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Ask Wizards - June, 2006

Ask Wizards
Thursday, June 1, 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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June 30, 2006

Q: I was wondering how big a regular guy would be in power and toughness terms. Would a 5'8" 160-pound guy be a 1/1 like **Eager Cadet** or would he be bigger? Not all the human characters are the same size. Does this indicate a difference in skill, like **Gerrard Capashen** vs. **Eager Cadet**?
--Anthony

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

Thanks for your question, Anthony. Power and toughness sometimes correspond to plain ol' size, but lots of other factors can explain a creature's power and toughness as well: magical strength, destiny, fighting skill, ferociousness, and so on. I would say an average human would be 1/1, or maybe even 0/1. That's because **Magic's** creature cards all represent creatures that are way better than the average thing of that kind. After all, if you're a wizard fighting a magical duel, why would you summon a random farmer or merchant to do your bidding?

June 29, 2006

Q: If you had to describe each of the ten guilds in one word each, what would those words be?
--Travis
Redding, CT

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

Fun question, Travis.

Selesnya: Nurturing

Golgari: Ambitious

Dimir: Manipulative

Boros: Proactive

Izzet: Visionary

Gruul: Passionate

Azorius: Prudent

Simic: Evolutionary

Rakdos: Carnal

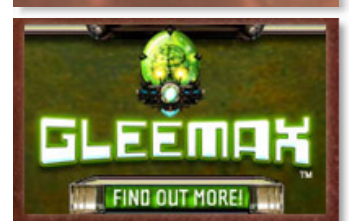
Orzhov: I moved the Orzhov to the end of the list because they're certainly the hardest to sum up in a single word. They really want two words because they're so divided and dysfunctional. They are privileged and oppressed, resourceful and hopeless, ruthless and apathetic. I guess if I had to choose one word it would be **Conflicted**.

June 28, 2006

Q: I know that the people over at R&D have been working to clean up **Magic** lately by doing such things as defining the color wheel and what a certain type of card should be able to do. However, doesn't the legendary land shown Monday violate one of the biggest rules for making a card, which is that all lands should have some kind of mana producing ability? I thought that it was decided a while ago that all lands should produce mana, so why make this land now?
--John
Billerica, MA

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

John,



We do have a lot of rules in **Magic** design and development. You are correct that one such rule is "all lands must produce mana". But these rules are trumped by an even larger rule: from time to time, it's important to break the rules. Afterall, **Magic's** identity is that of a game that breaks its own rules. That said, this isn't something we do lightly. We don't break rules for no reason. So why doesn't Dark Depths tap for mana? For starters, it did for a while. Originally, you could tap it for one colorless mana. Doing so put an ice counter on the card. The idea was that each time you used it Marit Lage was that much further frozen into the ice.

We had to drop that text because it didn't fit on the card. We added back the mana producing half, but without the drawback, the card proved too good in playtesting. The card was very flavorful, crucial to the flavor and story of the set, and was so unique that we decided that it was worth breaking the rule, particularly since this isn't out of place in the context of the older sets *Coldsnap* harkens back to. This is the first time in many years though, so don't expect us to make a habit of it. Oh no, for the upcoming sets we have a whole bunch of different rules we're planning on breaking. I'd better start working on the answers to those "Ask Wizards" now.

June 27, 2006



Q: Looking at Monday's preview card Dark Depths, does the supertype "snow" imply that it taps for colorless snow mana?

--Mark
Montreal, Canada

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

No, the supertype "snow" implies that it's really cold. Maybe even icy.

Dark Depths has no mana ability. That's kind of strange for a land these days (it's more like the kind of thing we'd've done back in the days of . . . *Ice Age* . . .), but there you go. There are two types of permanents that tap for mana: 1) A land that's a Plains, Island, Swamp, Mountain, or Forest, and 2) A permanent that says it taps for mana. Dark Depths is neither of these. The supertype snow doesn't come with an intrinsic mana ability.

