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Ask Wizards
Sunday, April 1, 2007

Ask Wizards - April, 2007

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April 30, 2007

Q: How many creature types does **Mistform Ultimus** have that no other creature card has?
—Jeff, Minneapolis, MN, USA

A: From **Doug Beyer**, **Magic** Creative Team:

A perceptive question, Jeff. As you suspect, the answer isn't zero—not even close.

Jeff's carefully worded question *doesn't* ask, "How many creature types does **Mistform Ultimus** have beyond the set of legal creature types in **Magic**?" The answer to *that* question is zero; **Mistform Ultimus** has all of them and no more.

No, Jeff asks a different question. How many subtypes does **Mistform Ultimus** have that no other *creature card* has? There are lots of creature types in **Magic** that no particular creature card itself has, but that are instead mentioned in the rules text of a card. For example:



There are no (non-Ultimus) Pincher creature cards in **Magic**. But there are Pinchers, and **Mistform Ultimus** therefore is one.

Another pretty huge example:



Saprolings have been around since waaay back in *Fallen Empires*. But they don't appear on the type line of any card. Sort of mind-blowing.

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Back to Jeff's question: so, how many? The number of creature types that have no (non-Ultimus) creature cards with that subtype, as far as I've counted at this writing (right after the release of *Future Sight*), is 31. They are:

Blinkmoth
Camarid
Caribou
Carnivore
Citizen
Coward
Deserter
Essence
Expansion-Symbol
Graveborn
Hornet
Kelp
Minor
Orb
Pentavite
Penguin
Pest
Pincher
Poison-Snake
Prism
Reflection
Sand
Saproling
Serf
Sheep
Splinter
Stangg-Twin
Survivor
Teddy
Tetravite
Triskelavite
Twin
Wasp
Wirefly
Wolves-of-the-Hunt

Aside from Blinkmoth (of *Blinkmoth Nexus* fame), these are all creature types derived from cards that generate creature tokens. Yes, types from non-tournament-legal sets, like "Teddy" from *Unhinged's Water Gun Balloon Game*, count.

Note that some of these may yet go the way of the *Nekrataal* (**Magic** has never had a Dodo subtype) in the future. Types like Wasp and Hornet should feel particularly nervous with that much-more-relevant Insect type looming nearby, and with *Giant Caterpillar* clearing the way for increased use of the "green Insect creature token *named Butterfly*" technology. As cards find themselves in digital form in **Magic Online** or reprinted in future sets, we'll see how they shake out.

Thanks for your question, Jeff!

April 27, 2007



Q: We've heard a lot about the mistakes that R & D has made over the years, and also about cards or sets they take particular pride in. What are the biggest successes or failures that Creative feels it has made?

—Nick, New York, NY, USA

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** Creative Director:

Thanks for your question, Nick, although it's really difficult to answer. One of the factors that makes working on **Magic** so difficult is that it has a lot of 'moving parts,' so when a card or expansion totally rocks or, um, fails to rock, it's nearly impossible to pin down why it did or didn't work. Creative quality is even more elusive than most elements, because people tend to like the creative elements on mechanically strong cards regardless of their quality, and they tend to dislike the creative elements on weaker cards, no matter how good they might be.

To complicate matters, the creative elements of **Magic** are so collaborative that I doubt there's consensus about success or failure even among those who directly contributed. For example, I might believe that a particular world design I lead was a bit limp, but that the card-by-card creative process really shored up its weaknesses. Or I might have had a really strong vision for a set that simply couldn't translate well onto cards or into a novel.

So rather than talk about **Magic** creative work generally, I'll stick to my own little sandbox: world design. First, the darts. I think Mercadia was an interesting and complex world design, but not right for **Magic**. Likewise, I'm very proud of the Kamigawa world design—it's a Japan-inspired setting unlike any other—but it makes sense to me that fewer players would really get into it. Lastly, there's *Odyssey*, which I believe was a huge missed opportunity for world design. *Odyssey* came right after the *Invasion* block, which was the conclusion of a plot arc that spanned several years. The Creative team at the time was eager to jumpstart a new story, one they believed was more resonant for **Magic**'s audience. But in the meantime, R&D was designing a block with a very tight thematic infrastructure (flashback, threshold, madness, etc.). The story of *Kamahl* and the *Mirari* was a perfectly good story. But in hindsight the *Odyssey* world design should have been all about the graveyard. All the set's major mechanics centered on the graveyard. If only the word "graveyard" had been used as the guiding force of worldbuilding for *Odyssey*, we would have produced a creepy horror-themed world perfect for the set's mechanical themes. I believe the whole block would have been twice as popular had we gone this way (imagine *Torment* in this world!). Ah well, hindsight is always 20/20.

