

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com



Ask Wizards - June, 2005

Ask Wizards
Wednesday, June 1, 2005

Do you have a question about **Magic: The Gathering** or *Wizards of the Coast*? Send it, along with your name and location, to us via this [email form](#). We'll post a new question and answer each day.

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June 30, 2005

Q: "Could you list all the planes that have been visited since Alpha, and which sets introduced them?"
--Robert
Rochester, MN, USA

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, Magic Creative Director:

"Big question, Robert. Many planes have been named in novels, comics, games, and so on without ever having appeared on cards, such as Shandalar and Moag. There are also several planes mentioned here and there on cards without being detailed, such as *The Abyss* and *Segovia*. For the sake of simplicity, though, I'll list just the planes featured as settings for the card sets:"

- Dominaria (Alpha)
- Rabiah (*Arabian Nights*)
- Phyrexia (*Antiquities*)
- Ulgrotha (*Homelands*)
- Rath (*Tempest*)
- Serra's Realm (*Urza's Saga*)
- Mercadia (*Mercadian Masques*)
- Mirrodin (*Mirrodin*)
- Kamigawa (*Champions of Kamigawa*)
- Ravnica (*Ravnica: City of Guilds*)

June 29, 2005

Q: "In *Saviors of Kamigawa* why only make two new Zuberas instead of five as you did in *Champions of Kamigawa*?"
--Alexander
Copenhagen, Denmark

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

"Alexander,

"Early in the design of the entire Kamigawa block we played around with an unconventional set structure. One aspect of this structure was that we radically decreased the level of five-card cycles and increased the levels of 'pairs.' Many of the cycles you see throughout the Kamigawa block were originally just two opposite-color pairs instead of five cards in five colors. One example is the *Kirin*, which were originally just the white and black versions. In the end we decided that this structure felt too strange and hindered our focus on the more important set themes. But some of the pairs we liked enough to keep just as they were, and thus we kept *Iname*, *Life Aspect / Iname*, *Death Aspect*, *Hand of Honor / Hand of Cruelty*, and *Rushing-Tide Zuberera / Burning-Eye Zuberera*, among others."

June 28, 2005

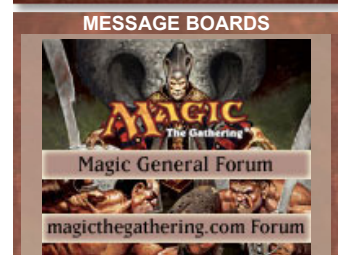
Q: "In an article a while ago, MaRo said that artifacts did not have to be colorless. Has R&D ever considered making a colored artifact?"
--Nick
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

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

"Nick,

"We've considered it but we keep deciding not to it for the same reason. It takes away from the identity of artifacts. Artifacts are the card type that anyone can put in any deck. Forcing you to pay colored mana turns them into enchantments that are only unique in that they can be *Shattered*."

June 27, 2005



Q: "Why are there so many carrots in the *Unhinged* art?"

--John
Ireland

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

"John,

"One of the gimmicks in *Unglued II* was an animated vegetable theme. No really. [Check it out](#). Because of that, we asked all the artists to have fun and hide a vegetable in their art. *Unglued II* never ended up being printed as a set, but about twenty percent of *Unglued II* art got used in *Unhinged*. That is why there are so many hidden vegetables. As to why so many of the artists chose to draw carrots? We may never know."



June 24, 2005



Q: "Why is it that none of the creatures with defender in the Kamigawa block have the creature type walls? Is the creature type wall an outdated creature type?"

--Todd
Lake Zurich, IL

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, Magic Creative Director:

"The Wall type isn't outdated, Todd, but it will probably be used a little less going forward than it has been in the past. [As you know](#), the defender ability was created to help do away with creature types with inherent mechanics (Legend and Wall). It used to be that if the card designers and developers wanted a creature that couldn't attack, they would just make it a Wall. Now they give it defender, which in turn frees up the creative team to concept the card as something other than a Wall.