So what's the deal with the ❄️ symbol? Well, there will be plenty of snow permanents that *do* have mana abilities. For example, the card **Snow-Covered Island** taps for blue mana and has (or will have, as soon as Oracle is updated) the supertype snow. So you can use a ❄️ produced by a **Snow-Covered Island**, for example, to pay for an ❄️ in a cost.

June 26, 2006



Q: The recent success of the book and movie "*The Da Vinci Code*" has inspired me to search elsewhere for secrets hidden in great works of art. So naturally, I turned to **Magic**. Is there indeed a secret code hidden in the artwork of **Magic** that hints at a heresy so great it could fundamentally destroy **Magic** as we know it???

--Andrew
Washington, USA

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

Yes. Let's look at how *The Da Vinci Code* and Magic tie together.

First, look at the title of the book "*The Da Vinci Code*". Clearly this is actually an anagram for "A VICE DID CON" - obviously referring to the two **Magic** cards **Black Vise** and **Viseling**. This would take an astute recognition that Vise and Vice are homophones. Next look at Dan Brown. That anagrams into "Brand Now" which clearly is speaking of the red *Urza's Saga* card **Brand** and giving the strategy advice to **Brand** immediately.

So far we see that **Black Vise**, **Viseling**, and **Brand** are all part of this elaborate conspiracy. The next piece has actually just become evident recently. Many people are claiming that the most recent set "*Dissension*" has been misspelled. One more look into the anagram library and we see *Dissension* turns into "SIDE IN SONS" referring of course to **Magic's** very own Masons...**Goblin Masons** (from the sidebar)!

What does this all mean? Well...oh wait, that guy from the art on **Consecrate Land** is at the door. I'll be back in a second.

June 23, 2006



Q: I have looked everywhere on the site and can not find a complete list of all the **Magic: The Gathering** novels that are out. I was wondering if you could put a complete MTG novel list up? I was hoping to get a complete list since the one I can print off is missing at least 6 different novels and I am hoping to get a completed list so I can get a complete set of all of the MTG novels for my collection. Hope you guys can help me out. Thanks for your time and help so far.

--Mike
Dansville, MI

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

If you go to [this page](#) and search for {Brand = Magic} and {Year = All}, you'll find all the **Magic** novels and anthologies Wizards has published over the years.

Additionally, before Wizards began publishing its own **Magic** books, Harper Fantasy published some novels and anthologies. Some had mail-in offers for exclusive cards. Those books are:

- *Arena* by William R. Forstchen
- *Whispering Woods* by Clayton Emery
- *Shattered Chains* by Clayton Emery
- *Final Sacrifice* by Clayton Emery
- *The Cursed Land* by Teri McLaren
- *The Prodigal Sorcerer* by Mark Sumner
- *Ashes of the Sun* by Hanovi Braddock
- *Song of Time* by Teri McLaren
- *And Peace Shall Sleep* by Sonia Orin Lyris
- *Dark Legacy* by Robert E. Vardeman
- *Tapestries*, an anthology edited by Kathy Ice
- *Distant Planes*, an anthology edited by Kathy Ice

June 22, 2006



Q: I've been looking at the Pro tour schedule, and I've noticed that there aren't any *Ravnica* Block Constructed PTQs scheduled for the summer like there was for the last 2 years. I and many of the people I know love block constructed formats and are currently building decks for it. Does the DCI plan on having said tourneys or are we stuck with the current formats?

--Brian
Asheville, NC

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

Brian,

We have 2 constructed rounds of Pro Tour Qualifiers each season. In the past, we have always offered Block Constructed and Extended. This year, we decided to run a Standard round of qualifiers (the Team Standard qualifiers for Pro Tour-Charleston). We ran Extended qualifiers for Pro Tour-Honolulu late last year. So, that leaves Block Constructed out as a Pro Tour Qualifier format this year. Rest assured, Block Constructed qualifiers will make an appearance again in the near future however.

June 21, 2006



Q: Just lately I was browsing an online store, and I searched for "**Magic the Gathering**". Unfortunately, I messed up and searched the Comics section instead of the entire site.

