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# Shadowmoor than Meets The Eye, Part I

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Welcome to the first *Shadowmoor* Preview Week. Yes, it's *finally* time to start talking about the first ever large set not to come out in fall. (Okay, *Legends* and *Ice Age* were big sets and they came out during the summer, but *Shadowmoor* is definitely the first non-fall large set since *Mirage* began the whole modern-era block thing.) I've been holding in all the cool info about this set / block for over a year and I'm bursting at the seams to start talking about it. Also, before I'm done today I'll have a new, shiny preview card for you all to salivate over. Not just yet though. Give me some time to set the scene up first.

## Team Players

Before I dive into the hybrid pool, I have to first give props to my team. Without further ado, let me introduce you to the *Shadowmoor* design team:

**Mark Rosewater** – This is my fifth large set design (*Tempest*, *Odyssey*, *Mirrodin*, and *Ravnica* were the other four). In my not-so-humble opinion, there is no greater challenge in **Magic** design than creating large sets, so I keep asking to be assigned to them. As luck would have it, the guy who assigns them is also me. Now I try not to let on that I want to design the large sets, so I have to play hard to get with myself. That way I make me come and ask if I'll work on it and I can act all coy. But in the end, I know how to trick myself so I always just say yes long before I mean to. Add to this the fact that this was a block dedicated to hybrid (one of my pet designs) and I was signed up before I even asked. Man, I have my number.



**Devin Low** – If you're ever called to run a **Magic** design team, here's the secret of success. Stack your design team with strong designers. I know, it seems obvious, but you'd be surprised how often secrets of success are pretty straightforward. Devin has been on numerous design teams (*Saviors of Kamigawa*, *Guildpact*, *Coldsnap*, *Time Spiral* and *Future Sight*) and he's always impressed me, so when it came time to make my hybrid dream block come true, he was the first person I tapped. I was not disappointed.



**Mark Gottlieb** – I've read a lot of comic books and one of the interesting dynamics is how often a hero and his arch-nemesis have respect for one another. Such a dynamic exists between Mark Gottlieb and myself. It turns out Mark is a very good designer. So much so that whenever he works on a design team he's a constant thorn in the side of the Rules Manager. I would now make the dramatic reveal that he is the Rules Manager but I'm assuming all but maybe four of you already know that. (To you four—welcome to Making Magic. You might want to check out [my archive](#) for over one million words of me babbling about **Magic**; honestly over a million words; freaks me out too.) Anyway, I was putting together a rock-solid design team and that included Mark. It's kind of like the time that the Fantastic Four had to ask Doctor Doom to help them save the world (♫). Just replace "save the world" with "make an awesome set" and you'll capture the essence of our team-up.



**Ken Troop** – Several years back I was in charge of overseeing the creative team. At some point someone decided perhaps it might be a good idea to have someone oversee the creative team who just oversaw the creative team and didn't have to oversee all of design in his spare time. So we went out and got someone to do that. That person was Ken. (I should note that Ken has since moved on to work in the Digital Game department of Wizards and is not currently in charge of the **Magic** creative team.) Ken felt it would be a good idea to be on a design team to help understand how **Magic** design functions. I agreed and added Ken to the team. Because this set had a lot of flavor issues, Ken turned out to be a valuable addition.



**Sean Fletcher** – Most of **Magic** design is done by members of R&D that spend some to all of their time working on **Magic**. Occasionally I invite R&D members that don't work on **Magic** to join design teams. Less occasionally than that I ask Wizards employees not in R&D to be on design teams. (Aaron Forsythe is the example of one such person who let's just say really, really worked out.) Only twice in the history of modern R&D (starting with *Tempest* where all design of **Magic** sets was brought in house) has a person not employed by Wizards of the Coast been asked to be on a design team. The first person was Gregory Marques and he was asked to join the *Fifth Dawn* design team. (You can check out that whole story [here](#) and [here](#).) Gregory, by the way, has since joined Wizards of the Coast R&D as a designer, although not on **Magic** specifically. The second non-employee to be asked onto a design team was Sean Fletcher. That design team was *Shadowmoor*.



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Since this happens very infrequently, I feel it's only fair to spend a few paragraphs explaining how it happened. Also keep an eye out for a future feature article where you can hear about Sean's experiences on the design team first hand. So, how did Sean live the dream of many a **Magic** player? It all began with a robot, or more accurately a piece of a robot. You see, one day I came to my desk to find an envelope on it. In the envelope was a very creative pitch for employment. I don't remember all of what was in it, but the thing that stuck with me was that he had sent out similar envelopes to eight different people in R&D and each one had a piece that when combined with the other seven pieces made a three-dimensional paper robot. I should also stress that the production values were top notch. (It turns out Sean is a graphic designer.) It was very impressive. So much so that I threw it on a pile on my desk and forgot about it.

