

Spotting counterfeit Magic cards Buyer Beware

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Monday, April 26, 2004

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They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Curiously though, our lawyers seem to define imitation as a violation of several federal and international trademark and copyright laws punishable by fines and/or imprisonment, and they requested that I write some information up to help the unsuspecting honest retailers and customers ferret out the truth from the lies. Because despite our efforts, illegal counterfeit boxes of **Magic** as well as counterfeit single cards are being produced and distributed, and you might be the next victim of these criminals.

Counterfeit box product

Let's start with the big stuff. A recent operation in Southeast Asia has been producing and distributing boxes of counterfeit **Magic** cards. A number of these have appeared on popular online sites and some have migrated over through solicitations to legitimate retail operations by some rather unscrupulous individuals. While we make every effort to assist in shutting down these operations, not everyone in the world respects copyrights and trademarks to the degree that they are enforced in the U.S., and some areas are more difficult to trace and shut down. Luckily though, these are fairly low quality and are fairly easy to spot. In fact, you can spot the counterfeits at every level you might see the product at.

Let's start with the box. All Wizards of the Coast product is packed out with plastic overwrap that contains white Wizards logo symbols printed on the plastic.

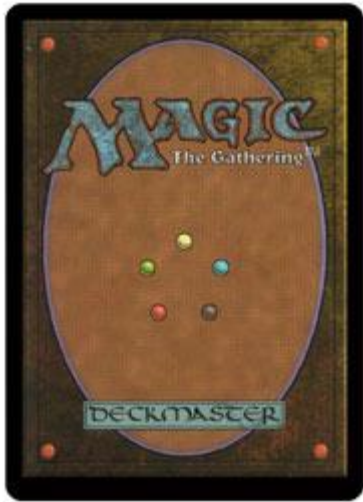


To our knowledge to date, no counterfeit product has reproduced these security markings, and the recent counterfeit boxes have only standard plastic wrap without the symbols.

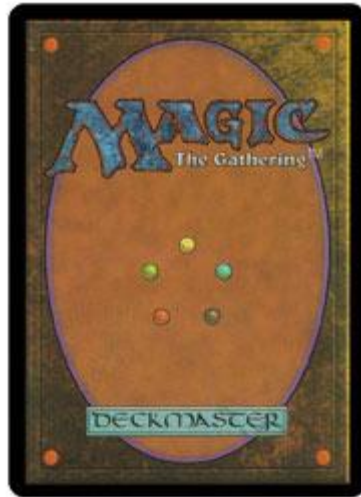
If the box is opened, don't worry. You will still be able to spot the fakes. The pack seals have distinguishing marks. On real product the heat seal striations are vertical. On the copy product they are generally horizontal and far fewer in number.

Additionally, the paper used in these products is usually much more flexible than paper used in standard **Magic** product. Hold the pack by the ends in your hand and apply gentle pressure to the ends of the pack in a slight arch. A real pack of cards will barely bend, while one of the counterfeit packs will bend quite noticeably with little effort.

And finally, most counterfeits are easily distinguishable as fakes without going into anything complicated. For starters, the colors are noticeably inaccurate when compared to real **Magic** cards. While different expansions of **Magic** cards over the years have occasionally had slight color variations, the counterfeits are often so far off you can't miss spotting it. The most noticeable is the color in the word **Magic** on the back of the card. Here are the two side by side.



Real Magic card back



Fake card back

The colors on the front often appear washed out when compared to a real card as well.

Additionally, the latest batch of fakes we uncovered has a distinguishing mark on the edges of the card. Hold the card as you would in your hand and look at the top edge. There is a slight white protrusion about a third of the way from the side edge. There is a similar bump opposite this on the bottom of the card. A stack of the fakes will have a visible line caused by these bumps when viewed on edge.



White bumps visible on counterfeit cards

But wait, there is more, although I would use this last one sparingly as it destroys the card. If you tear a **Magic** card in half, there is a blue or black line at the tear line, depending on the product. The counterfeits that have been recently uncovered (and most of the counterfeits we see) do not have this.



Left: Real Magic card. Right: Fake card.

