

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com



# Ask Wizards - September, 2006

Ask Wizards  
Friday, September 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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## September 29, 2006

**Q:** What was the story behind the **Grayscaled Gharial**? This card seems to have no connection to Ravnica at all, except that it may threaten Ravnica's water ways (if you look at the artwork). This card seems to have no connection to any of the guilds, not even to a race living on Ravnica. It is the only crocodile and seems very lost.

(By the way, there are only 7 crocodiles in **Magic**, each one in a different block)

--Patrik  
Germany

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

I see you've discovered our overarching Crocodile megacycle, Patrik. Seriously, though, **Grayscaled Gharial** is simply a random creature who's managed to survive in Ravnica's overdeveloped world. If you look again, I think you'll find lots of random creatures, from dromads to molochs.

## September 28, 2006

**Q:** What design spots do the designers have the most difficult time filling when there is a hole in rarity and/or color? Put specifically, which rarity and which colors are the hardest to design for?

--Reina  
Michigan, USA

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

Reina,

Here's the difficulty order from hardest to easiest.

For rarity:

- Common
- Uncommon
- Rare

For color:

- Red
- White
- Green
- Black
- Blue

Common is hardest because it has a lot more constraints for brevity and simplicity. Red is the toughest as it has the least number of available things in the color pie. Also, much of what red does has been plumbed pretty deeply. So yes, that means red commons are the hardest subset of all to design for.

## September 27, 2006

**Q:** Something struck me the other day as I was looking through my cards. Of all the spiders that have ever been printed all are green (or half green). While this makes decent sense, I had always considered spiders as candidates for black, or at least a crossover creature type like beasts or minotaurs. But to date there is not a single spider with a black mana cost in it. Is it a threat to color balance, or is it purely aesthetics?

--Joe  
Greenville, KY

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

It's an interesting question, Joe, because it calls attention to a kind of problem with mundane animals on cards. Green is the color of instinct, growth, and natural systems. And all regular animals, from **cows** to **cockroaches**



to **sharks to lions** are creatures of nature and instinct. So they should all be green, right? Unless they seem really angry, in which case they're red. Or unless they're scary or gross, in which case they're black. Or unless they live in the water, in which case they're blue. Which of these factors take priority? Which trumps the others?

Take **Killer Whale**, for example. It's a huge predator, not much different in its motivations or intelligence than a tiger. So should it be green? It certainly lacks blue's values. Killer whales are not concerned with knowledge, deceit, illusion, etc. They're concerned with eating. This is where the issue dovetails with the difference between [value definitions of colors](#) and [elemental definitions](#). There's no clear answer; it's all judgment calls – judgment calls made differently by different people over the course of **Magic's** history.

In the case of spiders, there are the issues of natural vs. creepy, but also the issues of mechanics and **Magic's** history. **Giant Spider**, **Magic's** first spider, was a "top-down" design: It can block flying creatures with its giant webs. And the ability to block flyers turned out to play well and to be useful, so more spiders were designed, until "blocks flyers" became partially synonymous with spiders and with green. Spiders seem like they'd be at home in black, but the ability to block flyers might not be. And that could mean divorcing spiders from their long-standing mechanical association. In other words, dang! this job is hard, because these kinds of interdependencies are complex and get more so over time.

September 26, 2006



**Q:** From Mark Rosewater's response, it looks like he's the evil one here. Mark Gottlieb has a job to do, and a hard one at that: keep all the evil cards imprisoned within the rules! Just like Arkham Asylum, cards like **Time Vault** escape and have to be reined back in. Mark Rosewater, on the other hand, keeps trying to make things, like **Flame Fusillade**, that help the imprisoned cards escape, or create entirely new enemies for Mark G, or even gangs, like the Hybrid Mana Gang!

As I see it, Mark R is the supervillain bent not on world domination, but sadistic torture of our true hero, the vigilant Mark Gottlieb!

