

Bog is for Boggart

Learn the ins and outs of *Lorwyn's* race of goblins.

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Has Taste the Magic traveled through some sort of time rift? Has the server clock on [magicthegathering.com](#) gone all glitchy? Are there goblins in the server architecture? No! Taste the Magic is settling into its new home, Wednesdays at 12:00 a.m., 11 p.m. Central! But I'm glad you brought up the glitches and goblins, for that is relevant to today's discussion.



Your car won't crank. Your milk's randomly gone sour. Your TiVo recorded the wrong channel. Four cards from your deck are missing. The last slice of German chocolate cake that you *totally* had dibs on is now a scant trace of crumbs, both delicious and suspicious.

I hate to tell you this, friend. But you've probably got boggarts.

Boggarts in Folklore

The *Lorwyn* setting draws inspiration from the folklore of the British Isles. In that source material, a boggart is described as a mischievous household meddler, sort of a more malicious version of an elf or brownie. That isn't much to go on, especially since those terms can mean a lot of things. I've [mentioned before](#) that in the source mythology, terms like "spirit," "elf," "goblin," and "faerie" are often used and/or translated interchangeably. Years of research have sought to determine what was meant in old stories of creepy forest folk; did the author mean a spirit, in the sense of a restless soul from a person who died? Did he mean one of the fairy folk, a supernatural creature of whimsy and mischief? Or did he just mean a grimy, eccentric old human hermit, possibly with some unfortunate mental illness that caused him to be exiled into the woods in the first place? Or did the author just not know what to call the beings responsible for running off with his four copies of *Wort*, *Boggart Auntie*, and so he made up a description of a goblin based on his neighbor's bratty children? (Those brats.) There are even stories that muddle the distinctions between faeries and Christian angels—faeries as divine guardian spirits. Many literary scholars have found that, of course, the stories change from town to town and teller to teller, and that the distinctions between such folklore critters were hazy at best.

In contrast, as the [Grand Creature Type Update](#) makes abundantly clear, these distinctions are *paramount* in **Magic**, especially now as tribal mechanics are taking center stage. It would not be cool to play out a *Scion of Oona* onto your kitchen table, and then get into a long discussion with your friends about whether it gives all dead people +1/+1, because faeries are, in some stories, "mischievous spirits."

Similarly, when we commissioned **Magic** artists to illustrate boggart cards, we first made sure they would have a crystal-clear vision of what we meant by "boggart." We didn't tell our artists, "Go look up what a boggart is on Wikipedia, and then paint one holding a torch, okay?" Because then we'd have seen everything under the sun coming out of those FedEx boxes from the artists, including things that looked like faeries, things that looked like elves, and things that looked like kithkin. And trolls. And dwarves. And moggs and akki, probably. And can I get an ouphe up in here? So, our first job was to lock down the "boggart look" in the style guide.



"I don't give +1/+1 to just any old thing."

Goblins are one of **Magic's** most flexible races. I think of them like Earth's dogs—sometimes they're wee and flat-faced, like [my boss's Boston terrier](#); sometimes they're enormous and brutish, like my aunt's Great Dane. I'm not sure if goblins have particularly elastic DNA, if they're naturally well-suited to diverse environments, or if they just reproduce like *Drosophila*. The main point is that they're adaptable, so they thrive just about anywhere that has red mana.



Moggs
(Rath)



Akki
(Kamigawa)



Krark-Clan goblins
(Mirrodin)

(But aren't goblins black-aligned in this setting? Partly, yes. There are more black boggarts in *Lorwyn* than red ones, and they have a "it's good when you sacrifice me" mechanical identity inspired by their partial alignment with black. But boggarts definitely have a chaotically red soul.)

Lorwyn's race of goblins are called boggarts. That's pronounced "BOG-gurt"—the first syllable rhymes with "hog" (and, as we'll see in a minute, many of them do actually live in bogs). It's *not* like "Humphrey BOH-gart." Now you know—and knowing is half the battle. (The other half is fighting people!)

Boggarts have greater diversity of morphology than other planes' races and sub-clans of goblins. Some of them have curving horns; some of them have stubby ones or none at all. Some of them have long snouts or goatlike muzzles. Some have broad, floppy ears; some have the sharp pointies. Their skin varies from green to blue to beige to purple to red. Why the variety? Well, this gave a lot of freedom to the artists to come up with these mischief-prone goblins, and also kept the boggart look from getting stale. As you know, *Lorwyn* is a heavily tribal set. By my count, there are 40 cards in *Lorwyn* that either are boggarts (have Goblin in the type line) or have boggarts depicted in their art (like the victims getting swatted away in the art of [Battlewand Oak](#)). Without their morphological differences, your eyeballs would start rebelling after that many gobliny profiles.



Boggart Warrens and Aunties

The *Lorwyn* style guide is packed with flavorful factoids about boggarts. Boggarts are organized into warrens, which spend most of their time exploring (also known as: trespassing on the lands of other races) or finding food (also known as: stealing food from the lands of other races).

