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Ask Wizards - October, 2005

Ask Wizards
Monday, October 3, 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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October 31, 2005

Q: "Is it just coincidence that the picture of **Greater Forgeling** shows a badass red creature and three clearly white-aligned soldiers/knights, or was the picture originally meant to be for **Hunted Dragon**? If it was, then how often are pictures swapped from one card to another, and why?"
--Antero
Tampere, Finland

A: From **Jeremy Cranford**, Magic Art Director:
"Hello Antero,
"The three soldiers you see in **Greater Forgeling** are intended to illustrate its special ability ({1R}: Greater Forgeling gets +3/-3 until end of turn). The three soldiers stabbing him with spears represent the -3 toughness. That makes the **Greater Forgeling** angry, so because of his ability he gets +3 power in the process.
"You are right, sometimes we swap art when a card changes during development or a certain piece of art is just perfect for a different card than the one it was originally commissioned for. That happens on one to three pieces of art per expansion on average but that wasn't the case for this one. I would never confuse a Dragon with a **Greater Forgeling**."

October 28, 2005

Q: "Is there actual flavor text for **Un-** cards that have large parts of their flavor text obscured, such as **Once More With Feeling**, or were random words/fragments just added to the card?"
--Etienne
Houston, TX

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, Magic Head Designer:
"Etienne,
"I was in charge of flavor text for both **Unglued** and **Unhinged** and I can tell you absolutely that every piece of flavor text was written, even the parts that are covered up. They are not word fragments. I've searched through my files and I can't find the original text for the specific example you chose, but my memory of it is that it was something close to: 'If you could see this it isn't what you expected.'"

October 27, 2005

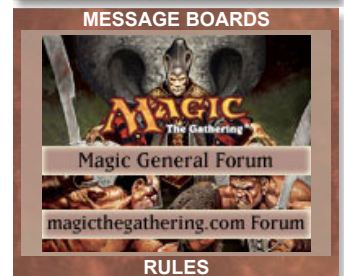
Q: "How come Russian **Ninth Edition** is black-bordered? Is this a new policy?"
--Vincent
Blaine, MN

A: From **Wendy Wallace**, Magic Brand Manager:
"Good question, Vincent. While it isn't a written policy, we do have a tradition of releasing cards in a new language with black borders. It isn't something that's come up recently because Russian is the first language we've added since 1996. The same thing happened then as now: **Fourth Edition** was released with white borders for the languages we had already been doing, and black borders for the new languages."

October 26, 2005

Q: "I have been wondering how much does Richard Garfield contribute to making new cards and sets these days? Is he still involved in the game?"
--Luis
Addison, IL, USA

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, Magic Head Designer:
"Richard keeps involved in several ways. 1) Every couple of years Richard will work on a design team. Since Alpha, for example, he was on the following design teams: *Arabian Nights*, *Tempest*, *Odyssey*, *Judgment*, and



Ravnica. 2) Whenever Richard comes up with card ideas he will share them with the Head **Magic** Designer (currently that's me). They are then doled out to the appropriate set that can use them. 3) Richard, who still works with Wizards on a freelance basis, gives feedback on **Magic** whenever he has a chance to play. Richard's comments are always taken very seriously as he obviously has great insight into the game."

October 25, 2005



Q: "In a [recent article](#), Mark Rosewater pointed out that blocks would now be designed to play better with the blocks next to them in the standard format. How much of a power level increase, compared to previous Standard formats, did you expect when implementing better inter-block design?"

--Jobi
Montrose, CA

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

"It shouldn't lead to a power-level increase. Instead, it should just be that Standard is more fun and more interesting as players mix and match cards from the different blocks to make new decks. There's nothing about that process that means those decks need to turn out more powerful. Of course, if we pushed our block themes to be as powerful as, say, Affinity turned out to be and then added in cards from the next block to make them even better, well, we might have a problem. But that's not what we're going to do. Instead, we don't want our block constructed decks to be nearly that powerful. Internally we actually refer to this as the 'Block Monster' problem. When you have very good block-specific themes (like Rebels or Madness or Affinity) then Standard turns into just a battle between these Block Monsters. In the new world the one power-level change you should expect to see is that block constructed decks may have a slightly lower power-level. Standard should be about the same."

