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March 31, 2003



Q: "In the *Onslaught* book, one of **Ixidore's** disciples makes Phage cough up a thousand deathwurms. And it occurred to me that **Drinker of Sorrow** is a spitting image of one of those deathwurms, and its description fits too. So is it a deathwurm, or if not, what is it?" --Daniel Stern, Ontario, Canada

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director: "Funny, Daniel, I thought **Bane of the Living** looked like a deathwurm. Neither creature is meant to be a deathwurm, however. **Drinker of Sorrow** was the result of Jeremy Cranford, the **Magic** art director, asking Carl Critchlow to paint whatever creature it was that he had nightmares about. **Bane of the Living**, which was called 'Pain Elemental' in playtesting, had this description for the illustrator: 'Show a horrible black creature somewhat snake/insect-like rearing up out of the swamp with imprints of its victims faces in agony clearly visible in its underbelly.' If you look closely, you can barely make out the faces. "To clue in our players who don't read the novels, the deathwurms are a deadly manifestation of Phage's evil, and when she barfs them up (in the form of cockroaches, if I recall correctly, which then become deathwurms on the ground), she gets to be **Jeska** again -- for a very short while. I'd tell you more, but (a) lots of players tell me they don't care about plot, and (b) I wouldn't want to spoil it for those who do."

March 28, 2003



Q: "Some older creatures have 'plural' names, like **Llanowar Elves**, **Goblin Artisans**, and **Killer Bees**. Do you try to avoid having names like that these days?" --Duke Doom

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:
"Thanks for your question, Duke. No, we don't worry much about whether our card names are singular or plural. Singular is a little better for a couple of reasons. First, we tend to get the strongest illustrations from very simple creature concepts. If you glance through some of your cards, I think you'll notice that illustrations of just one creature with minimal background really stand out. Second, plural names make it a little harder for players to talk about their decks. For example, if I tell you I have an **Elvish Pioneer** in my deck, it's somewhat clear that I mean one card. But if I tell you I have **Llanowar Elves** in my deck, you don't know whether I'm packing more than one or not.

"Overall, though, these are minor concerns, and we pluralize the card name when we feel it would make the card cooler, such as the *Onslaught* set's **Crowd Favorites**. In that case, we had a 4/4 creature that we wanted to make a Soldier. But 4/4 is too big to be a single human soldier, so we decided to concept the card as a pair of soldiers that fight together in the pits."

March 27, 2003

Q: "Does R&D encourage players designing more allied-color than enemy-color decks? Obviously I would have guessed that your stance towards this issue was balanced, but the 'dual lands' of the recent expansions show that allied-color decks have an easier time getting their mana bases stable than enemy color decks do. Are there any plans on completing the *Invasion* dual land / *Cameo*, *Planeshift Lairs*, *Odyssey filter* and/or *Onslaught fetchland* cycles with their enemy-color counterparts or equivalents in the near future?"
--Peter D., Germany

A: From **Brian Schneider**, Research & Development:
"R&D generally encourages players to play anything they'd find fun to play. One-color, two-color, whatever works. Occasionally we get bored with this 'fun' strategy and that's how we ended up with *Mercadian Masques*. After playing with *Masques* for a bit, we inevitably became bored with boredom and decided to design something players might actually like -- *Invasion*. What's all this have to do with your question? Not much, but I'll get to that -- relax. Anyway, historically there's been a design bias towards promoting allied colors because of the color wheel -- showing what colors work well together helps players understand and appreciate the flavor and story behind the cards. Some colors are friends, some aren't. *Invasion* block asked the question 'Can't we all be friends?' And it was fun for everyone. We could play all five colors -- or any three or four. And it was great. But fun can't last forever as we'd all get bored with that, so we've gone away from the land of off-colored mana fixers and have moved onto other interesting things. What we in R&D learned from this is that increasing the friendliness of the colors, as far as play experience is concerned, is a good thing. Accordingly, it seems likely that we'll do something with enemy-colored stuff in the future... particularly with lands. But I can't really say when."

