

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Lorwyn at all Costs

Mark Rosewater
Making Magic

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Welcome to *Lorwyn* Preview Week #2! Today I have not one but two preview cards to show you (I'll tell you why in a little bit), and I'll be explaining one of the big twists we're using to shake up the tribal theme in *Lorwyn*. But first, I'd like to take a few moments to talk about [last week](#).

Tree's Company

Several weeks ago, *Inquest Magazine* announced that it would be ceasing publication. (By the way, *Inquest* has put the feature article about me up on their web site. You can see it [here](#) if you're interested and you didn't have a chance to pick up the magazine.) I've been a bit shaken by the news, as *Inquest* has been a part of **Magic** for so long (it feels like I've done a hundred interviews with them) but the more I thought about it I realized that the introduction of the internet has really changed how information is shared, especially when it comes to a niche topic like **Magic**. And that's when I realized how important it is for Making Magic to take advantage of the medium it uses.

Making Magic is an internet column. That means that I get instant feedback on the boards and in email about what people have to think about what I've just said and, in the case of preview weeks, what card I've just shown. I then have the opportunity to address that issue in my very next column because they are written so close to "publication."

What does this have to do with last week's column? The feedback made it perfectly clear that I made a mistake and I want to own up to it. In fact, I believe I made two mistakes. I'll own up to both. First, I believe I picked the wrong card to start off previews with last week. Not because the card isn't a good card (and please be aware that I had just as many people writing in to me saying how the card did make them say "Wow" as I had people saying they were let down), but rather that it didn't do its job properly as a preview card. Let me explain.

Most of the people who work at Wizards of the Coast that play **Magic** aren't in R&D. Many of these people are much more casual than R&D, who by and large come from a more competitive background. As such, one of the things we like to do late in development is to run the cards by many of these Wizards casual **Magic** players and get their feedback. The data we got back showed us that Timber Protector was one of the most popular cards among the more casual crowd we surveyed. My inner Timmy also felt really good about the card, both because it seemed like a very impressive "lord" (and by impressive I don't mean "tournament worthy" as much as I mean "will play well in a casual setting") and because it gave support to a tribe that I felt was beloved but long ignored.

I knew that Rei was showing off a Spike card (odd I know, as that's not usually what Rei tends to preview but it made sense for [his article](#)), so choosing a Timmy card seemed right. Also, I felt like it was going to symbolize how we were going to show some love to some neglected tribes. One small problem, I forgot about the context. You see, both I and the Wizards employees saw Timber Protector in the context of *Lorwyn*. We got to see all the cards. We know the support Treefolk have in *Lorwyn*. We got to see what else Timber Protector got to play with. (Check out [last week's Latest Developments](#) for a great example.) But all the audience had to go on was the five existing Treefolk in Standard.



Which leads to my second mistake. I had a Timmy-friendly card that required some knowledge of what *Lorwyn* was doing with Treefolk. The card would have been fine *if* I had bothered to let my readers know these facts. Basically, I didn't properly set up who the card was for and why that audience should be excited. I didn't expect everyone to go "Wow!", I expected the people who the card was aimed at to say it. But I didn't tell all of you that. So I set a number of you up to be disappointed. That's a bad way to start a preview week.

Now that I think about it, I actually think there's a third mistake. Whenever we bring back a theme, I, as the representative of design, should explain how the theme is being handled differently. I need to walk you through how *Lorwyn* is to *Onslaught* what *Ravnica* was to *Invasion*. That's what I'm doing this week, but I should have done it last week.

Why am I spending eight paragraphs to talk about what I should have done last week? Because I want you to understand that [magicthegathering.com](#), and Making Magic in specific where I'm concerned, are about connecting with the public. I'm not just here to tell you things. I am here to interact with all of you. Remember, this is an internet column. This isn't what we in the biz call "one way communication". All of you letting your voice be heard does influence greatly how and what we say. Not just online but in the game itself. Merfolk, for instance, are returning in *Lorwyn* specifically because the audience let us know that it was a stupid thing to permanently get rid of them. And we listened. Same goes for the previews. I fumbled mine last week so I want to own up to it and

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try to do a better job this week. *Lorwyn* is an awesome set and it deserves a better preview article than I gave it last week. That said, let me try and do better.

Playing Against Creature Type

At the very first *Lorwyn* design meeting, I asked Aaron, the lead of the set, if I, as the head designer, could say a few words. Here's what I said:

Me: At the beginning of each design team, I like to lay down the non-negotiables. That is, here are the things the team has to deliver. Everything else is flexible. Non-negotiable #1: This year's block structure is going to consist of two mini-blocks each with its own large and small set. These two sets need to each have their own themes, creative and keyword mechanics. That said, we need to find a way to integrate the two to create a greater synergy than ever seen before between two adjacent blocks. Non-negotiable #2: The first mini-block's theme is tribal. Non-negotiable #3: This mini-block cannot just be *Onslaught II*. This team must find some new ways to approach the theme. That doesn't mean that you can't use any of the old ways. You can and should, but the overall feel of the block has to be distinctive from what we did the last time we went down this path. That's it. That's the only non-negotiables I have.

