

Hybrid Flavor

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Actually, this isn't just a hybrid article. It's a hybrid column. It's one part art appreciation, one part investigation of the meanings and origins of card names and flavor text, one part backstory / storyline of the **Magic** multiverse, and about seventy parts "what's it like to be a planeswalker" (I'm very fond of that part). And since I enjoy varying the format of my writing, it's also one part news article, one part short story, one part slideshow, one part radio call-in show, and about seventy parts multiverse-spanning stream-of-consciousness Vorthosian vision-quest scribbblings unearthed from the murky headspace between **Magic** player and the ideal of the planeswalker. So, to me at least, it's no surprise that today we talk about the concept of "hybrid" in a very hybridized way.

The Flavor of Color Alignment (Hint: It's Pie-Flavored)

In this column I talk a lot about "color alignment." Boggarts in Shadowmoor are red-green-aligned. Benalia is a white-aligned nation. But what does that mean? Here's a circular definition: a creature is aligned with a color if it's summoned using mana of that color. That sounds kind of meaningful, but really that's like saying "a creature is green-aligned because it's green." What we really mean by a creature's color alignment, in flavor terms, is that it embodies the values of that color. Most creatures are aligned with only one color; Raging Goblin, for example, is red-aligned because it embodies red values.



It's impulsive, it's short-sighted, and it's a goblin. Is it summonable with red mana because it's red-aligned, or is it red-aligned because it's got red mana in its cost? This kind of question is quite hard to answer, and it's because of the powerful flavor behind the **Magic** color wheel. The five colors of mana have mechanical import, to be sure, but the main division between them is *flavor*. There's no answer to the question "Which came first, red or red's values?"—they've been one and the same since **Magic** began. Creatures that embody red's slice of the color pie are red; and red creatures embody red's slice of the color pie.

Now let's look at a more complicated case. Vexing Shusher, as a Shadowmoor boggart, is both red- and green-aligned. The boggarts of Shadowmoor are brutish, instinctual creatures, concerned only with their next meal. They embody the values of both red and green. More specifically, they embody those values that red and green *share*. As such, many of them are summonable with either color of mana.



Now, there are individual differences among the race. Some boggarts in Shadowmoor skew a little more toward green, and others a little more towards red—just like there were both black boggarts and red boggarts in Lorwyn. The race as a whole has both colors among it, in both incarnations of the plane, and those individuals who lean so red that they're not green anymore, or so green that they aren't really red, aren't hybrid, even though the race as a whole is aligned with both colors. Hybrid is a special type of a two-color-aligned race. Hybrid red-green boggarts represent *individuals* who have elements of both colors. You'd expect Vexing Shusher to exhibit traditional red characteristics and traditional green characteristics—in particular, characteristics that would be at home in either. It's such a fitting example of the value *overlap* between the colors that it's summonable with either, or with a combination of the two.

The Flavor of Gold vs. Hybrid



Scab-Clan Mauler: Hey, uh...

Doug: Huh? What?

Scab-Clan Mauler: So... What about us?

Doug: What about you?

Scab-Clan Mauler: We're gold.

Doug: Yeah?

Scab-Clan Mauler: So we're red-green-aligned, too, but we aren't hybrid.

Doug: Ah yes. You guys have a different flavor from hybrid.

Scab-Clan Mauler: We know our flavor! We taste like the delicious rage that smashes civilization!

Doug: No, I mean...

Scab-Clan Mauler: Kidding. We know what you mean. Go ahead.

Doug: Well, the flavor of gold is—

Scab-Clan Mauler: SMASH CIVILIZATION!

Doug: I—

Scab-Clan Mauler: CHOKE THE SYSTEM WITH THE FIST OF ANARCHY!

Doug: ...

Scab-Clan Mauler: Sorry.

Doug: Okay then. So, while the flavor of hybrid is the *overlap* between the values of colors, the flavor of traditional multicolor (or "gold") is the *fusion* of the values of two colors. Gold creatures often combine very different aspects of the two colors into one, and as such require both colors of mana in order to summon them.

Scab-Clan Mauler: So we're red-and-green aligned...