There's the Stinkdrinker warren, known for its stockpile of stolen goods, and its boggarts' penchant for sneaking past even giants to steal their prizes. There's the Squeaking Pie warren, known for its culinary adventurousness—they bake mice and other delectables into their pies, and will go to any lengths to find bizarre new recipes and ingredients. There's the Mudbutton warren, a particularly chaotic and loud warren that appreciates a good party—even if comes at the expense of a few of their members. And there's the Frogtosser warren, a group of boggarts so emotionally changeable that the other warrens think them insane. You'll see some of these words in card names and flavor text for the set; their tone is on the whimsical side, which is a little strange for **Magic**, but it was important to us that we drive home the lighthearted feel of the setting.



Boggart warrens are led by nominal leaders called Aunties. The Auntie is usually the oldest boggart in the warren, and is usually female (some are male, yet are still called "Auntie"). The Auntie knows many tales, like fables, that they tell to educate their warren, pass on crucial boggart teachings, and adjudicate disputes. The most famous Auntie fables are about Auntie Grub, a folk hero to the boggarts and probably a real ancestor. Auntie Grub's tales are particularly helpful for informing young boggarts about racial enemies, dangerous predators, poisonous plants and fungus, and the like.

Yep, although it's an idyllic, pastoral world, Lorwyn still has its dangers. And boggarts tend to find them all, due to their curious nature.

Sensory Curiosity

Boggarts are collectors of sensation. While they aren't particularly intelligent thinkers, they are extremely *perceptive*, in that they *perceive* a *lot*. Their senses are intense: if we were to have a neurosurgeon look in on their brains, we'd probably find that the nerves from their sensory organs lead directly into their pleasure centers. Boggarts can never get enough novelty, which gives rise to behavior of exploring and stealing. During their travels through kithkin territory, if they smell delicious pie resting on a windowsill, they'll steal it and bring it back to the warren. If they spot a shiny stone in the river, they'll grab it and obsess over it all the way back to the warren. Consequently, their homes can appear like junkyards, full of trinkets and prizes they collected during their jaunts. And other races see them as mischievous thieves. But boggarts' kleptomania is largely accidental. They only want to get their grubby fingers onto treasures, for the novelty of sensation it brings. And they don't have a traditional concept of ownership.

About the only law in boggart culture, in fact, is the pressure to share new sensations with others of their kind. A boggart that refuses to share—a hoarder—will be cast out of boggart society for the sin of keeping a new treasure to himself. Since boggarts are so social and convivial among their own, exile is considered a terrible sentence.



Boggart Habitats

As boggarts are black-red in *Lorwyn*, they are associated with Lorwyn's mountains and swamps. A swamp in Lorwyn is as flush with life as any other place in the setting, so boggarts are always surrounded by creepy crawlies. When you think "swamp" here, think "marsh" or "wetland." It's a shallow, verdant, freshwater lowland that supports reeds, cattails, and pond lilies.



Boggarts make simple hovels and shacks on the hills of peat and boulders between the marshwater pools. Some are just piles of sticks leaning against a hollow in a bog-rooted stump. Others are more elaborate hideouts built to house greater numbers of treasures.



Boggart hovels, both humble and relatively grand; Auntie's Hovel art by Wayne Reynolds

A Tar Tale

The *Lorwyn* style guide had an entire Tale of Auntie Grub in it, composed by Wizards of the Coast writer and editor Jennifer Clarke-Wilkes. Unfortunately there was no room in flavor text to repeat an entire Tale of Auntie Grub, but I wanted to get a little of that flavor into the cards, and found an opportunity on the cards **Tarfire** (which

some know as "Goblin Shock" or "Tarmogoyf Pump Spell") and **Tar Pitcher** (which, in play, is a Goblin that **Shocks**). Those two cards were already strongly linked in flavor: they have before-and-after art painted by Omar Rayyan, a close mechanical tie (2 points of gobliny damage, coming right up), and related names.



Their flavor text, taken together, creates a little story about a goat, some burning tar, and a sensory experience involving the famous Auntie Grub that boggarts still talk about to this day. I'm excited whenever I can generate that kind of payoff for the amazing detail found in the style guide; more often than not, there is just not enough empty space below the rules text of cards to communicate all the ideas that were generated for the set.

Family Resemblance

Boggarts are unusually greedy for sensation and surprisingly respectful of tradition, but in essence, they're goblins. Just like goblin species from other planes, they raid, they ravage, and they reproduce. When *Lorwyn* was first being designed, boggarts (then called "Peanut goblins," as "Peanut" was *Lorwyn*'s code-name) had a lot of mechanics that had to do with "messing with your stuff," to represent the flavor of boggarts as mischievous gremlins. They would keep your lands tapped, switch control of things, and annoying things of that nature. As it turned out, "messing with your stuff" didn't translate very well to "winning the game," and the Goblin tribe just wasn't powerful enough. Doing "mischief" while all the other tribes were doing "kill you" was reflecting poorly on goblins, and goblins have a long tradition in **Magic**. Hence a new theme, the "benefits from being sacrificed" mechanical theme, was built up more during development. As goblins have always had self-sacrificial tendencies, this theme helps bridge the gap between *Lorwyn* boggarts and other goblin species, and makes it easier for you to build goblin decks, even if you now have to add a bit more black. There are still remnants of the "mess with your stuff" flavor in the set (for example, card names like **Boggart Shenanigans**) but, as it turns out, building a little machine around making your little boggarts die for a benefit, and then bringing them back from the dead, makes you feel pretty mischievous as it is.



Next week: we talk the flavor of the tribal type.