

## Elementalism

### Evoked, *Lorwyn* Elementals, the metaphysics of the multiverse, and more.

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The year was 1997, and I was as casual a player as they come. My pride and joy was The Elemental Deck, a blue-red deck that featured—you guessed it—Elementals. And not just *some* Elementals, or my *favorite* Elementals. No. The Elemental Deck had The Elementals in it. All of them. In **Magic**. Good, bad, or indifferent.

### Elementally Challenged

As far as I knew, anyway. Back then, it wasn't as easy to determine what cards there were in **Magic**. But to my knowledge, I had the whole crew. Alongside the classic **Earth Elemental**, **Air Elemental**, **Water Elemental**, and **Fire Elemental**, I had some odder elementals. **Fog Elemental**. **Storm Elemental**. That freak the **Wave Elemental**. The surprisingly useful **Flame Elemental**. Even the sneaky **Subterranean Spirit**. **Time Elemental**? No, I had heard about those, but I didn't own one. Something about a clock-covered dragonfly that was exceedingly powerful. *Legends* was a little before my time, so I had only heard ominous whispers of this creature *made from time itself*.

Sexy.

So, The Elementals Deck was missing a few elementals, sure. And, as I was discovering, it was missing an entire color—*Legends* had had a couple of green elementals, and the just-released *Weatherlight* had **Fungus Elemental**. What the heck? Fungus wasn't an *element*. (And critters such as **Aboroth** and **Barishi** weren't considered Elementals at the time. Oracle wha?) Besides, this **Fungus Elemental** thing required you to sacrifice your forests, which seemed terrible. But an elemental was an elemental, and I was already mentally making room for the strangely seductive oddity of **Time Elemental**. So as soon as I got my hands on some **Fungus Elementals**, I added green to the deck and welcomed them in. Good lord, it was terrible. Adding a third color to an already—let's just say *mana-problematic*—deck just made everything worse. I wasn't summoning enormous elementals to stomp my enemies to a fiery/watery/airy/earthy pulp; I was just **Fireballing** something for 1 and then getting overrun with all my cool elementals in my hand and all the wrong lands in play.



But occasionally, every zillionth game or so, The Elemental Deck would do something amazing. It would fight off attackers with fire spells and Walls until I had assembled a full suite of lands, and then it would hand me summonable elementals by the bucketful. I would become an unstoppable elemental mage, a man who had harnessed the power of those fundamental elements of the multiverse, a man capable of sculpting wind and fire into humanoid form and of ordering them to chew, just for my enjoyment, massive gaping holes in those nemeses who had defeated me so many times before. Well done, deck. Bravo, elementals. You done me proud.

(It also had \*cough\* **War Chariot** for a while. For, um, trample. But I took it out because it wasn't an Ice Chariot or a Stone Chariot or whatever. What self-respecting elemental rides around in a *War Chariot*? I know, I know—**War Elemental**. But *Mirrodin* was a long way off.)

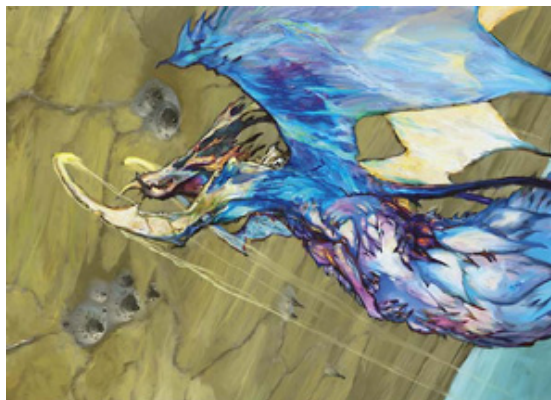
### Elemental Summoning = Power Trip

I'm older now, and I live in Seattle, and I know what a mana curve is. But I still like me an elemental. That feeling of wanting to put my hands out and grab hunks of raw elemental energy and shape it into a willing, devoted servant—that feeling is still with me. I want to summon forth a Bathroom Cleaning Elemental and a Bill Paying Elemental, forged from the essence of choredom itself. I kind of like grocery shopping, but I still wouldn't mind a Bag Carrying Elemental, even if it meant having to planeswalk to the Elemental Plane of Bag Carrying to find a fitting lackey.