"That's good for us, because Walls seldom made sense in creative terms; they had some problems as they were. First, they weren't usually creatures per se. Cards like *Wall of Stone* and *Wall of Swords*, for example, should rightfully be artifacts, not creatures (which are living, or at least animate, organically based things, not artificial constructs). Second, it's sketchy that even the largest of Walls can block only one creature, and a different creature of your choosing each turn at that. The only way to make sense of many Walls in visual terms is as large-door-sized slabs that can be slid around the battlefield as though on invisible rails.

"Defender enables us to concept a much wider variety of creatures that are dedicated/restricted to defending you, such as bodyguards, magically leashed familiars, and so on, without losing the ability to make Walls. We'll still make the occasional Wall, but only those that are credible as animate creatures (such as *Carrion Wall*, for example)."

June 23, 2005



Q: "Looking at the [new Maros](#) and using my little knowledge of Japanese I know that the blue one is Sky MaRo (sora=sky) and the black one Shadow MaRo (kage=shadow). Do the other Maro names have significance as well (kiyo, ada and masu)?"

--Bruno
Quillota, Chile

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

"Yes they do Bruno. You are correct that 'sora' means sky and that 'kage' means shadow. As for the others, 'kiyo' means purity, 'ada' means enmity/harm, and 'masu' means increasing/growing. So you can see how each name fits the color that it's in. For more info on the Japanese words in *Saviors* check out part three of the [Kamigawa glossary](#)."

June 22, 2005



Q: "Are sleeves with illustrated pictures allowed for tournaments like the Regionals, or only solid color ones?"
--Charles Modesto, CA, USA

A: From **John Grant**, Organized Play Investigations and Policy Manager:

"Hello Charles, thank you for your question.

"The DCI does not disallow any particular type of sleeve as a matter of policy, as long as they do not violate any other rules (such as marked sleeves). Tournament organizers may announce that particular types of sleeves, such as the ones with illustrations or reflective fronts, may be disallowed in their events. Tournament organizers cannot completely prohibit the use of sleeves, nor can they require that a particular sleeve, or a particular company's sleeves, be used.

"Players interested in knowing a particular tournament organizer's policy on the use of illustrated sleeves should contact them directly. For U.S. Regionals, the list of contacts is on [this page](#).

"In its role as Tournament Organizer for the Pro Tour, the DCI has decided to disallow the use of sleeves with illustrations or reflective fronts at Pro Tour and Worlds events."

June 21, 2005

Q: "On [May 26](#) you showed a nice picture of [Dreamcatcher](#) feeding off the thoughts of a Kamigawa peasant. Is this same kami featured on [Ideas Unbound](#)?"

--Craig
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** Creative Director:

"There's no intentional link between the two cards, Craig, although I agree they ended up having similar subjects. If Mark Tedin intended for the two to represent the same person, he didn't let us in on it."



June 20, 2005

Q: "We humans seem to be a fairly pathetic tribe in the great world of **Magic**. Are we ever going to get a leader like the rats have [Marrow-Gnawer](#)?"

--Jonathan
Maidenhead, Berkshire, UK

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

"The real answer, Jonathan, is that we don't know yet. At some point in the future we're going to want to make a group of tribal lords, and at that point we'll have to answer the question. Until then, we argue about it from time to time. The argument for is that humans are a race now, of course they deserve a lord. The argument against is that humans are mundane and take away from the fantasy feel of the game, but more importantly lots of old creatures that should be human aren't going to get errata, and thusly wouldn't work with the lord. We just don't know which way we're going to go yet."

June 17, 2005

Q: "I've noticed a trend with cards that you design that have a potential for Vintage decks ([Thunderstaff](#), [Trinisphere](#)). Many of the artifacts have the conditional phrase 'As long as [cardname] is untapped'. Many of the older Vintage artifacts have had their Oracle wording updated to include the phrase ([Howling Mine](#), [Winter Orb](#), [Static Orb](#)). Is this an effort to keep things closer to the original rules for veteran players that remember 'shutting off' [continuous] artifacts now that artifacts behave more like enchantments? Could you also explain why that move was made?"

