

# I'M IN UR COLUMN, TASTING UR MAGIC

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**S**urprise! I'm not Doug "Who's going to write my column while I'm on vacation?" Beyer. Though it shouldn't take a Rosheen-fueled Stroke of Genius to figure that out...

Welcome to a very special episode of Taste the Magic: The Uncreative Edition. Why is it so uncreative? Because I am NOT part of the **Magic** creative team. I'm a proud member of **Magic** Design and Development, the awesomest teams at Wizards of the Coast! And even if they're not (which they are), we're way more awesomer than the **Magic** creative team, that's for sure.

See, Design, Development, and Creative are separate yet intertwining entities that all take part in the **Magic** card creation process. Doug "Trade me your Grollubs" Beyer writes about how Creative handles the more "flavorful" aspects of the cards, namely card concept, card name, illustration, creature type, and flavor text. **Magic** Design and Development are responsible for mana cost, card type, rules text, and power / toughness. At least for *Shadowmoor*, our teams didn't overlap on any individual part of a card except creature type! It's better that way, really. Trust me, you don't want a designer choosing a card name or a creative writer choosing a power and toughness. Otherwise, you'd end up with cards named "Gruulemental Blast" or a -1/n creature. Not cool.

For the most part, the teams live in peaceful harmony during the short times when they aren't constantly at war. Otherwise, Design and Development get along very well with Creative, except when Creative totally screws Design and Development over, and the other times when Design and Development totally screw Creative over.











*Shadowmoor* was one of those times...

## \*Commence Flashback\*

I was offered the chance to do some pickup design work on *Shadowmoor*. I flatly said no.

Actually, I said, "Hells yes!" This was around the time Sean Fletcher finished his design work (Sean's *Shadowmoor* design article was as much news to me as it was to you.) Lucky for me, Mark Rosewater (a former writer for the hit TV sitcom *Roseanne*) was fond of tossing Great Designers into meeting rooms like ragdolls, just to show us who's boss.

One very important part of the set creation process for Design and Development is the inclusion of storyline characters, the legendary creatures. Due to the color-changing properties of the Aurora turning all of Lorwyn "upside-down," Creative requested for Design and Development to include these "dark versions" of Legends in *Shadowmoor*:

Race	Lorwyn Legend(s)	Lorwyn Description	Lorwyn Color(s)	Shadowmoor Legend	Shadowmoor Description	Shadowmoor Colors
Elf	Rhys, Maralen, Nath	imperious, privileged		Rhys	humble and hopeful	
Treefolk	Doran	friendly and insular		?	hostile and invasive	
Kithkin	Brigid, Gaddock Teeg	sympathetic, superstitious		?	xenophobic and suspicious	
Merrow	Sygg	diplomatic and aloof		Sygg	alien and avaricious	
Fae	Wydwen,	capricious and		Oona	(no change)	

	Vendilion Clique	cruel				
Boggart	Wort	mischievous, hedonistic	☞☞	Wort	aggressive and territorial	☞☞
Flamekin	Ashling	passionate and earnest	☞	?	bitter and vindictive	☞☞
Giant	Brion	territorial and solitary	☞☞	?	surly and temperamental	☞☞
Elemental	Horde of Notions	awe-inspiring, dreamlike	☞☞☞☞☞	?	awe-inspiring, nightmarish	☞☞☞☞☞

(Some of the *Shadowmoor* races bleed a bit from those colors on hybrid cards, but we wanted to stay true to these colors for the legends.)

These cards were called story holes, and it was important that our card designs for them stay true to the flavor of the character. Part of Creative's job is to populate **Magic** settings with interesting characters, and it's R&D's job to deliver on them with appealing card designs.

Flavor is an extraordinarily powerful weapon in the struggle to make appealing **Magic** cards. Cards without flavor become a series of onerous zone changes augmented with the incrementing and decrementing of variables. Not fun!

