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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. We'll post a new question and answer each day.

August 30

Q: "I have been looking at some older cards lately. I am just wondering why you made lands that didn't produce mana at all such as **The Tabernacle at Pendrell Vale**. Are you going to make any more of these cards or have they become 'extinct'? Thanks for your time."

--Lance, Jacksonville, FL

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

"At some point we decided that one of the defining characteristics of land was that it should produce mana. Printing a land that doesn't produce mana kind of feels like printing a creature without power and toughness - it just doesn't feel right. Like most of R&D's card design rules, we can repeal this rule if we see a good reason to. But until then, we don't have any plans to print more mana-free lands."

August 29

Q: "When designing new sets, such as *Onslaught*, how much does the current metagame affect your design decisions? Do you actively design to neutralize, or counteract what you may feel as being overpowering strategies in the game at the time?"

-- Christopher DeAngelus, Rochester, NY

A: From **Mike Elliott**, R&D senior designer:

"We attempt to take the current environment into account when we design new cards. Unfortunately, we design the sets well over a year ahead of time and by the time a set comes out that has a undesirable effect on the standard metagame, it will often be eight months or more before we can get a card or two out that will affect the environment. Two examples of this occurred in the *Mercadian Masques* (pronounced Mass-squeeze) block. Rebels were becoming a problem with **Lin Sivvi**, **Defiant Hero** and the **Ramosian Sergeant**, so we thought we should put out a creature type hoser that would be useful against rebels. So **Tsabo's Decree** was added. Similarly, **Tsabo's Web** was added to combat the proliferation of **Rishadan Ports** in the environment. But as you can see, the solution cards did not appear until *Invasion*, long after Rebels and Port were rampant in the environment.

"With the lag for production and printing, we just can't react to problems in the environment that quickly. Some of our longer term decisions are based on the metagame however. For example, if we look at the environment and see that blue is running rampant (again), we can be much less generous on blue cards coming out in the sets we are developing or remove all blue cards and islands from *Eighth Edition*. Over the course of two or three sets, this strategy can shift the metagame towards or away from a color, but it is always a slow process. So in other words, don't expect to see the 'Upheaval-proof, unbouncable, uncounterable creature' for at least 4 more months, or am I bluffing?"

August 28

Q: "How did **Razorfin Hunter** become a 1/1 creature when the cycle's other creatures were 2/2?"

-- Bernard Ng, Singapore

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

"Though I wasn't actually on the *Apocalypse* development team, I do think I recall the answer to your question. It's fairly simple really (yes we actually do things that could be considered simple around here!) Basically the development team just thought (rightly so) that the ability on **Razorfin Hunter** was among the strongest in the cycle, and didn't want to unbalance limited play by making a common 'Tim' that was super-powerful, so rather than cut the idea altogether they simply reduced its power and toughness by one. In retrospect, we probably *could* have released it at 2/2 and not messed anything up too badly, since **Gaea's Skyfolk** and **Goblin Legionnaire** are almost as good if not better."

August 27



Q: "Why did you guys put **Stern Judge** in *Torment*? To me, it sounds much more like a *Judgment* card. I mean, it is white, with a black hoser ability, plus it is a JUDGE!! *Torment* was supposed to be the black set and if that is so, I don't think that there should be that good of a black hoser in it."

-- Alex Saltzman, Ithaca, NY

A: From **Henry Stern**, Research & Development:

"When we made *Torment*, we knew we were also creating a pretty good mono black deck archetype. **Nantuko Shade**, **Mutilate**, and **Mind Sludge** were all created during development with this mono black deck in mind. Now this all makes sense, considering that *Torment* was supposed to be the 'black' set. Flash forward to the middle of *Torment* development, we had this white weenie card named 'Super Stud' that was showing up as one of the best cards in the set. Since we knew that *Judgment* was going to be the 'green/white' set, we decided to ship this Super Stud off to *Judgment* -- where it eventually wound up as **Benevolent Bodyguard**. We now had a hole we needed to fill in *Torment*.

