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Ask Wizards
Friday, July 1, 2005

Ask Wizards - July, 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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July 29, 2005



Q: "What's the difference between a [Spindown life counter](#) and a plain ol' 20-sided die?"

A: From **Monty Ashley**, Managing Producer for **Magic**:

"A Spindown life counter is actually designed for keeping track of life totals, which means that all the sequential numbers are next to each other. This means that there's no more picking up the die and looking for the '16' -- it's right next to the 17, which is next to the 18. This can save valuable seconds in the middle of a tight match!"



A Spindown life counter from *Legions* (Little red arrows added)



July 28, 2005

Q: "In the pictures of the [Scourge Warchiefs](#), it appears that the medallion each Warchief is wearing is actually a Mox of the appropriate color. Was this intentional?"

--Kevin
Waterbury, CT, USA

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

"Not moxes, Kevin, but medallions! Often we like our cycles of cards to have a common 'visual cue' that links them all together. In the case of the Warchiefs, we thought it would be cool to sneak in the [Tempest medallions](#), each of which reduces by 1 the cost to play spells of a color, just as the Warchiefs reduce by 1 the cost to play spells of a creature type. I think it worked out okay, although I've always wondered why a **beast** would wear a pretty necklace."



July 27, 2005

Q: "Perhaps I'm jumping the gun here, but as I was scrolling through the card list for *Ninth Edition* I found that there was no **Birds of Paradise**. Is Birds really gone from the game?"

--Davon
Baltimore, Maryland, USA

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

"As we [previously announced](#), **Birds of Paradise** is going to be reprinted in *Ravnica: City of Guilds*. The reason we didn't put it in *Ninth* is that we wanted to bring back **Llanowar Elves**. The Elves are a perfect common for showing off green's mana acceleration flavor, but having two different 1-mana creatures that tap for mana in the same core set is just too much. Elves and Birds are so powerful in constructed that it left us no room to print more good, cheap mana accelerators in the expert-level sets. Thus we're only going to have one of them at a time in the Core set."



July 26, 2005

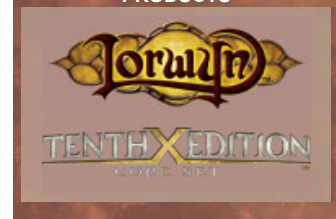
Q: "Who is Gatha, the Tolarian renegade? He seems to be some kind of Frankenstein-ish mad professor (okay, magician), but what's the full story?"

--Andreas
Denmark

A: From **Scott McGough**, **Magic** novelist:



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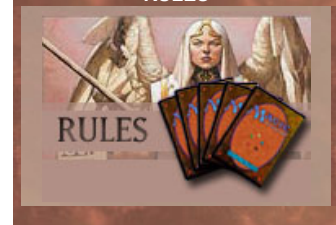
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"Gatha was a gifted wizard/instructor/researcher at the **Tolarian Academy** and a key figure from Urza's Bloodlines project. As part of Urza's plan to defeat the Phyrexian Invasion, the Bloodlines project's goal was to genetically engineer warriors and leaders for the coming conflict. Gatha proved most effective at getting the results Urza wanted, but his methods were brutal and he showed no compassion or concern for his test subjects. His reckless disregard for others eventually led to his dismissal from the Tolarian Academy, but he went on to continue his experiments in the violent warrior nation of Keld (and it has been suggested that he did so with Urza's secret approval). Many Keldons were willing to take the risks associated with Gatha's treatments in order to become stronger, faster, and more savage on the battlefield. Hundreds of Keldons died and many more became twisted monstrosities, but Gatha's work eventually produced Kreig, one of the most powerful Keldon Warlords in history.

"Gatha died honorably (he fell in combat against an advance force of Phyrexians, battling alongside Kreig), but his life's work completely destabilized Keldon society and threw the warrior nation into a decades-long period of chaos. Though Keld eventually reestablished its traditional hierarchy, the long-term effects of Gatha's tampering with Keldon bloodlines have never fully been revealed."

Gatha is mentioned in the flavor text of [several Urza's Destiny cards](#).



July 25, 2005



Q: "I've seen repeated mention (mostly from Mark Rosewater, I think) of the Urza block as poorly designed. Mark mentioned a dislike of the 'free' mechanic in the July 14th Ask Wizards, but I get the feeling that there's more to it than that. So what was it? Too many powerful cards? Imbalance of power? Beebles? It's the beebles, wasn't it?"

