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# Ask Wizards - August, 2005

Ask Wizards  
Monday, August 1, 2005

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## August 31, 2005

**Q:** "What do you take into account when you consider reprinting a card?"  
--Alex  
Sierra Madre, California, USA

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

"Though there are several factors we take into account. We often reprint cards simply because they fill a certain niche or when we think people will like something that hasn't been around for a while and the card has nostalgia value, or we want to reliably change the way constructed plays. In addition to that, we always take into account the [official reprint policy](#)."

## August 30, 2005

**Q:** "I have been trying to locate a list of all of the cards created by the winners of the Invitationals over the years, but in any given article they only list a couple. I know most of them, but I don't know if my list is complete. Is it listed in an article somewhere on this site?"  
--BJ  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

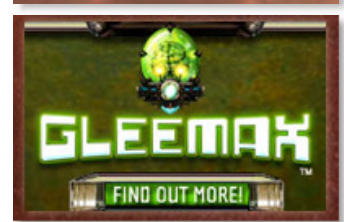
**A:** From **Scott Johns, magicthegathering.com** Content Manager:

"Hi BJ, thanks for writing in. The article you're looking for was published as part of the coverage from this year's [Magic Invitational](#) at E3. The article is titled "[Past Invitational Winners and Cards](#)" and it includes all the Invitational cards made up to that point, with a picture of each Invitational winner and the card they worked with R&D to create. Note that the cards are listed in the order that each player won the event, which is why Olle's is at the very end even though his card was printed much later. In addition to that list, there is also Bob Maher's card, which will be in *Ravnica: City of Guilds*."



## August 29, 2005

**Q:** "I understand that the writers need a break, and fully believe they should get holidays off, but something's been bugging me. If the columns are written in advance, why don't we miss articles some time after a holiday, instead of on the holiday itself?"



--Austin  
Williamsburg, VA

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

"Actually, the reason I moved us to a schedule that allows for holidays was based on our production schedule here in Online Media. Since writers have a full week for each article, one holiday in the middle doesn't normally really affect them that much. The problem for Online Media here at Wizards of the Coast with publishing on holidays was that the same number of articles had to go up, but we'd have a day less in the office to get all that work done.

"So, for example, let's just hypothetically say that next Monday were some kind of holiday. Let's call it 'Labor Day' for ease of discussion. (Oh, that *is* the case, what a coincidence!) In that case, on Thursday of this week Online Media would be finishing up the site you'd be reading on Friday. On Friday, however, now we'd have to put together all the content you're expecting to see on Monday (Labor Day) *and* Tuesday, since we won't be in the office Monday to prepare the Tuesday material and also get it up on the servers. For those that haven't been involved in a site as content-heavy as [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) that may not sound so bad, but please believe me when I say that double load was *awful*.

"The joke around the office was that employees hated holidays because of what it did to us the days before, while we rushed to get everything done in time. And though it was always said at least partly in jest, the simple truth is that it's not a good idea to put employees in that kind of situation, particularly if the site's quality may suffer in the process due to an unrealistic workload.

"That said, we do still try to do what we can for holidays. Feature articles are typically done enough in advance that we can publish the feature article anyway, even if it's a holiday, since it's work we've already done anyway. That's a handy thing, since so many holidays tend to fall on Mondays, so the audience still has something to read even if we're not otherwise publishing that day. Additionally, we add in other content when there's a special need. For example, next week is the beginning of *Ravnica* previews, so we'll have a preview article from Mark Rosewater despite the holiday."

August 26, 2005

**Q:** "Does the fact that Bob Maher is known as 'The Great One' have anything to do with the fact that the flavor text of his invitational card, Dark Confidant, is 'Greatness, at any cost'? Do other Invitational-winner's cards' flavor text reference their creators?"

--Blake  
Healdsburg, California, USA

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

"Hi Blake,

"The flavor text on Dark Confidant does indeed reference the fact that Bob has been known as 'The Great One' within pro magic circles for many years now. Funny you should ask about the others, as the only other invitational cards to have flavor text can be seen here:



"In the case of Chris Pikula's card ([Meddling Mage](#)), if you've ever spent more than 30 seconds around him at a tournament, you'd get why the text is the way it is. Chris likes to tell stories, tell them loudly, and tell them with many gestures. When Chris is talking, people might as well just give in and listen, since nobody can hear the person next to them talk anyways.

