

## Planeswalkers Unmasked Getting to know the *Lorwyn* planeswalkers.

Doug Beyer

We've had an entire [minisite](#) devoted to the five *Lorwyn* planeswalkers, yet we hardly know anything about them. You may have heard of them by reputation, your friends regaling you with tales of their exploits during hard-fought battles. You may have even summoned one or two of them yourself—watched them in action as they hurled magic at your common enemy, before vanishing off to whatever plane they came from. But when it comes right down to it, we've only had a passing acquaintance with these people. They never stick around for a coffee and a how d'you do, and they never return your emails. They're strangers.

Today we begin to change that.

### Ajani Goldmane

Ajani is a [leonin](#), the only nonhuman among *Lorwyn*'s five planeswalker cards. He's not native to Mirrodin, however. Note his lack of metal musculature compared to these other leonin:



**Metallized leonin of Mirrodin compared to Ajani Goldmane**

Ajani didn't start out doing wizardly things—he was born a warrior. He grew up on a far-off plane in his brother's pride of fellow (non-metallized) leonin, and quickly established himself as a shrewd and strong combatant,

specializing in his signature curved axe, just like his brother's.

Despite his talents in combat, Ajani was outshined in pride status by his brother, a fierce and charismatic leonin who eventually became leader of their pride. In fact, Ajani was never considered for leadership in the pride; he was thought of as an oddball. If it hadn't been for his brother's leadership position, the pride might have turned their backs on him altogether.

Ajani is not one to be petty about popularity contests, however. He's merciless with himself, never allowing himself excuses for being weak. If the rest of the pride saw him as a weirdo, so be it—he would just try harder to be better to them. In fact, their attitude toward him may have spurred him to manifest those gifts of his.

Although his physical power is formidable, Ajani's true power lies in the ability to see strength in others, and to coax it out. This gift was at work early on, although he didn't recognize it as such. Ajani's brother, however, always saw him as an inspiration, the workhorse leonin warrior who never yielded to any foe, yet who readily sacrificed for any ally. With his brother's encouragement, Ajani began to interact more with the pride. His presence had a subtle but positive effect, inspiring greatness in those around him. Things were going increasingly well for him—until everything changed.

Ajani found his brother murdered. The leonin were shocked and horrified, and the pride collapsed without its leader. Some even went so far as to blame Ajani—and although he wasn't the killer, he couldn't help but agree with their anger at his inability to prevent the murder.

The pain and shock ignited Ajani's spark. He wished for nothing more than to get away, as far away as possible, and his wish was immediately, unexpectedly granted.

Ajani eventually recovered from the shock of his brother's death, and learned to control his newfound gift for planeswalking. But to this day he suffers constant pangs of guilt and grief. He feels he owes it to his brother not only to find the killer, but to reunite the sundered tribe that his brother led. It won't be easy; Ajani's sudden absence after the murder only served to fuel rumors that he was somehow responsible, and after he returned, most of the leonin of the pride had scattered far and wide. To this day he searches for answers, carrying with him a double-bladed axe: his own signature weapon fused with that of his fallen brother.

## Jace Beleren



Jace's gifts all have to do with knowledge. He's a natural at magic having to do with thought and memory. With the application of a little effort, Jace can perceive flickers of imagery from the depths of other people's memories. He can get flashes of people's life stories, learn their most fervently held secrets, and even train in new skills right

from the minds of others, given enough time and concentration. Jace has honed this talent for one reason: he's deeply curious.

All blue mages want to know stuff—no surprise there. But knowledge is more than a hobby for Jace; it's an absolute longing. Jace's mind naturally wants to pierce through ignorance, to learn the truth hidden under the layers of polite lies. He's obsessed with facts and the interconnections between them.

Jace's rigorous devotion to knowledge probably prevents him from relating well to others. He can't stand the interpersonal crap, the regalia of fraudulence and hypocrisy that shrouds almost every person's being. He'd rather think than talk, but no one else has his talent for seeing past the ephemeral world of emotion and sociality, which serves to isolate him from his peers. Plus, thanks to his gifts, he excels at anything he puts his mind to. No mentor or master can keep up with his appetite for knowledge or his ability to procure it.

Nevertheless, Jace, I predict, has a tough road ahead of him. His incredible potential will attract the worst kind of attention, the kind brought by those seeking to subvert and control his power—and that's not even the worst of it. His ability to pierce through veils of secrecy, combined with his boundary-thwarting curiosity and smart-kid restlessness, will get him mired in secrets too dangerous for him to handle. There are secrets that denizens of the multiverse doesn't want anyone to know (which, of course, will just inspire Jace to discover them even more), and when he puts his mind to it, few can keep him out.

There's another side to Jace's power, one that he never intended to use. Jace can not only read the memories of others—he can destroy them. With enough time and preparation, he could devastate entire minds, even on a massive scale. It doesn't matter how good a kid you are, how decent and wholesome your upbringing—if you're presented with that kind of power, it won't take much to push you to use it. If you had the power to, say, break a law and then rearrange everybody's memories such that nobody ever knew you did it—would you? What if you knew they all thought you were an arrogant punk?

