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Ask Wizards - December, 2005

Ask Wizards
Thursday, December 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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December 30, 2005

Q: "I noticed that Mike Turian, **Magic** R&D Intern, recently answered an Ask Wizards question. Now as soon as I saw the word 'Intern' and 'R&D' in the same sentence, I was immediately envious of this individual. I wish to remove this envy and see what the requirements are for becoming an intern at the almighty, glorious R&D (I'd make a great intern as you can tell) and see if it's even possible for me to apply. If I'm eligible, this Mike Turian figure better watch his chair."
--Carlisle
San Francisco, California, USA

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

"Even if you aren't coming to take my job I had better watch my chair. R&D has the notorious habit of attempting to steal chairs. Worth Wollpert has gone so far as to have his chair labeled with his name. Devin Low has a rubber band wrapped around the leg of his chair to protect it. So before you think about stealing my chair I just wanted to let you know some of the security measures we have in place to protect our chairs.



"The first thing I would recommend if you were serious about becoming an intern in **Magic** R&D would be a college degree. It isn't required, per se, but with so many people interested in working at Wizards of the Coast a college degree makes a positive statement about who you are. When I read the job description for my internship, one thing became clear: to become a **Magic** Developer you have to be very good at **Magic**. When I asked Mark Rosewater what skill was needed to become a **Magic** Designer he said that he always looks for someone who understands how **Magic** works and what makes the game click. The last thing I would suggest is to try your hand at writing about **Magic**. If you want to get noticed writing great articles is another good way to get positive attention."

December 29, 2005

Q: "I've been looking at **Solemn Simulacrum** for awhile now, and thinking about how much more realistically 'human' his face looks than other cards. I was wondering, do any of the illustrations in **Magic: the Gathering** have a designer's face hidden somewhere in it?"
--Thomas K.
Gorham, Maine, USA

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

"It's a little known fact that I was actually the model for Matt Cavotta's painting of **Goblin Piledriver** that he briefly referenced in his [recent article](#). No, I wasn't the goblin with the chin rings (I wish)...I'm actually the guy in the middle getting choked to death. It was rather painful to hold that pose for several hours, but well worth it.

"Okay, that's not really true. The lead designer of *Mirage* and *Visions*, Joel Mick, can claim the first occurrence of a designer's face appearing in a **Magic** card. Since **Jalum Tome** is named after him (his initials are JLM, which makes Jalum if you try to pronounce it), someone thought it would be cute to fit him into the art of **Jalum Gifter** in *Unglued*. Since then, Richard Garfield has also found himself on the front of a card, with the aptly named **Richard Garfield, Ph.D.** appearing in *Unhinged*.

"There are also rumors of alternate art for R&D's **Secret Lair** that includes the five people who were in R&D at the time, but I can't talk

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about that (it's a secret).

"And a final bonus fact—there are actually three different tomes in **Magic** that are named after people who have influenced the game:"

- **Emmessi Tome** – MSE – Mike Elliott
- **Jalum Tome** – JLM – Joel Mick
- **Jayemdae Tome** – JMD – J. Michael Davis



December 28, 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."

December 27, 2005



Q: "I keep seeing references to the player types 'Timmy, Johnny, and Spike' but I don't know what they mean. Could you please explain?"

--Wietse

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

"'Timmy, Johnny, Spike' are terms we use here in R&D to describe the different types of **Magic** players. To find out what each name means (and which one you are!), click on this link: ['Timmy, Johnny, and Spike'](#)"

December 26, 2005



Q: "Is there a reason why sometimes the Ask Wizards question of the day is a repeat?"

--Andrew
Brenham, Texas

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

"It's a rare occurrence Andrew, but when it does happen there are normally three possible explanations. Most often, it's because that particular question is getting asked so much at Ask Wizards that it's worth reprinting every once in a great while. For example, we get asked about the different corners on Alpha and Beta cards on almost a daily basis. An answer by Richard Garfield was posted back on [September 25, 2002](#). Because we were getting the question so often I felt it was reasonable to repeat the answer on [July 19th, 2005](#), nearly three years later.

Another possibility is that it's around the end of the calendar year. **Magicthegathering.com** closes down for the last two weeks of each December to give everyone a break around the holidays, but we run 'best of

content each weekday on the site during that time. So any time you visit the site during that period it's likely that all the daily Ask Wizards you see were run sometime previously that year.