"We have discovered that when you deliberately create an archetype that you know is going to be good (like the mono black deck from *Torment*), it's usually a good idea to make sure there is something that can be used to fight against that archetype, a safety valve of sorts. The conversation in *Torment* development went something like this:

Team Lead: Well, what's a good white card that can be used against mono black?

Team Member1: Hmm... **Karma** was always pretty good.

Team Member2: Yeah, Karma was cool, but we shouldn't exactly repeat Karma, should we?

Team Member3: Karma would be much too good in this set.

Team Lead: How about a Karma on legs, maybe 2*** for a 2/2?

Team Member3: That creature would be much too good against mono black.

Team Member1: Maybe we could make it a tap effect.

Team Member2: Sure, but it should be cheaper than, 2* probably.

"And thus, **Stern Judge** was born."

August 26



Q: "In the [comprehensive rulebook](#) of **Magic**, Rule 502.9d reads 'Ignore this rule.' What was the original rule that we are now commanded to ignore, and why was it dropped from the rulebook? This has been bugging me for quite some time."

-- Juan Cuadros, Citrus Heights, CA

A: From **Paul Barclay**, TCG Rules Manager:

"What rule?"

"Rule 502.9d was 'An attacking creature with trample ignores any blocking creatures that can't have damage assigned to them.' It was confusing because we got rid of all the creatures that can't have damage assigned to them (such as **Fog Bank**, which has been reworded). Players were assuming that it covered creatures with protection and similar abilities.

"When your green creature with trample (for example, a 5/5) is blocked by a creature with protection from green (for example, a 2/3), you still have to assign enough damage

to the creature to kill it (3 in this case), even though that damage will be prevented. The extra damage can still be assigned to the defending player (2 damage in this case)."

August 23



Q: "I was watching an old **Magic** videotape... How was Matt Linde allowed to use proxied cards in his deck in the finals of 1998 US Nationals? He clearly has a plains with '**White Knight**' written on it. He plays it, then reaches off camera and gets a real one. How was this allowed?"

-- John Vilanova, Ocean, NJ

A: From **Andrew Finch**, Research & Development:

"I was the Tournament Manager for that event. At that time, if a Judge decided that a card had become damaged through the natural course of play, he or she could decide to issue the player a proxy card. Such proxies were only used during the final matches of championship events with a Judge or Judges present throughout the match because, at the time, we did not allow the players to use sleeves over concerns about glare for the cameras. Matt's **White Knights** -- and a few other cards -- were too worn to be played legally without sleeves, so the proxies were issued.

"Players are now allowed to use sleeves in the finals of large events, even on camera, so don't expect to see many more proxies any time soon."

August 22



Q: "I understand that **Crystal Quarry** was put in *Odyssey* in order for any deck to cast **Atogatog**, but **Crystal Quarry** just feels like it belongs in the *Invasion* Block. Was this card originally going to be put in the *Invasion* Block and then pulled out for some reason? If so, why?"

-- Peter Steiman, Brooklyn, NY

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, **Magic** senior designer:

"Would **Crystal Quarry** have made a good card in the *Invasion* block? Yes, it would. Why wasn't it in the *Invasion* block? Because we didn't come up with it until *Odyssey* development. Good ideas don't always come on schedule. But because *Odyssey* was the next set and would be played in the same Standard environment as the *Invasion* block for a year, we thought it would be okay to put a five-color helper in *Odyssey*."

August 21



Q: "Why was the white mana symbol changed from the old Alpha white mana symbol? Why was the continuity broken in such a blatant manner? Aesthetically, the old symbol was much more pleasing to the eye because it had softer contours like the other mana symbols. Was there some sort of legal consideration?"

