

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com



Ask Wizards - October, 2006

Ask Wizards
Monday, October 2, 2006

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October 31, 2006



Q: Have you ever listed anywhere what all the different expansion symbols represent/mean?

--Eduardo
Mexico City

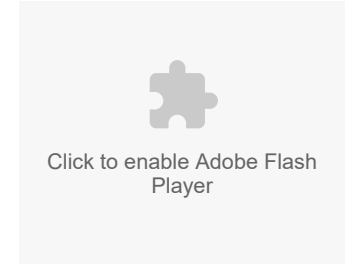
A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:

There's a comprehensive fan-made list at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic:_The_Gathering_sets, but I'll list the expert-level sets below with my own explanations of the symbols. Most expansion symbols are chosen just to convey a feeling or tone, so you'll find that many have no specific meaning.

- [Time Spiral](#) – An hourglass to reinforce the time themes and to imply storywise that “time is running out.”
- [Coldsnap](#) – Some icicles to reinforce the, um, general chilliness.
- [Dissension](#) – This is meant to be a variation on the wrought-ironwork shown in the *Guildpact* symbol, but broken to reflect the disintegration of the *Guildpact*. Like the *Guildpact* symbol, it has three “branches” to evoke its three guilds.
- [Guildpact](#) – A wrought-iron design with three “branches” meant to evoke the three-guild nature of the set as well as the urban theme.
- [Ravnica: City of Guilds](#) – A section of late-medieval urban skyline to reflect Ravnica’s overdevelopment.
- [Saviors of Kamigawa](#) – A lantern, or toro, that evokes Kamigawa’s *sengoku* flavor and also serves as a symbol of hope.
- [Betrayers of Kamigawa](#) – A throwing star, or *shuriken*, to evoke Kamigawa’s *sengoku* flavor as well as the *ninja* theme.
- [Champions of Kamigawa](#) – A Shinto gate, or torii, meant to evoke Kamigawa’s cosmology and *sengoku* flavor.
- [Fifth Dawn](#) – The Helm of Kaldra, one of three artifacts required to summon a legendary champion. The champion was sought by Glissa Sunseeker to help her defeat Memnarch.
- [Darksteel](#) – The Shield of Kaldra.
- [Mirrodin](#) – The Sword of Kaldra.
- [Scourge](#) – A dragon’s head, to reflect *Scourge*’s dragon theme.
- [Legions](#) – A shield with two crossed spears, a sort of heraldic crest meant to evoke the “tribal” and creature-heavy themes of *Legions*.
- [Onslaught](#) – A morph crawler, the creature that represents what a creature with morph looks like before its transformation into another creature.
- [Judgment](#) – Scales to evoke the concept of judgment.
- [Torment](#) – A symbol chosen to evoke *Torment*’s dark themes and ‘dementia summoning.’
- [Odyssey](#) – The Mirari, a powerful artifact that reflected and amplified its holder’s desires. Pursuit and ownership of the Mirari motivated many plot events in the Otaria storyline. It was later revealed that the Mirari was left by Karn to enable him to monitor Dominaria while he was away. The Mirari was later transformed into Memnarch, the guardian of the metal plane of Mirrodin, which Karn created.
- [Apocalypse](#) – The Mask of Yawgmoth, a symbol of Phyrexia’s lord and master. Apocalypse represented the brunt of the Phyrexian Invasion of Dominaria.
- [Planeshift](#) – A dual-swirl symbol meant to symbolize the planar overlay of Rath onto Dominaria.
- [Invasion](#) – The symbol of the Coalition, a cooperative effort of Dominarian forces from all five colors banded together to oppose Yawgmoth and the Phyrexians.
- [Prophecy](#) – Crystals meant to evoke the rhythic magic introduced in *Prophecy*.
- [Nemesis](#) – The axe of Crovax, the evincar of Rath. The story of Nemesis was split between the planes of Mercadia and Rath, and Crovax was the main antagonist of the story’s Rath component.
- [Mercadian Masques](#) – A stylized mask symbol meant to evoke the intrigues, deceptions, and double dealings involved with the Mercadia storyline.
- [Urza’s Destiny](#) – An Erlenmeyer flask meant to symbolize Urza’s continued experiments in finding a



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RULES

means to defeat Phyrexia. All three expansion symbols of the Urza block symbolize the planeswalker's talent with artifacts.

