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A Lorwyn / Lorwyn Situation

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Welcome to *Lorwyn* Preview Week 1! It's time to start spilling some of our secrets. Those of you who have read *Making Magic* during previous preview weeks know that I have two types of preview columns. First is the one where I lead up to my preview card and then show it at the end of the column. Second is the one where I start off with the preview card and let it speak for itself. Today is the second type of column. No set-up I could write can beat the visceral impact of just seeing this card. It communicates tribal. It communicates the environment. It communicates "Wow!" So let's start this column off on the best possible foot.

Click [here](#) to see what I'm talking about.



Come on, admit it. You said "Wow!" So why'd I pick this card as the first preview card (and yes I have some influence in what my preview card is going to be)? Because I felt the card communicated all the things I wanted to touch upon about *Lorwyn* in today's column. Once again for those that forgot my list from above: a) tribal, b) environment and c) "Wow!" That's what we'll be talking about today. (And yes, the set has a lot more than those three things, but I have to write this column every week and trust me most of this fall's columns are going to be about *Lorwyn*.)

Half Dozen of Another

Before I dive into the overflowing pool of juicy *Lorwyn* tidbits, I want to do what I always do in my first preview column (okay, okay, every once in a while it's in the second)—introduce the design team.

Aaron Forsythe (lead) – Here's how **Magic** design works. First you get on a design team. Then you get on a few more. Eventually you earn the right to lead the design on a small set. If that goes well you get another small set to lead. If enough small sets go well or if the first small set goes really well, you get a chance to lead the design of a large set. *Lorwyn* was exactly that—Aaron's first chance to lead the design of a large set. (He led the design team for *Dissension* and it went exceptionally well.) Aaron is going to be writing a feature article in a few weeks where he talks about leading the *Lorwyn* design, but I'll give you a little preview. It was hard. Very hard. Way, way harder than leading a small set. Why? Because leading the large set is about helping build the block plan. You



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need to set up everything that will be played out during the course of the year. (Okay, [half a year](#) this time around.)

I've worked with many designers, and few have as a natural an instinct for it as Aaron has demonstrated. For example, Aaron's first design team was *Fifth Dawn*, and his first large set lead design is *Lorwyn* two and half years later. While two and half years might seem like a long time, it's the fast track in **Magic** design. But Aaron clearly earned the right, and I was happy to hand him the reins for *Lorwyn*.

Paul Sottosanti – One of the things about Wizards R&D that this column doesn't really help you see is that there are a lot of people who don't work on **Magic**. In fact, the majority of R&D works on other games. (Before I get letters, the majority of TCG R&D does at least some work on **Magic**, but Wizards R&D is much more than just trading card games—hint: see my [Topical Blend #3](#) for another game this company makes that has a little following of its own.) This means that R&D has a lot of talented designers that don't work on **Magic**. One of my jobs as the Head Designer is to occasionally convince some of them to do design work on **Magic**. All right, it's not the hardest sales job in the world. Anyway, Paul primarily does designs on other Wizards games. His biggest contribution to **Magic** pre-*Lorwyn* (other than being on the *Planar Chaos* design team) is probably the **Magic Online** Vanguard avatar abilities, which Paul oversees. Yes, Paul designed Momir Vig (the Vanguard avatar, not the card—which if you're plugged into online formats is a way bigger accomplishment). I felt Paul did a good job on *Planar Chaos* design and wanted to give him another chance to try out his hand at **Magic** (See my detailed explanation of the design advancement process above), and *Lorwyn* seemed like a good fit. Paul did such a good job, by the way, that you'll be seeing his name first when I list the *Morningtide* design team.



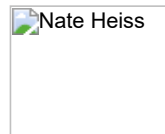
Brady Dommermuth – Hopefully Brady doesn't need any introduction. He's been the world designer (a.k.a. the guy that figures out what each world is about creatively—see [my column](#) on the roles of the creative team for more detail, though note that the names in those roles have changed somewhat) for many, many years. So why did we seek him out to be on the *Lorwyn* design team (and yes, we sought *him* out)? Because we knew after the craziness of *Time Spiral* Block that we wanted to go to a world that was straightforward and grounded—a proverbial sherbet to cleanse the palate after the nutty flavor that was *Time Spiral* Block. To do that, we wanted to have the World Designer in at square one. We wanted to be making choices mechanically that helped build up the world rather than forcing Brady and the creative team to stretch it. I believe our decision was a rousing success as the mechanics and flavor are as intertwined as the two can get.



