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# Who's the Lifegain?

Ben Bleiweiss  
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Welcome again to Life Gain Week, where I ask the question, "Who's the lifegain?" Each color in **Magic** has certain themes which are expressed through repetition from set to set. Randy introduced the [color pie](#), which showed where each color stood in relation to how many mechanics each used. Over the course of **Magic** history, different colors have controlled different shares of the pie, with some mechanics shifting from one color to another during different blocks. For instance, untargetability started out as a blue ability (with Spectral Cloak, Mistfolk, Homarid Warrior and Deep Spawn), but moved towards green (Autumn Willow, Deadly Insects) before being shared by each of the colors around Urza block (Citanul Centaurs and Zephid spring to mind, much less Morphling). But which colors have controlled the lifegain piece of the pie throughout Magic history? Mark went over some of this briefly on [Monday](#) from a design standpoint, but I'm going to take a more historical angle.

## RED

Red (and I mean cards that are only red in the mana cost, not gold cards like **Energy Bolt**) has been granted a grand total of five lifegain spells, three of which involve spending another color of mana to activate the lifegain effect (**Thunderscape Master**, **Primitive Justice**, and **Rakavolver**). Of the two remaining, one requires you to control four or more basic lands types to work (**Collapsing Borders**, which also conceivably could benefit your opponent), and the other requires you to win coin flips (**Game of Chaos**). It's safe to say that of the lifegain pie, red weighs in at a hefty near-zero percent.



*Red's meager cache of life gain cards.*

## BLUE

Blue shares a little lifegain when coupled with white and black, but usually you can distinguish the blue part of the effect from the lifegain side. For instance, **Absorb's** ♣♣ goes towards countermagic, while its ♠ gains you three life. The same goes for **Stormscape Battlemage**, **Reviving Vapors**, and **Dromar's Charm**. While blue controls about as many total lifegain effects as red, it does have one subset of lifegain that no other color partakes in: temporary huge life increases. **Illusions of Grandeur** and **Delusions of Mediocrity** both allow the caster to gain a sizeable chunk of life, but both share the weakness of being potentially temporary, leaving the caster right back where he started. This sort of "illusionary" lifegain (the life is there, but it really isn't) fits right into blue's theme, but once again not much divvying is being made in the pie.

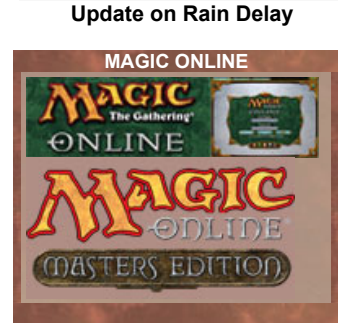
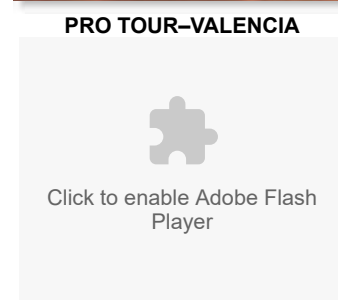
## BLACK

Now we're getting somewhere. From the very first days of **Magic** history, black gained life through inflicting damage. This mirrors a "vampiric" theme, where the caster sucks the life out of his opponent and uses it to bolster his own health. **Drain Life** began this type of spell, and this line of spells continues to this day. Some notable variants have included the multi-player favorite **Syphon Soul** from *Legends*, which could hit multiple opponents at once; **Spinning Darkness**, the alternate-cost instant from *Weatherlight*; **Corrupt**, a mainstay of the current Type 2 mono-black control decks; and **Morbid Hunger**, the most recent version of **Drain Life** to see print. In addition, the black-activated ability from the *Invasion* cycle of Masters involved a two-point drain.

Past that, black premiered a couple of lifegain effects that have since been moved to other colors. **El-Hajjaj** was the first "Spirit Link" effect, which gained you life for each damage dealt by the damage-inflicting creature. This is now mainly a white effect. For a short while black also gained life from the graveyard, with cards such as **Grave Robbers** and **Spoils of Evil**. Instead of using the graveyard as a resource for gaining life, black now mainly uses it to power spells and permanents (such as with **Sutured Ghoul** or **Skeletal Scrying**). Green and white have dually absorbed this aspect of lifegain, reflecting the cycle of life in nature, and the strength gained by giving tribute to one's ancestors.

## GREEN

Now things are starting to get juicy. Green and white vied back and forth for a long time for the title of king of lifegain. While white ended up as the primary





Fyndhorn Druid, Deepwood Tantiv, and Rysorian Badger: the "superstars" of green lifegain.

lifegain color (as you can guess, the colors are ranked in this article in ascending order of lifegain dominance), green still to this day get divvied a healthy portion of the pie. Which effects are in green's flavor?

