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November 29, 2002

Q: "Why don't you put puzzles more frequently in Magic Arcana? I tend to like it and I think it is a good way to think out a way to turn the game in your favor. Is it that hard to find such puzzles? Or do you think people just don't like it enough? Could you otherwise give tips where to find this kind of puzzles?"

-- Jochen Maes, Belgium

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

"People like the puzzles and we like doing them. But they are relatively labor-intensive. After the puzzle's creator comes up with an interesting idea, he has to build the puzzle around that idea so that there is only one answer, yet still make it look like there should be more than one. That's a tricky balance to find. Then our editing department has to take a crack at it and try every single possible combination of plays to make sure the puzzle isn't wrong, and that there is actually only one working answer. Then the puzzle has to be made graphically and checked again (Our last puzzle was originally put up with too many mountains, making it possible to solve in additional ways. I managed to fix it within an hour or so, thanks to the folks on our message boards.)

"So you see, puzzles take quite a bit of effort to produce. That said, we'll try to bring you one new puzzle by Mark Gottlieb a month, plus one old puzzle from Mark Rosewater's 1996 book *Magic: The Puzzling*.

"If you want more puzzles, you can try and find a copy of the book yourself (good luck). But there are other puzzles to be found. The Fat Pack that comes out with each new expansion set contains a Players Guide that usually features a puzzle by Rosewater. I believe the *Sideboard* print magazine is going to start featuring a puzzle by Gottlieb in upcoming issues. And our own Ben Bleiweiss does a puzzle in each issue of *InQuest* magazine."

November 28, 2002

Q: "Is there any chance of a crossover between the *Weatherlight* and the *Odyssey* storyline? I sure miss some characters from the previous expansions..."

--Cristiano Godinho

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

"Thanks for your question. The short answer is no. We feel that we've told the whole story of the *Weatherlight*, and we're ready for new people and places. Also, the *Odyssey* story takes place over a hundred years after the end of the Phyrexian Invasion. Even if characters from the *Weatherlight* story had survived (some did, but I won't spoil it for those of you who haven't read the novels), some of them would have grown old and died.

"The long answer to your question, however, is that all **Magic** stories intersect, even if it's in very tangential ways. It's likely that the **Mirari** story will somehow tie back into the

Weatherlight story, just as the *Weatherlight* story eventually tied back into the *Phyrexia* story; I can't be any more specific than that. Only time will tell--check out the **Magic** novels for in-depth details that tie all our settings and characters together."

November 27, 2002



Q: "I heard at Friday Night **Magic** a while back that **Fireball**'s official cost had been changed from **X** to **X****Y** and the text to: 'Fireball deals X damage divided evenly, rounded down, among Y plus one target creatures and/or players.'

"I clicked on the card name one day while reading an article, and lo and behold, yes, **Fireball**'s cost is **X****Y**. Why was this change made? Was the card, as printed, thought to be too confusing? Or is Wizards planning to make more cards with multiple variable casting costs?"

--Nick Bottomley, Oakland CA

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

"It was changed because it's easier to read and understand with the new wording. When we were templating the *Beatdown* set, we looked at **Fireball** and tried to work out how we'd word it if it had been designed today. We decided that the most sensible way was to put an X and a Y on the card. So, if we did a similar card in the future, it would probably use X and Y, too."

November 26, 2002



Q: "I noticed from the pictures on the cards and the *Tempest* storyline that **Oracle en-Vec** was a specific person and actually an important character. I would think she should be a Legend, but on the card she is a Wizard. Why isn't she a Legend?"

--Kyle LoPinto, Parkertown, New Jersey

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

"The reason is quite simple. **Oracle en-Vec** is not the name of a person, but a title like Chief of Police or Fire Chief. The **Oracle en-Vec** in the story was the current holder of the title. The reason we didn't make the card a Legend was because it represented that position, not solely the person. All Oracles en-Vec have the fortune-telling ability of the card."

November 25, 2002



Q: "I was thing about how the ability trample is only for attacking creatures. Why haven't you made a 'blocking trample' where a creature that blocks deals the extra damage to the attacking creature's controller?"

--Andrew McCarra, Maryland

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

"Designers sometimes talk about 'design space,' meaning the set of all possible card mechanics we would be willing to create. **Magic** card design space is a big place, and is still far from being fully explored. In other words, there are still lots of good card ideas we haven't done yet.

