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May 30, 2003

Q: "In light of **Upwelling**, have you ever considered making a card that directly manipulates the stack, something like 'Reorder all spells and abilities on the stack. You get to choose new targets.' (I figure this would be a fun blue spell, but it will probably cause chaos, especially when combined with something like **Word of Command**). You can probably refine it to something like 'Reorder all spells and abilities on the stack you control. You get to choose new targets.'"
--Jacques Eloff, Stellenbosch, South Africa

A: From **Paul Barclay**, TCG Rules Manager:
"Oh, yes, we've thought of that -- it was one of the first cards that was thought up when we created the *Sixth Edition* rules system. Our version didn't involve changing targets. Here's a version of the card that was talked about at the time:

Restack
 Instant
Change the order of all spells and abilities on the stack.

"If you understand how the stack works, this card is pretty simple to play. However, if a player doesn't understand the stack, he or she doesn't have much hope of understanding the card. We really don't like making cards that significant portions of our audience don't understand. But, in a couple of years, it's possible that enough people know how the stack works. Then, we could make cards such as this one, that reference the stack in weird and interesting ways."

May 29, 2003

Q: "Given the current arrangement of the color wheel, is it possible to fit a black hero into the storyline or setting? If so, how?"
--David Loda Arlington Heights, IL

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:
"David, I'm a big advocate of the notion that every color contains good and evil within its values. That said, certain kinds of characters are tougher to develop in certain colors, and a black-aligned hero is probably the toughest of all. After all, heroes are defined by self-sacrifice and the greater good, and black mana is all about selfishness and power at any price. At their best, black-aligned characters are ambitious, honest, and know how to get what they want.

"Possible models for a black 'hero' include the good guy under the influence of dark power (think of Elric of Melnibone), the bad guy who does good deeds because they happen to benefit him (Han Solo in the first *Star Wars* film), and the bad guy who's trying to redeem himself (Angel from the *Buffy* world). None of these are true heroes in the classical sense, but any of them could make good black protagonists."

May 28, 2003

Q: "Would you ever bring an old card set (like *Urza's Saga*) back from the graveyard (figuratively speaking) in its entirety? I ask because I like to collect old cards and my local card store is selling *Urza's Saga* for TEN dollars a pack."

--Steve, Mass.

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

"Interesting question, Steve. Well, we reprint cards. And we bring back mechanics, so I guess this is the next step. Of course, my job is to come up with new cards, so if we just reprinted an entire set, I kind of wouldn't have anything to do... It's a bad idea. A terrible idea. No, we'd never do that. That's crazy talk. Crazy, I tell you.

"On a more serious note, the real reason we'd wouldn't reprint an entire expansion is that it goes against one of the fundamentals of the game: exploration. One of the things that makes **Magic** so great is that the game keeps changing. The players have to constantly re-examine and relearn what works and what doesn't. This whole aspect of the game would collapse if the players could just search old posts to see what works."

May 27, 2003



Q: "Why is the reminder text for storm different on different cards? On **Brain Freeze**: 'Storm (When you play this spell, copy it for each spell played before it this turn. You may choose new targets for the copies.)' While on **Wing Shards**: 'Storm (When you play this spell, copy it for each spell played before it this turn.)' Both spells are targeted, so that can't be the reason. The only plausible reason I can think of is aesthetics, since space is obviously not the issue, seeing that **Wing Shards** has less text."

--Kestell Laurie, Stellenbosch, South Africa

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

"Well, you've already discovered the most obvious reason why the storm reminder text is different on different cards. The sentence 'You may choose new targets for the copies' doesn't appear on untargeted spells like **Dragonstorm** and **Hunting Pack** because it doesn't help you figure out how to play those cards. In general, reminder text for a keyword ability should both explain how the new mechanic works and help people play the individual cards correctly.

"This brings us to **Wing Shards**:

Wing Shards

①***

Instant

Target player sacrifices an attacking creature.

Storm (When you play this spell, copy it for each spell played before it this turn.)

"You *could* choose new targets for the copies of **Wing Shards**. The rules for storm let you do that no matter what the card's reminder text says. However, it's very unlikely that anyone would *want* to choose new targets. There isn't any way for more than one player at a time to control attacking creatures. Choosing a different target player just makes that copy do nothing. We decided to leave off the reminder text about targeting so that it wouldn't be a distraction. (If any of you want to use this trick to save your unsuspecting opponent's creatures from the flying feathers, have fun!)"

May 26, 2003



Q: "How come there are no more cards that say 'discard a card randomly?' Did it cause too much trouble in the past?"

