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Fire and Ice

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Uncommon Knowledge
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Greetings everyone! We're halfway through flavor text week now at MagicTheGathering.com. Unfortunately, flavor text and card mechanics/game history don't exactly go hand-in-hand. It's difficult to talk about how a certain creature ability originated, and then throw you some examples from the quote box. Anthony and Jay can usually come up with articles about anything, and Mark gave you a great look at his favorites. So Randy and I needed to get even more creative than usual in order to find an interesting angle.

Aaron wrote to me, and had the following to say (and I paraphrase):

Ben,

Why not write about vanilla creatures? They have a long history in the game, and taste better than chocolate or strawberry creations.

AF

A vanilla creature is a creature in **Magic** which has absolutely no rules text. For instance, **Grizzly Bears** comes in one variety: 2/2 with no abilities. **Savannah Lions** are the most used vanillas in tournament history, and the most recently printed (as pointed out in the Card of the Day feature a couple of weeks back) is **Woodland Druid**. **Ornithopter** is not a vanilla creature (it flies), and neither is **War Mammoth** (it tramples), **Juzam Djinn** (it damages you), **Kobolds of Kher Keep** (they have rules text making them red cards), nor is **Heart Wolf**, **Dwarven Sea Clan**, or **Wall of Kelp**. **Squire**, vanilla. **Devoted Caretaker**, not vanilla.

Well, I found it less than exciting to write about creatures who, by nature, are the most uninteresting in the game (though it would be interesting to see which powers and toughnesses have been covered with vanilla creatures in **Magic**, so I've included a chart at the end of the article). The catch, I'm told, is that since vanilla creatures have no rules text, the only thing in printed in that place is flavor text.

I wrote back to Aaron the following week:

Aaron,

Would you mind if I wrote an article cataloging each instance of the letter 'e' being used in the flavor text of each and every **Magic** card? I think such a study would prove fascinating.

Ben

To which he responded:

Ben,

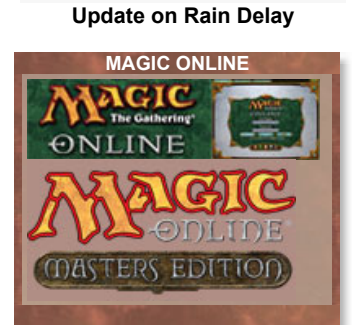
If you do that, I'll inflict serious bodily harm not only on you, but on every person you've ever come in contact with, starting with myself. Someone has to double-check your facts, after all. Think of something else.

Aaron

At least, I think that's how that exchange went. I can't be 100% certain, but Aaron will inevitably edit out any falsehoods that I might try to foist upon you, the reader. (Let's hope so... Ben can tell some convincing lies, however. - Aaron, channeling his old editor) Suddenly, inspiration hit when I ate way too much hot sauce at a local Mexican restaurant! Why not write about my favorite quotable mage ever in the history of **Magic**, **Jaya Ballard**?



Savannah Lions aside, several vanilla creatures have found their way into competitive decks.





JAYA BALLARD

Jaya Ballard is a task mage (see [Task Mage Assembly](#)), dedicated to the art of blowing up anything and anyone that gets in her path. She traffics in red magics (naturally), and boasts quite an ego. I mean, who else would say things like these?

"Yes, I think 'toast' is an appropriate description." --Incinerate, *Ice Age*.
"Eenie, meenie, minie, moe . . . oh, why not all of them?" --Meteor Shower, *Ice Age*.
"And I say north is where I want it to be!" --Mystic Compass, *Alliances*.
"Who needs the sun when you've got me around?" --Melting, *Ice Age*.
"Some have said there is no subtlety to destruction. You know what? They're dead." --Inferno, *5th Edition*.

Not only does she have a swelled head, but Jaya expresses a good amount of jealousy, envy and haughtiness. For instance, her comment about [Gorilla Shaman](#) reveals the following insight:

"Frankly, destruction is best left to professionals." --Gorilla Shaman, *Alliances*.

Undeniably though, no one red mage in history has been associated with so many good burn spells as this egomaniac. From [Flare](#) to [Pyroclasm](#) to [Incinerate](#) to [Pyrotechnics](#) to [Meteor Shower](#) to [Inferno](#) to [Lava Burst](#), Jaya covers the gamut of almost every conceivable form of red destructive magics. Although we haven't heard much from her since the Ice Age, she did sneak in a quote for *Unglued*.



ERTAI

Mirri's hackles rose as Ertai continued expounding his virtues. "If that arrogant brat doesn't shut up soon," she growled to herself, "I'm going to have to kill him." --Abjure, *Weatherlight*.

I like to think that Jaya was the prototype for a more famous egomaniacal magician. Some years later, the crew of the *Weatherlight* set out to recover the Legacy Artifacts to save the world. The most interesting of those characters was [Ertai](#), the [Wizard Adept](#). Ertai trained under [Barrin](#) to become quite a formidable mage, but eventually was captured holding the [Erratic Portal](#) open for the crew of the *Weatherlight* to escape from [Rath](#). He was converted to the dark side, and became an [evil multi-armed monstrosity](#) that you saw in *Planeshift*. Eventually he was (accidentally) disintegrated by [Squee](#), but not before he gave some of the most hubris-laden quotes in the history of the game. Here are some samplings of what Ertai said, capable of making Jaya blush:

"Was that it?" --Ertai, [Wizard Adept](#), *Exodus*
"Part of me believes that Barrin taught me meditation simply to shut me up." --Meditate, *Tempest*.
"It was probably a lousy spell in the first place." --Counterspell, *Tempest*.
"There is nothing you can do that I cannot simply deny." --Dismiss, *Tempest*.
"Why should I boast? The bards will do it for me -- and with music." --Tolarian Entrancer, *Weatherlight*.
"I'm too modest a wizard to reveal the full extent of my abilities." --Abeyance, *Weatherlight*.

