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# And the Rest

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Making Magic  
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Welcome to my three hundredth week writing Making Magic. Okay, okay, one could argue it's my two hundredth and ninety ninth week as I didn't technically have a column the first week as [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) started on a Tuesday (It was January 2, 2002 for all you [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) trivia buffs) but I wrote something that first week and, well, I count it. Longtime readers know that three hundred weeks means it's time for my next recap of my last hundred columns. Longtime fans would also know that that column would be entitled "Three Hundred and Counting," and as this one's called "And The Rest," something's amiss. You're right. I decided that using the Monday between *Lorwyn's* prerelease and *Lorwyn's* release to talk about something other than *Lorwyn* seemed wrong. What this means is that two weeks from now you'll get "Three Hundred and Counting." Today, you get more *Lorwyn*.

## Marking One in the *Lorwyn* Column

All right, now that *Lorwyn* is finally public knowledge, (and please check out the [sortable spoiler](#) in today's feature slot if you haven't had a chance to see the set—and want to.) it's time to start talking about how we designed all the different pieces of the set. We have two new card types and five new keywords so there's plenty of juicy stuff to dig into. Where should we start? How about we begin with the element that got [its own minisite](#)?

## Planeswalkers

It seems only apropos to start with the planeswalkers, as the story of their design is probably the most complex of any piece of *Lorwyn*. I already talked about their origin a little in my article on the planeswalker minisite, [Planeswalking the Walk](#) (if you don't know to look for it it's a little hidden), but I only touched upon the tip of the iceberg.

The story begins... What? Hold on a second. All right, I've just been informed by someone who managed to gain access to [a column of mine from the future](#) that there is going to be a Planeswalker Week. If I tell the design story now I'm not going have much to say then. I guess I'll have to skip this today. But we have six more things to talk about, so it shouldn't be a big deal.

## Tribal

This is the other new card type. Okay, perhaps "new" isn't technically accurate. There was a "timeshifted" card from the future in *Future Sight* ([Bound in Silence](#)) that made use of the tribal type, so from a rules standpoint the card type has existed for months now. For that matter, there was one future-shifted card that mentioned the planeswalker type in its reminder text, but I doubt anyone saw it. One, it was in reminder text. Who reads that? And two, it was on a [goofy Lhurgoyf variant](#) I made. What's the chance of that nutty thing seeing any play?

While the tribal story may not be as complex as planeswalkers it definitely had its share of twist and turns. I never realized that the vein in ([Magic Rules Manager / My Arch-Nemesis](#)) Mark Gottlieb's head could get that big. Anyway, the story begins... What? One moment.

...  
That was Aaron Forsythe (former [Latest Developments](#) author / Director of [Magic R&D](#) / my boss). It turns out he's writing the feature article for next week about his experiences as the lead designer of *Lorwyn*. And it seems that the trials and tribulations of the tribal card type feature heavily in one of the stories he was going to talk about. He's asked me if I wouldn't mind letting him tell the story. Okay, I guess no card type stories from me this week. But that's fine. The set has five keywords. I'm sure there's plenty of juicy stuff to share.

## Clash

There are not a lot of keywords that represent actions rather than abilities. (I know there's regenerate and scry; probably a few more that aren't coming to me.) So how did *Lorwyn* rack up its own keyworded verb? I'm glad you asked because it's an interesting tale. The story begins... What? Just a sec. So it appears that Devin already told this story last Friday when he [reviewed a clash card](#). I guess we'll be skipping this one as well.

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## Changeling

Yep, we keyworded the **Mistform Ultimus** ability. It's interesting how much feedback this has generated on the boards. It's funny because the same issues that are being talked about now were brought up when I first pitched the idea. In fact, I don't think many people realize the importance that changeling has to the structure of the set. We've had to skip some stories, but this baby will definitely make up for it. The story begins... What? You've got to be kidding me. Apparently there's also a Changeling Week coming up. Really? A Changeling Week? What is everyone going to talk about? I've got my story... which I guess I have to save. Let's move on.

## Hideaway

Here's a mechanic that slipped through the cracks during the preview weeks. So how did one rare cycle get a keyword? Well, as you'll see, it didn't start out as a rare cycle. The story begins... What?

