



Shadowmoor than Meets The Eye, Part II

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 Making Magic
 Monday, April 7,
 2008



Previously in Making Magic – Created during Ravnica block as a means to approach multicolor from a different vantage point than Invasion did, hybrid was born. But hybrid combined with traditional multicolor was a little too brain-numbing, so hybrid was sent packing. Until development, that is, when it was decided that Ravnica block would just use a wee bit. The big thrust was being saved for Time Spiral. Until that is, nostalgia muscled it out of the set. Then along came Lorwyn and Shadowmoor with its wacky two mini-block year. Lorwyn was chosen to be tribal, and Mark was looking for another set theme that would mesh with it. Realizing that tribal worked well because cards in the next block had to have creature types and thus could play along with Lorwyn block's themes without having to dedicate any rules text to Lorwyn's tribal theme, Mark stumbled upon the idea of using color as a theme for the second block which, of course, allowed him to bring back the mechanic he'd be dying to use for the last three years: hybrid. All that was left now was figuring out how exactly to build a set around hybrid.

Welcome to Shadowmoor Preview Week, Part Deux. This week I'll be continuing my story of Shadowmoor's design. I will also be showing off another preview card, this time something I hinted in my pre-preview tease [several weeks back](#). As usual, I'll drop it in when the time is right. I've spent several different columns hinting at all the potential hybrid had. Last week I explained that I've been dying to build a block around it. This week I am going to dive into how exactly I did just that.

Two for the Price of One

Before I start talking about building around hybrid, I wanted to start by first examining what exactly hybrid is and what it means to card design. I guess I'll begin with what drew me to hybrid in the first place. As Ravnica was a multicolor block, I began by spending time looking back at the multicolor cards that had already been created. What they made me realize was that all the multicolor cards we had were restrictive. What I mean by that is that every multicolor card at that point forced restrictions on you, the biggest of which was that it forced you into multiple colors.

Everyone always accepted this at face value because multicolor by definition meant that a card had more than one color. Which in turn meant that every multicolor card had to have multiple colors of mana in its mana cost. But that isn't exactly true. Case in point:



Here's a card that is colored yet does not share the colored mana requirements in its mana cost. This card made me realize that a card could be multicolored without necessarily having to link up with its mana. (Transguild Courier obviously didn't lead me to hybrid as hybrid was designed before the Courier was, but it was this general concept that got me there; general concepts are harder to show in a graphic than actual cards, though.) This, in turn, led me down the path of cards that are two colors yet didn't require two colors to play. From here I stumbled onto the value of "or" as opposed to "and." A card that was red or green could still be multicolored as long as it could be played by red or green.

But what did this mean? As is true with most of my favorite mechanics, hybrid allowed the players to have choice. A hybrid spell gives its caster the ability to decide how he or she wants to play the spell. Unlike most other spells in Magic, hybrid cards give the player options as to how to pay for them. It is in this option that lies much of what is interesting about the mechanic. For example, having cards that require one color or another really changes how deck building works.

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As an example, let's talk about cards in a particular set. Also, just to make the math easier, I am going to avoid the existence of colorless cards such as artifacts and lands and just assume all the cards are one of the five colors. Barring wacky *Torment*-like sets, we can also assume that all colors are represented equally. Finally, I am going to approach how this affects Limited. Constructed is similar with a few extra variables thrown in so I figure to make the cleanest point possible, I'll stick with Limited for my example. Here's what this means. An average set has this breakdown:

White – 20%
Blue – 20%
Black – 20%
Red – 20%
Green – 20%

If you choose to play two colors, you have access to 40% of the set. If you play monocolored, you have access to only 20%. Now let's look at a hybrid world where half the cards are hybrid and all hybrid is allied color. (*Shadowmoor*'s hybrid is slightly below half, but once again for simplicity I am rounding up.) Here's what this world looks like:

Mono-White – 10%
Mono-Blue – 10%
Mono-Black – 10%
Mono-Red – 10%
Mono-Green – 10%
White-Blue – 10%
Blue-Black – 10%
Black-Red – 10%
Red-Green – 10%
Green-White – 10%

Next let me condense the numbers down to each color. What follows is a listing of what percent of the set is in each color:


White – 30% (White, White-Blue, Green-White)
Blue – 30% (Blue, White-Blue, Blue-Black)
Black – 30% (Black, Blue-Black, Black-Red)
Red – 30% (Red, Black-Red, Red-Green)
Green – 30% (Green, Red-Green, Green-White)

This means if you are playing a single color you have access to 10% more cards than "normal." When you go to two colors you also get an additional 10%. (As an example, if you were playing white and blue you would have access to all white cards, all blue cards, all white and blue cards, all green and white cards, and all black and blue cards; note that you don't get 60% because then you would be counting the white-blue hybrid cards twice.) How different an environment does this extra 10% create? Quite different. For example, in *Shadowmoor* draft you can choose to draft a monocolored deck. Not just occasionally; you can pretty much do it every draft if you wish. With a few rare exceptions (*Urza's Saga* black, I'm looking at you), that's just hasn't been consistently possible in drafts.



