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June 28

Q: "Why didn't you make a blue, red, or black rare incarnation card like **Genesis** and **Glory**?"

-- Nick Gundam, Grand Rapids, MI

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

"Since *Judgment* is the green-white set, we decided that green and white should get two incarnations each, while black, red, and blue only got one. We felt this would reinforce the idea that *Judgment* is, in fact, the green-white set. For the same reason, we tried to make sure that **Genesis** and **Glory** were among the better incarnations. After all, a green-white set needs to have lots of strong green cards and white cards!"

June 27

Q: "It seems that flashback is sort of a one-shot buyback that's paid later. Was the flashback mechanic influenced by buyback?"

-- Michael Porter, Longmont, CO

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

"The short answer is no. The origin of flashback is this: I spend a great deal of time in the Feature Match area at the Pro Tours (for those unfamiliar, the Feature Matches are the highlighted matches that usually focus on big-name players). I noticed how top players often check their opponent's graveyard to see what had been played thus far. It dawned on me that it might be neat if there were cards that could be played directly from the graveyard. That way, players would be searching their opponent's graveyard to find spells that could still be played. The focus was much more on the playing it out of the graveyard than the ability to play it twice. This was the idea I brought to the *Odyssey* design team.

"I think so many people focus on the similarity of the two mechanics that they don't realize the fundamental differences. Buyback is focused on the cards reusability. As such, it lives in the hand. It's greatest enemies are permission and card denial. Flashback is focused on the card's ability to be played from a different zone than the hand. As such, it lives in the graveyard. Flashback cards are much less vulnerable to permission and card denial.

"Buyback's costs are all paid up front. Flashback's costs are paid over time. Buyback is cheapest the last time its played. Flashback is most often cheapest the first time its played. Buyback cards need to be drawn. Flashback cards often are strongest when they go straight to the graveyard. Buyback, due to its costs, works best in a controlling deck. Flashback, due to its lower costs and synergy with other *Odyssey* mechanics, can work well in an aggressive deck. The two mechanics might be brothers but definitely are not identical twins."

June 26

Q: "I just wanted to know why you guys felt you needed to completely wipe out the 'old world' as my friends and I call it. We used to have Phyrexia and Dominaria and people like **Reya** and **Gerrard**. Now we have all the new places and legends here in the new sets and it feels like it happened in the blink of an eye. Why did it all change so quickly and why does the 'new world' not have ties to the old?"

-- Katie M. Murphy, North Carolina

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

"For every opinion a player has about **Magic**, there's an equal and opposite opinion. The case for and against the *Weatherlight* story arc is a perfect example. Many, many players voiced everything from apathy to seething hatred for the characters and plot that began in the *Weatherlight* set and concluded with the *Apocalypse* set. But when that story was complete and we began to move on, plenty of players came out of the woodwork to say, 'Hey! Why'd you take away my story?'"

"There are a few reasons. First, the market research and surveying we've done tell us that most players either disliked or didn't care about the *Weatherlight* story. (But of course there's a minority of players who followed the story and enjoyed it a lot.) Second, the story had gone on for more than four years, and we felt that it was time to move on; the plot had run its course. Third, we wanted to get closer to the early vision for **Magic**: a multiverse consisting of thousands of planes, each different from the last.

"Our general understanding today is that players want each **Magic** set to be a kind of wizard's toolbox -- a bunch of monsters, spells, places, and objects from which they can pick and choose. So our focus now is to create cool, interesting worlds (and maybe a few cool characters, too). But we stop short of trying to tell a grand, sweeping story on cards. Cards are really bad for storytelling anyway. Once we create our world for a block, we hand it off to you, and you make your own stories using the cards that describe that world.

"As for why things seemed to change so quickly, Dominaria and Phyrexia both got decimated in the Phyrexian Invasion. Only a few of the characters from the *Weatherlight* story survived the devastation. The *Odyssey* set takes place about one hundred years after the *Apocalypse* set, on a remote continent called Otaria. Otaria is one of the only places on Dominaria that wasn't completely wrecked by the Invasion. But it has problems of its own, thanks to a huge criminal organization called the Cabal and a mysterious artifact that everybody wants: the **Mirari**. We're eager to know what you think of this new setting, and I promise that **Magic** sets will take place in some amazing new worlds in the future."

