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Ask Wizards

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Do you have a question about **Magic: The Gathering** or **Wizards of the Coast**? Send it, along with your full name and location, to ask@wizards.com. We'll post a new question and answer each day.

January 31, 2002

Q: "When will we see more elves?"
-- Brian Hughes, Vancouver, BC

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, senior designer, Research & Development:
"I've gotten this question from a number of players. And yes, the elf-loving contingent appears to be quite large. In R&D we often don't realize how much people enjoy something until we take it away from them. So elf-lovers take heart. While elves are taking a short break for the *Odyssey* block (for the reason why, see next week's 'Making Magic'), I am happy to say that they will return this fall in *Onslaught*. I can't give away anything about the fall expansion specifically just yet, but I can say that a number of elves have been seen around R&D's Future Future League (our year-into-the-future playtest league)."

January 30, 2002

Q: "When cards are made, do the designers think about what the card art should look like or is the artist more or less free to supply any painting he likes?"
-- Tim van Gendt, Holland

A: From **Mike Elliott**, senior designer, Research & Development:
"Sometimes I will have a idea of what the final card will look like when I design the card. For instance, **Two-Headed Dragon** was actually reverse-designed from an idea I had for a two-headed dragon, which I thought would look cool, so I designed stats around the concept. For other cards, I have had a general idea of creature type and size, but not an idea of what the card would look like, such as the **Avatars** and the **Dragon Legends**. Other cards, like **Kamahl**, I actually designed around the story concept and what the character did in the story. In very rare cases, like **Spiritmonger**, I designed the card around the art description that was sent to the artist. Most of the time I just design the cards and let concepting and art work out what the name and description of the card will be, and they commission art afterwards based on their concepting. Other than creature type and size, the designers have very little to do these days with the art descriptions that are sent to the artists, and the artists have always had the right to broadly interpret the art descriptions based on their personal styles. The artists will always send a sketch ahead of time, and we can adjust their direction if we feel it does not match the concept we envisioned, but this does not happen very often since most of the artists are quite familiar with **Magic**."

January 29, 2002

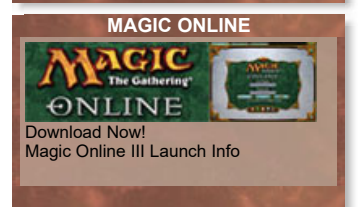
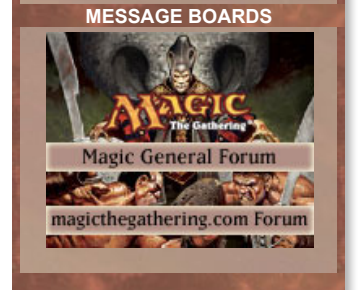
Q: "We've had quite a discussion about this card. Is **Nemata** male or female, or neither? Since none of us knew much about treefolk reproduction (who does?), we turn to you. Please answer!"
-- Henrik Jonsson, Sweden

A: From **Rei Nakazawa**, **Magic** creative text writer:
"Unfortunately, **Magic** flavor text is somewhat contradictory on the point of treefolk reproduction. On one hand, the flavor text originally used for **Ironroot Treefolk** reads: 'The mating habits of Treefolk, particularly the stalwart Ironroot Treefolk, are truly absurd. Molasses comes to mind. It's amazing the species can survive at all given such protracted periods of mate selection, conjugation, and gestation.' That obviously implies that there are different genders of treefolk. Under those criteria, we would guess that **Nemata** is probably female, given that a name ending in "a" is usually feminine.

"On the other hand, the *Urza's Saga* version of **Treefolk Seedlings** has flavor text that reads: 'The year that the brothers landed on Argoth, the trees produced five times as many seeds as normal.' That implies that treefolk produce like normal trees, with seeds, and thus are genderless. Of course, the contradiction can be explained with the differing regions, times, and/or types of treefolk, but in **Nemata's** case, since we don't know which type of treefolk she/it is, there's no definitive answer. So **Nemata** is either female or neuter; as for which it is, I'm afraid you'd have to ask her... or it."