But wait, there's more. You can also consistently draft any allied color pair in *Shadowmoor* draft. That's ten viable draft decks available to every draft. And note I'm not talking about archetypes, just colors that the set allows you to draft. On top of all this, *Shadowmoor* draft has one more giant quirk. You have the ability to shift between one and two colors or between which allied color you wish to pair with your main color pretty much up until the end of the draft. For example, when we first got *Shadowmoor* in (yes, one of the many perks of working in **Magic** R&D), I drafted a deck that I thought was going to be white-blue, only to finish the draft and realize that it was mono-blue—maybe. You see, I had enough cards that could be played in a mono-blue deck, thanks to hybrid, that I was able to just play *Islands* if I chose. But because of my large amount of white-blue hybrid, I was also able to play a white/blue deck. Adding in a few *Plains* to splash some mono-white cards wasn't really as much a disadvantage as normal.

This is the flexibility that the extra 10% brings. In **Magic** design we have a saying (okay, I have a saying), "You don't need to change much to change everything." Certain ideas are so cemented in the consciousness of the players that playing with just one of them can cause all sorts of ramifications. To use another example, one of the most disorienting things when building *Shadowmoor* decks in Limited is remembering what to keep when you get rid of a color. In traditional multicolor environments, you get rid of a multicolor pile when either color is eliminated. In a hybrid world, you don't get rid of a pile until both have been eliminated. As you will see when you get to play (plug: the [Prerelease](#) is under two weeks away), having half the set be hybrid completely changes how you look at deck building.

Mana Means

The next interesting thing about hybrid is how it relates to mana production. I'll begin by looking at monocolored cards (a.k.a. "normal" **Magic**). The direct tie between colors and mana means that inertia pushes you towards one color. For instance, if you have one-drops you want to play, you are encouraged by the game to play one color. Only by playing one color can you guarantee the ability to play turn-one drops on the first turn (I'm assuming you mulligan the no-land hands). As the mana requirements get turned up—that is, as more colored mana starts appearing in the mana cost—the game also pushes you towards monocolored. A card that costs  is only going to be played on the third turn in a deck that only has forests / green mana producers.



Now let's take a look at hybrid. Hybrid costs don't do what I said above. They don't push you towards one color but rather two colors. For example, if I have a creature that costs , I will be able to consistently play it on turn one in a deck with forests and plains. Likewise, a card that costs  can reasonably be expected to drop on turn three in a green-white deck. Note that hybrid doesn't prevent monocolor play.

Why then do I say it pushes towards two-color play? Because of the other great force in **Magic**. You see, there are two forces at work in the game, one that pushes you towards playing one color and the other that pushes you towards playing multiple colors. The first is the mana system, as I explained above, which rewards the consistency of monocolor play. The second force is the color wheel. To help promote the playing of multiple colors (as well as to add in flavor and a host of other valuable things), the color pie separates different abilities into different colors. The reason most players go into a second (or third or fourth or fifth) color is to gain access to abilities not available in the first color. It is this force that pushes hybrid toward two-color play. Since you are less penalized in your mana base, playing two colors gives you access to two different slices of the pie without the normal mana issues the game traditionally forces upon you.

Color Me Impressed

The last important thing that hybrid brings to the table is that while only requiring one color of mana to play, it is always a multicolored card. A monowhite deck that plays green/white hybrid spells will have green cards in its deck. While normally this isn't all that important, in a set built around hybrid, color wants to matter. Which brings us to today's preview card. Let me show it to you first and then I'll talk about all the ramifications of what it means.

Click [here](#) to see it.

To discuss this common Aura, let's assume I have the following three cards in play:



We have a white vanilla 2/2, a green vanilla 2/2 and well, what we in R&D call a "French vanilla" hybrid green-white 2/2. (For the point of this discussion just assume Safehold Elite is a vanilla 2/2—it's not, but the extra ability just muddles up my nice simple explanation.) If you play Shield of the Oversoul on each of these creatures, here's what you would get:

- **Glory Seeker** becomes a 3/3 flier.
- **Grizzly Bears** becomes an indestructible 3/3.
- **Safehold Elite** is an indestructible 4/4 flier.

At first glance it seems like Shield of the Oversoul pushes players towards having to play a two-color deck if they want to maximize the card. Here's the thing—it doesn't. A mono-white or a mono-green deck can play Shield of the Oversoul and maximize it. How? By playing green-white hybrid cards.

