

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com



Ask Wizards

Wednesday, November 1, 2006

Ask Wizards - November, 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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November 30, 2006

Q: In the art for **Bogardan Hellkite**, we can see many little (compared to the dragon) winged creatures surrounding him. First, what exactly are those creatures, and second, do they have anything to do with his ability to deal direct damage when he comes into play?
--Joseph
Keyport, NJ

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:
Sorry, Joseph, but they're simply random birds "for scale" -- provided to demonstrate the dragon's size. You'll find other such objects included for scale on many huge creatures, such as **Avatar of Might**, **Thorn Elemental**, **Leviathan**, **Segovian Leviathan**, **B.F.M.**, and **Rakdos the Defiler**, just to name a few. See the [June 6, 2006 Magic Arcana](#) for more examples.

November 29, 2006

Q: I was reading through the flavor text of the *Time Spiral* cards, and found something familiar, The Song of All! Where can I see this complete song? Does it really exist?
--Franco
El Paso, TX

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:
The *Song of All* chronicles the beliefs, worldview, and wisdom of the planeswalker Serra, as expressed through her angels. The Song has 1000 cantos of varying lengths. The whole song would take many days, perhaps over a week, to sing from start to finish. Its full text doesn't exist, unfortunately. Nine parts of various cantos can be found in flavor text from cards. Use the Gatherer tool to find the 13 cards that contain flavor text referencing the *Song of All*. If you look over the white cards from the Urza block, you'll notice musical themes here and there, including choruses, hymns, and harpists, for example.

November 28, 2006

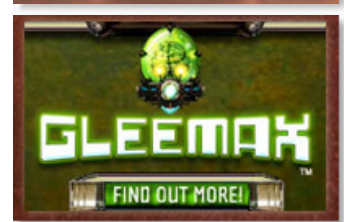
Q: I have been wondering why an emotion as strong as love has not been represented in any card, yet Hatred gets one? Is love confusing enough to print? Also, where in the color pie would love be?
--Mauro
Mexico City, Mexico

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** creative director:
I'll answer the easy part of your question first, Mauro. If you use the Greek words for various kinds of love, then *eros*, passionate love, is definitely red, and sometimes black. *Agape*, brotherly love, is white. *Philia*, fondness or appreciation, can go in just about any color, depending on its context—even loveless blue. As for why love isn't represented on cards very often . . . well, **Magic** is a game about spell battles, and cards tend to represent things that would have a use in such a battle. Just as there's not much use for florists or picnics in a magical battle, there's not much use for love, either. That doesn't mean we don't try to represent love when we can, though.

November 27, 2006

Q: I've noticed that there is only one non-aura enchantment in the 301 *Time Spiral* main set (**Opal Guardian**), and it doesn't actually perform any of the standard functions of enchantments. Is there a story behind why that happened?
--Chris
Kingston, PA

A: From **Aaron Forsythe**, **Magic** Head Developer:
Pure happenstance, actually. I suppose, now that you bring it up, that the role of normal enchantments was filled in part by some of the suspend cards. **Curse of the Cabal**, for example, feels an awful lot like an enchantment while it is suspended. Similarly, cards like **Wheel of Fate** affect the way the game is played, but



aren't creatures, lands, or artifacts--they just sit there, very similar to enchantments. Additionally, the Timeshifted cards like **Pandemonium**, **Stormbind**, **Sacred Mesa**, and **Enduring Renewal** gave the set a good bunch of build-around cards. We had no actual quota to meet, and gameplay never felt lacking, so it is just a random twist of fate that there are so few non-Auras in the main set.

And, you have to admit that **Paradox Haze**, while technically an Aura, really doesn't feel like one.

November 24, 2006



Q: "**Pride of the Clouds** looks like a great and fun card, but I'm very confused: Why doesn't it read, 'Pride of the Clouds's power and toughness are each equal to the number of creatures you control with flying?' It's confusing to have a creature that has the same power/toughness setting ability as 13 others in Standard, yet which uses the template for boosting other creatures. Why does **Pride of the Clouds** warrant this difference?"

--Jay
Philadelphia, PA

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

"The answer to your question can be found in the comments on this card in the Multiverse database:

Del 8/9: No amount of fiddling with the name and/or the colors of the tokens would make this rules text fit. I was able to trim the necessary line by changing from a */* with P/T = number of flying creatures to a 1/1 with Radiant, Archangel's ability. Okay?