June 25

Q: "I was reading a spoiler for *Judgment*, and I came across something that surprised me: On the card **Infectious Rage**, it says, "choose a creature at random **Infectious Rage** can enchant..." How would you choose a creature at random?"

-- Ryan Branum, Beaverton, OR

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

"This particular quirk was covered in the *Judgment* [FAQ](#), but based on the number of questions I get about it, the FAQ must not be popular reading material. Here is the relevant text:

"Choosing a creature at random can be tricky. The simplest fair way to do it is to find a die with more sides than the number of creatures in play (ignoring any creatures **Infectious Rage** can't enchant). Give each creature a different number, and roll the die. Reroll any number that's higher than the number of creatures in play. (Don't start counting again at the beginning or the selection will be biased toward the lower-numbered creatures.) Put the **Rage** on the creature whose number was rolled."

"Is that annoying? A little bit, but random effects can make the game more fun. I'm sure R&D is keeping a close eye on how that card is received by the public to see if anything like that should be attempted again."

June 24

Q: "The *Nemesis* expansion featured five Seals (**Seal of Removal**, for example) that functioned exactly like their common instant counterparts (i.e. **Unsummon**), except they were enchantments you had to sacrifice. I have always wondered why they aren't artifacts instead. It seems like a physical object should be an artifact not an

enchantment."
-- Mike West, Salt Lake City, UT

A: From **Mike Elliott**, R&D senior designer:
"There is a very hazy line between 'global enchantments or whatever term we use these days' and artifacts. Almost all of the cards we do as global enchantments could be done as artifacts, but often we don't want all the colors to have access to a particular effect. For example, if the red one was an artifact, a white deck, which normally wouldn't have access to good direct damage, could play it without playing red. The original concept for the Seals was that they were magical inscriptions on a place or object that triggered or broke when something passed by, much like the old Glyphs from **Dungeons and Dragons**. They ended up being drawn looking more substantial than this, so the flavor concept lost out a bit from what I originally envisioned. In general, we try to make artifacts be physical objects and enchantments be 'magical effects', and we are trying to make this more discernable in the future, but for color flavor reasons, some artifact effects end up getting converted to enchantments in a color."

June 21



Q: "Take the nearest **Magic** card you've got. Flip it over. You see the 'Deckmaster' label near the bottom? Look at the letters 'TER'. Notice something? There's a blue/purple mark right there! Is there any reason that's there? Defective printing plates? Evil government conspiracy to brainwash people through a careful message conveyed through it? Was it a fluke, or was it part of some sort of promotion?"
-- Jonathan Choi, Vancouver, BC

A: From **Worth Wollpert**, Research & Development:
"I noticed that when I first started playing as well. Up until your question I really had no idea, but I asked around and some old-timers helped me out with the answer. According to Sr. VP Skaff Elias, the purple line through the word Deckmaster (Specifically through the T and R) was simply a printing error -- a stray pen-mark, really -- that was never caught and corrected. As you know, it's very important that the backs of **Magic** cards are all uniform, so it was never changed. On a related note, I think one of you guys should write in and ask someone (probably Richard) about the day the card backs in *Arabian Nights* almost changed..."

June 20



Q: "Was **Molten Influence** (for example) intended to: a) counter target instant or sorcery spell unless that spell's controller decides to have **Molten Influence** deal him (or her) 4 damage instead; OR b) counter target instant or sorcery unless that spell's controller *has* **Molten Influence**, in which case deal him 4 damage instead? I know it's a stupid question, but this will get solved no other way."
-- Andy Hall, Brandon, MB

A: From **Mark Gottlieb**, **Magic** Technical Editor:
"**Molten Influence** reads: Counter target instant or sorcery spell unless its controller has Molten Influence deal 4 damage to him or her.

