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# Crash Course in Token-Makers

Ben Bleiweiss  
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While I was covering a feature match at [Grand Prix - Milwaukee](#), a spectator came up to the table. He commented that he had brought his son to play at the event, and had never really seen **Magic: The Gathering** being played before and it looked interesting. He then looked down at the table, saw an Elephant token on the board (made from a [Call of the Herd](#)), and asked, "What's a token?"



And, boy, did that question stump me at the time. I fumbled around for an explanation. "You see, it's a substitute for a creature, and it isn't really a card." But that didn't explain it that well, since the gentleman had no clue about the terms 'creature' and 'card' to begin with, in the strict technical sense. About this time, the competitors shushed him up so they could concentrate on their match, and I was somewhat relieved.

Flash forward not even a week, and Aaron sends out e-mails saying we're doing Token Week! What a coincidence, eh? By this time I had already checked in on the **Magic Comprehensive Rulebook** and come away with a good explanation for tokens. From the glossary of the comprehensive rules: "A token is an object in play representing a noncard permanent created by a spell or ability."

Fair enough. But where do tokens come from, and what do they do? The Comprehensive Rules answered this question as well, and you can read over section 216 in the [rules](#) for yourself, or refer to the sidebar in [Mark's Monday column](#).

So now that we've defined what makes a token creature, let's take a look at various milestones in token creature history.

## THE FIRST TOKEN CREATURE

The **Hive** introduced the concept of token creatures (and token creature generation) in the Alpha edition. A staple through *Classic (6th Edition)*, **The Hive** produced Wasp tokens, which were 1/1 artifact flyers. It was a highly sought after card initially, since it had the unique distinction of being the only card capable of producing creatures each and every turn! Before there were major tournaments and "power cards," you would often hear stories of players trading those "useless" **Black Lotuses** and **Moxes** for this critter maker.

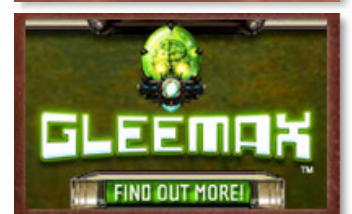
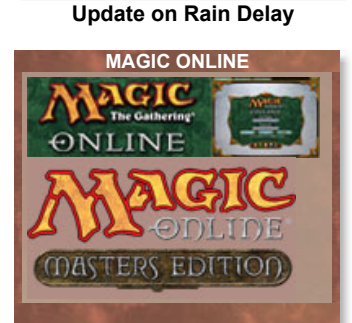
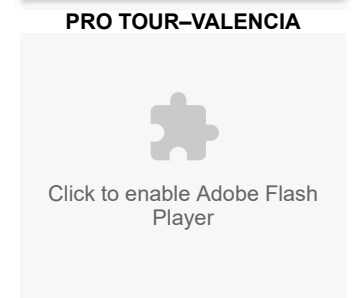
## SCRAMBLED EGGS

The wording on *Arabian Nights'* **Rukh Egg** proved extraordinarily problematic when it first started seeing play (The relevant sentence is "If Rukh Egg goes to the graveyard, a Rukh -- a 4/4 flying red creature -- comes into play on your side at the end of that turn."). Back then, in the Stone Ages of **Magic**, cards didn't really have clear-cut rules about how they get from one zone to another. Because of this, a common play was to draw your card, play no lands, and then discard the **Rukh Egg**, creating a 4/4 flyer on the first turn! Obviously this wasn't the intended use of the card, and after much debate it was decided that the **Rukh Egg** would only make a Rukh token if it went to the graveyard "from play." These days you might take that for granted, but back in 1994 people didn't assume such things!

## THE HIVE, PART DEUX

*Legends* brought three updated versions of **The Hive** into **Magic** lore: **Boris Devilboon**, **Serpent Generator**, and **Master of the Hunt**. While the Generator simply made poison tokens much like **The Hive** made flying ones and Boris wasn't all that devilish, it was the Master who really moved token technology forward. As long as you had green mana to spend, you could keep making "bands-with-other" Wolves. Players went crazy trying to figure out infinite mana combinations in order to make infinite Wolves. **Master of the Hunt** was the first card capable of producing multiple token creatures in a single turn with mana as the only investment.

