction with what the spell represents. Yes, the art is important, but as how it relates to the whole of the card. The **Magic** cards that make Vorthos the happiest are the ones that "feel" right. These are the ones where the pieces come together to create something organic and whole, where all the pieces of the card combine in harmony to create something greater than the sum of its parts.



As an example let's take a look at a popular Vorthos card, **Form of the Dragon**. Up close the card seems a bit messy. The mechanics feel somewhat random and one of the abilities doesn't even make sense in red. But step back a little bit and it all starts to become clear. You've become a dragon. *You... are a dragon!* The name is evocative. The art is sweet. The mechanics feel organic to the card's flavor. The whole package is a thing of

beauty. The card works for Vorthos (and note that I don't mean for every Vorthos, as there is much subjectivity in how Vorthos looks at cards) because all the pieces are working in conjunction with one another.

You'll see when I talk about Melvin that both types look for connections. As I've explained in numerous past columns (I believe [Zen and the Art of Cycle Maintenance](#) does it best.) aesthetics, the science of beauty, shows us that humans by natures crave having things interconnect. The difference is that Vorthos prefers his connections to be of mood and tone rather than a structure of interdependency and logic. He wants things to belong to one another, not because there is an obvious direct link but rather because the items in question feel right together.

This sensibility causes Vorthos to appreciate things by seeing the whole as the sum of the parts. The best metaphor I can give for this type of insight is the painting style known as pointillism where a picture is made up of tiny dots. Only by stepping far back can you see how the dots come together. Now imagine a giant pointillism painting made up of pointillism paintings. This is how Vorthos approaches **Magic**. Each piece doesn't live in a vacuum but is part of a larger picture. The key, though, is that the relationships of these pieces is based on their interrelation in the larger picture.

So why does Matt focus so much of Vorthos's interest in the creative? Because Vorthos is, by his nature, more in tune with how evocative things are. He likes elements that can viscerally affect him, and the creative elements (name, art, concept, etc.) have the strongest punch. Yes, a card mechanic does have the capacity to inspire awe, but not as easily as a well drawn piece of art or a rich piece of flavor text.

## Melvin

Which brings us to Melvin. Melvin is the speculative side of perception. What does this mean? It means that Melvin's appreciation comes from how a subject makes him think. Melvin enjoys comprehending the underlying structure. Melvin wants to understand how something is put together and then admire the craftsmanship of the interdependencies. This means that Melvin is much more comfortable dealing with subjective facts than objective feelings.

When Melvin evaluates something, once again like a **Magic** card, he tends to break things down into its components and then studies each part. He intellectually dissects whatever it is he is analyzing. Why does he do this? Because how something works is very important to Melvin. He enjoys understanding the rules that govern its creation. For that matter, unlike Vorthos, Melvin is a fan of rules. Rules create structure and allow things to make sense. Cards that excite Melvin are ones where he can admire the intricacy of the design.



For this example let's look at the *Time Spiral* card **Firemaw Kavú**. From a distance, the card seems like yet another nostalgia throwback (to **Flametongue Kavú**). But as you look closer you start to see a lot of careful design interactions. For example, the echo mechanic has proven to play very nicely with both comes into play and leaves play effects. Further, **Firemaw Kavú** allows multiple choices of what you want the card to be. It can act as a **Shock** this turn and then a 4/2 body on future turns. It can act as a **Shock** this turn and a **Lightning Blast** next turn. Or, and this is where the intricacy of design comes into play, it can act as a **Lightning Blast** this turn. How? The creature can **Shock** itself, and conveniently it has a toughness of 2. This triggers the leaves-play effect. (Note also that the 4 and 2 damage match up with the creature's power and toughness.) A card like this is exciting to Melvin because he enjoys watching how all the pieces can be skillfully woven together.

I talked about how Vorthos likes his cards connected by mood and tone. Melvin prefers interdependency and structure. Melvin likes seeing hard and tight connections between the cards. He enjoys keywords and cycles. He likes when cards are mirrored or designed to work together. Melvin enjoys looking at the set as a whole and seeing why certain pieces were included. He loves understanding why certain decisions were made.

Vorthos enjoys seeing the whole as the sum of the parts. Melvin likes seeing the individuals as pieces of the whole. How is this different? If Vorthos's metaphor is a piece of art, Melvin's metaphor is architecture. Melvin likes seeing how all the joints and beams come together to make a beautiful building. He wants to understand the role and function of each piece. This doesn't mean that the total of the parts cannot be a thing of beauty. It is the fact that such a thing is beautiful in spite of all the constraints and restrictions put upon it by functionality that makes Melvin admire it so.

Just as Vorthos is pushed towards the thing that have the strongest visceral feel, Melvin is pushed towards the things that have the strongest structure and functionality. Melvin enjoys the rules, the color wheel, and the hard mechanical design and development. He likes the things that can be broken down and explained—the things that have rules that can be learned and followed. To Melvin, **Magic** is the Taj Mahal and he loves admiring its blueprints.

## Melthos

When I explain that Vorthos and Melvin are on a spectrum, I don't mean to imply that their sensibilities cannot intermix. Melthos is my name for the center of the spectrum. Melthos is the one that admires both the art and the craftsmanship. Some Melthos lean one way for certain aspects of the game and another way for different aspects. Yet others find a mix of enjoying how structure and mood can commingle.

I don't have a lot to say about Melthos as he is just the cross section of the two types above. I just felt a need to clarify that such a hybrid very much exist.

## Is Your Brain Full Yet?

I'll be honest that I didn't have any idea how deep this subject was when I first decided to write it all down. There is an expression that says, "to truly learn you must first teach." Never did this expression hit closer to home than with this column. Because of this I really hope there is some in-depth discussion in the forums and some heartfelt responses in my email on today's topic.

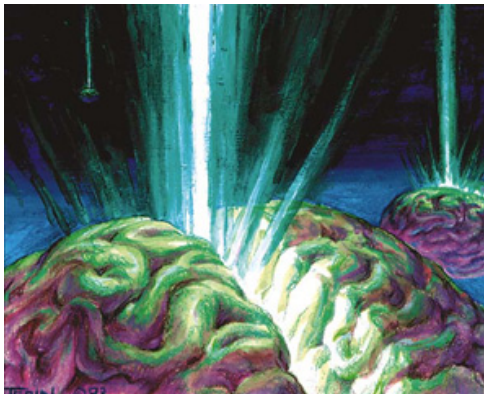
I know that my interpretation of Vorthos is much broader than what I think Matt originally intended, although I do feel that my interpretation does encompass the stuff Matt was trying to shine a light on. Matt, on the other hand, might completely disagree. I'm also curious to see what he has to say on the subject. (Yet another reason to read [Taste the Magic](#) each Thursday.)

That's all I got for today. Join me next week when I look into the future by looking into the past.

Until then, may you learn to appreciate how you appreciate.

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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