"In Olle Rade's case ([Sylvan Safekeeper](#)), the flavor text was inspired by one of his nicknames in the early days of **Magic**, 'The littlest Viking.' Olle was generally smaller than most other **Magic** players, and was universally regarded as one of the best players on tour, so his flavor text grew from that. Interestingly, the spider he's riding in the card's art was another tip of the hat to his past: His winning *Ice Age/Alliances* deck from Pro Tour Columbus had a bunch of spiders of all types in it.

"Generally, our policy on invitational cards is that we try to make any cards with space for flavor text reference the creator. However, lots of times the cards are on the complex side, and we just don't have room."

August 25, 2005



**Q:** "Since the introduction of pseudo-keywords (Channel, Sweep), I was wondering how it might've been applied if the idea came sooner. My question is what mechanics would be given a pseudo-keyword if such existed back then? Would the [Gustcloak ability](#) be given a pseudo-keyword, or would the repetitiveness in the name not require such a thing?"

**A:** From **Devin Low, Magic R&D:**

"Good question. The primary benefit of these 'ability words' is to allow players to talk about all these cards as a group. It's a lot easier to say: '[Promised Kannushi](#) is awesome with Channel creatures' than to say '[Promised Kannushi](#) is awesome with those guys where you can pay mana and discard them to do something similar to what they do in play.' People are going to come up with nicknames for these abilities anyway, so it helps players communicate if we can help them all use the same name.

"If we had had 'ability word' technology then, we might have written 'Recruit 2' on [Cateran Brute](#) and his Mercenary friends in *Mercadian Masques*. We probably would have written 'Spiritcraft' to link together the *Champions of Kamigawa* creatures with text like 'Whenever you play a Spirit or Arcane spell, target opponent loses 1 life and you gain 1 life.' My favorite example though, is *Planeshift's* 'Gating' creatures.

"Like 16 other *Planeshift* cards, [Cavern Harpy](#) says 'When [Cavern Harpy](#) comes into play, return a blue or black creature you control to its owner's hand.' I remember people saying '[Battlemages](#) and [Flametongue Kavu](#) get absurd with all those guys that return a guy to your hand when they come into play.' Blech. What a mouthful. Writing 'Gating' would give players a word to describe the group as a whole. It would let you say 'Gating on the stack.' It would allow players to see the word 'Gating' and skip over that sentence of rules text, already knowing what it said. And it also would have clued people in to the fact that [Cavern Harpy](#) and [Horned Kavu's](#) abilities were related to each other in some kind of structure. Think it's crazy that people might not notice the similarity? Just think: It never occurred to me that the cycle of [Planeshift Dragon Lair](#)s had 'Gating' just like [Cavern Harpy](#). Until I got to Wizards. And I'm *me*."

August 24, 2005



**Q:** "I was wondering what is the story behind [Sword of Fire and Ice](#) and [Sword of Light and Shadow](#)? Why did you leave out green? And how did you choose the abilities?"

-- Eric O., Winnipeg, MB, Canada

**A:** From **Tyler Bielman, Magic R&D:**

"Verily, Eric of Winnipeg, a noble inquiry worthy of a grand tale.

"Seven millennia ago, Planeswalker Stern and Planeswalker Tinsman forged the swords to do battle in a blood-feud that would tear asunder the very foundation of reality.

"Ok, not really.

"The Swords were created after *Darksteel* moved from Design into Development. History is unclear about who created them (I believe it was Henry Stern or Brian Tinsman), however they were created because we felt that there wasn't enough 'Randomly Cool' equipment. 'Randomly Cool' is a kind of code-term around here for splashy, interesting effects that have a lot of impact when you first see them. When I watched people open *Darksteel* packs at the Pre-release tournament, it was great to see people respond the way we had hoped.

"As far as green's absence goes, you may know that each color in **Magic** has two enemy colors. However, when looking at the colors symbolically, there is usually a more obvious animosity toward one enemy color or the other.

"For example, the enmity between White and Black is easier to see at a glance than the hostility between White and Red. Green is frequently an odd man out when looking at these snapshot relationships, because Nature doesn't really have an enemy in that sense.

