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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](mailto:ask@wizards.com). We'll post a new question and answer each day.

April 30

**Q:** "Do you think you'll ever print another ante card? 5-color is a pretty popular format, and I play in an ante league and know people that play in other ante leagues. Maybe you could sneak one ante card into each large expansion?"

-- Eric Pettersen, San Francisco, CA

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

"Unfortunately, we probably won't print any more ante cards. We like ante in R&D, but an awful lot of the people who play **Magic** don't, and they're unhappy when they get an ante card (it's just a dead card for them). Ante cards just don't work in tournaments, and most people don't want to open up a booster pack and get a card that can't be played in a tournament. Also, there are legal problems in some markets with ante (there are worries it might be considered gambling).

"Also, another reason we got rid of ante cards was that Richard was just too dangerous with **Demonic Attorney** in the environment.

"Ante is still fun, especially in limited formats and leagues where everyone starts from an even position. We often use it in our informal in-house leagues. I'd definitely encourage you to keep playing with it."

April 29

**Q:** "I noticed that while most cards in *Seventh Edition* have white borders, the foil cards have black borders. Why is that? Does it have something to do with the way foil cards are made?"

-- Andrea Standish, Kissimmee, FL

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

"Good eye! To answer your question, the reason those cards are black bordered is very much on purpose. We decided that we would make all the foil cards in *Seventh Edition* black bordered, and leave all the non-foil cards white bordered (as the cards in the base set have been, since the days of Unlimited). After talking it over we thought that not only did the black bordered foils **not** infringe on our reprint policy, but they flat-out looked cooler and we thought you all would want us to make the foils as 'cool' as we could make them."

April 26, 2002

**Q:** "Was madness considered when **Wild Mongrel** was printed? I was under the impression that you were trying to eliminate turn-5 kills from Type 2. I've been killed on turn 5 more times since *Torment* was released than at any time since **Fireblast** was rotated out."

-- Sam Ward, Scarborough, Australia

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

"**Wild Mongrel** was the most high-profile result of R&D trying to get a threshold enabler

into constructed. While the Mongrel was in development before madness was designed, once madness was created the development team was happy to have a constructed-level card that worked well with the new mechanic. **Wild Mongrel** was one of the most heavily-played cards in the Future Future League throughout both *Odyssey* and *Torment* development, so it was tested heavily with madness cards.

"R&D has made a concerted effort to slow the environment down since *Urza's block*. Whenever an R&D member can create a turn three goldfish kill, we take a close look at the cards involved and often change at least one of them. Kills that happen as late as turn five are usually vulnerable enough to disruption to not cause too big a problem."

April 25, 2002



**Q:** "Why do some wurms have trample and some don't? Surely they should all have trample or all not have trample."

-- Lawrence Salmons, Hertfordshire, UK

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

"Well, the key to this question is understanding what exactly trample means, from a 'real world' flavor standpoint. For example, first strike is often expressed in art through spears or long horns, and damage dealing through fire, lightning, or other types of magic. In the **Magic** world, trample isn't just being big enough to smush anything that stands in your path. If it did, then anything that's blocked by a 1/1 should technically trample. Trample is more of an attack style than anything else, an ability to just bowl over creatures it's in combat with, as opposed to stopping and engaging them in battle on the spot. So some wurms will be distracted enough by an opponent (blocking creature) to stay and fight and not bother trying to get past to the opponent, while others (the ones with trample) will just run over it like a freight train."

April 24, 2002



**Q:** "Wouldn't you agree that there is a great disparity in the number and, especially, quality of non-basic land hosers between Extended and Standard? I mean, **Price of Progress** and **Back to Basics** are brutal, and there is nothing remotely near those two cards in Standard."

-- Vasco Chaparro, Lisbon, Portugal

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

"Extended, because it spans so many sets, has much more depth than Standard. At any given time an Extended deck is likely to have more options in any specific arena (whether it be land-hosing, creature destruction, discard, etc.) than a Standard deck simply because there are more good cards available to it. By nature, Extended will often have more quality cards... non-basic land hosers included.