Flash forward to a year later. Sean tried again. Once again it was a very creative endeavor with top-notch production values. This one had a meta-puzzle which Mark Gottlieb and I solved together (hey, even Superman and Lex Luthor have had to work together on occasion; Mark, by the way, is a professional puzzle hunter so there was a reason I needed his help). Included with this latest batch was a cover letter where Sean said that we was visiting friends in Seattle and would love to have lunch with anyone willing to have lunch with him. I was impressed enough by everything of his that I'd seen that I took the bait and called him. I invited him to lunch. (I don't do this kind of thing very often, by the way. The only two other lunches like this I've had in the last few years were with current **magicthegathering.com** editor Kelly Digges and one of the designers in the Great Designer Search.... Okay, it appears having lunch with me is a good omen.)

The lunch went well and, as with Gregory, my instinct said that there was something there, so I got permission to ask Sean to join the *Shadowmoor* design team. I'm very happy I did, as I believe Sean was an excellent contributor.

## Stories from the City

Now that I've introduced the design team, it's time to get into the thick of *Shadowmoor* design. There are many facets to explore and in the upcoming weeks I plan to delve into lots of cool veins of design info. Today though I am going to focus on the backbone of the set: hybrid. How did it come about? How did it end up in *Shadowmoor*? Why is there so much of it in the set? Before my column is done I will touch upon all this and more. (And yes, I haven't forgot about the preview card—it's coming.)

Hybrid's story begins during the design of *Ravnica*. The biggest challenge of the design team was trying to find a way to approach the "gold" theme in a way that didn't just feel like *Invasion* 2.0. To that end, I decided that we were going to treat the ten two-color pairings equally. Normally, we put more emphasis on the allied color combinations both in volume and power. Sets tend to have one or two rules that they're allowed to break and the ally / enemy relationship was the rule I had chosen to ignore. Why had I chosen to do this? It stemmed from another departure I was trying to make from *Invasion*. The themes of *Invasion* pushed players towards playing as many colors as they could.



Mechanics like domain played directly into this design. To contrast with this, I liked the idea of *Ravnica* pushing towards two-color decks. This focus is what led to the "ten pairs treated equally" dictum. (Which, by the way, is what inspired Brady Dommermuth to come up with the idea of creating ten guilds, which then inspired me to use the guild model as the backbone for the block design.)

I knew I wanted a push towards two color decks. I knew I wanted some form of innovation involving multicolor. Most of all I knew I wanted to create something that pushed toward two colors rather than five. With all these ideas in my head I just began brainstorming. I focused on what made a card multicolor. It was two or more colors. It was color #1 and color #2. Then it hit me. What if we made a card that was color #1 or color #2? What if the card didn't require multiple colors but allowed multiple colors? This idea led me straight to the hybrid mana symbols.

The second I hit upon it I knew I had tapped into something very interesting. So much so that I started running around to other R&D members excitedly explaining what I had come up with. Be aware that I didn't have any cards or anything yet, just the concept of hybrid mana. Most of my conversations went like this:

**Me:** I've come up with an awesome idea.

**Them:** What is it?

**Me:** Cards that aren't one color.

**Them:** We already have those. They're called multicolor cards.

**Me:** No, what we have now is additive multicolor. For example, a card is black and red. Imagine if a card was black or

red.  
**Them:** I don't understand.

I would show them my crude hybrid mana symbol.

**Me:** This. This!  
**Them:** What is that?

My artistic ability is really bad so they literally meant "What is that?"

**Me:** It's a mana symbol. It's half black and half red.

**Them:** How do you pay half black?

**Me:** You don't. You either pay black or you pay red.

**Them:** So it's kind of like an artifact?

**Me:** It's not every color. It's only black and red.

**Them:** What do you do with that?

**Me:** I'm not sure yet, but it's got my spider sense going haywire.

Spider-man has an ability that lets him know danger is afoot. I refer to my instinct when a mechanic is hot as my spider sense. Yeah, I'm a geek. I don't think that's really news to any of you.

**Them:** Great, Mark.

It's hard to convey how someone says something in print but imagine "great" was said in the tone of "That's nice little boy; why don't you go back and play with your crayons?" The general issue that was raised was that yes I had come up with something that we had never done, but what was it good for? Traditional multi-color cards allowed you to make cards that couldn't be done in monocolour. Hybrid seemed to need effects that could only be done in monocolour and not just in one color but in two different colors.

For those of you that know something of Jungian psychology or the Myers-Briggs test know of a scale called sensation / intuition. Basically the scale measures how you understand and interpret new information. The sensation side trusts information that is tangible and present. The intuitive side is all about instinct and getting a sense of what the new idea is about. I'm off-the-charts intuitive. I don't think about new ideas as much as I allow them to wash over me. Such was the case with hybrid.

I knew that there was something very meaty under the surface but I hadn't quite wrapped my head around what it was. Fortunately, being in R&D had taught me that most of R&D was heavy on the sensation side and they had to understand how something worked before they would buy into it. This means that I often have to design cards to show something tangible for them to understand what I'm envisioning.

Luckily, one of the R&D members I went up to was Aaron Forsythe. He was on the *Ravnica* design team. Unlike many of the others, Aaron "got" it. He shared my excitement and the two of us set off designing hybrid cards. We went a little bonkers. We designed hundreds of hybrid cards. As we did so, we started getting a better of idea of what hybrid was capable of.