"The last reason is usually because I was sick or otherwise unexpectedly out of the office. When things are running well I'm usually able to send Ask Wizards answers to [Doug Beyer](#) in one-week batches so that we've got some stored up. Sometimes we don't have that many in the can, or I'm unexpectedly gone longer than that, or who knows what else. Normally in that case I'm able to do them from home (as I am with this one) but in rare cases that doesn't work out and either someone else in the office has to scramble to get one in time or we just pick an old Ask Wizards that's still applicable."

December 23, 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."



December 22, 2005

Q: "Dear Mark Gottlieb, is it true that you and Mark Rosewater are arch-enemies? If so, why?"

-- Tal
Auckland, New Zealand

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

"No, Mark and I are not enemies. On the contrary, we have a good working relationship and strong mutual respect. Sure, it gets a little annoying sitting next to him sometimes, since whenever someone comes up to talk to him and says, 'Hey, Mark,' I always turn around. But that's not the basis for deep-seated enmity, is it? Why, I don't know why you would even ask such an absurd question. How would you get the idea that Mark and I were enemies? Um... has he said something? Did he write something in his column about me? (I never read it, so I wouldn't know.) He did, didn't he? Oh, that is so typical of him. That is exactly the kind of underhanded maneuver he (probably) pulls on me all the time. What an enormous jerk. He's plotting against me right now. I can tell. It looks like he's sitting at his computer eating chips, but that's just to fool me -- he's plotting. Well, no dice, Mr. Rosewater. I'm going to get you before you get me. Count on it. And Tal -- thanks for the tip."

December 21, 2005

Q: "Dear Mark Rosewater, is it true that you and Mark Gottlieb are arch-enemies? If so, why?"

-- Tal
Auckland, New Zealand

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

"Arch' enemies? That's a lot of commitment. I mean, you think Superman and Lex Luthor just woke up one day and decided to be arch-enemies? No, it took years. Now, Mark and I are both focused individuals with enough drive to try and make something like this happen, but it's going to take time. You're going to need to be patient. As to why? If I worked through all the factors, I guess the brunt of the reasons fall on this letter, Tal. Us being arch-enemies seems so important to you that Mark and I really don't want to disappoint you. We're both on the same page about this, which is a problem since arch-enemies are supposed to be diametrically opposed to each other. Yet if one of us disagrees then we're never going to make this arch-enemy thing happen. But be assured, Tal, we're taking your letter very seriously. At least I am. Gottlieb seems to be taking the whole thing rather lightly. Curse him!"

December 20, 2005

Q: "The recent answer of the DCI members with the most sanctioned matches was very interesting. Here's another along that line... Among DCI members who played a sanctioned match in the last month (are 'active'), which members have the lowest DCI numbers (have been playing the longest)?"

--Karl
Toronto, Canada

A: From **RE Dalrymple**, Senior Manager, Organized Play Operations:

"And the player with the longest running DCI tournament history that was active within the last month is...

"Chris Otwell of Colorado Springs, CO. He's been playing since December 1, 1995, is a regular participant in [Friday Night Magic](#), and has a DCI number that is in the eight thousands."

December 19, 2005



Q: "For the week of August 15, it seemed as though the theme common to all the cards on Card of the Day was the word 'Gift' in their name. However, Friday's card was '[Presence of the Master](#)' and I cannot, for the life of me, see how it is relevant to the rest of the cards that week. What's the connection?"

--Sean
Jacksonville, FL

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

"First off, for those that aren't aware, when I put together the [Cards of the Day](#) I often do them in five-card cycles so that each card shown that week has some common thread with the other four. I've never been sure how many people actually play the game of trying to find the connection, but it's an amusing thing to put together and helps Mark Rosewater and me narrow the enormous field of **Magic** cards down to something manageable each week.

"How those cards connect varies pretty wildly (though card name is often a good place to start), and while some tend to be trivially easy once you know to look for them (such as how Arcane Week only features Arcane spells), others can be a lot more challenging. (A good place to start, however, is always to check if there was a theme week on the site at the time, or if we were previewing a new set.)

"One thing I should point out, however, is that not all weeks have a theme across the Cards of the Day. Sometimes I'm out covering a Pro Tour, on vacation, sick, or who knows what else. Sometimes that means a theme gets interrupted, or not done at all depending on circumstances. For example, last week was Equipment Week, but I was out early in the week, which is why [Scathe Zombies](#) seems so out of place when compared to the other four cards I used for Equipment Week. Also, for 2005 I was out for quite a bit of time around the [birth of my daughter](#). So, while 2005 is a bit hit and miss for these, those who have fun with this kind of thing will probably be able to find many as they work their way through 2004. (Anything before 2004 and you're before when I got hired at Wizards...)