🔨 [Urza's Legacy](#) – A machinist's hammer with the same purpose as the *Urza's Destiny* symbol.

⚙️ [Urza's Saga](#) – A pair of cogs with the same purpose as the *Urza's Legacy* and *Urza's Destiny* symbols.

🌉 [Exodus](#) – A stylized bridge meant to symbolize the exit from Rath and the transition from one chapter of the *Weatherlight* Saga to the next.

🏰 [Stronghold](#) – A portcullis meant to evoke Volrath's Stronghold.

☁️ [Tempest](#) – A stylized stormcloud to symbolize Rath's turbulent sky and Tempest's tumultuous plot.

📖 [Weatherlight](#) – The Thran Tome, an important artifact of the Legacy whose contents change depending on who reads it. Among the information contained in the Tome is the components and intended operation of the Legacy itself.

⚠️ [Visions](#) – The Triangle of War, a Zhalfirin symbol, inset with a "V" for *Visions*.

🌴 [Mirage](#) – A palm tree to symbolize the tropical aspects of Jamuraa. ("It's hot!")

🚩 [Alliances](#) – A banner to reinforce the "alliance" concept.

🌐 [Homelands](#) – A simplified globe of *Ulgrotha*, the plane where *Homelands* was set.

❄️ [Ice Age](#) – A snowflake to symbolize the arctic nature of Dominaria at the time. ("It's cold!")

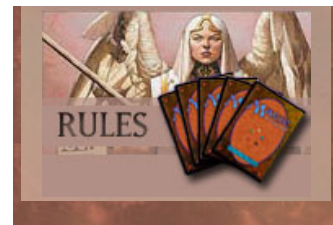
👑 [Fallen Empires](#) – A crown to symbolize the concept of empire.

🌑 [The Dark](#) – A thin crescent moon to evoke The Dark's tone.

🏛️ [Legends](#) – The top of a Doric column, meant to evoke a time of legends.

🔨 [Antiquities](#) – An anvil that symbolizes the artifact focus of the set. This symbol inspired the symbols used in the Urza block, which continues the story of the Brothers' War chronicled in *Antiquities*.

🗡️ [Arabian Nights](#) – A scimitar, meant to evoke the Arabian setting of the expansion.



October 30, 2006



Q: Are there any *Time Spiral* cards that don't have clever little allusions or references in their name, art, or abilities? Like, any cards that are just there to show off what Flash, Split Second, and Suspend can do?

--Cory
USA

A: From **Doug Beyer**, flavor text writer:

Sure there are! Why, there's... uh... well, of course there's... no, that's an allusion too... let's see....

Ahem. It's true that *Time Spiral* is jam-packed with allusions of all types—mechanical, verbal and visual. Because there were tons of mechanics to play with, tons of nostalgia to evoke, and yet only a limited number of cards in the set, most *Time Spiral* cards combine the set's nostalgia theme with the new mechanical twists. Hence many cards with flash *also* have a built-in allusion (e.g. [Scryb Ranger](#) or [Draining Whelk](#)).

But there are many cards that are all-new in mechanics and flavor. Take the flash mechanic as an example. [Ashcoat Bear](#) and [Bogardan Hellkite](#), while familiar enough creature types, are *Time Spiral* flash originals. Sure there have been bears before and creatures from Bogardan before, but they are not meant to evoke particular **Magic** cards from the past in the same way that [Scryb Ranger](#) evokes "[Quirion Ranger](#) + [Scryb Sprites](#) + flash." For more examples with flash, see also [Havenwood Wurm](#), [Viashino Bladescout](#), [Bogardan Rager](#), and even Grand Master Flash himself, [Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir](#) (although Teferi certainly has flavor references throughout **Magic's** history, he's definitely up to the job of showing off what new things flash can do).

While the set hits the nostalgia angle pretty strongly, I think you'll find that there's a lot of *Time Spiral* that is not a hidden reference to earlier cards. Even in such a past-focused set there's plenty of good old "present."

