



# Roguish Charm

Doug Beyer  
Taste the Magic  
Wednesday, February 27, 2008



*"A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking knave, a whoreson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd, in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pandar, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch."*

—Kent, to Oswald, *King Lear*

Despite what you may have heard from **Chandra Nalaar**, not every problem can be solved with a ball of fire. And despite what **Ajani Goldmane** believes, not every problem can be solved by appealing to the pure essence of another person's soul. Sometimes, to get the job done, it takes a subtler approach. Sometimes you have to walk down the shadier side of society, to a place where right and wrong are just terms in the deal, and loyalties are measured in coin. Sometimes you need law, order, and moral rectitude to take a back seat to *getting it done*.

Sometimes you need to summon a rogue.

They're sneaky, underhanded, ethically flexible, and skilled in the nastiest of aptitudes. They don't ask questions about why the job needs to get done—they don't mind ripping a few spells from your opponent's hand, they don't question the blowing up of a few artifacts, and they don't care why you need to steal that goat. When there's dirty work to be done, rogues are a planeswalker's best friend.

## The Rogue Creature Type

Although the Grand Creature Type Update retroactively installed Rogues into sets as far back as *Antiquities*, the first printed Rogues didn't show up until the adoption of the race/class model in *Mirrodin* in 2003. **Neurok Spy** and **Moriok Scavenger** represented the creative team's decision that **Magic** needed a type that would unify all those dastardly "worsted-stocking knives." (That set also introduced the Shaman type, now a staple class supported in *Morningtide* and throughout the game.) Until that set, Rogues were a scattered conglomeration of bandits, vandals, and spies, when classes were identified at all. After 2003, Rogues were still only a trickle—there were less than 30 of them in the Kamigawa, *Ravnica* and *Time Spiral* Blocks combined. It took *Lorwyn* block to turn on the firehose.

## Lorwyn's Rogues: Three Species of Mischief and More

The fairytale folklore that undergirds the Lorwyn setting is especially fitting for a set that supports Rogues. Theft, the rogue's traditional transgression of choice, is a central theme of fairytales. As a bonus, theft, as a crime of subtlety more than of violence, fit well with the creative team's desire to craft a lighter tone for Lorwyn. The art of *Lorwyn* and *Morningtide* depicts acts of trespassing, trickery, and petty theft as its worst sins, rather than the more intense aggression of other settings.

### Faerie Rogues

As the mischievous children of the plane, Lorwyn's insectile faeries make perfect rogues. They navigate faerie rings, allowing them a kind of intraplanar teleportation—the perfect getaway device (this disappearing-and-reappearing act is represented by the fact that many Faeries have the flash ability). Faeries are tiny, most of them only a foot tall at best, meaning they have the ability to wedge into spaces that others don't want them in, such as a kithkin's household or a giant's ear. And faeries of course fly, giving them a natural mobility that lets them look down on other races that may outbrawn them.



### Boggart Rogues

WHAT IS MAGIC?  
CLICK HERE!

PRODUCTS

Morningtide  
Lorwyn

MAGIC ONLINE

MAGIC The Gathering ONLINE

Top 8 Decklists  
Pro Tour-Hollywood Qualifier Season

GLEEMAX  
FIND OUT MORE!

MESSAGE BOARDS

Magic General Forum  
magicthegathering.com Forum

RULES

RULES

There haven't been many Goblin Rogues in **Magic's** history outside of *Lorwyn* Block; goblins aren't generally the stealthiest race. But *Lorwyn's* **boggarts** are sensation collectors, leading them to do whatever it takes to get their grubby claws on the new, the smelly, and the delicious. Boggarts' culture is based around sharing sensations with their warren-mates; their only recognized crime is withholding. So rogue-type behavior comes naturally to them. That's not to say they are in any way great at it—even though they have more of a kleptomaniacal bent on this plane, many of them lack the stealth skills to back it up. Just ask [this guy](#).



### Merrow Rogues

Merrows, *Lorwyn's* race of river merfolk, are among the plane's most refined and intelligent creatures. However, they are also the most skilled in subterfuge and double-talk. The silver-tongued fishtails can talk their way into someone's coinpurse quicker than you can say "My mom told me not to talk to strange river-folk." Furthermore, the Inkfathom school is composed of merrows willing to plumb the depths of the Dark Meanders, the mysterious underground tunnels of the Merrow Lanes river system where the sun doesn't reach. The Dark Meanders are rumored to be full of treasures, but the Inkfathoms who tread there may have lost touch with reality.



