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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](mailto:ask@wizards.com). We'll post a new question and answer each day.

February 27, 2004

**Q:** "I am looking for a spoiler list for Portal. It is not part of the list for Second Age." -- Carley Barta

**A:** from **Scott Johns**, [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) content editor:  
 "Normally you can find any spoiler lists you're looking for at our page of [Magic Cardlists](#). (If you're ever unsure how to get here, the easy-to-remember way is by using the 'Products' section from the [front page](#) of [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com).) The spoiler for the first Portal set was a little trickier though, as it seems you ran into, because on that page it's mixed in with the list for Second Age. However, I was able to follow the Portal links to the real spoiler you were looking for, which can be found [here](#)."

February 26, 2004

**Q:** "Is there any plan to bring back the Orb of Insight or some equivalent?" -- Aryeh Gregor

**A:** From **Doug Beyer**, **Magic** web developer:  
 "Flavorful answer: The Orb of Insight is a rare and powerful artifact that only visits a particular plane when the plane's mana matrices align correctly, and when a dramatic summoning ceremony -- involving master mages from all five mystic paths -- is performed. I've recently been told by Vedalken sages that the early stages of such a ceremony is currently underway on Mirrodin, and the matrices are ripe for alignment...."



"Slightly less flavorful answer: First, for new readers, let me explain what Aryeh is asking about. The Orb of Insight is a cool web goody that previews the contents of an upcoming **Magic** set, one search term at a time. For each single search term you enter, the Orb tells you how many times that term appears in the text of the cards of that set. We've done it three times before: for [Torment](#), for [Onslaught](#) and for [Scourge](#) (click those links to see how it works -- but you won't learn much since those sets are obviously out already).

"Aryeh, we're planning to revisit the Orb of Insight for *Fifth Dawn*, the last set in the *Mirrodin* block. Look for it on [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) a couple weeks before the *Fifth Dawn* prerelease."

February 25, 2004

**Q:** "How come there aren't any rare cantrips? Drawing a card seems like a great way to make a spell more powerful (and an excuse to severely overcost it). You've printed cantrip variants of several commons. When will we see a cantrip *Wrath of God*? And why weren't there any true cantrips in all of *Mirrodin*? Are you trying to starve my cantrip deck? (See, I have an ulterior motive. :-P)" -- Mike Kioski Winona, Minnesota

**A:** From **Devin Low**, Research & Development:

"Hi Mike, I love cantrips too. For those wondering what we're talking about, a 'cantrip' is a nickname for a spell that has 'Draw a card' as a bonus on top of a small spell effect, at the cost of a little more mana. *Eighth Edition's Demystify* destroys an enchantment for . *Planeshift's Aura Blast* says 'Destroy target enchantment. Draw a card' for . *Aura Blast* is a cantrip version of *Demystify*.

"Cantrips are a simple spell mechanic we trot out from time to time to supplement certain blocks. You probably got used to seeing cantrips a lot when we had them for two blocks in a row, in *Invasion* and *Odyssey*. But it's pretty frequent for a block to have hardly any cantrips at all. Out of the last 5 blocks (*Saga*, *Invasion*, *Odyssey*, *Onslaught*, *Mirrodin*), only *Invasion* and *Odyssey* have had more than a couple of them. Cantrips worked particularly well in *Odyssey* because they helped you get to threshold quickly without running out of cards. *Onslaught* cards like *Solar Blast* feel like cantrips, since you can cycle them to get a small spell effect and draw a card, but it's not quite the same thing.

"As you've noticed, cantrips are usually commons. This is because when the spell effect is something small like *Afflict's* -1/-1 until end of turn, the 'draw a card' part really shines and makes the spell worth playing. An effect like *Wrath of God* is so incredibly powerful that the 'draw a card' sentence would just seem pitiful in comparison. So I wouldn't get your hopes up for a cantrip *Wrath of God* anytime soon. If you just can't resist the idea of destroying a million creatures while drawing cards, see if you can trade for *Seventh Edition's Dregs of Sorrow*."