"One of the fun things about designing *Mirrodin* was that we could play around with combining colored effects without making gold cards. We picked two of the more natural enemies, Red & Blue and White & Black and made cards that fooled around with what it would be like if those colors got together and 'made' a sword. The abilities changed a lot before we landed on the ones that were printed. Unfortunately, it would be nigh impossible to scribe that entire epic upon this measly page. Verily."

August 23, 2005



**Q:** "I really like Equipment (from what I've seen of it so far), and it has very strong flavor. That is, as long as you equip Knights and Soldiers and Goblins with it. How can you flavorfully explain **Bog Rats** carrying around a **Worldslayer**? Or **Birds of Paradise** with **Loxodon Warhammer**?"

--Zaphod Zarniwoop, Netherlands

**A:** From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:

"Short answer: You can't flavorfully explain those situations. Here's an excerpt from a chat I did on wizards.com as part of 'UnCon,' the online 'convention' that took place on the various Wizards.Community websites. You can find the whole transcript here:

<http://boards1.wizards.com/showthread.php?threadid=94355>

"Equipment was really hard to envision for us. **Magic** has had such a wide variety of creatures that we couldn't really "equip" everything sensibly. So we had to accept the fact that you'd sometimes have a wombat wielding a sword or an ooze wearing armor. It doesn't make much sense from a roleplaying view of the card game, but we thought equipment was a cool enough idea to not worry about that too much."

"As others taking part in the chat pointed out, it's really not much different than enchanting your **Wall of Stone** with a **Crackling Club**, for example. In general, as **Magic's** flavor tightens up, the parts of the game that don't make sense flavor-wise stand out more, but we don't want to let that fact stop us from making flavorful cards."

**August 22, 2005**



**Q:** "In a recent article, Mark Rosewater denounced random discard by calling it 'unfun' and 'luck-based' (in so many words), however it's being reprinted in *Ninth Edition*. What changed in R&D's philosophy to bring back the 'unfun' **Hypnotic Specter**?"

--Robert

**A:** From **Mark Rosewater**, **Magic** R&D:

"Robert,

"Our philosophy has not changed. Our default discard is still non-random. Note the word 'default'. **Magic** by its nature is all about being an ever-evolving game. That means we need to keep shifting and changing things. In addition, we feel it's important to keep the audience off guard by doing things that are not expected. Reprinting **Hypnotic Specter** definitely falls in this camp (see Aaron Forsythe's article [Ninth Time's a Charm: Part 2](#) for more on this). In order for **Magic** to be the game that 'breaks its own rules' from time to time we actually have to break our own rules."

**August 19, 2005**



**Q:** "Where would '**poison**' currently fall in the color pie?"

--Spencer

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

"Yesterday you got to hear Brian Tinsman's take on poison. As it differs a bit from my take, I thought it would be interesting to follow up with how I see poison as it applies to the color wheel. Traditionally poison has been black and green. This has to do with how poison has been used, through creatures. And when one looks at what kind of creatures would be poisonous, you end up at black and green. Black for the unnatural poisoned creatures (the kind that got turned that way through different means or that ended up poisonous as the result of dark forces). Green had the naturally venomous creatures. And as long as you're delivering poison through creatures I think the traditional approach is correct.

"That said, I do believe other colors could have access to poison if poison was handled differently. White for example has a taxing theme that could work nicely with poison. Both black and red have a history of taking damage to themselves for gaining some ability (black usually doing it with a more long term goal than red). This means that these two colors would make sense poisoning themselves. If we decided to make spells that delivered poison through spells rather than creatures, black and blue seem like the most likely candidates as they are the sneaky colors that like to win through deception.

"I actually disagree with Brian in that I don't see poison as 'delayed gratification' but rather 'a willingness to think outside the box.' Poison's most defining trait is that it supercedes life. That doesn't feel much like white to me although as I said above I do think there could be ways to make a white-flavored poison card.

"In short (although this is the fourth paragraph), poison is more of a tool than a mechanic. It has many different potential uses and each use would make different sense in terms of the color pie. So what colors are poison? All of them, but each in its own way."

**August 18, 2005**



**Q:** "Where would '**poison**' currently fall in the color pie?"

--Spencer

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

"Traditionally poison has been **green** and **black**. This was mainly for flavor reasons since snakes, assassins, and other poisonous critters make sense in green or black. Theoretically, if poison came back in a modern set

it would probably be on a relatively high number of cards. If it's going to be an interesting alternate win condition, it should appear in high enough levels to make it a reasonable strategy in limited play. That means it would probably spread over at least two and maybe more colors.