March 26, 2003



Q: "When you made up the name 'Rath,' and more specifically when you decided that 'of Rath' would be 'Rathi' (as in *Rathi Dragon*), did this by any chance have anything to do with the *AErathi Berserker* from *Legends*, which was misprinted without the 'AE' so it read 'rathi Berserker?' Or is it just a coincidence that the word 'rathi' accidentally showed up on a card years before it would be used deliberately on another card?"
--Willie Lundgren, Barnesville, MN

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, R&D senior designer:
"It was a coincidence. The word 'Rath' came from a card name (*Death Pits of Rath*) we liked. When it came time to turn it into an adjective, I believe we just found a form that sounded good. Other than subconsciously, the *AErathi Berserker* (labeled as 'rathi Berserker' on the card because the combination 'AE' didn't exist in the font at that time) had nothing to do with it."

March 25, 2003



Q: "I know that *Legends* and *Walls* have special rules surrounding them. Have you thought about using any other predetermined rules for certain, or even new, subtypes?"
--Sonny Montefusco

A: From **Paul Barclay**, TCG Rules Manager:
"*(Walls can't attack.)*
Yes. We actually do have some other subtypes that have special rules. The five basic land types (Forest, Island, Mountain, Plains, Swamp) all have special rules about what color of mana they tap for. Generally, if the designers come up with a mechanic that might use the card's type, we'll look at it, and see how it can best be represented. Sometimes, we'll decide that it's better to give the cards keyword abilities, sometimes it's better to use the card's type. If we're unsure which is better, we'll go with the keyword ability option. In general, though, we like to keep the game's rules on the cards as opposed to in the rulebook like *Legends* and *Walls* are."

March 24, 2003



Q: "Are there ever cards created or inspired by the art that goes with them?"
--Renn Brown

A: From **Randy Buehler**, Director of **Magic** R&D:
"Yes. Sometimes this happens for a pretty mundane reason: art gets pushed off from a previous set because a last minute change makes the art no longer fit and we wind

up with a piece of leftover art. Rather than waste that art, we'll design a card specifically to match it.

"Recently, however, we've been running a pretty interesting experiment. We told some of our artists to just go nuts and draw whatever cool stuff they could think of, and then we're going to design cards to match the results. We're hoping to get some really kick-ass art this way because the artists won't be constrained by the boundaries of an art description. We can't do all the cards this way because we have specific needs for the art on most cards, but we're optimistic that doing this a couple times in each set will lead to some really cool cards."

March 21, 2003



Q: "I was going back over the [info page](#) for this year's **Magic** Invitational, and looked at the Invitationalist's cards again. Some of these cards would be really nice to see in a future expansion. Do you ever take a card idea from a non-winner at the Invitational and put it into a set, or does the person need to win next year for us to ever see their card?"

--Eric M. Sorensen

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

"We haven't... yet. Although that's about to change. The *Mirrodin* block (next year's block) has a card in it that started as the card of a non-Invitational winner. We've tweaked it a little but if you're familiar with the non-winners' cards, you'll recognize it."

March 20, 2003



Q: "Man, you guys really are ahead in your work. You're working on sets that are years away. But really how far ahead are you? When do you actually complete a set? And how much are you really working on in sets to come?"

--Brodie Widdifield

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

"We start thinking about a set about two years before it gets released. The designers spend the first six months brainstorming possible directions for the set and then they spend the next six months designing actual cards and putting the set together. About a year before it is released, a set will go into development, which lasts from 4 to 6 months. R&D finishes working on a set about 7-8 months before it comes out, because that's how long it takes for editing, typesetting, printing, shipping, etc."

March 19, 2003



Q: "Do you believe that **Magic** has become more mainstream in the past few years?"
--Jensen Bohren

A: From **Tyler Bielman**, Research & Development:

"Thanks for your interesting question, Jensen. Fantasy as a genre has certainly become more mainstream in the past few years. The popularity of Harry Potter and *The Lord of the Rings* has validated fantasy as a 'mainstream' choice for all entertainment. But at its best, **Magic** is a product that challenges people's perception of fantasy. A look at Alpha tells that story. There's the **Llanowar Elves**, for example, with his skull tattoo and goggles. The artists used in Alpha brought a style to fantasy art that was unheard of at the time. Other non-fantasy mainstream properties like Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh! owe a great deal to **Magic**. We invented the 'kids battling with collections of creatures and/or cards' setting that all the hottest kid shows revolve around. To be honest, I believe that in recent years **Magic** hasn't become more mainstream, I think the mainstream has become more like **Magic**."