-- Mark James Thompson, Bern, Switzerland

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

"There wasn't any legal consideration that I know of. A little while after the game came out, all the mana symbols were looked at again, and very minor (or no) changes were made to most of them. White got changed more, because the art people mostly thought it didn't look so good (of course, opinions on how it looks will vary) and because it looked a bit like a blob... it just wasn't very distinct, especially when viewed from a distance. There were some problems getting it to print clearly, too."

August 20



Q: "I was wondering where the names of the five *Apocalypse* enemy color combos (**Dega**, **Ceta**, **Necra**, **Raka**, and **Ana**) came from? **Necra** is pretty obvious, but what about the rest?"

-- Nate York, Garden City, MI

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

"The *Apocalypse* naming team wanted to link the three cycles of cards that keyed off enemy colors (the **Disciples**, the **Sanctuaries**, and the **Volvers**), so we invented five guilds to explain them. In happier times, these groups might have met secretly (in their sanctuaries, of course) to explore the magic of their ancient enemies. After the Phyrexian invasion, the Coalition's desperation brings these heretical guilds out of the shadows. The **Volvers** are created using these strange combinations of mana. At least that's one explanation for these three cycles of cards. So far, so good."

"Unfortunately, a couple of the Volvers use their card names three times in their rules text -- and at that time **Degavolver** gained '👁️': **Degavolver** gets +1/+0 until end of turn' instead of first strike -- so the guild names had to be as short as possible. Our task was to make up five very short words that players could associate with the appropriate color.

"White: Dega is just a made-up word. There's no hidden meaning. It went up on the white board at a meeting and just stuck.

"Blue: Ceta is short for cetacean. A cetacean is a member of an order of marine animals that includes whales, dolphins, and porpoises. We tried out 'Jele' for a while, but it just sounded silly.

"Black: Necra is obviously derived from the Greek *neckros*, meaning dead body.

"Red: Raka sounds like it might have something to do with rocks, but the word isn't really derived from anything. We briefly considered using 'Gnor' or 'Gnar' for the red guild, but we reassigned Gnarr to a pair of green creatures in the set with the playtest names '**Tweedledee**' and '**Tweedledum**.'

"Green: Ana has the same Latin origin as animal: *animus*, meaning soul. The green guild name was the toughest one to finalize. The most obvious made-up four-letter Magic word for something green is 'Maro,' but it didn't quite work in this context. 'Terra' was in the running for many weeks, but it sounded just as red as it did green. Dropping one of the R's didn't help much since 'Tera' is the metric system's prefix for trillion."

August 19



Q: "When I read about Rout as the 'Card of the Day,' I was wondering why the card isn't black. I know that from the gameplay side of view, the card should be white, but the overall flavor of the card is *really* black. Phyrexians burning down an innocent city doesn't sound really white to me. Maybe I'm totally wrong, I'm from Sweden and I don't really know what the word Rout means."

-- Simon Englund, Sweden

A: From **Brandon Bozzi**, R&D creative coordinator:

"Let's start with the definition of rout. Out of the *thirteen* definitions I found, this is the one, I believe, the creators of that card had in mind, "to defeat decisively or disastrously." So far, seems fine as a white card. Let's move on to the art. The art description called for the *Weatherlight* strafing a battlefield crawling with Phyrexians. The scene was supposed to take place in Benalia (a white setting). The idea was that the *Weatherlight* would be 'routing' the Phyrexians. Perfect? Almost. When the art came back we got Phyrexians in Benalia, but the *Weatherlight* was no where to be seen, and the Phyrexians were routing the Benalians! The art still fit the overall concept (decisive defeat), and was an opportunity to show the destruction of Benalia (showing plot points was important back then), so the art was kept."

August 16



Q: "When cards are put in a set how is rarity selected? It would seem like a card such as **Wild Mongrel** is a whole lot better than a card like **Pardic Miner** and therefore have a higher rarity, but this isn't the case."

