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Ask Wizards

Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Ask Wizards - March, 2006

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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March 31, 2006

Q: "With *Coldsnap* being released as the 3rd set in the *Ice Age* block, where does *Homelands* fit in the scheme of things? Will it still be listed as part of *Ice Age*, or will it now be listed as a 'special' set like *Chronicles* or *Unglued*?"
--Kent
Marysville, Washington, USA

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

"Now that *Coldsnap* exists, there is no need for *Ice Age* block to contain something like *Homelands*. *Homelands* was never actually part of *Ice Age/Alliances*, it was just added in to give that 'block' three sets. Now *Ice Age* has the two expansions it needs, and they are both far better fits than *Homelands*. So, *Ice Age* block constructed post-*Coldsnap* will now consist of *Ice Age*, *Alliances*, and *Coldsnap*. That leaves *Homelands* without a block to belong to, but it is for the best."

March 30, 2006

Q: "I saw in [Mike's recent column during Swap Week](#) that the online store is going to be part of the **Magic Online** client. Normally when buying stuff off the web I am comfortable but always check my browser for the SSL icon. Will purchases using MTGO III similarly be safe? Thanks."
--Vincent
Renton, Washington, USA

A: From **Brian Lindley, Producer, Magic Online:**

"The MTGO III client software utilizes 128-bit SSL encryption for all network communication with the **Magic Online** servers. So, purchasing product through the **Magic Online III** client will be just as secure as it is now through the web-based store."

March 29, 2006

Q: "I have a question that sorely needs to be answered about the **Magic** colors. It has come to my attention recently while searching [Gatherer](#) that White has only 17 5/5s. Only 10 of these are mono-white, the rest are multicolored. Plus, 3 of these mono-white 5/5s are part of a cycle that forces the creature to be 5/5s. Out of the 803 white creatures, there are only 7 5/5s that are mono-white and not part of a cycle. For a fairly common number (approx. one in forty creatures is 5/5) this seems rather odd. Why does white have so few 5/5s? Thanks."
--Charlie
Pacific Palisades, CA

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

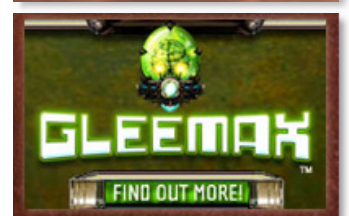
"Charlie,

"Why are there so few white 5/5s? The same reason that red has so few creatures with vigilance (there are five - only two of which are monored) and blue has so few first strikers (there are seven - three of which are monocolor). It's the reason that black's creatures have a higher power on average than toughness and green has less instants and sorceries at common. It all boils down to the heart of the game: the **Magic** color pie.

"The five colors wouldn't mean anything if there wasn't a strict division between them. One such factor has to do with creature size. White is the weeniest of the colors. Flavor-wise, white wins by making an army of little guys. Its strength lies not in the individual strength of its creatures but the combined strength of its army. If white had too many 5/5s, it simply wouldn't have any need to build an army and it would start losing this flavor. We feel this flavor is very important and thus, we just don't make all that many white 5/5s."

March 27, 2006

Q: "In reading Chris Millar's recent [Creative Death Match](#), I noticed that **Stone Rain** has been reprinted a lot! Does it hold the record for being reprinted the most? Not just in the core sets, starter, and all portal sets, but it



has also been in five regular sets. Are there any cards that beat it for ubiquity? "

--Ryan
Columbus, OH, USA

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

"Hi Ryan,

Here are a couple of cool things about **Stone Rain** that you may or may not have known. It has been done in 20 different **Magic: The Gathering** sets starting with Alpha and going through *Ninth Edition*.

"It appeared in all three *Portal* sets, *Starter '99*, *Starter '00*, every Core Set, and was in every large expansion until *Urza's Saga*. In *Urza's Saga* it was removed to make space for **Lay Waste**, a cycling version of **Stone Rain**.

"Stone Rain is tied for least amount of rules text among Sorceries and Instant. No Instant or Sorcery has less than three words as rules text. **Stone Rain** originally read, 'Destroys any one land.' but as of *Fourth Edition* reads, 'Destroy target land.'