"So, enough background, how about I actually answer your question? The answer is that this week revolves around 'gifts' just as you guessed. (That was National Thanks For All The Gifts Week, which I couldn't pass up mirroring in Card of the Day.) The part you missed was that [Presence of the Master](#) was included Friday because of the pun with 'presents'. (You can thank Managing Producer Monty Ashley for all the groaning you're hearing, as he came up with Presence of the Master as soon as I mentioned the 'gifts' theme.)

"So, what are some of the others we've done? Here are a few weeks to get you started.

2005

[July 25](#) (Core Set Week)
[June 27](#) (Beatdown Week)
[Tuesday, May 31](#) (Monday was an off day for Memorial Day)
[May 16](#) (during *Saviors of Kamigawa* previews)
[May 9](#) (the other week of *Saviors* previews)
[January 10](#) (*Betrayers of Kamigawa* previews)

2004

[December 6](#) (This one revolves around a common number. The embarrassing thing is that I can't remember why that number was relevant at the time for the site! If anyone figures it out please post to the message boards!)
[November 23](#) (The week leading in to Thanksgiving)
[November 15](#) (One of my (silly) favorites, this was during *Unhinged* previews)
[November 8](#) (also *Unhinged* previews)
[November 1](#) (Monty Ashley did this one while I was away. It's tough but also pretty cool.)
[October 4](#) (a fun one)

"Once you get past there you start getting into the period where I was doing the Card of the Day cycles a lot more often, so for those so-inclined I'll leave the rest of the finding to you.

"If you think these are fun please take a moment to let me know in the message boards. I've been letting them slip a bit lately but I'm more than willing to start them back up if people are interested.

"Have fun!"

December 16, 2005



Q: "I've noticed that in the last few large expansions there has been an artifact that pushes cards from the graveyard to the bottom of the library ([Tel-Jilad Stylus](#), [Reito Lantern](#), and now [Junktroller](#)). Is there a purpose

to these cards that I'm just not getting?"
--Tyler

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

"Thanks for your question, Tyler. There's a very simple answer to your question: Yes!

"Use 1: Prevent Yourself from Getting Decked

"**Junktroller** is getting a lot of play in *Ravnica* Limited games as defense against the Dimir milling strategy. Cards like **Vedalken Entrancer** and **Duskmantle** put cards from your library into your graveyard, so putting cards from your graveyard into your library -- an exact reversal of the Dimir offense -- is equivalent to gaining life. The extra turns you can get by doing this may be the turns you need to win the game. **Tel-Jilad Stylus** saw some casual-play action back in the days of *Mirrodin* as part of a combo with **Leveler**; it could put your lands back into your empty library while your 10/10 monstrosity went to town.

"Use 2: Hose Graveyard Strategies

"**Reito Lantern** was designed primarily to be an answer to soulshift in Kamigawa block limited games. After one of your opponent's creatures with soulshift dies and that player targets a Spirit in his or her graveyard, you can make that Spirit vanish in response. In the current block, **Junktroller** hates the Golgari almost as much as it hates the Dimir, since it can take dredge cards from your opponent's graveyard and put them safely out of reach on the bottom of his or her library.

"Use 3: Negate Trades

"This is where we start to get wacky. Every card has a use -- but some uses require more imagination than others. **Tel-Jilad Stylus** has done good work for me in the past. The key to the card is that it targets a permanent you *own*, not one you control. This is an excellent, cheap, repeatable way to get rid of permanents you own that an opponent controls. It doesn't matter how big it is, what kind of permanent it is, whether it's indestructible.... The best ways to abuse the Stylus are either by making trades or giving your opponent tokens. Exchange control of two permanents with **Confusion in the Ranks**, then use the Stylus on the permanent you just gave your opponent -- Now you have your opponent's permanent, and your opponent has nothing! It works with **Avarice Totem** as well. (See "[The Eyes Have It](#)") Another trick? When you play **Hunted Horror**, your opponent gets two 3/3 creature tokens. You own those token creatures since you controlled the ability that created them, so you can Stylus them into oblivion.