-- Jacoby Woods, Edmond, OK

A: From **Mike Elliott**, Magic senior designer:

"Contrary to popular opinion, we do not make all the good cards rare. In fact, we attempt to spread the cards out such that there are desirable cards for both tournament and casual players at all three rarities. (Unless its a Dragon, and then it is obviously rare. I mean, I've never seen a Dragon, have you? They must be rare.)

"One of the things that does affect a card's rarity is the complexity of a card. The more complicated a card, the more likely it is to be uncommon or rare. Simple cards however, can be any rarity, but are often forced down to common by more complicated cards taking their spots. When we do a internal color cycle, we will often do a common, uncommon, and a rare in the color. The common will usually be a small somewhat vanilla creature with the mechanic and the uncommon and rare will be larger or with extra abilities. An example of this is the **Thought Nibbler**, **Thought Eater**, and **Thought Devourer** cycle in *Odyssey*."

"Very narrow cards will often become uncommon and rare also, even if the text on them is very simple. The reason for this is the effect is not particularly good in limited formats, and you don't want players seeing the card all the time when they won't realistically play the card in limited ever. For example, **Battle of Wits** would not be that exciting a limited card, since you usually don't have deck searching available to a high degree, and you often can't build a 250 card deck, so making the card common or uncommon makes little sense.

"Often cards are part of cycles and the cycle is assigned a rarity. For example, **Wild Mongrel** is part of a 'hound' cycle of 1C 2/2 creatures, which also includes **Patrol Hound**, **Filthy Cur**, **Phantom Whelp**, and **Mad Dog**. In general, we tend to do all parts of the cycle at the same rarity, although we have broken this rule a couple times. And finally, some cards get forced up and down in a numbers crunch as we add or remove cards from the set during design and development. For example, the 'incarnation' land, **Riftstone Portal**, was originally a rare card, but got forced down when we decided to do all 4 of the rare extra cards as green white multicolor cards."

August 15



Q: "Why don't the five Burst cards from *Odyssey* (**Muscle Burst**, **Aether Burst**, etc.) have the tombstone icon next to their names?"

-- Eric McFarland, Elk Grove, CA

A: From **Mike Donais**, Research & Development:

"Originally the tombstone icon was designed to go only on flashback cards, as seen in *Odyssey*. However while templating *Torment* cards the editing team suggested that it also go on **lchorid** and be used to symbolize all cards that were active while in the graveyard. People liked this idea so we decided to implement it. We realized that the burst cards would be left off of the list, but since they were not actually usable from the graveyard we decided that it would be ok to do it anyways. In the end we were very happy with how the tombstone icon made limited play much easier."

August 14



Q: "I noticed a very distinctive character portrayed on the cards **Justice** and **Surge of Strength**. Not being too familiar with the *Ice Age* block storyline, I had no way of knowing who this guy was (or if he was just someone Ruth Thompson liked to draw). Is he part of the story and if so, who is he and what effect does he have on it?"



-- Nick Bottomeley, Davis, CA

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

"Notice he also appears on **Dystopia** as well! This particular elf wasn't meant to be anyone in particular; apparently, Ruth Thompson thought it would be interesting to show him in various stages of power, from strong (Justice and Surge) to weak (Dystopia). He doesn't correspond to any currently known major figure in the *Ice Age* block storyline, so ably written up by Jeff Grubb in a trilogy of novels. As far as we can tell, he just appealed to the artist as an interesting figure."

August 13



Q: "If you want to encourage color commitment for certain cards, why don't you print more cards that are, for example  or  to play? I'd prefer to play cards like these if they offered sufficient benefit for the commitment required."

-- Steven Gonda, Calgary, Alberta

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

"We've thought about doing exactly that and we even went as far as to try out a cycle of CCCCC creatures in *Onslaught*, but after playing with them for a while we realized they were flawed. Those creatures were absolutely insanely powerful in mono-color decks, but you couldn't even consider running them if you had more than one color in your deck. It's ok to do a card like that every once in a while, but a steady diet of them just isn't good for the game. There are already a bunch of pressures built into the game (starting with the basic mana system used to pay for spells) that incentivize players to play mono-color decks, and we don't want to add to that pressure very often."

