

## Goodies from the Mailbag Your questions, Doug's answers.

Doug Beyer

When you click the "respond via email" link at the bottom of one of my articles, that piece of feedback goes directly to my inbox, and I read it. All of it. I get more pieces of email than I can respond to individually, but it's high time I got to chipping away at the stack. There are more that I want to get to, but I'll have to save the other goodies for another time. For now, enjoy these piping-hot treats from my inbox.

Dear Doug Beyer,  
My dream job would be working on the creative team for Magic. What steps should I take to make myself appealing to whoever does the hiring there?  
—John



A *lot* of people ask this, so this is where I wanted to start today. The first thing to do is to watch [www.wizards.com/jobs](http://www.wizards.com/jobs). That's where all Wizards of the Coast jobs get posted, for **Magic's** creative team and all other parts of the company, so look there and don't stop looking. **Magic** creative text (meaning card names and flavor text) is often written by employees throughout the company. If someone inside the company asks to help out contributing flavor text, I generally try to make room for them on a writing team at some point. So if your goal is to be a writer for **Magic**, being inside the walls of Wizards is an excellent "in," even if you're not actually in R&D.

Beyond that, the best way to make yourself appealing is to draw attention to your art or your writing, especially stuff that makes it clear that you understand **Magic's** tone and vibe. Create, and show it off to us in a way that gets our attention. If you want to be a writer on the creative text, show off your ability to turn a phrase. (It's actually less important that you show your ability to weave an intricate plot than to prove you can get across one pure, punchy, clever, well-written thought.)

Like any job, you should show what you would add to the process—show how much better the team would be with you on it. It's very rare for any company to hire a person just because they're awesome; there are lots of awesome people out there. A company has to feel that it has a lack of something that *you*, in particular, would provide, and at the right time. Your desire to work for the company is not enough; you have to be selling something (namely, you and your skills) that the company currently wants to buy.

Dear Doug Beyer,  
Regarding your article "[Planeswalkers Unmasked](#)": You featured two fantastic sketches of planeswalkers with their masks removed. I was staring at them again after a while since it was linked in an Ask Wizards item, then, whoa! Am I really seeing this right? **Garruk Wildspeaker** looks like your empathetic old hunter/barbarian with a kind heart under a hard rugged face, based from his expression. Is he really like that?  
—Ryan

was very excited to reveal Aleksis's Garruk sketch, because I think it shows off a lot more of that [Worlds-dominating](#), metal-helmeted planeswalker. That sketch shows a number of things about Garruk:

- *It shows Garruk's species.* It's pretty clear that Garruk was human, but with his mask on there could have been some doubt. (Ajani, a leonin, is the only non-human of the *Lorwyn* bunch.) His humanity is important—part of the point of this era of planeswalkers is that they are, ultimately, *people*, subject to the same hardships you and I are. If Garruk were some unstoppable robo-alien, there'd be no way to empathize with him, to see things from his perspective. As we'll see later, Garruk is a complex man.
- *It shows Garruk's age.* Garruk is the oldest-looking of the group, which means a lot for his character. (Liliana is actually older than Garruk, but doesn't show it.) He's grizzled, experienced. He has a lot of hunts behind him, and may have taken up planeswalking long after he was set in his hunter's ways. This also contrasts him nicely with younger characters like Jace and Chandra, who took to planeswalking early in their spell-hurling careers.
- *It shows Garruk's eyes.* Perhaps most importantly, Aleksis's sketch shows those expressive soul-holes. When we can't see a person's eyes, we can't truly read their expression. We don't know whether they're lying or not, or in pain or not. We can't tell if they're holding back tears or a haymaker. By seeing Garruk's eyes, we get that sense of guarded kindness you're referring to, Ryan—the layers of complexity of his character. By seeing his muscles, we could see Garruk tearing the face off a ferocious beast, no problem. But by seeing his eyes, we could see Garruk mourning the loss of a loved one, say, or protecting a nest of baloth yearlings. It's very important that Garruk was shown as capable of that

complexity of emotion.

We have more plans for Garruk and the rest of the planeswalkers. Stay tuned.

