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Class Is in Session

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Making Magic

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Welcome to *Morningtide* Preview Week #1. Yes, it's time to start whetting your appetite for the second piece of the *Lorwyn* block. As usual I have a preview card for you, but that's going to come a little later as I want to talk about a few things before I show off the card. Also, before the column is over I'm also going to reveal and explain one other thing about *Morningtide*. Sound good? Then let's get started.

Good Morningtide

If you've been paying attention, the theme of *Morningtide* shouldn't be a mystery. (I, for example, outright said what it was in the second part of my trivia column [What Do You Know, Part II?](#)) *Morningtide* adds class to the tribal landscape. What does this mean? Well, in *Lorwyn*, there were eight tribes to care about, all of which were races. (Elementals, Elves, Faeries, Giants, Goblins, Kithkin, Merfolk and Treefolk for those of you who have been in hibernation since October.) With the exception of changelings (yeah, yeah, Shapeshifters with the changeling ability), no creature was a member of more than any one tribe.

Morningtide breaks this up by introducing five more tribes to care about: Rogues, Shaman, Soldiers, Warriors and Wizards, all of which are classes. (There are individual cards that care about other classes as well, but these are the five the set focuses on.) What this means is that the majority of creatures are going to start caring about two different tribes. In fact, this change is going to mean a lot of things, but I think I'm getting ahead of myself. Why don't I start by going back to the point where the *Lorwyn* design team decided that *Morningtide* was going to focus on class.

Top of the Morningtide

Actually, our story starts many years before the *Lorwyn* design team ever met. It begins during the design of *Mirrodin*. You see, it was concurrent with *Mirrodin*'s design that the creative team managed to convince R&D that the race/class system needed to be adopted. Before that time, creatures had one creature type. Sometimes it was a race and sometimes it was a class. Suffice to say things were a bit messy. The race/class system was designed to help align **Magic** with just about every other fantasy-based game in existence. The only quirky thing for me (I was one of the R&D folk fighting hardest to adopt the race/class model) was that we were starting it the block after *Onslaught*—you know, the tribal block. But as often happens, things don't always line up a neatly as they should and *Onslaught* block missed out on race/class design technology. Well, I said to myself, at least we'll be able to make use of it next time we do a tribal block.

Okay, now we can flash forward (or flash backwards depending where you feel you are right now) to *Lorwyn* design. One of the very first exercises I did was to do the math on how many tribes the set could support. When doing a tribal set, or any set with subset themes, you have to figure out what can fit in the space you have. Each tribe requires a certain amount of support to be viable. If the team chooses too many tribes such that each one doesn't hit this critical mass then the set will never play right. Remember that we didn't yet have changeling technology to help us bring up overall percentages.

My first pass said that the set could support either ten or twelve tribes, five or six race and five or six class. The overlap between the race and class was going to allow us to hit our numbers despite having more overall tribes than *Onslaught* block. These were the numbers I had in mind when we sat down for our first *Lorwyn* design meeting. The topic of the meeting was to bring together design and creative (Brady Dommermuth who's responsible for world building was on the design team) and figure out what tribes made the most sense for both groups. As we talked, something interesting happened. We only talked about races. The idea was that classes were easy to overlay and could be added later. The races, on the other hand, set the whole tone of the world. Before I knew it we had eight races we were considering. This led to the following conversation: (as always allow for significant heapings of dramatic license)

Me: I'm not sure if we could do eight tribes. My math said six tops.

Aaron (Forsythe, the set's lead designer): What if we don't do so many classes?

Me: If you unbalance them, you lose all the overlap synergy. It means you have to do less, not more.

Aaron: What if we just do eight races?

Me: There's a couple of issues. The biggest one is that you're throwing all this cool race/class design space out



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Aaron: But aren't the races what people care about anyway?

Me: I agree that races are a little more flavorful but I've seen plenty of Wizard and Cleric decks. Soldiers, Druids, Barbarians, Knights, Samurai—players clearly will embrace class decks.

Aaron: We can't do everything.

Me: What if we make it a feature instead of a bug?

Aaron: What do you mean?

Me: What if we take all class out of "Peanut?" [*Lorwyn's* codename] What if we only put in cards that reference race? The idea here is that when you're playing "Peanut" you never have to care about anything but what the race of the creature is. This means we're going to have to cut some tribal stuff we normally do like allowing the player to name a race or being self-referential.

Aaron: I'm not sure what you want to do.

Me: We save all the class stuff. All of it. We do it in "Butter." It will give "Butter" a definition. It will allow us to put a big twist on Limited. It will allow us to add new Constructed decks midway into the block.

Aaron: While that sounds great... isn't it going to cause a whole bunch of problems for "Butter" design? You can't make people care about eight races and then stop supporting it when the next set comes out.

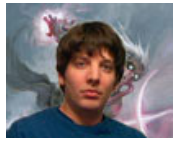
Me: We won't.

Aaron: How?

