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The Zoo

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Uncommon Knowledge
 Wednesday, February 13, 2002



Editor's note: Ben's topic this week is the largest green creatures in **Magic**, lovingly known as "green fatties." Instead of his normal historical litany, however, he's worked them all into a story with helpful footnotes. See if you can guess what cards he's talking about...

Phaednen Haelphanae (or Phae, to his friends) had heard the rumors buzzing around the forests. The natural order had been disrupted, with the highest predators on the food chain simply disappearing from his native lands – lands the ranger had grown rather fond of. "The trail has been warm," he had thought, inspecting a monstrosly large footprint embedded in the mossy ground before him. "It should only be a small matter of time until I find who – or what – is behind this disturbance in the flow of things."

Just then, what felt like a thousand sharp stings to the back of his head rendered him unconscious¹. When he awoke hours later, an awesome sight awaited him.

"Ya, Mr. Haelphanae, I've been tracking your progress for some days now and I must say, you were getting dangerously close to my menagerie."

Shaking the cobwebs from his head, Phaednen began to focus his eyes forward. Lifting himself to his feet in one swift motion, he quickly sized up his situation. He was imprisoned in a cage made from enchanted metal. His captor, it appeared, was a thin grey-haired man, with a scruffy beard than ran down to his waist.

"I know you can hear me, so I'll make it clear to you: this prison of yours held Lord Ith for years, so don't even try to escape.² I'm going to find a use for you, be sure of that, but you'll have the honor of seeing the finest collection of beasts and monsters ever created by Gaea!"

Phae shook his head. He had left civilization years before, having grown tired of dealing with raving lunatics such as this man. "You're crazy, you know that old man?" he shouted.

"Of course I'm crazy, only someone with true genius could capture all of these magnificent creatures and display them as his trophies! Mere Orgglin³ like you would of course call me insane, for you cannot comprehend the stupendous magnitude of my fantastic accomplishments!" the wizard retorted.

"You speak a good game, but who are you?" demanded the prisoner. "You may call me Maegrin, planeswalker extraordinaire. Some might call me Mad Mage Maegrin, but they are fools! Fools one and fools all!" screamed the magician at the top of his old hoary lungs. "And now, witness my brilliance!"

Maegrin clapped his hands, and called for his zookeepers⁴ to bring forth the first exhibit. It was a djinn⁵, its skin a lush green, hair trussed in a topknot.

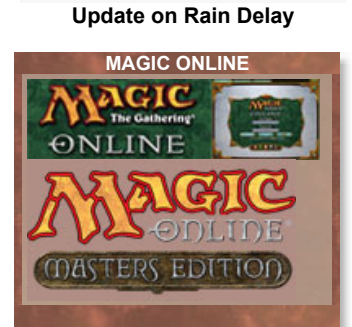
"Ah, this first fine beast comes straight from the forests of Rabiah⁶. It was easy to capture, as though it beckoned me to follow its trail!⁷ Bring him to the worm cage!"



The djinn was carted away, and this time Phaednen himself was brought to an enormously large exhibit. A slither of wurms were separated from one another within the same area, but by artificially inclement weather.

"Ah, the wurms, grand brainless beasts for my viewing pleasure! You'll notice that I have to keep them separate from one another, as they tend to get quite territorial."

Phaednen looked on in awe. In a corner of the territorium, a Scaled Wurm wrapped around itself upon a giant bank of ice.⁸ Just a scant few yards away rested a reptile with gigantic plated spines running along the length of



its epidermis.⁹ A third worm, seemingly from the forests of Yavimaya, lay chained to a tree. It came perilously close to a fourth worm, which seemed to be drugged into docility.

"Ah yes, the Penumbra Wurm must be preserved without any scratches, or the specimen will no longer be pure.¹⁰ But I see that your eye has been caught by the largest prize of them all, my captivated..." Maegrin paused momentarily to indulge himself in his double entendre, "...friend!"

As horrid as his humor may have been, the last of the worms was indeed impressive. It seemed to fully coil around a tree, leaving no bark to be seen. Its bottom half ("Was it a half?" wondered Phae.) ended at the ground, embedded deep within the earth.

"Every day – every single day – I must renew the enchantment that binds this worm here, or he would escape. But it is hard to leave when your body is trapped in the ground!"¹¹, the insane mage cackled. "Let's see if you can puzzle out this exhibit!"

The ranger was led, in his cage, to an aquarium as large as a mansion. It seemed to be filled with an opaque, greenish fluid, with no visible forms of life within.

