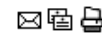


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# Bordering on Lunacy

Aaron Forsythe  
Latest Developments  
Friday, February 23, 2007



## First Tidbit

Starting this weekend, the life totals for Two-Headed Giant Limited [PTQs](#), [Grand Prix Trials](#), and [Grand Prix](#) is being changed to 30 life per team, as opposed to 40. This is not a change to the Comprehensive Rules - yet - it is just something that Organized Play is experimenting with. The change will also apply to the upcoming [Two-Headed Giant Limited State Championships](#).



When we debuted the new format a year or so ago, we started with 40 life, just as all other incarnations of Two-Headed Giant had done. Forty was chosen for no reason other than flavor: two of us, 20 life each, so 40 as a pair. Our forays with playtesting the rules didn't lead us to believe that anything was wrong with 40 life, and subsequent real-world data from the events we ran never showed a problem.

But now that 2HG is part of the "Road to Worlds" and all the serious tournament players have started taking cracks at it, strategies have begun emerging that slow the games down considerably - some incredibly high percentage of games played at the PTQ in Geneva didn't finish in the allotted time. To alleviate these problems, and to give aggressive cards a bit of their edge back, we're trying 30 life for the foreseeable future.

Maybe we end up keeping 30, maybe we go higher or lower. Let's see how this season plays out.

## Second Tidbit

The email server for this website was experiencing some difficulties between the site maintenance on Sunday and midday Wednesday, which means that if you sent anything to any of the authors or Ask Wizards during that period, we never got it.

Please resubmit your letters/questions... we all want to feel loved, and the empty inboxes have several of us feeling depressed!

## Black-Bordered Beginnings

If any of you were lucky enough to "Visit the Shores of Imagination" and open a booster pack of Alpha **Magic** back in 1993, you would have been greeted by fifteen beautiful black-bordered cards.

It is unclear to me why Richard Garfield and his cohorts chose black as the border color for that initial run of cards; after all, white borders were the industry standard for the time in the baseball card world. Maybe the black borders better hid some of the sizing and layout issues that Alpha had, or maybe Richard could just see even then that the frame colors and fantasy art just looked better when surrounded by black. In any event, a precedent was set.

The Beta set was just an extension of Alpha with a couple of previously-missing cards slipped in and a change to the cutting of the corners of the cards (a change that Garfield explained as "not intentional, and I don't know why it is there" in a Ask Wizards answer), and was also black-bordered. A real change was made with the "*Unlimited*" printing, which was done with white borders.

This made a lot of sense at the time. Collectors were a huge part of the **Magic** buying population, and so steps had to be taken to ensure that the collectibility of the game stayed strong. With no expansion symbols or legal text on cards in those early days, the best way to differentiate an *Unlimited* (second printing) card from an Alpha/Beta (first printing) was with the border color.

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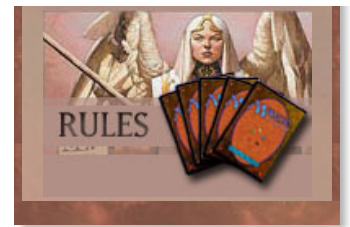
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## White at its Core

Expansions to the **Magic** game were released over the next year - *Arabian Nights* and *Antiquities* - with black borders. But the next update to the basic game (or Core Set as we call it these days), called "*Revised*," came out in 1994 with white borders.

A policy was taking shape. It was not the second printing of a *set* that called for white borders (as *Beta* and *Unlimited* are the same "set" of cards), but rather the second and subsequent printings of individual *cards* that were to have white borders. The first time you saw a card, it would be black-bordered, and then white-bordered after that.

Later in 1994, *Revised* was released in three new languages - Italian, French, and German - and, somewhat surprisingly, the cards were black-bordered, unlike the set's English counterpart. So the policy changed a bit: The first time a card is printed *in a language* it will have a black border, and white borders thereafter.

All the first printings of European *Revised* sold out, and the set was reprinted in each of the three languages, but with *white* borders the second time around. The sets were given new names in their respective languages, much as *Beta* and *Unlimited* were differentiated on the packaging, even though the list of cards they contained was identical.

## A Renaissance of Sorts

When *Fourth Edition* and *Chronicles* (a small set full of reprints from the *Arabian Nights*, *Antiquities*, *Legends*, and *The Dark* expansions) were to be released in 1995, things got a bit more complicated as we tried valiantly to adhere to our internal border-color policy.

*Fourth Edition* rotated in many cards from previous expansions, many of which had never appeared in foreign languages. So as an example, German *Fourth* would contain many, many cards that had already been printed in German (anything carried over from *Revised*), but a good number of cards that never had. So what color should the borders be? White seemed to be the correct choice, but that meant that some number of cards that didn't have German black-bordered versions would be released in white borders. Unacceptable!