"In the Core Set **Stone Rain** has never had flavor text but in expansions it always has. Everyone from **Arcum Dagsson** to **Oracle en-Vec** has been quoted on the ubiquitous spell.

"Nothing besides Basic Lands beat **Stone Rain** for appearances in **Magic**, but what card is number two... **Disenchant** with 16 different printings.

March 24, 2006



Q: "If a player were to make Top 32 at Pro Tour Prague, he would then be qualified for the next Pro Tour. If this pro tour happens to be a team Pro Tour (Since PT: Charleston is) could this player simply bring any 2 players of his choice? How does qualifying for a team Pro Tour work when it's done individually?"

--Taylor
Richmond, VA, USA



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

"Hi, Taylor.

"The **Magic: The Gathering** Premier Event invitation policy states that each individual format Pro Tour invites the Top 32 from the previous individual format Pro Tour. Since Pro Tour-Charleston is not an individual format Pro Tour, The Top 32 from Prague will be invited to the next individual format Pro Tour (which is Pro Tour-Kobe in October).

"The invitation criteria for the Team Pro Tour in Charleston are:"

- Any team of three players whose member's combined Pro Player Club levels equal 7 or greater. Teams formed in this manner must be announced at player registration before the tournament.
- Any team of three players whose member's DCI Constructed rating average is 2000 or higher.
- Any team of three players whose member's DCI Individual Team Constructed rating average is 1700 or higher.
- The Top 8 finishing teams of each Grand Prix tournament that feeds the appropriate Pro Tour event.
- Teams (who were previously uninvited) who earn invitations through appropriate Qualifier tournaments.

March 23, 2006



Q: "Nobody's more excited than I am about the advent of the Orzhov Syndicate. As a player that fondly remembers the day when White got reanimation (am I dating myself if I admit that I've still got copies of **Resurrection** floating around?), cards like **Debtors' Knell** make me all weak in the knees. My question is, are we possibly, hopefully maybe, just maybe, seeing a return of creature reanimation to White's slice of the color pie? Inquiring reanimators want to know!"

--Jay
New York, NY

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

"Jay,

"Reanimation is in white's slice of the pie. It's just at a very low level. Will you see more white reanimating spells? Yes. Eventually. Just not in the number or strength of the black ones."

March 22, 2006



Q: "Why is it that **Crovax the Cursed** is a Vampire, but his future form, **Ascendant Evincar**, is not? How did Crovax rid himself of that vampiric curse? On a similar note, what is the reason that **Baron Sengir** was denied the 'Counts as a Vampire' text?"

--Daniel
Jacksonville, Arkansas, USA

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

"Over **Magic's** history, legendary creatures have really been through the wringer, Daniel. Once upon a time creatures got only one type, and if that type was Legend, well, the other types that creature should have been simply left off. (**Shauku**, **Endbringer** should be a Vampire, also.) That's what happened with **Baron Sengir**. **Ascendant Evincar** I'm less sure about. Perhaps he wasn't really a vampire, per se, after he was 'completed' by his Phyrexian masters. More likely, though, it was simply an oversight. It could have even been the case that at one point in its development **Ascendant Evincar's** text box was too full to accommodate the 'counts as a Vampire' text. That's a shot in the dark, however."

March 21, 2006



Q: "It was noted in one of the articles on this site some time back that Ravnica block was going to be all about encouraging people to play exactly two colors. Well and good. Then along comes a cycle of five four-color creatures. They're certainly interesting deckbuilding material, but they don't seem to fit the block theme very well. Why did you put the four-color series in *Guildpact*, rather than stash it in a filing cabinet for another block?"

--Bryan

Bellingham, Washington, USA

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

"Bryan,

"While we are big fans of our themes, we recognize that not every player is going to be a fan of every theme we do. Because of that, we make sure every set does a few things that, while not contradictory to the theme, are non-theme related. The Nephilim cycle (or the Hunted cycle in *Ravnica*) is a good example of this practice."