And there's something wondrous in the idea that a creature could be made from something as abstract as an element (in the Empedoclean sense). It's a concept that magically takes living, (semi-)intelligent form. What incredible insights such a creature would have! I mean, what would it be like to *talk* to the essence of **Dawn**, or **Dread**, or **Bag Carrying** itself? Would we even understand what **Dread** thinks in a given day? Or would it be all too familiar, this condensation of our fears into a living creature—would peering into its mind be like peering into that

darkest place in our own, away from which we continually divert our conscious attention in order to preserve our grip on sanity?

Lorwyn's elementals are answers to just these kinds of questions. What would it be like if an abstract idea were [poured into a living mold](#)? If the retributive wrath of nature took beastly form, [what would it be like](#)?



## But That's Not an Element!

Empedocles, a Greek philosopher who lived in the fifth century B.C., proposed that all the matter we see around us is actually composed of varying mixtures of four basic elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Aristotle, and some Buddhist traditions long before him, added a fifth element, aether—which to them meant the void, the stuff that hung out between the stars and planets. The Chinese, even earlier, had the world broken down still differently: into earth, fire, water, wood, and metal. As it turns out, subatomic physics is way weirder than any of those thinkers could have imagined—but we do still talk about elements and the fundamental particles (or the collapsing-waveform quantum whatever) that make up reality.

*A well-known scientist (some say it was the philosopher Bertrand Russell) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the Earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the centre of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy.*

*At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise."*

*The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, "What is the tortoise standing on?"*

*"You're very clever, young man, very clever," said the old lady. "But it's turtles all the way down!"*

—Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*



So what are the fundamental elements of the Multiverse? White, blue, black, red, and green? Mana and aether? Something to do with the planeswalker spark? Baloths all the way down? The truth is that it's just not that simple. In a universe made of magic, the world just doesn't succumb to being reduced to formulae the way ours often can. The multiverse is a metaphysical wilderness, vast and incomprehensibly diverse from one plane to the next. Rules that apply in one world don't hold in the next world over, or sometimes even the next day. Fundamental truths only exist so long as a being with enough mana and willpower don't come along and give them a thrashing. Constants *aren't*. That's **Magic**, baby. Ontological monists need not apply.

Which brings us to Lorwyn.

## Elements of Dream

On Lorwyn, abstract entities such as hopes, fears, dreams, and nightmares are just as real as the grass and the trees. A feeling of hope, for example, can lurk in the heart of a single kithkin, or it can manifest into a glorious, shining creature—an elemental of hope.

Dreams are a commodity on Lorwyn. (You'll hear much more about this when we investigate the flavor of the faerie tribe.) Dreams can be harvested, stored, and delivered—and sometimes even stolen and rearranged. The visions of sleeping giants are especially rich currency among the fae. It's just an example to show you what counts, on Lorwyn, as a "fundamental

### Why "Evoke"?

**Magic** already had provoke and convoke as keywords—so why is *Lorwyn's* Elemental-related keyword mechanic called "evoke"?

The evoke keyword was chosen to generate a particular flavor, a particular Vorthosian state of mind. It was important to me that the keyword didn't just name the effect of "it comes into play for a second and then goes away again," the literal mechanical result of the mechanic. I wanted it to give a sense of calling to these ethereal essences, of humbling oneself in asstance for

particle"—as an element.

So, where dreams and aspirations are elements, dream-beings and aspiration-monsters are the elementals. Empedocles, eat your heart out.

This has some odd implications, to say the least. Elementals only exist insofar as do the elements of which they're composed. Sometimes elementals on Lorwyn vary in prevalence just like the abstract idea underlying them. If elves wage war on giantkind, then many-clawed elementals of warfare and strife can be seen with greater frequency. If merrows launch an expedition to the murky Deep Meanders of their river system, then soggy elementals of the sunken unknown appear. On the other hand, if bloodshed keeps to a minimum across the plane, elementals of violent death may themselves die out—at least, until their time comes again.

the sake of a visitation from one of them. It's the sense that the elemental appears, grants a power befitting the element it represents, and then departs—back into the primal beyond. You don't just plop an elemental into play and then bin it; you *evoke* its fundamental nature. Sometimes you want to commit large amounts of mana to summon the whole elemental, complete with its effects on the world. But sometimes you just want a moment of its presence—the chance to bask in its awe-inspiring grace for a short time, and benefit therefrom—before it passes on. The perfect word for that is *evoke*.