February 24, 2004



**Q:** "My friend has some of the Vanguard cards like Gerrard and Maraxus. How come you don't make them any more? They were a pretty fun way of playing and it would be cool to see some of the new characters like *Arcanis*, *Phage*, *Bosh* or even *Glissa*. Will they ever come back?" - Andres Solano, Trenton New Jersey

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

"We thought they were pretty cool too, but the problem was that not enough people carried around Vanguard decks. **Magic** players would meet (at school or at a game store or wherever) and they would want to play against each other, but if one had a deck based around a Vanguard card and the other person didn't, they couldn't really play. We've actually talked about possibly implementing them on *Magic Online*, since it would be really easy for the *Magic Online* players who like Vanguard to find each other. Nothing is going to happen anytime soon, but someday you might indeed get to see more characters turned into Vanguard cards."

February 23, 2004



**Q:** "I used to love when *Sideboard* had prominent pros such as Kai Budde write articles for them every now and then. Will there be articles written by current Pros in the new tournament section like it used to occasionally be done on *Sideboard*?" - Ben Chapman

**A:** from Scott Johns, **magicthegathering.com** content editor:

In addition to the eleven weekly columns we now post the schedule for the new site also includes a feature article every Monday. Since we have an incredibly diverse audience the subject matter for these feature articles will vary regularly, but I think you'll find that we'll be periodically posting some outstanding tournament strategy articles from many of the game's best players. You didn't know this when you sent the question in of course, but this week we've got a [feature article by Mike Flores](#) to fit the bill. Mike did a great job on this one, and I'm confident that we'll be able to provide plenty of outstanding guest articles on tournament strategy in the coming months.

February 20, 2004



**Q:** "I noticed that in Aaron Forsythe's [article](#) for September 24, 2003, he mentioned a card called Ring of Invisibility that was moved off to *Darksteel*. What happened to it? I think that it may have become *Whispersilk Cloak*, but I don't know." -- Michael Hocutt

**A:** From **Aaron Forsythe**, R&D developer:

"Good guess, Michael. *Whispersilk Cloak* was in fact called Ring of Invisibility during development. It started out in *Mirrodin*, but was moved to *Darksteel* because it was too similar to *Lightning Greaves*. The card didn't really change much and was released

with the same costs as when it was designed. The name was changed because our creative team would rather create things unique to the **Magic** world as opposed to simply copying from [Dungeons & Dragons](#)."

February 19, 2004



**Q:** "I have always been a huge fan of the 'druid' creature type, but it seems as though in *Mirrodin* and *Darksteel*, Wizards has moved more towards 'shaman.' What is the reasoning behind this? And is there any chance I can have my druids back? P.S., I know [Viridian Joiner](#) is a druid, but why isn't [Viridian Acolyte](#)? Why are there no Sylvok? Thanks for your time." --Ben Palmer, Plattsburgh, NY

**A:** From **Brady Dommermuth**, Magic creative director:  
"Hi Ben. No, druids haven't gone anywhere, but we did want to define more clearly what a druid is in **Magic**: someone whose magic relates directly to mana and/or the land. That's why the only druid in the *Mirrodin* block so far is the one green creature that actually generates mana ([Viridian Joiner](#)). Why isn't [Viridian Acolyte](#) a druid? There was some discussion about this, and in the end we decided that it shouldn't be a druid because it doesn't generate mana - it simply turns existing mana into green mana. The Acolyte was made a shaman instead, which is green's (and red's) equivalent of 'wizard.'"

February 18, 2004



**Q:** "We're all wondering why if you're so worried about Extended format being too fast, you don't directly ban [Chrome Mox](#), it's just too fast." -- Javier, Spain

**A:** From **Devin Low**, Magic development:  
"Hi Javier, you ask a good question, and the answer takes us into some interesting territory in **Magic** theory. Randy talked briefly about [Chrome Mox](#) in his [article](#) about the last wave of extended bannings. Let me elaborate on his explanation.

"[Chrome Mox](#) is quite powerful in Standard, but far from ban-worthy. The reason is that Standard games run long enough that spending a card to imprint the Mox is a big price to pay for the increase in speed. If you have ever gone first, played land, Mox, Mox, and a spell, then looked at the single card in your hand, you know what I mean. If you have ever drawn [Chrome Mox](#) off a mulligan or double mulligan, you definitely know what I mean. Spending a card to imprint Chrome Mox on the first turn can be really painful later in the game, when you run out of cards. In the old Extended, the game ended on turn 2 often enough that there was no 'later in the game', so investing an extra card in [Chrome Mox](#) never really hurt you.