Paul (Sottosanti): So as long as we make a tribal block and differentiate it from *Onslaught*, we can do whatever we want?

Me: Yep. It's wide open.

Andrew (Finch): Anything else off limits?

Me: Nope.

Brady (Dommermuth): So we can do absolutely anything?

Me: Carte blanche.

(Pause.)

Aaron (Forsythe): Do you have any ideas for what we may want to do?

Me: As head designer, I like to give my design teams enough room to creatively maneuver. So, I'd rather not give you ideas that might push you into a certain direction. I want the team to have autonomy.

Aaron: Well how about as a member of the design team?

Me: As a member of the team? Oh yeah, I have a whole bunch of ideas.

If it Bleeds, it Leads

Several weeks ago, during *Onslaught Week*, Aaron wrote a Latest Developments article ([Looking Back to the Future](#)) in which he looked back at old columns written about *Onslaught*. Among these was an old "Latest Developments" column written by Randy Buehler. Here's what Aaron said:

"Old Uncle Fester" by Randy Buehler

This one made me laugh out loud, as certain arguments that Randy lays out as being proposed by the mysterious "some people in R&D" in the days of *Onslaught* design were proposed again by the exact same "some people in R&D" five years later during *Lorwyn* design.

Stay tuned to this website, as I'm sure "some people in R&D" will go over this point in a column a couple Mondays from now.

And here we are. Yes, I was "some people in R&D." Here's what happened. I was probably the biggest proponent for tribal in *Onslaught*. I realized that the casual players really enjoyed building tribal decks, and my feeling was that the competitive players could be encouraged to build them if we just bothered making some of the tribal decks good.

Obviously I was successful in my tribal push, and the level of tribal in *Onslaught* kept slowly increasing. As I watched tribal take shape I realized I had one complaint. Because tribes in most cases had been so connected to particular colors, we were creating very static decks. Goblins were always mono-red because goblins only showed up in red. Elves were green. Merfolk were blue. Zombies were black. I felt like we were missing out on something.

Then it hit me. Every year, no matter what our theme, we always have to do a little bit of mechanical bleeding. For instance, when *Odyssey* block became the graveyard block, we had to find some ways to get colors like blue and red, which normally don't interact all that much with the graveyard, in theme. The key was to push the color pie gently in a direction that allowed us a little bit of graveyard interaction in every color. Why should *Onslaught* be any different?

The key was that we needed to bleed not mechanics but flavor. For instance, goblins have been carved out in **Magic** lore to be very chaotic and impulsive. Richard (Garfield) wanted them to be red so he played up all the



possible red characteristics he could. But if you go back to more traditional sources (Tolkien being the obvious choice) you'll find that goblins were much closer aligned with the black color pie than the red. Goblins were selfish and scheming. *Onslaught* could very easily make black goblins that felt right both for the color black and for the sense of what a goblin was.

The advantage of the bleeding flavor was clear. If Goblins, for example, only existed in red, then deck builders had limited options: play the best red Goblins you had along with the best red cards you have. Now, let's see what happens when you add black Goblins. The deck builder then has a number of new options. They can still make a mono-red Goblin deck, but now they can make a mono-black Goblin deck or a black-red Goblin deck or a red deck splashing black or a black deck splashing red. Goblins decks would now have access to the tools of two different colors. That, I felt, was clearly the answer to the problem.

So what happened? The rest of R&D weren't worried about the monocolored restriction (read Randy's column for an explanation from him), and the idea of bleeding flavor seemed odd to them. I stressed that I wasn't pushing creature types in places that would see odd. I just wanted to try them out in places that they'd seem natural. In the end, I wasn't able to convince them and the idea was locked away in my head (like oh so many others).

Back in Black

Why do I bring up this story? Oh, no reason. Why don't we just get to the preview card? (Remember, the first of two.)

Click [here](#).



Does this mean what you think it means? Yes, it does. You see, one of the great skills I have honed as a designer is perseverance. If an idea is good enough, it will eventually find a home. I just have to keep bringing up the idea. Here's what happened. *Lorwyn* was looking for some good twists to separate it from *Onslaught*. Wouldn't you know that I just happened to have one all ready?

Many people have asked why we brought back Goblins when they were so defining in *Onslaught*. Wouldn't having Goblins just make *Lorwyn* more like *Onslaught*? Yes, if we did the same thing with them. But we're not. In *Lorwyn*, Goblins are centered not in red but in black. Yes, there are some red Goblins (as well as a multicolored black and red Goblin), but the majority of Goblins in this block are black.