--Pedro Moraes, Denmark

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

In the past we had some very strong cards that made the opponent discard at random. We will not be making random discard spells that are as strong as **Mind Twist**, **Hypnotic Specter** or **Hymn to Tourach** but we are certainly open to making cards that have a random discard element. Cards that are more reasonable for us are **Stupor**, **Mindwhip Sliver** and **Rag Man**. In fact **Rag Man** is in *Seventh Edition* right now demonstrating that we are ok with the general concept of random discard."

May 23, 2003



Q: Is there an unwritten rule that every medium-to-large white creature must have its toughness equal or greater than its power? I mean, it's weird that there are absolutely no 5/4, 6/5, or even 3/2 white creatures printed lately, even if white is known for its defensive nature. Furthermore, recent examples like **Jareth**, **Leonine Titan** and **Exalted Angel** enforce my thoughts. To put it straight, exactly what is R&D's policy concerning this?"

--Ricardo Longo, Salvador, BA, Brazil

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

"In general, white is defined as having creatures that are small, defensive, or both. While it is not unheard of for white to get a 'power greater than toughness' creature, these tend to be very small on the order of **Savannah Lions** or **Jamuraan Lion**, and as you can see, these are very old examples so we don't do them that often. There are in fact no printed 4/1, 4/2, or 5/3 white creatures, and the only 3/2 was in *Portal*. Most of R&D feels that white creatures that are 'beatsticks with glass jaws' are just not in flavor for the color, and we have been amazingly true to that flavor for the last 5 years. Forgive me if I get the current **Magic** lingo wrong, but they really don't let me out of the cage much. I can't remember the last time I submitted a white card that had a higher power than toughness, and if I did, I doubt it would make it to print (unless it was 2/1, which we're okay with). So chalk it down as one of those unwritten rules, like not stealing in late innings when you're winning big."

May 22, 2003

Q: "In the PT Houston coverage, Alex Shvartsman wrote about Darwin Kastle that 'Kastle has been a Pro Tour staple. In fact, he remains the only player who has played in all the PT's.' However, in this weekend's PT Yokohama coverage, Randy Buehler wrote that Jon Finkel was the only player to have attended every Pro Tour: 'Finkel (who has played in more Pro Tours (all of them) than anyone else in the game)...' So, who has really played in every Pro Tour?"

--David Scotton

A: From **Andy Heckt**, Pro Tour Player Coordinator:

"Looks like Alex was right. According to our database, Darwin is the only person to have played in all the Pro Tours. Jon does not appear in the database for the PT Season 1 (Columbus, Los Angeles, or New York), though he was at Worlds that year. Jon played in what was called the 'Junior Division' for the early Pro Tours.

"Jon leads in the all-time Top 8 race, however, with 11 Pro Tour Top 8's. Darwin is tied for second with Kai Budde with 8 each."

May 21, 2003



Q: "I was just wondering why 'Earth' is included in titles of **Magic** cards or in flavor text sometimes. All of the beings in **Magic** live on a different planet, right? How would they know what Earth is if it doesn't exist to them? Shouldn't Earth be replaced by the name of wherever they come from on cards like **Spitting Earth**?"

--Dennis Forbes, New York

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

"In those cases, Dennis, we're using the word 'earth,' not 'Earth.' When used as a proper noun, 'Earth' is capitalized and is the name of our planet. When used as a regular noun, it simply means 'ground' or 'soil.' The fact that 'earth' is capitalized because it's part of a card name doesn't mean we're using it as a proper noun. Even if we were, 'Spitting Dominaria' doesn't sound so good."

May 20, 2003



Q: "I saw one of the **Two-Headed Dragon** promo cards that was given away at E3 last week. What's up with the red mana symbol in the text box? It looks black or gray instead of red."

--Philip Raymond, Amarillo, TX

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

"You're right -- the red mana symbol that appears in the 'firebreathing' ability in the text

box on **Two-Headed Dragon** is black text, and it will be the same on the actual *Eighth Edition* cards.

"We looked at all aspects of our printing process when we were putting together the new card frames and it turned out to be much simpler if we did the mana symbols in running text in black-and-white instead of color. We've had problems with them in the past, especially on foil cards, and by changing them to black text we will be able to minimize these mistakes. R&D was initially concerned that they would be harder to read and gameplay would be affected by this change, so we had some playtest cards printed up and tested with them in our Future Future League. After playing with them, we realized that you never really notice the difference. In fact, since the text box itself is colored, it tricks your eye into seeing the symbol as colored too. Based on this playtesting, we concluded that the advantages of making our printing process more efficient and subject to fewer errors outweighed the drawback of making the cards slightly less pretty and so we made the change. (Note that only mana symbols that appear in text in text boxes are affected by this change -- mana costs in the upper right and basic lands will stay the same.)"