October 27, 2006



Q: I've been wondering why 6 of the 27 Humans in the timeshifted *Time Spiral* cards don't have classes. All the Humans in the main set do, along with every Human printed since the race/class model was adopted. Does this indicate a policy change, perhaps related to the creature type clean-up referred to by Aaron Forsythe recently? Or is it limited to these out-of-time Humans? Perhaps [Sengir Autocrat](#) and [Sindbad](#) just aren't civilized enough...?

--Han
Bristol, UK

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

After looking at a bunch of creature cards both old and new, Han, we started realizing that we want the ability to print creatures that have a 'race' type but no 'class' type. Sometimes we come up with a concept that we like but that doesn't fit into any of our supported class types, and rather than add some random type such as Plumber or Hermit, we'd prefer to simply let the race type stand alone.

In the case of reprints, however, there's another criterion for determining what a creature's type(s) should be, and that's whether or not a player could reasonably guess at a card's type and be correct. Take [Sengir](#)

Autocrat, for example. It's been previously printed with the types Autocrat and Minion, neither of which are currently supported types. So what should it be under the current model? What race is it? Human seems to be the most reasonable answer – vampire seems wrong. What class is it? Warrior? Wizard? Rogue? Advisor? We didn't think many players would be able to agree on the right class type, so rather than arbitrarily choose a class type for it, we simply left it off. That way players who have older printings of the card will hopefully have a better chance at guessing the card's new type correctly.

October 26, 2006



Q: What has happened to the old keyword "Islandhome"? I believe 5th Edition rules introduced this keyword, on **Pirate Ship** for example. The wording for **Pirate Ship** has been changed yet again. What made you change it back to the way it is now?

--Joost
Zutphen, The Netherlands

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

A great question.

Islandhome had two rules and one of them we didn't like. The first rule was that you can only attack with the creature if your opponent controls an island. This rule we liked. The second was that you must control an Island or your creature dies. This rule made us mad! We decided we wanted to remove the second part of Islandhome from new card designs because it rarely came up that someone would lose a **Sea Serpent** due to having no Islands. This rule also limited the flavor to undersea creatures. What about creatures that could get out of the sea to fight but only traveled distances by swimming? Once we decided to get rid of the second half, Islandhome was a keyword with very little rules associated with it. So we decided to get rid of the keyword all together and just write the rule "can't attack unless defending player controls an island" on the cards.

October 25, 2006



Q: I was reading the *Time Spiral* Novel last night and an interesting question popped into my mind. Does anyone over at WotC have some kind of map of Dominaria?

--Seth
Destin, FL

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

Yes we do, Seth. In fact, we have multiple maps, some hand-drawn, and a globe lovingly made years ago by Pete Venters, illustrator and former **Magic** continuity manager. But Dominaria is enormous – roughly three times the size of Earth – and its history on cards spans many thousands of years. Most of those maps are wrong in some minor way, and some aspects of Dominarian continuity require *tectonic shift* to be taken into account before they line up. That means in order for Dominarian maps to make sense of story, we'd have to produce a series of different ones, each representing a different geological era!

Storyline gurus have put together some pretty awesome Wikipedia entries for **Magic** storyline and continuity details. Check out the Dominaria entry, which is pretty dang comprehensive, even if it doesn't satisfy your every cartographical desire: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominaria>

October 24, 2006



Q: I've noticed that all three sets of *Time Spiral* block are named after older cards. I know Wizards tries to avoid names or titles that might lead to confusion, so I was wondering if it was difficult to convince the powers-that-be to let you do this for *Time Spiral* block?

--Chris
Kingston, PA

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

Chris,

The fact that the three sets of the nostalgia block are all old card names was obviously on purpose. (*Coldsnap*, by the way, was not planned that way - our first choice name just didn't work out.) It didn't cause any real problem other than the fact that we created a much more limited group of possible names. Convincing the Powers-That-Be was easy as they thought it was a cool idea as well.

October 23, 2006



Q: Can you tell us anything about who designed the mats players use in feature matches at the Pro Tour? Is there anywhere to download a copy, or can you print the specs for people that might want to make copies to play on themselves?