January 28, 2002

Q: "Where can I find information on the Regionals tournaments for 2002? Don't they usually happen sometime in April?"



-- Daniel Rude, Minneapolis, MN

A: From **Jeff Donais**, DCI Manager:

"Information for Regionals usually hits the WOTC website in February. Check www.wizards.com/tournaments for information on Magic tournaments near you.

"Regionals will be held on April 13, 2002."

January 25, 2002

"Does the protection static ability protect from cards that do not target the creature specifically? For example, if a creature has protection from white, will **Wrath of God** still affect that creature? Also, do global enchantments like **Knighthood** affect creatures with protection from white?"

-- Josh Sanders, Holmen, WI

A: From **Aaron Forsythe**, Content Manager:

"Now I'm no judge, but I've played enough **Magic** to know the answer to this one. Let's look at the four things that 'protection' does, using 'protection from white' as the example:

- a) A creature with protection from white can't be the target of white spells or abilities from white sources.
- b) A creature with protection from white can't be enchanted by white enchantments.
- c) All damage done to it by white sources is prevented.
- d) If it attacks, it cannot be blocked by white creatures.

"**Wrath of God** is indeed a white spell, but it *doesn't target anything*; it just destroys all creatures. So **Wrath of God** *would* destroy a creature with protection from white. Similarly, **Knighthood** would grant the creature first strike, because it says 'all your creatures,' not 'target creature.'

"Note that a creature with protection from red would not die from a big **Earthquake**, however, because **Earthquake** deals damage, and the protection ability would prevent it all. For more help with the rules, visit the [Magic Rules Page](#)."

January 24, 2002

Q: "Why can't green have even one Type 2 'counterspell'? I don't think one is much to ask."

-- James Weeks, Princeton, NJ

A: From **Elaine Chase**, Research & Development:

"If you look back through the history of the game, you'll find that green does get some limited countering ability. The first of these was **Avoid Fate** from *Legends*. More recently, *Invasion's* **Bind** countered an activated ability as well as let you draw a card. While **Bind** did see some use in the Future Future League as a sideboard card against Rebels, you are correct that none of green's counters have been even close to tier-one Constructed quality.

"Part of what keeps **Magic** balanced is that each color has its own strengths and weaknesses. If one color could do everything, there would be no reason to play anything else. For instance, red is very good at doing direct damage to both players and creatures. It can also blow up artifacts and destroy lands, but it has almost no way to deal with enchantments. That one simple weakness helps keep burn decks in check because just one **Circle of Protection: Red** will shut them down.

"Green's strengths include big creatures, mana acceleration, and creature enhancements. As you've noticed, green's major weakness is the ability to deal with what your opponent is doing, either in the form of removing threats or in countering them before they hit the table. Green can destroy artifacts and enchantments, and occasionally it gets a little bit of land destruction or limited countering like what was mentioned above. For the most part, though, green is all about getting big beef on the table quickly."

January 23, 2002

Q: "Why have some 'fan favorite' artists been left out of the newer sets? Ian Miller, Phil and Kaja Foglio, Richard Kane-Ferguson, Melissa Benson, Anson Maddocks, and several other artists once were featured prominently, but now their unique artistic styles are absent from the pictures of **Magic: The Gathering**. Why?"

--Jensen Bohren, Roswell, GA

A: From **Jeremy Cranford**, **Magic** Artistic Director:

"There are many reasons why the artists we work with change. In some cases, artists move without giving us their forwarding addresses, and we lose track of them. Sometimes, after we revise contracts, artists become unwilling to work under the new guidelines. We also have a responsibility to maintain our high artistic standards for the **Magic** game - if artist quality slips, we have to be prepared to make changes. In addition, artists have distinct styles that sometimes cease to mesh with the evolving 'look and feel' of the game as determined by Brand."

January 22, 2002

Q: "How did the **Tolarian Academy** combo (**Stroke of Genius**, **Academy**, etc.) slip thru R&D? Along with **Memory Jar**, those were very big mistakes. What steps have you taken to ensure unfair combos like that don't occur again?"