"In this case, we have done cards that play somewhat like the blocking trample idea would (**Mogg Maniac** and **Wall of Souls**), so we know it would probably play fine. There are two issues I would need to think about. First, would the existence of two kinds of trample be confusing to most players? Second, how would it make sense on the battlefield? Your monster charges at me, my monster jumps in the way to stop him, and then somehow hurts you in the process. We'd have to contrive some reason for that to happen. Not impossible, but not simple either.

"We have a database full of all kinds of new ideas just like this one that we simply haven't gotten around to doing yet. Stick around and you might see them all someday."

November 22, 2002



Q: "Why do so many Pro Tour players play the same decks? There are so many different deck ideas; why pick a Reanimator or The Rock and not make a deck made around **Last Laugh** or **Grinning Demon**?"

-- Chris Dockril, Belleville, ON, Canada

A: From **Alan Comer**, *Magic Online* programmer:

"When pro players are practicing for the next big event, they generally get a group of playtesters together--usually other pros--and start testing out all the decks that they think have a chance at greatness. There are many cards the Pros will never get around to testing because they don't believe that they are good enough. For 2-3 months, this will go on, and in this time, they often test quite a large variety of decks. While they are playtesting, they are trying all sorts of decks that are often quite original. By the end of this time, everybody will have a pretty good idea of what they think is the best.

"Once everybody knows the strengths and weaknesses of all their decks, they choose a deck to play. Since they want to maximize their chances of winning, they choose the best deck that they have. The real find for pro players is a deck that nobody else thought of, which can dominate because nobody else has the deck. However, even when this happens, the entire team has access to this deck, so it still looks like many people are playing the same deck.

"In short, it isn't that they want to play the same old deck, it is just that they want to play the best deck to increase their chances of winning.

"As an aside, the Sideboard.com is starting a new feature called '[Ask The Pros](#)' where you can send in all your questions about high-level professional **Magic**."

November 21, 2002



Q: "I was wondering why you didn't introduce any morph costs that were different in colour than the colour of the card, or even alternate morph costs (such as 'sacrifice a creature'). Are you planning to include any of these costs in the future *Onslaught* block expansions, or have you considered them and rejected them? They certainly seem like a nice twist..."

-- Dimitris Tsementzis, Jr., Athens

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

"Traditionally when we introduce a new ability, we start with the basic version. Then as the block progresses, we start adding new twists and turns. The reason we do this is twofold. First, many players need time to learn the new ability. If we started with other variants, it would make it much harder to learn. Remember that we have no control over what order you get cards in an expansion. By only including the basic version in the first set, we guarantee it's the first thing you see.

"Second, we've learned that **Magic** is more fun if we slowly release new things rather than give them out all at once. This way we let you all have time to savor each new aspect as its released. Are we planning to include any new twists on morph in *Legions* and *Scourge*? Maybe."

November 20, 2002



Q: "Why are sets divided into the categories 'Starter,' 'Advanced,' and 'Expert' if consideration is made for beginners at all levels? Reminder text and the 'Creature' card type (as opposed to the flavorful 'Summon') both cater to someone who just picked up the game, while the 'Expert' sets are said to be designed for 'Experts.'"

--Gavin Olson, Ledyard, CT

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

Sets are divided into 'Beginner,' 'Advanced,' and 'Expert' in an attempt to steer new customers towards the product that is correct for them. Have you ever seen a brand-new **Magic** player try to learn the game from an 'Expert' product like, say, an *Invasion* Preconstructed Deck or *Onslaught* Tournament Pack? I have, and it isn't pretty.

"With that said, we eventually do want the new player to graduate to more advanced products. But some players will advance more quickly than others. This is one of the reasons for things like reminder text in expert sets. Another reason is that we don't want our sets to be too unfriendly to players that don't buy a large amount of product, or constantly go to tournaments (where new mechanics are explained). The thought is, if a veteran player purchases a few boosters of an 'expert' set, he should be able to figure out how to play the cards without needing to call customer service, or log onto the web for answers.

"As far as 'Summon' vs. 'Creature,' I believe the consensus was that 'Creature' just looked better and made more sense than 'summon' and this change was made more for aesthetics than for simplicity, i.e. Creatures are Creature cards, not Creatures are

Summon cards. Also, 'Summon' referred to the card when it was in your hand or on the stack, and it was called a 'Creature' when it was in play. Now they are just 'Creature' cards in all zones, which cleans things up nicely."