August 12



Q: "The **Star Wars TCG** currently uses an arrow (->) symbol for activated abilities,

instead of the colon (:). Since this is much clearer visually, are there plans to add this feature to **Magic** or not?"

-- Koen Braspenninx, Antwerp, Belgium

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

"We aren't planning to add the arrow to **Magic** mainly because everyone is so used to the colon. We often come up with things in our newer games that are based on the experience we've gained in **Magic**... another interesting example is our game **DuelMasters** (made only for the Japanese market) in which we eliminated mana problems by allowing you to play any card upside-down as a basic land. We were pretty happy with how that worked out (it also means all the cards in your deck are interesting -- you don't need to have a third of your deck be cards that do nothing but provide mana), but changing **Magic** in such a radical way would be too much!"

August 9



Q: "Why are some **Magic** expansions better as a whole than others, like *Urza's Saga* and *Judgment* are better than *Fallen Empires* and *Planeshift*? Wouldn't it make more sense to balance the power?"

-- Katee Kline, Delhi, NY

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, **Magic** senior designer:

"Let me start by promising I won't be writing an article on why R&D create bad sets. The reason some sets are better than others is threefold. First, while R&D attempts to balance each set, our ability to control its overall power level is far from a science. We aim sets at a similar power level but the variance between how we think the set will be used and how the set is actually used at times can be significant. For example, in *Torment*, we underestimated the entire madness mechanic, thus the set is overall stronger than we anticipated. This isn't a bad thing, but it does mean that power level can swing from set to set.

"Second, R&D has to respond to the current environment. What this means is that if R&D messes up and a set is more powerful than we like, we have to decrease the overall power in future sets to rebalance the environment. If we didn't do this, the game would have a 'power creep' that would make the game spiral out of control. An example of such compensation would be *Mercadian Masques*; we had to lower the power level to adjust for the overpowered *Urza's Saga* block that preceded it.

"Third, different sets are focused to appeal to different types of players. *Prophecy* is the best recent example of this. *Prophecy* was a conscious attempt to focus a set more towards casual players. Our market research has shown that reaction to *Prophecy* is very dependent on what kind of **Magic** player answered the survey. And that, in a nutshell, is why different sets seem better or worse than others."

August 8



Q: "In the old days, sets such as *Arabian Nights*, *Homelands*, and *Fallen Empires* were sold in 8-card packs, consisting of two uncommons and 6 commons. Why is this not done today? Ditto for 12-card packs."

-- William Boulden, Trenton, NJ

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

"The sets you remember being sold in 8 or 12-card packs were much smaller than sets we release today. When a set is only 80 cards or so, packing the sets with only 8 cards per booster assures that the booster contents are different enough from each other to make opening them interesting. Even though they were cheaper for the consumer, there were some big problems with 8-card packs. First of all, there weren't 'rare' cards as you know them now. Instead, the uncommon sheet was split up into U1 (cards that only appeared once on the sheet) and U2 or U3 (cards that appeared 2 or 3 times on the sheet). This meant that in the uncommon slot in your booster, you could get lucky and open a U1. But you were much more likely to get an uncommon that was 2 or 3 times as common as the elusive U1s. Also, 8-card packs made it especially difficult to draft. Nowadays, even small **Magic** sets are over 140 cards. This allows for a real rare card in every pack and makes drafting more enjoyable."

August 7



Q: "Have you ever thought of issuing an errata to the old 'non-Legendary Legends' (like *Ali from Cairo* or *Old Man of the Sea*) to make them Legends?"