-- Graham Mosby, Boise, ID

A: From **Henry Stern**, Research & Development:

"Hrmm, I could go through a lengthy discussion of our playtesting processes, but I think it is easier to say we simply screwed up on those cards. *Urza's Saga*, in general, was one of our more poorly developed sets. At the time we were somewhat understaffed in R&D (we have since hired 5 developers), and one of the effects of that

was not enough playtesting. **Tolarian Academy** further suffered from one of our classic blunders here in R&D. No, it's not starting a land war in Asia; our classic blunder is changing cards at the last minute. In this case, Tolarian Academy was changed from providing colorless mana to blue mana in order to fit into a cycle of lands that provided colored mana.

"As far as how will we insure that those sorts of mistakes don't occur again, well, I guess my best answer is more playtesting. All of the sets since *Urza's block* have received **much** more playtesting than those did. Also, 4 of the 5 new hires to R&D were former Pro Tour players, and they have helped to ensure that those sorts of 'mistakes' don't happen again. I think our record since *Urza's Saga* has been pretty good."

January 21, 2002

Q: "I see all these links for cards whenever they are referred to in articles and whatnot, and I think it's a superb idea. Is there/will there be a section of the site that we can go to just to browse the card images?"

-- Eric Wiggins, Baton Rouge, LA

A: From **Daniel Stahl**, Managing Web Producer:

"In the past we have posted card images on the web for people to see, and obviously we like to make card images available as links in our articles so you can see the card being talked about. However, when it comes to posting entire card sets online, we do have a plan!

"If you go back in the wayback machine of Wizards.com, you'll remember that for a long time, Wizards would refuse to allow cards to be displayed online due to the fear of card forgery. This was later relaxed when we started posting famous cards onto the site, and then with the release of *Seventh Edition*, we put up the entire card catalog. We even got so brave as to post PDFs of *Apocalypse* online... (gulp) until we got the call from Technical Services.

"One of the growing problems with having such a huge and growing website is the ever present: *Creature - Bandwidth*. This 24/7 beast can tap you for all you've got if you put too many creatures in play. Plus we've found that when we put card images online... everyone in the world LOVES to link to them. Creature - Bandwidth attacks for X damage where X equals the number of people who have linked to our cards.

"Thus our plan! As a solution, we will be allowing everyone to download the new **Magic** Online software for free (when it is released). This program will contain all the cards from every set thus allowing you to browse these cards via the built in card catalog. Since the images are stored on your computer once you download the software, there's not a continual attack from Creature - Bandwidth for the images. Plus I think you'll find the catalog in **Magic** Online to have a lot of cool features not found on the web. Plus, as soon as new sets are released, you simply log in and all the new cards will be streamed to your program."

January 18, 2002

Q: "Is there any particular reason R&D includes coin-flipping cards in their sets? They are worthless in limited and their value in constructed is negligible. **Magic** is a game of intelligence, so why would you print cards that effectively reduce it to a game of chance?"

-- John Cuadros, Citrus Heights, CA

A: From **Brian Schneider**, Research & Development:

"First and foremost, R&D includes coin-flip cards in their sets because a significant portion of the audience finds them fun to play with.

"The claim here is that these cards are, in effect, useless... but this is true only to the relatively competitive player. In a more casual setting *Goblin Bomb*, *Chance Encounter*, and friends are sure to make a pretty wacky impact no matter what the format is. Remember, **Magic** isn't solely a 'game of intelligence,' it's also a social game people play for fun. And coin-flip cards are just that - fun.

"Some coin-flip cards have made an impact on limited and constructed environments. *Frenetic Efreet* and *Crooked Scales* have both caused nightmares for opponents in the past - reason enough to make the coin-flip cards of the future considerably weaker... No competitive player likes losing to an obvious coin-flip, and R&D, over time, has diminished the power level of coin-flip cards to compensate."

January 17, 2002

Q: "Why are there next to no creatures with plainswalk in the game? There's plenty of landwalk for every other color but nothing to help against white. Is it because of the similarity of the terms 'plainswalk' and 'planeswalker'?"

