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# Lorwyn One for the Team

Mark Rosewater  
Making Magic

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Welcome to the third (and final) *Lorwyn* Preview Week! Today I'm going to show you another preview card, talk a bit more about what you can expect in *Lorwyn* and then make a few not-so-subtle hints that perhaps you want to go to the [prerelease](#) this weekend. You want to know why I'm personally extra pumped on *Lorwyn*? Because I drafted it today and I had a blast.

You see, one of the perks of working at Wizards of the Coast is that we get the cards a little earlier than the rest of the world. They're under lock and key and no card can leave the building (no really, we had to give back our cards after the draft—and I got two "choose-tuos," a.k.a. Commands, including [the blue one](#)). This obviously isn't the first time I've played with *Lorwyn* cards, but it is the first time I've played with pretty printed ones. While I'm used to playing with stickers, they just aren't the same thing as playing with real cards.

I'm often asked if the allure has been slowly lost since we play with the cards every day. Being that we cancelled the weekly **Magic** meeting so we could set up multiple eight-man draft pods, I'm going to go with no. The R&D folk who work on **Magic** honestly love the game. All of us started first as fans and second as employees.



So how'd I do today? Well, I drafted a solid blue and white Merfolk deck. There are a few options when drafting Merfolk but I opted for the more control-oriented version. Basically the deck ties up the ground and wins with islandwalkers (and it doesn't matter if my opponent is playing *Islands*). I was told that my deck was pretty good by R&D developer / Pro Tour winner Matt Place, who graded it a 7.5 or 8 out of 10. He was my first match (also playing Merfolk but with a splash of Faeries), and I walked away victorious. I then defeated another developer / Pro Tour winner, Mike Turian (playing Treefolk—he was from another draft pod but we didn't figure this out before we started playing) before losing 1-2 to web site head honcho / Pro Tour winner Scott Johns (also playing Treefolk). It appears I only play *Lorwyn* with former Pro Tour winners, but as my win percentage was 66%, I'm not going to complain.

I always talk about how we like to swing the pendulum to alter how formats work from year to year. *Lorwyn* draft is quite different from *Time Spiral* draft in that the basic strategies are a little more linear. The card quality is high enough that there is plenty of variance, but *Lorwyn* definitely has more obvious paths to draft. Anyway, if you happen to visit [a place this weekend](#) where side drafts with *Lorwyn* booster drafting happen to be going on, perhaps you might want to give it a try.

I apologize for this little diversion, but I've been told that I never give any reasons to encourage readers to want to work in R&D. (It's snarky comments like this that cause my mailbox to be filled to the brim.) But enough of R&D perks, let's get back to the topic at hand—*Lorwyn* previews.

## Looking in the Mirror

Last week I hinted (or more accurately just outright said) that this week's preview card was my best one yet. This card has a little story, but before I tell it let me first show you the card in question. Then we'll talk. I believe some of you might utter interjections of various kinds upon seeing this card. (Others will just write me nasty emails about how the card sucks – see I'm learning from experience.) Either way, let's get to it.

Click [here](#).

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At this point I'm sure that some of you are saying, "Shapeshifter? That's not one of the eight featured tribes."

No, it is not. It is not *one* of them. It's *all* of them. All shapeshifters in the block share a keyword mechanic called changeling (much the same way that all Kamigawa Samurai had bushido. I could give you the technical description of what exactly changeling means, but I'm not the kind of columnist that explains technical things. Instead I'll give you the layman's version. Changeling means... it's got the **Mistform Ultimus** ability, a.k.a. it's everything. As my article from Changeling Week ([The Times They Are A Changeling](#)) goes into great detail about the origin and reasoning behind the changeling keyword I don't see the reason to rehash it here. Suffice to say that the ninth tribe is really just the first eight tribes stacked on top of one another (albeit with a goofier looking exterior).