March 18, 2003



Q: "How do you guys come up with the new mechanics for each set, like provoke and amplify?"

--Ben Zurbrugg

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

"Keyword mechanics generally start with a designer or developer getting an idea and pitching it to the design team. If the designers think the idea has some promise, they write up a bunch of cards using the mechanic and playtest them intensively with the rest of the set. If it works well it stays in the set. If not, it goes to a reject file where it

may be recycled into a later set. It's not easy to come up with new keyword mechanics. Some of the requirements we have to think about include:

- The text has to be relatively brief since it will usually be sharing a text box with other abilities.
- It can't be similar to anything we've done in the last couple of years.
- It has to interact well with the rest of the cards in the set. (You don't want fading and amplify in the same set since the different counters would get confusing.)
- It helps if the mechanic supports the theme of the block—flashback and threshold for the graveyard-themed *Odyssey* block, amplify for the creature block, etc.

You can't have too many mechanics in one set that require building a new deck. (For example, *Mercenaries* are only good if you have lots of *Mercenaries* in your deck. But we also need to have mechanics that fit in existing decks instead of making players build a new deck around every new mechanic.)

- It needs a power level that works equally well on low-cost commons and high-cost rares.
- It can't be confusing or something that would be annoying to see often since there will generally be a lot of it around.

"As you can see, each set puts different constraints on what kinds of new mechanics we can do. Fortunately the R&D team is very much up to the challenge."

March 17, 2003



Q: "I noticed fairly early on that there is a cycle of creatures in *Legions*. Every color has a Gempalm creature (*Gempalm Avenger*, *Gempalm Strider*, *Gempalm Polluter*, *Gempalm Sorcerer*, and *Gempalm Incinerator*), and they all have effects when you cycle them. Is there a story behind these gems, or is it something that R&D came up with?"

--Christopher Ball, Atlanta, GA

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

"Thanks for your question, Christopher. When the **Magic** creative team gets a cycle of cards from the development team, we often try to link them up through their cardnames, their illustrations, their flavor text, or some combination of the three. In the case of the Gempalm creatures, we started with the idea that it would be a strong visual cue if the creatures were linked by having gems embedded in their hands. The rest simply followed from there. But as with most cycles (with some notable exceptions, such as the *Ramos artifacts* from the *Mercadian Masques* set), there's no elaborate backstory for the Gempalms."

March 14, 2003



Q: "I recently heard that *Entomb* was going to be restricted. Is this true? I would also like to know if *Dark Ritual* is banned or restricted."

--Kyle Hinchcliff

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

"The answers are yes and no, no and yes. Which means: depends on which format you are playing.

"*Entomb* will soon be restricted in Type 1, as per the DCI's [March announcement](#). Joining it on the Restricted list will be *Earthcraft*. (*Hurkyl's Recall*, *Recall*, and *Berserk* will all be unrestricted.) The restriction in Type 1 also means *Entomb* will be banned in Type 1.5.

"*Entomb* is still legal in both Standard and Extended.

"*Dark Ritual* is no longer legal in Standard (it isn't in print), or Extended (it is banned), but is legal in Type 1.5 and Type 1.

"For more information on the various tournament formats, start reading at Section 125 in the [Magic Floor Rules](#)."

March 13, 2003



Q: "We had a big tournament today and started to argue about what is on the picture

of **Angel of Retribution**, a woman or a man? If it's a woman, then why does she have a beard, and if it's a man, then why is he built like a woman?"