"That said, I think that there's a reason there're fewer good non-basic hosers in Standard right now than there were in past Standard environments: a conscious effort was made to let you play your spells. Multi-colored cards were a major theme of *Invasion*. Non-basic land hosers were weakened. And we took **Armageddon** out of the base set.

"So, assuming you like to play your spells, enjoy the lack of a good non-basic land hoser."

April 23, 2002



**Q:** "Why aren't chess clocks used for time management at serious tournaments, similar to what is done in **Magic Online**? In my opinion, that would be a great step towards curing the stalling problem."

-- Artem Kozachuk, Ukraine

**A:** From **Chris Zantides**, DCI Policy Manager:

"First, the DCI feels that it would not be feasible to expect all Magic players to provide a chess clock. Second, chess is a game that has a clearly defined turn order, with no additional phases. Magic isn't quite as simple as that, with the amount of times that a player gains and loses priority being a major issue.

"Players would need to have a significantly improved understanding of the technical rules before we could implement such a system. The DCI feels that our current system offers the best solution to keeping time for tournaments."

April 22, 2002



**Q:** "I recently purchased an old **Magic** booster pack from a local card shop. The booster contained eight cards with expansion symbols from *Antiquities* and *Arabian Nights*, as well as a few without expansion symbols that I have managed to identify as *Fourth Edition*. The cards are in Italian, as was the booster pack itself, and since I don't read Italian, I don't know what the expansion title on the booster says. Could you please inform me as to what expansion this could possibly be, and how I can possibly establish the values of these cards."

-- David B. Jenkins, Michigan, USA

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

"The set that that booster is from is called *Renaissance*, and its existence is due to an old Wizards policy.

"There was a policy in place at one time that stated: Cards will not be released in any given language with white borders unless they were released in that language with black borders first. Since *Fourth Edition* and *Chronicles* were white bordered and were going to be released in German, French, and Italian, we thought it would be necessary to print black-bordered versions of those cards first. Many of them existed in black-bordered versions as part of those languages' *Revised* printings, but the ones that did not were printed as *Renaissance*.

"So *Renaissance* is composed of the subset [*Fourth Edition - Revised*] for German and French, and [*Fourth Edition + Chronicles - Revised - Legends - The Dark*] for Italian. Full cardlists are available here for [Italian](#) and [German/French](#).

"The funny thing is that *Chronicles* ended up not being released in all those languages after all. That entire policy has been done away with due to the logistics involved with reprinting very small subsets of cards considering all the languages and all the expansion sets *Magic* currently encompasses. I don't think the demand for black-bordered German *Vodalian Soldiers* is very high, anyway."

April 19, 2002



**Q:** "I'm wondering what happened to artifacts. Sure there are some very powerful artifacts in the game right now (i.e. *Mirari*, *Legacy Weapon*). But there is no such thing as a Standard artifact deck anymore. Really all the artifacts in the game are concentrated in *Seventh Edition*. I was mad when I saw that *Torment* had no artifacts at all. What happened?"

-- Max Jensen, New Philadelphia, OH

**A:** From **Mark Rosewater**, R&D senior designer:

"What separates **Magic** from most other games is that it's constantly shifting. Chess, as a contrast, is a static game. Chess theory slowly evolves, but in general chess strategy is the same today as it was twenty years ago. In order to keep **Magic** in flux, R&D spends a great deal of time changing the environment. The metaphor I enjoy most is that of a pendulum like you would see at a science museum. The pendulum is constantly swinging in different directions but always returning to its neutral state. **Magic** is very similar. R&D is constantly finding new directions to push the pendulum to introduce unique twists to the game. But no matter how far we travel from the norm, in the end we always return to the staples of the game. Right now the pendulum is in a place where there isn't a lot of artifacts. You needn't worry. With time, the pendulum will do what it always does: swing back. "

April 18, 2002



**Q:** "Would you ever make the prerelease giveaway card a good 'Spike'-type card? Why are there no tier-one prerelease cards?"