--John
Houston, USA

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

John,

The mats were made by a small team. The two names you would most likely recognize from the team are Randy Buehler and myself. The mats came about because we realized how hard it was to watch matches due

to the fact that every player seemed to lay out their cards in a different manner. Our goal was to make a recognizable playing field that was as simple and elegant as possible but had the function we needed. In the end, we decided to isolate land as we wanted it separate from the other cards. We also made dedicated areas for the library and graveyard (which we made long enough to let people see the cards in the graveyard). The "red zone" was made because it was very hard to tell whether a player was tapping a creature for an ability or for attacking. Also, it let attacking feel more like an event. In the end, I was very happy with what we came up with. I feel it hit all the goals we had set out when we started.

October 20, 2006



Q: What non-silver bordered card has the longest Oracle text? What non-silver bordered card has the longest Oracle plus reminder text?

--Robbie

Portland, Oregon

A: From **Erik Lauer, Magic R&D:**

Hi Robbie, thanks for writing in. It probably won't come as any surprise to veterans that the oft-maligned **Ice Cauldron** from *Ice Age* has the longest Oracle text, though **Dance of the Dead** and **Takklemaggot** are also quite verbose. What does the **Ice Cauldron** currently do?

{oX}, {oT}: Put a charge counter on Ice Cauldron and remove a nonland card in your hand from the game. As long as that card remains removed from the game, you may play it. Note the type and amount of mana used to pay this activation cost. Play this ability only if there are no charge counters on Ice Cauldron.

{oT}, Remove a charge counter from Ice Cauldron: Add to your mana pool mana of the type and amount last used to put a charge counter on Ice Cauldron. Spend this mana only to play the last card removed from the game with Ice Cauldron.

October 19, 2006



Q: The design team obviously went to a lot of trouble to balance the 10 different guilds of Ravnica. For example, each guild has two top dogs that are legendary. But there is a sense of much greater symmetry than that throughout the guilds. If you consider only the rares (though the symmetry extends through the entire spectrum of rarity), you'll quickly see what I mean (see the list below). I was hoping someone could explain the three missing pieces. I'm particularly interested to know why Izzet didn't get an enforcer.

LEDGER

1. Guild Leader
2. Guild Second
3. Guild Enforcer
4. Hybrid
 - a. guild rare 1
 - b. guild rare 2
 - c. guild rare 3

BOROS

1. Razia, Boros Archangel
2. Agrus Kos, Wojek Veteran
3. Firemane Angel
4. Master Warcraft
 - a. Razia's Purification
 - b. Brightflame
 - c. Searing Meditation

DIMIR

1. Szadek, Lord of Secrets
2. Circu, Dimir Lobotomist
3. Mindleech Mass
4. Shadow of Doubt
 - a. Glimpse the Unthinkable
 - b. Dimir Cutpurse
 - c. Dimir Doppelganger

SELESNYA

1. Chorus of the Conclave
2. Tolsimir Wolfblood
3. Loxodon Hierarchy
4. Privileged Position
 - a. Glare of Subdual
 - b. Autochthon Wurm
 - c. Phytomyza

GOLGARI

1. Savra, Queen of the Golgari
2. Sisters of Stone Death
3. Woodwraith Corrupter
4. Gleancrawler
 - a. Grave-Shell Scarab
 - b. Vulturous Zombie
 - c. Bloodbond March

ORZHOV

1. Ghost Council of Orzhova
2. Teysa, Orzhov Scion
3. Angel of Despair
4. Debtors' Knell
 - a. Orzhov Pontiff
 - b. Culling Sun
 - c. [?]

GRUUL

1. Borborygmos
2. Ulasht, the Hate Seed
3. Rumbling Slum
4. Giant Solifuge
 - a. Burning-Tree Shaman
 - b. [?]
 - c. Killer Instinct

IZZET

1. Niv-Mizzet, the Firemind
2. Tibor and Lumia
3. [?]
4. Djinn Illuminatus
 - a. Invoke the Firemind
 - b. Stitch in Time
 - c. Cerebral Vortex

SIMIC

1. Momir Vig, Simic Visionary
2. Experiment Kraj
3. Simic Sky Swallower
4. Biomantic Mastery
 - a. Voidslime
 - b. Cytoshape
 - c. Omnibian

AZORIUS

1. Grand Arbiter Augustin IV
2. Isperia the Inscrutable
3. Windreaver
4. Dovescape
 - a. Pride of the Clouds
 - b. Swift Silence
 - c. Aethermage's Touch

RAKDOS

1. Raktos the Defiler
2. Lyzolda, the Blood Witch
3. Raktos Augermage
4. Avatar of Discord
 - a. Anthem of Raktos
 - b. Rain of Gore
 - c. Dread Slag

--Hyrum Tanner
Mesa, AZ

A: From **Aaron Forsythe**, Magic Head Developer:

I'll answer this question in two parts--first, regarding the three "missing rares" from *Guildpact*; second, regarding the idea of guild structure in general.