As a final note on boxes, while the recent counterfeit boxes are current product such as *Mirrodin* and *Eighth Edition*, there have been a number of other “fake” boxes over the years. While these boxes do not contain counterfeit cards, they misrepresent the contents of the package. A common example of this is a repack. An old box for a product like *Arabian Nights* or *Legends* is taken. The box is filled with cards, usually recent common cards, and then shrink-wrapped closed. The con artist will then sell the box for a reasonable discount off the going rate, figuring the buyer will attempt to resell the box without opening it and they will be long gone at that point. Most running this fraud have a set story of how they bought it off a guy they met somewhere if the box gets opened in front of them and they are confronted. Unlike modern plastic wrap, early boxes, which are more often the targets of repacks, had a gap on the side of the foil wrap. If the box you are inspecting does not have this gap, it could be a repack. You can often pick up on a fake box by looking at the plastic wrap, since repacks often have a much different look on the plastic wrap than official product.

Some I have seen are so shoddy that you can shake the box a little and see loose cards shaking around. Many of you would be able to feel that the box doesn't contain booster packs.

Counterfeit Singles

These days color copiers and scanners are everywhere, and the quality on them improves every year. Since **Magic** cards are often bought or sold as singles and some command some reasonable prices, people are often tempted and in some cases counterfeit individual singles. Some people may have questions as to the legality of this so here is some information you should know.



The mana symbols, tap symbol and **Magic: the Gathering** logo are all proprietary to Wizards of the Coast. Additionally, all individual cards are protected under trademark and copyright laws, including art elements and the card backs. Making reproductions of the art images and card faces of Magic cards is an infringement of our rights and is prohibited. The use of this art and images requires the express permission from Wizards of the Coast. Without this permission, scanning and posting and otherwise distributing these images violates the law. Even photocopying them to use as a “proxy” for personal use is illegal and violates our intellectual property rights.

In general, the more valuable the card, the more wary you should be of the card being a counterfeit. Older Type I cards such as [Black Lotus](#), the [Moxes](#), and [Library of Alexandria](#) are common targets of counterfeiting, but occasionally popular standard cards such as [Chrome Mox](#) are targeted. There are a number of ways to spot these cards. Here are a few.

Wear and Tear

Fake **Magic** cards often have a different gloss coating or different texture. As a result, they will handle repeated shuffling and exposure to dirt and skin oils differently. Some will chip on the edges or fray in a way real **Magic** cards do not, and some will wear very unevenly. Most counterfeit cards you will see are unplayed for this reason, since the played versions are often very obviously fake. The upshot is you should be more skeptical of unplayed cards than cards that have obviously been around.

Print Quality

Printing of **Magic** sets vary. Some professional players can flip through a deck of cards face down and tell you which expansions the cards are from by minor color variations, so the fact that a card is slightly off color from another card you know is real does not necessarily mean a fake is involved. You have to delve a little deeper. Many fakes will have the black edges with gaps or appearing to bleed into the other colors. With minor magnification like a simple magnifying glass, you can see this clearly. Some dealers and retailers keep a lens handy to spot fakes. Dealers and retailers who buy and sell

cards can sometimes be a good resource for spotting fakes. They buy and sell cards daily, so they are experienced in what to look for. They do, however, have businesses to run, so be respectful of this if you ask them for assistance, but many are willing to give an opinion if asked nicely. Unfortunately, Wizards of the Coast employees are not allowed to consult on these issues.

One of the best spots to look at print quality is the black/red edge of the lettering of the word **Magic** on the back of the card. On many fakes, you can spot inconsistencies at this spot without magnification, and mild magnification will show inconsistencies in this area quite often on fakes. With enough magnification, you will see a distinctive pattern in the color dots that make up the image that you see on the card. Most printers that counterfeiters use are a lower quality than is used to print real cards and you will see a distinct difference in the magnified pattern when compared to a real card, especially if you compare it to a known real card from the same expansion.

The above methods are generally the only methods that can be used for checking foil cards. Fortunately, most counterfeit foil cards look really bad and are easy to spot.