-- Ben Cislawski, Visalia, California

A: From **Robert Gutschera**, Research & Development:

"Good question. It didn't have anything to do with the spelling. In general in **Magic**, when we have an ability, we often try to give it to some colors a lot, others a little, and others not at all. Trample is a good example: green gets it a lot, red and black sometimes, and white and blue almost never. Landwalking was the same way.

"Why was white chosen as the color to get the least landwalking? Well, black is the color that originally got the most. The idea was partly visual -- creeping through the swamps without being seen is easier than creeping through the plains. Also, landwalking in your own color is an ability where a color hurts itself. If you play that color, you are taking a risk. That's very much in black's flavor, and not at all in white's."

January 16, 2002

Q: "Is there an age limit for being a Judge? If so what is it?"

-- James Billings, Mountain Home, ID

A: From **James Do Hung LEE**, Worldwide Judge Certification Manager:

"Thank you for your excellent question. There is no stated minimum age to become a DCI certified judge. While there are some correlations, age is not always an ideal measure of maturity and leadership, two of the primary characteristics we seek in our judges. We rely on the judge tests to measure the knowledge of our candidates and the experienced observations of our Expert judges (Level 3 and above) to evaluate their fitness for the program. For those judges who aspire to become Level 3 or higher, there is the additional barrier of the international experience we look for in these candidates. Because Wizards is unable to sponsor judges under the age of 18 to attend Pro Tours and other high level international tournaments, a candidate who hopes to attain Level 3 before reaching the legal age of majority will have to demonstrate greater initiative and have access to more resources in order to gain the experience needed to advance.

"We have had judges in the past demonstrate the knowledge, experience, and maturity needed to advance to Level 3 before their 18th birthdays. I hope to see others in the future.

"Keep it fair."

January 15, 2002

Q: "Did anyone at all in the Future Future League have fun playing a deck with **Battle of Wits** in it? What were you thinking when you designed this card?"

-- Christopher Hickman, Richmond, VA

A: From **William Jockusch**, Research & Development:

"Originally **Battle of Wits** was costed at **2**, and **Psychatog** allowed you to remove the top ten cards in your library from the game for +1/+1 until end of turn. A lot of people thought there was no way a deck big enough to support **Battle of Wits** could be any good, but I disagreed. So I built a 242-card black/blue deck with both of those cards as win conditions, plus four copies of both tutors and all remotely playable black and blue cards I could think of. People were surprised and cracking up because they were losing to such a big deck, but it soon became clear that it was no fluke. With 8 win conditions and 8 additional ways to find a win condition, the deck won a lot of quick games. Overall it seemed too good. Also, **Battle of Wits** was a totally new paradigm. We knew there was no possible way we could find the best **Battle of Wits** deck in the time available. So we added a mana to **Battle of Wits** and took the library-eating ability off of **Psychatog**. At this point, my deck was losing, but we knew the real world would find a better one, so we thought the overall situation would be reasonable enough."

January 14, 2002

Q: Why did you take **Dark Ritual** out of Extended and Standard? It might allow 2 more points on a **Drain Life** or so, but it was not a broken card.

--Ben Clark, Fayetteville, AR

A: From **Randy Buehler**, Research & Development:

"**Dark Ritual** is a very swingy card. The quick burst of speed that it provides when you play it on the first or second turn can give players a huge advantage. As R&D tried to slow the game down after the speed of the **Tempest** block and add player interaction after the "solitaire **Magic**" of the combo decks in the Urza-block, we found that **Dark Ritual** was a real problem. When you play a deck that tries to abuse **Dark Ritual**, you don't really get to make that many decisions. If you draw a **Ritual** and a quick threat then you're in great shape to win. Otherwise you're not. We don't want games decided by which cards you happen to shuffle to the top of your deck - instead, we want **Magic** to be about gameplay decisions and interactions between decks.

"Note that our real problem with **Dark Ritual** is just the potential to bust out something huge and/or threatening in the first couple turns of the game. We have no problem with adding two (or more) to a **Drain Life**, or any other late game spell. In fact, **Torment** has a **Dark Ritual** variant that isn't very good early, but is actually better than **Dark Ritual** in the late game."

