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September 30, 2004

Q: "When you decide to make a new Block, how do you decide how many cards are going to be in it? Most opening sets in a block have 300 to 350 cards, while the later sets in the block have less than 200 usually. Why is this?"

--Zach
Harrah, Oklahoma, USA

A: From **Mike Elliott, Magic R&D:**

"We make a conscious effort to keep the number of cards in the standard environment at a level that players can manage and reasonably obtain. Gleemax told us, er, I mean we decided a while back that this number was 616 new cards per year. Until recently, we had this as a 330 card large set and two 143 card small sets, but now we do a 286 card large set (plus four versions of each basic land, making 20 additional cards; 286 + 20 = 306 cards total) and two 165 card small sets to space the cards out a little more over the course of the year. We felt this helped the collectors and players have a little easier time collecting the sets over the course of the year.

"The reason we have the large set to start the block is that the entire previous block rotates out of standard when the first set of a new block comes in, so there is a large card gap to fill. Also, the first set of the block is establishing the flavor of that block, so a larger number of cards allows us to show off the new mechanics while still being able to keep a reasonable number of staple cards to make the block and standard environments dynamic and hopefully diverse.

"The core set, which comes out around every two years, is usually over 300 cards and is composed of cards from previous expansions and core sets. It is designed for newer players getting into the game and generally avoids mechanics such as Madness, Imprint, and others that require extensive explanations or rules knowledge."

September 29, 2004

Q: "Our online chat channel is trying to identify all the cards used in the banner at the top of <http://gatherer.wizards.com>, and they can't figure out what the green-furred doglike card is (above the word 'database') - can you help? And who makes all those banners? They're really cool!"

- Rune, Norway

A: From **Scott Johns, magicthegathering.com** Content Manager:

"The art in question is the Champions Elemental Token, illustrated by Kev Walker. Jen Page, new media designer, created the graphic design of the Gatherer. She is also responsible for wallpaper downloads, screensavers, weekly banners (theme weeks, etc), and the graphic design of magicthegathering.com. On occasion she has time for aiding with article images, such as [giant blue wizard penguins](#), [April Fool's gag](#)

[graphics](#), and a nice [brain in a jar](#). In her own words, 'One thing I love about my job is that I never know what the **Magic** team will ask of me next.'



September 28, 2004



Q: "Why do you sometimes give cards that are not great a cool picture? Like [the new picture](#) for [Dancing Scimitar](#)?"

--Evan
South Dakota, USA

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

"There are many factors that determine how popular a card might be, and only one of them is how powerful it is in tournament play. Every artist I work with tries to do their best work on every card regardless of how well the card does in tournament play. As with baseball players sometimes the artists hit a single and sometimes they hit a home run. In the case of [Dancing Scimitar](#) I feel the fact that it was an art contest brought out the best in Ron Spears and he hit a home run."

September 27, 2004



Q: "What does 'R&D' stand for? Don't you guys actually refer to yourselves as 'Design' or 'Development'?"

--Garrett, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

A: From **Robert Gutschera**, **Magic** R&D:

"R&D stands for Research & Development. But there aren't two different divisions inside R&D, one research, the other development. We just call it R&D because that's a name that people can understand (imagine the confusion if we called it '[D&D](#)!').

"The way R&D is actually set up, we have 6 areas: Magic, non-Magic Trading Card Games, Role Playing Games, New Business, Editing, and Shared Services (a kind of catch all; mostly it's TCG people whose time is split between Magic and non-Magic). Design and development are more roles than areas in the company. For example, New Business has lots of designers, **Magic** has lots of developers, but both groups need people in both roles."

September 24, 2004



Q: "What will be the release date of *Ninth Edition*?"

--Leo R.

A: From **Wendy Wallace**, **Magic** Brand:

"The release date for *Ninth Edition* is July 29th, 2005."

September 23, 2004



Q: "I saw the 'art intensive' promo card, and just have to ask - are these style cards legal for tournament play?"

--Chris
Marquette, MI

A: From **John Grant**, DCI Policy and Investigations Manager:

"Hello Chris,

"Thank you for your question. The answer is 'yes'; the [textless Terror spells](#) sent out in the latest [Magic Player Rewards](#) mailing are DCI-tournament legal. (We hope you like them!)

"We decided not clarify this question in the September 2004 version of the [Magic: the Gathering DCI Floor Rules](#) as doing so might have spoiled the surprise. The January 2005 update of the **Magic** Floor Rules (Section 102 - Authorized cards) will make it clear that these cards are tournament legal.