Dear Doug Beyer,  
I'm Vorthos to the core. I usually go daydreaming about stories and flavor, and many of the stories I imagine use elements from Magic. Recently it became important in one of those stories how much a planeswalker can carry with him from plane to plane. I'm figuring he doesn't just come out of the vortex stark naked, and Ajani proves me right in that, because he carries his double-headed axe around. But I'm also thinking that one planeswalker can't take an army with him from one place to another. So what can he take?  
—Sophus



This is a



dangerous question for me to answer, because some future novel or other bit of **Magic**-in-the-media could come along and, for story reasons, contradict my answer. It's like asking how fast the Flash can run—I could quote you how fast he *has* run but then some comic might come out and show him running faster than that. I definitely won't nail it down like a D&D *teleport* spell ("the caster can take with him 50 pounds of stuff per level, end of story"), but I'll tell you how I think of it, and you can go from there.

First of all, anything is *possible*, given the right conditions. Planeswalking is a form of magic. With enough time and mana, or with specialized spell knowledge, or with access to enormous power, it's possible for a planeswalker to transfer gobs of material and/or creatures with him as he planeswalks. Planeswalkers are mortal, but they're incredibly creative and resourceful—if there's something a planeswalker wants to hang on to as he planeswalks, then he'll probably pay the price and do the work to make it happen.

This implies that a *less* prepared or *less*-skilled planeswalker may have significantly lesser ability to bring items with him. A planeswalker on his spark-awakening "maiden voyage" might indeed show up naked on a new plane—or even missing some hair, a thumb, and a few patches of skin (the space between the planes can be dangerous territory)—while a veteran planeswalker might be able to hold on to a few trademark items and travel unscathed with ease. It's all about the particulars of that individual planeswalker.

Note that the nature of being a wizard generally lets a planeswalker ignore the necessity of, you know, packing a bag. When the Terminator shows up in 1984, he has to steal clothes and a motorcycle to execute his mission. When Garruk shows up on Lorwyn, he can cast spells to summon just about anything he needs. He might not be able to pop into being with a huge army all around him, but given enough time, you can be sure that he can build up a pretty good one after he gets there.

Dear Doug Beyer,  
Regarding your article "[Drakes and Dragons, Wurms and Worms](#)": Near the end of your article, you mentioned that the differences between Avatars, Elementals, and Spirits are much more abstract than those you detailed about worms, wurms, wyrms, dragons, and drakes (or wyverns). That piqued my curiosity a bit, and I'm wondering exactly what the differences between the three (Avatars, Elementals, and Spirits) are.  
—Jonathan

Will has a similar question, put another way:

What makes an Elemental different from a Spirit? How exactly did you decide that **Faultgrinder** is more closely related to **Force of Nature** than it is to **Ore Gorgor**, or that **Briarhorn** has more in common with Water Elemental than it does with **Moss Kami**? It seems to me that Lorwyn's non-Flamekin elementals have a lot more in common with Kamigawa's Kami (who maybe shouldn't have shared a creature type with Ravnica's spirits, but does that mean they should have been elementals? I think not) than they do with the classic definition of Elementals which has been handed down from Dungeons and Dragons to Alpha and on down to **Silvos**, **Rogue Elemental** and beyond. Elementals are usually masses of a single substance, not animalistic conglomerations of various chunks of coherent flesh. Admit it, this was just a kludge to make the evoke creatures play with **Incandescent Soulstoke** and the like, and makes negligible flavor sense. Or, if you feel differently, then tell us why so that we can judge whether or not you really believe it or are talking through your hat on the company's behalf.

—Will

There are classic cases of Elementals, Spirits and Avatars. The archetypal Elemental is a roughly humanoid creature made up of one of the classical elements: Earth, Air, Fire, or Water. The archetypal Spirit is a ghost, the restless soul of a deceased person. The archetypal Avatar is a divine being made flesh, or a representative of some supernatural power. These base cases are reasonably easy to distinguish.

But each **Magic** plane or other setting that comes along may twist and stretch those classic archetypes, sometimes in ways that blur the visual lines between them.

