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# Ask Wizards - February, 2006

Ask Wizards  
Wednesday, February 1, 2006

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## February 28, 2006

**Q:** "What's that **Magic** card that Bennie Smith is holding in his author picture? Please help me, because it's driving me batty trying to figure it out!"  
--Shawn  
Columbus, Ohio, USA

**A:** From **Bennie Smith**, [magicthegathering.com](#) columnist:



"When I got my first gig writing for this site (the original [Single-Card Strategies](#) that ran monthly/bi-monthly before it became a weekly feature with Adrian Sullivan), I was told I needed to send in a digital picture of myself. Since I didn't own a digital camera, I asked my in-laws if I could come by and have them snap my picture digitally.

"On the drive over, I decided that I wanted to add a little something more than just my ugly mug grinning for the camera. I have a bunch of oversized **Magic** cards that would work perfectly, and the one I had in mind to use was **Infernal Spawn of Evil**. Since I kept all of my **Magic** cards and stuff in the trunk of my car, it didn't even occur to me that I didn't have it with me until I was at my in-laws, frantically pawing through the trunk. Then I remembered-- I had packed away the oversized cards with some of my gaming books when we moved and I had not yet unpacked them!

"So, I ended up riffling through my group game deck and picked **Saber Ants** -- one of my favorite creatures ever printed -- as the card I would hold up for the picture. Unfortunately, with the picture shrunk down so small, you can't really make out what it is. But now you know!"



## February 27, 2006

**Q:** "Who created the booster draft format?"  
--Eric  
Willow Grove, PA, USA

**A:** From **Andrew Finch**, R&D Director of New Business:

"Booster draft has its origins back in the early days of playtesting prior to the actual release of **Magic: The Gathering**. Many of the original playtesters like Bill Rose and Charlie Catino were big fantasy baseball fans. So drafting in general played an important part in the development and playtesting of **Magic**. Those early drafts were very simple looking, more like what we would call Rochester draft today than a booster draft. Groups of four or more players would lay out all the cards on the table face up and take turns picking them. At some point drafts evolved into the booster draft format we have today, but no one is quite sure who introduced it. Richard Garfield points towards the 'Philly Group' which included Bill Rose and Charlie Catino. However, Bill does not remember his group coming up with it, and Charlie vaguely remembers Richard teaching it to him. Both Skaff Elias and Jim Lin don't believe that their playtest group came up with the idea either. So the true origins of the booster draft format is lost to the annals of history, at least for now."

## February 24, 2006

**Q:** "**Order of the Stars** doesn't bear the watermark of the Orzhov guild, but the star sigil on their shields and their purpose seems to lean towards the Orzhov. Are they in some way connected to the Guild of Deals?"  
--Sean  
Coxsackie, NY, USA

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

"Sean,

"A card could get a watermark in the following circumstances:

1. It was multicolored (and this includes hybrid cards).
2. The card has another color's mana symbol on it or directly refers to another color or its basic land (and even then only if the reference is positive, meaning the card wants the two colors to work together).
3. The card has the guild's keyword.



"As far as the **Order of the Stars**, the symbol on the shield, while similar looking, is not actually the Orzhov symbol. If you look closely, you'll see that the symbol on the shield has a flower in the center of it. The similarity was just coincidence."

**February 23, 2006**



**Q:** "*Ravnica* is full of cards that create saprolings, the Selesnya guild in particular. Some of the flavor text implies that the Conclave considers these new members. How intelligent are saprolings actually supposed to be in this setting? Are they just sort of minions, like zombies only using green and white mana? Or are they actually living things that can communicate?"

--Jonathan  
Boston, MA

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

"The Selesnya treat all living things with respect and love, Jonathan -- provided those living things are favorably disposed toward the guild. So to some extent, the level of self-determination of the saprolings doesn't matter much to the Conclave. That said, the saprolings range in intelligence from ant-like to dog-like, depending on the magic used to create them. The dryads of the Conclave can communicate with the saprolings telepathically, although the saprolings aren't capable of complex thought."