--Dan
South Carolina, USA

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

"Dan,

"I did not say that Urza's block was poorly designed. I said it was poorly developed. The biggest problem is not elegance of concept but in the power level of the cards. That is a development issue not a design issue. I do believe *Urza's Saga* had a poor design element in the 'free' cards. That was what I was complaining about in my Ask Wizards questions. (I do enjoy having Ask Wizards answers that spur new questions; that's a hint by the way.) All in all, I believe the design of the *Urza's Saga* block to be good **Magic** design. *Homelands*, on the other hand, not so much."

July 22, 2005



Q: "Why did Wizards not count one of the base sets? First came Alpha, Beta, Unlimited, and *Revised*. The next edition is called '*Fourth*', but shouldn't that have been called '*Fifth Edition*' since it was the fifth release of the base set?"

--Jan
Grants, NM, USA

A: From **Joe Hauck**, VP of Marketing, TCG Brands and Avalon Hill:

"When Wizards started **Magic** they didn't necessarily have the next two years of product mapped out because no one knew how big of a hit it would be. The names Alpha and Beta were applied retroactively to the sets as we moved forward and made changes to the base set product.

"For Alpha the corners were not cut the way we wanted them to be as there was something wrong with the slitter at the vendor. Additionally, there were several mistakes in Alpha, including some missing cards and several misprints. For Beta, the corners were changed to our original specifications, the missing cards were added back in, and the misprinted cards were corrected. Other than that, however, the card set and the border color were the same. So, from a company perspective, Alpha and Beta are the same set. Unlimited becomes the second base set, *Revised* the third edition and by *Fourth Edition* we went to naming the editions numerically."

July 21, 2005



Q: "I was so excited when I read that a Pro Tour was [coming to Hawaii](#), since the largest official tournament we've had all the way out here in Hawaii is a prerelease. However, I was wondering if you allow spectators to the event, and if so, how would I become a spectator? I'm just a casual player, so I wouldn't have a chance trying to qualify, but I would love to see some of the world's best players."

--Jonah
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

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

"Aloha Jonah! I am glad you are excited that the Pro Tour is coming Honolulu. We at Wizards of the Coast are excited as well! All Pro Tours are public events - the public is welcome to come and enjoy the Pro Tour experience. We will also have side events going on as well. So even if you won't be playing in the Pro Tour event itself, you can play in smaller **Magic** tournaments with other spectators. The schedule of these events will be posted as the Pro Tour gets closer."

July 20, 2005



Q: "What rainbow-colored bird was featured in the rainbow week banner? Was this an easter egg of the art for *Birds of Paradise* in *Ravnica*? Or is it art from some other card?"

--Eric
Provo, UT, USA

A: From **Jen Page**, Senior New Media Designer:

"The card art used of the colorful bird during Rainbow Week was *Rainbow Crow*. It was selected for the use of the word 'rainbow' as a play-on-words for the week's theme. It is an uncommon from the *Invasion* set so the art might not be too well-known. But sorry, this wasn't an easter egg/sneak peek of *Ravnica* art!"

July 19, 2005



Q: "Why did you decide to change the corners of the cards between Alpha and Beta?"

--Jani R.
Tampere, Finland

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

"The change was not intentional, and I don't know why it is there. I heard a rumor that the dies which cut the corners wear out over time and alpha was made using well worn dies, and beta's dies were fresh. I think that is nonsense though - if it were true we would see more variation in the enormous runs we have these days. So I believe it is just oversight, and once we saw the difference we chose to stick with the beta cut."

July 18, 2005



Q: "Once you know the theme for a theme week, how do you decide which writers will tackle that theme?"

--Stephen, British Columbia, Canada

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

Stephen, there are actually several factors that go into this decision. Once I know what an upcoming theme week will be, the first step is to make sure that we've got at least one column on theme each of the five work days. Fortunately, the fact that we do theme weeks and card previews is one of the key factors in how the columns themselves were scheduled out across the week, so this isn't usually too tough.

Depending on how deep the theme is, I'll usually aim for somewhere around 5-7 theme articles per theme week. The question here is how many different ways the theme can be approached before it starts to feel to redundant or too boring. For some very versatile or open-ended themes we'll even run them in every slot, like we did with Top 10 Week.