"From a purely philosophical approach, poison is delayed gratification. You attack now for a benefit (winning the game) later. Red wants to win NOW, so it's out. Blue on the other hand, likes playing the long game, investing early for late game dividends. Black's 'win at any cost' philosophy might also work well with the difficult-to-remove poison. Green's philosophy is to bash opponents with giant creatures, so it generally eschews indirect strategies like poison. White can thrive in the long game, and wants to create order and impose its own rules on the game. It might get a little bit of poison. So to answer your question, I think it's blue, black, and maybe a little white."

August 17, 2005



**Q:** "I've noticed that each Onna has a different name with '-onna' added to the end. What does 'onna' mean and what do the names of the Onna mean?"

Tommy, United States

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

"'Onna' just means 'woman' in Japanese, Tommy, but yuki-onna is a major figure in Japanese folklore. **Yuki-Onna** means 'snow-woman,' and in the folklore, she's a demonic creature in the form of a beautiful, pale woman. She stalks the snowy mountains, taking the lives of men during the night. We extrapolated from this myth in the *Saviors of Kamigawa* and created **Nikko-Onna** (sunlight woman), **Kiri-Onna** (mist woman), **Kemuri-Onna** (smoke woman), and **Haru-Onna** (spring woman)."

August 16, 2005



**Q:** "How is token generation divided among the colors?"

--Sean

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

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

"Tokens are a tool we use to represent creatures in the game when it isn't feasible to do so with cards, and that tool is not specific to any one color. For instance, just in the Kamigawa block we have **Oyobi, Who Split the Heavens**; **Meloku, the Clouded Mirror**; **Marrow-Gnawer**; **Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker**; **Sekki, Season's Guide**; and **Tatsumasa, the Dragon's Fang** as cards from each color (and an artifact) that all are capable of creating tokens. So obviously this isn't a 'mechanic' that we put only into one color.

"What does separate the colors, however, is the reasons why they need to produce tokens. All colors use tokens as a way to represent a card turning into something else (**Rukh Egg**, **Tomb of Urami**, and **Penumbra Wurm**, for example). Most colors can also create 'temporary creatures' that don't stick around longer than a turn or so (**Waylay**, **Tidal Wave**, **Broken Visage**). But the colors that really showcase the main use of tokens--getting more than one creature per card--tend to be green and white.

"Green has a 'growth' theme, using cards like **Verdant Force**, **Nut Collector**, and **Sosuke's Summons** to produce steady streams of creatures. White has a 'muster the troops' theme that plays out similarly, with cards like **Mobilization**, **Raise the Alarm**, and **Decree of Justice**. These rules are hardly hard and fast, however--we occasionally will make a card like the aforementioned Meloku that are capable of making a constant stream of creatures in a color other than white or green."

August 15, 2005



**Q:** "Was **Footsteps of the Goryo** printed correctly? As currently worded the card is nearly useless; in order to do anything at all in most situations, it would need to either give Haste or be an instant."

--Jeff

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

**A:** From **Devin Low, Magic R&D:**

**Footsteps of the Goryo** is a great example of a card that requires some creativity and/or sneakiness to make it 'do' something. Sure, if you cast it on **Hill Giant**, it seems pretty pointless. But if you cast it on **Keiga**, it's a **2♣♣ Persuasion**. If you cast it on **Forked-Branch Garami**, it's **2♣♣** 'Return two target Spirits with converted mana cost 4 or less to your hand.' Cast it on **Kagemaro** as a **2♣♣ Wrath of God**. In a pinch, cast it on **Sakura-Tribe Elder** as a **2♣♣ Rampant Growth**. But how do you get all those creatures into your graveyard? **Gifts Ungiven**, **Dampen Thought**, **Traumatize**... the list goes on. And it's arcane! Which means it does approximately 344% more things than I already said. Like countless other **Magic** players, I've had a lot of fun taking seemingly "useless" cards and winning the game with them. (Go go **Creature Bond!**)

August 12, 2005



**Q:** "I see that you decided to add equipment to *Ninth Edition*. That's great, but what was the reasoning behind moving it to rare?"