AF 8/9: Looks good to me. I'm pretty sure the tokens have to be WU birds at this point.

MP 9/2: Cost to cast and Forecast cost down by 1 each.

"This kind of thing happens a lot during card development. Mark Gottlieb will find a card with rules problems, or I'll come across a card with length issues. The next step is for us to give the development team printable options that fulfill their goals for the card.

"This particular functionality tweak is pretty invisible. In the language of rules gurus, the old ability applied in sublayer 6a (see rule 418.5, 'Interaction of Continuous Effects'), and the new one applies in sublayer 6d. Whatever. All you or the development team really need to know is that **Omnibian** turns **Pride of the Clouds** into a 3/3 creature that still gets the bonus. The card is a little more powerful, but it lost the useful '*/*' message of 'hey, read the rules to see how big I am!' As an added bonus, this particular ability exactly matches **Radiant**, **Archangel**, which needed this template because it has additional power and toughness."



November 23, 2006



Q: While I will never complain about iconic, classic pieces of art like Alpha's **Serra Angel** or **Black Lotus**, it's obvious that even an unpopular common from a modern set has far higher production values on its art than the best card from the early days. Why has the quality of the art gone up so drastically over the years?

--Alex
Ontario, Canada

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

Oh no you don't, Alex... I'm not stepping in that bear trap! Ha! Honestly, there are a couple different issues here. Art, its quality, the impact it has... these are all very personal and subjective. Let's not discuss this from when the art is 'better', as that will only lead to an inevitable crossfire of conflicting opinions, but talk about the functionality of the art. It is acquired and conceived a different way today, for a different final result.

In the 'old days', art descriptions were vague suggestions of images (I believe the original "**Lord of the Pit**" was simply commissioned as 'Balrog') and then those images were swapped around, and forced into homes on cards, often arbitrarily (the original "**Twiddle**" art was commissioned for a land, the original "**Birds of Paradise**" sports art also commissioned for a land). Also, art was purchased on site, and placed in cards from time to time. Neither continuity nor the idea of worldbuilding (creating distinctive and unique worlds and settings) would become issues until some time later.

Today those very ideas are some of our loftiest goals. To create a new and exciting setting, filled with creatures, people and locales that resonate as fantasy, but are unique enough to be specific to **Magic**. That has pushed us to find a stable of artists who are appropriate for each given set and setting, so we can commission art that is representative of the card and its mechanical needs, or at the very least not misleading or arbitrary. Along those lines, we now write card concepts and art descriptions that imply engaging visuals, but never at the expense of continuity or clarity. I think it is clear how these two different sets of processes and priorities would lead to different end results, and I am sincerely glad to hear your affirmation that the results are good.

November 22, 2006



Q: With hundreds of new cards being printed every year and the fact that almost every card in the game is

legal in Vintage, does R&D ever worry about a time when Vintage will "break"? That is, do you think there will ever be a point at which a certain combination of approximately 60 cards will become the most dominant deck in the game, and tournament Vintage players will be forced to build only that deck?

--Adrian
USA

A: From **Randy Buehler**, Director of **Magic** R&D:

If I use your definition of "break" then no, I don't think Vintage will ever break. In general, there are so many answers available in **Magic** that as soon as a bunch of people all decided on what 60 cards they wanted to play, an enterprising metagamer could turn a profit by playing cards dedicated solely to hosing that particular deck list. This almost never happens in constructed **Magic** because people play so many different decks that you have to play with cards that are versatile and generally useful.

Now another potential definition of what constitutes a "broken format" would be that cards are so powerful that the luck of the draw means too much and player skill means too little. A lot of people have used a lot of pixels debating whether this has already happened in Vintage. (It's a complicated argument that I'm not going to get into here but you can search the Star City forums if you want to read up on it.) My own take on Vintage is that yes, it is broken, but it's broken in so many different ways and there are so many different broken cards that they all cancel each other out and the format remains quite fun and exciting. You can't actually fit all the broken cards into one deck (**Mishra's Workshop** and **Mana Drain** don't exactly play well together, and neither plays all that well with **Dark Ritual** either) and so there's a diversity of different decks available and the format has just as much variety, if not more, than other constructed formats. The brokenness is what gives the format its flavor. That feeling of raw power coursing through your veins while you play it is why many of us keep coming back to play it some more.

November 21, 2006



Q: When designing split second did you ever consider allowing split second cards to be responded to by other split second cards?