May 19, 2003

Q: "How do figure out how many cards will be what card type and color in a set? For example, how would you determine the number of black cards in a set and of those how many would be creatures, instants, and sorceries?"

--David Kelly New Haven, CT

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

"The real answer to this question is that I go ask Mark, since he pretty much always has it figured out anyway. But if I had to do it myself, I would first group all the cards by the 5 colors and then by the 3 rarities. In a 143 card set that makes 15 groups of about 9 cards each, plus an extra group of 8 for artifacts, gold cards, and lands. In general about half the cards in each group are creatures. Of the remaining cards I would eyeball it and make sure each group has a reasonable number of sorceries, instants, and enchantments. There's no formula or anything like that and sets do have some variation in the number of sorceries vs. enchantments, and so forth. I like it that way. It keeps the sets less predictable. Each set goes through many rounds of close scrutiny so if the design team forgets to put in any blue cards our expert developers will often find those kinds of errors."

May 16, 2003

Q: "Since US Nationals and the Amateur Championship fall on the last weekend of June (June 27-29), they will not include *Scourge* as part of the card mix for the events. Is the DCI considering a change to the existing set legality date to allow *Scourge* to be legal for these events? Typically, these events fall during the first week of July, allowing the new set to rotate into the environment, making these events the first chance to use the latest set."

--Michael Villa

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

The DCI will not be modifying it's set legality policy to allow *Scourge* to be used in these events. *Scourge* will be used in the draft portion of US Nationals, but not the constructed portion."

May 15, 2003

Q: "Have you ever considered putting multiple expansion symbols on core set cards to let players know the original set a card is from? This would add a nice bit of history to every card and possibly even allow expansion hosers to be printed."

--Greg Janson, California

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

"We have considered this idea. The plus side is that it would provide a sense of history to the cards. On the minus side, the core set is what new players learn with, and having multiple different symbols could be confusing. Even many experienced players can't recognize all of the different expansion symbols.

"Doing this for the core set only wouldn't actually let us print expansion hosers, since we will always be repeating cards in future expert-level sets, like **White Knight** in *Legions* and **Patchwork Gnomes** in *Odyssey*. Additionally, it wouldn't be feasible to

print the expansion symbol of every set a card has even been in. For instance, **Stone Rain** has been in four different expansions sets (*Ice Age*, *Mirage*, *Mercadian Masques*, and *Tempest*) in addition to every base set, both regular *Portal* sets, *Portal Three Kingdoms*, and the special *Starter* set from 1999. If we implemented this plan for *Eighth Edition*, and if **Stone Rain** is actually reprinted in *Eighth Edition*, what symbols would it have? Of course, we could always do another card face redesign to allow for more room for expansion symbols. Maybe we could put a box around each one..."

May 14, 2003



Q: "How do you explain that **Defiant Elf** has trample, and **Krosan Cloudscrapper** doesn't?"

--Simon Englund, Sweden

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

"This one has a pretty short and to the point answer. Most of the time we try to match up flavor to cards, but occasionally (and this is a source of some of the more memorable arguments here in R&D) flavor gets trumped by mechanics and balancing issues. In this particular case, we wanted to make the biggest creature we've ever made, and we wanted it at a very specific place as far as costing goes. To give a creature like **Cloudscrapper** trample, it would have had to cost a lot more, or been designed in a very different way. The reason **Defiant Elf** got trample was that we like to give players different levels of building blocks so that some people can look at a card immediately and go, "Aha!" and some say, "Who would ever play this in any format?" Certainly **Defiant Elf** looks pretty bad on the first pass, and I personally love to give fellow R&D member Henry Stern a hard time for playing it, but looking back to the *Wizards Invitational* and seeing me get run over by a trampling 5/5 **Defiant Elf** backed up by two nigh-unkillable **Timberwatch Elves**, it's tough to say who's right."

May 13, 2003



Q: "Are you ever going to make cards based on people we see in flavor text, like 'Matoc, lavamancer' or 'Toggo, goblin weaponsmith'?"

--Stas Nikiforov, Moscow, Russia

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

"That would take away some of the charm and mystery. In past sets we've had plenty of flavor text that involved well-known characters from the storyline. Sometimes it's great to have flavor text from obscure characters, too. There will always be names that show up in flavor text and aren't explained too deeply anywhere else. Are these characters important individuals each with their own fascinating but untold histories, or are they just names a flavor text writer made up so they could attribute a clever quote? You decide."