Let's take elementals as an example. Alpha took care of the four classic elementals, but the tribe still had plenty of room to grow. Green nature elementals like **Verdant Force** and **Silvos** took the subtype in a new direction, but kept to the definition of an Elemental as a being made of a basic material—except that now the "material" was a more abstract force, the essence of the power of the growth or ferocity of nature. Lorwyn elementals follow in that same tradition—they are creatures made of elements, but those elements are dreams or ideas. They don't look like they're made up of sheets of rock or tongues of fire, because they're elementals of *dream*. How do you show a being made of "dream"? Well, we chose to depict that surreal feeling by showing them as ethereal creatures that often fade off into translucency, combine elements of multiple strange creatures, and have impossible structures or behaviors.



Kamigawa's spirits had a lot of the same art decisions behind them, but for different reasons. They too were shown as surreal, impossible creatures—in order to illustrate their fundamental differences from the mortals of the realm (some of which were pretty odd in themselves, like the kitsune or the orochi). The whole point of Kamigawa was to show the contrast between the mortals on the one hand and the spirits on the other, so the classic floating-ghost look of the Spirit type was pushed into far weirder territory. This makes the look of a surreal Spirit in Kamigawa bear some similarities to a surreal Elemental in Lorwyn.

Did tribal mechanics factor into there being Elementals in *Lorwyn*? Of course! Just like *Champions of Kamigawa*'s "spiritcraft" mechanics (which also has tribal elements) made all the Kamigawa kami have to be one type, Spirit. (The kami could have been some other type, but the word "spirit" was already the traditional English translation of "kami," and besides, letting the Kamigawa Spirit mechanics play nice with other **Magic** Spirits helps casual deckbuilders use more of their cards together.)

But the design team included Elementals in *Lorwyn* set at the request of the creative team, not the other way around. Creative was intimately involved in the selection of the *Lorwyn* tribes. A few tribes were nailed down by the designers, which led the creative team toward one concept of how the Lorwyn setting would be (a European folklore-inspired world), which led Creative to request the other tribes (among them, Faeries, Giants, Treefolk, and Elementals), which in turn led the design and development teams of *Time Spiral* block to seed more of those rarer tribes into those earlier sets. The idea that there would be a race of humanoid Elementals (the flamekin) and other, more abstract, greater Elementals was there from very early on, and was a crucial part of Lorwyn's concept—as central as the kami were to Kamigawa.

Dear Doug Beyer,  
Regarding your article "[Drakes and Dragons, Wurms and Worms](#)": But **Water Wurm** looks like a worm... Did they pay their rights to be a remain a wurm too?  
—Ryan

**Water Wurm** has all the characteristics of a Worm (with an "o"—a small, legless invertebrate) rather than a Wurm (with a "u"—a subway-train-sized, limbless creature with an enormous mouth), but sadly it has the word "Wurm" right in its name. We have a pretty firm rule about that—if it says it's a Wurm, we try to honor the name and keep it a Wurm. If a creature came back with that art today, we'd definitely call it *Water Wurm* and type it appropriately.

Dear Doug Beyer,  
Regarding your article "[Name Killers](#)": I was just wondering why **Phthisis** was so named. I love the word, but everyone I know who plays the card (or who did during drafts) called it something different. F-this-is, P-thy-sis or whatever. Anyway, this one seemed to have slipped through nonetheless, and I was just wondering why.  
—Lester

**Phthisis** is definitely a challenge for most English speakers, and I know there are a variety of theories on its pronunciation (the "ph" is silent—your best bet is to pronounce it either THIGH-sis or TIE-sis; my favorite is the latter). We considered it worth the trouble, though, because the degenerative disease phthisis has such a history in the **Magic** storyline. The dark lord Yawgmoth owed a lot of his power in Phyrexia to phthisis, so we figured the game needed a card named after it. A powerful suspend spell that caused a creature's nasty death came along, and the rest is card history.