After that, the question is which writers are best suited to the topic. For this, it's a question of highlighting each writer's strengths while (normally) also staying within the scope of that writer's column. To use a specific example, Mike Flores is an outstanding writer when it comes to decks from **Magic's** past, so when the opportunity comes to feature that strength I typically jump at it.

Lastly, I also try to balance out which columns have been on theme when possible. Some columns are more narrow than others, which means they just get less themes. (Scott Wills' column is an easy example.) Because of that, one of the first things I look at with themes is giving the less-represented columns a shot at them when possible.

July 15, 2005



Q: "How many (and which) countries have held DCI sanctioned tournaments for **Magic**?"

--Jeff, Colorado, USA

A: From **Didier Monin**, Organized Play Data Systems Manager:

"Jeff, as I write this we count 83 different countries recorded where a tournament has been held. (However, because this goes back in time, some of these may not technically be accurate any more. For example, Hong Kong is now part of China, etc.)

Here's the complete list, in order of how many events each country has held:

United States
Japan
Canada
Germany
Italy
England
France
Russian Federation

Spain
Australia
Brazil
China
Argentina
Chile
Portugal
Netherlands
South Africa
Czech Republic
Poland
Mexico
Greece
Ukraine
Belgium
Malaysia
Taiwan
Sweden
Thailand
Croatia (Hrvatska)
Colombia
Austria
Finland
Norway
Denmark
Singapore
Switzerland
Philippines
Hungary
Peru
Hong Kong
Scotland
New Zealand
Bolivia
Korea (South)
Indonesia
Dominican Republic
Ireland
Slovak Republic
Venezuela
Slovenia
Yugoslavia
Israel
Uruguay
Wales
Costa Rica
Panama
Northern Ireland
Bulgaria
Estonia
Guatemala
Macedonia
Ecuador
Turkey
Malta
Belarus
El Salvador
Macau
Iceland
Lithuania
Romania
Latvia
Kazakhstan
Luxembourg
United Arab Emirates
Paraguay
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Iraq
Honduras
Iran
Namibia
San Marino
Guam"

July 14, 2005



Q: "Is there a single card that you most regret ever printing? What about a mechanic or cycle?"
--Sam, Texas, USA

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

"Sam,

Design is in some ways a big experiment. We come up with interesting ideas and then see what all of you do with them. I usually don't regret the printing of a card as much as regret that it didn't end up being used in the way I had hoped (and often it gets used in cool ways that I never thought of). But since Ask Wizards is about actually answering the tough questions, I'll give you my thoughts as of this moment:

Card - Duplicity (*Tempest*) - This was a great card idea that was poorly executed. I hate when I let down my good ideas like that.

Mechanic - "Free" Mechanic (*Urza's Saga*) - This mechanic was flawed in its design. So much so that it couldn't be properly developed. That's just bad design.

Cycle - Shrines (*Odyssey*) - These cards started out so cool in design and ended up so lame in print. I'm not quite sure what happened along the way. I think development saw them as something different than the designers and took them a very different direction."

July 13, 2005



Q: "Is there a reason that as of late, the 3rd set in a block has some quality that changes it from the previous two? For example; *Onslaught* and *Legions* dealt mainly with morph and cycling etc., but when *Scourge* came around, focus suddenly shifted to 'converted mana cost matters.'

Mirrodin and *Darksteel* (while differing in entwine and indestructibility), focused primarily on artifacts and affinity. Then with the release of *Fifth Dawn*; it seems as though that was all dropped off in favor of altering mana-colors. Finally, *Champions* and *Betrayers of Kamigawa* contained massive cardplay strategies with spirit and arcane; a trend that now seems abandoned in favor of spells that center around the players' hand size. Is there a reason for this 'Third Set Shift'?"

--Griffin, Vermont, USA

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

"Griffin,

The reason is simple. Too much of the same thing gets boring. As the final set in the block, the designers realize that we need to shake things up. Often this is done by adding a new theme that adds new strategies while still playing well with the rest of the block. **Magic** is a game of constant evolution. This includes during blocks as well as between them."

July 12, 2005



Q: "Do you guys ever look at other boards or forums to see what **Magic** hoaxes and spoilers have been shown? If so, what is your reaction to the Power 9 hoax picture?"

--Jeremy, New Zealand

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

"Hey Jeremy-

We do keep an eye on what's happening with the online **Magic** community, both on our boards as well as some of the other boards out there. Our policy on spoilers has been [posted numerous times](#) so I'm not going to reshuffle that one here. As to hoaxes, well, to be honest, they're too numerous for us to comment on every one of them. I recommend if you're looking for the official news on what's happening with **Magic** you check here at www.magicthegathering.com."