October 24, 2005




Q: "Has there ever been an Invitational card that was submitted and rejected right off the bat as being too powerful?"

--Shawn
Norfolk, VA

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

"Shawn,

"There have been two cards turned in that were rejected for being too powerful (in a way that development couldn't adjust for). Olle Rade, after turning in a red enchant world for  called World of Bums with no rules text that we rejected (as enchant worlds had been retired), submitted this card:

```
Crazy Counterspell
1UU
Interrupt
Counter target spell. Put CARDNAME on top of your library.
```

"The second was Jon Finkel's original submission when he won in Sydney:

```
Wrath of Leknif (Finkel backwards)
1WWU
Sorcery
Destroy all creatures. They can't be regenerated. Untap up to four lands.
```

We would have rejected Bob Maher's original submission in 2004 had he not asked to remove it as his choice before he won:

```
Asp's Grasp
G
Sorcery
Target player gets nine poison counters.
```

"As for the rest of the submissions, we worked with what the winner submitted to make their prize card."

October 21, 2005



Q: "Is there a reason that each new block starts in the fall, rather than at the beginning of the year, since it would be easier to remember each year associated with each block?"

-- Brian
Arkansas, USA

A: From **Michael Turian**, **Magic** R&D Intern:

"There are a few reasons that a block starts in the fall instead of at the beginning of the year. We all know that school isn't as fun as **Magic**. So what could be better than the newest set starting up right at the same time as school? This way when you come back from vacation and get back together with all of your friends, you will be able to play an all new **Magic** set. Second, we all know people want fun stuff to buy/receive during the Christmas season. An October release allows us to have our new block showcased during the Christmas shopping season. Lastly, there is history working for it. The first block, *Ice Age*, was released over the Summer of 1995. The whole idea of 'blocks' was still new to **Magic**. The *Mirage* block was realigned to be released in Fall 1996 and the schedule hasn't changed since."

October 20, 2005



Q: "Why did you remove the Enchant World cards from Standard after *Mirage* block? Did cards like **Teferi's Realm** or **Pillar Tombs of Aku** dominate the environment? Some were really annoying, like **Nether Void**, but the rest of them brought a lot of fun to casual play, and you even reprinted variations of some of them as normal enchantments (**Caverns of Despair** as **Dueling Grounds**, **Living Plane** as **Nature's Revolt**). What was the problem with them?"

-- André, Salvador, Brazil

A: From **William Jockusch, Research & Development:**

"We removed Enchant World cards as part of a general drive to simplify the rules. Enchant Worlds by themselves added only a small amount of rules complexity, but we thought they also added only a small amount of interest. We felt the space they take up in the rulebook could better be used on something else.

"We are constantly doing a balancing act between keeping the game interesting and keeping it easy to learn. This is one case where 'easy to learn' won out."

October 19, 2005



Q: "I know this may seem like an odd question, but on your cards, you reference many books, e.g. Sarpadian Empires Vol. III or other sources. I was wondering if these books actually exist?"

--Anthony

A: From **Doug Beyer, magicthegathering.com** web developer and flavor text writer:

"Thanks for your question, Anthony. For those of you who don't know, Anthony is referring to flavor text in which a quote is attributed to a presumed outside source, like a book, poem or song. (Quotes from the 'Sarpadian Empires' in particular can be found on *Fallen Empires* cards like **Aeolipile**, **Basal Thrull**, and **Fungal Bloom**.)

"With the exceptions of the [Love Song of Night and Day](#) (which is a complete poem written for the purposes of being quoted on many *Mirage* and *Visions* cards) and real-world quotations (see for example the *Eighth Edition* versions of **Cowardice** and **Naturalize**), the books and other texts quoted in **Magic** flavor text are fictional.