January 11, 2002

Q: "There are certain abilities that appear on a large number of cards. For example, 'Attacking does not cause this creature to tap.' Given that cards often have reminder text, why haven't some abilities been given names, when other abilities (like **Haste**) have?"

--Peter Niemeyer, San Francisco, CA

A: From **Worth Wollpert**, Research & Development:

"Interesting question, Peter; the simple answer is simplicity. Words like 'Haste' and 'Flying' are what we in R&D call 'keywords.' One of the reasons why many cards do not have keywords is that we feel like we need to limit the number of keywords in use. For instance, if we keyworded everything, the keywords would eventually become meaningless, as no one could remember them all. Another factor that goes into deciding what gets a keyword and what doesn't is the frequency of the ability in question. In your example, you cite 'Attacking does not cause this creature to tap,' and while we tend to use that ability off and on, it's not nearly as prevalent as something like **Haste**. On that subject, I wouldn't be surprised to see, at some point in the near future, a keyword for the traditional 'This creature cannot be blocked except by black and/or artifact creatures.' In the end, someone (usually **Magic** lead designer and VP of R&D Bill Rose) decides what gets a keyword and what doesn't."

January 10, 2002

Q: "If my opponent wants to play a spell, (say a **Black Knight**), and I play **Vision Charm** and choose to change the basic land type of her swamps to plains... Can she still cast the **Black Knight**?"

--Christopher Clarke, Fort Lee, NJ

A: From **Paul Barclay**, TCG Rules Creation & Writing:

"You can't do that. Once your opponent has started to play the **Black Knight**, you can't do anything until she's finished announcing it. At that point, it's too late for the **Vision Charm** to have any effect on the **Black Knight**. If you think that she's going to play a **Black Knight** during her main phase, you could play **Vision Charm** during her

upkeep step, which could change her swamps to plains, and thus prevent her from playing the Black Knight in her main phase."

January 9, 2002

Q: "I've noticed that Legend cards don't always 'fit' into the story... Their power/toughness, abilities, and creature types don't always mesh from the novels to the cards. Why is that?"

--Billy O'Reilly, Wheaton, MD

A: From **Rei Nakazawa**, **Magic** creative text writer:

"Bet you're thinking of the fact that the **Tsabo Tavoc** card could beat the **Gerrard Capashen** card in combat any day, while the opposite is true in the story, right? That's probably the most stark example of the sort of discontinuity that you're talking about, but those who work in **Magic** R&D and Continuity believe that we've done a fairly good job overall in keeping the link between cards and characters.

"There are a few factors that come into play. The first is that R&D's involvement with (and knowledge of the finer points of) the **Magic** backstory has fluctuated over the years. This was especially true with the Urza block, when Wizards' book publishing department began contracting novelists to create **Magic** plots and characters. So that from that point on, R&D has depended on the story writers to communicate plot points. For example, **Vhati il-Dal**, a legend from *Tempest*, was reduced in power and toughness because **Greven il-Vec** kills him in the story. The aforementioned Tsabo Tavoc and Gerrard issue might have turned out differently if the outcome of the Tsabo/Gerrard battle had been communicated to the developers in time - which it wasn't, due to the very different schedules R&D and novel writers have.


"Another fairly obvious factor is that gameplay has to come first. If a story point makes a legend too powerful to be an accurate card, the card's abilities have to be toned down, even if the character it represents is godlike. Finally, remember that R&D might just have different points of view than the players. Some players expected Gerrard to be a Soldier Legend, but many members of R&D just didn't think of him as a Soldier, which is why he is just a Legend."

January 8, 2002

Q: Do you ever plan on creating a white creature that has a power above 4 again, *and* have the casting cost be fair? By fair I mean if you hypothetically make a 6/6 groundpounder, are we going to have to pay eight mana for it?