March 20, 2006



Q: "I was shuffling through some *Onslaught* cards and I noticed something: In the background of **Disruptive Pitmage** there appears to be a fountain...with legs! This alone wouldn't have been curious, but I remembered that **Skittish Valesk** looked similar, and transferring to my red stack, sure enough the bases look strikingly similar. Did the mage turn the Valesk into a spring of water? Or was the Valesk simply tired of having pennies thrown into him?"

--Chris

Argyle, Texas, USA

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

"Chris, what you're seeing are the morph-shells that those creatures emerged from. The six-legged morph 'crawler' represents what a creature with morph looks like while it's face down. You'll see the same morph-shell on **Ascending Aven**; **Backslide**; **Break Open**; **Exiled Doomsayer**; **Ixidor**, **Reality Sculptor**; **Patron of the Wild**; **Primal Whisperer**; **Scornful Egotist**; **Serpentine Basilisk**; and **Skirk Alarmist**."

March 17, 2006



Q: "With the shifting of the color pie recently, wouldn't a Black/Green variant of **Vindicate** make more sense than White/Black, since Green is the best at killing artifacts, second at killing enchantments and either second or third at killing land, while White doesn't come in second for any of those anymore?"

--Matt

Staten Island, New York, USA

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

"Matt,

"You are correct that both black/white and black/green have the proper overlap to do a **Vindicate** effect from a color pie philosophy standpoint. The reason we haven't done a black/green **Vindicate** is mostly a matter of wanting to carve out flavor for each two-color combination. Black/green already has the ability to destroy large swaths of permanents with cards like **Pernicious Deed** and R&D feels that duplicating the **Vindicate** effect in two color pairs doesn't seem necessary. Note that choices like this are made about the color pie all the time and that making differences between the colors, or in this case two-color pairs, is fundamental to making the color pie have meaning to the game."

March 16, 2006



Q: "I qualified for JSS Champs last year off rating and was wondering if I can qualify off rating again this year? Also, in order to qualify for JSS Champs off rating, how high does your rating have to be?"

--Josh

Washington, USA

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

"Josh,

"As long as you have 0 Pro Points and are still 15 years old or younger on the date of the JSS Championship, you can still qualify via DCI Rating. The top 50 players (who are 15 years old and younger and have 0 Pro

Points) in the DCI-Constructed rating (published on Jun 14, 2006) will be invited to the JSS Championship. The actual rating that you will need to be in the Top 50 is hard to predict, so keep playing!"

March 15, 2006



Q: "Along with being an avid **Magic** player, I'm also a casual (well, semi-casual) comic book reader. So it surprises me when I see familiar comic book artists such as Glen Fabry (*Centaur Safeguard*, *Goblin Spelunkers*, *Nullstone Gargoyle*, etc.) in *Ravnica*, and Pat Lee (*Sink into Takenuma*, *Reciprocate*, *Giant Solifuge*) in Kamigawa and *Guildpact*. Is this a recent trend in hiring comic book artists for **Magic** art or have I missed some that were in previous sets?" --Paul Arlington, TX, USA

A: From **Jeremy Cranford**, **Magic** Art Director:

"Hello Paul,

"I'm not sure if this is a new trend or an old one, but many comic book artists have painted for **Magic** and many **Magic** artists still illustrate comics. Chris Moeller, Greg Staples, Jim Murray, Carl Critchlow and Kev Walker are a few of the guys who fit that description. Being a comic book fan myself, I like to contact artists who I think would be a good fit with **Magic** in addition to comics. Glen Fabry, Pat Lee and Simon Bisley were a few of the artists that took me up on that offer."

March 14, 2006



Q: "When are the 2005 World Championship decks scheduled to be released, and which decks will they be?" --Paul Hanover, New Hampshire, USA

A: From **Jake Theis**, Assistant Brand Manager for **Magic: The Gathering**:

"Hey Paul,

"We currently have no plans to release the 2005 World Championship decks. We try to have a full product offering for our fans, and the increased popularity of the Fat Pack seems to have gobbled up the demand for a fourth **Magic** product (after Boosters, Tournament Packs, and Theme Decks). Sorry, Paul.