**February 22, 2006**



**Q:** "Was the Bloodthirst mechanic inspired by **War Elemental?**"

--James  
Chestertown, Maryland, USA

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

"James,

"I went to the source and asked the designer of the bloodthirst mechanic, Brian Schneider. He says no. He says the ability (originally called paincast) was designed during *Saviors of Kamigawa* design and that it was trying to get a blood frenzy flavor. The original mechanic, by the way, didn't make the creature bigger but instead made it cheaper. This is when I poked my head in design (one of the perks of being Head Designer) and said that because of convoke in *Ravnica*, bloodthirst had to change its effect. I liked how the effect happened, just not the effect itself. After playtesting a few versions, the team (Mike Elliott, Aaron Forsythe, Devin Low and Brian) decided to go with the +1/+1 counter version."

**February 21, 2006**



**Q:** "Why didn't you include the '**Gruul Turf**' land in the Gruul precon deck? All the other guilds got their 'tap for two' lands, why didn't the Gruul?"

--Chris  
East Brookfield, MA, USA

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

"Hi Chris,

"As it turns out all of the other theme decks have at least one of the 'Karoos' or as you call them the 'Tap for two' lands. This was more coincidence than anything else. Each theme deck is built individually from one another while only following some very generic constraints. Personally when I was building the deck I didn't feel the need for **Gruul Turf**. I saw it as a fairly aggressive Gruul deck that wouldn't want to invest the time waiting for the **Gruul Turf** to come online.

"If you disagree with my decision feel free to add in a few **Gruul Turfs** of your own. Theme decks are a great way to practice your deck building skills and making changes to them are always fair game."

February 20, 2006



**Q:** "When creating the card **Tibor and Lumia**, how did you decide that two wizards, each with a presumably different ability given what the card can do, could be represented as a singular Legendary creature?"

--AI  
Washington, USA

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

"It's always tough to concept cards that do two or more unconnected things, AI. The *Mirage* block cycle of **Charms**, for example, are pretty flavorless mainly because they do three totally different things. I considered conceiving the **Tibor and Lumia** card as a single figure who had both flight and 'earthquake' magic, but I couldn't think of a compelling way to represent such a figure visually. So that led to the idea of the card representing two figures, one for the flight magic, one for the blasted magic. After that the characters kind of suggested themselves. Here's the original art description I wrote:

*"Show a husband-and-wife team of Izzet archmages. Tibor, the man, is a master of the air and can grant both of them magical flight. Lumia is a master of earth magic and can bring magma to the surface, scorching enemies on the ground. Tibor is wise, noble, head in the clouds. Lumia is fiery and wild-eyed. Both should have the Izzet look/feel in costuming, hair, etc."*

February 20, 2006



**Q:** "Why was **Char**, which features a picture of an Izzet mage and flavor text about the Izzet, released in *Ravnica: City of Guilds* instead of in *Guildpact* with the rest of the Izzet-flavored cards?"

--Alex  
Renton, Washington, USA

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

"**Char** isn't an Izzet card, Alex, because there's nothing blue about it (and it doesn't have replicate). But the non-guild-affiliated spell cards in the block, such as **Char**, must usually show someone casting the spell and/or someone being affected by it. We sometimes used these opportunities to preview or show off the guilds a bit. I think if you keep your eyes peeled for guild-affiliated figures in non-guild-affiliated spells, you'll find a lot more than just this Izzet pyromancer."

February 17, 2006



**Q:** "I know that the creature from **AWOL** is on **Urza's Hot Tub**. However, what is the other text on the milk carton on **AWOL**? I can make out that it's a **Magic** label, but it doesn't look like it says 'The Gathering' underneath it."

--Kurai  
Fort Worth, TX, USA

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

"Kurai,

"We actually had an article on *Unhinged* that showed off numerous graphics used on the product and packaging that were too small to see all the details. However, since we've received this question several times since then, here's a note to anyone that missed it: you will definitely want to read the excellent article on *Unhinged* that Brian Dumas wrote for this site back in late '04: [Behind the Scenes of Unhinged](#)."