To my surprise, I found a ton of old **Magic** comics, based on storylines such as *Ice Age* or *Antiquities*.

I've never heard of these before. Could you please explain what they are?

--Charlie
Pacific Palisades, CA

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

Over a *decade* ago, in 1995, Armada, a division of Acclaim Comics, released a series of **Magic** comics.

- *Arabian Nights* (2 volumes)
- *Antiquities War* (4 vols)
- *Fallen Empires* (2 vols)
- *Ice Age* (4 vols)
- *Homelands* (1 vol)
- *The Shadow Mage* (4 vols)
- *Wayfarer* (5 vols)
- *Elder Dragons* (2 vols)
- *Shandalar* (2 vols)
- *Legend of Jedit Ojanen* (2 vols)
- *Convocations -- A Magic: The Gathering Gallery*
- *Dakkon Blackblade* (1 vol)
- *Serra Angel* (1 vol)
- *Fallen Angel* (1 vol)
- *Nightmare* (1 vol)

Some of these comics came bagged with a booster pack or a sheet of punch-out cardboard chits to be used as counters.

In 1996, Calliope Comics produced *Musings Magic Special*, which was a black-and-white volume that consisted mainly of interviews with artists. A little later, in 1998, Dark Horse Comics produced a 4-volume series collectively called *Gerrard's Quest* that told the story of The Rath Cycle. None of the comics above are in print anymore, but [the Coldsnap minisite](#) that just launched has the *Ice Age* comics as part of its story section if you're looking for a fun walk down nostalgia lane. I *think* the list above is a complete list of all the comics ever produced for **Magic**. If I'm wrong, let me know!

June 20, 2006



Q: Your website states that the Vintage championship at Gencon happens on the 13th of August, while Gencon lists it as occurring on the 12th of August? Which date is it? I need to plan accordingly.

--Tinlin
Calgary

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

[The fact sheet on our website](#) was incorrect. The 2006 Vintage Championship will take place on Saturday, August 12 at 9:00 AM at GEN CON. We will also have other Vintage events all weekend, including a \$500 Vintage tournament on Saturday, August 12 at 11:30 PM and a Vintage Championship Prelim tournament on Friday, August 11 at 5PM. The winner of the Prelim tournament gets a 2-round bye in the Championship.

As a special treat, the winner of the 2006 Vintage Championship will win new, original art for **Mox Pearl** painted by Volkan Baga. Don't miss [today's Magic Arcana](#) to see how great that particular prize came out!

June 19, 2006



Q: In a previous Ask Wizards, you mentioned that no non-loxodon elephants were printed in *Mirrodin* block, because it would be strange for there to be both sentient and non-sentient varieties of a creature type in that plane. So what's the deal with *Ravnica* having both sentient viashino, and normal lizards (*Whiptail Moloch* and *Torpid Moloch*)? And if Loxodon count as Elephants as well for tribal, why aren't Viashino also Lizards?

--Kevin
West Dundee, IL

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

I guess it's just a judgment call, Kevin. To me, viashino aren't humanoid molochs in the way that loxodons are humanoid elephants. They're both reptilian, true, but the overlap doesn't make me itchy in the same way that, for example, having cat warriors ride cats would. There's no hard rule dictating which way we go on creature-type issues like this

As for your second question . . . it's true that a good case can be made for Viashino having the Lizard type. In fact, if they had debuted in *Ravnica*, that's probably how they would've ended up. But partly because they were introduced so long ago (and partly because we didn't make the Lizard realization in time), Viashino get to keep their unusual type. If that answer leaves you feeling a little unsatisfied, think about these questions: Should a Minotaur have the type Cow? Should Centaurs be Horse Humans? Should a Pegasus be a Bird Horse?

June 16, 2006



Dear Ask Akroma,

I was wondering, if you were you to date a human, might I add who absolutely loved you, and beat his friends down with only you on the board so many times they banned you from casual games with them (**breathes**), what would you look for in such a guy?