-- Brian Ty Kelley, Portland, OR

**A:** From **Randy Buehler**, **Magic** Lead Developer:

"We've spent a lot of time thinking and debating what goes into choosing a good giveaway at our prerelease tournaments. Most of those conversations revolve around who it is that attends prereleases and how we can add value to their experience. Our research shows us that the typical prerelease player is not a diehard, competitive tournament player. Prerelease players are in fact much more casual than the 'Spikes' that populate Pro Tour Qualifiers. Often the top tournament cards are fairly small and have low mana costs, and that mana efficiency is what makes them top tournament

cards. But the typical prerelease player would rather get something big and cool and splashy, regardless of cost. So that's what we pick."

April 17, 2002



**Q:** "Why did you remove the Enchant World cards from Standard after *Mirage* block? Did cards like *Teferi's Realm* or *Pillar Tombs of Aku* dominate the environment? Some were really annoying, like *Nether Void*, but the rest of them brought a lot of fun to casual play, and you even reprinted variations of some of them as normal enchantments (*Caverns of Despair* as *Dueling Grounds*, *Living Plane* as *Nature's Revolt*). What was the problem with them?"

-- André Simas, Salvador, Brazil

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

"We removed Enchant World cards as part of a general drive to simplify the rules. Enchant Worlds by themselves added only a small amount of rules complexity, but we thought they also added only a small amount of interest. We felt the space they take up in the rulebook could better be used on something else.

"We are constantly doing a balancing act between keeping the game interesting and keeping it easy to learn. This is one case where 'easy to learn' won out."

April 16, 2002



**Q:** "Why do mana symbols seem out of order on various gold cards? Some cards requiring green, white, and blue mana, like *Treva's Charm* (♣♦♠), have it in that order. Some cards, like *Phelddagrif* (♠♦♣), go white, blue, and then green. *Rubinia Soulsinger* (♣♦♠) goes blue, white, green. Shouldn't there be more organization?"

-- Cid Silhouette, Boston, MA

**A:** From **Del Laugel, Magic** technical editor:

"As you've noticed, three different systems have been used in the past to order mana symbols on cards. One system always put the colors in the order white-blue-black-red-green, and that ordering was used for *Ice Age*, *Tempest*, and *Chronicles*. Another goes clockwise around the "pentagon of colors." *Mirage* block used that ordering, and we've been following it consistently since *Stronghold*. And then there's the *Legends* system, which involved throwing mana symbols into a hat and then pulling them out at random.

"Our current (and final!) system for ordering mana symbols is pretty simple. If you look at the back of a **Magic** card, you'll see the pentagon of colors. Going clockwise, the colors are white, blue, black, red, green, white, blue, black . . . . To order a pair of mana symbols, find them in that list, and then put them in whichever order puts the fewest colors between them. For example, white/red has two colors in the middle (blue and black), but red/white has only one (green). That's why *Goblin Legionnaire*'s mana cost is ♣♦.

"Then came the *Apocalypse* 'wedge' cards. Our system breaks down when you're trying to order two friendly colors and their common enemy, and *Apocalypse* has five rares with mana costs that fall into that category. For *Lightning Angel*'s mana cost, ♠♦♣ and ♠♦♣ are equally valid options. In the end, I decided to put the enemy color pair first.

"(Yes, I know that the *Apocalypse* split cards all violate the color order. It was decided that those five cards would be easier to name that way.)"

April 15, 2002



**Q:** "Where did Serra go after the decaying process of the Sanctum? Did she die? Or she simply abandoned it? No one has answered this question to me yet... Maybe the answer is in a novel, but not in one I can find here in the Philippines! Lastly, why is there no Serra card when *Radiant* has one?"

-- Mervin Lat, Philippines

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

"The main reason you haven't found the answer to your question is that it lies in the storyline of a set from long ago: *Homelands*. The backstory to that infamous expansion tells us what happens after she abandoned her Sanctum, due to the ever-increasing black mana corruption spreading over it. She found a home in the distant world of Ulgrotha, where she met a fellow planeswalker, Feroz. The two fell in love and married,

living happily and protecting Ulgrotha natives from being whisked away by planeswalkers. Unfortunately, Feroz died in an accident; heartbroken, Serra eventually perished in a duel with another planeswalker, her will to live pretty much destroyed by Feroz's death.