"Well, I can see how there might be some confusion if you inserted a period after the word 'Influence' on this card. But it turns out that the correct interpretation is (a). **Molten Influence** is one of the 'punisher' cards, a new red mechanic sprinkled throughout the *Odyssey* block. Each of these cards will either give you an undercosted effect or deal damage to your opponent -- but your opponent gets to choose the outcome. R&D likes to think of playing a punisher spell as saying "If you don't let me [get some effect], I'm going to punch you in the face."

June 19



Q: "**Teferi's Care** from *Invasion* does the exact same thing as **Arenson's Aura** from *Ice Age*. Why? They both have the same cost, they both have the same activation costs, and they are almost the exact same card, except **Teferi's Care** has different art. What was the thinking behind this?"
-- David "Davo" Elkind, Louisville, KY

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:
"What, you mean you don't want to play eight of these in your deck? Four **Arenson's Auras** and four **Teferi's Cares**! You'll be unstoppable!"

"Seriously, although renaming a card does allow players to play with eight of them in a deck, that's not the main reason we do it. It's almost always a cosmology reason. In this case, Arenson is a character in the *Ice Age* story, and we didn't want him randomly appearing in the *Invasion* block. So we reconcepted the card as a spell of Teferi's.

"When we reprint cards in a base set, the cosmology aspect of them doesn't matter nearly as much. That's why it's okay with me that *Gerrard's Wisdom* is in *Seventh Edition*, for example. But in expert-level sets, we like to visit a different world every year, and some relics from past worlds can disrupt the mood of the new one. For example, if we wanted to reprint *Kjeldoran Frostbeast* in *Mirage*, we would have reconcepted it and renamed it Mtenda Basilisk or something."

June 18



Q: "I don't quite understand your reasoning behind the gold card *Raging Kavv*. You gave it the ability haste but then said you could play it as an instant. The two abilities to me kind of contradict each other. And if you can play it as an instant, like a surprise blocker, why is it only a 3/1? Why didn't you replace the haste with first strike or trample? The card now has two abilities that are almost the same."

-- Jeff Weyant, Scottsdale, AR

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

"As the designer of this particular card, let me explain what I was thinking. The flavor behind the card was that it was very fast. As such I gave it two abilities that reflected speed: playing as an instant and haste. You should note, as this was a multi-colored card, that the first is a green ability and the second a red ability. The two abilities compliment each other not in interaction (they obviously don't work in conjunction) but in the variety they give the creature. Most 'fast' creatures I found were either good offensively or defensively. In *Raging Kavv* I was trying to make one that was good at both."

June 17



Q: "In the older sets, such as *Homelands*, many cards were printed multiple times, each time with a different picture. Is there any chance of that happening again in the future?"

-- Frantz Louis-Jacques, Manalapan, NJ

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

"While we don't like to completely rule anything out, there currently aren't any plans to repeat the alternate art within a set model. The main reason is that most players recognize cards through the artwork. With the enormous number of different cards available now, having many with alternate art can actually be a drawback, since you would have to memorize more images. This is especially cumbersome in areas where players use cards in many different languages. Additionally, even the small expansions that are released now are large enough to provide variety in the card abilities without needing to rely on extra art. The old expansions where the alternate art model was used, such as *Fallen Empires* and *Homelands*, were much smaller, and different art was used to help fill out the sets.

"Of course, we still plan on releasing alternate art for many cards when they get reprinted in later sets. New images help keep reprints fresh and exciting. We just don't want to be in a situation where the number of images a player needs to know to reasonably play the game gets out of hand."

June 14



Q: "When I first looked at *Phantom Centaur* I saw that it was strangely similar to one of my all-time favorites. Were you thinking of *Blastoderm* when making this card or what?"