Here's what I'm saying. Every supported creature type in *Lorwyn* (the ones that we're doing in enough quantities to build decks around in Limited or Block Constructed) shows up in more than one color. Let's walk through them, shall we?

Goblins – Primary in black, secondary in red

Elves – Primary in green, secondary in black

Merfolk – Primary in blue, secondary in white

Kithkin – Primary in white, secondary (although in smaller quantities than most secondary colors) in green

Elementals – Primary in red, secondary in all the other colors (I should point out that the red elementals are mostly humanoid creatures called flamekin, while the rest of the elementals are strange and otherworldly creatures)

Faeries – Primary in blue, secondary in black

Giants – Primary in red, secondary in white

Treefolk – Primary in green, secondary in black and white (also in smaller quantities than most secondary colors)

This leads into the next obvious question: why did we choose to bleed into the colors we did? Good question. One I will answer (repeat just with me) in a future column. The reason I do not want to answer it now is that the choices we made tie into the mechanical definition we were trying to create for each tribe along with where we felt the flavor made sense. I'm very excited by how we tied the mechanics to the flavor, and I believe that this is yet another way *Lorwyn* distinguishes itself from *Onslaught*. I feel like the *Onslaught* tribes were more about doing what that color did rather than having a crafted mechanical identity.

But *Ravnica* taught us the importance of crafting mechanics to flavor and we wanted to make use of this technology in *Lorwyn*. Each tribe isn't just a mix of its colors but rather a carefully selected group of cards that come together to give the tribe a particular feel. So what is the feel of each tribe? As I said above, I'm not going to tell you. Why? Because I truly believe one of the joys of a new set is discovering how it works. Figuring out there are black and red Goblins is instantly apparent, but getting a sense of how Goblins play is something I want you to discover through play rather than just having me spoon-feed it to you. Previews, to me, are about giving you a taste, not spoiling the entire meal.



Which all folds back into how bleeding tribes into new colors gives us new tools to change up the tribal theme. Having an extra color (or colors) allows us to change-up the tribal decks by giving each tribe access to things it's never had. Elf decks can now play creature removal. Goblins can play discard. Merfolk have access to, well, lots of white-only things. With *Lorwyn*, the eight tribes will be able to build decks of a whole new cloth. And that's just the first set. We have a world of more surprises hanging out around the corner.

Oh Lord

Which brings me to my next tangent. One of the reasons some people were upset with last week's preview card was that they felt it wasn't very innovative. "Lords" (although I should stress that this is a nickname, as the creature type Lord is no more) have existed since Alpha. How is making yet another lord in any way innovative?

This, by the way, is why I have a second preview card. How do I annoy all my readers that were upset I previewed "just a lord" last week? Why, preview a second one. But Mad Auntie made the point I wanted to talk about (color bleeding), so Scott agreed to let me show off "something new" in addition to my "something old." (All I need now are "something borrowed" and "something blue".) And before the column is done, I will.

But I wanted to take a moment to talk about doing "lords" in *Lorwyn*. I'll let you in on a secret: every supported tribe in *Lorwyn* gets a "lord." Why? Because research has shown that players like them. Not everything we do in a theme has to reinvent the wheel. Part of working with a theme is knowing when to borrow old ideas that players like. Trust me, *Lorwyn* has plenty of new takes on tribal. Besides the color bleeds, we also have the tribal card type (the tribal theme can get very different when your tribal-themed cards interact with noncreature cards) and numerous other innovations that I'm not at liberty to talk about just yet.

Suffice to say, that *Lorwyn* makes good use of modern design technology. It has most of what we believe made *Onslaught* what it was, along with some new components that we believe will take the theme to the next level.

Panning for Gold

I'm just about to wrap it up for the day, but before I do, it seems I have one last task at hand. Yes, the other preview card. Let me set it up. *Lorwyn* has eight gold cards, all rare, all creatures, all legendary. Each one is a different combination of colors and has a unique creature type. (Hmm, eight supported tribes, eight rare legendary creatures—what could we possibly be up to?) You've already met Gaddock Teeg and Doran, the Siege Tower. Today, I have for you a legendary Elf. And if you've been paying attention you know he's black-green. What does he do? Let's take a look.

Click [here](#).



I'm pretty sure this isn't an effect you've seen in an Elf deck before. (Okay, the second half maybe.) That's a sentiment that should be a constant in this environment. And that is why *Lorwyn* is to *Onslaught* what *Ravnica* was to *Invasion*.

All right, was *this* a better *Lorwyn* preview column? (Post in the thread or drop me an email and let me know.)

Join me next week when I have my best preview card of all, a card I made to be goofy fun that is seeing lots of play in development's Future Future League.

Until then, may you know the joy of reconnecting with old friends and finding new connections.

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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