--Cody  
USA

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

Cody,

Man, I feel like Spider-man. You try your best to do heroic things and you get branded a villain for your hard work. Man, I hope I don't get ulcers. Or get cloned. Or have to watch my loved one get dropped from a tall bridge by a psychotic dressed as a goblin. Or have to reveal my secret identity. Or have to kiss Kirsten Dunst. Wait, maybe I'd do the last one. You know, if I was forced. Don't tell my wife.

September 25, 2006



**Q:** Shouldn't the **Spirit Link** ability be black instead of white? Maybe it's a personal thing, but to me the flavor is "draining and sapping life out of the living".

--Ong  
Singapore

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

Hi Ong,

First, let's just talk about that ability and who gets it. Right now I would say that black is the second best color at that ability. As you note, white is clearly the best at this. (Green has more life gain than black but that life gain isn't often based on the "Spirit Link" ability.)

Black has certainly cornered the market at pointing *direct* draining at an opponent. **Drain Life** effects like **Last Caress**, **Thief of Hope**, and **Tendrils of Agony** are all examples of this. Getting back to fighting-based draining, **El-Hajjaj** was the first creature to have the **Spirit Link** ability. It wasn't until **Spirit Link** was released in **Legends** that this kind of draining shifted colors. Recently, the **Guildpact** release **Mourning Thrull** (he seems somehow better than **El-Hajjaj**) highlighted the overlap between black and white when it comes to this particular ability.

As you pointed out, I think the real issue is that **Spirit Link's** flavor has a different feel depending on whether we're talking about black or white. On a black card, it does indeed have that feeling of draining the opponent, whereas in white it feels like a life gain card. And, in a game based on attacking with creatures, triggering life gain off that attacking doesn't feel weird as a white card. But, that's one of the cool things about **Magic**, since the different colors can see the same things differently. Note that a very similar thing happens between these two colors when it comes to comparing cards like **Resurrection** and **Zombify**...

September 22, 2006



**Q:** I was just flitting through Mark Rosewater's archive, and happened across his list of goblins that hadn't yet seen print in "[Mons Made Me Do It](#)". Have any of these been printed (under different names, obviously) since then?

--Matt  
Maryland, USA

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

Matt,

Most of them have yet to see the light of day. The one exception is Goblin Gatling Gun which appeared in *Onslaught* as **Goblin Sharpshooter**.

September 21, 2006



**Q:** I was reading "[Time \(Spiral\) Is On My Side](#)", and I wanted to know what books I would need to read the full storyline of Dominaria?

--Vinny  
Beaver Dam, WI

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

Hi Vinny,

Unfortunately there's no "full" storyline of Dominaria. For example, the events of the *Mirage*, *Visions*, and *Weatherlight* stories were never novelized. However, there are lots of **Magic** novels dealing with Dominaria's sordid, cataclysmic history. Here they are in chronological order:

*The Thran*, J. Robert King

*The Brothers' War*, Jeff Grubb

*The Gathering Dark*, Jeff Grubb

*The Eternal Ice*, Jeff Grubb

*The Shattered Alliance*, Jeff Grubb

*Planeswalker*, Lynn Abbey

*Time Streams*, J. Robert King

*Bloodlines*, Loren L. Coleman

*Rath & Storm*, various, ed. Peter Archer

*Mercadian Masques*, Francis Lebaron

*Nemesis*, Paul Thompson

*Prophecy*, Vance Moore

*Invasion*, J. Robert King

*Planeshift*, J. Robert King

*Apocalypse*, J. Robert King

*Odyssey*, Vance Moore

*Chainer's Torment*, Scott McGough

*Judgement*, Will McDermott

*Onslaught*, J. Robert King

*Legions*, J. Robert King

*Scourge*, J. Robert King

There are many other **Magic** novels, including trilogies about *Mirrodin*, *Kamigawa*, and *Ravnica*. Each has some connection to Dominaria (even if that connection isn't yet apparent), but they aren't about Dominaria per se. Additionally there are several anthologies that deal with people, places, and things on Dominaria, but are largely unconnected to larger storylines:

*The Colors of Magic*, various, ed. Jess Lebow

*The Myths of Magic*, various, ed. Jess Lebow

*The Dragons of Magic*, various, ed. J. Robert King

*The Secrets of Magic*, various, ed. Jess Lebow

*The Monsters of Magic*, various, ed. J. Robert King

Happy reading!