-- Peterson, Brazil

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

The answer is that **Magic** has already run that experiment. They were called interrupts. (For newer players, interrupt was a seventh card type that was weeded out when the *Sixth Edition* rules were added.) Split second was, in fact, R&D trying to capture the essence of what we liked about interrupts (that they can't be responded to with other cards) without the baggage that we didn't want (timing confusion). That said, we did consider your idea, but in the end reminded ourselves why we got rid of interrupts in the first place.

November 20, 2006



Q: With *Time Spiral* did you consider re-templating flanking to read "flanking 1" like the other numbered keywords (mainly bushido)? You re-templated echo, so why not flanking? It looks especially odd how it's written for *Calvary Master*.

-- Ellis Troy
Ohio, USA

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

We considered this, but determined that the costs outweighed the benefits.

Bushido was designed from the beginning with multiple bushido numbers because it's a much more interactive ability. When a creature with bushido blocks or becomes blocked, it gets a bonus... and then the combat continues. The creatures fighting it still get to deal damage, maybe killing it or maybe just dealing enough damage that something else can finish it off later. Because the ability involves addition, the sky's the limit.

Flanking isn't the same. Because it lowers the toughness of a creature, it's much less interactive. We never found it that interesting to actually print a creature with "flanking 2" because it doesn't play very well. If the creature is blocked by a creature with toughness 2 or less (which is more than half of them), that creature dies before it deals damage. If the creature is blocked by a creature with toughness 3 or greater, it shrinks the blocker by such an extent that combat is still brutal. The ability is basically "Don't block me." It might be interesting to print a single one, but not really any more than that - and it's not worth changing the entire nature of the ability for that one creature. Instead, the *Mirage* block had **Knight of Valor**, and *Time Spiral* has **Cavalry Master**.

Note that **Cavalry Master's** ability is not the same as "flanking 2." It would actually be very awkward (if not impossible) to word it that way since it would have to remove flanking 1 from all creatures and replace it with flanking 2. It's also functionally different. Multiple **Cavalry Masters** are cumulative, so creatures can get three or more instances of flanking. The alterna-**Cavalry Master** would just set things at "flanking 2."

Well then, what about echo? We changed the rules for echo, changed the reminder text, and gave errata to every single card with echo... yet not one single echo card now works any differently than it would have before. That is really strange. Seems like a lot of needless work. I wonder why we did that...

November 17, 2006



Q: I was reading the [Time Spiral novel](#), and in the about the author page it states that Scott McGough has

appeared on a magic card. Which card is it? What other real life MTG staff members have appeared on cards?

-- Jason Syosset
Long Island, USA

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

Scott McGough has appeared on the card **Opportunity** from **Urza's Legacy**.



Ron Spears was working at Wizards of the Coast at the time the art was commissioned and he used co-worker McGough as the model for the art. This occurred again recently when Jeremy Jarvis (**Magic** Art Director) used D. Alexander Gregory (**Magic** Artist) as the model for **Rakdos Guildmage** and Gregory's wife as the model for **Adarkar Valkyrie**.

Ever wonder what your favorite **Magic** artist looks like? An artist using themselves as models is fairly common as well. Todd Lockwood appears as the "guy on the right" of **Capashen Standard** from **Urza's Destiny**. Matt Cavotta used himself and his wife as the models for **Shared Fate** from **Mirrodon**.

Magic R&D has shown up on a few **Magic** cards as well. Of course Richard Garfield shows up on **Richard Garfield, Ph.D.** For **Unglued 2** the card **R&D's Secret Lair** had artwork commissioned using a photo of five R&D members. **Unglued 2** was never printed, however, and the card had to wait until **Unhinged** to see print. The original painting featuring Mark Rosewater, Henry Stern, Bill Rose, Mike Elliot and William Jockush was replaced by the current artwork. The portrait featured the five members sitting around a table with Mark burning a **Black Lotus** to light a cigarette. Mark doesn't smoke and it was decided that **Magic** didn't want to show anyone smoking on a **Magic** card (let alone burning a **Black Lotus**!)

November 16, 2006



Q:Where would each Ravnican guild fall on the spectrum of D&D alignments?

Thanks!