Me: That's more of a "Butter" design issue. Don't worry though. I have a few ideas.

Morningtide Becomes Electra

Which brings us to the "Butter" (aka *Morningtide*) design team. Let me make a few quick introductions.



Paul Sottosanti (lead) – As I mentioned when I talked about the *Lorwyn* design team, Paul is a designer that usually works on what I'll call "non-Magic" games. He kept his toe in the **Magic** waters designing most of the online Vanguard cards—yes, including **Momir Vig** (recently Ken Nagle took over this responsibility). Paul worked on both *Planar Chaos* and *Lorwyn* design. He did such a good job that when I was looking for a lead for *Morningtide*, I decided to see if Paul was up for such a task. He was and here we are. Paul created my favorite mechanic in

Morningtide, one you will see on today's preview card.



Aaron Forsythe – There's not much I can say about Aaron that I haven't said before. For quite a while I thought that I was going to be training Aaron to be the next Head Designer. Then Aaron wised up to the fact that I'm not going anywhere and decided to become my boss instead. Aaron was an asset to the team, just as he's an asset to every design team he's been on.



Erik Lauer – You know how R&D likes to turn former pro players into developers? Yes, Erik is one of those. Known as "The Mad Genius," Erik was one of the Pro Tour's foremost deck builders. Among others, he built the deck that Randy Buehler won his first Pro Tour with. Randy brought Erik in for a development internship and Erik never left. Here's the most interesting part (well, for me anyway): Erik was very eager to try his hand at design. He would make cards whenever there were holes. It turns out he shows real potential so I convinced Paul that we

should add him to the team. Erik didn't disappoint for his first time out and I've been searching for another design team to add him to.



Mark Rosewater – Keeping the streak alive, I'm on yet another design team. Note while I was on this team I was concurrently running *Shadowmoor* design (which is a large set for those that don't retain info like that), so I was up to my eyeballs in **Magic** design (which is normal course for me).



Kenneth Nagle – Finally, we have Ken Nagle. Ken started working as an intern (earned by doing well in The Great Designer Search) during the middle of *Morningtide's* design. I was eager to get him into design meetings so I drafted him onto the *Morningtide* design team. (In a few weeks, you'll actually get a chance to see *Morningtide's* design through his eyes.) Ken was an excellent addition to the team as he came to the process with fresh eyes and a very unique perspective. The quality of his work on *Morningtide* (and *Shadowmoor* and "*Doughnut*") was

what led to us hiring him full-time as an associate designer.

You'll note that three of the five members of this design team were also on the *Lorwyn* design team (that would be everyone except Erik and Ken). This wasn't an accident. A lot of what got set up was done during *Lorwyn* design so it seemed only natural to keep the core group together to do the small set. It's interesting to note that back in the day the team that did a large set almost always designed the small set that came right after it.

Morningtide Has Broken

Now it's time to talk through the big challenge of *Morningtide* design. We wanted the set to be about class. But the set right before it was all about race. If we simply switched everything over (meaning 100% class and 0% race) we were going to upset all the people that had built decks around one of the eight supported tribes. But if we just kept doing race then *Morningtide* wouldn't have any identity and those that have read my thought on block

planning (my State of Design articles ([2005](#), [2006](#), [2007](#)) are the best to read up on this) know that I feel it's very important to give each set its own unique identity. With the five classes we wanted to support, that would mean making thirteen tribes matter.

How did we solve this problem? Let me walk you through the steps:

#1) Make Use of Overlap

The thing that excited me most about race/class for tribal design was how much the two overlapped. For example, if I'm trying to reach tribal threshold for Goblins and for Rogues, every goblin rogue I make gets to count toward both subgroups. Because each humanoid creature gets both a race and a class (and the majority of creatures fall into this camp), the two sides don't have to fight each other for space all that much. The one area that you would expect conflict would be on the cards that refer to a certain tribe rather than merely be that tribe, but even these type of cards allow for significant overlap.

To explain, let's look at a number of different types of tribal cards.

Traditional Tribal – These are cards like *Goblin King* that merely enhance a particular tribe. The key to overlapping here is simple. Just reference a race and a class. Race A and Class B all get blah. The reason this works better than enhancing two races (and note that *Lorwyn* did do this on a handful of cards) is that race and class seem like a better fit. A lieutenant that helps Kithin and Soldiers feels pretty natural.

Self-Referential Tribal – These are cards that affect creatures that share one or more creature types with them. The reason this design space is so rich is that using your own creature type as a means to set who you affect feels very natural. Of course, you want to help those like yourself. And as most creatures have a race and a class, this is an elegant way to affect two tribes without feeling forced. In fact, my favorite mechanic in the set happens to be on my preview card today, and it just happens to be a self-referential tribal mechanic. Add this to my desire to keep previewing awesome Treefolk cards until the people start getting the hint to build some Treefolk decks and I have something I'd like to show you.