### Rogues of Other Races

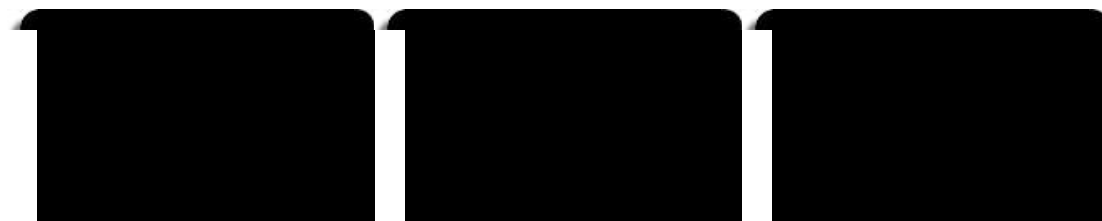
A few other races dabble in the thieving arts. **Moonglove Winnower** represents an elf charged with destroying eyeblights, the creatures deemed too ugly to live. He's got claw weapons lashed onto his fingers, which are then coated with the poison of the moonglove flower (see today's Letter of the Week). **Goldmeadow Dodger** is one of few kithkin who takes up the Rogue moniker—he's given up his old soldiering job to test his personal record in evading giants. In this way he unknowingly continues the hard-to-catch tradition of his far-away **Amrou** cousins.



### Changeling Rogues?

The flavor of changelings being rogues is a little hard to explain. Changelings, [as I've described](#), are not schemers. They adopt other forms reflexively and involuntarily, like chameleons—they are obvious even while being shapeshifters. Furthermore, their flavor is based around them taking the *physical form* of other creatures, which is strange when it turns out that their *class type* (like Rogue, or Warrior / Shaman / Druid / whatever) is what matters to game play. What is the flavor of a changeling counting as a Rogue?

Changelings are expert mimics. They don't ever fool anyone that they're actually elves or faeries or brushwaggs—but they do a good enough impression that you can tell what they're acting like, and good enough that the changeling does take on some actual properties of what it's mimicking. Check out the art of **Shapesharer**, a changeling sitting next to a giant who's doing some fishing. Does **Shapesharer's** mimicry allow it to become an expert fisherman? No—that changeling has no clue about trout psychology or river currents. But its goopy form allows it to simulate a physical net, which actually isn't that bad at catching some fish. A changeling that has **mimicked the moonglove** actually has some of the poisonous properties of the flower (again, see below for more on moonglove). A changeling mimicking a bunch of moths actually grows semi-functional wings.





Similarly, a changeling who's mimicking, say, a boggart rogue, will take on some of the properties of that rogue. It might grow gelatinous lockpick-fingers that kind of work in some padlocks after seeing a **Latchkey Faerie's** key-ring. It might take up the lithe, darting form of a **Pestermite** or the spikes of a **Prickly Boggart** to evade capture. It might mimic a rogue's **Cloak and Dagger**, gaining just enough of the essence of "rogueyness" to count when you're paying a Prowl cost. Changelings are Lorwyn's pretenders, poor at subterfuge but good enough at play-acting that they can get the job done.

## Rogues Gallery

*Morningtide* brings us some excellent rogue art (and a pun opportunity on Rogue Week).



*Prickly Boggart art by Jesper Ejsing*

I already showed off Jesper Ejsing's art of **Prickly Boggart** [back in January](#), but I wanted to bring it up again here. If you ask me, fear is an extremely fun ability to represent in art. Is this rogue's evasion a product of his woodland stealth or his smooth bluffing skills? No, not so much. He just has quills lashed all over him. They're spiky. Get out of his way. That's fear, boggart style.



*Oona's Blackguard art by Kev Walker*

There's a lot of cool here, and that's not easy to pull off on such a cute race of flitting faeries. But then that's Kev for you. I love the acorn-cap hand-guard on her sharp, blackthorn rapier. I love her bitter look—the "fun's over, give over your dreams or we're gonna get stabby" expression. And I love the barbed cord tying back her hair. She's a foot tall, sure. But she's got miles of badass.