...

Aaron, you're killing me. I gave you tribal. You want hideaway too? Yes, it is a good story. That's why I wanted to tell it. Fine, you can have it. But that's it. You get nothing more. Let's move on.

## Champion

Has anyone told this story yet? No. Is there a Champion Week coming up? My sources say no. Aaron, are you dying to tell the story of the champion mechanic? No. This one's all mine? I can tell this one? I've got dibs? Good.

Many trading card games have "evolution" mechanics. The idea behind evolution is that players can play a creature card which essentially changes (a.k.a., evolves) a creature in play into a new improved version. Because this limitation is significant, it allows the designers to create cards that seem very powerful for their cost. In addition, evolution mechanics have proved very flavorful. So much so that just about any TCG that Wizards of the Coast designs always decides during initial design whether or not it wants evolutions. Matt Place is best known to all of you as a **Magic** developer, but before he took that role he was very involved in the design and development of non-**Magic** TCGs.

The next piece of this puzzle involves coffee. You see, Seattle is well known for its coffee. Starbucks, for example, started in Seattle. As such, there are more coffee places in a ten-minute drive radius from Wizards than you can shake a doughnut at. Bill Rose, the VP of R&D and frequent **Magic** designer (as the set design lead he just handed *Rock*, the fall set for 2008, over to development) is a huge coffee drinker. Because of this, many meetings involving Bill take place at a nearby coffee house. One day during one of our trips for coffee, Bill Rose was riding with Matt Place. During this ride, the two talked about random things. One point of discussion was Matt's disbelief that **Magic** had never done an evolution mechanic. Matt felt it was a no-brainer. When they got back from coffee that day, Bill walked by my desk and said, "I think Peanut [Lorwyn's codename] should think about doing an evolution mechanic."

I wasn't surprised by the comment because the issue had come up numerous times before, and not always from Matt. *Lorwyn* was actually a pretty good choice for it as I felt the mechanic wanted to go into a tribal block. But wait, I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's take a few steps back and look at the thought process we went through while thinking about evolution.

The key to understanding any mechanic is to start off with the mechanic's non-negotiables. That is, what must the mechanic have to be the mechanic? Here's what I felt evolution needed:

1. **It needed to be on a creature.** The entire idea behind the mechanic was that you had a cool creature with a much lower cost than normal.
2. **It needed to replace a creature.** Another important part of the mechanic was that one creature evolved into another. (You'll note that this "non-negotiable" didn't stick; see below.)

That's it. That's all I felt the mechanic had to have. Note the "had." I still believed there were important restrictions for the mechanic, but they were more prejudices I had when thinking about the mechanic and less qualities that were defined by what the mechanic was. Here are my additional issues:

1. **The creature could only evolve a subset of creatures.** Part of the flavor that I initially felt was important was that these creatures couldn't just evolve any creature (yes, I understand this is a bit ironic now but I'll get to how we got to where we did in a moment). Because of this, I felt it was important to have a restriction. The most logical restriction, as the mechanic was based more on flavor than anything else, was to use creature types. An upgraded Goblin (I initially called the ability "upgrade") felt like it could evolve any Goblin and still work flavorwise. This is, by the way, is why I felt *Lorwyn* was a good fit. To me evolution and tribal went hand in hand.
2. **The creature had to be able to evolve more than one creature.** There are a number of trading card games, almost all built around existing licenses, that have created cards that only work on one specific character. As a designer, I've never been a fan of this as it greatly reduces the modularity of the cards. I much prefer to have cards, even ones with restrictions, work with as many cards as possible. This just leads to more interesting deck and game decisions.



3. **The mechanic had to have some fundamental difference from Auras and Equipment.** In many ways, Auras and Equipment do much of what evolution does. If we were going to make a mechanic out of evolution we needed to find some extra twist to make it unique.
4. **We needed to solve the card disadvantage problem.** One of the ongoing plights of Auras (one that Equipment fixed) is that they have a huge negative as they have card disadvantage built into their design. For those unfamiliar with the term "card disadvantage," what I mean is they easily allow your opponent to trade one card (a Terror, a Shock, etc.) for two of your cards (the Aura and the creature it enchanted). This drawback makes it very hard to make worthwhile Auras. It's a problem we've been struggling with since Alpha.