"The **Magic** Floor Rules are much clearer as to how the textless cards should be played. Section 103 of the **Magic: the Gathering** Floor Rules states that cards are interpreted using the [Oracle card reference](#); This covers all tournament legal cards, including textless spells."

September 21, 2004



Q: "In all of the years of **Magic**, exactly how many hounds were made and what was, in your view, the best one (aside from any in the Kamigawa block)?"

--Sam.A.J.

Lakeland, Florida, USA

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

"So Henry already answered the question that was actually asked, but I thought this might be a fun chance to tell my favorite hound story. Erik Lauer was an old teammate of mine (on Team CMU) back when I was playing on the Pro Tour. Erik loved every card that had a dog on it and would bark playfully whenever he played one. When I qualified for the **Magic** Invitational the team all wanted me to make a dog card if I won - a blue dog, since for some reason there had never in the history of Magic been a blue dog. "Why is **Snow Hound** white? Isn't snow frozen water? Shouldn't snowhound have been blue?! Why is blue being discriminated against?" Erik would lament. So after I got to R&D and we were developing *Odyssey* and we had this cycle of 2/2's that we needed to concept, I suggesting making them hounds. It seemed like a perfectly reasonable concept in the abstract, and I knew there would be at least one person in the world who would be really happy about ... **Phantom Whelp**."

September 20, 2004



Q: "In all of the years of **Magic**, exactly how many hounds were made and what was, in your view, the best one (aside from any in the Kamigawa block)?"

--Sam.A.J.

Lakeland, Florida, USA

A: From **Henry Stern**, **Magic** R&D:

"Well, a quick check of our database reveals the following Hounds:

Champions of Kamigawa

Isamaru, Hound of Konda

Odyssey

Patrol Hound, Phantom Whelp, Filthy Cur, Mad Dog, Wild Mongrel

Nemesis

Mosssdog

Mercadian Masques

Lightning Hounds, Blood Hound

Urza's Destiny

Plague Dogs

Urza's Saga

Hollow Dogs (also in *Portal/7E*), Wild Dogs

Exodus

Dauthi Jackal, Vampire Hounds, Monstrous Hound

Tempest

Jackal Pup, Elven Warhounds, Mongrel Pack

Weatherlight
Lava Hounds (also in 8E)

Homelands
Ghost Hounds

And of course...
Unhinged
B-I-N-G-O

Clearly, the most powerful of all these cards is **Wild Mongrel**, which was a key card in Standard during his time. Isamaru in *Champions* will certainly give him a run for the money. My favorite hound is **Lava Hounds**, but not for power reasons. You see, I was on the *Weatherlight* development team, and back then the development team was more responsible for determining creature types than we are now. (development still chimes in when it is important, but for most cards we are happy to let the creative guys do whatever they feel is best for the set.) Anyways, being the gamer that I am, I have always enjoyed playing **Angband** an old text based dungeon delve game, a la Moria and Hack. In that game, there are elemental 'Hounds' that have Area of Effect breath weapons depending on their type. For example, Air Hounds breath poison gas, while Nether Hounds breath Nether, etc. I remember thinking, 'Wouldn't it be cool if we had elemental hounds in **Magic?**', and voila **Lava Hounds** were born, unleashing the modern Hound era.

September 17, 2004



Q: "Why did you change the [Champions of Kamigawa set webpage](#) to a different layout than *Invasion to Fifth Dawn*, and will there be a spoiler on the magicthegathering.com website?"

--Gabriel
Mesa, Arizona

A: From **Monty Ashley**, **Magic: the Gathering** producer:

"Gabriel,

"To answer your second question first, there *will* be a complete sortable spoiler on magicthegathering.com on Monday, September 20. In fact, it will be our feature column, so it will be easy to find for a whole week. And it will always be available on the [Champions of Kamigawa microsite](#), which brings me to your first question. We figured that since *Champions of Kamigawa* was such an interesting set with every rare creature being a Legend, we wanted to make sure that **Magic** players got a good feel for the story behind the cards. After the prerelease, all the information you're used to seeing on the expansion pages will be there, including a downloadable sample chapter from [the novel](#).

"Besides, we happen to think the *Champions of Kamigawa* site looks pretty snazzy. Did you see that [animated screensaver](#)? Neat, huh?"

September 16, 2004



Q: "Are Legends ever considered for inclusion in the Core Set? "

--Ibrahim
Waalwijk, Holland

A: From **Worth Wollpert**, **Magic R&D**:

"Hi Ibrahim,

"Here in R&D we'll 'consider' just about anything from time to time. In the past, we haven't done it for one main reason, and that is that the legend rule was a little complicated and wasn't spelled out on the actual legends themselves.