"The reason why she doesn't have a card is that she's a planeswalker. See one of my previous [Ask Wizards answers](#) to see why this answers your question. Even though **Radiant** is an archangel, she's still completely a creation of Serra, so she's able to be represented by a card."

April 12, 2002



**Q:** "Why do you make rare cards? To make money? If all cards were equal then more people would play because some of us don't stand a chance in a tourney without rares. **Magic** should be about how you play a deck, strategies, and combos. It shouldn't be about who has the most money to pump into a deck. I think that lots more people would play if there weren't rares. I don't mean to sound like a whiner but I have felt this way and I see and hear this around where I play."

--Ted Todd, Columbus, OH

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

"The original reason some cards were made rare was to create a **Magic** community in which players had different cards from each other. Richard Garfield's vision was to have players playing each other for the first time and discovering new **Magic** cards in each other's decks. This was very true during playtesting of Alpha in 1992. I can remember wanting to play everyone in the playtest group each time Richard distributed out a new set of playtest cards. With each game I would see new and interesting cards being introduced into **Magic**. The experience of rare-card discovery lasted from the Alpha release through *Legends*. After *Legends*, **Magic** grew to such a size that there were enough copies of each rare for players to easily collect every card in the set. In addition, the Internet provides the costs and abilities of all cards weeks before they're published. Nowadays, you don't even need a full set of cards to know what every card does.

"While Richard's vision for rare cards is no longer true, other developments to our game created a necessity for rare cards. Today, the overwhelming driver of a card's rarity is its role in limited play, mainly booster drafts. A lot of the most powerful rares aren't that great in limited play -- **Balancing Act**, **Battle of Wits**, and **Haunting Echoes** to name a few. Also some of the largest creatures are rare because they're hard to deal with in sealed. It's tough enough to handle your opponent's **Laquatus's Champion**. Imagine if you had to handle two or three of them each time you played an opponent with a black deck.

"Are tournament cards rare cards? Some are and some aren't. The all-common deck will beat the all-rare deck. The best tournament decks use commons and rares. Look at the top *Odyssey* tournament cards. They are **Wild Mongrel** (clearly #1 and it's common), **Psychatog**, **Call of the Herd**, **Shadowmage Infiltrator**, **Aether Burst**, **Firebolt**, **Werebear**, **Braids**, **Mystic Enforcer**, and **Barbarian Ring**. Four are common; two are uncommon; four are rare. Rarity doesn't always equal quality."

April 11, 2002



**Q:** "In answering the [recent question](#) 'Are some rare cards rarer than others or are all rares printed with the same frequency?' Joe Hauck neglected to mention the impact of preconstructed Theme Decks. If I'm not mistaken, the cards included in preconstructed decks are printed separately from those that are inserted in tournament packs and boosters. If this is the case then wouldn't there be more copies printed of rares that are included with preconstructed decks compared to those that are not?" --Christopher Richter, Madison, WI

**A:** From **Joe Hauck**, **Magic** Brand Manager:

"Ah, 'neglect' is such a strong term whereas 'honest oversight' is more accurate. Yes, you are correct sir, Theme Decks do affect both the rarity balance and the supply and demand model for **Magic**. In general, with small set expansions like *Torment*, this would affect 8 out of the 44 total rares or 18% of the total rares printed. In a large set expansion this would affect 8 out of 110 total or 7% of the total rares printed."

April 10, 2002



**Q:** "I recently bought a booster box of *Torment* and opened both **Ambassador Laquatus** and **Laquatus's Champion**. Now, I knew what both cards were but never noticed the names. Other than the names, I don't see how the champion is in any way related to Laquatus. Laquatus looks like a fish... what's the deal?" --Landon Doane, Knoxville, TN

**A:** From **Brandon Bozzi**, creative administrator:

"In an effort to strengthen the alliance between the Cabal and the underwater empire, the Patriarch orders Chainer, his best dementia summoner, to create a new familiar for **Ambassador Laquatus**. (The ambassador's original familiar, Turg, had died in a battle with a giant squid.) Chainer reached into his nightmares and brought the champion to life. Laquatus was, of course, very pleased.

