

Ok y'all, I have some ammo for your next podcast if you are interested in game history and some context for the things you are seeing and reading about.

So The Thran came out in December 1999, right after the October release of Mercadian Masques. Back then, the cards were released in three part sets known as blocks, and the books would be released in parallel in sets called Cycles. For example, the books in the Artifact Cycle correlate to the Urza Block from 1998-1999, followed chronologically with the Masques block and Masquerade Cycle from 1999-2000, with the next being the Invasion block and Invasion Cycle from 2000-2001. Now here is the wild part. The Thran was written both as a prequel to the Atrifact cycle AND as the first part of the Invasion Cycle, all written while the Masquerade Cycle was in progress. Now all of the MTG books are kind of wild, but this one in particular is extra off the wall as it exists out of time – a side project designed to fit a long completed series, a series in progress, and a series that hadn't even been drafted yet all at the same time.

Some interesting trivia, the Urza block is known as the most powerful block ever printed, featuring cards like Time Spiral, Memory Jar, Tolarian Academy, windfall, Fluctuator, and more. Its power level was so high it initiated a period known as the first "Combo Winter", in which an unprecedented number card bans were pushed through all formats, and the following block was massively nerfed and deliberately designed to underperform in hopes to help get the game back to playable. As such the Masques block is considered to be one of the weakest blocks ever printed featuring self defeating archetypes like mercenaries and mongers and other clunky mechanics with wild downsides like fading and rhythic effects (a fun video explaining this cluster fuck: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BylwCE186dg>)

Some other 1999 context for where the game was at can be found here: <https://mtg.fandom.com/wiki/1999> . This was slightly before my time, so I don't have any anecdotes for you on this arc. Anyhow, now it's time for some art design history for Yawgmoth and associated characters.

At this point, the MTG community had been long wondering what Yawgmoth actually looked like. At this point in the game, it was exceedingly rare to have legendary creatures from the plot printed on to cards. In the Urza Block out of 621 cards, only 6 legendary creatures were printed (Karn, Multani, Barrin, Rayne, Roefellos, and Radiant) while characters like Yawgmoth, Urza, Mishra, Gix, Serra, Jhoira, Terefi, K'rrik, Xantcha ,and more were nowhere to be found. However, the art teams had a way around the lack of direct printings: they would depict characters on cards that were not explicitly their own. For example while Urza didn't have a card until 2019, we had seen him depicted in several instants and sorceries through the Urza block in cards such as 'Opportunity' and 'Blessed Reversal' (and plenty more). Alternatively, characters like Teferi have non-legendary creature cards where they were explicitly depicted; in this case the card 'Disruptive Student'. So where was Yawgmoth in all this? He had some cards in the Urza block, but he was explicitly not depicted in any of them. But curious fans had another place to look: in March 1994 there was a set released called Antiquities with a card known as the 'Yawgmoth Demon':



It is critical to note that this card was printed before the set Legends in June of 1994. Legends was the expansion immediately after Antiquities, and as its name suggests it introduced legendary creatures for the first time, allowing for plot relevant characters to be made distinct from the chaff. Could this card be the intended appearance of Yawgmoth? For years this was the sole point of fan speculation with no confirmation or denial if this actually was our nasty little sewer boy or not. Prior to the descriptions in 'The Thran' this was the only visual that existed. However, in June 2001, InQuest Gamer magazine published this blurb with some imagery for the boy:



This nasty appearance was the first formally recognized commissioned art of Yawgmoth, but it depicts him as he was intended to appear in the Invasion cycle of 2001 alongside the release of the magazine. Still no canonized art design for original Yawg. The real surprise came much later - a slow burn that starting in July 2005 with the release of 9th edition in which a rerelease of 'Yawgmoth Demon' was printed with new art:



Fan speculation continued, but to no avail. Three years later, in 2008 during a Q and A session on magic the gathering's website, the blurb for the art direction commissioned for the new version 'Yawgmoth Demon' was released to the public:

"Color: Black

Location: Phyrexia

Action: Show Yawgmoth, who is an enormous flying abomination of Phyrexian origin (a necro-tech setting). It should have two horns and wings, but the rest is up to you. Should be a horrifying flesh/metal hybrid."

In the article, Monty Ashley with the Magic team made a powerful statement: that the antiquities version of 'Yawgmoth Demon' was a "look at raw, unfiltered Yawgmoth" and that "The art description for the Ninth Edition version seems to settle the question pretty definitively". This information was promptly taken down, and you can see the redacted Q and A session here:

<https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/ask-wizards-october-2008-2008-10-01>

Fortunately, the comment was immortalized within the mtgsalvation form as fans freaked out over the interview:

<https://www.mtgsalvation.com/forums/magic-fundamentals/magic-storyline/335535-yawgmoth-mess-up-at-ask-wizards-29th-oct-2008>

We'd see fully acknowledged canon Yawgmoth on a card for the first time in 2018 in the Dominaria expansion depicted in his fleshy demon form in 'Yawgmoth's Vile Offering', but again, this was not his original romance novel protagonist look. We'd see this form for a second time in 2022 in commander collection: black as well in 'Toxic Deluge':



We wouldn't see stupid sexy Yawg until 2019 with the release of modern horizons where his human appearance from The Thran was canonized a whole 20 years post publication. It is also worth noting that characters like Glacian and Rebbec were printed in 2020 a year later in commander legends.





Oh, and also, our favorite little crime boy Gix was first depicted in a Vanguard card in 1997. Behold, crablord starscream, leader of the revolution:



He would be depicted three more times during Urza's Saga in 1998:

Bereavement 1 



Enchantment 

Whenever a green creature is put into a graveyard from play, its controller chooses and discards a card.

*"Grief is as useless as love."
—Gix, Yawgmoth praetor*

Illus. Andrew Goldhawk
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Oppression 1  



Enchantment 

Whenever a player successfully casts a spell, that player chooses and discards a card.

*"Do not presume to speak for yourself."
—Gix, to Xantcha*

Illus. Pete Venters
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Tainted Æther 2  



Enchantment 

Whenever a creature comes into play, its controller sacrifices a creature or land.

Gix despised the sylvan morass. The gouge that the portal had torn in the forest was the only pleasing sight.

Illus. Thomas M. Baxa
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