--Josiah
South Bend, IN

A: From **Akroma**, angelic avenger:

Josiah,

What do I look for in a guy? Looks, charms, intelligence, a sense of humor. Oh yeah, and invulnerability. You see, I have some anger issues and at times I inappropriately take it out on my significant other. All couples fight. My relationships just add bladed weapons to the mix.

So Josiah, do you have good medical coverage?

June 15, 2006



Dear Ask Akroma,

Now that you're the undisputed champion of the "[You Decide](#)" contest, how have the other defeated Legendary creatures been treating you? Have they celebrated with you, or is there an air of hostility when you're around?

--Dominick
USA

A: From **Akroma**, angelic avenger:

Dominick,

To be blunt, I wasn't that well liked before the contest. I intimidated all the men and being the "idealization of female beauty" made all of the female legends jealous. Occasionally, one of the male legends would work up the courage to try and ask me out. Luckily most of them understood that a stabbing with my sword meant no.

I didn't think it could get worse, but after the contest, I started getting anonymous hate letters. They said some pretty mean things about me. I tried killing some legends but the letters kept coming. My therapist said that I had to stop judging myself through the opinions of others. It took me the whole day to let it sink in. It really made me regret killing him.

The real answer is that it's lonely being the embodiment of wrath. I've made a solemn vow to try not to kill the next friend I make. Wish me luck.

June 14, 2006



Dear Ask Akroma,

What was the situation when you uttered your now famous quote?

--Kevin
Houston, Texas, USA

A: From **Akroma**, angelic avenger:

Kevin,

I guess I should start by repeating the quote for all of you out there that aren't one of the four people to memorize the flavor text of every card (Hey Daniel, Jay, Bill and Devin): "No rest. No mercy. No matter what."

I'm not suppose to reveal what I'm about to tell you but, hey, that's their mistake for letting me talk to the public. So forget all the articles by [Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar](#) and [Doug Beyer](#). Here's how flavor text is actually written. The Creative Team assigns a writer to follow you around and write down things you say. And they keep doing this until they get something they like.

For a while I tried solving the problem by slaughtering them when they annoyed me, but flavor text writers are kind of like cockroaches. Squash one and another one shows up before you've even sat down. Plus, I was getting nasty letters from Wizards' lawyers. Eventually I realized that just this once killing and maiming might not be the answer (this was before my anger management training).

So I started trying to be witty. Unfortunately, I was built to slay not to be pithy. At one point I finally said to the writer, "Can't you just make something up? You're driving me crazy."

"No can do," he said, "The creative writers have a motto: No rest, No mercy. No matter what."

"Fine," I said, "Just use that."

Not the answer you were expecting, huh. Once the line caught on I started having people ask me to say it all the time. I even started to use it in battle. When my enemy smiles, it gives me a good opportunity to smite him. And that's how the line came to be.

June 13, 2006



Dear Ask Akroma,

Can you kill **Experiment Kraj**?

--"numa"
[Location unspecified]

A: From **Akroma**, angelic avenger:

Numa,

Recently I've been attending anger management classes. It's brought to my attention that, on occasion, I sometimes allow my anger to prompt certain undesirable behavior. For example, my first impulse upon reading your letter was to track you down and kill you. Because, and you probably weren't aware of this, you insulted me and in the culture I come from that means I get to kill you. Probably in a showy, bloody manner.

But that's the old me. My more anger-managed self realizes that your question was meant as a thought exercise. In a hypothetical duel, could I kill **Experiment Kraj**? Of course. Easily. It's kind of why it's so insulting.

He's a 4/6. I'm a 6/6. He has two abilities. I have seven. His first ability does nothing (with me around at least). His second ability is too slow to keep me from kicking his ass. Note that I'm not even taking into account things like the fact that I first strike, although I will point out that he is two colors, neither of which I have protection from. The end result is Kraj ends up a bloody pulp. That is, if he even has blood. I have no idea what Momir's up to.