"While I have this forum, I can make a positive announcement, though. Do to the influx of emails and other responses we have received about the Fat Pack redesign, we will be bringing back the 'old school' spin-down lifecounter to the Fat Pack with the *Coldsnap* release. You asked for it; you got it. Spin-o-rama!"

March 13, 2006



Q: "I don't know how big Grand Prix rooms are, but 1592 people sounds like a lot. I was wondering how the DCI managed to fit 1592 players into one room, or did they use multiple rooms?"

--Justin Basking Ridge, NJ

A: From **Gijsbert Hoogendijk**, DCI Manager Europe / 2nd Head Judge, GP Paris:

"In the past there have been European GP's run in multiple rooms (Antwerp '98 and also Leipzig '05 which was split in two so it wasn't a problem) or on multiple floors (Heidelberg '02). It has proven that those configurations are not optimal for a smooth tournament (Leipzig was the exception where we had a room for each tournament 'part') so we have been trying to rent bigger venues.

"For [Paris](#) we anticipated around 1500 people. Seeing the queues during registration gave us some scary moments, but in the end the 1592 was not as bad as we imagined then. One small problem though was that we had really run out of chairs so around 75 players needed to build their decks on the floor. This wasn't a problem when the actual matches started because of the byes and players dropping. Recently (GP Lille and Hasselt) the venues were actually too big and we needed to build 'walls' to make the area look smaller, but it's a chance we take because there is always the chance that 1500+ players could show up when a European GP is centrally located!"



Chairless in Paris

Q: "Is **Magic** going to design a 'color' set for each of the other colors like they did with *Torment* when black 'infiltrated' the other colors as well as increase the number of black cards? Or are the colors balanced and there is no need for you guys to do that. Can you even comment on stuff like this?"

--Reg Washington, USA

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

"I can't comment on stuff like this, but for you I'll make an exception. Hopefully no one will notice. R&D didn't do *Torment* because the colors were unbalanced - we unbalanced them in *Torment* because we hadn't done it before. The reason we do things like *Torment* is to constantly give our players something new and unexpected. We want them to think: 'Wow, I never thought they would do that. I didn't think they *could* do that. That's cool!' Then they have to figure out how to react to it. If we did a set where white and green outnumbered the other colors *cough* *Judgment* *cough* to compliment *Torment*, that would make sense, but we wouldn't go to that well a second time without a good reason. But, then again, that gets you back to what players do and don't expect."

Q: "I plan on playing at [Grand Prix Madison](#) on March 25th and also in a few of the qualifiers. I'm wondering how the byes will work for the GP. Does everyone on the team need to have byes? Thanks!"

-- Chicago, IL, USA

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

"Your team can receive byes for Grand Prix Madison in 3 different ways.

"DCI Rating: If the average Constructed rating of the 3 members of your team is 2000 or higher, your team will receive 2 byes. If the team average is 1900-1999, your team will receive 1 bye.

"Pro Players Club: If the total players club levels of the 3 members of your team is 8 or higher, your team will receive 2 byes. If the total levels for your team is 4-7, your team will receive 1 bye.

"Your team can also win 2 byes by finishing first in a Grand Prix-Madison Trial. A list of GP-Madison Trials can be found [here](#).

"Good luck!"

March 8, 2006

Q: "Who, exactly, is Zur the Enchanter? I've noticed his name in several *Ice Age* cards' flavor texts and am familiar with his *Weirding*. But I've never seen him on a card. Perhaps he's a planeswalker? Did he have anything to do with the brothers' war? Thanks for shedding some light!"

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

"Zur the Enchanter, also called Zur the Mad, was a rival of the famous Gustha Ebbasdotter, the founder of the *School of the Unseen*. Whereas Gustha espoused *illusion magic* and was an ally of the nation of Kjeldor, Zur used more *manipulative magic* and considered Kjeldor to be a corrupt culture and a lost cause. Zur had a small following of like-minded mages. Although he tangled with Gustha more than once, Zur's eventual fate is unknown. Some believe him dead, others believe he found the immortality he so desperately sought and became a hermit."

March 7, 2006

Q: "What is 'substance'? It appears in the Comprehensive Rules between Transmute and Bloodthirst and it says that it is a 'static ability with no effect'. What is this useless keyword, which has never appeared on a card, doing there?"