Under normal circumstances, an elemental is as wild as a Montana mustang. They're forces of nature; nothing tames the elementals just like nothing tames grains of gravel, or grief, or gravity. But of course, planeswalkers are a different story; with enough mana and effort, they can not only call on the *essences* of greater elementals, but also summon the elementals themselves, along with the power they bring. (That's the vibe of the *evoke* keyword—check out the sidebar for more.)



## Elementals as a Tribe

In addition to being nicely flavorful for a storybook world, the Elemental creature type served a practical function in the creative design of Lorwyn. The Creative Team knew that *Lorwyn* was going to be a thoroughly tribal set, that all of its creatures would fall into one of the "creature type matters" tribes. But most of the races conceived for the set—kithkin, elves, goblins, merfolk, faeries—were small, and most of them lacked flying. The Creative Team knew that design and development would likely create creatures—such as huge fatties, or flyers—that didn't fit comfortably into any of those tribal boxes. A 5/5 blue ground creature, for example, would be too huge to be a Merfolk, and couldn't be a Faerie due to its inability to fly. The Elemental type provided a way for *Lorwyn* to cover those creatures of unusual or hefty profile without violating the set's tribal-matters theme.



As a bonus, doing this fleshed out a tribe that had very little tribal support in the past, one I was particularly fond of. *Lorwyn* is full of ways to make all kinds of Elemental tribal decks; they occur across all five colors and many shapes and sizes. The funky twist is that the Elemental tribe in *Lorwyn* also supports a humanoid race centered in red.

## Flamekin

We first saw "flame-kin" on the plane of Ravnicā—humanoid fire elementals who wear armor and use weapons. (Note the hyphen.)



We called Lorwyn's red-aligned humanoid Elementals "salamands" at first, a nod to the salamander, a lizardlike monster of mythology that lives in fire. But that never had the right ring to it. But we didn't like simply calling them flame-kin, hyphenated, because it looked odd next to all the kithkin, unhyphenated, in the set. Yet we worried about the potential confusion of spelling it "flamekin," when *Ravnica* had established the hyphenated spelling first. Eventually we just removed the hyphen and told *Ravnica* to suck it up.

Red already had a humanoid race in boggarts, Lorwyn's red-and-black-aligned goblin race. But having every small red creature be a Goblin would tilt the tribes out of whack, and would just be too monotonous. Besides, flamekin bring a kind of blazing, passionate counterpoint to both the id-driven boggarts and the pastoral setting of Lorwyn.

Flamekin are beings of fire and mutable stone whose strong, intense passions drive them to wander the world. The flame of their bodies burns magically cool, but they can choose to burn hot at will. Other races are wary of flamekin and their fickle, fiery natures, a reputation that a group of flamekin called the [Brighthearth](#) are working to change. The [Brighthearth](#) serve as emissaries of flamekin goodwill to other races, performing useful tasks that require fire, such as smithing. On the other hand, one named Vessifrus is an upstart looking to inspire rebellion among the flamekin. One day he may lead an uprising against the tyranny of the beauty-obsessed elves.



Flamekin have an almost spiritual connection to the more mysterious greater elementals of Lorwyn. Flamekin regard them as totems or demigods that inspire their creative impulses—or frustrate their understanding. In the [Lorwyn novel](#) by Cory Herndon and Scott McGough, a flamekin called Ashling is tormented by her relationship to an unknown elemental essence.

Elementals are as powerful in *Lorwyn* as they ever were, and just as fun as back in Alpha. They still ooze with the flavor of an abstract essence come alive, and they still give you that power-trip of summoning a fiery henchman to do your bidding. I think you'll find that *Lorwyn* takes those feelings in a new direction, and gives you about a bazillion more tools to build decks around them. If you'll excuse me, I think it's about time to go update The Elemental Deck.

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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.

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