One of the best tricks to solve a problem, be it card design or just any kind of creative problem solving, is to pit two of your restrictions against one another. I chose to take #3 and #4. We want to differentiate from Auras and we don't want to have card disadvantage. What if we separated evolution from Auras by taking away the card disadvantage? How do we do that? Let's just take away the ability to two-for-one them. How? Don't put the evolution on the first creature. Put it into play instead of the first creature. What do we do with the old one? Remove it from the game, and here's the most important part—have it return if the evolved creature leaves play. The first two issues, meanwhile, were solved by using tribal as the restriction.

The finished version of evolution (a.k.a. champion) ended up mechanically very close to design's first execution. The big change turned out to be flavor. Creative felt the idea of creatures turning into the evolved version didn't make a lot of sense given the amount of flexibility we wanted mechanically. Elementals, for instance, represent two completely different concepts in *Lorwyn* (both the humanoid flamekins and the greater elementals which represented concepts taking life). There would be no way to flavor an elemental upgrade that made sense for both halves. Thus, upgrade changed to champion. For an explanation of what that means, see Doug Beyer's article [Champions of Goldmeadow](#).

A few other changes along the way:

- In the original proposal, we also tried having upgrade cards that worked on lands. One card, for example, would turn a forest into a nonbasic land that produced green in addition to having a second ability. Playtesting showed that these cards just weren't worth the mind space they took up (trying to get players understand why lands were replacing other lands).
- Early versions of upgrade were made for common creatures. This was due to the fact that there were just more upgrade creatures in general. To make them more special and to keep the power level up, development chose to restrict the mechanic to uncommon and rare.
- As part of development's restriction, it was decided to have all the uncommon champion creatures be tied to Shapeshifters, thus working on any creature (the original version of upgrade cued off of the upgrade creature's creature type; the flavor of Shapeshifters championing anything was kept even when the template changed). This obviously flies in the face of the idea that the mechanic not work on any creature, but playtesting showed that while champion cards worked well in Constructed it was hard to make tribal-specific ones shine in Limited formats as too much had to line up. Too often in Limited games, you'd get the cool upgrade creature but not enough creatures to make it worthwhile to play.
- The initial version of upgrade, like the final version, was able to work on anything that was that creature type regardless of whether it was a creature. A Goblin upgrade, for example, could work on a Goblin enchantment or a Goblin artifact. Then during development this was changed because the team felt that changing noncreatures felt too strange and didn't make any sense from a flavor perspective. Design countered that we were trying very hard to make *Lorwyn* different from *Onslaught*, and one of the big ways to do this was to have the tribal card type make players think about creature types differently. Upgrading a noncreature was one example of how tribal (the theme, not the card type) worked differently this time around. So it was changed back. And in the end, the creative team stepped up to the plate and provided flavor that did make sense for championing noncreatures (again, see Doug's article [Champions of Goldmeadow](#)).

All in all, I'm quite happy with how champion played out. I feel that the mechanic captured much of what we set out to do while still keeping enough interesting play value.

## Evoked

There were a lot of interesting design stories that I couldn't tell today, but luckily this is one I could. While evoke is an interesting mechanic as printed in *Lorwyn* it's nowhere close to how strange it was when I first pitched the idea. Let me begin by showing you a loose mock-up of an actual *Lorwyn* card based on the layout I first presented. I'll show it to you first and then walk you through it:



I'll assume the first thought of many of you is "Huh?" Let me walk you through what I originally pitched. The card in question was an instant (a Tribal Instant – Elemental to be precise). If you paid its animate cost (that's what evoke was originally called) then the card turned into a creature as it resolved. And by "turn into a creature" I also mean it stopped being an instant. I thought this sounded awesome—instants and sorceries that you could "kick" into being creatures. It seemed innovative, cool, and very grokkable. Just one small problem. But rather than use my words, why don't I show you the letter written in response to the idea by Rules Manager Mark Gottlieb? This is verbatim the email he wrote to the development team (this idea was created after the file had been handed off to development). Mark uses the term manifest because by the time he looked at it the name had changed (it started as "animate," then changed to "manifest," then to "discount," then to "expedite," and finally to "evoke." I have no idea why some mechanics keep changing their names while others stick the whole way through even to print).