Dear Doug Beyer,  
Regarding your article "Name Killers": I want to know how **Squeaking Pie Sneak** got his name.  
Thanks.  
—Uvaz

"Squeaking Pie" is the name of a warren of boggarts on Lorwyn. The best reference I can give you on the Squeaking Pie warren is this snippet right out of the *Lorwyn* style guide:

**Squeaking Pie Warren.** This warren is known for its culinary adventurism, and the warren's recipes are its most prized possessions. Boggarts from other warrens often claim Squeaking Pie lineage so they can attend their **Footbottom Feasts**, which are widely thought to have the tastiest food. The warren is led by Auntie Jowl, who raises the mice that often end up in the warren's famous savory pies.

Dear Doug Beyer,

I started playing Magic: the Gathering with the Portal Second Age set, which is often derided for it's inclusion of old-fashioned guns, amongst others by Mark Rosewater, who states in his most recent article that after the set came out, it was decided that guns were a poor fit for the Magic multiverse.

I just want to write in to tell you and all of the creative team that I love the guns. To me, it showed that this wasn't just any old fantasy setting. To see guns in a fantasy setting was interesting and cool. In TTM, both you and Matt Cavotta often talk about how you want to keep Magic away from fantasy's stereotypes, such as wizards with pointy hats and damsels in distress. Guns, I feel, fit right into that scheme. I also liked their look. They looked old-fashioned, ornamental (check out **Alaborn Musketeer**, for example) and even kinda magical - some of the rifles have magical-looking globes on them (**Goblin General** is a good example). So my plea is: please bring back guns! Just think of what it hints at (wouldn't an industrial revolution setting be fun?).  
—Matthijs



The biggest problem with guns is that they compete with magic for conceptual (and visual) space. A gun is a weapon that blasts a projectile at an enemy with explosive force. But so is a mage's knowledge of a **Fireball** spell. Since **Magic** is a game of spell-casting wizards, anything that upstages the feeling that mages are the prime movers of the multiverse is going to get the official Creative Stinkeye.

There are other problems, too. Although some of the *Portal Second Age* guns came out appropriately magic-looking (implying that they, ultimately, rely on a wizard's magic to function, not potassium nitrate or whatever), when you add any machine to a setting, there's a risk of it coming out looking too straight-up mechanical. The more mechanical it looks, the more real-world it looks—and you begin to lose the advantage of escapism. The real world has enough guns as it is, and many people turn to **Magic** to spend time in a world without those problems.



The gun is deeply symbolic—it's the dividing line in the technology of warfare, past which things just stop looking "fantasy." On the one side of that line you have weapons like crossbows, ballistas, and catapults, that all feel right at home in fantasy, even though they are real-world, nonmagical machines. On the other side, you have—well, everything else. If you allow even basic muskets in your setting, then suddenly those elvish archers look a little under-equipped, and the mages look downright obsolete.

However, I'm never going to say never. It may be that some world deep in the Blind Eternities is undergoing an industrial revolution, whose engineers are working on the problem of how to kill their enemies by using more saltpeter than mana. Besides, magic and technology have certainly combined in **Magic** before—the Izzet are a prime example, as is the entire artificial world of Mirrodin. **Magic** is a game of eternally swinging pendulums—so who knows, maybe one day the time will be right for guns to make another appearance.

Dear Doug Beyer,

Regarding your article "[Magic in Stories](#)": That was a great article. But while I read it a thought popped into my head, what is the story flavor of judges? What I mean to ask is that during a tournament, you are still playing the role of planeswalkers fighting each other, and here comes a judge who can reset turns, decide who wins and who loses, etc. How does a judge fit into the Magic flavor perspective?

—Shaun

As much as I like to think in flavor terms, some things in the gameplay of **Magic** as a card game don't have flavor equivalents. What's the flavor of the Swiss pairing system? What's the flavor of tiebreaker percentages, or of [winning a car](#)? Some elements of **Magic** *quod* TCG don't translate to the world of dueling planeswalkers. If anything, judges represent the laws of the multiverse, the fundamental principles that keep it ticking, that mages must understand if they are to grasp the inner workings of magic.

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More goodies from the mailbag another time. Got a burning question? Click the email link below! I always like hearing from you guys.