--Adam
Davie, Florida, USA

A: From **Mark Gottlieb**, **Magic** Rules Manager:

"Useless??? Adam, just because substance doesn't do anything-or mean anything-doesn't mean it's useless. And as for appearing on no cards, well, I suggest you type it into [Gatherer](#) and see what pops up.

"Substance is the newest *Mirage* block keyword. *Mirage* and *Visions* each had a cycle of 'insta-chantments'-enchantments that you could play at the time you could play an instant. If you played one that way, though, you'd have to 'bury' it (we now say 'sacrifice' it) at end of turn. They worked great! Then a funny thing happened: The entire rules system was yanked out from under them. When the *Sixth Edition* rulebook was released, it reworked the end phase, and these cards didn't work so well anymore. Let's look at the difference:

"Mirage functionality: You play *Shock* targeting my *Squire*. I play *Armor of Thorns* on the *Squire* in response. *Armor of Thorns* enchants the *Squire*, it becomes 3/4, and 2 damage is dealt to it. At the end of the turn, the damage wears off and the *Armor of Thorns* goes away. The *Squire* lives another day.

"Sixth Edition functionality: You play *Shock* targeting my *Squire*. I play *Armor of Thorns* on the *Squire* in response. *Armor of Thorns* enchants the *Squire*, it becomes 3/4, and 2 damage is dealt to it. At the end of the turn, the 'sacrifice *Armor of Thorns*' ability triggers. It resolves, and *Squire* becomes a 1/2 creature with 2 damage on it because damage hasn't worn off yet. *Squire* dies. All *Armor of Thorns* did was delay the *Shock* damage, but it didn't save the creature.

"Why did this happen? Because the end phase is broken into two steps: the end of turn step (when all 'at end of turn' things happen), then the cleanup step (when all 'until end of turn' things stop happening). Damage that's been dealt to creatures wears off at the same time as the 'until end of turn' things stop happening. *Armor of Thorns* and friends worked under the new rules (they just worked differently and poorly), so they weren't changed.

"So these 10 *Mirage* block enchantments worked the first (good) way from 1996 to 1999, and they worked the second (crappy) way from 1999 to 2005-twice as long as they worked the original way. And no one noticed or cared. But then *Mirage* was released for **Magic Online**. Suddenly the functionality of these cards became relevant again, especially in *Mirage* limited formats. These cards were significantly worse than they were when they were first printed, they didn't work the way they were originally intended to work, and (worst of all) they didn't work the way players would think they worked.

"I was tasked with making these cards work the way they worked in *Mirage*, despite the fact that the rules don't support that kind of functionality. Various options were considered. Maybe the sacrifice ability triggers at the beginning of the next upkeep? Too much of a functional change, especially with phasing in the same set. Maybe these cards would only get their 'enchant creature' ability temporarily, so these Auras would fall off at the same time damage cleared, then be put into the graveyard as a state-based effect? **Parapet** (a *Visions* insta-chantment) isn't an Aura, so this solution wouldn't work for all of these cards. The 'sacrifice' ability needed to trigger during the cleanup step. My solution was to give these enchantments a dummy keyword ability until end of turn and an ability that would trigger when it lost that dummy ability. The dummy keyword is substance. And the result is that the sacrifice ability triggers and resolves during the cleanup step, after damage has cleared from the enchanted creatures.

"Current functionality: You play **Shock** targeting my **Squire**. I play **Armor of Thorns** on the **Squire** in response. **Armor of Thorns** enchants the **Squire**, it becomes 3/4, and 2 damage is dealt to it. During the cleanup step, **Armor of Thorns** loses substance and damage clears from **Squire**. Then the 'sacrifice **Armor of Thorns**' ability triggers. The Aura goes away, and **Squire** lives another day.

"The best part is that you can ignore everything I just wrote and just play these cards like you think they work... and you'll probably be right."