One aspect of card design I excel at is capturing flavor (at least, I'm told by Brian Tinsman, my boss and my favorite game designer who didn't write for Roseanne). As such, I have a relatively high "batting average" for legendary creatures: Ashling the Pilgrim's game text, Maralen of the Mornsong, Rhys the Redeemed's 2nd ability, Sygg, River Cutthroat's trigger condition, and Wort, the Raidmother. And Rosheen Mea—

Wait, Rosheen Meanderer is NOT on the list of story characters for *Shadowmoor*! So how did she get there?



## Hijacking the Flavor

At the time, I had a card design backburnered since *Morningtide*. Believe it or not, this was the character description sent to hole-fillers during *Morningtide* (before *Shadowmoor*):

Rosheen Meanderer (R or RW) – Ancient, constantly babbling giantess who is one of only a few beings in the world who maintains her memory across the Aurora.

Rosheen Meanderer herself is the sister of Kiel and Lorywn's Brion Stoutarm. At first glance, persist would be a nice fit with her due to her resistance to the Aurora.



If you remember from my first ever design article, I hinted at some 'big spell' mechanics for *Morningtide's* Shamans. One such Shaman had the ability to tap for four mana, but only for X spells. After all, the biggest spells in **Magic** are X spells!

So, during a hole request for [R] rare creatures in *Shadowmoor*, I ran across my notes for this X-spell-loving Shaman while remembering the scramble-brained Rosheen. I thought to myself, "This could be Rosheen!" While some kind of coin-flipping rules text might be "more flavorful," X spells capture enough variance to fit the character (at least, that was my plan!).

I stated my case in an email for why Rosheen should be in *Shadowmoor*, along with a card design. If you didn't know, this brash, process-derailing initiative was a bit uncouth. At the time, I was just SOME KID with an INTERNSHIP in R&D that's TELLING CREATIVE what LEGENDS TO PRINT as if I'm KING CRAP OF TURD MOUNTAIN. Besides those reasons to not listen to me, there was already a [R] legend in Wort, the Raidmother, not to mention the color-bleeding of my card design, the narrowness of her ability, and the distinct lack of rules support for the ability.

That's a lot of ifs, ands, or buts! But to my surprise, my card design entered the "Jelly" file, ripe for Future Future League play (where we test cards for brokenness):

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Rosheen Meanderer
3(r/g)
Legendary Creature - Giant Shaman
3/3
T: Add {4} to your mana pool. Spend this mana only to play spells that contain
{X} or activated abilities that contain {X}.
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Aaron Forsythe, lead developer of *Shadowmoor*, made a point during a subsequent meeting to remove "activated abilities" from Rosheen's text, but being very busy as the Director of R&D, he didn't update the file swiftly. This delay was long enough for playtesters, including me and Noah Weil, to independently build and smash Rosheen decks into each other.



Upon seeing our Magi of the Candelabra, Mirror Entities, and Citanul Flutes fight each other, Aaron Forsythe began to weep. He held up a silk-embroidered napkin firmly twixt his fingers to catch his tears, soaking each pellucid drop as time stood still. In this moment, he was again wholly human. He whisked away, climbed the highest, surf-battered outcrop and decreed into the gale winds, "Never again shall Johnny be denied fun!" Thunder crackled in reply; the gods, it seemed, were pleased.

Rosheen Meanderer was updated to work with "any costs that include X" along with a +1/+1 buff (she's Brion Stoutarm's sister, after all!), and life was good.

As for Rosheen's controversial flavor text:

***"Night after night,  
Rosheen babbled  
about a bygone sunlit  
world, her every word  
dismissed as a  
madwoman's ravings."***

The words "night after night" have detractors, but let me explain. Shadowmoor is indeed a "never-ending dusk," so much so that many early illustrations required tweaking to remove sunlight, but there are still "days" and "nights". Creatures (like us) still operate on a daily cycle, even with no true sunrise or sunset. Just as Lorwyn has dawn, noon, and dusk with no night, Shadowmoor has dawn, dusk, and night with no noon (and the sun is always hidden behind a thick blanket of cloud).

And that's the story of how the lowly design intern defeated the entire **Magic** Creative Team for a day, and all was right with the world. Just remember: what's both Tasty and Magical at the same time?