The three guilds in *Guildpact* were each "shorted" a gold rare card in comparison to the other seven guilds. I discussed this in the first answer of my "[Guildpact: Twenty Questions](#)" article. The team working on these felt like it couldn't maintain the number of gold cards per guild as *Ravnica*, and asked that the design team submit one fewer card. So we never got to see what card was cut from each of those guilds, as the card was never made to begin with. It was not an ideal situation, and if we were able to go back in time and fix the symmetry somehow, I'd like to do so.

I do believe that too much symmetry and structure is unnecessary, however, and the rare cards in each guild are not particularly structured. We did mandate that each guild had a pair of legends, each of which had some design restrictions attached, and a hybrid card that could be just about anything (creature or spell), but that ends the formal structure. We didn't even insist that each guild had a gold rare with the guild's keyword--some did, like Boros's *Brightflame* and Orzhov's Pontiff, but others, like *Dissension's* graft, don't have a multicolored rare. The "enforcer" category you created is more or less imagined; we do like making awesome large rare creatures, and I can see how you'd want to group them together. But that level of structure just doesn't exist; instead, we focused on making the cards cool on their own merits.



Q: In Mark Rosewater's article "[Small Change](#)," referenced in today's Ask Wizards, Mark mentioned "a semi-popular Alpha card whose color needed to change" which had been perpetually on the wish list for years but kept getting shoved off for miscellaneous reasons. Has it been printed yet, and if so, what is it?

--Stefano
Old Bridge, NJ

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

The card in question was **Mana Flare**. We loved the card but felt that according to the color pie it really needed to be green. For years, every time I led a design team I included "Green Mana Flare" in the initial design file. (This included *Tempest*, *Urza's Destiny*, *Odyssey* and *Mirrodin*.) I even got the card into a number of set designs that I was just on the design team rather than leading it. Ironically, it finally got made in a set that I wasn't on the design team at all. You all, of course, know the card as **Heartbeat of Spring**.

October 17, 2006



Q: I notice a yellow triangle with the picture of a lion's head on the packaging of **Magic: The Gathering** product such as tournament packs and boxes. What does this logo represent?

--Andry
Auckland, NZ

A: From **Sarah Haines**, **Magic** Brand Management:

Hi Andry,

Since **Magic: The Gathering** is sold around the world, we take every precaution to comply with international standards. The Lion Mark is a symbol developed by the British Toy & Hobby Association (BTHA). Games bearing this mark have been made to the highest quality and safety standards currently enforced in Britain and the European community.

October 16, 2006



Q: Is it just coincidence or is there a flavor reason that white has so few sorcery spells?

--Dave
Tuscon, AZ

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

Dave,

To add flavor to the colors, R&D has definitely pushed certain colors more towards instant or sorcery speed. White, with its damage prevention, life gain, protection granting and combat tricks, really wants to have a lot of instants. Green, on the other hand, tends to have more abilities that work as sorceries. This isn't to say that white won't have sorceries or green won't have instants, just that one type will outnumber the other as a general default (and remember we do like breaking from our defaults).

October 13, 2006



Q: I remember a prior question from Ask Wizards about printing cards with Mishra, Urza, etc on them. In particular, the response was that: "We don't print cards with planeswalkers on them, since you are a planeswalker and telling a story."

I noticed recently you printed a Jaya Ballard card pre-Planeswalker ascension. I'm curious about the **Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir** card. From the flavor text, it seems that he has the power to shift planes, so wouldn't he be in his planeswalker-powered form?

--William
British Columbia, Canada

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

WARNING: PARTIAL SPOILERS AHEAD.