## Creatures which go to the graveyard

Although **Onulet** was the original, **Tarpan** was the first colored creature to net life upon entry to the graveyard. White dipped into this ability briefly (with **Auspicious Ancestor**), but green outnumbers white with this effect by a margin of two to one (**Fyndhorn Druid** being the other green creature).

## Blocked creatures

Alliances introduced this with **Fyndhorn Druid**, although the Druid would need to die in order for the actual lifegain to take place. Newer variants include **Deepwood Tantiv** and **Sacred Prey**, both of which can merrily swing to their heart's content, taunting the opponent to block and boost your life total.

## Creatures in the graveyard

White mucks around with the graveyard theme, but much less discriminately than green. From **Rysorian Badger** to **Blossoming Wreath** to the most recent **Invigorating Falls**, if there are creatures in the graveyard, green will find a way to use them for the purpose of gaining life.

## WHITE

I don't suppose this was a big mystery, but the answer to the title of this column is, "White is the lifegain". There was a period leading up to **Mirage** where green and white were splitting lifegain effects pretty evenly. Green had the first "gain life for each creature in play" spell (**An-Havva Inn**), but white did this effect much more effectively with **Congregate**. Green had the first "X" lifegain spell, **Stream of Life**, but white topped it with **Alabaster Potion**. Just how many different lifegain effects does the white stable contain these days?

## Lifegain for killing creatures

The black mage might take the energy straight from an adversary, but the white mage simply dismisses the creature and doles out some life. Originally this effect gave the creature's controller life (with **Swords to Plowshares**), but it has fluctuated back and forth between caster and controller since. **Exile**, **Path of Peace**, **Last Breath**, **Avenger en-Dal**, and **Chastise** all belong in this category.

## Lifegain that doubles as damage prevention

The original white boon, **Healing Salve**, gave you the choice of gaining three life or preventing three damage to a creature. **Alabaster Potion** from **Legends** upgraded **Guardian Angel** and gave it the ability to either prevent damage or gain life. While the two effects are separated most of the time these days, you can still see them together on cards such as **Atalya**, **Samite Master**.

## Spirit Link

These are the cards and creatures which allow you to gain life each time your creature deals damage. Originally black (see above), white has completely co-opted this ability starting with the card this ability is named after, **Spirit Link**. Every card in **Magic** with this ability since **Legends** has contained some white, including **Warrior Angel**, the global enchantment **Noble Purpose**, **Armadillo Cloak**, the white kicker on the Volver cycle of **Apocalypse**, **Soul Link**, and the gigantic **Phantom Nishoba**.

## Creatures which come into play

Here's an idea which debuted in **Portal** (with **Venerable Monk**) and then made the transition into tournament **Magic**. **Staunch Defenders** and **Venerable Monk** were released back to back in **Tempest** and **Stronghold**, followed by **Radiant's Dragoons**, **Angel of Mercy**, and most recently **Teroh's Faithful**.

from *Torment*. These creature cards gain the caster life when they come into play.

## Artifacts and lands making the transition

Many lifegain effects originally appeared on artifacts and lands, but were converted to white over time. *Fountain of Youth* became *Silent Attendant*. *Life Chisel* became *Worthy Cause*, *Diamond Valley* morphed into *Animal Boneyard*, *Zuran Orb* was molded into *Reaping the Rewards*, *Sheltered Valley* contains shades of *Convalescence*, and *Gerrard Capashen* himself reminds one of *Ivory Tower*.

## WHITE/GREEN/BLACK CARDS



Before I end the column, I'd like to take a moment to talk about the times when white, green, and black have been combined on cards (mostly gold) for the purpose of lifegain. It first happened in *The Dark*, with *Dark Heart of the Wood*, a card that combined black's penchant for sacrifice with green's lifegain effects. *Fiery Justice* contained a lifegain element (though it's hard to tell if it's the white or the green component, since there are two effects and the damage aspect is clearly red's), as did *Misfortune*. In *Mirage*, Wizards finally printed two white/green cards which dealt with gaining life. *Zebra Unicorn* was the first creature since *Arabian Nights* to have built-in *Spirit Link*, and *Vitalizing Cascade* combined the powers of *Stream of Life* with *Healing Salve* in one neat package. *Victual Sliver* added a four-point lifegain effect to the sliver stable, and the multi-colored *Invasion* block threw out a whole bevy of effects, including *Heroes' Reunion*, *Horned Cheetah*, *Treva*, *Vigorous Charge*, *Dromar's Charm*, *Mournful Zombie*, *Soul Link*, *Putrid Warrior*, *Death Grasp*, *Gerrard's Verdict*, and appropriately enough the first black/green/white card, *Overgrown Estate*.



Well that's it for this week. Stay tuned next week for the second installment of my "how the rules used to be" series.

Ben may be reached at [bleiweiss1@cox.net](mailto:bleiweiss1@cox.net).

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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