Doug: Right.

Scab-Clan Mauler: But we don't embody the overlap of red and green?

Doug: Oh, certainly you represent a lot of the intersection of those colors. Trample is mainly green, but occurs frequently in red. And like all Gruul creatures, your flavor is based on an ardently-held antiestablishment sentiment, common to both red and green. And the bloodthirst ability occurs across both colors.

Scab-Clan Mauler: So we could be hybrid.

Doug: Based on your abilities, yes. It wouldn't shock anyone if you were hybrid. But you're pretty aggressively costed at two mana.

Scab-Clan Mauler: So? Vexing Shusher is two mana.

Doug: It's a fine line, but you're slightly finickier to cast.

Scab-Clan Mauler: SMASH THE STATE!

Doug: !

Scab-Clan Mauler: Sorry. All these fine distinctions, these notions of carefully balanced **Magic** development... it makes us... twitchy. We meant, what do you mean, finicky to cast?

Doug: Let's... let's use a visual aid. If I put up a chart, will you promise not to go postal on me?

Scab-Clan Mauler: We promise nothing.

Mana Payment	Gold (Scab-Clan Mauler)	Hybrid (Vexing Shusher)	Artifact (Painter's Servant)
Play for  ?	No	No	Yes
Play for  ?	No	No	Yes
Play for  ?	No	No	Yes
Play for  ?	No	Yes	Yes
Play for  ?	No	Yes	Yes
Play for  ?	Yes	Yes	Yes

Doug: Here we have three two-mana creatures and some of the ways that you could come up with two mana. Some of those ways of paying two mana succeed in casting you, my friend, and some of them succeed in casting the Shusher—and others don't. For reference I included an artifact creature, too—Painter's Servant, a Scarecrow from *Shadowmoor*.

Scab-Clan Mauler: Eyes... glazing over...

Doug: Note how there's a continuum of mana specificity from gold at the most specific to artifact at the least specific, with hybrid in the middle.

Scab-Clan Mauler: Did you just say "continuum of mana specificity" to a couple of Gruul berserkers?

Doug: *coughs*

Scab-Clan Mauler: Relax, we're kidding! We're grateful that you're not talking down to us! Most people think we're idiots just because we're easily bored, anti-intellectual, and prone to the destruction of people bearing charts.

Doug: Yes, well... *pulls collar*

Scab-Clan Mauler: But we don't see the point. You're telling us this chart has something to do with flavor?

Doug: Ah. Yes. See, in order to summon Vexing Shusher, a planeswalker would need to be in touch with red mana, green mana, or both. Assuming they were properly acquainted, Chandra Nalaar could

summon the Shusher, as could Garruk Wildspeaker, as could some planeswalker who could tap into both of those colors of mana. All these planeswalkers could also theoretically summon a Painter's Servant, as artifact creatures are colorless and therefore colored-mana-independent.

Scab-Clan Mauler: But in our case...

Doug: In your case, you're a multicolored creature. The planeswalker summoning you would have to be trained in both kinds of magic. Multicolor spells and creatures are the most restrictive types of magic on that chart—look at all the Nos.

Scab-Clan Mauler: We like to stick it to the man.

Doug: So you do.

Scab-Clan Mauler: So now... what does this have to do with anything. Sure we're harder to cast than hybrid creatures. What does this mean for our flavor? What are we *like*, compared to a hybrid creature?

Vexing Shusher: You're, like, really loud.

Scab-Clan Mauler: Heyyy! Little hybrid dude!

Vexing Shusher: Shhhhhhhh.

Doug: Hybrid creatures express the values that are in common to their two colors. You, Mr. Shusher, embody some value that both red and green share—specifically, an abiding hatred for counterspells!

Vexing Shusher: Damn straight.

Scab-Clan Mauler: Heard that. *high-fives him*

Doug: Multicolor creatures express the values of the two colors, sometimes the overlapping values, sometimes not. You, Scab-Clan Mauler, embody some red values and some green values—specifically, the bloodthirst ability, trample, and creatures that work well in straightforward, aggressive strategies.