-- Jeremy
College Park, Maryland, USA

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

When we were building the identities of *Ravnica's* guilds, Jeremy, we actually talked about each color in terms of D&D alignments (and in terms of superheroes, animals, food, and whatever else we could think of). There's not a clean match, but the closest we came was that white = good, blue = lawful, black = evil, red = chaotic, and green = neutral. (Lawful is a stretch for blue, and good and evil have less meaning in **Magic** than in D&D.) Those assignments would yield the following guild alignments:

Azorious = lawful good

Dimir = lawful evil

Rakdos = chaotic evil

Gruul = chaotic neutral

Selesnya = neutral good

Golgari = neutral evil

Orzhov = [good evil]

Boros = chaotic good

Izzet = [lawful chaotic]

Simic = lawful neutral

This scheme works surprisingly well, in my opinion. The exceptions are the Boros, which would be "lawful passionate" or something, and the Orzhov and Izzet, which have two values on the same alignment spectrum. Interestingly, this scheme also reveals how conflicted the Orzhov are, how insane the Izzet are. If I had to choose alignments for the Orzhov and Izzet, I guess I'd choose lawful evil and chaotic neutral, respectively. That in turn demonstrates that the Orzhov and Dimir are two sides of the same coin, and that maybe the Izzet and the Gruul have more in common than it would appear at first glance. They're both chaotic and passionate, but otherwise mostly amoral (blue and green are united by their amorality).

November 15, 2006



Q: Black's two main ways of critter kill ("destroy target" and "target gets -x/-x") are very different in how they play out functionally, but can you give me a rundown on how they differ flavor-wise, which might also explain why one block or set would have more of one than the other beyond just function reasons?

-- John
San Diego, CA

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

The difference in flavor between minus effects and destroy effects is as simple as the difference between *weakening* and *killing*; the two abilities fall on different points on the maliciousness scale of the color black. That flavor is never really taken into account when making cards, however; typically, we just want to vary how the different removal spells in a given format play. So we try to include a mix of weakening, killing, and *draining* -- the third major type of black removal that typically couples damage and life gain--in each set. Never (to my knowledge) has the flavor of a particular set or world made us want to make more of one kind of removal than another.

November 14, 2006



Q: When you came up with the Snow supertype for *Coldsnap*, why didn't you go back and errata some of the old creatures from *Ice Age / Alliances* to be snow creatures? This would have suited creatures like **Fyndhorn Elves** (to set them apart from the Llanowars), **Rime Dryad**, and **Orcish Squatters**, along with the fairly obvious **Goblin Snowman**. I mean, come on! It's a freakin' snowman! It's MADE of snow! It just occurs to me that in Legacy/Vintage play this would really make Snow a lot more meaningful.

--Nick Yankton
South Dakota, USA

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

Hi Nick,

Good question. It's very important to us that when players look at the cards they own and read them, the cards still do what they say they do. These days we're very cautious about any errata that would make the cards do something different than what you would guess they do from reading the cards. Sometimes we have no choice but to issue errata to make *Legends*-era cards work within the modern rules. However, we really try hard to avoid significant functional errata, meaning errata that fundamentally changes what the cards officially do in Oracle versus what they say they do on the physical cards themselves. Adding "Snow" to **Goblin Snowman** and **Fyndhorn Elves** might seem "fairly obvious" to you, but your friend might not agree that it's obvious, and it would be really annoying if you had to go to Oracle to find out all the functional changes that had been made to each card you owned.

The only big exception to this is that after many discussions, we decided to update all the creature types in *Mirage* and *Visions* when we published those sets online. (Why we were ok with that gets into a more complicated question that's been talked about quite a bit on the site already and is more than I could get into here.) And if you're dying to get a Snowy mana-producing Elf, look no further than **Boreal Druid**!

November 13, 2006



Q: In Mark Rosewater's Great Designer Search essay test answer key, he says that he considers mana screw to be an important part of the game - it evens the odds between skill levels and functions as a psychological pressure release valve for players' frustration. In the next article, while critiquing a submission he states that he'd remove mana burn from the game if he could. Why? Mana burn seems much more innocuous than mana screw - it is so rarely a problem, and it seems to open up a minor design space (like **Braid of Fire**, **Coal Stoker**, **Eladamri's Vineyard**, **Upwelling**) as opposed to taking up mandatory slots in every set which must be devoted to fixing the problem, like mana screw. Minor bookkeeping and memory issues seem to me to be the only real problem with mana burn. How would eliminating mana burn add to the complex decision-making tension of the game?