-- Ari Kristinn Gunnarsson, Reykjavík, Iceland

A: From **Brian Tinsman**, R&D game designer:

"*Judgment* was my first time participating on a design team and I was overflowing with ideas. The problem was the set didn't need any of those ideas, it needed a strong, flavorful mechanic appropriate for white and green creatures. I figured if I came through with a good one, the team would be more receptive to my weird ideas like *Masked Gorgon*, *Anurid Brushhopper*, and *Infectious Rage*. I started with a 'top down' approach, imagining different possible scenarios for white and green creatures rising from the ashes of *Torment* to exact justice on black. My original thought was to give

them the ability to attack and block while still in the graveyard, but that ran into too many rules complexities. I still liked the 'revenge of the ghosts' idea and began playing around with different ways to make ghosts that were difficult to kill. Eventually I decided when you swing at a ghost each blow has little effect, so it should be the number of hits, not the magnitude of damage that counts. The team liked this and once we settled on the phantom mechanic we sorted out how many creatures we wanted to use it on and how big each of them should be. One of them happened to be the Centaur, and like the good old **Blastoderm**, what a beating he turned out to be!"

June 13



Q: "In [Magic Arcana](#) for May 29, the sketches for an Elephant Token card were shown. However, there already exists an Elephant Token card. So why did you choose to make a second Elephant Token? And does this mean that we will see other versions of token cards in the future as well?"

-- Arjan Schuurmans, Eindhoven, Netherlands

A: From **John Grant**, Magic Player Rewards Program Manager:

"There are many factors in deciding which token cards to create for the **Magic** Player Rewards program. The anticipated popularity of Elephant Tokens in the Standard and *Odyssey* Block tournament environment led us to the decision to release a new Elephant Token card. While there are no hard and fast rules at this time about Magic Player Reward Token cards, it is likely that we will create different versions of token cards that have already been released."

June 12



Q: "What made R&D decide to invent the *Apocalypse* enemy pain-lands and not just reprint the comes-into-play-tapped *Tempest* ones?"

-- Jonathan Lam, San Francisco, CA

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

"I think that we decided not to reprint the *Tempest* lands because they just weren't good enough. We really wanted to encourage off-colored play and the *Apocalypse* enemy pain-lands better served that purpose. If we just reprinted *Skyshroud Forest* instead of making *Yavimaya Coast*, for example, a lot of the current Type 2 decks wouldn't exist, let alone scores of casual off-color decks."

June 11



Q: "Is there any way there could be a Grand Prix or Pro Tour - Honolulu? I remember one was on the Grand Prix schedule about two years ago but it was cancelled. Until then, we here in Hawaii were extremely excited about it. If there's a place to have a Grand Prix or Pro Tour, I think Hawaii would be quite a nice place to have it."

-- Charles Toratani, Honolulu, HI

A: From **Chris Galvin**, Director of Organized Play:

"You have a good memory. There was a Grand Prix scheduled for Honolulu back in 1999, if I recall correctly. It was planned for April of that year. Unfortunately, there were scheduling difficulties, and the event was rescheduled for later in the year and moved to the mainland.

"Generally speaking, we only hold Pro Tour events in cities with populations in the multiples of millions. Tokyo, New York, Paris, Rome, London, Los Angeles, Chicago, etc. Sometimes we'll go to smaller cities, like New Orleans, but that's an exception. So I'll limit my response to Grand Prix.

"When we select Grand Prix cities, we consider many factors. The city needs to be accessible to people coming from out of town. It needs to be large enough to have local media and have a generally recognizable name. The cost to attend and run the show can't be too expensive. There needs to be a tournament organizer capable of running the event. And we want to be relatively sure we can draw a reasonable attendance. We consider an attendance between 250 and 500 to be reasonable for a North American Grand Prix.

"Sometimes, as a bonus consideration, we will have a GP in a city for reasons that are strategic for our business. This last point was the driving force behind our original plan for GP-Honolulu. The DCI is interested in promoting international competition, and it was hoped that a Grand Prix in Hawaii would attract out-of-state players from the

mainland US as well as Japan. Since 1999, however, the state of the Japanese **MTG** community has changed in various ways that make us prioritize this strategy lower.

"While GP-Honolulu is not in our immediate future plans, we won't say 'never.' The local area population of about 850,000 is reasonable. We have an excellent judge and organizer in the city, Mark Morimoto of mtghawaii. The challenge would be in actually getting the attendance up to 250. Since only the locals would be able to 'road trip' to the event, we would face a serious challenge. But we do still give it consideration. I can only promise that we will continue to do so, and one of these days the time could be right."