I suppose we've waited long enough to answer this very commonly asked question. Is it true that planeswalkers are too powerful to represent on normal creature cards? Yes, that's true. But if that's true, why do Jaya and Teferi both have cards in the *Time Spiral* set? Here's the explanation: Jaya's card (which you figured out but many others have misunderstood) represents her being displaced in time, existing in 'present-day Dominaria' and in her own time (millennia ago) simultaneously, like a kind of temporal mirage. The card represents a young taskmage Jaya, before she realized her planeswalking ability. Teferi's card, on the other hand, represents his current state. That's right—by the time the curtain closes on the story of *Time Spiral*, Teferi has lost his ability to planeswalk. How does this happen? Check out [the *Time Spiral* novel by Scott McGough](#) to find out. I don't want to explain everything, but I will say that Teferi's sacrifice enables most of the entire continent of Shiv to phase back into its rightful place on Dominaria, after being phased out for the centuries since the Phyrexian Invasion. (For you storyline gurus, **Blind Seer** represented the persona of Urza's disguise, not Urza. Cheaty, I know.)

October 12, 2006



Q: Was there a flavor reason for Lin Sivvi, or was she just a combination of mechanics and abilities?

--Jaja
Chonburi, Thailand

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

It was a match made in heaven, Jaja. The card-design team had a "Rebel lord" card and the *Nemesis* story had a young female Vec who led a group of rebels against Volrath's Stronghold. Naturally, the character made it onto the card smoothly. It's worth noting, though, that whereas the Ramosian rebels call Mercadia home, Lin Sivvi is no Ramosian. Her home was the bleak plane of Rath.

October 11, 2006



Q: In Mark Rosewater's 2003 article "[Small Change](#)," he outlined several cards on the *Eighth Edition* wish list; that is, cards planted in expert-level expansions so they could be printed in the Core Set. What were some of the cards on the *Tenth Edition* wish list?

--Mike
Minneapolis, MN

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

Mike,

While I would like to tell you, I can't do so without talking about what cards are in *Tenth Edition*, which I'm not supposed to do yet. (Check out [Selecting Tenth Edition](#) for what cards we have revealed so far.) But after the set comes out, write back in and I'll share the list with you.

So, why post the question in the first place? It seemed like a good time to remind people that in the vast majority of cases, we just can't answer questions about what's in future sets. If you're writing in to Ask Wizards and want to see your question get answered, try to avoid questions like "How many spiders will be in Peanut?" We get more of these than almost anything else, but obviously we can't answer questions like that. Will this help? Hopefully!

October 10, 2006



Q: I was recently going over some cards from *Mirage* block, what with the *Magic Online* release and all, and I noticed that quite a few cards have excerpts from what seems to be a poem called "Love Song of Night and Day". Is there anywhere I can go to read the poem in full or was it never intended to be complete?


--Adam
New York, USA

A: From **Scott Johns**, [magicthegathering.com](#) Producer:

Thanks for writing Adam. Back in April 2003, [magicthegathering.com](#) posted a feature article called "[The Love Song of Night and Day](#)" that should help you out. And, just as that article claimed back then, we're *still* getting a lot of questions at the Ask Wizards mailbox about this famous piece of world building. So much so, that we figured it might be helpful to post the link for newer readers that may not have been around the first time and have been writing in asking for more information.

October 9, 2006



Q: How do you guys determine better uncommons from rares? Take **Eradicate** for example: for a measly , you get to kill a creature completely, avoid all copies of it in the future, and look at your opponent's hand and deck! How did this get to be uncommon instead of rare?

--Tom
Santa Cruz, CA

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

Hello Tom,

Many of **Magic's** best cards are printed at uncommon or common. What makes a card rare has more to do with complexity than power. For example, most red direct damage spells are very simple and so they are "rarely" rare, in spite of being extremely powerful. **Eradicate** and the rest of the cards in its cycle (**Quash**, **Splinter**, **Sowing Salt** and **Scour**) are fairly complex. They all could easily have been rares, but they had the advantage of being uncommons the first time they were printed back in *Urza's Destiny* so they were printed as uncommons in *Betrayers* as well.

October 6, 2006



Q: Blue has lost many, many of its functional abilities recently for (what I assume) is a scaling back of its power, yet you cite thematical reasons for doing so. If blue is as scholarly as you say it is, surely it should make sense that blue can study the other colors to learn and use their abilities - ping in particular.