--D.J.
King City, California, USA

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

D.J.,

There are two major reasons that some designers (and I should stress not all - so don't think it's going away anytime soon) want to get rid of mana burn.

Reason #1 - It Adds Complexity That Doesn't Seem To Matter Enough For The Complication - One of the ongoing issues **Magic** has is that over time the game keeps getting more complicated as we keep adding new things (mechanics, individual abilities on cards, etc.) to the game. As a means to help slow down this complication, we constantly look at things that exist in **Magic** and ask if their complication is worth their value. Mana burn is a hard concept for some to understand and it matters very little of the time. If we were starting the game over again, I think it's quite likely mana burn would never exist (or more likely, would be an effect that the few cards that would care like **Heartbeat of Spring** would self generate).

Reason #2 - It Cuts Off More Design Space Than It Creates - Mana burn makes certain cards more interesting but there are few cards that couldn't exist without mana burn. The existence of mana burn though seriously constrains designing cards where life total is important because mana burn makes it so that players can by choice lower their life total at any time.

Mana screw, on the other hand, is a by-product of the game's mana system which is fundamental to how **Magic** functions. Whether you consider it an important function or merely a necessary evil of the game, it isn't something **Magic** can easily take away. Mana burn could leave tomorrow and the game would work just fine. Once again, let me stress mana burn isn't going away anytime soon. Mana burn has a lot of inertia and taking elements like that out of the game are very tough to do.

November 10, 2006



Q: In the September 28 Ask Wizards, Mark Rosewater mentioned the difficulty of designing for both rarities and colors, but he didn't mention card types. My question is, what is the order of difficulty of creating card types?

--Matthew

Concord, North Carolina, USA

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

Interesting question Matthew. This probably varies from person to person, but for me I would rank designing the card types from easiest to toughest as follows.

- Creature (by far the easiest as they have both the most parts to play with and have the greatest amount of ongoing keyword support.)
- Instant (Another area with a lot of choices.)
- Enchantments (Very restrictive at lower rarities.)
- Sorceries (We just have less effects that we either do or work well at sorcery speed.)
- Artifacts (You'd think they'd be easy as they can kind of do anything, but having to keep from overlapping colors actually makes designing these harder than you might think.)
- Land (The space is just so restrictive and we've covered so much that there's less design space to work with than the other card types.)

November 9, 2006



Q: With all the new slivers in *Time Spiral*, I started wondering - If I had one of each sliver in play, what would the stats of my **Metallic Sliver** be?

--Brad

Cleveland, Ohio

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

Hi Brad, fun question. Going through Gatherer, I got the following. (Though I'm sure we'll hear in the boards if I missed anything!)

Metallic Sliver

①
Artifact Creature - Sliver

Flying. Shadow. Haste. First strike. Double Strike. Flanking. Trample. Provoke.

You may play this creature any time you could play an instant.

This creature can't be countered.

This creature has protection from the color chosen for **Ward Sliver**.

This creature can't be the target of spells or abilities.

If this creature would be put into a graveyard, you may put it on top of its owner's library instead.

This creature can't be blocked except by two or more creatures.

This creature can't be blocked except by Slivers.

This creature gets +1/+1 as long as you control a swamp.

This creature can block as though it had flying.

This creature is colorless.

①: This creature's type becomes the creature type of your choice in addition to its other types until end of turn.

②: This creature gets +0/+1 until end of turn.

②: This creature gets +1/+0 until end of turn.

②: This creature gets +1/+1 until end of turn.

②: Regenerate this creature.

☞: Regenerate this creature.

Pay 2 life: Return this creature to its owner's hand.

- ☞: Regenerate target Sliver.
- ☞: Target Sliver gets +X/+0 until end of turn, where X is the number of Slivers in play.
- ☞: This creature deals 1 damage to target attacking or blocking creature.
- ☞: Target player puts the top card of his or her library into his or her graveyard.
- ☞: Tap target permanent.
- ☞: This creature deals 2 damage to target creature or player and 3 damage to itself.
- ☞: Add one mana of any color to your mana pool.
- ☞: Name a card. Target opponent reveals a card at random from his or her hand. If it's the named card, that player discards it. Play this ability only during your turn.

Whenever this creature deals damage, its controller gains that much life.
 Whenever this creature deals combat damage to a creature, destroy that creature. It can't be regenerated.
 Whenever this creature deals combat damage to a player, you may draw a card.
 Whenever this creature deals combat damage to a player, its controller may put a 1/1 colorless Sliver creature token into play.