From: Gottlieb, Mark  
Sent: Friday, November 03, 2006 2:53 PM  
To: Low, Devin; Turian, Michael  
Subject: Manifest notes

(Here are my notes on manifest so far)

A card with a creature type and a power & toughness printed on it - but it's an instant, not a creature. [Assume for the rest of this document that "instant" means "instant or sorcery."] A card with two text boxes but one type line. Issues so far:

-- This would mean that instants now have the characteristics of power and toughness.

-- This effect tries to put an instant into play. The keyword says to put it in play "as a creature." The rules say that if an instant would come into play, instead it doesn't. What wins here? Either this is OK (manifest changes the card's type before the rule's prohibition kicks in), or it isn't (the rule's prohibition kicks in before manifest's type-changing effect even gets a chance to work), but I have no idea which.

-- If the latter is true, the ability would have to turn the card into a creature while it's still on the stack resolving. Then it would continue to resolve as a creature spell and thus enter play as a creature. That might be a better option regardless.

-- With the above card, we can't have a creature in play that has the static ability "Destroy target land" printed on it. Therefore, we'd need to implement rules that dictate that in certain zones, only text box A is "real" and text box B "doesn't exist," and in other zones, only text box B is "real" and text box A "doesn't exist." We'd have to come up with some way to refer to the two text boxes in the rules (and, probably, on

the cards).

-- This has interaction issues with Momentary Blink. I believe the rules already cover this and the card would remain removed from the game.

-- This has interaction issues with Cytoshape. If manifest winds up being a "comes into play as" ability, it's possible that the rules (such as they are) that govern copy versions of Primal Clay and Molten Sentry would also govern this, meaning the Cytoshaped creature would become a copy of the creature version of the manifest card. However, I've heard from Rules Gurus that those rules don't really work as they stand.

[THERE WAS SOME QUESTION ABOUT THIS AT THE TIME, BUT GOTTLIEB ASSURES ME THAT EVERYTHING WORKS JUST FINE. -MARO]

If this plan doesn't help here, then Cytoshape would result in an instant in play. We'd need to create a new SBE [State Based Effect] saying that an instant in play is put into its owner's graveyard.

-- This has interaction issues with Clone. Again, if manifest winds up being a "comes into play as" ability, perhaps the rules result in Clone copying the creature version of the manifest card. But if not, Clone results in an instant trying to come into play from the stack and being forced to remain on the stack forever. We'd need to modify the "instants can't come into play rule" to say that if an instant would come into play from any zone other than the stack, it remains in its current zone, but if an instant would come into play from the stack, it's put into its owner's graveyard (which is what the Aura rule now says, due to Copy Enchantment).

-- This has interaction issues with Twincast. The copy of the spell turns into a creature either as it resolves or after it resolves, and this object is then put into play. However, I believe it's no longer a copy of a spell at this point (is it?), so 420.5j doesn't cause it to cease to exist. The object in play isn't a token creature - it's just a copy - so we'd need some sort of new rule to cover this. (An object in play that's neither a card nor a token ceases to exist?)

Why can't we do this?

Crushing Essence

3G

Creature - Elemental

5/5

Trample

When CARDNAME comes into play, destroy target land.

Keeper 3 (When this creature comes into play, sacrifice it unless you pay its keeper cost.) As far as I can tell, the tradeoffs look like this:

Cons:

-- The keyword reads like a negative

-- We lose the wacky card frame (though it's not all that wacky until you start reading it)

-- This doesn't do something we've never done before (though that's what planeswalkers are for)

-- We lose some minor interactions (Mystical Teachings, Scrivener, etc.)

Pros:

-- We get more creatures into the tribal set (um, players liked Legions)

-- We lose the wacky card frame (which, IMO, is unintelligible once you start reading it) and the resultant confusion issues

-- The cost-to-size ratio looks good (that's a bit of a balance to "the keyword reads like a negative")

-- We get 99% of the functionality without incurring scenarios players can't handle (such as manifest & Twincast) and needing to implement a raft of arcane rules to cover them (such as "An object in play that's neither a card nor a token ceases to exist" - a rule I think would be necessary to handle the manifest & Twincast interaction)

-- This card is actually common

-- We gain some minor interactions (Momentary Blink, Zombify, etc.)