--Adam
Pelham, NH

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

"Hi Adam,

"**Magic** used to be filled with all sorts of wonderful rules! Before *Sixth Edition* Rules came out tapped blockers didn't deal damage, tapped artifacts shut off, and there was a damage prevention bubble. Unfortunately these rules were too awesome and had to be removed.

"The real problem with artifacts shutting off is how much confusion they created. Take a look at [Mana Vault](#). [Mana Vault](#) and other similar artifacts needed special rules that allowed you to use its abilities while it was tapped. Check out [Ben Bleiweiss' article](#) where he goes into further depth about the confusion caused by the tapped artifact rules. I especially enjoy the [Mana Vault](#) poster in the article.

"The confusion wasn't just an issue with players. Mark Rosewater reported that even **Magic** designers couldn't keep the 'shut off' rule straight. Designers couldn't help themselves and would continually make cards that worked fine when untapped but would go into goofy mode when they became tapped. [Sands of Time](#) is a perfect example of how weird things get when you forget that tapped artifacts don't work the same way as untapped artifacts.

"Since cards like [Winter Orb](#) and [Howling Mine](#) are actually fun cards to shut off the decision was made to add the 'shut off' text in order to preserve the way these particular cards function. Instead of burdening every new

artifact with cumbersome and confusing rules we left the door open for future simple cards to have an old school effect."

June 16, 2005



Q: "I was looking at the snakes I have and I began to wonder what is the difference between the tribes (Sakura, Kashi, Matsu) of orochi, and which of the legendary snakes lives with which tribe?"

--Michiel
Washington, USA

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** Creative Director:

"Michiel, here's how it breaks down: The [Sakura](#) tribe consists of orochi shamans. The [Kashi](#) tribe are the warriors, and the [Matsu](#) tribe are the archers. The Sakura tribe is led by [Sachi](#), [Seshiro's](#) daughter. The Kashi tribe is led by [Sosuke](#), his son. The leader of the Matsu tribe was never identified. (Also, each tribe is named after a kind of tree: 'sakura' means 'cherry,' 'kashi' means 'oak,' and 'matsu' means 'pine.')"

June 15, 2005



Q: "Why do effects that grant protection ([Blessed Breath](#), [Moonlit Strider](#), [Mother of Runes](#), etc.) only ever seem to let you target creatures you control? I have often wished to use this effect to stop opposing creature enchantments and combat tricks. This seems to be the main use on opposing creatures, and not powerful enough to warrant extra rules text. Is the reason just flavour (protecting others' creatures seems a bit weird)?"


--Paul
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

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

"This question comes up in R&D from time to time. Some designer will 'forget' to put a few words on a protection effect, and weeks later, someone else will have their cool creature enchantment countered by that same sinister designer. In that context, protection feels too much like a counter, and acts very differently from what the color white intends. Then we make the 'only targets things you control' text appear. It doesn't have to happen every time, though. There have been cards in the past with abilities like what you describe, such as [Crimson Acolyte](#) (and [Obsidian Acolyte](#)), [Floating Shield](#), and [Stormscape Master](#). Someday, I'm sure, we'll print other cards that allow you to give protection to any creature."

June 14, 2005



Q: "What's the purpose of releasing huge casting cost cards? Cards with costs like  and up. Triple specific color casting cost cards seem like just a waste of print."

--John
Lisbon, Portugal

A: From **Nate Heiss**, **Magic** R&D Intern:

"Using a high casting cost is a great way to allow R&D to make really splashy and powerful cards without any other drawbacks. Having many of the same color of mana in the casting cost encourages that the card is played in one particular color of deck. It also allows us to lower the overall mana cost of a card by increasing the color requirements.

"In essence, it is to preserve the balance of the game while allowing us to make very cool and splashy cards with nothing but upside. Without casting costs like that, we could never have enjoyed cards like [Silvos](#), [Rogue Elemental](#), [Rorix Bladewing](#), [Visara the Dreadful](#), or the ever-popular [Serra Avatar](#).