November 19, 2002



Q: "I don't know if it was intentional, but I've noticed that **Symbiotic Deployment**, **Yawgmoth's Bargain**, and **Solitary Confinement** all serve similar functions:

- Skip your draw & pay life for cards (a black trait)
- Skip your draw & use creatures (temporarily) for cards (a green trait)
- Skip your draw for damage prevention and untargetability (a white trait)

"And although they're spaced too far apart to be a cycle, I was wondering if you have any plans to create enchantments like this for red and blue."

-- Mark Santiago, York, PA

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

"Skip your draw' is one of the effects that we generally consider not to be color-related, like cycling and some of our other mechanics. While it occurred first in white with **Island Sanctuary**, it could easily appear in blue or red if the effect you got for skipping your draw was appropriate. In general, black can get almost any effect if you have to pay life to do so.

"As far as enchantments go, the entire words cycle (**Words of War**, **Words of Wilding**, **Words of Worship**, **Words of Wind**, and **Words of Waste**) all had skip drawing as a cost for an effect. (and all start with 'W') These effects had the advantage that they could be used for any draw and not just in place of your normal draw. As far as base enchantments that make you skip your draw step for a continuous effect, which is a subset of a larger skip draw mechanic pool including the above cards, **Ivory Gargoyle**, and a number of other effects, we have not actually done that many vanilla ones. Blue is one of the better colors as card drawing, so using this as a standing enchantment in blue is not that interesting, but I could imagine we might do a red version where you skipped your draw step for some sort of damage effect similar to **Words of War**, only not optional."

November 18, 2002



Q: "Why did you choose 'Phage' as Jeska's new name? The word denotes a virus that inhibits bacteria especially. Since Phage is clearly a non-virus person that spreads disease and rot wherever she goes, why was Phage considered a good name for this character?"

-- Jonathan Miles, New York, NY

A: From **Brandon Bozzi**, **Magic** creative coordinator:

"Webster's defines 'phage' in two ways. The first references 'bacteriophage,' a virus that attacks bacteria. The second describes a virus or cell that destroys cells, stemming from the Greek word *-phagos*, one that eats. 'Phage' is also used in conjunction with other words to mean devouring or consuming. It's the second definition and the combined usages of the word that we had in mind when we renamed Jeska 'Phage.' Her touch spreads rot which devours and consumes all flesh in its path.

"We've used the base 'Phage' in this way before, on the card **Carnophage**."

November 15, 2002



Q: "Does Wizards ever intend to print another card like **Elvish Spirit Guide** that can be used for free mana? For all intents and purposes, that card has a unique mechanic in **Magic**, and not an overly powerful one."

--Dimitri Zakharov, Moscow

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

"Cards like **Elvish Spirit Guide** are very dangerous. The mana curve is an important aspect of the game and we have to be very careful when we make cards that allow players to ramp up quicker than normal. That said, we do occasionally make cards that allow an early mana jump. Are we doing any in the near future? Unfortunately, we have a policy of not talking about specifics of certain cards until the previews the lead up to a set's release. Will you ever see a card like **Elvish Spirit Guide** again? Probably."

November 14, 2002



Q: "I have noticed that **Youthful Knight** and **Elvish Archers** are the exact same card just different colors, but my question is why are **Elvish Archers** rare and **Youthful Knight** is a common?"

--Bradon Schmidt, Miami, FL

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

"When you look at Alpha (the very first **Magic** set) under a microscope, some patterns are evident. One such pattern is that creatures with abilities that match their colors occur at a lower rarity than creatures with abilities that were out-of-color.

"The best example of this is the Alpha cards **Benalish Hero** and **Timber Wolves**. Both are 1/1 creatures that have banding, and they both cost one mana. But the Wolves were rare, whereas the Hero was common. Why? Well, banding is a 'white' ability; most banding creatures are white and it was in white's themes at the time. So a white creature with banding was much more 'common' than a green creature with banding. It's all flavor, I suppose. Another good example is the uncommon blue flyer **Phantom Monster**, and the identical, yet rare, red **Roc of Kher Ridges**. Flying was considered more of a blue ability in Alpha.