--Antony
London, England

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

Hi Antony, thanks for the question. I'll give you three different, good answers, in the order they occurred to me. (As a note for those that don't know, "Ping" is slang for "Deal 1 damage to target creature or player.")

1. I'll be honest - your flavor justification here sounds really thin. If we started letting blue ping things again because it "can study the other colors and learn their abilities," then the same justification would allow blue to cast **Terror**, **Wrath of God**, **Jackal Pups**, **Call of the Herd**, and so on. Then the whole color pie goes out the window completely. That's bad.
2. We definitely still decide to break the color pie sometimes, as long as we do it for specific reasons and a specific structure that makes sense, usually springing from the nature of the set. For example, there are a whopping *three* blue pingers in *Time Spiral*: **Fledgling Mawcor**, **Prodigal Sorcerer**, and **Pirate Ship**. The reason is that *Time Spiral* is designed to evoke the past, and all three of those cards are references to the long history of **Magic**. In **Magic's** past, blue did have pinging, with cards like the original **Mawcor** and, well, **Prodigal Sorcerer** and **Pirate Ship**. So they break the color pie, but they are there for a reason. I don't think we would do any color-pie breaking in *Time Spiral* that was not a direct reference to the way the color pie was in the past.
3. Good news! Blue's abilities *do* include "study[ing] the other colors and learn[ing] from their abilities!" But blue has to *see* the other colors performing their own abilities before blue can learn from and copy them. This is represented by playing **Twincast** on the enemy **Putrefy**. Or playing **Clone** or **Sakashima the Impostor** on a **Chainflinger** to learn from red's pinging creatures and copy them.

October 5, 2006



Q: *Ravnica* has a grand total of two rats in it, and they're not really anything you would want to use **Ratcatcher** to retrieve. I could use **Ratcatcher** with other rat cards like **Marrow-Gnawer**, but why was it chosen to be put into *Ravnica*?

--Paul

Mooresville, NC

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

Hi Paul,

I was going to write an elaborate joke about how I've always wanted to answer a question about **Ratcatcher**, and this lifelong dream led me to pretend I'm from Mooresville, North Carolina and write a question to Ask Wizards for myself to answer. Luckily, it turns out that wasn't funny at all, and instead I'll just compliment you on your name.

Anyway.

I've asked around, and the answer turns out to be a simple one. **Ratcatcher** is a rare, and since rares don't come up in Limited all that often, it isn't as important that they fit the themes of the set. So once in awhile we'll throw in something that we think will make some specific group of players happy. While I don't personally know anyone who has a Rat deck, I'm sure there are quite a few of you out there. And besides, **Magic** sets would be a little too predictable if every card always fit the themes perfectly.

So in a nutshell, **Ratcatcher** was printed to make rat players happy, and was printed in *Dissension* just because; although we wouldn't have done it if there weren't at least one or two rats in the set to fetch up.

(Interesting trivia note: **Ratcatcher** used to be a Rat himself, but was turned into an Ogre and given the ratcatching flavor because we feared he would play too much like **Avarax** in constructed. Not to mention that 4/4 is kinda big for a rat.)

October 4, 2006



Q: I just saw Mark Rosewater's "[80,000 words](#)" on what the Wizards of the Coast's new offices look like. I saw many statues of goblins and no elves!

Is it just me or is Wizards biased against elves?

Is this why my elf decks are never as good as goblin decks?

Thanks,

--Morgan

Berkeley, CA

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

Aluethai Morgan, tu'menneloth annuethyn,

Biased against Elves?? Do you realize how many Elves still work at Wizards?!? How else do you explain the reoccurrence of Elves, Elves, and more Elves all across **Magic**? How do you explain the consistent power and synergy packed into these little 1/1's across thirteen years? You can argue the order, but Alpha's three best one-mana creatures have got to be **Birds of Paradise**, **Llanowar Elves**, and **Savannah Lions**. In a sea of broken *Urza's Saga* combo engines, **Priest of Titania**, **Rofellos** and **Gaea's Cradle** still powered out infinite pointy-eared buddies, including **Elvish Lyryst**, **Deranged Hermit**, to power up with **Coat of Arms** and deal 36 in one turn.