Most of the shapeshifters in *Lorwyn* serve as "tribal grease," but for rare I thought it would be cool to make a cycle of flavorful shapeshifters with strange but cool abilities. It turns out that two cards of the cycle got pushed off (the green and red ones—*Morningtide* has them, so have no worry). The white, blue, and black ones are all in this set, and I think they all are pretty cool. You'll have to take my word on the blue and black ones (you know, until you open them in boosters [this Saturday](#)), but this is the white one in all it's glory.

While this card might look a little goofy, be warned that Timmy and Johnny are not the only ones who will be playing this card. Mirror Entity has seen plenty of play in the FFL (Future Future League—development's testing league using future cards). So where did this quirky little card come from? Well, as I said above, I thought it would be cool to have a rare cycle of shapeshifters. The challenge was to find a way to give each color something "in pie" that felt like a shapeshifter. Here's my first pass at the card:

**Saintly Changeling**

1WW

Creature - Shapeshifter

2/2

Changeling (This card has all creature types, even when it isn't in play.)

W: CARDNAME gets +1/+0 or +0/+1 until end of turn.

1WW: Until end of turn, the power and toughness of all creatures in play becomes the power and toughness of CARDNAME.

This design came about because I asked myself, "What does a white shapeshifter look like?" White is able in color to pump its power and toughness, both independently and together, but that change alone didn't seem all that shapeshifter worthy. As I thought about it I realized that I was missing an important piece. I needed to take advantage of one of the key cornerstones of white's philosophy—equality.

You see, white is the color that cares about the welfare of the group (for more on what white means, feel free to check out my column on the philosophy of white, [The Great White Way](#)). As such, white is very focused on keeping things "fair" for everyone. It wants to treat everyone equally. So, instead of changing itself, I thought what if it could change everything else to be like it. I decided to limit the change to power and toughness because if I changed any more I was worried it will feel too **Clone-y** and thus too blue. I gave the card changeling because all shapeshifters in *Lorwyn* have changeling.

This is how the card got turned over to development. While they liked the card, they decided to make a few changes. For starters, they felt the hoop-jumping maneuver of changing yourself to then change everyone else

was unnecessary. Just let the creature change everything. To keep it in check, they added mana to the activation so you couldn't just turn everyone into a 20/20 once you had one more attacker than they had blockers. Because the creature could now more easily change its own stats, they made its base power/toughness smaller. Finally, to play into a changeling theme, they decided to also let the creature turn everyone into changelings. Here's how the next version looked:

```
[Mirroroid]
2W
Creature - Shapeshifter
1/1
Changeling (This card is every creature type, even if it isn't in play.)
X: All creatures become X/X and gain Changeling until end of turn. X
can't be zero.
```

Mirror Entity saw a lot of FFL play. Too much play. The ability to turn all of your opponents' creatures into 1/1s proved to be too good. To solve this, the development team changed the ability to only affect your creatures. Now the ability was about helping your own guys rather than hosing your opponent's. This also allowed them to drop the clunky "X can't be zero" text.

And that's how we ended up with the preview card you saw today.

## And Now for Something Completely Different

One of the reasons I was happy to preview this card today (beside the fact that it's cool) was that I wanted to use it to make a point. While Mirror Entity is tangentially connected to tribal, it's much more of a "stand-alone cool card" than "another piece in the linear puzzle." As I explained in my column on linear and modular design ([Come Together](#)), each side of the spectrum tends to irritate a different portion of the audience. Get too modular and certain players have trouble getting a handhold into what they should be doing. Get too linear and other players complain that R&D is making their decks for them.



Tribal definitely falls on the linear side of the fence, and as such we are sensitive to the fact that the "stop building my deck" contingent are going to get grumpy. This is why we took a number of steps to move *Lorwyn* farther towards the middle than *Onslaught*. By bleeding colors, we give deck builders a lot more options in what they can play. The extra colors also allow more overlap between races in each color allowing hybrid tribal decks to be more viable. We took great care to give each tribe an identity across a spectrum allowing each tribe multiple things to care about. Finally, we made the tribal card type to allow tribal decks to care about other card types beyond creatures.