*Flavor.*

## **Bonus Section!**

This excerpt from the *Shadowmoor* anthology shows a little of Rosheen's role in the storyline:

Jack joined the hushed crowd of Mistmeadow dounsfolk huddled together in the town's broad central square. Two hundred or more of his fellow kithkin had effortlessly arranged themselves as close to one another as possible without actually touching. A line of overhead torches cast a sickly yellow glow over the area to create an irregular chamber of diffuse light amid the otherwise endless and perpetual dark. Hundreds of unblinking eyes stared, wide open and waiting, into the infinite night.



The assembly didn't wait long. Not long after Jack arrived, Mistmeadow's leader, Cenn Molla Welk, strode to the center of the square. She was an older woman, gray and wizened, but her voice was sharp and her mind was even sharper.

Cenn Molla positioned a three-legged stool on the cobblestones and stepped up onto it. It was a small stool and she was a small woman, but she towered over the diminutive residents of Mistmeadow. Molla tossed her head to clear a lock of silver-white hair from her eyes and raised her hands over her broad, round head.

"My friends," she said. Initially, almost everyone was startled by Molla's voice, as almost everyone was more accustomed to hearing her thoughts than her words. "Thank you for coming to listen in person. Mistmeadow has a decision to make. It was presented to me as your leader, but I am a cenn, not a queen." This brought more than the expected amount of laughter from the villagers, belying their tangible anxiety. "I do not make decisions for you, but with you," she said, quieting the laughter with her trust and confidence.

Jack nodded, his approval of Molla's words joining the ripple of support that slowly rolled across the square. Everyone liked Molla because Molla had done a good job of keeping them all alive—and she had an undeniable way with words.

"Kithkin of Mistmeadow," Molla said. She extended her hand to the cottage on her left, and the crowd silently parted between Molla and the cottage's front door. "I present Maralen, who speaks for the Wilt-Leaf elves."

The mindweft seethed in shock and horror as a tall, willow-limbed figure emerged from the cottage. Everyone was expecting a fellow kithkin from a distant doun, a long-lost cousin who had traveled far to bring them important news. No one was expecting an elf, let alone one so lanky and predatory.

"Listen to what she has to say," Molla said. "Hear what she has to offer. Then let us decide on it together."

The tough woven material of the elf's drawn hood stretched over the elegantly sweeping horns below. The lithe woman's legs were freakishly long and her body appallingly slender, as if some dread mystical force had taken a properly proportioned kithkin maid and stretched her out into some kind of two-legged stick insect shape. She was taller than any Wilt-Leaf the doun had ever seen.

Jack felt more than simple mistrust or tribal revulsion churning among his fellow kithkin. The assembly's collective reaction was decidedly suspicious, hostile, and growing malevolent. The mood became ugly when Molla climbed down from her stool and the elf climbed up. Mistmeadow's leader yielding to an alien, an elf? If the cenn herself hadn't called them here and presented the hooded maiden as an honored guest, the crowd could have easily become a mob and painted the doun's gates with this Maralen's blood.

Jack shared the crowd's hostility, though his was slightly tempered by curiosity. Surely the elf maiden knew the risk she was taking, as did Molla. What had the stranger said to the cenn to arrange this sudden audience? What could Maralen say now to overcome Mistmeadow's palpable fear and distrust of her?

The elf pulled back her hood to expose her fine, curving horns and her heart-shaped face. Her hair was black and luxurious, her eyes dark and wide. She stood silently for a moment, craning her face as she scanned the crowd. Maralen bowed deeply at the waist, perfectly balanced atop the tiny stool.

As she straightened once more, the elf inhaled deeply. Raising her hands and stretching them wide, Maralen began to speak. "Mistmeadow," she said. "I will be brief, as I am an unexpected guest."

An unwelcome guest, Jack thought, though he could not be sure if the snide correction originated in his brain or filtered in from the majority of those listening.

"Your doun is in danger . . ." Maralen went on.

Our doun is always in danger, the crowd thought.

"Beyond the normal dangers it contends with every day. Far beyond, and far worse. Worse, and bigger."