This is one of the most intriguing aspects of the multicoloredness of hybrid. It allows colors to matter in places that they normally don't. For instance, multiple times I've had my opponent unable to use his black creature destruction spell on my creature because it's black, except I'm not playing a deck with **Swamps**. Because we want to make hybrid matter, we have woven much into the set that makes color matter. As today's preview card shows, the power of having both colors makes everyone eye the hybrid cards even in monocolor decks.

I Love It When a Plan Comes Together

Now that we have the key components that make hybrid tick, we can start talking about how to build a block around hybrid. The first thing I had my design team (myself, Devin Low, Mark Gottlieb, Ken Troop, and Sean Fletcher—see [last week](#) for more info on these guys) discuss was the percentage of hybrid we wanted. To get the effect that I described in my first section, I wanted to push that percentage as high as I could. Thus, we started design by having half of all the cards be hybrid. That number stayed through all of design as was only scaled back a tiny bit by development.

Once we had the large volume of hybrid cards, we had to make them relevant. This played out in two ways, each connected to my other two points about hybrid. First, we realized that we had to go heavier in the mana requirements. Why? Because without them we didn't have the ability to push them. Let me explain. When we make a traditional multicolor card (which I'm going to call "gold" for this discussion) the card has a restriction built into it. A green-white

gold card requires a player to have both green and white mana. That restriction allows us to make cards in green-white cards at mana costs lower than we could in just one color.

The problem with hybrid mana is that it's not restrictive. A green-white hybrid card is no harder to play than a mono-white or a mono-green card. Thus, there's no mana savings. In fact, we tend to run into the opposite problem. If a hybrid card does something that both colors can do and it does it at the same mana cost then we are just making a card that is more powerful than the two monocolored versions. Be aware that sometimes this is okay because the cards in question are not at the top of the curve. For example, Safehold Elite, which I showed part of above is a 1 2/2 creature with a keyword ability. The reason this is okay is that neither *Glory Seeker* nor *Grizzly Bear* is anywhere near the top of curve. In fact, both cards have been obsoleted multiple times.



The trick we learned was adding extra colored mana. A 2 2 card has to compete with all the 2 * and 2 2 spells. A 2 2 2 card, on the other hand, is competing with the * * *, * * *, * * * and * * * spells, a much tinier subset. Note that 2 2 2 by definition cannot be stronger than * * * or * * *, but it can be a little below that and still be pretty powerful. The interesting side effect of pushing up the number of colored mana symbols is that it pushes decks towards one and two colors and away from three-plus. Interestingly enough, *Shadowmoor* block does a much better job of driving players to two-color decks than *Ravnica* block, which had a two-color guild theme.

The final piece to the puzzle was making the set care about color. As I explained above, making both colors relevant on a hybrid card made what could be an extraneous quality significantly matter. In addition, by playing into color we had the interblock synergy that I talked about last week. Just as we can make tribal matter merely by having consistent tribes, we can make color matter in the block before by pushing people towards one- and two-color decks.

A Second Look

Now comes the fun part where I get to roll back the clock and talk about how *Shadowmoor* shaped some decisions in *Lorwyn*. During *Lorwyn* previews, I [talked about](#) my desire to push creature types out into more colors. Now, everything I said then was true, but there was another important factor at play that I didn't talk about. Because *Shadowmoor* wanted to be a hybrid set and having color matter is a important way to make hybrid relevant, I knew it was going to have a "color matters" theme. (For those who care, by the way, hybrid begat the "color matters" theme, not vice versa—it was the understanding that hybrid wanted "color matters" that made me realize how well the two blocks would fit together.) This meant that I needed to make sure that color was relevant in *Lorwyn* in ways above and beyond normal.

So, how do I make color relevant? For starters, I discovered how to make color an issue in a tribal set. How do I do that? Two ways. First, I pushed every tribe into multiple colors. Second, I bled tribes into new colors (which is essentially mandatory to accomplish the first step) to make color itself a novelty of the tribal block. The end result is that it forced more players into two-color decks and it allowed a set-up of flavor that we can pay off in the next block.

Now we get to one of the most controversial parts about my mega-block plan. One of the reasons I set up two (or more) color associations for each tribe was that I knew the big linchpin to connect the block was the shift of the world. I wanted the two blocks to be connected yet I needed each to work independently. The way to accomplish this was to make the two blocks aspects of the same world that has gone through a great metamorphosis. As you will see next week, there are numerous ways we set this transformation / contrast up, but as today I am focusing on hybrid, I'm going to talk about how I used color as a tool.

Here's what I needed:

- **The two worlds had to feel connected but different.**
- **I had to represent a change.**
- **I wanted to build on the previous blocks themes in a way that didn't eat into design space yet also advanced those decks.**

The answer was color. By setting up color associations in the first block, I could accomplish all of the above by shifting the colors of the tribes, in each case leaving one color the same to overlap. Let's walk through how this accomplished each objective:

- **The two worlds had to feel connected but different** – The continuity of keeping the same races (and I should stress that because this isn't a tribal set

the creative team was not restricted to making every single creature overlap creature types) help connect the two blocks. Shifting the colors clearly made them feel different both in mechanics and in flavor.