June 10



Q: "While you were coming up with the card ideas for *Judgment*, what happened to all the rules? I mean we haven't had a **Suntail Hawk** since **Scryb Sprites!** Each ability on a card is supposed to have a cost, the power and toughness has a cost, a 1/1 creature is generally worth 1 colorless. Are you arguing that the flying ability is worth the difference between colorless and colored mana? And **Anurid Brushhopper**. A 3/4 for three mana with a good ability is just plain crazy! (Apparently **Spiritmonger** still lives because "We asked for it") I think an explanation is necessary."

-- John Koziar, Oshawa, Ontario

A: From **Randy Buehler**, **Magic** lead developer:

"While R&D does have rules about how much you should get for certain amounts of mana, we are constantly examining those rules to see if they're right or not. If we can find ways to print bigger better or cooler creatures without doing damage to the overall balance of the game, we will. I wrote a whole column on **Suntail Hawk**, so you can click [here](#) if you want to read why we suddenly think we can get away with a 1-mana 1/1 flier in white. As far as **Spiritmonger** and **Anurid Brushhopper** go, we did a lot of testing of gold cards during the *Invasion* period and realized that they all have a built-in drawback: you have to build a two (or more) color mana-base just to play with them. That constraint allows us to charge less overall mana for a card just because it's gold. While **Spiritmonger** is definitely good, our playtesting showed that he wasn't broken (mostly because many decks can just chump block him forever). It's also been only a Tier 2 card in constructed tournament play, which I read as more evidence that it's good-but-not-too-good. The jury is still out on the Brushhopper, obviously. I think it will also be good, but the drawback that it can only go into green-white decks will keep it from being too good."

June 7



Q: "Why is our favorite game called **Magic: The Gathering**? What does The Gathering stand for? What added value did Richard Garfield think it had for the game, because I never saw anything on the cards that indicated any form of 'gathering.'"

-- Michiel de Jong, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

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

"The name used in playtest for **Magic: The Gathering** was simply 'Magic,' and that is certainly how I still think of it and refer to it outside of formal contexts. The trouble began when Wizards of the Coast wondered if a proprietary name would be better -- one can own the name 'Shmorghapler,' but not 'Magic.' Many names were considered; some I remember are Mana Clash, Mana Flash, Flash Magic, and Lords of Dominia. None of them thrilled me (or anyone else, for that matter), and I began to feel more and more strongly that **Magic** was the best name for the game.

"Then it was suggested that we keep the name **Magic** but add a subtitle to the game in order to make it more proprietary. I believe the inspiration for this naming convention was the *Vampire: The Masquerade* role playing game. A number of different subtitles were considered and eventually we settled with 'The Gathering.' People were thinking of gathering in a number of different ways: gathering of friends, gathering storm, and, of course, gathering cards. I don't think anyone loved the name, but I think a lot of folks kinda liked it, and no one really hated it.

"One reason I liked this form of name was that it allowed me to keep calling the game **Magic**. Another reason I thought it was a good move relates to the way I envisioned the product being printed at the beginning, which was large sets coming out in regular time intervals and replacing one another, and so the subtitle could be the name of the subset of cards, playing the same role as the name of the expansion today. If this had been the case we would have seen **Magic: The Gathering** followed by **Magic: Ice Age**, followed by **Magic: Mirage**. For reasons outside of the scope of this question, the

expansions and the way they fit together changed, and so we were left with 'The Gathering' being the name of the entire product, rather than just the first set of cards."

June 6



Q: "Why is *Homelands* such a bad set? It seems to stick out like a sore thumb when compared to the rest of the expansion sets **Magic** has released. My friend and I built two *Homelands* deck, and played them with two copies of **Helm of Awakening** in play to start the game. That actually made the cards playable."

--Mike Register, Tucson, AZ

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

"Why is it a bad set? To be blunt, because it was poorly designed and not properly developed. Although to be fair, development in the early days was a much shorter process than it is today. The *Homelands* development team had only a few months to 'fix' the set and it just wasn't enough time. The good news is that the *Homelands* experience led to radical changes in both the design & development processes as well as the hiring in R&D. In fact, that reorganization is the thing that led to me getting my job at Wizards.