Scab-Clan Mauler: Yeehaw! We *love* the values we embody!

Doug: Yes. Yes, you do.

Scab-Clan Mauler: So if you met a hybrid creature on the street, and you didn't know anything about him but that his mana cost was hybrid, you might expect him to be, I don't know, consistent in his character.

Doug: What do you think, Shusher?

Vexing Shusher: I think this conversation has gone on long enough.

Scab-Clan Mauler: We get it. You hate talking, huh.

Vexing Shusher: Shhhh.

Doug: Yyyeah. Anyway, yes, I'd say you're on the right track. But it's not that a hybrid creature has to be consistent with itself. In a way, hybrid creatures have a smaller scope of values that they can embody. If you've studied Venn diagrams—

Scab-Clan Mauler: No. More. Charts.

Doug: Fair enough. Well, that is, you might expect a red-green hybrid creature to be very similar to another red-green hybrid creature, whereas gold red-green creatures could actually be more "Chinese menu"—mono-red aspects fused together with mono-green aspects. Hybrid creatures are more focused in their flavor and values, because they embody smaller pieces of the color pie.

Vexing Shusher: The edge crumbs.

Doug: Sorry?

Vexing Shusher: If you were slicing a pie into five pieces, hybrid would be the crumbs that develop at the places where you sliced. It's the bits right on the edges, the crumbs that originally belonged to the pieces on either side.

Doug: Yes, that kind of works. Venn diagrams are better, honestly. But that works for now.

Scab-Clan Mauler: I'm hungry.

Vexing Shusher: Me too.

Doug: Me three.

Scab-Clan Mauler: AZORIUS PIE FOR EVERYONE!

Vexing Shusher: Shhhh!



Letter of the Week

Today's letter comes from Josh.

Except for one, I can tie back all of the art on the *Shadowmoor* rare lands to lands in the *Lorwyn* block (which was a very cool idea). Does *Mystic Gate* tie back to a specific land from *Lorwyn*?

-Josh W.

Sharp eye you've got there, Josh. There are indeed intentional flavor correspondences between five of the "tribe lands" in *Lorwyn* and *Morningtide* and the "hybrid duals" in *Shadowmoor*. Each one represents a location that has gone through a kind of before/after process as sunlit Lorwyn became gloomy Shadowmoor. Let's take a look at the lands you're talking about:



Lorwyn's red-white-aligned giant land, the amphitheater where Galanda Feudkiller would hear and evaluate the problems of other races, has become a smoking ruin in Shadowmoor, more aligned with the cinders than giants. Artist Rob Alexander made the transformation complete.



Elves were once green-black-aligned, and now they're green-white. As Christopher Moeller illustrates, their handsome palisade has become worn and run-down as their role has changed from beautiful tyrants to humble beauty-seekers.



Boggarts were black-red in Lorwyn, and now they're red-green. Ralph Horsley reillustrated Wayne Reynolds's tree-fort-like hovel as a gloomier location—ironically with less green growth to match the Shadowmoor look and feel, despite the land now producing green instead of black!



You might think that Wanderwine Hub would become the blue-black land in Shadowmoor, and there are definitely compositional similarities thanks to artist Warren Mahy. But the bell tower in the art reveals a deeper truth: merrows in Shadowmoor inhabit places that have flooded, like some old Rustic Clachans. Warren Mahy reimagined his Wanderwine Hub with Fred Fields's Rustic Clachan in mind.



Which brings us to Mystic Gate. Mystic Gate represents the *Shadowmoor* evolution of *Morningtide*'s Rustic Clachan—although a different clachan than the one that flooded—note the lack of a bell tower. Both cards are the efforts of artist Fred Fields. You can see how the diagonals and perspective are similar in each piece of art. In Shadowmoor, though, kithkin are more about walled fortresses rather than welcoming, open villages, so they have a gate to trap intruders either in or out. If it weren't for

their increased xenophobia after the Aurora, you would probably see similar buildings inside the village, like on Rustic Clachan.

Thanks for your question! I'm heading out on vacation for a bit, so I'll see you again in two weeks. Hopefully nothing terrible will befall the column while I'm gone.

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