"Furthermore, in Standard, drawing [Chrome Mox](#) on turn 4 is often pretty unexciting. In the old Extended, there was no turn 4, so this drawback didn't show up either. With the recent round of bannings, we think that Extended will slow down enough that the times you draw [Chrome Mox](#) on turn 5 ('Bad' Mox) will balance the times you draw a [Chrome Mox](#) on turn 1 ('Good' Mox).

"So while [Chrome Mox](#) is still quite good in Extended and Standard, we never suggested it to the DCI for banning."

February 17, 2004



**Q:** "As far as I know, every ante card is banned in every format in existence, but will the [comprehensive rules](#) always have to acknowledge that they exist? Or is it possible that some format will be created allowing them to be used in some way so that cards like [Timmerian Fiends](#) can finally have his moment in the sun?" --Thane Mullen, Nova Scotia, Canada

**A:** From **Paul Barclay**, Magic rules manager:  
"The [Comprehensive Rulebook](#) is intended to cover all forms of play, including play that isn't covered by the DCI's **Magic** tournament rules. So, we have to make sure that we cover all the cards in the game, including banned cards such as the Ante cards.

"However, I wouldn't recommend holding onto those [Timmerian Fiends](#), as we're not going to be introducing any format that includes the ante cards. The best use for a [Timmerian Fiends](#) is probably as part of a complete set of *Homelands*. And that's not saying much."

February 16, 2004



**Q:** "With all the talk of the 'Color Pie' going on I have a question about the new card: **Shunt**. I have seen random redirection effects in red before but this just seems far too blue. What was the thinking behind the color pie and this card?" - Anonymous

**A:** From **Devin Low**, Research & Development:  
"The reason you think of target redirection effects as Blue is. . . they almost always have been! But that doesn't mean they always will be in the future. A couple of years ago, we noticed that Blue contained lots and lots of mechanics and themes, and Red and White had too few. When we reorganized the 'Color Pie', we subtracted some mechanics from Blue and added some to Red and White to redress the balance of the pie. To do this reorganization, we worked from the colors' philosophies - what the different colors want and how they get it. Mark Rosewater's [recent column on Black](#) is a great example of these philosophies. We decided that both Blue and Red are tricky in different ways. Blue gets the subtle trickiness of **Mind Bend**, **Sleight of Hand**, and **Unstable Shapeshifter**. Red gets the 'practical joker' or 'chaotic' trickiness of **Temporary Insanity**, **Goblin Archaeologist**, and yes, **Shunt**. In future sets, I wouldn't be at all surprised to see fewer **Deflections** and more **Shunts**."

February 13, 2004



**Q:** "What is with the Trolls? When I saw them in *Mirrodin* I was excited, I thought that a new green creature theme was born, but there are no Trolls in *Darksteel*! Why were there so many Trolls in *Mirrodin*, and none in *Darksteel*? If they're the 'sworn protectors of **Tel-Jilad**' shouldn't we see more of them?" -- Aus Anderson

**A:** From **Brady Domermuth**, **Magic** creative director:  
"Thanks for your question, Aus. With only eleven green creatures in *Darksteel*, the opportunity for another troll simply didn't arise. Of those creatures, most are in the wrong power and toughness range, none have regeneration, and only one has protection from artifacts. That card, **Tel-Jilad Outsider**, was almost conceived as a troll, but in the end I decided that its 3/1 stats made it more suitable for an aggro but not-so-tough elf. But don't worry - you haven't seen the last Tel-Jilad troll just yet."

February 12, 2004



**Q:** "Why doesn't the **Tangle Golem** have trample? All of the other land affinity golems have a trait of their 'color.' The 'black' golem has fear, 'red' golem has haste, 'blue' has flying, 'white' has doesn't tap to attack. What's up with that?" -- David Kruskop

**A:** From **Tyler Bielman**, **Magic** R&D:  
"Mr. Kruskop, thank you for your insightful inquiry. What is 'up with that' indeed?  
"I remember, it was about a year ago... (cue the harp flashback music, start wobbly video dissolve)..."