"Books, poems, songs, chants, scrolls, sayings and other bits of written lore are made up by **Magic** world-builders and flavor text writers in the same way that characters, objects and locations are. *The History of the Goblin Wars*, the *Necromancer's Handbook* and the *Scroll of Beginnings* are fictional elements of the **Magic** fantasy world in the same way that **Akroma**, the **Mirari** and the **Tel-Jilad** are. In most cases it's not necessary (or possible!) to create the entire text from which the flavor text is fictionally taken -- it's enough that their existence is implied, and the details are left to the imagination."

October 18, 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."

October 17, 2005




Q: "I was wondering if you could help me find a decklist of the old Prosperous Bloom deck that from the *Mirage* Block tournaments? I have a decent sized group of casual players and have heard about the deck from them. Any help that you can provide would be greatly appreciated."

--Paul, USA

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

"Paul, the most famous version of the deck you're asking about would have to be the version Mike Long played to first place at Pro Tour-Paris way back in '97. Here's the list:

Wishing Well		
Mirage Block Constructed - Mike Long - PT Paris Winner		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
3 Bad River	4 Cadaverous Bloom	3 City of Solitude
7 Forest	1 Drain Life	4 Elephant Grass
5 Island	1 Elven Cache	1 Elven Cache
6 Swamp	1 Emerald Charm	3 Emerald Charm
4 Undiscovered Paradise	4 Impulse	1 Memory Lapse
25 lands	4 Infernal Contract	1 Power Sink
	2 Memory Lapse	2 Wall of Roots
	4 Natural Balance	
	1 Power Sink	
0 creatures	4 Prosperity	15 sideboard cards
	4 Squandered Resources	
	1 Three Wishes	
	4 Vampiric Tutor	
	35 other spells	

"You can read about that and many other famous mana engine decks (including the hysterical 'Horsecraft Deck' played by our own Randy Buehler and Mike Turian at Worlds '98) in a great article by Aaron Forsythe, '[Decks with Horsepower](#)'."

October 14, 2005



Q: "One of the formatting changes introduced with *Eighth Edition* was that mana symbols were no longer set on circles colored to correspond with those symbols' colors of mana. With *Ninth Edition*, this change seems to have been reversed. What was the reasoning behind this reversal?"

--Adam
Ithaca, New York, USA

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

"We decided that colored mana symbols in the text box just look a lot better than the black and white ones. We actually always knew this, but when we switched card frames (with *Eighth Edition*) we also switched printing technologies and it took us a while to work out all the kinks (especially with the way non-English product is printed). Once we figured out a reasonable way to make colored mana symbols be colored again, we switched back immediately."

October 13, 2005



Q: "What is the purpose of putting otherwise vanilla landwalk creatures such as **Goblin Spelunkers** and **Greyscaled Gharial** in **Magic** expansions?"

--Jacky
Sydney, Australia

A: From **Zvi Mowshowitz**, **Magic R&D**:

"Landwalking is part of **Magic** just like flying or regeneration. In Limited environments (Sealed Deck, Booster Draft, etc.), it is important to have common cards that can break stalemates, and landwalking creatures serve that purpose well. We know that people get tired of vanilla all the time, especially on all those lonely landwalks, so we tried out several variations. Chocolate landwalkers melted in the hot sun, and those who playtested strawberry ones ended up getting creamed. Everything we tried had a problem. Some of them were too complex to be common, which would mean that they don't serve their purpose. Others were a little bit too nutty. In the end, we realized that vanilla landwalkers are a great tool so long as they're not overused - there's already enough there to be interesting."

October 12, 2005



Q: "Has there ever been a card name you wish you could 'take back'? A name that, in retrospect, you wish you'd used on a different card? If so, what's the most memorable example?"

--Ben
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

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

"Greetings Ben-

"A whole category of names pops to mind - good, simple names that we used on mediocre cards. In the old days, in the Before Time, in the long-long ago, we used up too many names that packed a ton of punch into a simple, clean execution. Some examples that come to mind are **Invisibility**, **Reverberation**, **Reincarnation**, **Transmutation**, and **Teleport**. Now-a-days, in the After Time, in the (oh, forget it) we try to save names like this for powerful, promotable cards."