To "solve" this problem, Wizards created a small set called *Renaissance* that would only be printed in languages that had black-bordered *Revised*. The German and French versions contained the subset of cards that were to be in *Fourth* but were not in *Revised*. The Italian version contained the subset of cards that were to be in *Fourth* and *Chronicles* but were not in *Revised*, *Legends*, or *The Dark* (the latter two expansions were released in Italian). You can read more about *Renaissance* from one of our own archaic web pages [here](#). Here's the long and short of it:

"Our policy instructs that we not print cards in white-border sets that didn't previously appear in either the original black-border **Magic: The Gathering** set in that language or in some black-border expansion set of that language. For example, the initial set for German and French is the same set as the *Revised*<sup>TM</sup> (third edition) set and the first German and French cards were released with black borders. Since there were no previous German or French expansions, the cards rotated into **Magic: The Gathering-Fourth Edition**<sup>TM</sup>, according to our policy, had to have first appeared with a black border before *Fourth Edition* could be printed with a white border."



In my opinion, *Renaissance* is a product born of a policy gone awry and probably severely hurt the demand for *Fourth Edition* in the countries it was printed in by providing black-bordered

versions of all the new content months before the white-bordered versions were released.

There were plans - great plans, I'm sure - to release *Chronicles* with white borders in Italian and black borders in all other languages, but that never happened. Due to some problems, which I'm guessing involved overprinting of the English version, *Chronicles* was not released at all in any European languages. The only foreign language *Chronicles* was released in was Japanese, and it was black-bordered.

*Fourth Edition* was white-bordered in French, German, and Italian, and was also released as a black-bordered set in Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, and Traditional Chinese.

## The Art Issue

*Ice Age* was released in 1994 and was a revolutionary set in that it could "stand alone." It was the first expansion set to contain all the basic lands, and it also reprinted several staple cards from the basic game, like **Power Sink**, **Wild Growth**, and **Dark Ritual**.

These "reprinted cards" appeared in black borders, which seemed a violation of policy. The *Ice Age* **Power Sink**, **Dark Ritual**, even **Plains** were certainly not the originals; how could they appear in black borders? The policy was amended ever-so-slightly yet again: The first time a card is printed in a language *with particular art* it will have a black border, and white borders thereafter.

The only cards to break the policy to that point were the infamous "**Arabian Nights Mountain**," the **Revised Plateau**, and the **Revised Serendib Efreet**. Each was due to a mistake, not a conscious decision to reuse or change art.

## Plead the Fifth

*Fifth Edition*, released in English in 1997, departed from many points of the border-color policy. The oddest change was that *Fifth* debuted in a new language - Simplified Chinese - but not in black borders. Additionally, new art was commissioned for many cards in the set, marking the first time art had ever debuted on white-bordered cards. And, lo and behold, the decision to do a second version of *Renaissance* was not made.

Three sets - *Fallen Empires*, *Ice Age*, and *Homelands* - had cards rotated into *Fifth Edition*. *Fallen Empires* was printed only in English (again due to overprinting), and the other two were not printed in any of the Asian languages. That meant that if *Fifth Edition* were to be printed in all languages with white borders - and it was - that there would be white-bordered cards in languages for which no black-bordered analogue existed.

No one cared. Perhaps there was no need for a policy.

## Weirdly White

Wizards released several black-bordered beginner products, most notable *Portal* and *Portal: Second Age*. The black borders made sense; after all, the sets contained many new cards and, at the very least, new art.

Then the beginner products began being printed with white borders. *Portal: Three Kingdoms* contained fewer than 20 reprints out of 170 cards, and even those had new art, yet the set was inexplicably white-bordered.

*Starter 1999* contained a good deal more reprints, but did introduce its fair share of new cards - most notably **Tidings** - yet was also printed on white borders. You still can't get a black-bordered English **Tidings** anywhere that isn't foil.

## Oooh... Shiny!

*Seventh Edition* marked the introduction of premium "foil" cards into the Core Set, and there was much time and energy put into discussing if the foils should have white borders like the rest of the cards in the set. Many believed that integrity demanded that the foils be white-bordered; even if the rest of the policy was a little hazy, it was clear that English Core Set cards should be white bordered.

But in the end, white-bordered foils looked terrible - bad enough that no policy enforcement was worth unleashing them on people. Coolness prevailed, and it would prevail again.

## Two Big Changes

In 2002, we revamped our [reprint policy](#), mostly to allow older commons and uncommons to be reprinted (paving the way for recent reprintings of **Clone**, **Juggernaut**, **Jade Statue**, **Resurrection**, and **Consecrate Land**). Tucked



into the list of changes Randy Buehler outlines is "The border-color policy section was removed because it was obsolete." At least we admitted it.



*Eighth Edition* marked one of the most profound changes in the game to date - the revision of the card frames. I was working at Wizards by this time, and I felt that the iron was hot for the Core Set to be black-bordered at that time. After all, it was a huge refresh, and I'm sure the policy could have handled another line referring to a difference in frame.