**Brian Schneider:** Probably should be 3/3 trample? Could just be 4/3 without trample as well.. seems too good at 6 for a 4/4, and 7 for a 4/4 with affinity already exists in Bacon...

**Henry Stern:** Changed power/toughness just to make him a little different. Also, helps separate from the white one. We could add trample, but team didn't feel it was necessary.

**Me:** Who is ordering lunch?

"In actuality, those are notes from our internal card database where we track changes to cards.

"*Darksteel* was my first outing as a developer and card balance isn't my forte. I'm not even sure what a 'forte' is.

"But I do know that with cycles like these we try to create the symmetry you so keenly allude to. We also try to make the cards different from one another. That can be tough when they all needed to cost roughly the same and, in this case, they are all colorless (strictly speaking).

"We didn't add trample because we liked the card at 5/4 to make it distinctive and green feeling. 7 was the correct cost for that, and still in the vicinity of the others.

Adding trample would have meant changing one of those two elements (power/toughness or cost). In the final analysis, we sacrificed the symmetry of the cycle to maintain the power/toughness and cost we wanted."

February 11, 2004



**Q:** "I often find it difficult to contact the writer of a particular article. Scott Willis has his e-mail at the bottom, but neither Mark Rosewater nor Doug Beyer have one listed. In the future, it would be greatly appreciated if every writer provided a link to their e-mail. Thank you for your time, and keep up the very excellent work!" -- Jonathan Cicci

**A:** From **Scott Johns, magicthegathering.com** content editor:  
Previously on magicthegathering.com the practice has been to include a link to the author's email address, at least in most cases. The problem with that approach is that this site enjoys a phenomenal amount of traffic. That's a good thing, but one of the downsides is that these email addresses get absolutely buried in spam. One of the missions of the site is providing interaction and voice for the readers so we're in the process of correcting the problem by instead using a web-based form that would allow readers to reach the authors while hopefully getting the spam problem under control. Once we have the new system in place (and it should happen very soon) you'll be able to email any of the authors on the site. For reference I'll also point out that all of the site's articles include a linked forum discussion for that article and I can tell you from direct experience that the authors do pay attention to them.

February 10, 2004



**Q:** "What is the flavor text for the *Unglued* card **Cardboard Carapace**? On the card, it is partially visible under the errata, and the only visible words are 'exciting' and 'about.'" -- Flo Wuersch

**A:** From **Scott Johns, magicthegathering.com** content editor:  
"Actually, this card never had any real flavor text. The words were just added to entice the reader. Apparently it worked!"

February 9, 2004



**Q:** "Where are the cardlists for *Darksteel*? Many of us now depend more than ever on cardlists and spoilers from the game's website. And the cardlists from the magicthegathering.com are practically guaranteed to be content accurate." -- Oliver Pierce

**A:** From **Doug Beyer, Magic** web developer:  
"A good question. You can find *Darksteel* cardlists on its product page [here](#). If you're on the lookout for other cardlists, try this page of [all Magic products](#) or this page of [all Magic cardlists](#)."

February 6, 2004



**Q:** "I was wondering if you've ever considered making a set whose theme is group play. It could include cards with abilities like 'All allied player's (teammates') creatures get +1/+1 and gain trample until end of turn.'" -- Oliver Pierce

**A:** From **Elaine Chase, Research & Development**:  
"We try to make sure that every set we release has something for everyone. Since the basic way to play **Magic** is one-on-one, it is unlikely that a set themed around team play would happen. However, we recognize that an awful lot of **Magic** play is multiplayer (including both team play and free-for-all variants), so we make an effort to make cards that are very compatible with that style of play. For instance, you'll notice that many cards are worded as 'each player' to make sure they effect the big game and not just 2 players. Many cards get designed with multiplayer in mind, such as **Siphon Mind**, **Wheel and Deal**, **Innocent Blood**, and **Blatant Thievery**. Additionally, some of our playtest teams are enlisted specifically to provide us with feedback on multiplayer issues. So while a whole set for team play is unlikely, no matter how you choose to play you'll find new cards in every set to suit your tastes."