March 6, 2006



Q: "Why are there so many cards in *Ravnica* and *Guildpact* that let you draw a card upon resolution? **Repeal**, **Smash**, **Shadow of Doubt**, **To Arms!**, **Wildsize**, **Festival of the Guildpact**, all cantrip spells. Is this supposed to tie into *Saviors of Kamigawa's* cards in hand ("wisdom") mechanic, or is it a coincidence?"

--Brian

Ashburnham, Massachusetts

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

"Hi Brian,

"Although you're right that we have recently been trying to tie the blocks together more consistently, in this case it is largely a coincidence. The main reason for the large number of cantrips in *Ravnica* block is to help smooth out mana troubles in Limited. We knew that you all would be playing 3 or 4 colors in both sealed and draft on a regular basis, and cantrips simply help players churn through their deck until they find all of their various land types.

"As an added bonus cantrips also add some variety to Limited games. Effects like the ones on **Quickchange**, **Festival of the Guildpact**, **Reroute**, and **Surveilling Sprite** would likely not be playable without the "draw a card" clause. Having it there, however, means that unique situations like a creature being **Quickchanged** in response to a **Cleansing Beam** or a **Gelectrode** being **Rerouted** to kill itself come up a lot more often.

"Essentially, cantrips do so many good things for a Limited format that we tend to include them by default, and only exclude them from a block if we have good reasons for doing so."

March 3, 2006



Q: "The art for *Ravnica* is fantastic, particularly the illustrations of what appears to be a team of artists: Zoltan Boros & Gabor Szikszai. Are these real artists or pseudonyms? Surely 'Zoltan Boros' isn't that artist's real name?"

--Matt

Las Vegas, NV, USA

A: From **Jeremy Cranford**, **Magic Art Director**:

"Hello Matt,

"Don't you love non-American names like Zoltan and Gabor? Those are not pseudonyms but are indeed their real names. If you'd like to learn more about this amazing team you should visit their website: www.boros-szikszai.com. Stay tuned for another new artist you'll soon learn about who's first name is 'Volkan'."

March 2, 2006



Q: "I love the idea of *Coldsnap*, but I'm confused about how the books are going to work. *The Gathering Dark* was already portrayed as the first *Ice Age* book. Are you going to break the trilogy pattern for the first time with *Coldsnap*?"

--Tom

West Milford, New Jersey, USA

A: From **Alex Tinsman**, Associate Brand Manager, **Magic: The Gathering**:

"We joke around here that *Coldsnap* has more ice than *Ice Age*. And, well, it does. The epic of *Ice Age* begins once more and lucky for you, we went ahead and reprinted *The Gathering Dark*, by the talented Mr. Jeff

Grubb. So, no, we're not breaking the trilogy but instead we're taking you back to the desolated Terisiare and Jodah's battle against Lim-Dûl. (Think Phyrexians, smashing mirrors and sparks galore.) The Archmage-Eternal finds a way to end the Ice Age and naturally, we find a way to bring it back to you. We like *The Gathering Dark* so much, we're even including it in the *Coldsnap* Fat Pack where it can live right next to the new pitch cards and snow-covered lands!"



March 1, 2006



Q: "What do you do when you get a concept that goes against the established design molds for reasons such as the storyline? In other words, and as an example, if the ongoing storyline provided for the opportunity to have an elf character who is almost entirely blue in terms of the characteristics that define each colour in **Magic**, what would you do?"

--Antonio
Mexico City, Mexico

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

"Good question, Antonio. Generally speaking, I think it's good to have the occasional character (or other element) that 'plays against type,' such as the brilliant goblin engineer (**Slobad**), for example. But too many of those get old pretty quickly. In other words, for characters to be more interesting by defying expectations, you need plenty of characters that *fulfill* expectations.

"To answer your question, though, one of the perks of my job is that I can always negotiate and work with the other creative professionals who work on **Magic** to come up with solutions. If, say, the author of one of our **Magic** novels wanted a blue-aligned elf character, maybe that would be fine (depending on the context, the character's importance, whether or not s/he was slated to appear on cards). Maybe the elf's blue qualities could be adapted to green. For example, blue is intelligent, generally, whereas green is wise. Or maybe the character should be changed from an elf to some other, more blue-friendly race. As with almost everything related to **Magic**, the decision would be made collaboratively."



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