

The Shadowy Pendulum

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Waaaaay back in September of 2007 I talked about the way **Magic's** pendulums were swinging with *Lorwyn* (and how that makes me salivate a bit). The message at the time was that we were letting the pendulums of setting, scope, and emotional tone swing in a new direction on their own. *Lorwyn* -- it's a departure from the gloomy post-apocalyptic setting of *Time Spiral* Block. It's a break from gore and diabolical evil and world-spanning crisis. It's a breath of fresh spring air for the art of **Magic**, giving some spotlight time to a few growing things for a change. It's a lighthearted romp through the woods in a game that's usually about killing enemy wizards across dimensions.

Yes, the setting of *Lorwyn* was all those things. But confession time: it was something else, too. It was the wind-up to a hard shove of the pendulum.

Lorwyn was, in part, constructed to set up the payoff of *Shadowmoor*. It was the high, arching pass while the power forward sneaks along the baseline for the alley oop (go Jayhawks!). It was a bump set for the spike (thanks, volleyball.about.com!).

Lorwyn's light tone was no accident. Ceaseless sunshine. Sunlit green on mountains, islands, plains and even swamps. Lighthearted treefolk and cherubic kithkin and glassy-eyed changelings and, for pete's sake, a mechanically-relevant tribe of faeries. It was all part of a concerted effort to take the tone pendulum and push it as far in one direction as it could go, so that when we let it drop, it would swing back, hard, in the other direction. Welcome to the payoff, folks. Welcome to *Shadowmoor*.

Attractive Opposites

The *Lorwyn-Shadowmoor* year has two blocks in it. We had sort of contradictory goals for those two blocks, which was going to make them tough to pull off. We wanted the two blocks to be:

1. Extremely different from one another, yet
2. Fundamentally connected to one another.

Those two goals aren't exactly predisposed to like each other. They're not just at odds; they break each other's toys and bicker in the back of the station wagon on long car trips about who touched whose side of the seat. But somehow, we had to make them come together as friends and work together.

The solution was to use the double-block format as an advantage. What comes in related, yet contrasting pairs? Opposites. The idea was, let the two blocks be flip-sides of one another. Find a fun pendulum, and let the two blocks represent opposite ends of that pendulum. *Magic* hasn't had a two-and-two year like this before, so the field was wide open. Tons of tonal opposites were available. But one stuck out. Honestly, the decision wasn't that hard.

R&D member 1: The agenda for this meeting is deciding what opposites we should use to distinguish, yet connect, the "Peanut" and "Jelly" blocks for next year.

R&D member 2: How about light and dark?

R&D member 1: Good meeting, everyone.

Seriously. Choosing the way to contrast the two worlds wasn't that hard. The devil is in the details, though—it would have been easy to make the two blocks feel too close to one another, but then we wouldn't have done justice to our first goal: making them feel unique and distinct from each other. Part of how that was implemented was in the design of the cards, and the move away from tribal mechanics.

Tribes, but not Tribal

It's a good time to emphasize that *Shadowmoor* and *Eventide* are *not* a tribal block. Nor do they form some kind of "reverse tribal" or "anti-tribal" block to contrast with *Lorwyn*. From a mechanical standpoint, it's an all-new block that happens to be set on the plane that was once Lorwyn. It has its own mechanical themes, its own styles of deckbuilding, and all-new keywords that steer it away from *Lorwyn's* tribal-heavy gameplay.

However, our pal Vorthos, magnanimous psychographic that he is, will offer a powerful gift to Timmy, Johnny and Spike once *Shadowmoor* releases. The fact that the plane of Shadowmoor is peopled with the same races that lived on Lorwyn means that you (as a deckbuilder) can continue to evolve and empower the tribal decks you have already built from *Lorwyn* and *Morningtide* cards. *Shadowmoor* adds a few unusual monsters beyond the normal tribal races, and a few oddball class types too; the further we get away from *Lorwyn*, the less of the eight core tribal races you'll see. But for now, the overlap is pretty huge, giving you a lot more ammunition for your elf decks, giant decks, warrior decks, shaman decks, and what-have-you.