The reason we think white-bordered cards have any value in the game at all is because of the value they "add" to older, black-bordered cards. We know the black ones look nicer. If you want to play *Shock* in Standard, and you want your deck to be black bordered, you'll have to dig out your *Stronghold* or *Onslaught* ones. That way, we hope that your older cards will continue to maintain some of their value even though we are constantly reprinting the cards from those older sets.

But to me, the card face change altered that equation significantly. Most players who are concerned with the "aesthetics" of their cards would rather have their decks all be the same frame *and* the same border color, and by printing *Eighth* with the "traditional" white border, we were denying them that opportunity - unless, of course, they tracked down foil copies of the cards they wanted, which could be expensive. Additionally, many players don't like playing with foils.

But the status quo held up. There was still a policy of sorts in place: Non-premium Core Set cards are white-bordered.

## From Russia, with Love

*Ninth Edition* marked the first new language added to the game since Simplified Chinese with *Fifth*, and to commemorate it we went back to our old ways and introduced the game to the Russians with a black-bordered Core Set release.

What we found out was that there was a big demand for black-bordered Core Set cards; Russian *Ninth* sold very well here in the United States! It seems that our long-standing policy of making Core Set cards white-bordered had really whet the players' appetites for black bordered versions.

## Shifted Slightly

Following *Ice Age*'s lead, we have been reprinting old cards in new sets with new art and black borders for years. *Mirage* had *Boomerang*. *Tempest* had *Disenchant*. *Urza's Saga*, *Pestilence*. And so on, up to *Dissension's* *Seal of Fire* and *Coldsnap's* *Frozen Solid*.

With *Time Spiral*, we did something we had never done before: Reprint a bunch of cards using their original art and with black borders. Heck, we didn't even update the frames!





To be clear, there were discussions insinuating that policy demanded we print the "timeshifted" cards with white borders; they were, after all, reprints. But common sense prevailed over policy once again. We needed the timeshifted cards to feel like old cards had crept into your packs, and the best way to do this was to have them look as much like the actual old cards as possible.

We knew we were doing something we hadn't done before, flying in the face of a policy we had adhered to for quite some time, even if we had publicly admitted that the policy no longer stood. So we kept our ears open to see if we heard complaints from collectors or secondary market speculators...

Nothing.

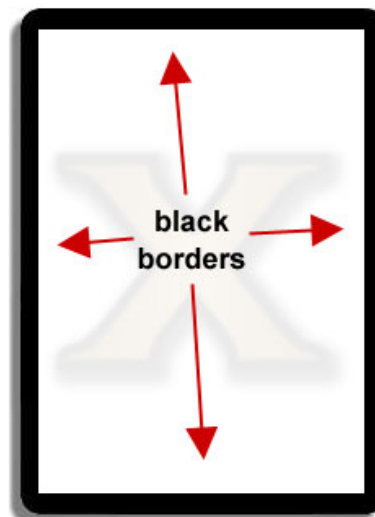
## And So...

You've read the [announcement](#) by now, I'm sure. *Tenth Edition* will be the first English Core Set release since Beta to be black bordered. We figured what the heck, ten editions is a pretty monumental feat, especially in this industry. Why not celebrate it with something special, a return to our roots that our players can enjoy?

Yes, it marks the final straw, breaking the back of the long-crumbling border color "policy" once and for all, but, as *Renaissance* showed us, policy isn't necessarily worth following all the time. There is some concern over a drop in consumer confidence because we're doing something we've more-or-less promised - explicitly or implicitly - that we wouldn't do. But I think the positives far outweigh the negatives with this product. For me, the black-bordered Core Set has been a long time coming - I'd wanted to see it from the day the card face changed, and now it will finally be a reality. As somebody who spent way too much money on foreign black-bordered *Fourth Edition* as a player, I'm already scheming to get my hands on as much of it as I can!

What happens in the future, with *Eleventh Edition* and beyond? Some think that by returning to white borders, you preserve the "coolness" and monumental feeling of *Tenth*, as well as older cards in general. Some believe that it would be hard to go back to white borders now that we've "crossed over." Personally, I have no idea what we'll do. But that's years from now - not one single card has yet to be singled out for inclusion in *Eleventh*.

But *Tenth Edition* is done, it rocks, and now it has black borders. This summer, boys and girls, so get ready.



## Last Week's Poll

Did you watch any of the YouTube video clips from Pro Tour - Geneva?		
No, I didn't look at the Pro Tour coverage at all.	3365	50.2%
No, but I checked out the written coverage and/or audio podcasts.	1383	20.6%
Yes, one or two of them.	767	11.4%
Yes, several of them.	667	9.9%
Yes, all of them.	524	7.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6706</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Even if you aren't a fan of the Pro Tour, this stuff is worth checking out. It's just neat to see **Magic**, this game we all love and play for fun, look so "big time."

## This Week's Poll

**Black-bordered Tenth Edition...**

Yay!

Boo!

*Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.*



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