"As for those cards being a waste of print - both casual and competitive players seem to enjoy them. Just from looking at the most recent Pro Tour top 8 in [Philadelphia](#) you can see that even very hard to cast cards like [Myojin of Night's Reach](#), [Myojin of Cleansing Fire](#), and [Myojin of Seeing Winds](#) see play in top level decks."

June 13, 2005

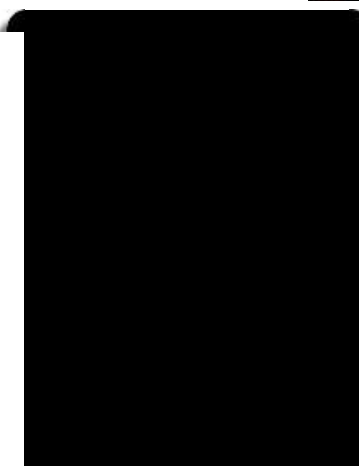


Q: "Is [Rustmouth Ogre](#) having a chew on [Staff of Domination](#) in its picture?"

--Lee
Middlesbrough, England

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** Creative Director:

"It could be, Lee. Each staff is of Vedalken design, and although they're not identical, nothing says that all Staves of Domination are alike. But I can't say for sure. The art description for the card didn't call for a [Staff of Domination](#) specifically, however."





June 10, 2005

Q: "I was wondering, why is it that when you guys start a new block you take out the older block completely. Why don't you guys take out the block set by set so then each set in the block gets the same amount of time as the other sets in the block?"

--Justin
Quebradillas, Puerto Rico

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

"Way back in the day it used to work the way you're describing. The problem was that once *Ice Age* was taken out of Standard, there weren't any **snow-covered lands** that were legal to play with the *Alliances* cards that affect snow-covered lands. This sort of situation comes up pretty much every block -- R&D builds the block so it's a nice coherent whole, extending 'big set' themes in each of the 'small sets.' If you then try to play with the small sets without the big set, though, you wind up missing the basic building blocks you need to build decks around the themes of the block."

June 9, 2005

Q: "I have noticed that for a lot of the books that **Magic** has, there is always a reference back to the old **Magic** days. Are all the planes of **Magic** connected in some way?"

--Alex
Phoenix, Arizona, USA

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** Creative Director:

"The vast majority of **Magic** expansions have been set in one plane, Alex: Dominaria. Dominaria has a rich history, one that we do our best not to ignore whenever our stories are set there. As for your question about planar connections, yes, all planes are connected by the Blind Eternities, the metaphysical 'routes' that planeswalkers traverse when they move between planes."

June 8, 2005

Q: "I was wondering, how do you choose which creature will go on the constructed deckbox?"

--Jean Philippe
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

A: From **Jake Theis**, Assistant Brand Manager for **Magic**:

"Bonjour Jean Philippe,

"Packaging decisions are made through a consensus between our Art Director, Jeremy Cranford, our Creative Director, Brady Dommermuth, the fine folks in **Magic** R&D and the **Magic** Brand team. The Creative team highlights cards that feature key characters in the set and other selections that just have really amazing artwork. R&D is responsible for pointing out which creatures have been saucy during development. After the pool of art is chosen, the Brand team makes sure that each piece matches **Magic**'s strict values. Then, the Brand team assigns the finalists to the wide pool of products that we offer with each new expansion.

"Packaging artwork is selected more than eight months prior to a set's release. As a result, the abilities and powers/toughnesses of creatures can change noticeably during the selection process."



Saviors of Kamigawa deck box, featuring *Hand of Honor*

June 7, 2005



Q: "When a Chess player's rating gets to a certain level he is made into a 'Grandmaster', a title he can then keep for life. And a pretty cool title at that! Have you ever thought of having Grandmasters (or an equivalent) for **Magic**?"

--Scott

Redhill, Surrey, UK

A: From **Scott Larabee**, DCI Program Manager:

"Yes we have...and it is here! Please read Chris Galvin's article about the [Magic: the Gathering Pro Tour Hall of Fame](#)."