So *Shadowmoor*, as a new perspective on the same plane, gives you plenty of fuel for more (and now slightly twisted and macabre) creature-type-theme-deck fun. But it also gives you the opportunity to ignore the creature type line entirely and start fresh with a new set of mechanics and themes.

A tiny caveat: *Shadowmoor* does have two cards (by my count) that "care about" creature type. But they're not about any of the *Lorwyn* races, and they definitely don't make *Shadowmoor* a tribal set (any more than Elvish Champion made *Invasion* a tribal set). More on that later in Taste the Magic's *Shadowmoor* previews.

So, what are these mechanical themes, and what do they mean to us in flavor terms? Let's talk hybrid.

To Two, Too

Almost all of the eight main races in Lorwyn (elves, kithkin, merrows, faeries, boggarts, flamekin/elementals, treefolk, and giants) span two colors. Kithkin are almost completely mono-white, with only a tinge of green; treefolk touch three colors; and elementals span all five. But the rest of them are solidly two-color.

Those races all appear again in *Shadowmoor*, and they are all generally two-color again.

But their colors have shifted. However, let me add the technical addendum: "sort of."

Example time. Let's look at a rare elf in *Lorwyn*.





Elves were green- and black-aligned in Lorwyn. They were haughty tyrants of the realm, so beautiful that they considered any creature less beautiful to be unworthy of life.

Now let's look at a rare elf in *Shadowmoor*.

Elves are green- and white-aligned in the plane of Shadowmoor, having shifted in flavor from their Lorwyn selves. But the *set* of *Shadowmoor* has a hybrid mana theme, meaning that Wilt-Leaf Liege's green-whiteness is expressed in *hybrid* mana, not "gold" multicolor like Nath of the Gilt-Leaf—hence my caveat that elves have "sort of" shifted in color affiliations. You could cast Wilt-Leaf Liege for $\{G}\{W}$, $\{G}\{W}\{G}$, $\{G}\{W}\{W}$, or $\{G}\{W}\{G}\{W}$ —and that last one means that Nath and Wilt-Leaf Liege could be played in the very same two-color deck.

And it plays pretty darn well there. Wilt-Leaf Liege's "Glorious Anthem" ability makes all your green creatures happy—and guess what? Nath and a whole lot of other elves happen to have been green all this time. Wilt-Leaf Liege does a good impression of Imperious Perfect, making Lys Alana Huntmaster churn out 2/2s and Hunting Triad crank out 6 power worth of elves. Imperious Perfect herself becomes 3/3 and cranks out 3/3 Elf Warriors when both are in play.

But the Liege can do some new tricks. It works with any green creatures, not just elves—it makes Ambassador Oak a 4/4 that gives you a 2/2 buddy, for example. It works perfectly well in white decks, too, making Cloudgoat Ranger a spit-take-worthy 10-power-for-five-mana proposition.

The true drama comes when you play the Liege with creatures that are both green *and* white (as many hybrid creatures are). Those +1/+1 abilities are listed separately, so Wilt-Leaf Liege makes gold (or hybrid) green-white creatures +2/+2. How about a Gaddock Teeg being a 4/4 for ? How about a Rhys, the Redeemed who becomes 3/3 for  (hybrid), and who cranks out 3/3 green-white elves? And believe me, *Shadowmoor* comes with many more hybrid creatures to max out the power of the Lieges. (Oops. Oh, what the heck, you know you were gonna have the Orb of Insight count up instances of the word "Liege" anyway.)

As a bonus, the Liege comes with an extra ability that makes it counterproductive to Thoughtseize or Mind Shatter it from your hand. Discard? Schmiscard.

The New Role of Elves

So, elves are green-white now. What, pray tell, does this do for their flavor? The answer lies in their relationship to things of beauty. The elves are still creatures who care about the beauty in the world, but now that the world has become dark and scary, the elves have fallen in stature—they no longer rule a world of beauty, and instead they ply a losing fight for whatever beauty is left. This change has shifted them from powerful to meek, from tyrannical to protective. Let's take a glimpse at the style guide for *Shadowmoor* for more elf flavor goodness.

From the *Shadowmoor* Style Guide: Elves and Beauty

Where there is beauty, there is hope.