September 20, 2006



**Q:** I was wondering, are the **Elvish Impersonators** elves that do impersonations, or non-elves that are impersonating elves (and are so good at it that they have the creature subtype of elf... err... elves)? If the latter do we know what kind of creatures they really are?

--Nate  
Baltimore, MD

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

Nate,

Your answer can be found on the creature type line. Let's take a look.



Creature - Elf. This means that they are elves that do impersonations. If they were creatures impersonating elves, the creature line would be something like Illusion or Shapeshifter.

If anyone has any more *Un* questions, please send them my way.

September 19, 2006



**Q:** What is written in arabic in the art for *Aladdin's Lamp*?

--Tim

Schenectady, NY

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

Tim, the most interesting thing about your question to me isn't the answer, but rather the fact that no one here at Wizards R&D knew the answer offhand! We have many fonts of trivia and obscure **Magic** facts here at the office, not the least of whom are myself and Mark Rosewater. So I was kind of stunned when I couldn't find anyone in R&D who could tell me what that text means. After some more research, it turns out that the Arabic script reads "danger" although the script was slightly misdrawn and has an extra aleph on its end.

September 18, 2006



**Q:** I couldn't help but notice the similarities between Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir and the original concept for *Vedalken Orrery*. Was the Orrery a contributor to Teferi's abilities?

--Daniel

Saltspring Island, BC, Canada

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

Daniel,

Teferi's abilities are actually based on the original version of *Vedalken Orrery*. The *Fifth Dawn* design team (Aaron Forsythe, Randy Buehler, Greg Marques and myself) turned in a card that allowed you to play anything when you could play an instant and forced your opponent to play everything only when they could play a sorcery. Development simplified it to its current version because it was felt that the first time we allowed you to play non-instants at instant speed, the simplest version was best. When we were designing Teferi and we were looking for time related mechanics, I thought back to the original Orrery.

September 15, 2006



**Q:** Is there any one place that lists what each of the guilds do for Ravnican society?

--Anonymous

USA

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

**Azorius Senate:** Ravnica's ostensible government, particularly its legislative and higher judicial functions.

**House Dimir:** No known function beyond subversion of other guilds and maintenance of a thieves' guild.

**Cult of Rakdos:** Parties, festivals, demolition, murders for hire, and all manner of hedonistic diversions.

**Gruul Clans:** No known function beyond destruction of abandoned areas and maintenance of a beggars' guild.

**Selesnya Conclave:** Spiritual refuge and communion, although it is viewed by some simply as a very large cult.

**Boros Legion:** Enforcement of Ravnica's laws.

**Izzet League:** Design and maintenance of Ravnica's infrastructure, such as heating and water distribution.

**Simic Combine:** Caretakers of what's left of the natural world.

**Golgari:** Custodians of the dead and providers of food for Ravnica's poor.

**Orzhov:** Stewardship of Ravnica's economies and money, although the methods are usually in their interests.

September 14, 2006



**Q:** I've been hearing calls of "No way!" lately, and I was just wondering whether *Time Spiral* will live up to the hype. Also, if it does end up amazing (as I hope it will) what fate does that leave for the block afterwards? Will it forever live in the shadow of *Time Spiral*?

