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# The Great and Powerful Oz

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Taste the Magic  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

A couple weeks ago I took a trip down a bright golden road. No, not the Yellow Brick Road, but the wondrous walk known as Imagination Lane. I sauntered down the lane, taking in the scenery and an ice cream cone, thinking about the **Protean Hulk**. The article, [The Incredible Hulk](#), was an exploration into the nitty-gritty surrounding the flavor of the egg-toting beast. (If you have not read it yet, I encourage you to do so now—because it really helps clarify some important stuff in this article.) As it turned out, my ramblings struck a chord with many readers. I received a bunch of emails inquiring about the background of the “hulk,” its art description, and its place in the grand scheme of *Ravnica*. The message boards for that article seemed to echo these inquiries as well. One email message, from Greg Krajenta, contained questions that lead to a few important points:

I enjoyed your article about **Protean Hulk**, but it left me with a big question: how much of this information did you create for the article and how much already existed? I'm sure a good portion of the "what" elements were already a part of the card concept before you painted it, but the background information seemed so much more in-depth than would be sensible to devote to the flavor of a single card. If all card concepts are given that much depth, I will be extremely impressed.

My initial reaction was not to answer his question. In fact, this was my reply.

I think the wise way to answer your question is not to answer at all. It should not matter which came first, the chicken or the egg, only that the omelet tastes good. I am glad you enjoyed the green eggs I served up last week.

At the time, I felt it would be a good thing for the fans of **Magic** to believe that we, (the folks at Wizards who make **Magic**) cover all the bases, dot all the i's, cross all the t's, and speak all the proper incantations to make the magic that is **Magic**. This game is incredibly deep in many ways, whether we're talking Spike stuff or Vorthos vittles. Would it be good for the creators of **Magic** if you believed that they had planned and set into motion every little nuance of **Magic**? Of course. As Greg Krajenta stated above, he'd be “extremely impressed.” He, and many of you, would probably think we are “geniuses.” We would be The Great and Powerful Oz.



But I have decided to take my hands off the levers, move the microphone away from my face, and slide the curtain aside. I am not the Great and Powerful Oz. I am not stepping out from behind the curtain because I don't want you to believe I am part of a coven of genius wizards who gather in the Northwest to weave mighty **Magic**.

I am doing so because I think it is more important to **Magic** that *you* are the genius, not us.

I'll get to explaining that more clearly after I finally answer Greg's question. How much of the information in *The Incredible Hulk* already existed? The Great and Powerful Oz would say, “All of it and then some, my feeble-minded friend.” But this is not the case. All that existed before I wrote the article was the *Ravnica* world and guild system as we have all come to know it, the *Ravnica* novel, and the art description for the card:

Color: Green

Location: Emerging from an algae-covered canal or reservoir in the city, lumbering into a street

Action: This is one bizarre creature -- it's a colony of giant frog-egg-like objects in the shape of a six-legged behemoth of your design. To picture it, first imagine what frog eggs look like while greenish tadpoles are wriggling inside them. Now imagine that frog egg 2 or 3 feet across. And finally imagine a huge monstrosity of a creature composed of these things.

Focus: the bizarre "spawn elemental"

Mood: Like a cross between a dinosaur and a huge microorganism

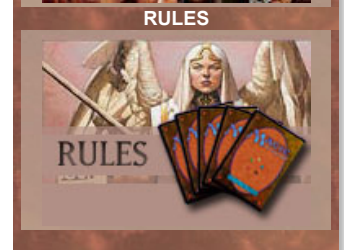
Notes: Here's the reason this card is so bizarre: Mechanically, it's just a large green creature (6/6).

But when it dies, you get to pull a bunch of creatures out of your deck and put them into play, as though destroying the creature "birthed" them

The rest—the Hulk's ties to the Simic, the living genetic storeroom, the secret plans of Niv-Mizzet—all this stuff popped into my brain as I was clicking away at my keyboard one Sunday night a few weeks ago. The little Groodion fetus in the Hulk's egg sac was not meant as a Groodion when I painted it. Does this make my whole *Incredible Hulk* story less cool? Perhaps. Does this make my art for **Protean Hulk** less cool? Perhaps. Does it make the whole thing less “impressive,” as Greg Krajenta would say? Almost certainly.

Final Wrap-up

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It probably seems odd that I would steal my own thunder this way, dash some of the mystery and wonder that is attributed to the creation of **Magic**. The Creative Team works terribly hard to create rich worlds into which your imagination can dive, dwell, spy, fight, dance, sneak, and fly. But the sort of card by card depth that was explored in the **Protean Hulk** article is not really part of what the Creative Team builds. Instead, the Team builds a world in which this sort of imaginative exploration is possible. Herein lies the reason why I am pulling back the curtain.

**Magic** is a game in which you get to tell the story.

At its very core,

**Magic** is a game of creativity. You pull pieces from all around to build decks *and stories*. When I wrote *The Incredible Hulk*, there was nothing available to me that was not also available to you. (Well, except for this column.) The level of story depth surrounding **Protean Hulk** in that article can be reached on any card by any of you. This is the magic of **Magic**. Consider *The Incredible Hulk* to be like a 'net deck. It's a good example of the kind of creativity that is possible with **Magic**. But don't just be a 'net decker—go rogue! Make your own stories.

When you play a **Tin Street Hooligan** (random example) and an **Akki Raider** (another random example) in the same turn, spin a little yarn about the mad Planeswalker who combs the universe in search of all goblinkind. Or rather, spin a yarn about where on Tin Street you can get some sweet leather pants like the Hooligan is sporting.



I happened across an old book just the other day, **The Art of Magic: The Gathering: The Rath Cycle**. I was pleased to find some interesting stuff in the introduction, which was written by none other than **Magic's** original wizard, Richard Garfield. Here's the part that grabbed me:

...when I created **Magic**, contrary to most fantasy settings, I wasn't trying to tell a pre-determined story. Rather, I wanted to provide players with evocative art that conveyed story elements from which they could weave their own tale.

That's exactly what we're talking about here. While the game's creative approach has changed a bit since its inception, the basic premise of "you weave your own tale" is still there. In the beginning, there was nothing but the cards to inspire your creativity. Then, in *Antiquities*, a pre-determined plot was added to the creative. In *Weatherlight*, the story took center stage on the cards. I think we have found, since then, that focusing on the story on the cards is not such a good idea. Why? Because it keeps you from getting involved. We don't print combos on cards—that would keep you from discovering them, or exploring other ideas, on your own. We put enough on the cards to set the stage so that you can step in and become the director. Take **Martyred Rusalka** and **Yore-Tiller Nephilim**, for example. The Creative Team had no deep plans for these two cards, but there they are; the ropes. Way, way back in the background of each card illustration is a person, or persons, hanging at the end of a rope. The stage was set and that was all it took for me to write what I believe to be my best article of them all, "[Precious Gold](#)."

So what does that mean for the Incredible Hulk, and for Precious Gold, for that matter? Are the ideas expressed in these articles official, or completely irrelevant? There was a time when I would have said that they are absolutely official, like the death of [Taaveti of Kelsinko](#). I won't do that today. But I won't say they're irrelevant either. You might have your own ideas for the future of Niv-Mizzet. Maybe you think Rusalkas are mindless spirits of the dead. Maybe you think the Simic used **Protean Hulk** amnions to derive cytoplasts. Or, maybe you like the ideas put forth in *The Incredible Hulk* and you want to roll with them. Whatever the scene is, I don't want to nip your creativity in the bud.



*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own **D&D** characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; **D&D** and **Magic**. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



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