Numa, I hope that answers your question. And just for safety sake, maybe you might want to get out of town to an undisclosed location for a week or so. I'm making progress but I have had a slip or two recently.

June 12, 2006



Dear Ask Akroma,

Is it true you had a torrid love affair with the **Spirit of the Night**? How do two creatures with Protection from one another make such a relationship work?

--Orgg
United States

A: From **Akroma**, angelic avenger:

Orgg,

When I agreed to answer the "Ask Wizards" column for a week I made two demands of Mr. Johns. One, I'd be allowed to speak my mind without any censoring. And two, I got to pick my questions.

So why did I pick this one? Because I want to put this tabloid fodder to rest. For starters, yes, I was briefly involved with a certain black legend from the *Mirage* expansion. And by briefly, let's just say he lives up to his name, literally. I was young and lonely. I foolishly thought that a love of keywords was enough to carry a relationship.

And yes, I didn't handle it well. This incident is where the "of Wrath" got added to my name. So yes, I might have broken a few of his things and/or acquaintances. You know, an angel scorned...

When the dust settled, I realized the folly of my actions. I don't think the world was ready for a pro black/pro white relationship. If only protection reduced emotional damage to zero.

June 9, 2006



Q: I have noticed that many "Ask Wizards" responses are quite sarcastic. Is sarcasm a prerequisite for Wizards employees in general, or just for the "Ask Wizards" responses?

--Marc
Simi Valley, CA







Marc,

It's actually a prerequisite for the job. In R&D we demand that designers and developers have at least an undergraduate degree, that they have a significant breadth of game knowledge, that they have strong communication and analytical skills, and, of course, that they are deeply, deeply sarcastic. The last quality makes interviewing far harder than it might be somewhere else. I don't want to name names but after hiring several candidates, we learned things like they don't actually have mind control skills and the "scarily accurate" crystal ball was just a paperweight. Hopefully, this answer has been sarcastic enough to answer your question. I do realize that sarcasm is hard to read in print, so I've decided to also include a translated version for those out there that might be sarcasm-impaired. It will follow this paragraph. Note that in it every word that holds any sarcasm will be bolded. That said, thanks for writing in.

[Click here](#) to reveal the sarcasm-impaired version:

June 8, 2006



Q: **Death Denied** is an instant that costs    to return any number of creatures back to the hand. There was the original card **Shattered Crypt** which cost    along with being a sorcery. It had an additional cost of making the player lose life equal to the number of creatures returned. What went into the idea of making a much better version of this card?

--Adam Cartrette
Jacksonville, FL

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

Good question. We take the overall power level of **Magic** very seriously, and it's important to us that in any given block, certain things get more powerful while other things get less powerful. That way, individual parts of the game can become exciting and better than ever, while the overall power level of the game stays pretty steady over time. **Saviors' Cut the Earthly Bond** is a pretty awful **Boomerang**, and **Death Denied** is a pretty awesome mass **Raise Dead**.

Having different parts of the game vary in power over time also helps ensure the game is always changing and always unpredictable. Casting a bunch of enchantments to steal all the opponent's lands sure wasn't powerful in the days of **Conquer**. But it is powerful now. And I'm willing to bet it won't be powerful two years from now. (Hmm, enjoy it while you can!)

So then the question is: How do we choose which parts of **Magic** to "push" and make powerful in a certain block, and which to make weaker? The answer is that we often push the aspects that will combine in a fun way with the other mechanics existing in the block. Let's get back to **Death Denied**. **Saviors of Kamigawa** featured a lot of cards like **Descendant of Kiyomaro** that are better if you have more cards in hand than your opponent. Those cards are more fun if players' hand size can suddenly grow and shrink in the middle of combat, changing who has more cards. With card drawing and Moonfolk, Blue had tons of ways to do this already, but the other colors needed help. Along with the Sweeps, **Death Denied** is a great way for Black to suddenly change the size of **Deathmask Nezumi** and all his friends at instant speed.