"These events are referenced in the flavor text on **Laquatus's Champion**, 'Chainer's dark gift to a darker soul.'

"For more info, check out Scott McGough's novel, *Chainer's Torment*."

**April 9, 2002**



**Q:** "I have recently acquired a **Clockwork Avian** from the Beatdown Gift Box. And it does NOT have flying. Its name suggests that it should, and when it appears in other sets it has flying. It makes no sense. Was this a mistake in the production of the Beatdown set?"

-- Erik Klump, Boca Raton, FL

**A:** From **Bill McQuillan**, **Magic** Lead Editor:

"The omission of flying on the Beatdown box set version of **Clockwork Avian** was an error.

"All cards from box sets are reprints. We often update the wordings of reprinted cards, but the reprints should have the same functionality as the originals. We only change functionality in rare cases, such as when updates to the **Magic** rules mean that a card doesn't work like it did the last time it was printed, or if R&D decides to make slight alterations to a card's functionality so that the wording is cleaner. The Avian doesn't fall into any of the legitimate categories for a functional change. The change was simply a mistake.

"Because of that, the wording for **Clockwork Avian** in the Oracle card reference overrides the printed Beatdown version of the Avian (the Oracle version includes the flying ability). If you're playing the Beatdown decks casually, be sure to tell your opponent about the error before your first game."

**April 8, 2002**



**Q:** "What was the logic behind **Decimate**? The other allied colored gold rares from *Odyssey* differ from **Decimate** in two main ways: (1) they are all creatures, and (2) they are all pretty powerful. Two are tournament quality (**Shadowmage Infiltrator** and **Mystic Enforcer**) while the others (**Iridescent Angel** and **Vampiric Dragon**) aren't cost-efficient enough for constructed but are bombs in limited."

-- John Cuadros, Citrus Heights, CA

**A:** From **Randy Buehler**, **Magic** Lead Developer:

"Basically, we tried to make all the gold cards cool. I agree that **Decimate** isn't the most powerful card we've ever made, but you've got to admit that it looks really cool when you first see it. And I've heard many players telling stories about the time they pulled it off, the time they sideboarded it into their draft deck against that one perfect opponent, etc. The dragon and the angel weren't made specifically to be bombs in limited -- they were made because we thought they too were really 'splashy' (aka look cool). I still think **Decimate** fits into that category pretty well."

**April 5, 2002**



**Q:** "About five years ago, I went miniature golfing and saw a weird game in the arcade. It said **Magic: The Gathering** on the side, but it was out of order. Was there ever a **Magic** arcade game, and if there was what was it?"

-- Kent McKernan, Santa Clara, CA

**A:** From **Mark Jindra**, web developer:

"There was in fact a **Magic: The Gathering** arcade game created in 1997 by Acclaim

called **'Magic: The Gathering: Armageddon.'** There were a handful of them that were actually shipped; one was to the Tomorrowland arcade at Walt Disney World, another showed up at Namco's WonderPark in San Jose, CA, and a third known machine was at the Wizards of the Coast Game Center in the University District in Seattle (the machine is now residing at a private residence). So it is possible that you saw one of the few that were out there. Rumor has it that there were only four machines and that the fourth has mysteriously disappeared. I myself played the game and it was lots of fun, but Acclaim's Mountain View, California-based coin-op division went out of business shortly after creating this game, so it never went into full production. I can't remember if the side of the machine had a **Magic** logo on it, though.

"You can check out the specs at the Killer List of Video Games online at ([http://www.klov.com/M/Magic\\_The\\_Gathering\\_Armageddon.html](http://www.klov.com/M/Magic_The_Gathering_Armageddon.html)).

"In case you're interested, there were also two arcade games made that were based on **Dungeons & Dragons: 'Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara'** and **'Dungeons & Dragons: Tower of Doom,'** as well as a **D&D** pinball machine."

April 4, 2002



**Q:** "Will we ever see the return of our favorite gold cards in a base set (*Eighth* or even *Ninth Edition*)? I know that the idea of these sets is to keep them basic for less advanced players, but there are some very basic gold cards around. Otherwise what could come back from the *Invasion* cycle?"