Hunted, surrounded, humbled, and besieged, the elves of Lorwyn suffer a cruel reversal of fortune as the world shifts to its twilight. Once the elves gathered the world's beauty out of a sense of entitlement. After all, as the most beautiful of all Lorwyn's creatures, the elves were the only ones fit to control, judge, and appreciate beautiful creatures and objects. Now, the elves gather wondrous objects and noble creatures to their safeholds to protect and preserve them. The elves are the keepers and defenders of the beauty that remains in the world.

Elves seek out examples of beauty in the world, such as creatures, objects, and places. When the elves locate such a target, they do everything they can to protect and preserve it. If the elves find a wondrous location, they establish a safehold there and attempt to protect it from harm. The elves steal or capture creatures and objects to bring them to their safeholds. The elves believe that by gathering the world's beauty and protecting it as it appears, they can slowly increase the total beauty in the world. One day, this beauty can overcome the fear and ugliness that plagues the land.

From the *Shadowmoor* Style Guide: Safeholds

A fortified elven homestead, usually located in the trees and sometimes on the ground as well, to protect it from attack and to give the elves a bird's eye view of surrounding lands. Safeholds are fortified both physically and magically. The oldest and largest safeholds are built into trees that stand on small hillocks called shee knolls. A shee knoll is an ancient gravesite, where the souls of elf warriors and druids lie slumbering. The soil around a shee knoll is sterile. It provides a clear meadow that makes sneaking up on a safehold difficult. If a safehold is destroyed, the shee knoll beneath it remains. This place becomes a horrid, twisted reflection of the great defeat suffered by the elves. Rarely, the ghosts of elvish dead haunt these places.



So if Shadowmoor is a world of eerie gloom, why did I start out by previewing an elf, now the world's only defenders of light? It's because the elves show off the change in the most dramatic way. Some of the world's races changed only a little after the Aurora, but the elves, as the race with the most to lose, have transformed the most completely. As previews continue, keep tuning in to the site to see how the other creatures of Lorwyn have become darker incarnations of themselves—and how other creepy-crawlies have made their way out of the folklore and into the newly gloomy world.

Letter of the Week

Last week Andrew D. asked whether **Magic** would ever return to a setting it had visited before.

Would **Magic** creative ever go back to a plane? From what I'm hearing, Shadowmoor is still set on Lorywn, but it's changed a lot. If you were to return to a plane, what would you do to make it different but still recognisable as it was printed before?

-Andrew D.

Well, Andrew, *Shadowmoor* represents exactly the way we would do so—with a twist. In many ways it's still the plane of Lorwyn—it's still a pastoral plane with little civilization, still a world derived from the myth and folklore of the British Isles, and still a place peopled with fairytale races—but its tone and palette (not to mention its mechanical themes) have changed dramatically. Today's preview is another hint to the way that Shadowmoor has become "different but recognizable"—the elves' majestic Gilt-Leaf Wood from Lorwyn is now a haunted Shadowmoor forest called the Wilt-Leaf Wood. There are other terminological tweaks across the plane that suggest this "dark reflection" feel.



There are other examples of **Magic** returning to planes. During *Time Spiral* Block we returned to Dominaria, but that plane was so shaken by apocalypse that it was transformed to a blasted wasteland. I wouldn't be surprised if **Magic** went back to a previous setting again sometime, Andrew, but it's unlikely we would ever return to a plane without changing anything. Part of the reason we like to switch it up every year is to keep players guessing, and to add to the repertoire of worlds that planeswalkers can visit, draw power from, and occasionally, threaten.

The Shadowmoor Anthology!

As a partially self-serving final note, the *Shadowmoor* anthology releases this week! It starts off with an 88-page novella by the *Lorwyn* and *Morningtide* novel authors Scott McGough and Cory Herndon, that continues the story from those two novels as the Aurora cloaks the plane in shadow. Plus, there are eight eerie tales set in the world of Shadowmoor (including one written by me, and another by former Taste the Magic columnist Matt Cavotta), each highlighting a different set of characters from that haunted plane. I'm hearing that many locations have it on shelves *today* – check your local hobby game shop or bookstore.



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!

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