*Merrow Witsniper art by Steve Prescott*

We talk about "storytelling" in the creative team a lot, meaning the ability of a piece of art to evoke a whole scene with deep characterization. Steve Prescott, who also is an accomplished **D&D** artist, has storytelling in spades. Check out how the Witsniper is about to load a dart into her ornate blowgun. Check out how clueless the flamekin shaman in the background is. It's not easy for an artist to sell a scene like this while still obeying all our barked orders, like "be sure to focus on the merfolk, she has to be the main element of the piece" and "merrows live in rivers, so make sure it looks like a riverbank" and "the flamekin shouldn't be able to see the merrow, so she should be behind the rock" and "we want the piece to be engaging, so don't turn her face too far away from the viewer." Balancing all these things is rough. But that's why Steve is one of our best go-to artists.



*Stinkdrinker Bandit art by Brandon Dorman*

This art just plain tickles me. **Stinkdrinker Bandit** gives your unblocked rogues a big power and toughness bonus, including himself. How do you get across the vibe of a creature who both sneaks around and hits hard? Why, you show a boggart hiding behind a tree with a turtleshell flail. He sneaks, and then he bonks. Hey, sometimes the storytelling is brief, right?



*Cloak and Dagger art by Daren Bader*

A quick note about Daren Bader's **Cloak and Dagger**. Usually a card has three names during its R&D lifetime. First it has its initial placeholder name, which is often something slangy like "Aggro Elf"—whatever the design team called it when they put it into Multiverse, the R&D card database. Once the card gets conceived, gets an art description, and gets commissioned to an artist, it takes on its conceived name, such as "[Druid of Gilt-Leaf Wood]." This name is seen by the artist and by the flavor text writers as they create art and words for the card. Finally it receives its final name after the flavor text writers get a crack at naming it, and the creative text coordinator (that'd be me) finalizes the winning name—like "**Leaf Gilder**." **Cloak and Dagger** is one of few **Magic** cards that kept its name all the way from initial design all the way to print, and you can see why—it's literally a dagger (which grants a power increase) and a cloak (which is, by the way, a synonym of the word "shroud"), and the clandestine meaning of the phrase ties to the mechanics of being a Rogue equipment.

## Letter(s) of the Week

Dear Doug Beyer,

With you being the new flavor guru, I was hoping if you could answer this quandary for me. **Wren's Run Packmaster** gives your wolves deathtouch. What is the flavor of this supposed to be? I just can't wrap my brain around it. I hope you can help me with this puzzler.

-Nathan S.

Good question, Nathan. Elves in Lorwyn use tiny amounts of a white flower called moonglove to make their blades and arrows poisonous (see cards like **Lace with Moonglove** and **Moonglove Extract**). The Packmaster taints the claws of his wolves with the poison, making even their casual touch lethal. You definitely don't want to have one of those puppies jump up on you.

As a follow-up to last week's article, [Share the Spark](#), I wanted to address one more clever letter.

Dear Doug Beyer,

Lots of writers say "Help someone just starting to play Magic" or "Help someone who wants to play Magic get started." But, if you play for the flavor, and your favorite color is black, then why would you help them? If you're supposed to be a black-mana-using planeswalker, wouldn't you prey upon them and use what little they know to your advantage?

-Sebastian B.

Absolutely. I'd go as far as to say that black-aligned mages might even be more motivated to teach **Magic** to others than white-aligned ones. How else are you, the power-greedy black-mana user, going to assemble your stable of spell-slinging underlings? How else can you corrupt your apprentices to your mad vision of a multiverse sculpted to your needs? Certainly the lessons might go a little differently—you might teach your fledgling planeswalker that there's a "booster tithe" inherent in the rules of **Magic**, say, or you might tell him that in multiplayer, you can never attack the person who taught you the game. I mean hey, it's Rogue Week—use flavor however you see fit, and for your own reasons. **Awakening** another person's spark doesn't have to be an act of selfless altruism. Go forth, black mages, and create your army of warped planeswalker minions!



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Doug Beyer](#) archive

---

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

---

© 1995-2008 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