"What manner of fiendishness would you show me now, you defiler?" snorted Phaeden. His retort was met with a whip lashing against his cheek, drawing blood. "Silence, fool! Call me a defiler of nature again at your own peril! I seek only to preserve, across time and space itself, specimens that surely one day will be extinct! You should thank me for my work, behold, the revival!"¹²

Mad Mage Maegrin started to gesture rapidly, and the primordial ooze in the tank began to bubble. As the urgency of his incantation rose, shapes began to take form within the glass... truly enormous shapes!

"Behold! From the forests of Skyshound to the jungles of Ulgrotha,¹³ these beasts would surely be dead were I not around to restore their energies!"

The forms congealed, and immediately set upon themselves in fierce battle. A seemingly sentient mist enveloped a shambling mound made of algae, the two mixing together to create a giant ball of green sludge.¹⁴ A huge brownish giant stood astride, and charged straight into the glass, attempting to shatter the tank. Each of his blows seemed to weaken, with bits and pieces of his body disintegrating with every strike. Just as it seemed this abomination¹⁵ might lose all physicality, it was eaten wholesale by the largest behemoth that Phaeden had ever laid eyes upon. Satisfied with its meal, the monstrosity simply let itself go, leaving the tank filled with the same green goo it had contained when first presented.¹⁶

"Yes, impressive, is it not? There are yet animals who have escaped my menagerie. Ah, but one day they will be mine! Not every treefolk can be guardian of an entire grove¹⁷, or slip past my best laid of traps!¹⁸ One sapling even fled from my hunt for ten days and ten nights, only to collapse dead from exhaustion.¹⁹ What a fine addition he would have made to my collection!"

Phaeden's cage was wheeled further down the nearly interminable estate. "Be careful," Maegrin cautioned the men pulling the cart, "You don't want to rile up the Mwonvuli rhinoceros again. They nearly trampled us to death last time they were started," the mage noted to his prisoner.²⁰ "Plus, it'd be a terrible, *horrible* tragedy should you die before my prize exhibit."

They continued onwards, past a great clutter of statues. Dozens of men of all shapes and sizes clutched fervently onto a large basilisk. Suddenly, the lizard opened his eyes, and began flicking his enormous rock-like tongue in the direction of the procession.²¹

"Oh, those were the men who caught that precious thing for me. They might have been saved, but they just couldn't help themselves now, could they?"²²



Soon, they came to a house, shrouded in mist. "Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum!" bellowed a voice from somewhere in the fog. "When I find my way out of this accursed trap, I'll snap your bones in half and drink your marrow!"²³

"Oh, and he'll not be the only one," hissed a voice from a nearby cage. "If I were to gain my strength from the forests again, I would break free in an instant and break you in two!" Phaeden attempted to locate the source of this new threat, but could not match the commanding voice with anything other than a rather diminutive djinn.²⁴

Soon, they arrived at a rather large conclave of empty cages. "Yes," Maegrin began, answering Phaeden's still forming question, "the zoo is not complete. Some creatures have managed to elude my clutches. This cage," he began, gesturing at no place in particular, "will hold the elusive Jackalope, should I finally catch it unawares."²⁵ "And in this settlement," he mused, pointing directly at an area covered completely in ice and snow, "this settlement will hold a gorilla so gargantuan that you will never again see a mammal so impressive!"²⁶

The ranger sunk down to the ground, trying to cope with the magnitude of his captor's hubris. How could he, a mere human, hope to escape from an enchanted prison when so many of Gaea's beasts lay imprisoned before him? Suddenly, he snapped back to attention, realizing that the mad mage had been rambling further.

"...And then they escaped, quite similarly, as if I weren't there. Just ran on through past us. The Elemental, I followed for quite a while, but it eluded my chase.²⁷ The beast, not only did he do the same, but I could not even find a trail. It dug itself a hole in the ground with lightning speed, and then disappeared for good."²⁸

Finally, the zookeepers stopped pulling the cart with the cage and the ranger. Quickly they left, leaving Maegrin and Phaednen alone for the first time...alone except for two gigantic creatures, seemingly held to the ground by the glow of an enchanted stone.²⁹

"It took me quite a while to capture this Pangosaur. It seemed every time I thought I found it, it would find a new place to run and hide. Ah, but when it heard the tortured cries of this Wumpus," Maegrin boasted, acknowledging the creatures before him, "it came running straight into my clutches."³⁰

Mad Mage Maegrin pulled a small item from his pocket, which quickly grew into a large horn. He blew into the instrument, and a deafening blast resounded, knocking Phaednen straight onto his back. The planeswalker began to speak as the ranger regained his footing, but he quickly stopped himself mid-sentence realizing his audience was quite unable to hear.³¹

After what seemed like an eternity, a lone shabbily dressed figure emerged from the distance. "An elf?" Phaednen thought to himself. By now his hearing had partially returned.