June 7, 2006



Q: On the textless **Giant Growth**, what is the giant creature? Is it a gorgon, a dryad, or something else all

together?
--Richard

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

It is, in fact, a gorgon, Richard. It's a **Magic** gorgon, though, meaning it has strange, motile, segmented-cable hair, rather than actual snakes like the Medusa of Greek mythology.

June 6, 2006



Q: I've noticed on creatures with multiple keywords (flying, trample, etc.) that the keywords are in a certain order. For instance, Flying comes before First Strike and First Strike comes before Trample (Just look at **Akroma**, **Angel of Wrath**). My question is: Imagine that there was a creature printed with every keyword in **Magic**, what is the ordering of the keywords and is there any logical pattern to the ordering?

--Matthew
Burnaby, BC, Canada

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


The short answer is that there's no fixed order for keywords. I check Oracle for similar cards whenever an unusual combination comes up, but my top priority is getting the individual cards to read well. But what fun is a short answer?

Keyword Ultimus

Creature — Sliver Samurai Ninja

1/1

Sliver offering


Affinity for Auras with enchant Forest, kicker , convoke

Ninjutsu

Fading

Graft 1, sunburst, amplify 1, bloodthirst 1, modular 0

Defender, flying, horsemanship, banding, bands with other Slivers, phasing, Urza's-walk, provoke, flanking, rampage 5, first strike, double strike, vigilance, trample, haste, bushido, protection from Yeti, shadow, substance

Cumulative upkeep , echo

When Keyword Ultimus comes into play, if the kicker cost was paid, all Equipment lose equip until end of turn.

Imprint — When Keyword Ultimus comes into play, you may remove target creature card in your graveyard from the game.


As long as an imprinted creature card has flying, all creatures you control gain flying. The same is true for fear, first strike, double strike, haste, landwalk, protection, and trample.


Threshold — : Return target card with splice or storm from your graveyard to your hand.






Haunt, soulshift 4

Whenever the creature Keyword Ultimus haunts leaves play, scry 2.

Morph 

Madness 

Cycling  , transmute   

Forecast — : You may pay     rather than pay the buyback, entwine, or flashback cost for spells you play this turn.

Dredge

Epic

June 5, 2006



Q: **Squealing Devil** brings back a creature type that hasn't been seen since *Arabian Nights*. What's the flavor difference between Devils and Imps (and Demons, for that matter)?

--Adam
Minneapolis, MN

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

The quick answer, Adam, is that Devils don't fly and Imps do (with the exceptions of **Nettling Imp** and **Norritt**). Flavor-wise, I'd say that the basic breakdown is as follows: Demons are huge, menacing creatures of hatred and pain. Imps are annoying, stinky, pesky scavengers. Devils are resourceful little menaces that take absurd delight in wreaking havoc and destruction. Devils are defined mainly by their irrepressible, sadistic glee.

June 2, 2006



Q: How much of a factor do current standard strategies have on designing a new set?

--Kevin
Ithaca, NY

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

A bit, Kevin. Normally when making a new set, we have a good idea about what each color currently "does well" in Standard and try to focus on new things. For instance, white in the *Kamigawa* block was all about efficient 2-mana creatures, so we didn't make too many of those (mono-white at least) in the *Ravnica* block. Ideally we like for each block to focus on making new aspects of the game relevant and fun, and to do that we have to know what old aspects are in the forefront of players' minds.

Of course, the real analysis of the "future" environment versus the current one happens in development. There we discuss things like "Should we print this card if it will make Heartbeat better?" or "Red isn't showing up very much; how can we change that?" When you get right down to it, the biggest factor of whether or not cards show up in constructed are their mana costs, and that is almost all development's domain.

June 1, 2006



Q: What is the difference between the creature types Worm and Wurm?

--Sam

Redmond, WA

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

Sam, a Wurm is a huge reptilian monster that usually resembles a dragon without wings or limbs. Wurms generally are vertebrates and have scales. The Worm creature type, on the other hand, is used for invertebrate worms -- earthworms, flatworms, tapeworms, roundworms, and so on.



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