Basically, if we can get 99% of the desired result without baffling the players and gutting the rulebook, why wouldn't we do so? R&D keeps telling me that they wish they'd have printed the "simpler" Stalking Yeti - the one that does most of what Stalking Yeti does but doesn't confuse the players.

Or, for another example, we wouldn't print Krajenta's "ethereal" mechanic on a creature when we could just give it 1 toughness. We'd lose some fringe interactions, but we'd also avoid needless confusion. What's

different here?

[GOTTLIEB IS REFERRING TO A DESIGN BY ONE OF THE GREAT DESIGNER SEARCH CANDIDATES. YOU CAN SEE IT [HERE](#). -MARO]

Are we so desperate that we need to be arcane purely for the sake of arcaneness? That's the kind of thing that backfires. Arcaneness for the sake of inspiration works (see: split cards, Time Stop, Mindslaver), but those blazed truly new ground we couldn't cover any other way. Planeswalkers fit that category. Manifest does not.

I'll keep working on manifest, but the list of rules headaches and quandaries I've compiled so far is mind-boggling for 5 commons and 5 uncommons. (Let me know if you want to see it.)

Mark

For those that might have scanned the letter, let me recap. The rules are fine with having permanents. The rules are fine with having nonpermanents. But mixing the two on the same card, even if they change between the two and are never both at the same time, causes mega-rules headaches. Above are the interactions that dawned to Gottlieb off the top of his head. They were meant to represent far more other issues that would come up once he and the Rules Gurus (the people who help him look over the rules issues) spent some energy on the problem.

I often talk about how design hits snags when rules get involved. Because I'm always telling the story from the vantage point of the designers it's easy to see the Rules Manager as the enemy trying to keep us from doing cool stuff (all right, me always referring to Mark as my Arch-Enemy might not help this perception either). But in reality the Rules Manager is an important check to the design process. Things being done "outside of the box" when a very close "inside of the box" answer exists need to be called out. Sometimes design pushes back (check out Aaron's story on tribal in next Monday's feature for such an example), but sometimes, actually most of the time, design needs to listen. It's also important to note that Gottlieb didn't say we couldn't do it but rather that we shouldn't. He ended the letter by saying he'd do the extra work needed to figure out how to do it if design and development wanted to proceed.

One of the great tensions between design and the rules is that design wants to do things in ways we haven't before while rules wants to do things in the way we have done things before. The phrase "Mark, we already have a way to do this in the game" comes up a lot. While I imply this often I don't think I come out and say it enough so let me do this now. **Magic** design is a collaborative process. We don't work in a bubble. Our job isn't to just do what we want. We have to make things work in a way that addresses all the facets of the game, including the parts that make it run smoothly. Having innovative ideas that don't mesh with the rest of the game isn't, in the end, fun. Design has to respect this.

So how do I feel out about how evoke ended up? Pretty good. Functionality is pretty close to what I originally created. The biggest loss was perception. I feel my original version looks sexier but also is much more confusing. Also, by wording it as we did we make the mechanic sound more like a negative than a positive. Rather than make your temporary thing become permanent (and a permanent no less), you get make your permanent thing become something temporary. Perception is important, but as *Lorwyn* has plenty of splashy mechanics I felt it was okay for evoke to be a fun mechanic to use that players can learn to appreciate as they play it.



## The End of the Three-Hour Tour

I hope today's column let you get a little more insight into some of the design (and development) issues that went into creating *Lorwyn*. Once all the stories are finally public I think you'll get a better sense of how much time and energy went into making all the pieces of *Lorwyn*. It was a complex set to design (and develop) but I'm really happy with our finished product. The more I play it around the office (we had our employee Prerelease last week, not to mention the few drafts I've gotten in) the more I'm energized by how the set came together. There is a lot of layering to the design and I plan to spend some future weeks talking about some of the finer points.

One of those "future weeks," by the way, is next week, so come back and I'll walk you through some of the nuts and bolts of how we created the foundation for the set.

Until then, may you learn to appreciate the value of having your ideas challenged.

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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