--Sean

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

Sean,

There is great irony in the fact that the reward for designing a great block is having to then design one that can live in the shadow of it. But everyone was worried how we were going to follow up *Ravnica* and if you believe the hype (which I do), *Time Spiral* block looks like it's going to do all right. What does this mean for "Peanut" (the 2007 large set)? It just means we have to keep up the high level of quality we've set for ourselves. A challenge, but one I feel design and development is up to. (As is the norm, we're planning to do something very different from the block that precedes it.)

September 13, 2006



**Q:** Greg Collins recently mentioned a **Magic** card (**Gobhobler Rats**) in a wizards.com article about **Dungeons & Dragons**, and he called interaction between the two games "crossing the streams." Does this imply that Wizards would explode if it happened too much? Are **Magic** and **D&D** like matter and antimatter? Did **Hunted Lammasu** start a chain reaction that will eventually destroy the Earth?

--Bill

Pittsburgh, PA

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

From a fan perspective, Bill, many think the fantasy genre is just this big, community-property pile of stuff. In this view of things, different books and movies and games add stuff to the fantasy pile, and it automatically becomes fair game for any other fantasy-themed work to take whatever it wants from the pile. But from the perspective of any given fantasy-genre work, it's really important to have elements that define you and distinguish you from everyone else, whether it's unique characters, creatures, settings, or whatever – so important, in fact, that an entire body of intellectual-property law has arisen to define and protect that uniqueness.

Wizards of the Coast likes the fact that **D&D** and **Magic** are two separate entities, each with their own identities, attitudes, messages, and so on. Having them meld together or constantly reference each other would hurt the uniqueness of both. Sure, both games have swords, sorcery, elves, goblins, and other familiar elements of fantasy. But there are no beholders or drow or gelatinous cubes in **Magic**, nor are there any atogs, Serra angels, or Phyrexians in **D&D**. We believe that's a good thing. We're not dead-set against the idea of crossovers, but they would be a rare and carefully executed treat, not an ongoing, thoughtless mishmash. (As for the lammasu, that's not unique to **D&D**, but a creature from ancient Mesopotamian folklore. Now if it had tentacles all over its back . . .)

September 12, 2006



**Q:** I was very excited with the preview of Sedge Sliver because Richard Kane Ferguson did its artwork. I also saw that Quinton Hoover is back from the Orb of Insight. Should we be expecting other new art by old artists like Ferguson or were they merely old artworks that you dug up from years ago?

--Matt

Danville, CA

**A:** From **Jeremy Jarvis**, **Magic: The Gathering** Art Director:

Matt!

For shame, my friend! "Merely dug up from years ago"?!

Richard Kane Ferguson  
Liz Danforth  
Christopher Rush  
Mark Tedin  
Quinton Hoover  
Rebecca Guay  
Dan Frazier  
Tom Wärnerstrand  
Tony Szczudlo  
Pete Venters  
Una Fricker  
Ron Spencer  
Mike Dringenberg  
Drew Tucker  
Heather Hudson  
Mark Poole  
Stuart Griffin  
Terese Nielsen  
D. Alexander Gregory  
Randy Elliott  
Janine Johnston

Daniel Gelon  
Anson Maddocks

All are artists strongly associated with **Magic's** past (especially with the visual comings and goings of Dominaria)... all are present in *Time Spiral*...with...wait for it... ALL NEW ART!\*

**Magic** Head Designer Mark Rosewater and then-Art Director Jeremy Cranford felt this was a grand opportunity to further hit home our long awaited return to Dominaria by calling in the troops who know Dominaria best, and having them further unfold the story of the places and figures (and cards!) that you know so well.

We've long said that for each set we use the artist roster as a tool to help us convey, in the strongest way possible, the uniqueness of the world and demands of the setting. Oh ye of little faith, look upon *Time Spiral* and believe us at last!