Whenever this creature becomes blocked, it gets +1/+1 until end of turn for each creature blocking it.
 Whenever this creature is dealt damage, put a +1/+1 counter on it.
 Whenever this creature becomes the target of a spell an opponent controls, you may draw a card.
 When this creature comes into play, destroy target artifact or enchantment.

7/7 (8/8 if you control a **Swamp**)

November 8, 2006



Q: Since **Uncle Istvan** and **Sindbad** represent unique individuals, it seem that (from a flavor perspective at least) they should be legendary. Was any consideration given to switching them to legendary creatures when they were reprinted in *Time Spiral*? What if they were printed for the first time today instead?

--Nathan
 Columbia, PA

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

It was decided fairly early on, Nathan, that the timeshifted cards should be reprinted with as few functional changes as we were willing to live with, and making Istvan and Sindbad into legendary creatures would be a huge functional change. Yes, from a flavor perspective, these cards should be legendary. But part of revisiting the old days is revisiting not just the greatness, but also the randomness and sometimes dumbness of the old days. (If we were to print those cards for the first time today, they would be legendary, although it's more likely that they'd be conceived entirely differently.)

November 7, 2006



Q: **Mistform Ultimius** is every creature type. When it was printed, "legend" was still a creature type, so **Mistform Ultimius** was legendary by default. However, the creature type "legend" has been replaced by "legendary creature" ever since *Kamigawa*. My question is this: If it had been printed today, would **Mistform Ultimius** still be legendary?

-- Stephen Whitworth
 Germantown, MD

A: From **Randy Buehler**, Director of **Magic** R&D:

Yes, it would have and for two different reasons. One reason to make it legendary is that it's special - this is a one-of-a kind creature, not just one example of a bunch of **Mistform Ultimuses** (Ultimii?) that populate Otaria. Even if it wasn't for that flavor argument, I think we still would have made it legendary just because of the history of the legend creature type. Some people still think of it as being "like" a creature type, some people have theme decks that are all legends, etc.

November 6, 2006



Q: I noticed in *Time Spiral* that the Slivers seem to have gotten... well, fat. Looking back at older cards like **Spined Sliver** or **Essence Sliver**, they appear sleek, sharp, deadly. Then I look at *Time Spiral*, and **Quilled Sliver** and **Gemhide Sliver** look like they belong on a couch eating potato chips. Is there any particular reason for the change, or was it just something that happened?

--Michael
 Lawrenceville, GA

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

Random occurrence, Michael. I suppose they are a little . . . zaftig compared to the Slivers of old. Maybe it's a side effect of the wider range of power/toughness among the modern-day Sliver cards. Or maybe it's the higher-in-trans-fat Dominarian diet. More likely, however, it's a purely accidental development.

November 3, 2006



Q: Why is it that new-border flashback spells like **Think Twice** don't have the tombstone next to the card name? Was it given any consideration??

--Kris
 Orlando, FL

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

When the tombstone icon was introduced, Kris, we had every intention to use it on every card with flashback, and thought it might even have applications for other mechanics (or some other icon in the same location). But as time passed, we decided that, well, we just didn't like it very much. It's aesthetically a little disruptive, perhaps more so on the new card frame design than on the old one, and it's not quite as useful to gameplay as we once thought it might be. So it simply fell by the wayside.



November 2, 2006

Q: When I saw the German versions of **Scragnoth** and **Evil Eye of Urborg**, I wondered who or what the "Franz" in the flavor texts could be. I searched the Internet for other cards with "Franz" in the flavor texts and found that there are some German cards where this Franz appears, but no English cards with "Franz", and besides I found that some flavor texts are totally different (like **Scragnoth's**) So I would like to know

1. Who or what is Franz?
2. Why do you print these different flavor texts on the same cards?

--Arne
Germany

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

Franz is an invention of Hanno Girke, a member of our translation team who works on **Magic** translation into German. To understand Franz's origin, you need to know something about flavor text translation.

Magic flavor text is first written in English and then translated into other languages. As you might imagine, it can be nearly impossible to preserve the precise intent of English flavor text when it is translated into other languages, especially when it relies on a pun or other untranslatable wordplay. Instead of having to force an awkward translation, **Magic** translators have the freedom to tweak flavor text to preserve meaning or even to invent their own.