Andrew Finch – At the time of this design team, Andrew was the Director of New Games. (He currently is waist-deep in our new digital games initiative and [Gleemax.com](#).) He had always wanted to be on a **Magic** design team, and he came and asked me if he could be on the design team for *Lorwyn*. I've worked with Andrew on a number of non-**Magic** design teams (Andrew and I were both part of the initial design team for *Duel Masters*, for example) and I knew he would be a valuable contributor so I said okay. And he was. That is until halfway through the design when other concerns—a.k.a. dealing with new games—forced him to drop off the team. Nonetheless, we were happy to have him.



Nate Heiss – So Andrew had to drop out (and Brady dialed back his time as design moved farther and farther away from the point where his input was the most valuable) so we needed another team member. Remember above when I said that I'm always trying out designers from other Wizards games. Nate is one such person. The big advantage with Nate is that he is a former pro player (and [magicthegathering.com](#) author) and is no stranger to **Magic**. Nate was given a tough task for his first design team as he had to hit the ground running since the set was well into design but he did an excellent job and even designed an awesome mechanic that, well, got pushed off to "Jelly" (which, by the way, I can't talk about yet but is clearly making its move to bypass *Lorwyn* as the best large set of the next year; it's still too close to call). But seriously, Nate did a great job and his fingerprints can be seen all over the set. (Really, Nate has to learn to wash his hands.)



Mark Rosewater – Finally, every team has to have some fifth wheel that makes the other members feel better about themselves. Not wanting to break my design team streak just yet (and I guess to help out Aaron with his first large set design), I asked myself if I would be willing to find time to be on this team. Since I have trouble saying no to myself, I accepted. I might have designed a card or two, and maybe I'll talk about some of them in upcoming columns.



Just My Type

With the introductions out of the way, let's jump right in. In case you haven't officially heard this yet, *Lorwyn* is what's known in the biz as a tribal set. A tribal set is a set built around creature subtypes (such as goblins, elves, etc.). The last block, which was also the first one, with a tribal theme was *Onslaught* (although there is a case that *Fallen Empires* was the first tribal set). *Onslaught* was so popular that by the end of the block we'd already penciled it in for a return. The fact that this block was tribal was the first thing we'd settled on. Long before we had any idea of the rest of the set. Before I knew that we were going to have a four-set block. Before just about anything. In fact, I think I knew it was going to be a tribal set before all of you found out its codename (in one my column on codenames, [Today and Tomorrow](#)).

Eventually though the four-set block issue came along and I came up with the idea of two mini-blocks. (See my column [Two Plus Two](#) for more info on this.) For reasons I cannot explain yet (you have to wait for the first "Jelly" column), tribal seemed like a perfect fit for the first mini-block. When I handed off the set to Aaron (i.e., when the design team started meeting), I had several instructions:

1. The set had to have a tribal theme.
2. The set had to approach that theme in a way different than *Onslaught* block had. In short, *Lorwyn* was to be *Onslaught* what *Ravnica* was to *Invasion*. I had a few ideas about this that I brought to the table. (This is the major topic for next week's column.)

3. The first mini-block had to work with the overall mega-block. (I let Aaron know what I believed the second mini-block was going to be about—I was leading it but hadn't started on it yet.)

As is normal between the lead designer of a set and the **Magic** head designer, Aaron and I talked a great deal about what areas made the most sense to explore. Finally, we had our first few meetings and walked away with the list of the eight tribes we wanted to support in *Lorwyn*. (There's an interesting story about how we chose the specific eight tribes that we did, but Aaron called dibs on it for his feature in a few weeks.) Here's what we ended up with:

Goblins
Elves
Kithkin
Elementals
Merfolk
Faeries
Giants
Treefolk

The five major races (meaning the ones that get the most cards) are the first five, with the last three being "minor" races (although have no fear, they definitely get enough cards to build decks with both in Limited and Constructed). For more about how each of these tribes fits into the world of Lorwyn, including some juicy art previews, check out [Rei Nakazawa's feature article](#).

Let me answer a few questions you all might be having.

I remember reading a column ([Small Change](#)) where you said that merfolk were dead (as far as Magic creative was concerned). What happened?

Um, they got better. Basically, what happened was all of you. We had so much negative reaction to us killing off merfolk as a race that we decided that we made the wrong decision. (Yes, believe it or not, audience reaction can actually reverse decisions.) Note, by the way, that this doesn't mean merfolk are returning to their status of old, meaning a blue staple in every set. It means that we plan on using them when it makes sense. Merfolk are a tool in our creative arsenal that we plan to use sporadically but with strong flavor when we do. Luckily *Lorwyn* block has them back in large numbers. (Were you wondering what **Lord of Atlantis** was doing on the *Time Spiral* "timeshifted" sheet?)

Faeries and Treefolk also haven't been seen in large number for a while. What gives?

Not every environment makes sense for a cloud of faeries or a grove of treefolk. Lorwyn, though, does.