--Andrew Healy, Manchester, NH

A: From **Mike Elliott**, senior designer, Research & Development:

Well, **Ruham Djinn**, 5/5 first strike for , is certainly not weak. The drawback against creatureless makes it weak in constructed, but it is certainly solid in draft and sealed for a white fatty. White will be unlikely to get strong constructed cards with fat stats -- that isn't really white's strength -- but you may see the occasional white legend with higher stats and somewhat reasonable mana costs. So, sorry, the 6/6 white groundpounder will always have to pay through the nose for the extra stats.

January 7, 2002

Q: "Since **Magic** Online looks to have a nice multiplayer capability, do you believe that there will be a boom in multiplayer **Magic**? If so, do you see future sets being designed with that in mind?"

--Will Reiffer, DeSoto, MO

A: From **Bill Rose**, head of Research & Development:

"Many **Magic** players are already playing multi-player **Magic**. So, while many on **Magic** Online will play multi-player **Magic**, I don't think there will necessarily be a 'boom' in multi-player play. There will just be a lot of it in **Magic** Online.

"Actually, Wizards R&D has been designing and developing **Magic** cards with multi-player in mind for the last couple of years. Now we evaluate a card's potential in both two-player and multi-player. Next year's block does have an increased number of cards designed primarily for multi-player play. Next year's stand-alone currently contains a card called 'Thought Plunder' that reads: 'Each opponent discards a card from his or her hand. You draw a card for each card discarded this way.' Now there's a card for Grand Melee."

January 4, 2002

Q: "Why does R&D print ridiculously bad cards in sets, particularly as rares?"

--Elliot Fertik, Philadelphia, PA

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, **Magic** senior designer:

"This is a very complex question that I'm sure I'll discuss in greater detail in a future column. But the short answer is that weak cards are a fundamental part of the game. Richard Garfield has described **Magic** as a 'game of exploration.' Much of the fun of the game comes from players examining each new set to see what they can discover. Many players take great enjoyment in finding use of cards that others dismiss. R&D cannot make bad cards that are secretly good without also making bad cards that are actually bad.

"The history of **Magic** is filled with 'sucky' cards that later show up in high-profile decks (High Tide, Despot's Scepter, Lion's Eye Diamond, etc.). The reason that a large percentage of these cards is rare is that we tend to avoid making cards with narrow functions common or uncommon because they have no role in limited. One way to get a good appreciation of how cards rise in value as players find uses for them is to go back and look at a review of an old set."

January 3, 2002

Q: "What are some of the cards that never made it to print in the first run, and why?"

--Ken Wable, Fairchance, PA

A: From **Richard Garfield**, creator of **Magic: The Gathering**:

"The only card I intended to be in the first print run that wasn't was the black Circle of Protection - and its absence was just a mistake of course. There were not that many cards that I chose not to include; we didn't understand trading card games back then as we do now, and it was much harder designing cards - the standards were lower but the number of tools at my disposal were far lower also.

"The only cards I can think of that I chose not to include were cards that changed ownership of themselves or other cards, and except in the case of ante I left that principle out of the design. An example is a green sorcery, Ecoshift, that shuffled and redistributed all the land in play. Another example is Pixies, like Scryb Sprites, but when they hit an opponent you could force a random exchange of one card from each hand. I left these cards out because they took the focus of the game away from winning duels and put it on hustling cards."

January 2, 2002

Q: "Will flavor text ever again contain classical quotes on a regular basis? Is there a reason not to do so?"

--Chris Parker, Austin, TX

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:

"The short answer is, 'We don't know.' The longer answer is this: We understand that many of you like to see quotes from real-world literature on cards. But every time we do that, we miss an opportunity to develop the **Magic** world. You might be thinking, 'Why bother trying to tell a story in flavor text? It doesn't work.' I agree. But we're trying to rethink the kinds of details we give in flavor text, and we're excited about detailing our settings and creatures without getting bogged down in plot.

"If you have preferences or opinions about **Magic** creative elements such as flavor text and card names, we'd like to hear them. You can make your voice heard on our **Magic** message boards. This URL will take you directly to a thread about names and flavor text: http://boards.wizards.com/tcg/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic&f=28&t=006119."



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