Click [here](#) to see the preview card (I won't promise it will make you say "Wow!" this time but I do hope it brings a smile to your face)



It's a Treefolk card and a Shaman card all in one.

A quick note on kinship (called synergy in design). At the beginning of your upkeep each turn, you get to look at the top card of your library. If the card matches a creature type with the creature with kinship, you may reveal it for a positive effect. (Note may; also note that your opponent doesn't get to see the card unless you choose to reveal it.) I know at first blush that this mechanic might seem a bit random, but if you've been paying attention during *Lorwyn* you might get a clue that it's a lot less random than one might think. Add to that even more tricks in *Morningtide* and we have what I feel is a mighty fun (and sometimes quite powerful) mechanic.

Self Chosen Tribal – These are cards that start off with a line that tells you to choose a creature type. You get to customize the tribal effect. When we decided to separate out class, we pulled all these cards from *Lorwyn* as they allowed you to care about class. Since this wasn't allowed, we pushed them all off to *Morningtide*. While this isn't exactly an overlap since you can't choose a race and a class at the same time, it does allow a card the potential to affect either so I felt it belonged in this list.

Token Making – Hey, here's one we managed to sneak into *Lorwyn*. In fact, I believe this was the mechanic that tipped our hand. By making all the tokens in the block have race and class (a move, by the way, that I'm fighting to keep as a permanent thing) we created yet another way to have something, in this case a permanent, that was relevant to two different tribes. I could note that the mere existence of race/class does this to most of the existing nontoken creatures.

As you can see, the first step to creating enough room for thirteen tribes is to make sure that as many cards as possible are doing work for more than one tribe.

#2) Make Use of Rarity

So we have all these tricks to make race and class matter on the same card. The next step was to use an age-old design trick. Put the stuff you want people to get more of at lower rarities. If the overlapping race/class cards do good work, put them at common. In fact, with a few exceptions, we made sure that none of the common cards care only about class. The reason behind this was simple. If you were very invested in *Lorwyn's* tribes and weren't looking for anything new, then *Morningtide* just gives you more of the same. But if you were looking to find new facets to think about, then *Morningtide* delivers that as well.

We then took the class-only tribal cards and stuck them at uncommon and rare. This way they would be there for the people who wanted to build decks around them but at a level that didn't disorient the players who wanted to keep focusing on the races. In addition, we allowed ourselves to make class cards that cared about specific classes other than the five we chose to focus on but kept them isolated to single cards and put them mostly at rare where they existed for deckbuilding but not generally for Limited.

#3) Continue to Make Use of the Smoothing Tools of *Lorwyn*

Finally, we took all the tools that worked so well in *Lorwyn* and applied them to *Morningtide*. Changelings return, as they are just as much class helpers as race helpers. Champion gets stretched to apply to class. And clash all of a sudden starts having tribal significance thanks to the kinship mechanic.

I know when the news of the class theme broke there was much discussion online about how we were going to make the numbers work. Ironically the best tool at our disposal was the very thing that caused me to be so upset that *Onslaught* missed out on race/class the first time around. Race/class is a boon to tribal sets, and with *Morningtide* we are milking it for all we can. I'm quite curious to see what you all think of what we've done once you get a chance to play with it.

But don't go away just yet. I have one more announcement.

The *Morningtide* After

Changeling is back. Champion is back. Clash is back. Even evoke shows up again. This, of course, brings up the obvious question: what does *Morningtide* do with planeswalkers? I'll try to pull the band-aid off quickly. What does *Morningtide* do with planeswalkers? Nothing. There are no planeswalkers in *Morningtide*.

But didn't we say that planeswalkers are a permanent addition to **Magic**? We did and they are, but we've chosen to handle planeswalkers differently from other card types. The planeswalker card type was created to make the planeswalker concept have more relevance both inside the game and out.

The planeswalkers are an important part of **Magic's** future and as such we felt it was crucial to integrate them mechanically into the game. Even moreso, we wanted to integrate them in a way that made them important and gave them focus. Of all our tasks in *Lorwyn*, it was the introduction of the planeswalkers that I feel was our greatest success.

What this means is that R&D has chosen to treat planeswalkers as something very special. To this end, we have made the conscious decision of quality over quantity. We want every planeswalker to matter. To do this, we just have to make a lot less of them than we do of any other card type. This means that not every set will have planeswalkers and when they do appear they will come in smaller numbers. But when you do see them, you can know that we've taken the time and energy to make them something special.

In addition, we are going to make the planeswalkers a bigger element of **Magic** in general, which means while you won't see planeswalker cards every set, you will have other opportunities to learn more about who the planeswalkers are and how they influence the world of **Magic**. More planeswalker cards will come, but at a slower pace than I believe most of our audience currently expects. My comments today are meant to better set these expectations.

I would love to hear feedback (positive and negative) on our plan in the forums or my email.



That's it for today. Join me next week when I have another preview and I talk about some of the other stuff going on in *Morningtide*.

Until then, may your race commingle with your class.

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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