

A look at a few of the many Magic surprises hidden in plain sight. **Magic: A Gathering of Easter Eggs**

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To the fighting game aficionado, it's the unlockable secret character. In software tech-writer lingo, it's the undocumented feature. Audiophiles know it as the hidden track at the end of the CD. It's the Easter egg, and it's in just about every entertainment medium. **Magic** is no exception; at its core, the Easter egg is as crucial to the creation of a **Magic** card as the cardboard. Secrecy yields surprise, which generates fun, which encourages fandom – and that progression is the key to what makes **Magic** more than a game, and greater than the sum of its parts.

We'll look at some examples of **Magic's** Easter eggs in action, and then I'll wrap up with why they're so important. But first, let's be sure we're straight on what we mean by "Easter egg" in this context.

What's an Easter Egg?

When I was a philosophy major in college, I was fond of starting every discussion by defining terms. Usually this devolved into a side debate over the semantics of the proposed definition, which in turn devolved into a scrap over the epistemological underpinnings of language, which in turn devolved into a brutal knuckle-bloodying over the reality of the external world and the naiveté of the concept of "efficacy of the senses." Then cheesecake at a café. Good times. Now I work for a living, and don't have the luxury of answering the threat of a deadline by questioning the metaphysical reality of my boss. But I still like definitions, so hey:

An Easter egg is a secret feature hidden in a piece of media by its author or designer.

It has to be *secret*. The prize in a box of Cracker Jacks doesn't count—everybody expects a prize in their Cracker Jacks. The prize is advertised right on the box. Not an Easter egg.

And it has to be *put there on purpose*. A potato chip shaped like Abraham Lincoln in profile doesn't count – nobody at the Frito-Lay Corporation toiled away at creating and hiding such a chip. (But if someone did, *awesome*.) A series of letters at the beginning of chapters of the French translation of



War and Peace that spell your middle name doesn't count – that's just a coincidence. Not an Easter egg.

There are lots of Easter eggs in **Magic**. I mean lots and lots. There are entire features devoted to them on this very website—Card of the Day and Magic Arcana are workhorses of daily **Magic** Easter egg documentation. And there are good reasons why there are so many Easter eggs in **Magic**, and why they're so important to the game. Let's look at some examples first.

Hiding in Plain Sight

Take a look at [Liege of the Pit](#).



It's kind of the love-child of [Grinning Demon](#) (a morph fattie with a drawback that you could avoid by playing it face-down) and [Lord of the Pit](#) (the more straightforward homage – a 7/7 flying trampling demon with an endless hunger). *Time Spiral* has all kinds of allusions to past cards this way, and you, as a player and fan of **Magic** who already knew those past cards, get that little neighborhood picnic on Memory Lane every time you *get* the allusion. Fine.

But then you take a [closer look](#) at the art.



[Liege of the Pit](#) art by Jeremy Jarvis

And you see it, and build decks with it, and beat down your friends and random **Magic Online** strangers-in-the-night with it, and nothing is out of the ordinary.

But then one day you do a double-take and take a closer look at it. You get goose bumps and wonder aloud, "Were those there the whole time?" And you show your friend and he goes, "Whoa," and you laugh and say, "Jeremy Jarvis, what a sicko! That's great."

Why?

See, it's because you finally noticed that, dangling from the top of its spread-rib chest cavity are not wrinkled, heart-like organs as you had assumed, but crying baby heads.



Undocumented feature, no?

Magic is a print medium, which presents certain challenges for hiding information. Every piece of information is built into the card when it's printed – there's no message that appears on the card when you pull off a secret combo, no cut scene that pops up only on Mark Rosewater's birthday. Every secret is hidden in plain sight, encoded into the normal-appearing elements of the card you've come to expect. This is a time-honored tradition – think of "Where's Waldo?" books or the thief in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter." (The thief steals a sensitive letter, and the police search every cranny of his lodgings and can't find it. They never suspected he would leave it sitting in plain view, so they overlooked it repeatedly.)

Magic art is a great spot to hide Easter eggs in plain view. It's only a few square inches, so the secret is likely to be small. And **Magic** art is often crammed with detail, so it's easy to overlook hidden details even if they're plainly visible. Lastly it's the art of a card in a card game, in which the mechanics of the card matter more for gameplay than minutiae of the art.

But still, if you spend enough time with the game, and you start to see patterns forming. After waiting to get to seven mana in one game, you get a Rorschach impression of the Flame Wave in your hand and [see the image](#) of a deadly skull in the tidal wave of fire.



Flame Wave art by Donato Giancola

And then you look even closer and you see a little guy (presumably with protection from red) [hanging ten](#) in the midst of the wave!

Storyline Secrets

Cards that depict events in **Magic** novels are their own type of Easter egg; they wrap little presents of flavorful connection in an innocuous cardboard package. One example involves several cards and the *Invasion* Block storyline. In those novels, in order to help his ally planeswalkers survive the lethal conditions of a counterstrike on Phyrexia, Urza constructs a series of mechanized suits of powered armor called “titan engines.”