Elementals? Is that this set's Beasts?

Yes and no. Yes, it is the default for many of our big creatures that in *Onslaught* Block would have, more often than not, been labeled Beasts. But no, because there is also a humanoid elemental clan known as the flamekin. The vast majority of the tribal elemental cards are for the humanoid tribe and not the beasts.

Did you give any thought to not doing Goblins because the Goblin tribe was so dominant in *Onslaught* Block?

Yes we did, but what's a tribal set without Goblins? Besides we have done something rather radical with them that will definitely make them feel different from *Onslaught*. (More on this next week. I know I keep pushing off things to future weeks but hey, this is just the first preview.)

Where are the humans?

Sorry, no humans here. Okay, I guess some of the planeswalkers are human. But creaturewise, no humans in this tribal block. It was a decision we made early in design as the human tribe has some weird issues with tribal. (For example, "Sacrifice a Human" just sounds creepy.)

Are there any other races that show up in any number?

No. Well, unless you count Shapeshifters, then yes.

Each of the eight tribes has its own definition. Its own style of play. Its own routes to victory. Much like design (and development) worked so hard to give each guild in *Ravnica* a different feel, so did we focus on making sure each tribe in *Lorwyn* had its own identity. So what are they? I'm not going to tell you. Not because there's not a lot to tell, but because I'm a big believer that the point of previews isn't to give away everything about the set but rather to give you a sample of things to come. I'm excited for all of you to get a chance to play with *Lorwyn* and discover for yourselves what each tribe brings to the card table. That said, next week I will explore an important facet of how *Lorwyn* explores the tribal theme. (Hint: I'm "[some members of R&D](#).")

Da Plane, Da Plane

While design came into *Lorwyn* with its goals, so to did the creative team. Metal world, Japanese-inspired world, city world, post-apocalyptic world—each of these environments had their own distinctive stamp, but none of them were solidly grounded in traditional fantasy. Combine that with a desire to swing the pendulum back from the crazy chaotic feel of *Time Spiral* block and you have a sense of where the creative team wanted to go. They were eager to build a world steeped in a more traditional fantasy. They wanted a simple world with a calm not seen in a **Magic** world in many years. Sure there would be fighting—this is **Magic** after all—but set in a context more of squabbles among neighbors and less like the all-out world war seen in many sets.

For inspiration, the creative team turned to Celtic folklore, basically one of the major influences that led to the traditional fairy tale settings that have come to define fantasy for the modern day mass audience. This is why creatures such as faeries and treefolk are rearing their not so ugly heads (okay, maybe ugly as it refers to the treefolk—their bark really is worse than their bite). As Rei's article hints at, even the races that are staples in normal **Magic** settings have been given their own take here in *Lorwyn*.

The big point I want to make is that I feel the environment of *Lorwyn* is a wonderful breath of fresh air that returns a flavor to the game not seen in a number of years.

The Wow Factor

While I don't want to give everything away, I'm all about the tease. Here are some of the many awesome things you'll also find in *Lorwyn*:

Planeswalkers – If you haven't checked out the [Planeswalkers Minisite](#), you might want to take a look. Many, many answers about planeswalkers can be found there (including, yes, how they work). Every set we hype the new thing the set is introducing. Seldom (or maybe never) do we introduce something this different. Planeswalkers are something truly new. So new, in fact, that I don't think you can really understand them until you play with them. There's nothing in **Magic**'s past to compare them to that will give you any significant frame of reference.

Tribal – What, one new card type wasn't enough (yes, yes, *Future Sight* had a tribal card)? If you're interested to see what new paths we take with the tribal theme, you need look no farther than the tribal card type. Why does it matter that my noncreature is a Goblin? Oh, you'll see. You'll see.

Five New Keywords – Apparently two new card types wasn't enough.

All Sorts of Cool Cards – Yes, it's time for the patented Rosewater partial information tease. Without further ado, some cards you'll see in *Lorwyn*.

- the next evolution of a popular cycle from *Mirage*
- a 10/2 creature for 3 (okay, there might be another cost)
- a green enchantment that can keep the 10/2 from hurting you
- a cycle of creatures that lets you use a resource first seen in *Unglued*
- a card that makes all your Treefolk indestructible (I know you already know it; it's still cool)
- a white answer for any bothersome nonland permanent
- a Shapeshifter lord
- an artifact that lets you play spells for free
- lands that provide two colors of mana and can come into play untapped
- and a card that finally cares about Goats

That's all the teasing I have in me for today. Hopefully I've managed to whet your appetite for what's sure to be an exciting large set.

Join me next week when I explore a big twist in the tribal design.

Until then, may your Treefolk not fear giant hacksaws.

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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