February 16, 2006



**Q:** "Why was **Unsummon** removed from *Ninth Edition*? Was it part of the overly ambitious program of blue-hosing, or is there some more subtle purpose to its absence? I ask because I would have thought it would be a great card for the Core Set - it rewards careful timing, and teaches players the stack (especially where combat damage is concerned). Or did **Boomerang** just make it redundant?"

-- Ezra  
London, England, UK

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

"There was no sinister subtext behind the removal of **Unsummon** from the Core Set in *Ninth* (not a permanent change by any means, I assure you). It was done simply to shake things up. We wanted to give **Time Ebb** a slot, as it generates an effect that is very blue yet has never been in the Core Set before. Because it targets

only creatures, it overlapped with **Unsummon** a bit too much, so **Unsummon** was given the day off. All the things **Unsummon** does as far as teaching can be accomplished just as well with **Boomerang**, and **Boomerang** is also more of a tournament staple."

February 15, 2006



**Q:** "What was the first non-basic land, besides the dual lands, that made a great impact on **Magic** and how huge was it?"

--Zhafir  
Singapore

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

"*Arabian Nights* was **Magic's** first expansion, and it included several lands that expanded the scope of what lands were capable of doing. **Deserts** were everywhere, so much so that there were creatures with Desertwalk or whose job was to protect other creatures from deserts, but the big one was a little card called **Library of Alexandria**. This was way before the play/draw rule, so both players would draw on their first turns, and using all your mana at maximum efficiency was neither as powerful given the cards available or even appreciated as an important strategy. When a player had **Library of Alexandria**, he would use it to draw an extra card every turn and use that extra card to keep himself at the seven cards required to keep using the Library. Library continued its reign of terror until it was restricted, at which point it continued it on a smaller scale - for a long time, players would be able to summarize many of their losses by saying 'he drew his Library.'"



February 14, 2006



**Q:** "I have noticed that there are several different Gruul clans mentioned in *Guildpact* (The Burning-tree clan, The Ghor clan, The Scab clan, and the Skarrgan). But which clan is **Borborygmus's**? Also, does **Ulasht** belong to a specific clan? And are there any unmentioned clans?"

--Caz  
Ontario, Canada

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

"Caz, we purposely didn't identify 'Rygmos's' clan. His is the most powerful in terms of brute force and clout among the Clans, but it's never specified or described in the Ravnica-block cards or novels. When we return to Ravnica, as we undoubtedly will, we want to have details to fill in and explore, and perhaps who **Borborygmus** runs with will be among those details. As for **Ulasht** . . . crazy hellion-hydra abominations aren't generally interested in guild membership. Ulasht is like a mascot for the Gruul, a kind of living totem that represents the guild's values and passions. And are there unmentioned clans? Yes, countless ones. The clans mentioned on cards are just some that have influence in The Tenth, the core, 'downtown' district of Ravnica. And 'Skarrgan' isn't a clan, per se, but the adjective that refers to all those who reside in Skarrg. That includes more than one clan, as well as other denizens and creatures not part of the Gruul Clans."

February 13, 2006



**Q:** "There appears to be a cycle of good uncommons in each of the Guilds. These cards take the most efficient part of each of the two colors and combine it into one color. For Orzhov it's **Mortify**, for Gruul it's **Wreak Havoc**, Boros is **Lightning Helix** and Izzet is **Electrolyze**, and so on. I cannot, however, figure out what the cards of the cycle for the Selesnya and the Dimir cards are. Which cards of those fits the cycle of combining one of each color's proficiency into one efficient card?"

--Kevin  
Edina, Minnesota, USA

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

"Lots of the cards in this block fit the pattern of efficiently combining what each of the two colors in a guild are good at, but there's no one explicit 'cycle.' We just looked for whatever opportunities we could find, but didn't force things if there was no obvious good fit."

February 10, 2006



**Q:** "Who or what is that fat creature visible in the art of **Dark Confidant** and **Lurking Informant**? My first thought was he is an Orzhov, but that doesn't really match with the appearance of other Orzhov. So what gives?"