In short, we used modern design technology to take a popular theme from the past and improve upon it. The tribes in *Lorwyn* are less one-dimensional both in how they feel and in what choices they allow you, the player, to make. *Onslaught* was revolutionary not in how it used tribal but in the fact that it was a theme at all. *Lorwyn* has taken the theme and found much greater design depth. Yes, a Goblin deck will still revolve around Goblins, but the many choices you will get to make will allow a much greater depth of deck design than tribal has ever shown before.

Also, and this is what I was getting at with Mirror Entity, there is plenty in the set that doesn't revolve around tribal. For instance, three of our five new keywords (clash, evoke and hideaway) as well as one of our new card types (planeswalker) have nothing to do with tribal. (Okay evoke and planeswalker do have something to do with creatures but not creature types.) There is a lot in *Lorwyn* that is new and different that isn't locked into the tribal theme. So why do we keep talking about tribal whenever we discuss *Lorwyn*? Because that's the theme of the set. And our research shows us that the vast majority of players are very fond of tribal. (If something isn't liked by the players we tend not to repeat it, especially with such pomp and circumstance.)

This, of course, brings up an interesting question. What sells a set better, a theme or individual cool cards? The answer is that while both contribute to a set's success, the former has a quality that the latter lacks. What is that? The theme is something we can deliver on in every pack. It's something we can make matter in every Limited game. It's something we can sell aggressively because we know you can't not experience it. The problem with selling a set with a particular card is that we have no guarantee you'll ever open that card. Yes, we could push a common, but the nature of trading card games makes the audience care more about the rares.

In addition, it is easier to get more people interested in a theme than in a particular card. Why? Because themes are just much grander than any one individual card. To embrace a theme you have a wide selection of cards to choose from. To embrace a card you merely have that one card.

This all boils down to two messages. Pick the one below that applies to you.

**"I love tribal"** – Then you're in for a good time. *Lorwyn* takes tribal design to the next level. It's richer and more intricate. It creates a stronger tie between flavor and mechanics while also giving the player more choices in how to build it.

**"I do not love tribal"** – I think you will be pleasantly surprised how many interesting cards for Constructed you can find even *not* playing a tribal deck. Yes, Limited is going to revolve around tribal, but we have added more layers to the design to allow players extra variety in how they can build tribal decks even in Limited. Plus, there

are other themes woven into the set that will allow players to occasionally build around something other than tribal.

## The Old College Tribal

Because we work so far ahead, when a set comes out, it feels like the distant past to me. Add to that that I don't always keep up on every change development makes (and I never know the final names), and new sets have much more surprise value to me than you might expect. When I sat down to draft *Lorwyn* today I had some idea what I was in for, but the actual act of drafting and playing with the cards excited me more than I had expected.



*Lorwyn* is a fun set. And it does so many things right. I'm not just talking about design. I feel the development on the set was excellent. The creative work is also top notch. The whole package just comes together beautifully. It's both distinctive yet familiar. It's simple yet deeply layered. And it is a distinctive change from *Time Spiral* block (this isn't meant as a knock to *Time Spiral* block merely an acknowledgement that **Magic** thrives best when it keeps evolving).

I guess I want to end my previews by saying that I feel very proud of this set. And that's not even getting into how *Lorwyn* fits into this year's bigger picture (which as you'll see is quite interesting). I want to encourage you to go to the [prerelease](#) this weekend because I think this will be a fun set to discover in a room full of other people also discovering it. Hopefully the little taste we have given you during the previews will help entice you to check *Lorwyn* out.

Join me next week when I explore how many pieces of the set came to be.

Until then, may your first trip to Lorwyn be a pleasant one.

Mark Rosewater

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Go to your local store for [Lorwyn Release Events](#) October 12-14 for lots of fun activities and to play with the *Lorwyn* set as soon as it goes on sale.

Get a sneak peek at a [Lorwyn Prerelease](#) on September 29-30.

*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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