"With the new [legend rule change](#) in *Champions of Kamigawa* being much shorter and simpler than the previous template, we are definitely reconsidering legends in core sets down the road. The other relevant bit is that we think (and hopefully you do too!) that legends are special and extra-cool, stuff we normally tend to save for standalones. So Ibrahim, in short, never say never!"

September 15, 2004



Q: "With the new splice mechanic, can you splice a card more than once to the spell you cast? And can you splice more than one card to the same spell?"

--Mike, SC, USA

A: From **John Carter**, Magic Rules Manager:

"Mike, the long version is coming later this week with the FAQ and in [Saturday School](#), but the short versions are 'no' and 'yes'.

"When you play an arcane spell, you reveal all the splice onto arcane cards you want to use at once. You can reuse those spicers on another spell, but not multiple times on the same spell. Let's say you're holding three [Glacial Rays](#) - you could play a Glacial Ray and reveal two other Glacial Rays (for a total of three Rays). Then you could play the second Glacial Ray and reveal the last one (for two more Rays)."

September 14, 2004



Q: "Can you explain what's up with the new 'legend rule'? I'm confused about ..."

A: From **Del Laugel**, Magic Technical Editor:

Let me start by stealing some text from an insert that's going into the *Champions of Kamigawa* booster display boxes, and then I'll deal with some of the more frequently asked questions readers have sent to Ask Wizards.

The *Champions of Kamigawa* expansion introduces changes to the rules for legendary permanents. These changes affect cards in the new set as well as all older Legends and legendary cards.

The first change is that the creature type Legend no longer exists. Every creature that was printed with the Legend creature type is now simply legendary, which is a supertype like basic. That means, if an effect asks you to choose a creature type, you can't choose Legend.

The second change affects what is commonly referred to as the "legend rule." **Now, if multiple legendary permanents with the same name are in play, all of them are put into their owners' graveyards.** It no longer matters which one came into play first. For example, if your opponent plays Eight-and-a-Half-Tails when you have an Eight-and-a-Half-Tails of your own in play, both of them go to the graveyard—not just your opponent's.

What happens to older Legend creatures that didn't have another creature type?

All older creature cards that were printed with the creature type Legend, from [Sol'kanar the Swamp King](#) to [Raksha Golden Cub](#), will lose that creature type in the October 1 Oracle* update. Raksha's new type line says "Legendary Creature -- Cat Warrior." Legends like Sol'kanar that didn't have an additional creature type are going to become just a "Legendary Creature," with no creature types at all.

*The Oracle card reference contains the most current text for cards. That's the text you see at the bottom of the autocard window when you click on a card name on this website ([Raksha Golden Cub](#)). Whenever a change is made to the **Magic** rules, the rules manager checks [Oracle](#) to see which older cards need to be updated so that they behave properly under the new rules. The Oracle update for the *Champions of Kamigawa* set is more extensive than most updates, but Paul Barclay has it all ready to post to the public on October 1. As always, our goal is that a card should do what a reasonable person would expect it to do given its printed wording and the current rules, so we hope the changes won't be too disruptive. More on that later.

But that means there will be colored creatures that don't have creature types! Are you guys going to give them extra creature types? Is [Gerrard Capashen](#) going to be a Human?

We know that many former Legends are no longer going to have creature types. No, we're not going to do mass errata to give them creature types. No, Gerrard isn't going to be a Human. (Well, not unless he gets reprinted in a core set ten years from now. For the foreseeable future, though, he's not Human and he has no job.)

What are you going to do with cards like **Tsabo Tavoc** that mention Legends?

The October 1 Oracle update will take care of all of these cards. Most just have “search-and-replace”-style changes: You should read “Legend” as “legendary creature” and “choose a creature type other than Legend” as “choose a creature type.”

For example, **Tsabo Tavoc**'s new Oracle wording looks like this:


Tsabo Tavoc



Legendary Creature

7/4

First strike, protection from legendary creatures

: Destroy target legendary creature. It can't be regenerated.

If you have concerns about specific cards, you should check [Oracle](#) after the update is posted.

Can I still use **Unnatural Selection** for the “legend trick”?

No, you can't. Since the legend rule now has nothing to do with creature types, creature-type-changing effects like **Unnatural Selection** can't make permanents subject to the legend rule.

What happens to my **Patriarch's Bidding**-Legends deck?

Dig your deck out for its last hurrah. Once Legend ceases to be a creature type, you won't be able to choose “Legend” for **Patriarch's Bidding** -- and none of your creatures will have the Legend creature type anyway.