"A young company makes mistakes and *Homelands* was our early lesson that card quality is essential to the health of the game. From *Homelands* forward, we have spent a much greater time in both design and development to ensure that **Magic** is the best game possible. I think the results speak for themselves."

June 5



Q: "Why do you guys seem to rely on the 'pie' of mechanics to strike a balance? It's true that black and blue have more mechanics than, say, red and green. However, don't red and green make up for it in the strength of simple and potent things like creatures and burn spells? Maybe mechanics can be out of balance while the actual colors are still in balance."

-- Ryan Marlow, Bakersfield, CA

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

"You raise an interesting point, but one could also argue that cards like **Counterspell** and **Terror** are also quite potent and very simple. When you get down to it, most of the colors have at least some sort of mechanic we could consider simple and potent (**Disenchant**, **Giant Growth**, **Shock**, etc...), but colors like blue and black have a much deeper pool to draw from. And there's the rub, we felt like we needed to spread things out a little more evenly than they have been in the past. Coming from someone who has racked his brain trying to design that last uncommon green *spell* or non-direct damage red spell, I feel pretty confident that we can spread things out a bit more and still leave blue and black with the cupboards chock full of goodies."

June 4



Q: "About how long does it take to complete one average **Magic** card?"

--Ray Longfellow, Dover, DE

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

"Well, we don't really do them one at a time; we do them in sets (just like we sell them). Design for a set will start about two and a half years (yes, that's *years*) before the set is due to be released. For the first six months, the designers aren't usually putting in that many hours of work. Instead, they are thinking in a general way about what the theme of the set should be and what sort of mechanics it should have. Then for the next year or so they are actually designing the set.

"After the designers are done (about one year before release), they hand the set over to the developers. The developers play with the set a lot and try to make sure that all the costs are right and that all the themes fit together. They have about six months to do that. The last six months before release are taken up with typesetting, printing, and shipping the cards. So that's six months for concept, one year for design, six months for development, and six months for production.

"So even if a designer thought up an idea for a card in just a few seconds, it's usually over two years from the very beginning of the idea until the card is printed. And sometimes it's even more -- some cards are planned for one set, but then are moved to

a later set because they'd fit better there. There are cards in the *Odyssey* block that were originally conceived five years ago!"

June 3



Q: "I have noticed that in the past two blocks, *Planeshift* and *Odyssey* both had cards that were created by the winner of the Magic Invitational. *Planeshift* had **Meddling Mage** and *Odyssey* had **Shadowmage Infiltrator**. My friends and I noticed that this had occurred every other set, and it would make sense if there was one in *Judgment*. However, after going to the prerelease, I wasn't able to figure out which one it was or if there even was one. Will you continue to do this and will there be one in the next set if there isn't one in *Judgment*?"
--Garrick Talmage, Denver, CO

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

"There was an Invitational card in *Judgment*, but not because we're releasing them every two sets.

"The Invitational used to be held in the spring of every year, and the winners' cards were put into the first set possible, which was always the second set of the following block; Darwin Kastle's **Avalanche Riders** was in *Urza's Legacy*, Mike Long's **Rootwater Thief** was in *Nemesis*, and Chris Pikula's **Meddling Mage** was in *Planeshift*. But in 2000 the Invitational was moved to late autumn to better line up with the end of each Pro Tour season, which allowed the cards to see print in the first set of each block as opposed to the second -- Jon Finkel's **Shadowmage Infiltrator** was in *Odyssey* and Kai Budde's card from the most recent Invitational will be in *Onslaught* (the next set we'll be releasing). That leaves the card in *Judgment*: Olle Råde's **Sylvan Safekeeper**. Råde won the very first Invitational (Hong Kong, 1997) but he took forever to submit a usable card idea. He eventually came up with the Safekeeper and it was slipped into *Judgment*.

"Actually, **Sylvan Safekeeper** was ready at the time *Torment* was being made, but since it was a good green card, R&D held it back until *Judgment*."



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