--Jack

Tampa, Florida

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

"We did add a couple pieces of Equipment to *Ninth Edition* and, yes, each of them moved up one rarity slot. The 'simple' Equipment in the set--**Vulshok Morningstar**--went from common in *Darksteel* to uncommon in *Ninth*, and the splashy showcase equipment--**Loxodon Warhammer**--was bumped up from uncommon in *Mirrodin* to rare in *Ninth*.

"We do this because, when building a Core Set, we examine each card and figure out what rarity it should go into regardless of what it was previously. The 'rules' for *Mirrodin* were different than those for more normal sets--*Mirrodin* had tons and tons of artifacts at every commonality because it is a metal world full of artifacts. Back in 'normal **Magic**' world, artifacts are not common, and appear only at higher rarities. Once we were willing to move Morningstar to uncommon, it made sense to make the Warhammer rare. The fact that we couldn't fit the trample reminder text on it also meant that it would have to be rare--we don't leave reminder text off of commons or uncommons in the Core Set.

"The player in me wants to answer, 'Both cards are absolutely ridiculous in draft, and everyone should be thankful they moved up in rarity,' which is really quite relevant. By taking them out of *Mirrodin*, we actually increased their power (they'll be played in formats without tons of artifact destruction now), so a shift up in rarity is called for. We know that people still enjoy the Warhammer, and if you'd never seen it before it would make sense to you as a rare, so making it one was clearly the right decision.

"(By the way, we used the same logic to move **Dancing Scimitar** down from rare to uncommon--it's a really simple card. We're willing to move cards both ways.)"



August 11, 2005



**Q:** "I thought that Black was not supposed to get efficient small creatures anymore unless they have a drawback? If so, doesn't **Hand of Cruelty** go against this?"

--Ryan

Washington, D.C.

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

"**Hand of Cruelty** does bend the rules slightly but we have a good reason. Up until *Fifth Edition*, **White Knight** and **Black Knight** were natural enemies year after year. *Sixth Edition* was the end of this very popular pairs' run. With the *Saviors of Kamigawa* design we wanted to revisit that natural rivalry with **Hand of Cruelty** and **Hand of Honor**. Of course, this was no problem from a white creature, white is known for its efficient weenies, but as you noted black is not. We wanted to make the pair mirror each other but the only way this was possible was to make them each 2-mana 2/2's; anything else wouldn't emphasize their rivalry. In the end the color pie took a back seat to make **Magic** a more flavorful game."

August 10, 2005



**Q:** "Given that green hates enchantments, how come **Verduran Enchantress** is in the Core Set?"

--James

Melbourne, Australia

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

"Hi James, thanks for writing in! While it is true that green is very good at destroying enchantments, we in R&D don't see green as hating enchantments. Au contraire, mon fraire, or perhaps better said given your location, on the contrary mate. Green loves him some enchantments. It's had some pretty awesome ones throughout the years too, cards like **Mythic Proportions**, **Elephant Guide**, **Heartbeat of Spring**, and **Eladamri's Vineyard**, just to name a few. Like his bosom buddy white (who, incidentally, is even better at destroying them, and even betterer at using them), green and enchantments is like peas and carrots."

August 9, 2005



**Q:** "I was wondering if you could provide a little history on the playtesting of **Shinen of Fear's Chill**. Traditionally, 'CARDNAME cannot block' is a sufficient drawback that it provides a discount to the casting cost (**Villainous Ogre**) or at least keeps it mana-efficient (**Spineless Thug**). But this creature technically costs two mana more than a 3/2 creature 'should', with a serious drawback. Most of the other channeling cards seem to be more cost-effective despite the Channel ability (**Shinen of Life's Roar**, for instance). Since the channel cost is so low, I assume there's a story behind why a seemingly crippled creature is so expensive?"

--Nicholas

Spokane, Washington, USA

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



"We find that Limited play (both Booster Draft and Sealed Deck) is more interesting when there is a bell curve of power level amongst the commons. Some of the commons should be very efficient while others should be mediocre and some should be so bad that they almost always wind up in your sideboard. We knew the black Shinen was over-costed, but we did it on purpose anyway because we needed to curve the set properly for Limited play. I actually chose the Shinen as one of the specific black commons to put 'below the curve' because the channel ability is actually out of flavor for black. When you play it, you get the very red effect 'target creature can't block' and I thought it was fair to charge a black card extra for bleeding that ability out of its normal color."