What about flip cards and legendary creatures?

The flip cards you've seen previewed on [magicthegathering.com](#), like [Nezumi Shortfang](#), become legendary creatures after they flip. The important thing to remember is that all the information on the bottom half of a flip card kicks in only if the permanent is in play and only if the permanent has been flipped.

If you have one flipped version of the card (**Stabwhisker the Odious**) in play and one unflipped version, the legend rule doesn't apply. If the second version flips, though, both creatures will be put into your graveyard.

If an effect lets you put a legendary creature card into play or search your library for a legendary card, a flip card isn't a legal choice.

Is being a legendary creature the same thing as being a Legend?

Yes and no. Under the old rules, legendary creatures and Legends weren't quite the same thing. Section 215, “Legends and Legendary Objects,” in the **Magic Comprehensive Rules** was required to handle what happened when a Legend became a noncreature permanent and a legendary noncreature permanent became a creature. That rule is not intuitive, and if you haven't seen it before I don't recommend reading it now. The good news is that the distinction is going away and section 215 will be blank in the October 1 Comp. Rules update. Under the new rules, all Legends become legendary creatures.

Have more rules questions about the *Champions of Kamigawa* cards and mechanics? John Carter's [Saturday School](#) column will be covering Kamigawa-specific questions during the next few weeks. Be sure to check it out!

September 13, 2004



Q: “I understand that **Crystal Quarry** was put in *Odyssey* in order for any deck to cast **Atogatog**, but **Crystal Quarry** just feels like it belongs in the *Invasion* Block. Was this card originally going to be put in the *Invasion* Block and then pulled out for some reason?”

-- Peter Steiman, Brooklyn, New York

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, **Magic** Head Designer:

"Peter,

"**Crystal Quarry** was thought up during *Odyssey* design. At the time it was created, we did in fact realize that it would have worked well in the *Invasion* block, but by then it was too late as *Invasion* was already being printed. Fortunately, we like it when blocks have synergy between them, so we were fine with having an *Invasion* block friendly card in the *Odyssey* block."

September 10, 2004



Q: "How much does Wizards R&D look to the past for inspiration when designing new cards?"

- Keith, Hamilton, Ohio

A: From **Brian Tinsman, Magic R&D:**

"R&D looks to the past quite a bit. In fact in one way or another most cards are based to some extent on past ones. Take a look at any recent set and you'll see a few different ways this happens. First are the common staple effects like **Stone Rain** and **Giant Growth**. Some variant of these makes it into just about every set since they are so critical to limited play. Less frequently and maybe most obvious, are cards that are direct homages to previous popular cards. For example, **Razormane Masticore** is a nod to the original **Masticore** and **Pemmin's Aura** is based on the amazing **Morphling**. In between these two extremes are a wide variety of cards that borrow basic effects and manipulate them in different ways. Compare **Birds of Paradise**, **Utopia Tree**, **Lotus Guardian**, and **Paradise Mantle**. It's actually fairly infrequent that we release a card with a totally new effect. Cards like **Jester's Cap** and **Platinum Angel** made such big splashes partly because they did something the game had never done before."

September 9, 2004



Q: "Why are some **Magic** expansions better as a whole than others in terms of power, like *Urza's Saga* and *Judgment* are better than *Fallen Empires* and *Planeshift*? Wouldn't it make more sense to balance the power?"

--Katee, Delhi, NY

A: From **Mark Rosewater, Magic Head Designer:**

"Katee,

"There are two reasons why the power levels vacillates. First, because that's what trading card games do. R&D Development works very hard to keep the power level within certain ranges, but a trading card game has too many variables to have complete control. We didn't, for example, set out to make *Odyssey* overpowered or *Prophecy* underpowered. It happened because a variety of factors (combinations with other cards, synergy with other blocks, the current metagame, etc.) pushed each set in a different direction.

"Second, even if we could control the power level perfectly, I don't think we would want to make every set the same. One of the things that makes **Magic** such a fun game is that we're always changing it. This constant shifting keeps the players on their toes as they never know what to expect. Power level is part of this variance. In addition, it's important that **Magic** design constantly strives to explore uncharted areas of the game. This venture into the unknown brings a great deal of excitement. In fact, I feel it defines what makes **Magic** such a great game. But fiddling with the unknown increases the power level swing. It's a big cost but one that R&D feels it has to pay.

"So why does power level fluctuate? Because it has to (and fortunately, because we want it to)."

September 8, 2004



Q: "Who or what is an Abuna? Is 'Abunas' singular or plural? I ask this because the picture on **Leonin Abunas** shows only one leonin, implying that 'Abunas' is singular; but the card name **Abuna's Chant** implies that 'Abunas' is plural."