-- Sam Aitken, Syosset, NY

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

"No. It *would* be cool if they were Legends. But we like to leave cards unchanged when possible, so that players will be correct if they play the cards using what is written on them. So we will be leaving **Ali from Cairo** and the **Old Man of the Sea** alone."

August 6



Q: "What are Kavus?"

-- Matt Varan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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

"Kavu (which, like 'sheep,' is both singular and plural), known as 'dingo lizards' during *Invasion* set development, were nature's (or Gaea's) contribution to the anti-Phyrexian war effort. From what we know of them, they are an ancient species that at some point went into hibernation beneath Dominaria's surface. During the Phyrexian Invasion, druidic magic revived them, and they immediately went about fighting the war. Shiv and Yavimaya seemed to have the greatest concentration of powerful Kavu dormant beneath them. Flavor text like that on **Coastal Drake** and **Raging Kavu** hint at their ancient nature."

August 5



Q: "How many different **Magic** cards are there? (Meaning, how many different card names there are, not how many cards have been produced?)"

--Vidar Otterholm, Istanbul, Turkey

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

"Through the *Judgment* set, there are 5,783 unique **Magic** card names. (Well, 5,793 if you include ten cards that appeared only in a Japanese video game, but I choose to ignore those whenever I can.) As a **Magic** editor, I need to know which card names are 'taken' so that we don't accidentally reuse a name. You can find a [card list](#) on the DCI website. The **Magic** card names list I use includes all of those plus the little-known Astral Set from an old Microprose computer game and *Vanguard* cards. (Did you know that **Gerrard Capashan's Apocalypse** card used his little-known last name because Gerrard was the name on his *Vanguard* card?)

"I was the *Odyssey* set editor, and one of the first things I did with the 'final' *Odyssey* names was to check them against the list of past **Magic** card names. **Forced Retreat** turned out to be a *Portal Three Kingdoms* card, so **Dematerialize** was born. Mystic Vindicator was a fine name for a very playable creature, but **Vindicate** was a high-profile *Apocalypse* card. The name was changed to **Mystic Enforcer**. **Traveling Plague** was -- and is -- very close in meaning to **Spreading Plague**, an *Invasion* card. Since the two cards are in different blocks and weren't likely to be played together, we left that one alone. And obviously **Otarian Juggernaut** was intended to remind players of the original **Juggernaut**."

August 2



Q: "Will you ever bring Demons back to **Magic**? There is a fine line between Horror and Beast... but they are no Demon. I do remember an **Unglued** card made a joke about **Demon crossed out as Beast**. But a Beast is no Demon, and either is a Horror."

-- Lancer, cyberspace

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

"Here at Wizards of the Coast, we believe in gentleness and love and smiles. That's why when our creatures 'fight,' they hug each other and make friends! We try to avoid icky, scary things like spiders, snakes, and demons. But be on the lookout for the following cards: **Basket Full of Kittens**, **Lollipop Elemental**, **Bracers of Sparkliness**, **Circle of Protection: Cooties**, and **My Pink Unicorn Friend**.

"So in short, we would never, ever, ever print anything gross like a Demon in a million million years. Unless it was a fun, happy demon. Like a **Grinning Demon**, for example. That would be super fun!"

August 1



Q: "Why do you put the name of the artist on cards but never the name of the

designer? It seems to me they both have a very important job."
-- Wim Vanrie, Bruges, Belgium

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

"We put the artist's credit on each card because we feel the artist deserves credit and we can identify each piece of work to an individual artist. Designers also deserve the credit, but we can't put designers' credits on each card because we can't associate design/development credit of each card to one or two individuals. Designers and developers work on teams. Sometimes a card can be attributed to a single designer. But most times, three, four, or five people helped build the card. We have about 15 people who have helped design a card in the *Odyssey* block. There's no practical way to track all the design credits. Even if we could, there's no way to fit the credit on the card. We publish full credits on the web, in rulebooks, and on the themed-deck inserts."



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