Urza's suit of power armor, and other planeswalkers' titan engines, appear in several pieces of *Invasion* Block art. Famously, you can find [examples on...](#) [Urza's Rage](#) and [Void](#):



Somewhat less famously, you can also [find it on...](#) [Pledge of Loyalty](#) and [Searing Rays](#):



But perhaps the most secret shot of a titan engine [is on...](#)
[Confound:](#)



[Confound](#) art by Doug Chaffee

Check out the pattern of the windows in the scene. It's a shot through the cockpit of a titan suit, with Tevesh Szat inside. Urza built a titan engine for Tevesh Szat, but unsurprisingly, the evil Szat betrayed the other planeswalkers. As [Confound](#)'s flavor text points out, Urza was ready for the betrayal.

If you hadn't read the novels, you might see the art of those cards and not see the relationship between them. But the Creative Team often builds connections to the novels in card art and names to build the feeling of the setting.

There's more to the [titan engine story](#).

The design of the titan engines' cockpit window structure strongly resembles the [Thran symbol](#). Urza was heavily influenced by the designs of that ancient race of artificers, and so the design of the titan suits reflected the symbol, which you can see on cards like [Thran War Machine](#):



[Thran War Machine](#) art by Pete Venters

Scrambled Easter Eggs

Magic buries information in card names as well. "[Liege of the Pit](#)" conjures its referent [Lord of the Pit](#), but that's not exactly buried. Anagrams are the way to go if you want to hide secrets in just a few words.

Magic's early years were flush with anagrams. [Wyluli Wolf](#), [Phelddagrif](#), [Ernam Djinn](#), [Mijae Djinn](#), and [Ydwen Efreet](#) are all anagrams or partial anagrams for the names of friends and family of **Magic's** first creators.

"Onulets" is an anagram of the life-gaining artifact [Soul Net](#), as seen on the *Antiquities* artifact creature [Onulet](#). Then, years later, a life-gaining artifact creature in *Fifth Dawn* was named [Anodet Lurker](#), an anagram of "Darker Onulet."



Ice Age's [Elkin Bottle](#) and *Weatherlight's* [Bösium Strip](#) brought some higher math into **Magic** via the anagram. The Klein Bottle and Möbius Strip are mathematical concepts that demonstrate principles of [single-surface topology](#). That's what you get when your game's creator was a Ph.D. in combinatorial mathematics.

Anagrams met a kind of backlash inside R&D after those first few heady years, and the *Mirage* character of Mangara (an anagram for "anagram") was named as a tease to those editors frustrated with the preponderance of those scrambled Easter eggs. The "vanity Easter egg" of inserting a scrambled friend's name into a card name still tempts **Magic** card namers to this day, but the practice is frowned upon. So much rides on the flavor and continuity of the **Magic** backstory now that it becomes awkward when important storyline characters get named [Mr. Toilet](#) or [Larry Niven](#). Still, anagrams crop up from time to time. As one of the slang terms for the powerful [Morphling](#) is "Superman," Pemmin's Aura, an enchantment that grants a creature the activated abilities of [Morphling](#), is an anagram for "I am Superman." And there's another anagram in Planar Chaos.

Un-egg-ceptable

Unglued and *Unhinged* are the White House lawn of Easter egg hiding spots. Those non-tournament-legal sets pack in as many jokes as they can fit inside the silver borders (and sometimes, spilling past even that). *Unglued's* "Double" cards ([Double Dip](#), [Double Take](#), [Double Cross](#), [Double Deal](#), [Double Play](#)) have mechanics that span multiple games, and flavor text that spans all five cards. [Jack-in-the-Mox](#) has moxen hanging from his jester's cap. [B.F.M.](#) shows off its size by using [Polar Kraken](#) and [Phyrexian Dreadnought](#) as decorative earwear. The words near the copyright line on *Unglued* cards spells out a long message that span every card in the set. (See [this article](#) for more buried jokes and secrets in *Unglued*.)



The Easter eggs continue in *Unhinged*. There's the [Time Machine](#) that shows up in both [Old Fogey](#) and [Blast from the Past](#), and the creature from [AWOL](#) that shows up in [Urza's Hot Tub](#). There's the incredibly detailed Easter eggs in the graphic design of [Goblin Secret Agent](#) and [Unhinged packaging](#). Furthermore, *Unhinged's* very existence was shrouded in mystery, itself a kind of meta-secret about a set full of hidden jokes, following this (in retrospect, surprisingly forthright) [April Fool's article](#).

As a flavor text writer, my favorite "hidden in plain sight" message buried in *Unhinged* is [this one](#):



Why Easter Eggs?

When you uncover a surprise, you get not only that initial whoosh of enjoyment, but also that feeling of belonging to the exclusive club whose members know the secret. It's just fun. **Magic** accomplishes this mechanically in a zillion different ways – if you thought of the combo of [Guilty Conscience](#) and [Stuffy Doll](#), the velvet rope parts for you and suddenly you have a weapon your less creative **Magic** buddies don't. Of course that combo was just as available to them, but you thought of it and they didn't, so you deserve to win with it. Membership has its privileges!

Magic Easter eggs are the ultimate hidden feature. They give back to you, the dedicated player, as a bonus for the time you've spent on **Magic**. They congratulate you on your hard work and promise you another special tidbit if you look just a tiny bit closer. They reward your fandom. And isn't that what a good business should do?

So the next time you notice a named spear in [Goblin Grenade](#), spot the [Malachite Talisman on a Coldsnap card](#), or see plans for [a certain silver golem](#) in the background of [Stroke of Genius](#) (and [noton Chrome Mox](#)), think of it as the creators of **Magic** giving you a nod of thanks and a secret, conspiratorial wink.