May 12, 2003



Q: "Why is 'wurm' spelled that way?"

--James Jack, Meriden, CT

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

"Interesting question, James. There are three usable spellings: 'worm,' 'wurm,' and 'wyrm.' The problem is that they actually all mean the same thing and come from the same root. ('Wyrm' is Old English and 'wurm' is Old High German.) So most fantasy books and games choose one, or differentiate between different kinds of 'w*rms' with the spelling. Now to **Magic**. Thanks largely to Tolkien, 'wyrm' means 'dragon' for most fantasy fans. And 'worm' is easily confused with the annelid meaning-earthworms. So that leaves 'wurm,' which is what **Magic** chose to use for its limbless, wingless, dragon-like creatures."

May 9, 2003

Q: "Among the five colors, is any one particular color harder than the rest to design cards for?" (Take 4)

--Darren Boyce, Wisconsin

A: From **Bill Rose**, Vice President of R&D:

"If I have to choose one color, it'll be black. Black has not carved out a niche for its

creatures as white has with weenies, or blue with fliers, or red with goblin hordes, or green with the beef. And black's spells, while having the potential to be powerful, tend to bore me. How many 'destroy this' or 'discard that' cards can you make?

"Now if I have to choose one specific trouble spot, it'll be blue commons. Blue, as a whole, is fun to design. You can create wacky and creative cards in blue. The problem is those cards tend to be complex, narrow, and/or expensive—making most of them candidates for rare cards. My difficulty in designing blue commons is creating a cohesive theme while keeping the cards appropriate for commons."

See also Brian Tinsman's, Mike Elliott's, and Mark Rosewater's answers to this same question, below.

May 8, 2003

Q: "Among the five colors, is any one particular color harder than the rest to design cards for?" (Take 3)

--Darren Boyce, Wisconsin

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

"Red spells and black creatures are easy. It's true that if you are relying on 5-color cycles to fill out your card set you will run out of available effects pretty quickly. But if you take a flavor-driven approach to card design the possibilities are endless - red is brimming with strange and tricky abilities. Black is full of bizarre and disgusting flesh-eating horrors. Every color has unique and interesting creatures. Except white. White is so boring compared to the other colors. It's a bunch of soldiers and clerics sitting around singing songs or praying or something. What do white commons do? They prevent damage and gain life. If designers ever made those abilities really good, games would go on forever and developers would kill the cards anyway. So instead we have to do **Starlight Invoker**, who tries to hit you with her giant Q-Tip, or **Grassland Crusader** who likes to hold up his pinky finger when he fights.

"Kidding aside, when you design commons you have to rely on each color's most defining abilities. I think these three different responses show that it's pretty subjective which ones are the toughest to design. The fact that the three of us can have totally different opinions on such a basic question demonstrates the richness of the **Magic** universe and the strength of the **Magic** game design."

See also Mike Elliott's and Mark Rosewater's answers to this same question, below.

May 7, 2003

Q: "Among the five colors, is any one particular color harder than the rest to design cards for?" (Take 2)

--Darren Boyce, Wisconsin

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

"A lot of people will tell you red spells are the hardest to design, but that just isn't true. Since there is an infinite number of numbers, you can have 'Deal 1 to target creature or player,' 'Deal 2 to target creature or player,' and so on, so I won't listen to any arguments about red lacking design space.

"I find it varies from set to set which color is the hardest. If you have a mechanic that is weighted to a color or colors, it tends to make those colors much easier. For instance, in *Judgment*, having the 'ghost' creatures (which ended up being called 'Phantoms') be in green and white helped a lot with the green and white creature cards. We usually have specific number goals for creatures and non-creature spells, so for design these are usually broken out into separate categories.

"For me, the two hardest categories are black creatures and green spells. Black creatures are hard for the simple reason that black has a number of flavor constraints and does not have a wide variety of basic abilities. When we do a wheel cycle, green will often get trample, red will get haste, white will get first strike or doesn't tap, blue will get flying, and black will have its choice of fear, which overlaps a lot with flying, or regeneration, which we don't tend to do a lot of in black. Black's strengths of hand destruction, reanimation, and creature destruction do not lend themselves to a lot of creature design space, so it is often a struggle to come up with black flavored abilities that are suitable for creatures. For green spells the problem is similar. Green's big strength is its creatures, and it gets punished somewhat in the spells for this reason. The other big problem in green is a number of the effects it gets for spells overlap with

other colors. Life gain overlaps with white; land destruction, artifact destruction and enchantment destruction all overlap with its allied colors as well. Very little in green is unique to green. You can do a couple 'giant growth' effects and some sort of anti-flying card like **Hurricane** every set, but after that you are scrambling and trying not to overlap with the other allied colors.