The crowd's reaction grew louder, more insistent, and for a moment it lost its perfect unity. Worse than boggarts? Bigger than treefolk?

Oblivious to the silent debate, Maralen kept talking. "A giant has been roused southeast of here."

A kithkin at the far end of the square shouted aloud, her voice shrill and mocking. "You brought us together for that?"

"You're wasting our time, elf. And yours."

Maralen waited for the heckling to subside then said, "A giant has been roused, and is on her way here. A very large and very dangerous giant."

"Bollocks!"

"Yeah! Haven't you ever seen a century oak treefolk?"

"Bigger than any giant. Much bigger."

"And we fight them off three, maybe four times a year."



"This giant is unique," Maralen said, still unperturbed by the catcalls. "I would not have troubled you otherwise. Her name is Rosheen Meanderer."

Jack recognized the name, as did many others. A cold feeling of concern took hold of the assembly. Rosheen Meanderer was a name that commanded respect, even awe. Oldest and largest of the giants, she was blessed with the gift of prophecy and madder than a rabid weasel. For the first time since Maralen started speaking, everyone gave the elf their full and undivided attention.

"Rosheen is coming through this region. The swathe of destruction she has cut so far is more than wide enough to encompass Mistmeadow and everything around it. Her progress is rapid and steady, and it obliges every living thing to get out of her way. Citizens of Mistmeadow, I fear your down is in her way. You must go or Mistmeadow will be trampled flat, along with any kithkin who remain inside."

The elf paused to allow her audience to fully digest her words. Jack's reaction was perhaps the most dismal of all. He knew better than anyone else in the courtyard how unlikely it was to find safe refuge in the wilds outside Mistmeadow's walls.

"All is not lost." Molla's steady voice cut through the mounting panic in the square. "Hear her out."

An old man beside Jack shouted, "But what can we do?"

Maralen's smile was both sad and hopeful. "Reach out to your neighbors," she said. The crowd murmured but Maralen raised her voice over them. "The Wilt-Leaf tribe is just on the other side of the river. Vigilant . . ." Maralen wavered slightly and a strange flicker of sadness crossed her dark eyes, but she continued forcefully. "The elves are dedicated to preserving that which is good, healthy, and beautiful. Their mission is to protect things . . . things like Mistmeadow." Jack felt a tiny ripple of pride roll through the attentive minds of the doun.

"With their help," continued Maralen, "you can avoid Rosheen's frenzy. When Rosheen moves on, the vigilant will help you rebuild—for Mistmeadow can be rebuilt so long as her clever and industrious residents survive."

"Mistmeadow can do far more than merely survive." The kithkin who interrupted the elf stood at the back of the assembly, but his voice was loud, strong, and even. A moment of concern flickered across the mindweft, the speaker was not of the doun. The anxious moment passed when the crowd realized that even though the stranger was not from Mistmeadow, he was one of them, a kithkin.

The citizens of Mistmeadow stepped aside to let the robust figure through. Jack's skull buzzed with excitement as the crowd recognized Donal Alloway, warrior-cenn of Kinscaer, the formidable leader of the largest and most prosperous kithkin community in the world.

Alloway was of average height, but extremely lean and wiry for a kithkin. A black leather cloak with a stiff, high collar hung across his broad shoulders. The collar framed a face both stern and handsome set beneath slicked-back black hair, and he wore a huge sword on his hip that was nearly as long as he was. The blade hung at an angle just off the horizontal—woe betide anyone foolish enough to stand behind the warrior-cenn should he turn quickly—yet Donal Alloway's footing remained balanced and assured. His polished boots clicked against the cobblestones as he approached Maralen's speaking perch.

"You all know me," Donal Alloway said, and he was right, everyone did, "what I've accomplished, and what I'm capable of." His eyes darted back and forth across the crowd and his gaze was sharp and accusing. "I thought I knew the brave kithkin of Mistmeadow. But in listening to you scrape and grovel before this . . . elf. . . seeing how quickly you turn to them without once consulting us, your own kin . . . after all this, I wonder if I ever knew Mistmeadow at all." The unexpected scolding stunned and silenced the dounsfolk in an instant.