-- Gary O'Bree, New South Wales, Australia

**A:** From **Brian Tinsman**, R&D Operations Manager:

"A base set has two primary purposes. First, it provides staple cards like **Counterspell** and **Shock** for the Standard tournament environment. Second, as you pointed out, it gives newer players a starting place for getting into the game. As part of that role, it acts as a foundation for defining what colors can and can't do. Currently we feel that the base set provides a more clear and solid foundation without gold cards.

"However, we realize the base set also has a third role; it gives players hope that their favorite old cards may return someday. *Invasion* block fans shouldn't despair -- there will always be chances to see those cards again. Remember that **Lobotomy** made the long journey from *Tempest* to appear in *Invasion*. It's likely that a number of other cards will follow its example. Card designers are actually becoming more and more willing to put old favorites into new expansions. **Sengir Vampire** in *Torment* is another example. So don't give up hope!"

April 3, 2002



**Q:** "A few months ago, I found some artwork for the *Torment* set on another website. The art ended up being for **Hypnox** and **Soul Scourge**, but there were differences. In the card versions, they have wings, which weren't there before. Is this because you hadn't decided to add flying to the text until later? What did the artists have to say about you having to change their work? Does this happen often with cards?"

-- Cory Barden, Milo, ME

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

"The **Magic** R&D team feels very strongly about making the best card sets as possible and will tweak different card mechanics all the way through the development process. When they decided to add the flying mechanic to **Hypnox** and **Soul Scourge**, the art had already been painted. Normally we'll send the art back to the artist to repaint the wings but if we don't have the time we'll modify the art during post production so that the art will work for the mechanic. Most of the artists would like to make the edits themselves, but they understand if we have to modify their work in-house because of scheduling constraints. We try our best to limit any edits to art but it stills seems to happen on a few pieces of art in each expansion."

April 2, 2002



**Q:** "Do you have a strict mathematical model of game process? As far as I understand, the game is a kind of stochastic nonlinear optimization task. It could also be examined as 'usual' task of nonlinear mathematical programming, or in some other ways. Do you use such modeling to design cards or rely just on R&D playtesters' intuition?"

-- Victor Sergienko, Ukraine

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

"The gist of your question is whether we try to analyze **Magic** precisely and completely, using probabilities. [For the mathematically inclined, this oversimplifies the question, but I want it to be comprehensible for most people.] The short answer is: no. **Magic** is far too complicated to analyze in that way. We mostly rely on our intuitions.

"That said, we do use mathematical models to try to make sense out of certain cards. For instance, there is:

"**Goblin Bomb**  
Enchantment



During your upkeep, you may choose to flip a coin. Target opponent calls heads or tails while the coin is in the air. If the flip ends up in your favor, put a fuse counter on Goblin Bomb. Otherwise, remove a fuse counter from Goblin Bomb.

Remove 5 fuse counters from Goblin Bomb, Sacrifice Goblin Bomb: Goblin Bomb deals 20 damage to target player.

"We wanted this to be a 'fun' card that would occasionally win you a game if you put it in your fun decks, but we didn't want it to be a tournament card at all. Using a mathematical model, we were able to determine that the card gave you about a 25% chance of getting up to 5 counters at some time during the first 10 turns after you play it. We thought this met our criteria -- it's too slow for tournaments, but it would come up in fun games."

**April 1, 2002**



**Q:** "Why is it that words beginning with the letter h on **Magic** cards are not capitalized?"  
--Evan Leal, San Jose, CA

**A:** From **Del Laugel**, **Magic** technical editor:

"That's one of the first questions I get the first time someone looks very closely at **Magic** cards. Here's the deal: The capital H in the font used for the title line on Magic cards does look like a lowercase h, but they're not actually the same character. For example, if you look closely at the first word of the title line on the *Torment* card **Hydromorph Gull**, you'll see that the first H in the name is significantly larger than the second one.

"Although many details of a **Magic** card's appearance have changed over the years, the selection of fonts used has remained constant. You can see that same weird-looking capital H on **Helm of Chatzuk** in Alpha. If we ever do decide to change fonts, I promise you that no one around here would miss that strange H."



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