Oh, Jace. I'm looking forward to seeing how you handle things, buddy.

## Interlude: Why *Lorwyn*?

So why the heck did the planeswalker cards first appear in *Lorwyn*, a tribal set with a setting inspired by the folklore of the British Isles?

To be honest, the creative team's intent was for the first planeswalker card to appear in *Future Sight*, as the culmination of the plot events in the *Time Spiral* Block novels. We believed *Future Sight* was where they belonged, as a glimpse at a new fixture in the future of **Magic**, and the logical conclusion of the rift-healing storyline. Teferi and other planeswalkers made great sacrifices to heal the damage that their own power had created, and the nature of the spark had been altered, so the stage was set for the planeswalker cards to make their big premiere.

But the word from design and development was clear—this new card type was so fundamentally new and hard to evaluate, that they would not be ready in the short time remaining before the *Future Sight* deadline. Tweaks to both the cards and the rules governing planeswalkers were still happening every day, and the cards were varying wildly between too good and not good enough—neither of which were acceptable. It was going to take more time to get them right. It was decided that the planeswalkers, therefore, would go into the next set, *Lorwyn*.

In the creative team, we respected the difficulty the cards posed. We ourselves had generated many of the constraints on them—they had to play well, they had to feel right, and they had to be *cool*. Planeswalkers are **Magic**'s main characters, the ultimate mages in a multiverse filled with magic. If the cards turned out to be chaffy flops—or overpowered frustration-generators—then, either way, they'd be doing a painful disservice to that flavor. Furthermore they'd be breaking a very important link. As planeswalkers are player analogues, they form the bridge of metaphor connecting the **Magic** player and the **Magic** setting. If playing a planeswalker card didn't feel like you were letting a buddy sit down at the table next to you, then that metaphorical link would be severed.

But planeswalkers—in *Lorwyn*? That thought was truly weird to us in creative at first. Planeswalkers would stand out like a sore thumb in a carefree world peopled with faeries and kithkin. Four of the planeswalkers are human, and there are no humans on *Lorwyn*—and there certainly aren't any leonin either. We worried that a cadre of magical badasses would contradict the rustic, idyllic feel of the world we were creating, which would in turn make the planeswalkers look detached, distinctive, and otherworldl—



...

—Huh.

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad that the planeswalkers would look strange in *Lorwyn*. It wasn't our original intent, but strangely enough, an obscure little world with no humans, a place that probably has no clue about the existence of planeswalkers, might be the ideal place to premiere the world-hopping magi. Yes, they don't fit on Lorwyn. That's kind of the point. They're *planeswalkers*. They're strangers to—and yet at home in—every setting.

So the next time you're flipping through the contents of a *Lorwyn* booster and suddenly feel the jarring sensation of a planeswalker as your rare, take a moment to appreciate the flavor there. It's approximately the same emotion a Lorwyn boggart would feel, seeing the otherworldly Liliansa staring back at him.

## Liliansa Vess



If Jace is teetering on edge of the moral abyss, Liliansa is careening into the howling void after taking a swan dive right over the safety railing. Liliansa has made some... arrangements, and the cost of those arrangements will be high. Is that fun and cryptic? Cryptic yes, fun no? You're saying I'm basically just restating parts of [her bio](#) from the planeswalker minisite, where it mentions she "made a dark deal with ancient, sinister forces"? You're right. Let's get down to brass tacks here.

Demons.

They were demons.

Liliansa made a deal with some demons, and now she's got the bod and vigor of a young woman for a long, long time.

Also, incredible power.

See, the thing about necromancy is, it gets you into creepy circles kind of right off the bat. You deal in dead things and fraternize with creatures from abyssal hell-dimensions. By the time you've spent your life becoming an accomplished necromancer, like Liliansa, you've got a Blackberry full of seedy underworld contacts ("underworld" not in the "crime-ridden streets" sense, but in the literal "place where demons live" sense). These unsavory characters are willing to offer you just about anything, as long as you're willing to sign their contract using a regulation bloody quill. (Blood not included. Some assembly required. Note: contract not made from wood pulp—those with allergies to exotic animal dander should seek a pathophysiologicalist and/or exorcist after signing.)

It's not even clear how long ago Liliansa finally took her demonic contacts up on their offer. How many years did her pact undo? Decades. So Liliansa has the taut beauty of a young woman, and the craft and experience of an

entire lifetime. Rather than face the consequences of age and death, she pushed the reset button.

Thing is, that's only going to bring a different set of consequences. The multiverse has infinite possibilities, yet a free lunch still isn't one of them. Lilliana is in the debt of demons, and they aren't known for being forgiving creditors.

She's got plans to deal with them (what, did you think a black mage expected to play fair?), and in the meantime, she's having the time of her life. Lilliana gave the Grim Reaper the finger and lived to sneer about it. But still, there's a nagging note of panic behind her thoughts—an edge of doubt about her ability to handle the terms of her contract, threatening to slice through into her conscious mind.