- **I had to represent a change** – What better way to represent a change than by having a change? How do we make the players feel like the world has changed? By taking a fundamental part of *Lorwyn* and changing it.

- **I wanted to build on the previous blocks themes in a way that didn't eat into design space yet also advanced those decks** – I've already talked about the joy of supporting tribal without needing any rules text. The part that I haven't talked about is how I feel it's important for each block to not only continue what the block before it has done but to build upon it. By shifting colors, we open up how each tribe can be built. I'll take elves as an example. Before *Lorwyn*, Elves were a green race that primarily showed up in mono-green decks. Then *Lorwyn* came along and started making black Elves. Now players who wanted to build Elf decks had more options. Beside mono-green Elf decks, now they could build mono-black or black-green decks. *Lorwyn* takes that a step further. Elves now also exist in white. This just adds whole new layers on how Elf decks can be built.



I said above that this was controversial. Let me explain why. A certain contingent of R&D felt as if the best thing we could do was stay consistent with colors so that we maximize the number of cards from *Shadowmoor* that simply could go into *Lorwyn* decks. Making green-white Elves muddied the water as players that had a black-green deck didn't know what to do with them. My response was that we were giving more Elves to the *Lorwyn* elf deck. Every green elf simply went into the deck as did any hybrid elf with green in it. I felt like the ability to shake things up and force *Lorwyn* decks to adapt was completely in the spirit of how **Magic** evolves. The compromise we came up with was to throw a bone to the *Lorwyn* decks by having a few hybrid creatures in *Lorwyn* tribes that showed up in the *Lorwyn* color combinations. The flavor was that these are the last remnants of *Lorwyn*, creatures that were able to partially fight the change.

In addition, while this isn't true for Elves (at least in *Shadowmoor*), many of the other tribes picked up cards that were beneficial to the color combination even if many of the creatures weren't of the proper race. For example, there are cards that benefit black and red that could find a home in a *Lorwyn* Goblin deck.

My point with this section is to show that much of what we set up to do in *Shadowmoor* had to be laid in to the design of *Lorwyn*. As I said when I [first announced the two mini-block plan](#) a lot of thought went into figuring out how to build two blocks that fit together yet each stood on their own. This theme will be explored a bit more in Part III.

Half and Half

The final thing I wanted to talk about today was a general philosophy that went into designing hybrid cards. Hybrid cards, by definition, are about finding overlap between two colors. When designing hybrid cards you have to figure out where the line is drawn. On one side, you have the tight and exact. This side looks for pure overlap, abilities that both sides clearly have available. Black and red can both have haste. Red and green can both have trample. Green and white can both have vigilance. (Perhaps you can now see why I [pushed during Future Sight design](#) to expand where creature keywords were allowed.) On the other side you have loose and general. This extreme allows you to put something in a hybrid card if either color has it.

The problem with either extreme is they lead to bad things. The first extreme greatly limits your design space and doesn't allow anything fanciful and fun. The second extreme can irreparably damage the color pie. The key I found was to find a sweet spot in the middle. What this means is that you have to find areas that each color has access to but that you are free to explore lesser used areas of the color philosophy. For example, let's look at my preview card from last week:



A number of people in the boards and my email asked what was white and blue about this card. My answer is this: white has the ability to reduce creatures to a small 0/1 or 1/1 state. This can be seen in cards like [Afterlife](#), [Crib Swap](#), [Humble](#), [Humility](#), and [March of Souls](#). Its flavor is that white can bring meekness through its power of humility. Blue, meanwhile has the ability to change the shape of other creatures. It can be seen on cards like [Ovinomancer](#), [Polymorph](#), [Pongify](#), and [Shapesharer](#). Note that Godhead of Awe bleeds a little in each area. White tends to neutralize the creatures abilities when it shrinks them and blue tends to target its "polymorphing" effects on single creatures, but the idea was that each color was close enough that it felt okay. And in hybrid design, we have to be willing to be a little more lax as long as we are keeping to the color's philosophies.

I'm sure this hybrid design philosophy will bring up much debate and I am eager to hear people attack or defend different choices made on hybrid cards. I do want to reassure everyone though that while we have stretched the color pie a bit in this block, we did so in a reverent way making sure to not violate the essence of the colors.

Signing Off

Whew! That's what I have to say for today. As always I am curious to hear all of you chime in be it in the thread or my email. Almost halfway into the previews, how are all you feeling about *Shadowmoor*?

Join me next week when I explore some non-hybrid aspects of the block.

Until then, may you explore the colors you hadn't noticed were there.

Mark Rosewater

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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