\*okay, so there is this one Mark Tedin piece that was in the 'graveyard' from a recent set that had to be shelved when its card left the file, and we had been dying to find a new home for it, and so we did. But other than that... ALL NEW! :)

September 11, 2006



**Q:** While looking at the art for *Dovescape* and thinking about the dove's connection to the Azorius Senate, I remembered that *Plumes of Peace* also had doves in its art. Was this purely coincidental or is there some sort of tie-in with doves, peace, and the Azorius mentality?

--Joseph  
Keyport, NJ

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

Good eye, Joseph. Every guild has some recurring visual motifs, and wings, especially white wings, are one of several motifs for the Azorius, who are flighty, airy, high-minded, and all that other stuff.

September 8, 2006



**Q:** I used the word parun in a college essay the other day and my professor tried to tell me it doesn't exist. Rather than ripping *Pillar of the Paruns* out of my backpack as proof of her mistake, I just slouched in my seat and didn't say another word. So what's the deal with this word that shows up on two **Magic** card names? Is it Okra, Twinkie, or Tofu? I'd love to prove my prof. wrong!

--Matt  
Erie, PA

**A:** From **Matt Cavotta**, **Magic** Etymology Guru:

Matt,

I am sorry to break the bitter news, but your professor is correct. "Parun" is not an actual English word, nor any other non-**Magic** sort, for that matter. In Ravnica, it is a word for any one of the ten original signatories of the Guildpact, each the charter member of one of the ten guilds.

On the Okra, Twinkie, Tofu scale, it's an interesting combination of Twinkie and Tofu. (For those not familiar with Okra, Twinkie, Tofu, [click here](#) for a little primer.) Think of a Twinkie with an all-natural, whipped bean curd filling. The word Parun is, on the surface, completely made-up and unrelated to its meaning as a charter member of an elite organization. But, there's some real, natural soybean hiding in there. It can be found in Parun's phonetic resemblance to the word "parent." At the root of it all, the Paruns are the fathers and mothers of their guilds and all subsequent guild members (speaking symbolically, of course).

While your **Magic** cards are often a great source of arcane words, they are not always going to bail you out in a head-to-head with a learned educator. **Magic** is a game of fantasy, and there will be made-up words sprinkled throughout. But, as is the case with Parun, **Magic** does "made-up" with intelligence, effort, and thought.

September 7, 2006



**Q:** I have noticed that the two Allosaurus Rider arts (Prerelease and normal) form a mural much like the one in a recent Arcana. Was this intentional?

--Claudiu  
Portland, OR

**A:** From **Jeremy Jarvis**, **Magic: The Gathering** Art Director:

Hi Claudiu,

After a very technical and formal process... looking up the unframed art for both versions, juxtaposing the illustrations together in different ways, re-reading the art descriptions that Daren Bader was given, and applying all of my super sweet visual prowess to glean the truth... I emailed Daren and he said 'no'. :)



We asked for a dude riding an Allosaurus through the snow, and an alternate version of that same dude, and that's what Daren gave us. Short and sweet.

September 6, 2006



**Q:** One Mr. Richard Wright did some fantastic land illustrations for the *Ravnica* set, the merit of which got two of them [voted into Tenth Edition](#). However, he has appeared from nowhere to do this, and I can't find any of his other works. You do not list him in your list of artists in "[Pack a Lunch, It's a Field Trip](#)". Using Google results in other Richard Wrights, such as Pink Floyd's keyboardist (w00t) and the author of "Black Boy". Who is the mysterious Richard Wright?

--Michael  
USA

**A:** From **Jeremy Jarvis**, Magic: The Gathering Art Director:

Hi Michael,

As in the music world, a fairly reliable truth of the art world at large, and certainly of commercial illustration is that an artist 'appearing from nowhere' or becoming an 'overnight success' typically has a backstory of ten to fifteen years of good, solid, quiet and unassuming professional work behind him/her.

I emailed Richard to get some skinny, and I think you'll find that his story certainly supports this.

Richard studied Graphic Design in college and promptly found a summer job at Games Workshop's factory, which happened to be located conveniently near his parent's home. He moved from the factory scene on to Games Workshop's studio working on White Dwarf magazine, doing layouts only, no illustration yet.

