



Blood Type V

Matt Cavotta
Taste the Magic

Wednesday, December 26, 2007



—Doug Beyer

As a *magicthegathering.com* columnist, I get to select a couple of my favorite columns from this year to encore (who's calling it a "rerun"?). This year I took over the column from Taste the Magic originator Matt Cavotta, and although Matt was originally known to **Magic** players for his art, I couldn't do better this holiday than to shine a little more of the spotlight on his writing achievements. There was a lot of Cavotta goodness to choose from this year, but I had to choose one, so here's an article that stirred up a little Vorthosian fervor in all of us. Enjoy.

This article originally ran May 24, 2007

Billy Idol is so Rock-n-Roll, and it has nothing to do with the fact that his music is electric guitar-based with roots in punk rock, Elvis Presley and the blues. His music is quintessentially "Rock-n-Roll," but that's not what makes him rock-n-roll. There's the irreverent personality, famously rebellious hairdo, signature fist-pumping, hotel room trashing, multiple arrests for public indecency, near-deadly motorcycle wreck, famous philandering, and all sorts of other things that have nothing to do with 4-4 beats or blazing riffs. So what does this have to do with **Magic**?

Vorthos is Billy Idol. He (or she) is Magic beyond the music of the cards.

Mark Rosewater's column has invoked Vorthos a couple times in the recent past and I, as the bell-hop who opened the door for Vorthos, feel the need to talk about my favorite tenant of the **Magic** hotel. The first thing I want to do, however, is clarify that I am not counter-pointing Mark's articles on the subject. In most respects I agree with how Mark lays it all out. Instead, I want to add to the conversation some important points that have not been made yet.

Mark is the Head Designer for **Magic**. That being the case, it makes complete sense that he would create a system in which he and his designers could easily talk about the target audience and tailor the game to its diverse subsets (Timmy, Johnny, and Spike.) But **Magic** is not just 4/4 beats or **Flame Rifts**. There is a lot more to **Magic** than just a card game.

I have been extremely proud in the last couple years to have brought to the spotlight some of the aspects of **Magic** that are not part of a spoiler list. I am also very proud to have brought to the conversation the unnamed throngs of **Magic** fans who do not define themselves by the decks they play. If you define yourself by a color, a guild, a race, or a type—if you are a goblin, a Boros, a Blue mage, or a Legendary Mutant Barbarian—you are a Vorthos. You are a Vorthos, and you are my peep. I will not let your story go untold.

Mark is Head Designer. I am in charge of card names, keywords, and flavor text. That being the case, it makes sense that I would take up for the people to whom my work speaks most directly. But I am not the only one speaking to Vorthos. While this web site speaks most loudly and most often to the *players* of the *game*, **Magic** itself rocks a pretty bad-ass tune to *all* of its fans. I differentiate "player" and "fan" because, like Rock-n-Roll, **Magic** has evolved into a lifestyle. There are plenty of ways to live the **Magic** lifestyle without laying land, tapping for mana, or entering your combat step. (Interestingly, each of those three "game" terms is rooted in pure Vorthosian flavor.) I know this first hand, because I just spent 7 solid hours at Grand Prix—Columbus signing cards, decorating play mats, and selling prints to fans of the game. I know this because I saw people in the Two-Headed Giant tournament switch booster packs because of their preference for the art on the flow wrap. I know this because of the **Magic** t-shirts people were wearing, the tattoo of **Ogre Shaman** I saw on a dude's arm, and the poor guy who was a "huge fan of Lim-Dûl" that couldn't get a drawing of The Necromancer on his play mat because there were too many people waiting in line to get their cards signed.



PRODUCTS



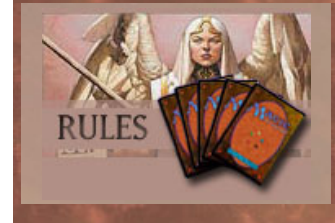
MAGIC ONLINE



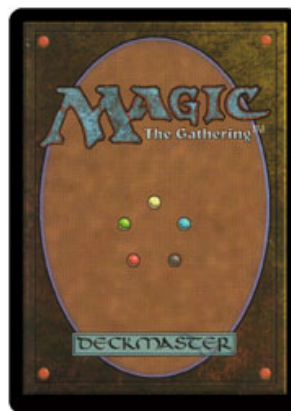
MESSAGE BOARDS



RULES



Magic has created a lifestyle in which a doubles match is called "Two-Headed Giant" and nobody bats an eye. It has created a scenario in which a dork like me can't see over the heads of all the people waiting for *my freakin' autograph*. I'm not Billy Idol, I'm a dude who likes zombies and monsters enough to paint them and write about them. It is pretty obvious to me that **Magic** has become a lifestyle in which fantasy has become the norm. It all started with the game being called "**Magic: The Gathering**." It is not "Statistics: The Comparison." It is not "Points: The Accumulation." From its beginnings as a battle of wits between mages, **Magic** has become a culture of intelligence, competitiveness, camaraderie, creativity, as well as one of goblins, dragons, warriors, wizards and weirds. The game itself is set up to be enjoyed by someone who is at least a smidge Vorthos. Your graveyard, library, land, and spells are all part of the fantasy framework of the game. Whether or not Timmy, Johnny, or Spike want to admit it—and whether or not the mouths of magicthegathering.com mention it—they tread on Vorthosian ground all the time.