"Jibjib," the wizard began, "I'm going to let my prisoner free now, but he will be in your care. Do not let him escape, for you know the price of failure!"

"Boss," the elf replied, "he'll do what I say, or I'll feed him to Vern." "Very well," Maegrin replied, "and to you, ranger, I will let you free, but be very aware that a mage of my power who can contain the greatest beasts of nature, would have no trouble at all squashing you like a proverbial ant."

With that, Maegrin disappeared in a puff of smoke, and the cage crumbled³² around Phaednen's ears. "Follow me then," the elf instructed, as he began off into the distance at a slow pace. The ranger decided to follow, as he weighed the chance of escape now versus seizing an opportunity later.

"Now, I know whatcha might be askin' yourself, what's an elf doing in a place like this? Well now, my people might want to save the forests and all that nonsense, but I've found that there are more important things in life... like good eatin'. Yeah, I'd sell out Yavimaya and Argothia in a heartbeat if it meant I'd keep Vern. But you'll meet ol' Vern soon, yes you will!"

The mismatched pair continued down a grassy trail, until they came to a grove of trees, on the edge of a lake. Jibjib emitted a high-pitched yell³³, and slowly two figures began to emerge, one from the water, and one from the trees. They both wore muzzles, and had their enormous limbs bound in glowing leather harnesses.



"The smaller one, that there is the largest dang ol' Thallid you'll ever see," the elf began, concentrating on the water-logged beast. "He's quite feral, so we had to keep him from harming himself, us, and the other guests here."³⁴ "And the other one?" asked Phaednen. "That's Vern. A veritable Verdant Force, he is! And I'll tell you, he's my own favorite, yes he is? You know why?" the elf inquired. Phaednen shook his head no. "Because them's good kibbles! Every day he leaves a wake of little saporlings behind, and with a little salt and a little heat, you've never had you nothing that quite tastes so good!"³⁵

Phaednen felt sickened by the very notion of eating the living offspring of such a magnificent creature, and swung his head downwards. He tried to think about pleasant thoughts, growing up on his farm, or his first meeting with the cat-folk, but could only imagine the stench of burnt saporling flesh in his nostrils.

"Now you've seen everything we have here, and the boss wants me to lay it straight for you. There's one trophy he wants, but hasn't been able to obtain. One prize he still cannot even begin to plan for, and saying that means a lot, given what he has taken from the forests. And he thinks you're just the man to do the huntin' for him."

"Why would I ever help such a maniac in his assault against the woods? You must think I'm as mad as him if you think I'd even consider helping you!"

"Ah," the farmer replied, "I sorta kinda thought you'd say that. So did Maegrin. I'll lay you the deal here, mister never-in-a-million-years: you either do this one hunt for my boss and then walk away, or I'll be feeding you to Vern here." Phaednen looked Jibjib straight in his eyes, and saw that the elf was deadly serious. "I'm trapped!," the ranger thought to himself, "If I don't help them, there's no way I'll escape from this insane place, but if I do, I'm damning myself as a traitor to everything I hold dear! But... if I aid Maegrin, I buy myself time, and may yet find a way to free myself and all those held here."

"I'll do it, under one condition."

"You're not really in the position to be making demands now are you, sonny boy?"

"No, I suppose not. But still, if I do this task, I want Phaednen to find a way to ease the suffering of all those here, to allow them to roam free. There's nothing I can do to save any creatures here, but they should not be held prisoner in such inhumane conditions!"

The farmer cackled. "Well, we'll see about that, won't we? But for now, I'll show you to your hut, where you can begin to formulate plans for your great hunt. You'll need all your wits and cunning about you if you're going to survive, let alone come home with your mark."

"And what exactly is it that I'll be tracking for your master?" the ranger questioned.

"The Force of Nature itself."³⁶

NEXT WEEK: The Cheese Stands Alone

[1] Phaednen has been hit by an **Unyaro Bee Sting** here. His foe, Mad Mage Maegrin, is a master of green spells.

[2] He's being held in **Barl's Cage**.

[3] Referencing **Orgg**. Orgg wasn't known for its intelligence, hence the insult here.

[4] **Zoologist**, from *Odyssey*, who puts a creature directly into play.