Of course once Ertai was corrupted, he eventually ran back into [Gerrard](#). The meeting definitely wasn't pleasant for one of the two.

"Don't worry, Gerrard," said Ertai. "I'm sure the crew will come to your rescue as quickly as they came to mine." --Ertai's [Trickery](#), *Planeshift*.

The words of Jaya Ballard

	Flare Incinerate Lava Burst Melting Meteor Shower Panic Pyroblast Pyroclasm Wall of Lava Word of Blasting
Ice Age	
	Browse Burnout Gorilla Chieftain Gorilla Shaman Gorilla War Cry Mystic Compass Pyrokinesis
Alliances	
5th Edition	Inferno
Unglued	Chicken Egg

The words of Ertai

	Abeyance Abjure Aether Flash Cone of Flame Fledgling Djinn Flux Paradigm Shift Psychic Vortex Relearn Teferi's Veil Thunderbolt Tolarian Entrancer
Weatherlight	
	Ancient Runes Canyon Drake Canyon Wildcat Chill Counterspell Dismiss Fool's Tome Gaseous Form Meditate Reality Anchor Soltari Emissary Steal Enchantment Time Ebb
Tempest	
Exodus	Ertai, Wizard Adept
Nemesis	Oraxid
Planeshift	Ertai, the Corrupted Ertai's Trickery

And Ertai wasn't exactly shy about taunting his fellow travelers on their journey.

Morgue Toad

"Relative of yours?" Ertai teased. Mirri simply sneered. --Canyon Wildcat, Tempest.


Squee: "What's that?"

Ertai: "It's a magical book."

Squee: "Am I smart enough ta use it?"

Ertai: "You could say that." --Fool's Tome, Tempest.

So as you can see, both Ertai and Jaya shared a lot of traits: they were boorish, rude, arrogant and full of themselves. Also, they were colorful as all get out, and made the game of **Magic** a lot more interesting to play, as you could follow along and share in their glee by taunting your opponents (yelling out "it probably was a lousy spell!" or "Toast is appropriate!" can give you a certain satisfaction when countering a particularly nasty spell or burning a troublesome regenerator). Take the time to vote for which mage you think was the better of the two. While we won't be hearing anything from Ertai anytime soon (cellular dismemberment can do that to a guy), hopefully we'll hear some more words of "wisdom" from Jaya Ballard, task mage in the future.

Is Jaya or Ertai the bigger badass? 

Jaya

Ertai

Next week: You wrote them in way back in the day, and now I discuss them! The best cards ever printed that never got used.

Here's the "Bonus Chart"... a list of all the vanilla creatures ever printed! "Vanilla" means no rules text, which in turn means only flavor text graces these bad boys! (Ok, some walls have reminder text, but technically that really doesn't need to be there.)

All the Vanilla Creatures		
0/3 Phyrexian Walker Wall of Wood	0/6 Wall of Earth	0/7 Glacial Wall Wall of Granite Wall of Ice
0/8 Wall of Stone	1/1 Dwarven Trader Eager Cadet Merfolk of the Pearl Trident Mons's Goblin Raiders Muck Rats Willow Elf	1/2 Devoted Hero Norwood Ranger Squire Trained Jackal Vodalian Soldiers Volunteer Militia Woodland Druid
1/3 Straw Soldiers Talas Merchant	1/4 Border Guard Femeref Scouts Horned Turtle	2/1 Coral Eel Coral Merfolk Dakmor Scorpion Goblin Bully Goblin Piker Independent Troops Savannah Lions Skeletal Snake Wei Infantry Wu Infantry
2/2 Balduvian Bears Barbary Apes Bear Cub Forest Bear Fresh Volunteers Goblin Hero Gray Ogre Grizzly Bears Headless Horseman Knight Errant Pearled Unicorn Raging Bull Scarwood Goblins Scathe Zombies	2/3 Alaborn Trooper Hurloon Minotaur Keepers of the Faith Minotaur Warrior Regal Unicorn Shu Foot Soldiers	2/4 Foot Soldiers
2/6 Wall of Heat	3/2 Balduvian Barbarians Goblin Cavaliers Gorilla Warrior Python	3/3 Barbarian Horde Giant Octopus Hill Giant Ogre Warrior Shu Elite Infantry Tor Giant Trained Armadon Trokin High Guard Wild Jhovall
3/4 Highland Giant Rowen Treefolk	3/5 Ironroot Treefolk	3/6 Moss Monster Redwood Treefolk

Southern Elephant

4/1 Elvish Ranger	4/2 Giant Cockroach Lizard Warrior Viashino Warrior	4/3 Golden Bear Lowland Giant
4/4 Durkwood Boars Obsidian Giant Tobias Andron	4/5 Blanchwood Treefolk Carnivorous Plant Earth Elemental Jasmine Boreal Meng Huo's Horde Plated Wurm	4/6 Obsianus Golem
4/7 Sir Shandlar of Eberyn	5/1 Skeletal Crocodile	5/2 Blistering Barrier
5/3 Kasimir the Lone Wolf	5/4 Fire Elemental Phyrexian Hulk Spined Wurm Water Elemental	5/5 Jedit Ojanen Silverback Ape The Lady of the Mountain Torsten von Ursus
6/3 Panther Warriors	6/4 Barbtooth Wurm Craw Wurm Sivitri Scarzam	6/5 Barktooth Warbeard Jerrard of the Closed First
6/6 Trained Orgg Vizzerdrix	7/4 Lady Orca	7/6 Scaled Wurm
8/5 Whiptail Wurm	- -	- -

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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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