--Aare Klooster

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

"Thanks for your question, Aare. The illustration on **Angel of Retribution** is of a female Angel wearing a leather gorget, the armor piece that covers the neck. It's not a beard, although I know it's difficult to see that on the card. The illustrator, rk post, invented the unusual gorget and face mask that covers the Angel's chin and neck. I've wondered if a little Hannibal Lecter influence crept in."

March 12, 2003



Q: "I was looking through all of my artifacts and realized that Wizards hasn't printed any artifacts as commons since *Tempest* and *Fifth Edition*. Why is that? Some artifacts that used to be commons, like **Grapeshot Catapult**, are now uncommons. What is the reasoning behind this?"

--Chris Gregory, Natchitoches, Louisiana

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

"The reason that artifacts aren't common ties into the belief of R&D that in the world of **Magic**, artifacts shouldn't be all that, well, common. Artifacts are supposed to be something special and rare. The average wizard isn't supposed to be tripping over artifacts. When a wizard gets one, it's supposed to be a big deal. To reflect that in the game, R&D made a decision (back during the end of the *Tempest* block as you surmised) to keep artifacts out of common. Will you ever see common artifacts again? Possibly; rules are meant to be broken."

March 11, 2003



Q: "Is it possible for me to trade in my **Magic: The Gathering Online** cards for physical **Magic** cards?"

--Strider Fred, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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

"Yes. You can redeem entire sets of **Magic Online** cards for entire sets of physical **Magic** cards through our **Magic Online** store. It's not possible for us to offer the ability to trade in individual cards, or to trade physical **Magic** cards for **Magic Online** cards. A few game stores do offer both these services independently of Wizards of the Coast."

March 10, 2003



Q: "I know that **Shadowmage Infiltrator** is called 'Jonny Magic' by many **Magic** players. Why? I mean, why isn't **Shifty Doppelganger** or something like that called 'Jonny Magic?'"

--Corey Boyle, Westhampton, MA, USA

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

"The reason that **Shadowmage Infiltrator** is called 'Jonny Magic' by some players is because the card was designed by Jon Finkel after he was the **Magic** Invitational in Sydney. When a player wins an Invitational (we have one a year, roughly) the only prize is that they get to design their own card that we then put into a set (with the player put into the card's artwork). Other past winners include Chris Pikula, Darwin Kastle, and Olle Rade, with Jens Thoren's (from the last Invitational here in Seattle) card set to come out in *Mirrodin* later this year. 'Jonny Magic' is Finkel's nickname because he's been so successful on the Pro Tour, and that nickname got carried over to his card."

March 7, 2003

Q: "When designing a card, if you want its art to have a certain 'feel' to it (such as a cartoony or glowing feel), do you discuss what artist should make the art?" --Marty C.

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

"Most of the time the card designer doesn't have a detailed vision of what kind of creature or spell the card will end up representing. We design card mechanics, the concepting team comes up with an art description, then the art director assigns the piece to an artist. (Sometimes though, especially with cards that do something unusual, the designer starts with a concept in mind and stays involved with the card as

it moves through the concepting and art process.) In the end, it's the art director who makes the art decisions. Jeremy can address how he decides which pieces to give which artists."

A: From **Jeremy Cranford**, Magic Art Director:

"We always try to match up the right illustration style with a card and its mechanic. For example, Kamahl needed to be tough as nails and we knew Kev Walker could deliver. Phage was a twisted incarnation of Jeska and we knew rk post was the right man for the job. We also have artists who only like to paint black, green and red cards while other prefer painting white and blue. So the answer is yes we do discuss what artist should do which cards in hopes that it will have the right 'feel'. Sometimes it works out better than others."

March 6, 2003



Q: "In a previous [Magic Arcana](#), I noticed that under the 'Striking Shroud' playtest sticker was the *Urza's Saga* rare **Planar Birth**. Normally when I am testing decks, the proxies I use are commons or lands. Do you guys just have a bunch of old packs that you use for the proxies of the Future Future League? At Wizards, are any rares actually rare? Are rares actually worth anything more than commons?
--Max Rabin, Los Angeles, California

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

"Yes, we have a lot of extra cards lying around that we reuse whenever possible so that they do not go to waste. We don't get them from opening packs. When new expansions are printed, we receive full sets--the same number of each card--so rares are not really rare here. They don't have a monetary value to us, though, since we obviously aren't allowed to sell them. We keep all of these cards in a giant sorted library which is filled with card games, board games and role playing games from since the beginning of time."