Just so all you full-on, partial, or closet Vorthoses out there don't feel so neglected, here's something to think about. There are people at Wizards whose jobs are only to design packaging, logos, expansion symbols, posters, banners, web graphics, novel covers, and card faces for **Magic**. Their jobs are for you, Vorthos. And if there are any of you out there grumbling, "It's not just for Vorthos. It's for me too," then open the closet door and join the **Rauck-Chauv**. If you are moved at all by **Magic's** gritty fantasy look, or by the quality of a demon illustration on a booster box, you have some blood type V in you.

There are also people whose jobs are to write novels and short stories, and other people whose jobs are to edit them and still others whose jobs are to make sure these writings mesh well with the work of flavor text writers and world builders. These people are working for you too, Vorthos. They don't have multiple columns on this web site and can't trumpet their own cause in cyberspace, but they speak to you through the quality of their work. Brady Dommermuth created the guild system knowing you would eat it up like a Peanut Buster Parfait. Scott McGough came back to write the *Time Spiral* novels because he's a writer with considerable **Magic** experience, and that knowledge of the old days was needed in order to satisfy you, old time Vorthos, and your demand that respect be paid to **Magic's** historical storyline. Jeremy Jarvis is there for you, as was each art director before him, to bring you the highest quality art that delivers most clearly **Magic's** own fantasy message. There are people at Wizards whose whole purpose is to make you happy, whether you shuffle up and play or not.

Wizards cares about you, little red-headed Vorthos. Wizards may not talk *about* you as much as your other brothers, but we speak to you more than any of the others. While not every card is designed for Spike, or Timmy, or Melvin, we do our best on every single card to deliver to you, Vorthos, the best possible flavor—every time. We're speaking to you on cards, in books, on posters, at conventions, in line to get your cards signed.

The greater point I am trying to make here is that Vorthos is actually NOT the little red-headed stepchild. It's that he is probably the big brother. In fact, I do not feel like it's a stretch to say that there are more **Magic** fans out there that are part Vorthos than any other player profile or psychographic. This does not, by any stretch of the imagination, mean that more people will admit to being Vorthos than any other. I am sure many people would like to think that they are Spikes, goin' for the kill. But the truth is, you're all here, tapping for mana, casting spells. Do you know what that means? That means you are a wizard bringing forth power that resides in the land so you can use it to make real, through magic, the ideas swirling in your potent mind. Even if you pay zero attention to the flavor I just described, not running from it like a macho jock too-cool-for-school means that, in some way, you have accepted fantasy as the norm. *Fantasy as the norm*. Fantasy, always there in the same seat at the end of the bar. That's where Vorthos sits.

Vorthos does not have to be the most chocolate goober out there. He can be someone who likes dragons and likes competition—put 'em together and BAM! **Magic**. But if you take out the dragons and replace it with no-holds-barred weaponless combat you get the Universal Fighting Championship. Replace dragons with Wall Street and you get a floor trader on the exchange. Without the flavor of **Magic**, the audience changes drastically. Somehow, in some way, **Magic** brought us all in and holds us. There may be a few examples of people who were brought straight into competitive play because of their uncanny ability to calculate odds and evaluate data, but I'd be willing to bet that most of us were hooked first because **Magic** looked cool. Perhaps **Magic's** own Director of R&D, Aaron Forsythe, said it best in his article [How I Got Here, Part I](#):



*A week or so later, I was hobbling by the Comics Crypt, the neighborhood comic shop. They were closed, but in their window was a poster showing nothing but a bunch of illustrated fantasy game cards—a poster for **Magic**.*

The cards on the poster had nothing but names, art, and artist credits, but it was enough to grab me. "Demonic Tutor?" "Coal Golem?" Wow, did that sound cool!

I don't think it can be denied that our buddy Aaron is a Spike. He played on the Pro Tour and he also played his way to the top of the **Magic** ladder at Wizards. That's easy enough to see. But guess who was the first person to email me with hoots of joy when I finalized the card name "Heldozer?" That's right, Mr. Forsythe. Kicking ass and taking names on the Pro Tour does not make you unable, or too cool, to appreciate a giant zombie when you see one. Apparently, running **Magic** R&D doesn't either.

I think the reason why Vorthos has not gotten the attention I think he deserves is because he's always been there, sitting at the end of the bar. We all love **Magic**, and we bicker over whether the Baloth is better than the Loxodon. I guess in all the bickering we lose sight of the fact that we're arguing about a giant toothy beast and an anthropomorphized elephant priest. If we're all willing to entertain that argument, then we have to admit there's some blood type V pumping through our flapping gums. Understanding Vorthos is not about compartmentalizing **Magic** players. It is not about saying "I am this, but not that." It is about admitting that we are ALL fans of the

fantasy culture **Magic** has created. If you don't like dragons more than dinosaurs, raise your hand. If you don't like knights more than professional wrestlers, raise your hand. If you don't like swords more than guns, raise your hand. Okay, everybody, use your swords to hack the five guys with their hands up.

*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own **D&D** characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; **D&D** and **Magic**. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Matt Cavotta](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