June 6, 2005



Q: "Why did you publish Brady Dommermuth's answer Friday to the question about the relationship between **Tetsuo** and **Toshiro Umezawa** if all you were going to do is dodge the question anyway?"
- Several readers

A: From **Scott Johns**, [magicthegathering.com](#) Content Manager:

"We got several complaints on this particular Ask Wizards, so I want to address the underlying issue here, as it's one we come up against quite often on [magicthegathering.com](#) in general, and one that ends up being a big part of my job specifically.

"We get a *ton* of this particular Ask Wizards every week. We've *been* getting a ton of these since the day **Toshiro Umezawa** first hit spoiler lists. However, as Brady pointed out Friday on [the message board](#) for Ask Wizards, we're not here to spoil plot points of the novels. That leads to something of a dilemma though: what to do when a significant portion of the audience is asking about something that we really can't talk about on the site? In this particular case, rather than just ignore a question that obviously has a tremendous amount of interest it was better in my opinion to instead let people know where they could find the answer if they were so inclined.

"This kind of judgment call comes up pretty often on the site, as I'm sure you can imagine. When in doubt, I believe it's best to err on the side of giving you what information we can rather than just skipping something entirely."



June 3, 2005



Q: "I was recently looking through the '*Legends*' cards and I came across the card '**Tetsuo Umezawa**'. Of course, this surname is identical to the protagonist's in Kamigawa, so I was wondering if this was merely coincidence, or if it's a deliberate nod toward another expansion that, like Kamigawa, is legend based?"

--Paul

Wales, United Kingdom

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** Creative Director:

"Paul, I'm told that the novel [Guardian: Saviors of Kamigawa](#), by Scott McGough, reveals whether or not there's any possible connection between **Toshiro** and **Tetsuo Umezawa**."

June 2, 2005



Q: "Why is our favorite game called **Magic: 'The Gathering'**? What does The Gathering stand for? What added value did Richard Garfield think it had for the game, because I never saw anything on the cards that indicated any form of 'gathering.'"

-- Michiel, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

A: From **Richard Garfield**, creator of **Magic: The Gathering**:

"The name used in playtest for **Magic: The Gathering** was simply 'Magic,' and that is certainly how I still think of it and refer to it outside of formal contexts. The trouble began when Wizards of the Coast wondered if a proprietary name would be better -- one can own the name 'Shmorghapler,' but not 'Magic.' Many names were considered; some I remember are Mana Clash, Mana Flash, Flash Magic, and Lords of Dominia. None of them thrilled me (or anyone else, for that matter), and I began to feel more and more strongly that **Magic** was the best name for the game.

"Then it was suggested that we keep the name **Magic** but add a subtitle to the game in order to make it more proprietary. I believe the inspiration for this naming convention was the *Vampire: The Masquerade* role playing game. A number of different subtitles were considered and eventually we settled with 'The Gathering.' People were thinking of gathering in a number of different ways: gathering of friends, gathering storm, and, of course, gathering cards. I don't think anyone loved the name, but I think a lot of folks kinda liked it, and no one really hated it.

"One reason I liked this form of name was that it allowed me to keep calling the game **Magic**. Another reason I thought it was a good move relates to the way I envisioned the product being printed at the beginning, which was large sets coming out in regular time intervals and replacing one another, and so the subtitle could be the name of the subset of cards, playing the same role as the name of the expansion today. If this had been the case we would have seen **Magic: The Gathering** followed by **Magic: Ice Age**, followed by **Magic: Mirage**. For reasons outside of the scope of this question, the expansions and the way they fit together changed, and so we were left with 'The Gathering' being the name of the entire product, rather than just the first set of cards."

June 1, 2005



Q: "Every week on magicthegathering.com the site has a theme, although sometimes the theme is no theme. Now, this may be a really stupid question, but how can we tell what the theme of the week is going to be without reading articles? Is it listed somewhere on the home page? It's probably staring me right in the face, but I've never seen it."

--Bif

New Hampshire

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

"Bif,

"It is in fact staring you in the face. Check out the banner at the top of just about every page on the site. You know, the one with the **Magic** logo and the rotating montage of card art. During theme weeks, the name of the week appears directly under said **Magic** logo. Currently, the theme is 'Fire Week.'"



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