March 5, 2003



Q: "My wife opened a preconstructed deck and found an extra card--totally black on the face (regular back). Can you tell us anything about it?"
--Joel, Conner, IN

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

A: "This is part of our 'black ticket' promotion. It was going to be a 'golden ticket' promotion and the five winners were going to get a trip to WotC to see all the people sing and dance, but we had some problems with the printing and the cards ended up black, so we cancelled the whole promotion, which is really too bad, since Randy and Mark were really starting to get the whole song and dance thing down.

"Seriously though, cards are printed on very large sheets and there is often extra space on some of the sheets. These extra cards are usually separated off but occasionally one ends up in the final product. We used to put DCI promos and other special cards in the extra spots, but these also had a habit of sneaking out, so we gave up that practice. An interesting fact is that the blanks are often collected and used by the R&D department to playtest future sets, since we can put stickers of the new cards on the blanks, which means we no longer have to destroy old Moxes and Lotuses for proxies of our new 1G 1/1 trampers. So what you found is one of these blank playtest cards. Feel free to go get a silver pen and go wild; make yourself a 15/15 flying, first strike, haste creature, but please try to cost it appropriately."

March 4, 2003

Q: "Why haven't we seen a mechanic equal or similar to that found on **Apocalypse Chime** from the *Homelands* expansion? I thought it was a very good mechanic that would be the finishing attack within the *Onslaught* story line. It would also be very interesting to see it in play."
--Nicolas Burrows, Colorado Springs, CO, USA

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

"The problem with expansion hosers (**Apocalypse Chime**, **City in a Bottle**, and **Golgothian Sylex**) from a design standpoint is the following: The only way a card knows what expansion it is part of is by its expansion symbol. This means that mechanically cards that care about expansions have to look at the expansion symbol. But we reprint cards. Reprinted cards have the expansion symbol of whatever set they

are reprinted in. In addition, there are older cards that have no expansion symbols (cards printed in any basic set from Alpha through *Fourth Edition*). So let's say that we created an artifact called Death Orb that could be used to destroy all *Onslaught* cards (other than basic land) and put it in *Onslaught*.

"Here are the repeats (with the same name) in *Onslaught*:

- Clone
- Elven Riders
- Disciple of Grace
- Lay Waste
- Meddle
- Pacifism
- Shock
- Swat
- Syphon Soul
- Taunting Elf

"Take out the non-permanents and Clone (because it will just muddy the issue). That leaves us with:

- Elven Riders
- Disciple of Grace
- Pacifism
- Taunting Elf

"All four of these cards exist in sets with other expansion symbols. In addition, *Elven Riders* appeared in *Fourth Edition* without any expansion symbol. Now imagine the next Block Constructed Pro Tour (in Venice in late March) and subsequent PTQ rounds. Players who want to be competitive now have to go out of their way to get non-*Onslaught* versions of the cards in question as those versions won't die to Death Orb. Remember that tournament rules allow you to play with any version of a card. Since the expansion would then have a functional value, the DCI would be required to make the players record what versions of the cards they're playing with. This creates a lot of bookkeeping for something that is seldom going to matter.

"So why don't we do cards like that any more? Because we feel the extra burden to the tournament players is not worth the small bonus it adds in coolness."

March 3, 2003



Q: "Why are *Grinning Demon* and *Havoc Demon* both wrapped up in barbed wire?"
--Richard Dub

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

"Thanks for your question, Richard. In the same way that we want **Magic's** elves or goblins to have a look and feel distinct from elves and goblins in other fantasy properties, we wanted our demons to be unique, too. The **Magic** demon concept was developed by Matthew D. Wilson. The barbed wire symbolizes demons' craving for torment and anguish; pain is their lifeblood. [Here's the color concept sketch](#). We hope you think it's as cool as we do."

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