"I am amazed," Alloway continued, "truly amazed, my cousins, and disappointed. Did you believe a threat to Mistmeadow would escape my notice? Or that having identified the threat I would simply abandon you to it? I too have heard of this giant, Rosheen Meanderer, and her rampage. I too recognized the danger she poses to Mistmeadow. I came to offer my help and my protection. All of your brothers and sisters in Kinscaer will stand with you against those who would destroy you, no matter how large or how numerous. But I must warn you, I will burn Mistmeadow to the ground and make war on Vigilant Eidren himself before I allow your noble kithkin down to form an alliance with Wilt-Leaf."



Maralen stepped nimbly down from the stool. She faced Donal Alloway across ten feet of empty space. "This isn't a debate, Cenn."

"No, it is not," Alloway laughed harshly. "It's an insult. Why would good, honest kithkin throw in with elves from the perilous east when their own flesh and blood calls to them from Kinscaer in the warm, safe south?"

"The elves are just across the river," Maralen said. "Kinscaer is three days away at least. Can this flesh and blood arrive in time to do Mistmeadow any good?"

"I came here from Kinscaer in less than a day," Alloway said. "No one knew I was here." He raised his hand over his head and shouted, "Who is to say I don't have a hundred archers with me already, standing by and waiting for my signal?"

"I am," Maralen said. "If you came that fast you came alone. Rosheen only turned this way a few days ago. But it'll be days more before you can assemble any kind of meaningful fighting force. The giant will have come and gone by then."

"Oh? And why is that?"

The elf woman frowned. "What?"

"Why is the giant coming at all? What 'roused' her and sent her this way in the first place?"

Maralen's eyes narrowed. A thin, sharp smile curled the corners of her mouth and she cocked her head to one side. "You do cast quite a long shadow, don't you, Cenn?" she asked. "But you are misinformed. No matter how numerous and skilled your spies and scouts"—the elf's voice dropped into a terse whisper—"they are inferior and unreliable compared to the ones I employ."

"Perhaps," Alloway said. "But if so, that is not the only unreliable thing present at this gathering." The black-clad cenn drew his giant sword and pointed the blade at Maralen, its tip steady and unwavering. "My reach extends even into the Wilt-Leaf Forest, milady. I have the confidence of Vigilant Eidren himself. And I'm reliably told that the Wilt-Leaf sent no envoy to Mistmeadow."

A soft, audible gasp floated up from a hundred kithkin throats. Maralen's hard, sharp eyes did not blink.



"No offer of aid from Wilt-Leaf," Alloway continued. "No promise of protection. No foundation for a long and lasting alliance. And no Wilt-Leaf maiden named Maralen." He slashed the air with his sword. "Who are you, stranger? Who are you really? Did you come here to exploit the giant's rampage? Or are you just the bad omen that precedes misfortune? Molla Welk did this down no favors when she received you. Leave Mistmeadow before your presence brings us even worse luck."

Maralen glanced past Alloway. The crowd was quickly growing hostile and aggressive behind him. "You will regret this, Donal Alloway," she said. Then she turned to the throng and said, "As will Mistmeadow. The cenn of Kinscaer doesn't want to protect you from me, my suspicious friends—he wants to enslave you. Your tribe has a name for this, I'm told. A word to describe a relationship where one party has all the power and the other does all the work: lanamnas. That is what Donal Alloway offers Mistmeadow. Permanent lanamnas."

Alloway blinked in both astonishment and amusement. "You don't know anything, do you?" he said, and everyone who heard him had to agree.

Chuckling, Alloway lowered his sword. "Lanamnas is natural. Lanamnas how we get things done." He spat at her feet. "No outsider could ever understand."

Maralen's expression grew dark. "Accept his aid," she said to the dounsfolk, "and you will have his agents and spies on every street corner inside of a month."

"Would elves on every corner be any better?" Alloway sheathed his sword. "Take my advice, false envoy, and get out of Mistmeadow while you can still walk. The giant is a kithkin problem, and we will deal with it."