At this point, we decided to have our first big playtest with hybrid and all the traditional multicolor (a.k.a. gold) cards we had made to go with them. Those of you that read my three part column on the design of *Ravnica* ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) know that the first playtest showed us that having a set full of gold and hybrid cards was brain-melting. As it was a gold block, the hybrid had to go.

## It's About Time

As you all know, the *Ravnica* development team decided that the set needed a little splash (what I called "form" [a few weeks ago](#); as opposed to "function" which I'm going to talk about in a second) and hybrid was brought back in tiny numbers—thirty total for the entire block. I knew that hybrid was something much bigger than thirty cards. My work with Aaron had made me realize that it was a mechanic that could act as the function backbone of a block.

The block after *Ravnica* was *Time Spiral* and we walked into it knowing that the set was going to reflect a temporal disaster on Dominaria. My thought at the time was that hybrid would do a good job of reflecting the chaos of the environment. Things had gotten so bad that even the basic function of mana was starting to splinter. The other piece of the set was going to be mechanics that messed with the concept of time. This would reflect the temporal distortion.

But as *Time Spiral* started finding its identity it became clear that the time theme pushed us towards nostalgia. As nostalgia started eating up more and more of the set's design, it was obvious that there wasn't room for nostalgia and hybrid. Hybrid was, of course, shown the door for the second time.

Here was the real kicker. During each block, we do market research to determine what players liked and disliked. For *Ravnica* block, hybrid scored high. Very high. Higher than gold. It was the highest-rated mechanic in the block. Now, I took that news with a grain of salt. A lot of hybrid's excitement came from the novelty of it. Still, I felt like it tapped into something that players really liked. We had to find a home for it.

## Two by Two

Next came *Lorwyn* block. For reasons I explained in [my column at the time](#), we had chosen to chop the year into two two-set mini blocks. The idea was we were going to build two mini-blocks that each had their own identity but that



connected in interesting and synergistic ways. When I started mapping out the block design I began with the assumption that *Lorwyn* block was going to be tribal. Why? Because it had been tagged for tribal many years before. But with the new two-and-two scheme, I wanted to take a step back and rethink everything.

As I did this, it became obvious very quickly that tribal was a perfect fit because it was a block theme that we could support in the second block without any rules text support. Merely keeping the same creature types would allow for new cards in the new block to fit in decks from the old block. As the blocks evolved, numerous other synergies came up, but I'll talk about those as I get to them.

The big question was what to do with the second mini-block. I was hoping to find something that, like tribal, could be seamlessly hidden in the first block without having to spend any text space dedicated to it. The more I thought about it, it became clear that I needed to mess around with some quantity that was already naturally on the cards, much like creature types. This list is pretty short but as I ran through it one stood out in my mind: color.



Just like creature type, color is easy to include because **Magic** by design uses color. The vast majority of cards would have a color because in the game the vast majority of cards have a color. The second block was going to revolve around color mattering. We had played around with the theme a little in *Invasion* but it isn't something we've really exploited as a block theme.

Remember that in the back of my head I've always wanted to find a home for hybrid. *Shadowmoor* looked like it wanted to be about color. The two dovetail beautifully together. Why? Because the key to making hybrid matter as a block theme is finding ways to make the hybridness of the cards matter. What I mean by that is that a hybrid block has to have things in it that make players want to play with hybrid cards for the sake of them being hybrid cards. To do this you have to find something unique about them that grants them some boon that other cards wouldn't get. While there are a few answers, the clearest and easiest answer is that hybrid cards are multicolored. Even if you play them in a monocolored deck, they still have their multicolor status.

So we had a theme that wanted a mechanical hook and a mechanic that wanted to exploit that very theme. It was a marriage made in heaven. To me at least. Well, to me and Aaron (remember that Aaron was the lead designer for *Lorwyn*). I had stressed when I pitched the two mini-block system that the two blocks had to have stronger synergy than any two consecutive blocks we'd ever done, so when I explained that the two blocks were going to be tribal and hybrid, I got a few strange looks.

"Trust me," I'd say, "It's going to work out great."

And it does, but that's a story for future weeks. (The "Part I" in the title should have been a little warning that this was going to happen.) Before I go, I promised you a preview card so let's get to it. First I'll show you the card and then I say a few things about it.

Click [here](#) to see something cool.

Hopefully this card is worthy of having "Awe" in its title. Let me start by explaining that this is white-blue's "demigod"—that is, this is part of a five hybrid mana cost creature cycle at rare. The first preview card Demigod of Revenge is also in the cycle. Yes, that means there's three more for you to see. Why are there so many of the hybrid mana symbols? As you'll see when I start explaining the theory behind a hybrid block that there's method to our madness.

That's all I got for today. Join me next week as the story of *Shadowmoor's* design continues.

Until then, may you enjoy hiding things in plain sight.

Mark Rosewater

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\* See [Fantastic Four #6](#), true believers! -ed.

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Can't wait for *Shadowmoor's* release on May 2? Don't miss your first chance to play with *Shadowmoor* cards at the [Prerelease](#) on April 19 and 20!

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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