October 11, 2005



Q: "I've noticed that 2/2 wizards, such as the **Meddling Mage**, tend to be very handsome. I've also noticed that 1/3 wizards, such as **Shadowmage Infiltrator**, aren't so nice to look at. I would think that, these being the high-profile Invitational cards that they are, you would be careful in this area. Is this a trend you plan on continuing?"
--Chris P.

New York, NY

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

"Dear Chris P.,

"Thanks for writing in! I guess the best way this can be explained is that even the ugliest creatures are usually considered 'handsome' by someone, usually the creature's mother. It's funny though, this is the only email we've gotten that claims the Meddling Mage could be even remotely considered as an attractive man. Conversely, we are bombarded by emails (mostly from adoring female fans, actually) about how cute the **Shadowmage Infiltrator** is. I don't work in the Online Media department, but at last count I heard those emails were coming in at a rate of about 2592 per day. Actually now that you mention it, as far as wizards go, the poor **Meddling Mage** is quite homely compared to the male-model types that are **Dark Confidant**, **Sylvan Safekeeper**, **Voidmage Prodigy**, and the aforementioned Shadowmage. In fact, I've heard that the second 'figure' to appear in the **Dark Confidant** art (in the background) is widely considered to be Brad Pitt to **Meddling Mage's** Dom Deluise. Yes, I know that's a rather unfortunate comparison for Chris Pikula who was the inspiration behind **Meddling Mage**, but facts are facts. Since your name is also Chris, I'm not sure if you are a guy or a girl, but if we safely assume you are female, and you appear to consider **Meddling Mage** attractive, I ask only that you consider your fellow humans before deciding to procreate. Thanks for writing in, sorry your warped view of reality doesn't mesh too well with actual facts. Let me know if I can be of any further assistance to you!"

Worth Wollpert
Shadowmage Infiltrator Fan
Wizards of the Coast R&D

October 10, 2005



Q: "I have downloaded some of the coverage available on your website and have really enjoyed it. I wanted to ask when the next coverage will be added? Also, having watched both older and newer coverage, I found that the quality has improved greatly. The commentary is far more interesting, the camera work is much tighter and the general quality of image and sound has improved markedly. Keep up the good work. I realize you must receive thousands of emails every week, but if you are able to find the time to reply, I would be most grateful. Many thanks,"

--Kevin

Norwich, Norfolk, England

A: From **Greg Collins**, event coverage producer for **magicthegathering.com:**

"Hi Kevin --

"Thanks for the kind words about the Pro Tour webcasts. Our next event is Pro Tour-Los Angeles, which starts October 28. The Top 8 webcast will begin Sunday, October 30th at 11 a.m. Pacific Time, with Randy Buehler and Mike Flores providing commentary on the new Extended format (including *Ravnica: City of Guilds*). After that, we're on to Yokohama, Japan for the 2005 World Championships. You'll be able to watch the Worlds Individual Top 8 and Team Final webcast on December 4th. In addition, we'll be posting match clips from our archives showcasing the five Hall of Fame inductees in late November so you can see how these masters of **Magic** played the game back in their heydays."

October 6, 2005



Q: "I was wondering who writes the four or five paragraphs that describe, in detail, the preconstructed decks for any given set. I just thought that the enthusiastic author whose name is not given deserves some credit for his or her in depth study and analysis of the precon." --Scott
San Diego, CA

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

"Hi Scott,

"As a player, I always enjoyed the awesomely enthusiastic theme deck text you mention. In short, the builder of each theme deck drafts his or her own strategy text, then the current **Magic** technical writer 'overwrites' the text as necessary to punch it up and make it more fun and more correct. Some strategy texts are submitted as carefully considered works of art, others as chickenscratched notes on the back of a napkin. So some get changed just a little, while others are overwritten almost completely.

"From the debut of theme decks with the *Tempest* set in 1997, multifaceted **Magic** mastermind Brady Dommermuth overwrote the theme deck text as a side project while advancing through his many roles contributing to **Magic** as a whole (Magic Brand team, the Editing department, R&D Magic set Design, and his current role as Magic Creative Director). In about 2003, the mantle of Magic technical writer shifted to absurdly talented Aaron Forsythe. Around 2004, it went to talentedly absurd Mark Gottlieb.