After 4 years, Richard left the design job to work as a freelancer, painting figures and dabbling in illustration. After about a year of that, he went back to Games Workshop, but now as an illustrator, working on floorplans for their games and cardboard model kits etc. In his spare time he decided to paint a Space Marine Dreadnought to prove his mettle. That painting did indeed showcase Richard's chops, and won him a gig painting box art for all of their miniatures and kits.

Three years later Richard landed a job at a computer game company called Particle Systems doing 3D fmv for a game called I-WAR, and then for Powerdrome. He took what he had learned at Particle Systems and setup ARK with Steve Tappin, Greg Staples and Andy Turner. Richard is still at Ark as we speak.

Besides his work for Wizards of the Coast, Richard (through ARK) has done a music video for Muse - Sing for Absolution, a music video for Shazney Lewis, a couple of TV ads, and fmv for Driver 4 - Parallel Lines. He has also done concept work for movies that we have yet to see.

Richard Wright is absent from Matt Cavotta's "[Pack a Lunch](#)" article due to the lack of an official illustration website, but you can check out Richard's (and ARK's) handiwork at <http://www.arkvfx.net/> and at <http://ark-vfx.cgsociety.org/gallery/> for Richard in particular.

So Michael, there you have it. With his work for *Ravnica*, Richard certainly left a thumbprint on **Magic** that will not soon be forgotten, but wait until you see the moody, evocative landscapes he has captured for the *Time Spiral* block! You'll punch a kitten!

September 5, 2006



**Q:** With the printing of the ten Guildmages in the *Ravnica* block, every color now has multiple 2/2 creatures with abilities ranging from pretty good to excellent. White even has **Isamaru**, **Hound of Konda**, a 2/2 for 1 with no drawback sans not being able to drop several of them at once.


So my question is, will there ever be an artifact creature that's just 2 mana for a 2/2, period?

Thanks!

--Leif  
Birmingham, AL

**A:** From **Henry Stern**, Magic R&D:

Keep in mind, in a mono-color deck, the guildmages really require 2 colored mana. In a two-color deck they are close to requiring 1 kind of mana (in fact some people think they are easier to cast). But, we knew the guildmages were going to be "good" cards, and we were ok with this. We liked how they did a really good job of defining what the guild was all about.

While we could make a 2 casting cost 2/2, and I don't think it would break anything, I don't think you will see us make a guy like this. Why? Well, like all aspects of **Magic**, what you get for 2 colored mana can ebb and flow slightly from set to set. *Ravnica* gave you guildmages, but the next set might not give you anything better than a 2/1 (in red, say). This is one of the things that makes **Magic** so interesting. Yes, that 2/1 for  is for sure worse than a guildmage, but you know what? It's still a decent creature that you might play in Limited, or even in Constructed if you needed a lot of weenies.

Now, getting back to your colorless version, if we were to make a guy like this, it would be something that everyone could always point to as being "better" than this 2/1, and that is something we don't like to do if there is not a very good reason for it.

September 1, 2006



**Q:** If I were to walk up to a member of the rules team and say, "you know, I think you should keyword 'this creature can't block' with 'Attacker' so that you can change the wording of **Pacifism** to 'Enchanted creature has attacker and defender'", which one of them would punch me in the face the hardest?

--Henry

Waterloo, Ontario

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

The answer is easy: Mark Gottlieb, for two reasons. The first is that he is "Lord and Keeper of the Rules" (he forces the rest of R&D to refer to him that way). The second is he is a 12th degree blackbelt, specialized in punching faces. He didn't become the leader of his own cult by letting people push him around! That being said, I think your idea of writing "Enchanted creature gains Attacker and Defender" on **Pacifism** is one he may actually like. Who could get confused by that?? I'll ask him for you, and let you know how it (my face) goes.



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