## FALLEN EMPIRES



To this day, no set has passed *Fallen Empires* as the pinnacle of the token creature. You had Saproling tokens, Thrull tokens, Saproling tokens, Camarid tokens, Citizen tokens, Saproling tokens, Goblin tokens, and of course, Saproling tokens. And while *Icatian Town* was the first non-permanent to produce token creatures, it's the Saprolings which have evolved and survived to this very day to become one of the favorite creature types (period!) among **Magic** players. Remarkably there has never been a single "Creature – Saproling" in **Magic** history! Every single Saproling, from those produce by *Verdant Force* to those grown through *Spontaneous Generation* has come through token generation!

## TRIX? TRIX WHO?

*Alliances* thrilled players with a pair of cards which forced your opponent to have creatures! *Varchild's War-Riders* and *Phelddagrif* both had abilities which created token creatures...for your opponent! Whether they were given Survivor tokens or Hippo tokens, your opponent was sure to thrill at the sight of a growing army of creatures you'd generously "donated" to his cause. Aside from the odd "swap" card (such as *Juxtapose* or *Gauntlets of Chaos*), these were the first cards in **Magic** that outright gave your opponent permanents where there were none before.



## SQUIRREL FARM

As the story goes, *Waiting in the Weeds* from *Mirage* was supposed to be the first squirrel generator in **Magic**, but the artwork came back with a wild cat as the focus. The squirrels would have to wait until *Weatherlight* to debut, with *Liege of the Hollows*. Since then, Squirrels have rivaled Saprolings for supremacy as green's main token creature. R&D seems to be content letting the two duke it out, as neither has been relegated to second-stringer status yet. *Deranged Hermit*, *Squirrel Nest*, and *Chatter of the Squirrel* contend with *Saproling Burst*, *Verdant Force*, and *Rith, the Awakener*.

## FIVE COLOR FLUSH



Although the 1996 *World Champion* card contained all five colors in its casting cost, the first commercially released card to have that requirement was *Sliver Queen* from *Stronghold*. Notice a trend here with token generators? They seem to be tied in with an awful lot of "fun" cards that are also tournament playable! The ability to make 1/1 Slivers for two mana was too good to pass up for many decks, with otherwise mono-green Secret Force decks sometimes running her in order to fetch her with a *Natural Order*!

## THE BEST TOKEN GENERATOR YOU NEVER PLAYED


*Stronghold* also introduced the most advanced token creature maker in all of **Magic**. *Volrath's Laboratory* (aka "Make Your Own Monster") allowed you to create 2/2 creatures of whatever type you chose --

and what a headache this caused! People argued back and forth about what exactly you could name with the Lab! Could you make Green Sharks? Black Slivers? Purple People Eaters? Blue Instants? Red Opponents? Yellow Forests? The DCI kept changing their policies on the card, but at this point you can only make cards that are one of the five "**Magic**" colors (black, blue, green, red and white). Also, you can name ANYTHING as the creature type, as long as it isn't a term or card name in **Magic**. So you can make Snickerdoodle, Popsicle, and Potato tokens, but you can't make Instant, Thwart, or Priority tokens.

## THE RETURN OF THE KING

*Odyssey* saw the triumphant return of the token creature. Flashback allows you to cast a spell twice: once from your hand and once from your graveyard. But how do you cast a creature from your graveyard if it's already in play? The answer: Make sorceries and instants that produce token creatures! Thus *Chatter of the Squirrel*, *Elephant Ambush*, *Roar of the Wurm*, *Call of the Herd*, and *Beast Attack* were born. On top of those, you had *Zombie Infestation*, *Bearscape*, *Nut Collector*, *Nantuko Shrine*, *Druid's Call*, *Squirrel Nest*, and *Kirtar's Wrath* all

producing various token creatures. Did I say that *Fallen Empires* was the king of token creature sets? I'm not so sure anymore, and I'd like your help deciding.

**Which is the king of token creature sets?** 

*Fallen Empires*

*Odyssey*

We'll check back next week to see the results, and also to discuss a very controversial topic. Why should Mark get all of those? Until next week, folks!

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Ben may be reached at [uncommonknowledge@wizards.com](mailto:uncommonknowledge@wizards.com).

*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](http://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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