"Use 4: Recursion Fun

"Sometimes you want to put one of your permanents on the bottom of your library just so you can search it back up! That's what the Stylus-Avarice Totem deck mentioned above does. Earlier in the year, I [wrote about a deck](#) that uses **Reito Lantern** as part of a **Verdant Succession** engine. By repeatedly putting green cards like **Mystic Snake** or **Sakura-Tribe Elder** back into my library, I could keep fetching them over and over as the game progressed. The **Reito Lantern** mechanic let me mimic having infinite numbers of these creatures (not just four!) until I could achieve a nearly unbreakable **Mystic Snake** lock.

"As you see, this mechanic actually has multiple purposes. Some were specifically intended. Some were left for deck designers to dream up. But no matter what cards you asked about, the answer would have been yes - every card, every mechanic has a purpose. If it's not apparent to you what it is, that just means it's up to you to puzzle out!"

December 15, 2005



Q: "Szadek appears in a lot of Dimir flavour text, but do the forces of Dimir even know who their leader is?"
-- Cody
Campbellton, Canada

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

"Cody,

"**Szadek** is like the Wizard of Oz. The people of the Emerald City sing about the wizard, and they are pretty sure he exists, but they don't get to have him over for dinner and they don't get to talk to him. Szadek's minions know enough to be afraid and to respect his power, but they don't see him or communicate with him. If they are lucky they know a specter who knows a **guildmage** who knows one of the **Necrosages** - and the Necrosages get to talk to Szadek and hear his evil commands."

December 14, 2005



Q: "Mark Rosewater and others have repeatedly [said](#) how the 'free' mechanic from Urza Block is 'inherently broken' and that most of the cards with the ability are overpowered. However, cards like **Early Harvest**, **Turnabout**, and **Rude Awakening** that untap all lands you control instead of a set number of lands don't seem to be considered 'inherently broken'. I was wondering what makes the cards with the 'free' mechanic broken but these other cards not broken."

--Andrew
State College, Pennsylvania, USA

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

"Andrew,

"As the cards you mention point out, the effect of untapping multiple lands is very powerful. The free mechanic does this as a side effect to a normal spell. Or in other words, the mechanic itself is very powerful before you even add the effect of the spell. In fact, many people played 'free spells' because of the free effect and not because of the card itself. This is a big sign that the mechanic is degenerate. On top of that, the free mechanic had the problem that there was no way to change the costing to effect the untapping part of the spell. Making it more expensive just made it more powerful. What this means in the big picture is that we will still make spells that untap multiple lands but we will do them carefully and we won't make it a side effect of an entire mechanic."

December 13, 2005



Q: "I've been trying to understand how the orochi ability (when this creature damages another creature tap that creature, it doesn't untap during its controller's next untap step) fits into green's slice of the color pie. Could you help me out?"

--Nate

Reading, MA

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

"The Orochi ability started from flavor. We wanted the snake people (who clearly made sense in green) to have an ability to reflect their venomous attacks. The tap down ability felt like something that would happen if someone bit you with a poison bite. Traditionally tap down creatures rest in white and blue, but green has dabbled with the ability (on cards such **Tangle** and **Elvish Hunter**). In addition, the fact that this ability only worked through creature combat helped give the ability a green feel."

December 9, 2005



Q: "What are the differences between the self-destructive tendencies of red and black?"

--Sean

Omaha, NE, USA

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

"Interesting question, Sean. I think self-destructiveness in red tends to represent the consequences of impulsiveness and recklessness. In black, it represents the cost to be paid for power. In other words, red is self-destructive because it simply does whatever comes to mind without considering the consequences. Black is self-destructive because when there's power to be gained, black considers the consequences and then decides they're worth suffering."

December 8, 2005



Q: "The card '**Orcish Settlers**' from *Weatherlight* is a parody on the painting 'American Gothic' by Grant Wood. Is there other **Magic** art (humorous or serious) that is based on or inspired by modern art?"

--Freek

Deventer, Netherlands

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

"Here are the other references to real-world art I could dig up, Freek. I'm sure I'm missing some."

- "**Circle of Protection: Art** -- DaVinci, Michelangelo, Edward Munch, Hieronymus Bosch
- "**Brushstroke Painter** -- Piet Mondrian
- "**Clam-I-Am** -- Dr. Seuss
- "**Toy Boat** -- the unholy lovechild of Scuffy the Tugboat and Thomas the Tank Engine
- "**Mise** (see [today's Magic Arcana](#)) -- Cassius Marcellus Coolidge
- "**Icy Manipulator** -- Some think this is an homage to M.C. Escher. I'm not so sure."