Every demon knows: *everybody* expects to get away with it.

## Chandra Nalaar



Chandra's already had some [bonus backstory](#) on the site this week, so I thought about leaving Chandra out of this article. But then I thought better of it. Because look. You do not. Diss. The fire chick.

Chandra is living the dream right now. She's using her planeswalker gifts to do the two things that she loves to do most in the world:

1. Learn new magics, and
2. Stick it to the Man.

When I played D&D with my buddy Mike in high school, we agreed that there were two types of spell in the spell lists. On the one hand, there were interesting, subtle, practical spells. And on the other, there were what we called "boom spells." Fireball, lightning bolt, meteor swarm. *Boom* ♦ *spells*.

Chandra is all about the boom spells.

She loves them so much that she scours the multiverse to find them, even if it runs her afoul of the occasional authority figure—or maybe, just maybe, *because* it runs her afoul of the occasional authority figure. Chandra isn't a criminal, not really. She'll practice her pyromancy without lawbreaking, if the situation presents itself. But there is almost nothing so satisfying to Chandra as giving some order-barking, bureaucratic prick exactly what's coming to him. If a little "extended borrowing" gets a middling public servant in trouble and gets her some new fire-lore in the process, perfect. And if her planeswalking abilities serve the double duty of getting her both into and out of this particular kind of scenario, then that's all the better.

The danger for Chandra won't be all these figures of authority catching up to her, I don't think. Like that time on Kephala, she'll prove she can handle those bozos just fine with the clever application of boom spells. If anything, the danger for her is that her formula might be working *too* well. She's gathering more and stronger magic every day, and she might be gathering more than she's able to keep inside of her. If she outstrips her abilities and tries to manifest more fire than she can handle, she'll rupture. If she can have the patience to take it slow, to truly understand and integrate everything she's learning, she could become one of the most powerful planeswalkers of her age.

## Interlude: Behind the Masks

Before we talk Garruk, I want to talk a little art. We love Aleksí Briclot's awesome art for the planeswalkers. We love Garruk's mean faceplate (good for head-buttin' when those 3/3 Beast tokens aren't getting it done) and Jace's moody-broody attitude (he's a wrong-side-of-the-tracks kind of blue mage, one who's not afraid to get his hands dirty to find out what he wants to know). But if we were going to base future creative efforts around these characters, we wanted to see shots of their faces. Today for the first time, I present two additional sketches that Aleksí Briclot did of Garruk and Jace. These sketches include little headshots of them that help give a better sense of their character and personality.



## Garruk Wildspeaker

Garruk is the quintessential hunter. He planeswalks for the same reason a predator roams: to find fresh game. And Garruk doesn't mess around with little stuff; he hunts the biggest, nastiest creatures on any plane he visits. I'm not even sure he'd visit Earth if he could—we don't have the kind of game Garruk is looking for. Elephants, tigers? Whatever. Small potatoes. Unless you count the stuff chilling out in the fossil record, we just don't have anything that'd challenge him.

*"People think a claw devil is easy to track. Watch for the big tracks, feel the ground vibrate. But the jungle is alive. Things slither; plants shift. The baloth is camouflaged among all that life. It hides in aliveness."*

Garruk's a bit of a closed book, but those who've seen him know him by his abilities. We know that he has some sort of druidic past—maybe he's some kind of Druid School dropout. Or maybe he excelled so much that his masters had nothing to teach him anymore. Suffice it to say that he's as in touch with the land as any elf in Llanowar. Garruk pretty much always has heaping gobs of green mana at his fingertips, which he uses to power his other skills.

*"Tracking isn't about what's left behind. Tracking isn't following. Tracking is anticipation."*

Garruk's got an uncanny understanding of the animal mind. It's unclear how he knows what he knows, but this gift certainly benefits his control of creatures and his hunting. He might throw out a little spell to tell a beetle to fly away, or to encourage a bird to come impale itself on his spit for dinner. (Sound unsportsmanlike? Garruk doesn't share your citified squeamishness.) His gifts are most obvious when he uses his most common tactic: summoning some of the beasts native to whatever plane he's on for use as sidekicks and hunting pets.



*"Life is need. I know what it needs, so I know its life. I intuit its goals, so I know its destination. Its odor's on the breeze. It's close."*

Garruk's challenge will be to find a true challenge—and to deal with its impact on his conscience, once he does. He will have some larger-than-life adventures, incredible hunting stories that no city slicker will ever hear (but that they'd wish they had). But I'm not sure that's going to be enough for him. I get this weird feeling that Garruk is hunting something he doesn't understand yet. He'll need to either temper his predator instincts with some kind of ethical sense—or abandon his humanity altogether.

*"Claw devil's dead, skinned, stripped of its sharpest bits. Another world, another trophy."*

*"I need more."*

## Passing Through

We met these planeswalkers because they each happened to make stops on a plane called Lorwyn. I hope we get to see more of them along their travels, because there's way more to them than the splashy cards in the set. Something tells me we will.

Next week: Put on your hiking boots.