August 8, 2005

**Q:** "Why, starting with *Urza's Destiny*, was 'Summon [creature type]' replaced with 'Creature-?'"  
-- Matt  
Rutland, VT

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

"All the other cards had the name of the type of card that they were on the type line. So artifacts said 'Artifact', lands said 'Land', and so on. We figured it only made sense for creatures to just say 'Creature'. There was one other exception: enchantments that went on top of other cards were labeled 'Enchant Creature', 'Enchant Land', and so on, instead of just plain 'Enchantment'. Starting with *Ninth Edition* we've fixed that, too -- for more details, see Rules Manager Mark Gottlieb's article [Aura Hygiene](#)."

August 5, 2005

**Q:** "Why is *Ninth Edition* an 'advanced' product when regular expansions are 'expert?'"  
--Adam, USA

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

"There are currently three experience levels for **Magic** product, and each level indicates what you would expect to find in that product. In beginner product, you will only find the most basic keywords and abilities. Beginner product is usually reserved for starter games and has been used in the past for *Portal*. Advanced product has a medium level of complexity, keywords, and abilities on cards. Core sets are usually advanced. In expert product, anything goes -- it is chock-full of complexity. The stand-alone sets and their expansions (the yearly block, like the three sets of Kamigawa Block) are expert level.

"The core sets are slated to be advanced sets because they represent the core elements of **Magic** and they need to be accessible to players with less experience. For instance, you wouldn't find Morph or Affinity in an advanced set, but you would find Flying.

"That said, there is no lack of cool cards in *Ninth Edition* just because it's not an expert set. In fact, many players have already said it is the best core set in years!"

August 4, 2005

**Q:** "I have heard that, long ago, there existed cards that defied the color pie (such as blue direct damage, among others). Which of these aberrations would you deem the most notorious?"  
--Myreldon  
Dallas, Texas

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

"Well, there are many candidates (like *Psionic Blast* or *Gate to Phyrexia*). I'd actually choose *Prodigal Sorcerer*, though. The reason I think it should gain the coveted crown of 'most notorious' is in part that it was very well known and very common (it appeared in base sets all the way through *Seventh Edition*). Also, it actually changed people's idea of what the color pie was. Even though now we'd say red is the color of direct damage, and red is the color that should get a card like *Prodigal Sorcerer*, at the time people felt like 'tap to do a point of damage' was a blue ability, just because *Prodigal Sorcerers* were everywhere. Even R&D was convinced... as late as *Mercadian Masques*, we were making cards like *Stinging Barrier* (and there's *Hermetic Study* in *Urza's Saga*). So I'd say that, for those who believe in the purity of the color pie, *Prodigal Sorcerer* wins for its baleful influence."

August 3, 2005

**Q:** "Many cards (87, I think) contain the phrase 'his or her' or 'he and she.' Why not be more efficient and

economical and say 'their' or 'they'? For example, **Acquire** reads, in part, 'Then that player shuffles his or her library.' Why not have it say, 'Then that player shuffles their library'? While using 'they' or 'their' may not be grammatically correct, it is colloquially acceptable. Wouldn't the space saved be worth it?"

-- Jay  
Warsaw, Indiana

**A:** From **Del Laugel**, Senior Editor:

"That's a question to make an editor cringe . . . . Gender neutral pronouns are a controversial subject. At least once a year, I'll read in the newspaper about someone declaring that 'their' is now a singular pronoun. Older reference books claim that 'he' can refer to someone of either gender. Some even like the look of 's/he.' Grammar isn't as black-and-white as your English teachers might want you to think.

"Even within Wizards of the Coast, different product lines approach this particular issue in different ways. The **Magic** game has used 'he or she' from the beginning. **Dungeons & Dragons**, on the other hand, uses an alternating mix of singular pronouns -- 'he' in some places, 'she' in others. The target audience for the **Duel Masters** trading card game tends to think that girls have cooties, so that game uses 'he' exclusively. And the **Hecatomb** game Wizards is releasing later this month really does use 'their' as a singular pronoun.