"Luckily, there is a huge ocean of possible card ideas, and even if one of the beaches is small and rocky, it still has a lot of sand to sift through."

See also Mark Rosewater's answer to this same question, below.

May 6, 2003

Q: "Among the five colors, is any one particular color harder than the rest to design cards for?"

--Darren Boyce, Wisconsin

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

"Because each block has its own theme, the difficulty changes from year to year. In general, commons are the hardest to design because they have the most limitations. You have to make them simple and elegant yet not repeat cards we've already done. As the vein of common cards gets tapped, creating new ones gets tougher and tougher.

"As far as colors go, I'd have to say traditionally that red has been the hardest to create. Up until our recent reconfiguring of the color wheel, I felt that red had the least number of mechanics. Although white had some "tournament quality" issues, it had more mechanics available than red.

"Put it all together and my personal pick for the hardest cards to design are red commons."

May 5, 2003

Q: "When and where is the Type 1 Championships? Mark Rosewater's [article](#) from July 22, 2002 stated: 'Organized Play has promised to run a Type 1 Championship at next year's Origins convention.'"

--Nick

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

"It turns out Mark's article had the right idea, but the wrong convention. There is a Type 1 Championships at Gen Con in Indianapolis on July 26th.

"All players are welcome; it is a DCI sanctioned tournament with a K-value of 48-the highest possible.

"Excellent prizes will be awarded including a piece of original artwork. At this point we are trying to get Christopher Rush to do a reinterpretation of **Black Lotus**."

May 2, 2003



Q: "Now that you guys are reevaluating the color pie and the concept of enforcing 'order' has really become white's focus, shouldn't the **Confiscate** mechanic belong to white? **Aura Graft** and similarly 'tricky' effects might still be blue, but the **Control Magic** genre really seems to be a white effect now. And since blue has more mechanics (and more obnoxious mechanics) than the rest of the colors combined, I'm sure it won't miss one."

--Garrett Baumgartner, Lake Stevens, WA

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

"One of blue's major themes is its trickiness. Fighting a blue mage is difficult because it can use its resources to bend and shape yours. While we carved part of this and put it in red (red now gets temporary stealing and will soon be getting some surprise-oriented instants with a prankster flavor), we wanted to keep the core of the ability in blue. Thus, blue keeps its permanent stealing cards.

"Could we flavor it in white? Possibly, but we felt the 'order' flavor was better represented by moving blue's 'rule setting' cards to white, such as **Windborn Muse**. As you will see in upcoming sets, white will set order by changing the rules. This means blue will steal your creature while white will make it hard to use."

May 1, 2003



Q: "Why does **Swooping Talon** have its provoke keyword ability on the bottom of the card? The standard templating would seem to require it to be with the rest of the keywords at the top (e.g. flying)."

--Chris Manrique

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

"You're right that keyworded creature abilities are normally listed first in a card's rules text (after any additional costs). Consistency is a good thing, but sometimes the templating team chooses to make an exception to a standard template in order to make an individual card more clear. That's what happened with **Swooping Talon**.

"At this point, let me introduce Bob, an 'average' **Magic** player. Let's show Bob the standard template for **Swooping Talon**:

Flying

Provoke (*When this attacks, you may have target creature defending player controls untap and block it if able.*)

T: Swooping Talon loses flying until end of turn.

"Listening to Bob's thoughts, we might hear this: 'Flying, provoke . . . Why would I ever make this guy lose flying?! I never have to think about that ability again.' Two turns later, Bob tries to provoke his opponent's **Flamewave Invoker**-and misses. Oops. Poor Bob. He managed to read the card without noticing that the Talon needs to be grounded to pick a fight. What can the templating do to stop Bob from being unhappy? Well, we could add reminder text to the flying ability . . .

Flying (*Flying makes this creature hard to block, even when you really, really want something to block it!*)

". . . but that doesn't seem like a good thing to print in an expert-level expansion. The easy fix is to reorder the abilities on the card.

Flying

T: Swooping Talon loses flying until end of turn.

Provoke (*When this attacks, you may have target creature defending player controls untap and block it if able.*)

"Back inside our palindromic friend's brain: 'Flying . . . An activated ability that makes it lose flying?! Why on earth would I ever want to use that ability? . . . Provo- Aha!'"

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