"Here are the theme deck builders from recent sets who wrote the first drafts of the strategy texts:

"**Fifth Dawn**: Mike Elliott, Aaron Forsythe, Devin Low, Worth Wollpert.

"**Kamigawa Block**: Elaine Chase, Mons 'Goblin Raider' Johnson, Devin Low, Justin Webb, Worth Wollpert.

"**Ravnica Block**: Aaron Forsythe, Nate Heiss, Mark L. Gottlieb, Devin Low, Mike Turian."

October 6, 2005



Q: "Just how many ways of designing cards are there? I've heard of conventional, and top-down, but are there others?"

--Jacky
Sydney, Australia

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

"Jacky,

"In total, there are seventy-two, although modern card design in the latest scientific journals hint that there might be as many as sixteen more. But in all seriousness, it's hard to pin down art by classifications. Conventional doesn't really mean anything and top-down is more about where you start the design (from the vantage point of flavor) than how you design it. Card design, like any art form (and yes I see it as an art form), is almost infinite in its possibilities. How many ways are there to design **Magic** cards? Too many for me to figure out."

October 5, 2005



Q: "When an article has unique artwork for it, like a card with fake text (such as in '[Snack Time with Vorthos](#)' by Matt Cavotta - specifically his 'Sekki, Pronunciation's Guide') who creates that? Does the author just submit his text and someone decides it would be clever to add it, or did the author request it?"

--Scott, USA

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

"Scott, we've actually received that question several times, so it's clearly time to cover it. Generally speaking, you're right, the authors just send in the text for their articles and as I work them up I look for chances to feature something visually. In those cases, once I know what graphic I want there I let the website's artist [Jen Page](#) know what I'm looking for, and then she puts it together. A running joke between us is how ridiculous our email would look out of context (or, for that matter, even in context) to someone outside the company. Subject lines like 'Needed: Giant Wizard Penguin' or 'can you make a Ninja unzip himself out of a boar today?' are par for the course and remind me regularly that, like so many people in this building, I sometimes have a really weird job. (This is also a good time to give credit to the site's two outstanding developers, Kevin Endo and [Doug Beyer](#), as they put together many of the images you see as well.)

"Now in those cases the visual idea comes from me, but there are plenty of times where a writer will suggest graphics as well. And, sometimes, it's somewhere in between, as happened with Sekki, Pronunciation's Guide. Being an artist, when Matt sends in his articles they already come with graphics that he has put together himself. In this case, he had suggested adding a card mockup of the regular Sekki, but changing the name to what you ended up seeing. When I read it, I thought it was a good chance to also add some humorous rules text as well, since we were already mocking the card up anyway. Matt liked the idea and promptly whipped up the mockup himself."

October 4, 2005



Q: "I was wondering why **Yavimaya Enchantress** has become creature type 'human druid' when she looks like an elf?"

--Jimmi
Providence, RI

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

"We messed up, plain and simple. When we added a 'race' creature type to the Enchantresses in *Ninth Edition*, we put the Human type on both and never looked back. Changing creature types multiple times gives everyone a headache, however, especially tournament players. So we're going to leave **Yavimaya Enchantress**'s creature types in place. Instead of changing the Human type to Elf down the line, we'll change the illustration so a human is represented. Until then, the card's illustration will be annoyingly incongruent with its creature type. We're sorry for the error."



October 3, 2005



Q: "Was there a decision to make the Invitational cards from the winners non-Legendary? If so, why? Wouldn't that add more flavor to the game? It certainly would make sense - the cards represent their creators, the 'Legends' of **Magic**."

--Mike
Kansas City, MO

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

"Mike,

"The Invitational cards have been non-legendary thus far for one reason: No one has ever turned in a legendary creature. Would we do it as a legendary creature if it were turned in that way? I don't know. I guess we'll have to wait until it happens. (Although note that we'd never do a legendary creature that was actually the player - that honor has thus far been reserved for **Richard Garfield** and even then only in silver border.)"



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