In *Classic* (Sixth Edition), translator Hanno Girke introduced Franz as a mad blue wizard on **Memory Lapse**, which, on the German printing, reads essentially:

"I'm not Franz." – Franz

Thereafter Franz made it onto a few other cards, receiving good feedback from German players—see also the German printings of **Defy Gravity**, **Gorilla Chieftain**, **Worldly Tutor**, **Creeping Mold**, **Uthden Troll**, and **Defense Grid**.

As you've found, the most recent appearances of Franz were on timeshifted **Scragnoth** (the intelligence / counter-intelligence joke didn't work in German) and **Evil Eye of Urborg** (which had its English quote tweaked to include the mad wizard Franz).

Who knows, maybe Franz will even appear in English flavor text someday.

November 1, 2006

Q: What is the connection between starcitygames.com and magicthegathering.com? I have noticed an increasing amount of cross references and promotion as well as [starcitygames](http://starcitygames.com) generally "playing nice" with **Magic** and not saying anything remotely controversial or "against company lines".

--Kyle
Brisbane, Australia

A: From **Scott Johns**, magicthegathering.com Producer:

Good question Kyle. I went back and forth a couple times on who to give this to, such as someone in **Magic** Brand, but in the end I decided to just answer it myself. Why? Well, because I'm probably the person most responsible for what you're noticing. For those who don't know, before I came to Wizards a few years ago, I used to be a pro player who also ran other independent web sites. I was responsible for reviving Mindripper back in the late Dojo days, and after problems with the management at that company I moved over to run a little start-up called Brainburst instead. After leaving Brainburst I wrote briefly for Star City, and then ended up getting hired by Wizards.

All that background matters, because during the time I worked on those sites I believe Wizards' general policy was to require exclusivity from its writers. So, when someone like Zvi Mowshowitz would become a regular columnist somewhere like *The Sideboard*, that would normally become their only gig, forcing them to leave the smaller site they used to write for. As someone trying to run one of the non-Wizards sites, I repeatedly saw how tough this could make it for the little guys. One of my expressly stated goals coming here to Wizards was that I wanted to allow our writers to work at the other sites as well, if they wanted to. There are a lot of reasons behind that (including the subscription issue, which I'll get to in a sec), but the main one is that the independent sites and Wizards have the same goal: to promote **Magic**. As far as I'm concerned, if it's good for **Magic**, it's good for us. There's plenty of great content to go around, so I have no problem linking to other sites that promote the game, or featuring people that may be prominent on other sites.

Now, I can't speak of previous brand management policy and whether the independent sites were seen as competition for the Wizards sites, because I don't know what the reasoning or policy was. (In fact, none of that original team of brand managers is even with us anymore.) What I can tell you is that my own opinion is that the independent sites don't compete with magicthegathering.com. The good ones want to promote the game, which is a complementary goal. Because of that, I don't have any problem sharing writers with other sites. That goes double now that sites like Brainburst and Star City have subscription-based content. I certainly don't have any problem with that (heck, I was the first to introduce it, back at Brainburst) but I am aware of the fact that the vast majority of readers *don't* have subscriptions to those sites, and so they would otherwise miss out on top-notch writers like Flores, BDM, and Frank Karsten. (Pointing out Karsten by the way, it's not just Star City we link to and point out from time to time. We link to Brainburst articles as well, plus featuring Frank Karsten who was and continues to be a Brainburst Premium writer. But, Star City is putting a lot more content out right now and features more writers, so it's not surprising that they would get more mention and have more writers on our site.)

The shorter version of all that is: I strongly believe the independent sites are good for the game, and so we watch for opportunities to help them out. (One of the reasons we throw them occasional preview cards as well, by the way.) So, at least since I joined the company, there has been more and more openness to throwing publicity to those other sites. As to what those sites choose to post, that's up to them. As long as they follow the legal guidelines of what's acceptable, there certainly isn't any cabal telling them what's ok or not ok to say, how not to offend us, or anything else like that. In fact, should some controversy come up I'm sure there will be plenty of posts on sites like Star City and Brainburst. And that's fine, that's what those sites are for.

More importantly, it's not just what I believe. There certainly hasn't been anyone at the company asking me to stop giving free mention to those other sites. So, though I don't know enough about the time prior to my arrival here to say anything definitive, I can say that since I did arrive it's been a conscious choice to allow the spotlight to shine on other **Magic** sites when good opportunities are there, and I think that's what you're noticing.



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