"Since first strike is not a green ability, but is instead white (and now also red), a green creature with first strike would have been rare in Richard's eyes. I suppose **Elvish Archers** stayed rare throughout the years just by grandfathering--it had always been rare so why change it? When R&D got around to making **Youthful Knight** in *Stronghold*, it was a simple in-flavor card with no power-level issues, and thus made common."

November 13, 2002



Q: "On the Attendant golems (**Crosis's Attendant**, etc.) in *Invasion*, the flavour text talks about the 'Ur-dragon.' In the *Planeshift* book, the five Dragons are described as members of race of ancient Dragons called the Primeval, and the 'Ur-Dragon' isn't mentioned at all. What is the connection between the two?"

--Adam Deusien, Sydney, Australia

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

"In the flavor text of the Attendants, 'ur-dragon' is meant to be a symbolic or poetic concept, not an actual thing. The 'ur-dragon' is the ultimate dragon, the ideal dragon. The flavor text means to say that the five Dragon Legends in the *Invasion* set can each be seen as an aspect of the ideal dragon."

November 12, 2002



Q: "Over the years, prior to *Onslaught*, there have several tribal lords that boosts creatures of a type: **Goblin King**, **Lord of Atlantis**, **Zombie Master**, and most recently **Lord of the Undead** and **Elvish Champion**. My question is, why was there never a white tribal lord like those?"

--Rick Reed, St. Paul, MN

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

"To be honest, we've just gotten around to it. There is something similar to what you're talking about in *Onslaught*, **Aven Brigadier**. In a more traditional sense, I'm really not sure why there wasn't a specific white creature lord back in Alpha times. There was always **Crusade**, which seemed like a good enough substitute, I guess. Look for something along the lines of a traditional white tribal lord before the *Onslaught* block winds down, though."

November 11, 2002



Q: "Whenever you show playtest cards in the "**Magic Arcana**" area, I wonder why there are symbols in the activation cost of activated abilities. Before each mana letter (GRBUW) is an "o" and before each "T" for "Tap" there is an "oc". Why?"

-- Matthias Ludewig, Bremen, Germany

A: From **Randy Buehler**, Director of **Magic** R&D:

The trailing 'o's are a signal to the typesetter that he needs to put a backcircle behind the text that's about to follow because it's a special symbol, and not just ordinary text. So, for example, if you see 'o1' that comes out as '1' -- otherwise known as one generic mana. Similarly 'oG', after it goes through typesetting, comes out as 'G'. In the

case of the tap symbol, there's more to it than just adding a backcircle. The typesetter also has to put in the tap symbol itself so he translates 'ocT:' as 'backcircle plus the T-character and then a colon' or '⦿:'. Voila ..."

November 8, 2002



Q: "Why is the flashback of *Roar of the Wurm* only 4 mana? It seems too cheap for a 6/6 creature."

-- Largo Luong, San Francisco, California

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

"Yes, 4 mana for a 6/6 creature would be cheaper than normal. But you can't play *Roar of the Wurm* from your hand for 4 mana. You have to get it into your graveyard first. That means to get the cheap Wurm you either have to play the card in combination with something else (like *Wild Mongrel*), or you have to play the card for its 7 mana cost from your hand first.

"So viewed on its own, *Roar of the Wurm* might not seem so great. In combination, it's really good. And finding ways to make cards much better in combination is a big part of what **Magic** deckbuilding is about!"

November 7, 2002



Q: "I noticed that lots of the talk surrounding *Onslaught* is about how much creature types matter. If that is true, why wasn't *Coat of Arms* reprinted in the set? I think that would help a lot with creature type decks."

--Mike Zuerlein, Nebraska

A: From Mike Donais, Research & Development:

"Well, *Coat of Arms* is in *Seventh Edition* so we decided that we did not need to reprint it in *Onslaught*. If we had *Coat of Arms* in *Onslaught* it would make creature type decks pretty swingy in block constructed. Instead we made new and different cards that help creature decks like *Shared Triumph*, *Steely Resolve*, and *Cover of Darkness*.

November 6, 2002



Q: "Mark Rosewater has repeatedly mentioned that R&D's policy now is that all lands must be able to tap for mana, in addition to any other abilities they might have. Why did R&D choose to not follow this policy when creating the new *Onslaught* 'fetch' lands (*Polluted Delta*, et al)?"