Card Density

Magic cards, other than foils, show through some light when put up against a relatively bright light source. Take a card you know is real and note how much light shows through. Then hold up the suspected card the same distance away and compare. Often fakes will not allow any light through the card and almost always they will vary from a real card in a recognizable way.

Water test

Not my favorite test, and again these are all use at your own risk and not on foils. This test basically involves taking a damp edge of a paper towel or cotton tip and wiping the edge or border of the card. A real **Magic** card will not bleed from this, while fakes will occasionally have card bleed from this. This will also pick up black marker modifications, although most of these are visible to the naked eye.

The Infamous Bend Test

If you have been around the game for a while, you have probably heard the term, "Bend Test" used at some point. Here's the lowdown. Different paper formulations have different characteristics. The US Government uses this to keep people from counterfeiting US currency. The papers have different textures, hold ink differently and, important for this, bend differently.

Use this test at your own risk and never on foil cards. Do not use this test on our other card products besides Magic as they will fail.

While almost every counterfeit card will fail this test, even real **Magic** cards will eventually succumb to the stress of being distorted multiple times. The test works like this: Hold the card between your fingers and thumb and bend the card so that the ends touch briefly. Then straighten the card out flat and examine the center. A fake **Magic** card will show visible creases and cracks, but a real magic card will appear unaffected. Storage of cards in dry areas will affect the ability to pass this test, and even

real cards can only stand up to this test for so long. Most will show minor creases after about 8 "folds" and most will fail completely by 12 folds.

Oddities

Square cornered cards

While these cards never were released in official products, a number have been stolen from Wizards of the Coast and various printers over the years, including some print test cards. The corners are square, similar to the Collector's Edition sets, but they have white or black borders. Many dealers and retailers are aware that these came onto the market through questionable channels and do not buy or sell these for that reason. Quite a few have been turned in to Wizards of the Coast by dealers and retailers over the years and our security has improved greatly.

Collector's Edition cards

These are square cut cards of all the cards in the *Beta* set. They are some of the most commonly altered cards. The cards have a gold border and square corners. Over the years, many people have done various things to these to make them look like much more valuable *Beta* edition cards. These include trimming the corners and painting the borders black with a pen and removing the fronts and pasting it onto a standard size card. Usually close examination reveals these alterations easily. Interestingly, the collector's edition cards have gone up a bit in value, and as such people don't tend to use this alteration method these days.

Pasted Cards

This is a variation sometimes used with World Champion decks and sometimes with photocopies. It is not seen that much these days as it is very time consuming to do and very easy to spot. One usual tell is the front of the card is heavily worn and marked and the back is nearly new. You can also examine the edge for unevenness, although you might need magnification to accomplish this.

Pen Marked Cards

I mentioned these a little before, and this is another scam and not really counterfeit, but in the interest of being thorough it is included here. The basic idea behind the scam is to take a newer edition card, such as *Revised*, *Unlimited* or *Chronicles*, and pass it off as an older set. This is done by filling in the white edge with a black marker so that the card appears to be a black bordered card. There are a number of various ways to tell, such as the lack of a beveled edge at the card frame border, the copyright dates in the legal text, and a few others depending on which set is being modified. In most cases it is so obvious in reasonable lighting that you don't need any other indicator. This mostly relates to cards that have been out of print for a long time, but some of these are still floating around so you still have to be careful. A side note on this is that this technique is often used to "fix" poor condition cards to make them appear to be in better condition. Again, when buying single cards, look at the front and back and make sure you are satisfied before completing the sale.

Be Careful

My parting words. Not everyone in the world has your best interests at heart. If something looks like it's too good to be true, it probably has a catch. So be careful and you can avoid falling victim to these scams. With today's world-wide computer auction network, where you can buy stuff online from all over, you have to be especially careful. If something seems hazy to you, take steps to attempt to protect yourself or back out if you are unsure. If you do fall victim to counterfeiters or one of these scams, feel free to contact us with details (Customer Service can be reached at 800-324-6496, or <http://wizards.custhelp.com>). While we do not compensate individuals who fall prey to counterfeiters and scam artists, as a company we are concerned about these issues and will certainly assist local and foreign governments in their efforts to track down and prosecute the individuals involved in these crimes.