[5] **Erhnam Djinn**, to be specific.

[6] *Arabian Nights* took place in the plane of Rabiah, not in standard Dominia.

[7] Erhnam Djinn gives other creatures forestwalk, hence the abduction.

[8] **Scaled Wurm**, from *Ice Age*.

[9] **Spined Wurm**, from *Stronghold*.

[10] The token made by **Penumbra Wurm** going to the graveyard is black, which would not be useable in this green zoo.

[11] The **Endless Wurm** is held by **Roots**, from *Homelands*. Just as Endless Wurm needs to sacrifice an enchantment every upkeep or die, the Roots have to be renewed every day.

[12] **Revive**, from *Mercadian Masques*, returns a green card from your graveyard to your hand.

[13] Ulgrotha, the plane where *Homelands* takes place.

[14] **Hungry Mist** attacking **Lichenthrope**, killing them both.

[15] Not the creature **Abomination**, but **Aboroth** from *Weatherlight*, which gets smaller each upkeep.

[16] **Skyshroud Behemoth**, which comes into play tapped (hence the last here to act), and fades away.

[17] **Nemata, Grove Guardian**. Maegrin has a difficult time capturing legends.

[18] **Argothian Treefolk**, who can't be damaged by artifacts.

[19] **Wormwood Treefolk**, who after forestwalking for 10 days (turns) died (2 damage per turn = 20 life).

[20] **Crash of Rhinos**, from *Mirage*.

[21] **Stone-Tongue Basilisk**, from *Odyssey*. It petrified the men hunting it, but was trapped in the process.

[22] When Stone-Tongue Basilisk gains threshold, all creatures must block it.

[23] **Craw Giant** (from *Legends*), trapped in **Constant Mists** (from *Stronghold*).

[24] **Sulam Djinn**, from *Invasion*. With so many other green creatures around, he's quite small.

[25] **Jackalope Herd**, from *Exodus*, which can leave play at a moment's notice, hence evade capture.

[26] **Gargantuan Gorilla**, from *Alliances*, which thrives off of **Snow-Covered Forests**.

[27] **Thorn Elemental**, from *Urza's Destiny*.

[28] **Gurzigost**, from *Torment*. During your upkeep, you return cards from your graveyard to the bottom of your library, hence his disappearing act.

[29] **Meekstone**, from *Alpha*.

[30] **Pangosaur** and **Hunted Wumpus**, from *Mercadian Masques*. Hunted Wumpus was "brought into play" as a prisoner, and the Pangosaur followed.

[31] **Horn of Deafening**, from *Legends*. Quite handy for capturing beasts of large power.

[32] **Crumble**, from *Antiquities*.

[33] **Call of the Wild**, from *Weatherlight*.

[34] **Feral Thallid**, from *Fallen Empires*.

[35] **Jibjib** is an **Elvish Farmer** (from *Fallen Empires*), who subsists on the saporlings produced by the **Verdant Force** (from *Tempest*).

[36] **Force of Nature**, from *Alpha*.

The Biggest Green Fatty From Each Set			
<i>Alpha</i>	Force of Nature	<i>Stronghold</i>	Carnassid Endangered Armodon Spined Wurm
<i>Arabian Nights</i>	Erhnam Djinn	<i>Exodus</i>	Jackalope Herd
<i>Antiquities</i>	Argothian Treefolk	<i>Urza's Saga</i>	Endless Wurm
<i>Legends</i>	Craw Giant	<i>Urza's Legacy</i>	Yavimaya Wurm
<i>The Dark</i>	Wormwood Treefolk	<i>Urza's Destiny</i>	Thorn Elemental
<i>Fallen Empires</i>	Feral Thallid	<i>Mercadian Masques</i>	Hunted Wumpus Pangosaur
<i>Ice Age</i>	Scaled Wurm	<i>Nemesis</i>	Skyshroud Behemoth
<i>Homelands</i>	Hungry Mist Autumn Willow	<i>Prophecy</i>	Avatar of Might
<i>Alliances</i>	Gargantuan Gorilla	<i>Invasion</i>	Sulam Djinn
<i>Mirage</i>	Crash of Rhinos	<i>Planeshift</i>	Nemata, Grove Guardian
<i>Visions</i>	Lichenthrope	<i>Apocalypse</i>	Penumbra Wurm
<i>Weatherlight</i>	Aboroth	<i>Odyssey</i>	Stone-Tongue Basilisk
<i>Tempest</i>	Verdant Force	<i>Torment</i>	Gurzigost

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Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by StarCityGames.com, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.



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