"The key is that each product line is consistent about its choices, for everything from pronouns to what gets capitalized to when numbers are spelled out. All those choices add up to something called 'style,' which is documented in each game's style guide. The reason **Magic** cards say 'he or she' is that it's **Magic** style to do so. Editors hate change almost as much as **Magic** players do. :)

"That doesn't really answer your question, though. You asked, 'Wouldn't the space saved be worth it?' The short answer is that no, changes like this aren't worth it. Over the years, I've investigated the space-saving potential of templating changes a lot more radical than this one, and it's really tough to find even a single card that goes from unprintable to printable. It's a hard thing to test with existing cards, though, because cards that aren't printable don't get printed.

"On the other hand, it's pretty easy to evaluate the impact of changes that make card wordings longer. Let's take an extreme example like [moving 'enchant creature' and the like off the type line](#) and into the text box. While the templating team was considering whether to make this change, I looked at every local enchantment card from the *Mercadian Masques* set to the present. The net impact for those six years worth of cards? **Floating Shield** would have needed a shorter name, and **Dragon Wings** and **Parallax Dementia** wouldn't have room for reminder text. That's it. Even **Pemmin's Aura** still fits. If we can add a line and a half to that many cards without anything bad happening, then it's pretty obvious that changing a standard template just to shave off a few letters isn't going to be worth it.

"(By the way, there are 424 cards in the Oracle card database that use 'he or she,' 'his or her,' or both. That sounds like a lot, but it's only 5.7% of the 7451 cards in that database.)"

**August 2, 2005**



**Q:** "Was there a flavor or power reason that **Adamaro** and **Kagemaro** don't have descendants like the other three maros?"

--Andik  
Jakarta, Indonesia

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

"Let me hijack your question for a sec, Andik. They're not actually maros, as most storyline fans know. In **Magic**, a maro is the avatar of a forest, the sum of its life force made manifest. We snuck the '-maro' suffix onto the Ancestor Spirits because we thought it was a cool nod to the original **Maro**, which keys off how many cards you have in hand. In Japanese, that '-maro' suffix is an archaic honorific.

"Anyway, when the Saviors set was designed, each Ancestor Spirit had one accompanying card. The accompanying cards for **Kiyomaro**, **Soramaro**, and **Masumaro** were creatures, so they became the descendants. The accompanying cards for **Adamaro** and **Kagemaro** were noncreature spells, so they became **Gaze of Adamaro** and **Kagemaro's Clutch**. If those cards had been creatures, **Adamaro** and **Kagemaro** would have had descendants, too. In a way I think it's lucky they weren't, because I'm not sure I'd like to know what **Adamaro** and **Kagemaro's** descendants would have looked like!"

**August 1, 2005**



**Q:** "Since a **Nekrataal** is a sheitan, a type of djinn, I was wondering what influenced the decision to change **Nekrataal** to human?"

--David  
Highland Park, Illinois, USA

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

"David, your question took me a while to understand and an even longer while to answer. As most of you know, as of *Ninth Edition*, **Nekrataal** is a Human Assassin. We didn't make this change lightly. To us, the [illustration](#) shows a gaunt, sinister-looking human with a magical brooch. I did some research to try to make sure that the word 'nekrataal' didn't have a real-world meaning, and then we went ahead with the change. After all, if you have a bunch of creatures in play that all look human, we want them all to have the Human type if possible (without retroactively issuing creature-type errata to thousands of cards).

"As for the sheitan reference . . . that took some digging. Here's an excerpt from *The Duelist* #15 (Vol. 4, issue 1), February 1997, just one month before I started work here at Wizards:

"'We had to change Sheitan to Nekrataal,' [Bill] Rose points out. 'Sheitan means 'Satan' to Muslims, and it has never been our intent to offend anyone.'

"When **Nekrataal's** name was changed, so was its concept. The commissioned illustration wasn't of a sheitan, or evil spirit, but of an Arabic-looking human.

"Some players' reaction to **Nekrataal's** sudden humanity is 'Huh?,' and I think that's due to (a) the impression the art makes at card size, as opposed to how it looks at its [full size](#), and (b) Adrian Smith's unique art style, which exaggerates facial features. You can see this on [Aysen Bureaucrats](#), the horseman on [Fallen Askari](#), [Grave Servitude](#), the *Fifth Edition* [Black Knight](#), and on *Portal's* [Mercenary Knight](#) and [Cruel Bargain](#)."



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