February 5, 2004



**Q:** "Now that the Novels forum is gone, where can I discuss **Magic's** storyline?"

**A:** From **Melanie Creel**, Wizards.com Community Manager:  
"The newly created forum for discussion of **Magic's** story and flavor elements can be found [here](#). WizOs will be moving some FAQs and long running community threads from the old forum to the new Storylines forum. In the coming year **Magic** storylines will be making appearances in a variety of venues, including stories on the web as well as other exciting things we have in the works. In the meantime make sure to drop by the forum to post about the latest developments on the plane of Mirrodin."

**February 4, 2004**



**Q:** "If **Darksteel Colossus** is indestructible, why did you give it the ability 'if **Darksteel Colossus** would go into the graveyard from play, shuffle it into your library'? Unless you'll be making cards that have it lose indestructibility..."

--Sean Van Hoesen

**A:** From **Aaron Forsythe**, Research & Development:

"Indestructible cards can still go to the graveyard from play. If you force me to sacrifice my Colossus using a card like **Wing Shards** or **Barter in Blood**, the Colossus would be put into the graveyard (sacrifice and destroy are two different things). Similarly, if you can somehow reduce its toughness to 0 (a magnificent **Mutilate**, perhaps), the Colossus would go to the graveyard as a state-based effect (which, again, is not the same as destroying). So in both cases I mentioned above, the Colossus ends up shuffled into my library.

"But note that the Colossus doesn't say 'from play' on it; it says 'from anywhere.' That includes from my library (should I **Millstone** myself or play **Entomb**), my hand (should I discard it to **Wild Mongrel**), or the stack (should I play it and you counter it). That clause exists because we don't want **Darksteel Colossus** to be put into play 'on the cheap' using cards like **Zombify** or **Exhume** in the early turns of the game. While that combo might seem like fun, it's a tad too easy and too overpowered for our tastes.

"That doesn't mean there aren't ways to get the Colossus into play for less than 11 mana. **Call of the Wild** is one (admittedly suboptimal) way of doing so, and if you think on it, I'm sure you'll come up with others on your own."

**February 3, 2004**



**Q:** "Has Wizards ever considered tweaking threshold a bit? I think it would be really cool for cards to have something like 'Threshold 3' or 'Threshold 8,' the number indicating how many cards are needed in your graveyard for it to apply. I think it would give more diversity to threshold abilities. Also, what about the same idea except referring to how much life a player has?"

--Ian, Bellingham WA

**A:** From **Matt Place**, Research & Development:

"We have actually already made cards that activate when your life is at or below a certain 'threshold.' Both **Second Chance** and **Convalescent Care** activate if you had 5 or less life. **Avatar of Hope**, **Convalescence**, **Lurking Jackals** and **Opal Avenger** could all be considered 'Life Threshold' cards as well.

"We made threshold seven and only seven to keep things simple. If both players have a few threshold creatures in play and only half of them have met their threshold number it gets very confusing. Then throw in cards like **Coffin Purge** and **Crypt Keeper** and it becomes a bookkeeping nightmare. We wanted to keep **Magic** a game where you just need 'A Deck and a Friend' not 'A Deck, a Friend and a Personal Accountant.'

"That said, we probably should have put 'Threshold 7' on the cards. That way we could change the number down the road if we want to revisit the mechanic, like we did with cycling in **Onslaught**."

**February 2, 2004**



**Q:** "What defines how or what will become a new set's symbol? *Mirrodin* has a scimitar, much like *Arabian Nights*. Since its the beginning to a new artifact block, why doesn't it have something similar to the gears or anvil of previous artifact sets?"

--Josh Rudis, Renton, WA



**A:** From **Jeremy Cranford, Magic** art director:

"An expansion symbol has to represent an entire expansion, but in a very simple graphic that is still recognizable when reduced down to a very small card size. It could deal with flavor of the setting or it could deal with the mechanics of a particular set. We wanted *Mirrodin* to have a very distinct visual look just as *Arabian Nights* did, but more importantly we wanted to use an artifact for the *Mirrodin* expansion symbol. We wanted to something similar to what we did with the *Urza's Saga* block but we didn't want it to be cogs or beakers. We became real excited about using the *Sword of Kaldra* as the artifact to be featured as the *Mirrodin* expansion symbol but we also were concerned that it might be confused with the scimitar expansion symbol. In the end we decided they were different enough. I'm glad you liked it."



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