-- Bill Johnston, Boston, MA

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

"The reasoning behind the 'must create mana' policy was that we wanted lands to have a unique identity. Some lands of the past such as *The Tabernacle at Pendrell Vale* felt more like enchantments than land. The 'fetch' lands, while not strictly following the guidelines, do follow the spirit of the policy. You use them to access mana. Their purpose is to give you choice of what color mana you want. In short, the policy is just a guideline. These cards feel like lands. They do indirectly get you mana. As such, R&D felt comfortable making an exception and printing them."

November 5, 2002



Q: "About the 'tribal' aspect of *Onslaught*... I can understand Goblins for red, Elves for green, Zombies for black, and Soldiers for white, but why Wizards for blue? I mean, when I think of blue, the first creature type that springs to mind is Merfolk. Wizards are (I think) in every color. Merfolk are not. Why didn't you use them?"

--Stephen Frimmel, Carrboro, NC

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

"Thanks for your question. We're always working on improvements to **Magic**'s creative elements. One of those improvements involves rethinking blue's creatures. For example, does it make sense to summon an aquatic creature in a battle between dueling mages? How would a merfolk attack a land-bound creature? In general, we're trying to leave underwater stuff behind, or at least make our aquatic creatures amphibious, to make the game make more sense.

"Also, Merfolk were a staple creature type for a long time, but they weren't ever particularly loved by players (unlike Goblins and Elves, for example). When we poll

players, underwater settings and themes are near the bottom of their lists. So change is afoot for blue creatures. Because of *Onslaught's* tribal theme, almost all Wizards will be blue for the block. But as you've begun to notice, Wizard is a job, not a race (as are Soldier and Cleric), so we're currently working on a new iconic race for blue."

November 4, 2002



Q: "I noticed that pro players Jon Finkel, Chris Pikula, and Dave Price all received invites to Pro Tour - Houston just for attending the **Magic** Invitational. How many Pro Tour invites does making the Invitational get you? Just the next one, or something more?"

-- Max Spevak, Mountain View, CA

A: From **Jeff Donais**, DCI Manager:

"If you play in the **Magic** Invitational, you receive an invitation to the next individual Pro Tour. We started this practice in 2000 for the **Magic** Invitational held in Kuala Lumpur. I believe Chris Pikula was the only player who needed it at that time.

"The only players that sometimes need the invitations are the people that get voted in through the online player ballot. Most players already have enough pro points to receive an invitation to the next Pro Tour.

"Having this policy prevents us from having an Invitational player that has completely fallen off the Pro Tour. This policy gives the Invitational players one last chance to get on the 'grave train' if they do well at the next event. You don't receive this invitation if you are voted into the Invitational but don't show up for some reason."

November 1, 2002



Q: "Before morph became part of **Magic**, players would put cards face down to illustrate that they were phased out. Now doing that is illegal and can result in an automatic loss. How are players to keep track of phased permanents easily? I have heard someone suggest a separate pile other than the removed-from-game pile and graveyard pile for phased out permanents, but that gets very confusing when seven or eight permanents--some with enchant creatures and counters on them--are moving from one area of play to another. How should we keep track of phasing permanents?"

-- Hal A. Kramer, Summerville, SC

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

"First off, this little conundrum shows why our rules people dislike phasing so much. Permanents retaining their enchantments and counters in zones other than the in-play zone is quite messy. But that's neither here nor there.

"The important thing to remember is that you'll only be assessed a penalty for misrepresenting the game state if you are in a sanctioned tournament. Your friends at home aren't going to give you a game loss. So if you are playing casually with phasing cards and not morph cards, turning your **Teferi's Honor Guard** face down should not confuse anyone.

"With the *Mirage* block rotating out of Extended today, there is very little potential for morph/phasing interaction in sanctioned play. Yes, a Type 1 or 1.5 deck may include both **Frenetic Efreet** and **Dwarven Blastminer**. In that case, you need to remember that the phased-out zone is a considered a normal game zone just like the graveyard, in-play, and removed-from-game zones. You should probably designate a part of the play area for phased-out cards. Is that annoying? Yes, but it will save confusion in the long run.

"The bigger issue that arises with morph is players' tendencies to use face-down cards to represent creature tokens. That is a habit tournament players need to break, as face-down creatures and token creatures share the board quite a bit in *Onslaught*-heavy environments. Get used to using coins, scraps of paper, or (our favorite) the [Player Rewards tokens](#)."



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