Invasion brought **Elvish Champion**, a fitting nemesis to that snarky **Goblin King** and a true hero of the Elven nations. And then *Onslaught* Block. Whoooo, Elves in *Onslaught* Block. **Wellwisher**, **Timberwatch**, **Elvish Vanguard**, **Elvish Warrior**, **Wirewood Savage**, **Voice of the Woods**, **Wirewood Pride**, **Wirewood Lodge**, **Wirewood Hivemaster**, **Caller of the Claw**, **Ambush Commander**, **Fierce Empath**, **Wirewood Symbiote**. Elves have almost every kind of green spell built right in, from artifact destruction to enchantment destruction to **Giant**

Growths, to token-making to mana-fixing. Heck, we even give 'em 8/8s. Heck, in *Time Spiral* we even give 'em direct damage to creatures and players!

In short, Wizards is pretty clearly pretty heavily biased *in favor* of Elves. Why? Elves are an important, integral, beloved part of fantasy literature, games, and movies. And over time they have become an important, integral, beloved part of **Magic's** worlds, storylines, and gameplay. Players enjoy seeing Elves on the table, and enjoy putting Elves in decks. We enjoy that too, and we want to see that keep happening. So when we design little green creatures, we try to concept as Elves a lot of the cool and powerful ones whose mechanics match Elven values.

Finally, let me address your Goblins vs. Elves question. Both tribes are among **Magic's** absolute most powerful. Each is capable of incredible tribal effects when it gets a lot of its creatures together. Since green has enchantment destruction, green Elves are way better at handling enemy circles of Protection than red Goblins. But red can kill little creatures (such as Elves) and green can't kill little creatures (such as Goblins). So, when Goblins fight Elves directly, Goblins **can** kill off the key Elves, Elves **can't** kill the key Goblins, and Goblins usually come out ahead.

October 3, 2006



Q: Are older versions of the cards printed with the purple expansion symbol also legal in tournaments where *Time Spiral* is legal?

--António

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

António,

The tournament rules state that in most cases any version of a tournament legal card can be played. This means, for example, that the *Legions Akroma* is just as legal to play as the timeshifted *Time Spiral* version. The exceptions are cards from special sets or supplements with alternate backs, squared corners, or gold borders, such as Collector's Edition, Pro Tour Collector's Set, World Championship decks, etc. The last exception is the original Alpha set, which can only be mixed with non-Alpha cards when you are using opaque sleeves which will not show the difference in the card corners. As always, when in doubt about tournament legality just check the [Magic Floor Rules](#).

October 2, 2006



Q: In August 2's Card of the Day article, an R&D game called "The Game" was briefly mentioned, and a rule or two were explained which may have mentioned a wrestling match between R&D members at IKEA. The game seemed much more complex, though. I was wondering what the full rules to that game are. Could you explain?

--Matt

Washington DC, USA

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

"The game" is the "shotgun game". And, it is what all civilized people use to determine who gets to sit in the front seat of the car. Without the game to give us guidance and rules for such things, chaos and anarchy can result.

MOST of the rules can be found here:

<http://www.shotgunrules.com/>

With a few IMPORTANT exceptions.

One, "shotgun" is Power word, ("Jinx" is the other famous one). You can not just simply say a power word for no reason at all. These words serve powerful functions and should not be used at any time other than the appropriate one.

Two, if you "quote" what you are saying, typically by using your fingers to "quote" it, then it is as if you said nothing, your call means nothing. In this way, you can use power words in every day conversation and not suffer the penalty.

Three, the Penalty for rules infractions is you will get hit once (this penalty expires at midnight). The Penalty for hitting someone when they have not done anything wrong is they get to hit you back twice. While this may seem savage, you will find it keeps things civilized. Without these rules we would be little better than barbarians, hitting each other for no reason at all.

Now, as to the Ikea incident, if I recall correctly, we were approaching the exit. That is, leaving Ikea and entering the parking garage. Obviously the first person to enter the garage has a significant advantage in being able to call "shotgun" first, and thus enjoy the ride home in comfort. The two people involved both realized this, and a small struggle ensued in that they both wanted to be the first person out the door.



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