December 7, 2005



Q: "I was looking through my '**Unhinged**' cards lately and trying to understand the jokes in them. The one card I could not understand, however, was **Mise**. Could you explain it to me?"

--Josh

Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA

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

"Actually, Mike Flores has already explained the [origins of the word 'mise'](#) on this very site. Just scroll down to the May 13th question.

"As far as the *Unhinged* card, we were looking for a chance to make a reference to one of the more popular pieces of **Magic** slang. (There was also some talk of making a card called 'Thanks Barn!' but for better or worse that didn't make it into the set. It did, however, show up in the secret message that may or may not exist on the cards.) The mechanic just refers to the fact that, when you cast this card, you have a chance to get lucky ('mise') and turn it into **Ancestral Recall**. Of course, tricky players could use it alongside cards that let them know the **top** card of their library, but I don't know anyone who would do something like that, and I certainly hope you don't either."

December 6, 2005



Q: "Why do cards like **Veteran Armorer** say each other creature? In **Veteran Armorer**'s case, why not just make him a 2/1, and then say 'Creatures you control get +0/+1'?"

--Gunner

Woodbridge, Virginia, USA

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

"The philosophy at Wizards of the Coast is to make our cards the repositories of all knowledge. When **Veteran Armorer** comes into play it is a 2/2 creature, so it is listed as such so that no one is misled or forced to do unnecessary math. The closer those numbers are to a creature's real power and toughness the easier it is on players, both when evaluating the card and when looking at it on the board. In most people's experience, a 2/1 that gives all creatures you control +0/+1 will then become translated in your head into a 2/2 that gives other creatures you control +0/+1; it 'is really a 2/2.' There are exceptions to the rule of course, but with new cards those departures are generally by choice for reasons specific to those cards."

December 5, 2005



Q: "In **Magic**, what is the difference between a Sphinx and a Lammasu?"

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

"The difference is pretty much the same as the one in real-world folklore. A [sphinx](#) is a winged lion with the head of a man or woman, based on a unique creature from Greek myth known for its famous riddle. A [lammasu](#) is a protective creature from Mesopotamian myth. It's a winged bull with the head of a man, thought to ward off evil spirits and such."

December 2, 2005



Q: "I was wondering what influenced the decision to bring back creatures from old sets such as the loxodon, the vedalken, and the viashino?"

--Dylan

Grass Valley, California

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

"We wanted Ravnica to seem like a world that contained a wider-than-normal variety of humanoids, Dylan, so we went looking for humanoids that we thought players would enjoy seeing again, or that we want to explore in more depth. We also like giving players cards that they can put in older decks. Sure, there may not have been many players running loxodon decks in September . . . but there are certainly more now!"

December 1, 2005



Q: "Why are 'o's used to separate the mana symbols on **Magic** playtest cards?"

-- Daniel

Americus, Georgia

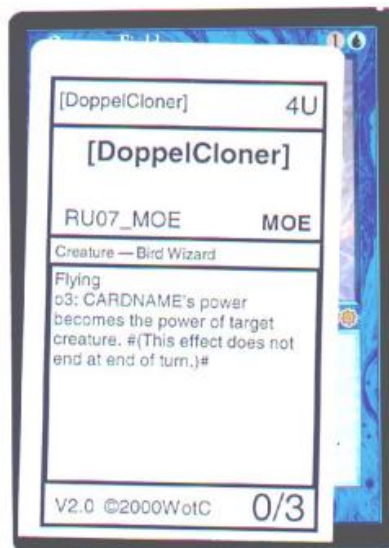
A: From **Paul Sottosanti, Magic R&D:**

"Ah, the mysterious o's. Well, no one really knows why the o's are there, but they've been around for as long as we can remember so honestly, we're just afraid to take them out. We're kind of superstitious here in R&D. Not to mention, it just makes the mana costs look more elegant and official, don't you think?"

"...

"Okay, kidding. If you take a look at the mana cost on a printed card, each symbol or number is surrounded by a circle. The 'o' is a notation to the typesetter to put the circle around whatever comes directly after it. This is fairly obvious in the mana cost field, but becomes quite relevant for rules text, where a character like 'X' should sometimes be in a circle and other times not.

"Playtest cards function just fine without them, so the o's don't tend to get added until around midway through development when editing starts to look at the file."



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