July 11, 2005



Q: "What is the thing being reached for in the art of *Reach through Mists*, *Peer through Depths* and *Sift through Sands*?"

--Alex

Cambridge, United Kingdom

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

"That object is really just a tangible symbol, Alex, a spirit-realm manifestation of a thought or memory. It was conceived by Anthony S. Waters, who also illustrated all three cards. In them, a kami seeks out these 'knowledge nodes' in three different places around the Kamitaki Falls."

July 8, 2005



Q: "*Saviors* seems to be the 'throwback' set. You've reprinted *Gerrard's Wisdom* as *Presence of the Wise*, *Umbilicus* as *Blood Clock*, *Fork* in blue as *Twincast*, White and Black Knights in samurai form, a whole cycle of Maros, etc. Is there a reason for all these links to the past?"

--Matthew

Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

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

"Matthew,

"*Saviors* doesn't really have an exceptional amount of throwbacks. I haven't heard many people point out that in *Betrayers* we reprinted *Spore Frog* as *Kami of False Hope*, or *Gaseous Form* as *Heart of Light*, or *Phantom Wings* as... uhh... *Phantom Wings*. Maybe it's just that the cards you mention in *Saviors* were more memorable and tournament-worthy cards in their day. I guess that makes the question 'Why did *Saviors* reprint variants of so many popular old cards?' One reason is that when we started thinking about the hand size theme we thought it would be a great chance for some of those beloved high-profile cards to do their thing in a new environment. The Maros, *Presence of the Wise*, and *Blood Clock* are all examples of well-known cards that gain a lot of synergies from all being in the same environment together.

"In regard to *Twincast* and *Hand of Cruelty* / *Hand of Honor*, sometimes the third set is where cool cards that got kicked out of the other two sets end up."

July 7, 2005



Q: "What percentage of questions submitted to Ask Wizards actually make it to the site?"

--Alex
Menlo Park, California

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

"It can vary pretty widely (particularly whenever there's a hotly debated issue) but on average I seem to get somewhere around fifty to sixty questions per day for Ask Wizards. However, of that group, a large number tend to be unusable. The most common reasons are that they aren't appropriate for Ask Wizards ('I have this rules question...'), they ask about something we've already answered, or they ask something that we specifically can't answer for any of a number of reasons ('Is card x going to be in *Ravnica: City of Guilds*?'). So, if we split that and just use 55 for sake of discussion, that's 1,650 submitted questions per 30 day month. We post one question and answer each weekday, so you're looking at somewhere around 1% of the total number of questions making it to the site."

July 6, 2005



Q: "What's the flavor behind the Cycling mechanic?"

--Paul
Manila, Philippines

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

"I'm sorry to say that there's no flavor at all behind cycling, Paul. Fairly early in **Magic's** development, the designers started coming up with mechanics that simply don't translate well (or at all) in the game's creative terms. These mechanics include buyback, cycling, kicker, and threshold. There are a handful of other mechanics that have just a hint of flavor but are largely abstract, such as cumulative upkeep, echo, affinity, and imprint."

July 5, 2005



Q: "When you search [Gatherer](#) for 'oboro' with the 'Search rules text' field selected it brings up cards that have either 'WUBRG' or 'BRG' mana symbols. Do you know why?"

--Sebastian
Townsville, Australia

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

"It's strange but true actually. It happens because WUBRG is actually represented as "oWoUoBoRoG" in the Multiverse data, which is where Gatherer gets its information. Take a look at "oWoUoBoRoG" again and you'll notice it contains your search string of "oBoRo" (Gatherer is case insensitive). Whether that's a cool factoid or just a backend formatting quirk is up to you."

July 1, 2005



Q: "Do the **Magic: the Gathering** cards fuel the novels, the novels fuel the cards, or are they independent groups that take on each other's characters when desired? How does one influence the other?"

--Preston
Dickenson, Texas, USA

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

"Preston, ['The Story of the Story'](#), a short article I wrote a couple of years ago, mostly answers your question. Generally the cards provide the world in which the novels are set, and the novels sometimes provide characters represented on cards. But cards also introduce their own characters that might not appear in the novels. In short, the **Magic** creative team and the novelists work largely in parallel and inform each other as much as possible."



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