--Ted  
Saugus, MA

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

"Both figures are, in fact, Orzhov patriarchs, Ted. You're right that they don't look quite the same as others. Part of that is simply Ron Spears's art style, but there's something else at work. It was always my thought that the Orzhov aristocrats move very slowly from magically prolonged life to semi-undeath to ghosthood. But **Magic's** creature types don't do transitional phases -- a creature is simply a Human or a Zombie or a Spirit, and can't be somewhere in between. The figures in the cards you mention represent a patriarch who's well on his way to undeath."

February 9, 2006



**Q:** "Why is **Giant Solifuge** an insect when the picture is so obviously a spider? You're not getting rid of Spiders as a type are you?"

--Ti

Barrington, NH, USA

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

"I cheated a little, Ti. **Giant Solifuge** is a **solpugid**, also called a 'wind scorpion' -- a giant version of a real-world creature. It's technically an arachnid (as are scorpions), but is neither a true spider nor a true scorpion. In **Magic**, 'Spider' so strongly means 'can block creatures with flying' that I chose to fudge the Solifuge and call it an Insect instead. Maybe it was a bad idea to use that concept . . . but solpugids are so damn creepy-looking that I couldn't resist."

February 8, 2006



**Q:** "I noticed that the artists' credits for some unhinged cards have a nickname of sorts. For example, **Greater Morphling** is credited to Greg 'six-pack' Staples and **Fascist Art Director** is credited to Edward P. 'Feed Me' Beard, Jr. What do these nicknames mean? And what other cards are there with such nicknames?"

--Ken

Singapore

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

"Ken,

"What does it mean? You do understand you're talking about *Unhinged*. I feel lucky when things in that set mean anything. But luckily for you, the item you're asking about just happens to mean something. You see, *Unhinged* has an 'artist matters' theme. These are all cards that mechanically care what artist a particular card was illustrated by. As a little bonus for those cards, we gave the artist on each a nickname. What do all the nicknames mean? It varies. Some are jokes on the artist's name. Some are jokes about the card as a whole. Some are inside jokes about the artist. Basically, we chose things we thought were funny or insightful, although mostly we just leaned toward funny. And yes, we did ask permission of the artists involved."

February 7, 2006



**Q:** "What went into the decision for **Putrefy** to have the 'cannot be regenerated' clause while **Mortify** does not?"

--Cameron

Fremont, MI, USA

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

"Hey Cameron,

"Good question. Here are four reasons:

1. Artifacts can regenerate (**Welding Jar**, **Masticore**, etc.), though admittedly infrequently. Anti-artifact cards have a history of preventing regeneration (**Pillage**, **Oxidize**). Enchantments, on the other hand, typically cannot regenerate, and enchantment removal spells thus usually don't sport anti-regeneration clauses.
2. **Putrefy** combines **Terror** and **Oxidize**, both in mana cost and effect. We sometimes called **Putrefy** 'Oxor' in playtesting, for 'Oxidize-Terror.' Since the anti-regeneration clause is a part of **Oxidize's** identity, as well as **Terror's** identity, we decided that the clause should be part of 'Oxor' too. **Mortify**, on the other hand, is the combination of **Terror** and **Demystify**, both in mana cost and effect. Since **Demystify** doesn't prevent regeneration, that's a reason for **Mortify** not to either.
3. Regenerators have not historically made it in constructed very often, largely because many of **Magic's** most popular removal spells prohibit regeneration (**Wrath of God**, **Swords to Plowshares**, **Terror**, **Last Gasp**, **Incinerate**, etc.) R&D has a long-term goal of making regeneration matter more. One way to accomplish this is to use anti-regen clauses less frequently. We knew that **Putrefy** and **Mortify** would both be heavily played. We felt that **Mortify** preventing regeneration would just hammer regeneration out of constructed too much.
4. Finally, the power level of individual effects in **Magic** ebbs and flows. If we always said 'This new removal spell has to have all the bells and whistles of the previous one!', while also adding new bells and whistles, it would create a power creep that could not be sustained.

"We discussed your question a lot during development, and some people were in favor of sync'ing up the two spells, but in the end these 4 reasons were more convincing."

February 6, 2006



**Q:** "Mark Rosewater has commented several times that the 'free' mechanic from Urza block was inherently broken. In a recent Ask Wizards he explained why cards like **Early Harvest** and **Rude Awakening** were printed, but I'm curious why **Rewind** was included in *Ninth Edition* if this mechanic is such a problem?"