--Mark S.

A: From **Brandon Bozzi, Magic R&D:**

"Thanks for your questions, Mark. In the real world, an abuna is a patriarch-priest in the Ethiopian Christian church. We have taken that word and redefined it to loosely mean,

'a leonin cleric'. You may have noticed that we have done this in the past with other real world culture-specific terms, such as **praetor**, **nabob**, and **caliph**.

"To answer your second question, 'Abunas' is plural. If you look closely at the art on **Leonin Abunas**, you will see multiple abunas in the background."



September 7, 2004



Q: "How do you pronounce 'Auriok'?" Many of my friends have Auriok cards, and they all want to know.

Thanks, Richard London St. Albans UK

A: From **Brandon Bozzi**, **Magic R&D**:

"Thanks for the question Richard. 'Auriok' comes from the word 'auric', meaning 'of or relating to gold'. This refers to the Auriok's metal evolutions which are gold in color. 'Auric' is pronounced 'AW-rihk'. 'Auriok' is pronounced 'AW-reh-ahk'. Hope that helps."

September 6, 2004



Q: "Has there ever been a Legends Week (featuring legendary cards) and if not, will there ever be one?"

--Jon, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA

A: From **Scott Johns**, **magicthegathering.com** Content Manager:

"We've actually had two theme weeks like that so far. The week starting 3/4/02 was dedicated to the *Legends* expansion set. The week of 8/25/03 was 'Legend Week', as in the card type. However, just because we've already done these doesn't mean we can't revisit them in the future as well. And since *Champions of Kamigawa* has so many legends (every rare creature is a legend!) it's likely we'll be coming back to this area for future themes."

September 3, 2004



Q: "How do you decide which question will be picked for Ask Wizards?"

--Scott

Groton Connecticut, USA

A: From **Scott Johns**, **magicthegathering.com** Content Manager:

"Good question! While there are a lot of factors that I weigh, the two main things I take into consideration when choosing questions for Ask Wizards are:

1. Is this something enough people might find interesting?
2. Have we answered this or something similar in the past, and if so, how long ago?

"That said, even both of those are only loose guidelines. Regarding #1, I definitely don't mind choosing more narrow questions from time to time, especially if it's something that might not be able to get answered anywhere else anyway (plus the variety can be great). In general, the main question is how interesting the question is for others, especially when people come up with something unique, like your question!"

September 2, 2004



Q: "In every 'Ask Wizards' response, there is a mana symbol (white, red, black, blue or green) in the upper right-hand corner of the black borders. I can see no distinct pattern for these symbols. Is there any pattern to them?"

A: From **Doug Beyer**, magicthegathering.com Web Developer:

"The answer is: 'sort of, sometimes.' Since I generally enter each day's question and answer into our web content management system, I'm the guy who picks what color the little mana symbol should be for each question. Sometimes I follow the strict **Magic** color order of white, blue, black, red, green (the same order as the back of a **Magic** card), so you can see that pattern in sequence. Sometimes I try to make the color appropriate to the question for that day. But since most questions don't pertain to a particular color (this one, for example), some pertain to multiple colors, and some pertain to colorless cards, the rule I most often follow is: it's whatever color I feel like. Today I'm feeling, let's say... green."

September 1, 2004



Q: "Would Wizards of the Coast ever consider making a block that was based on **D&D**?"

--Alex
Petoskey, Michigan, USA

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** R&D:

"A lot of us here at Wizards play both **Magic** and **D&D**, so sure, we've talked about it. But **D&D** has its own look and feel, its own identity, and so does **Magic**. Also, most **D&D** players have made up their mind about whether to play **Magic**, and vice versa. For a bunch of different reasons, the basic view of the possibility can be summed up with a line from *Ghostbusters*: 'Don't cross the streams.' On the other hand, we love breaking rules, and we never (or hardly ever) say never. So maybe someday..."

August 31, 2004



Q: "What are some of the card cycles from Magic's first set?"
- Jim, Indiana

A: From **Mike Elliott**, **Magic** R&D:

"We do a ton of cycles in every set, and Alpha was no exception. The most notable ones from Alpha are the **Moxes** (and there was a cycle of basic lands also), and the ones we would most like to forget are the **Laces**. I still have a binder with a couple hundred of each Lace. A couple years ago, Ben Bleiweiss compiled a very nice list of the cycles we had done covering all sets out at the time. Any extended answer I could give you would pale in comparison to the comprehensiveness of his work, so here are the links to his article: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)."

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