The elf straightened to her full height and sadly shook her head. "Forgive me, Mistmeadow," she said. "I should have been more persuasive. I will do my best to remember you when you are gone." Maralen drew her hood back over her horns. She walked toward the far end of the square, toward the doun's main gates.

Several dozen kithkin refused to move out of her way, and many more moved forward to block her path.

"Let her through." Molla Welk had climbed back up on the stool and she shouted over the square through cupped hands. "She entered Mistmeadow on my invitation and spoke as my guest. She is not to be harmed or hindered until she leaves."

The angry kithkin stepped aside. No one wanted to bring the curse of a faithless host down on Molla as the cenn, for it would surely spread to the rest of them.

Without another word or a glance backward, Maralen strode out of the town square. She continued down the cobblestone street until she passed through the doun gates and disappeared into the fog.

Scores of kithkin voices all spoke at once as soon as Maralen was out of sight. Jack felt a nauseous rush as audible words and inaudible thoughts competed for his attention. After the initial surge of excitement dwindled, the crowd's reaction became organized, coherent, and whole. What do we do now?

Molla hesitated and Donal Alloway's voice filled the gap. "I have a plan to save you," he said.

Someone voiced the crowd's first and most immediate hope. "Are your archers standing by, like you said?"

"No," Alloway admitted. "But only because they wouldn't be much help. No, this is a problem to be avoided, not confronted. Your lives are paramount, but I know a way to save your homes and businesses as well. It will be dangerous," Alloway said. "But if you will put yourselves in my hands and follow my stratagem precisely . . . a single one of you can save the whole doun. One brave kithkin will fend off this giant."

"How?" Jack said, and his voice was joined by a hundred others.

"By the same method that has kept your village safe for generations: misdirection. We can't allow the giant to come through here, or even near here. To keep her away, we just have to find the right lure. Once we have something she wants more than she wants to keep blundering in this direction, we can lead her somewhere else, somewhere she won't cause any harm."

A warm flush of hope swept through Jack. Donal Alloway was onto something. This was precisely the sort of magic at which Mistmeadow's adepts excelled. The doun knew at least a dozen spells to irresistibly draw an enemy's attention.



"What's the right lure?"

"How do we find it?"

"We need a personal item from the giant. Something . . . intimate." Alloway warmed to the crowd, his voice charming, engaging. "A swatch of her clothing, a token she regularly employs, or a charm she wears. Best of all would be a lock of hair or a droplet of freshly shed tears."

"I'll do it," Jack said.

"How do we make a giant cry?"

"I'll do it," Jack said again. The thoughts and voices fell silent. The kithkin around him quietly edged away, leaving Jack in a space by himself, but all eyes were upon him.

"I'll do it," Jack said once more. "Just show me how to find her and teach me the spells I need."

Donal Alloway smiled triumphantly at Jack. "Who is this fellow? Is he as capable as he is confident?"

"He is," Molla said. "Jack Chierdagh is one of our best long-range scouts, if not our most experienced." She chuckled, and nervous laughter erupted from the crowd. They all expected great things from Jack, and Jack had never been so sure of that as he was now.

"Come forward, Jack." Jack obligingly stepped closer to Alloway. "You understand what I'm asking you to do? Rosheen won't come to Mistmeadow but she will come after you. You'll have to find her, rob her, enchant her, and then stay ahead of her for some time. Can you do all that?"



For a moment Jack felt nothing from the mindweft. Then the full support and gratitude of the entire doun washed over him, surrounded him, and buoyed him up. It had been far too long since Mistmeadow had a proper hero, a fabled favorite son or daughter who adventured on behalf of the doun, served as its champion, its chief defender, and its standard-bearer. Be our hero, the mindweft told him, so that we'll be here to sing of your exploits for years to come.

Donal Alloway must have felt the surge of support swirling around Jack. The cenn of Kinscaer threw his arms over his head dramatically and shouted again, "Can you do it, Jack?"

"I can," Jack said. "I will." He choked back a small knot of humility that was struggling up his throat. "If everyone else helps."

The roar of approval answered Jack's question even faster than the mindweft. Of course everyone would help. Everyone needed a hero.

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