--Lincoln  
Houston, Texas, United States

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

"First of all, we here in R&D love 'poking the bear,' meaning doing something that we have called out as dangerous in the past. It keeps us on our toes and keeps players guessing about what we'll do next. **Rewind** is kind of in that category. In general, the free spells that 'broke' were ones that you could play on your own turn and did something proactive. **Frantic Search** and **Palinchron** are the best examples of such cards. The best way to abuse such a card is to play it with a reduced cost (via something like **Sapphire Medallion** or **Sunscape Familiar**) and/or with something that allows your lands to produce more than one mana (a la **Tolarian Academy**, **High Tide**, or even just **Fertile Ground**). That way you got the spell's effect and end up ahead in mana. Enough of that and eventually all the extra mana is used on something game-winning, like **Stroke of Genius** or **Mind's Desire**.

"**Rewind**, being a reactive spell that you generally play on an opponent's turn, does not lend itself to such combinations easily. There are a few cute things you can do, but no combos involving **Rewind** have been found that would make an impact on top-level constructed play in the way the other free spells did. That, in my mind, makes it a great card to reprint—it reminds you of vastly overpowered cards from the past, but isn't problematic in and of itself."



February 3, 2006



**Q:** "Does Richard Garfield or any high rung R&D member like Mark Rosewater have a room or vault in their house that is home to every **Magic** card made? If so, I'm sure you got them for free, right?"

--JD  
Monticello, Arkansas, USA

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

"JD,

"I'm not sure how to answer this question. If I tell you there is no such thing as a vault, I'm worried I'll crush the spirit of numerous players who dream of one day joining the ranks of R&D in order to get their key. But if I say there is a vault then I might be misleading the public into believing that it exists. (And as we've learned recently, making jokes about non-existing things can sometimes result in nasty letters.) So, I'll say 'maybe' with a knowing wink that says 'by maybe I mean no.'"

February 2, 2006



**Q:** "What was the first article that appeared on **magicthegathering.com**?"

--Ilvaldi  
Laurel, Maryland, USA

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

"It's a little screwy how that happened actually. **Magicthegathering.com** officially launched on January 2, 2002. On that day it had several different things to read, including an article from Mark Rosewater introducing the site ('[In the Beginning...](#)'). The screwy thing is that the site actually published live a day before that, with an article by Anthony Alongi ('[On Your Mark... Get Set... Radiate!](#)'), but there was no true introduction on that day, and Wizards didn't publish any links our announcements about the site anywhere else on Wizards.com. Why the extra day? Wizards thought it would be fun to let people discover the site on their own before anything official had been announced. So, the site went live a day before its 'official' launch day. It wasn't until the second day that Mark's introduction article was published. Because of all that, Anthony actually gets the honor of having our first article, even though Mark's article was the one that introduced the site!"

February 1, 2006



**Q:** "Back in the old days the colour Red had an affinity with two elements: Earth, and Fire. Earth was represented with cards like **Stone Wall**, **Earthquake**, **Earth Elemental**, Minotaurs, Dwarves, Giants, etc. These days, Red seems to be all about goblins, fire and blowing things up: the chaotic fire side of red, while the Earth Side of the colour seems to be forsaken. Was this a conscious decision?"

--Matthijs  
Arnhem, The Netherlands

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

"On our own boards, in a thread I'm too lazy to dig up, some players began to polarize between the 'value' definition of the five colors and the 'elemental' definition. For example, is blue about water and air, or is it about knowledge, logic, and manipulation? Is red about earth and fire, or about passion, impulse, and rage? My

answer, I think, is 70/30 in favor of the value definitions. Why? Mainly because the elemental definitions get repetitive and monotonous pretty fast, whereas the value definitions open up more options and more interesting options.

"The particular issue of red's connection to earth and stone has another aspect as well, though. Red has and will continue to have earth/stone-themed cards. But green wants to be connected to earth as well, in the soil sense. So red gives up a few of its 'earth' cards for green's sake."



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