Now for the world-design laurels. I believe *Ravnica* is the gold standard. It had unprecedented synergy between set design and world design; the two were totally interdependent. The world's identity drove the set structures, and those structures enriched and reinforced the world. The whole was greater than the sum of its parts. I also think the folks responsible for *Mirage* should be extremely proud of their work. *Mirage* broke new ground in the fantasy genre—no mean feat. It was the first fully realized African fantasy setting. My bronze medal goes to the *Tempest* block. The world of Rath contained such a

wealth of cool new concepts, all of which hung together amazingly well. Its visual style was dark, compelling, and tight without risking monotony.

April 26, 2007



Q: How do you choose which creature type gets first billing on creatures with two creature types? For that matter, what about the creature type order for creatures with three or more creature types?

–Benjamin
Brookville, IN, USA

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

Let's take a look at the comments in the Multiverse record for [Experiment Kraj](#):

```
Del 6/15: Last ability falls off the card. Note that the middle ability has been
killed in past sets for rules reasons. Help?
Del 7/8: Note that "Legendary Creature – Mutant Shapeshifter" doesn't come close
to fitting on a card, even ignoring the Ooze.
Del 8/9: Concerted Effort was triggered so that it wouldn't do weird things, but
that doesn't fit here. MG will ask the review team about this one.
MP 8/17: Dev team is willing to remove the "gain keywords" ability and keep
activated abilities (and of course his tap ability).
Del: On 8/26, dev cut "As long as another creature with a +1/+1 counter on it
has flying, CARDNAME has flying. The same is true for fear, first strike, double
strike, landwalk, protection, trample, and vigilance."
Del 8/29: Does the "other" need to be there? It's confusing me.
Del 10/3: Was "Experiment Kraj has all activated abilities of other creatures
with +1/+1 counters on them."
Del 10/26: Brady swapped the order of the creature types.
```

Buried in all the interesting stuff going on with this card is a brief mention of creature types. Most creatures just follow the "race-class" model. The creature's species comes first, and its job comes second. Anything more complicated than that gets referred to the guys in Creative. This leads to fascinating arguments about the differences between Plant Zombies and Zombie Plants, whether Spirit is more like a race or more like a class, and stuff like that. Then we get sidetracked talking about the lack of a creature type for "nonillusory strange things that are usually blue" or the historical role of pigs in **Magic**. When the dust settles, I check that the result isn't completely insane and then get it printed on the card.

April 25, 2007



Q: Given the success and popularity of color-shifted cards like [Harmonize](#), is it likely that the door is now open for a little more color bleeding in sets after *Time Spiral* block?

–Tim
Buffalo, NY, USA

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

Tim,

Yes and no. Yes, we will have more color bleeding. Every set has a little. (More on this in a second.) No, we're not planning to up the level. *Planar Chaos* was a special exception, not a change of how we handle the color pie.

How exactly do we bleed the color pie in every set? Here's how. Each set and block has a specific theme. When we build around that theme, we tend to shift cards towards it. For example, most graveyard interaction is done by black, green and white. Normally, blue and red do little with the graveyard, but in *Odyssey*, when we had a block focused on the graveyard, we found ways for the graveyard to interact with blue and red that logically made sense with the colors' philosophy even if it pushed the definitions a little.

If the color pie is so important, why do we ever bleed it at all? Because the color pie, like the game itself, is dynamic. While the philosophies of the colors are constant, the execution of them is always shifting. Slowly and methodically, but over time the color pie will always make subtle shifts as the game changes around it.

That said, one of the fun things we do in **Magic** design is to take things we do in small doses and focus on it for a set. *Planar Chaos* was the color pie's turn. Will another set ever return to this theme? Maybe, but not in the near to mid future. For now, you'll have to enjoy the little bleeds as we do them. (And trust me, there are some interesting bleeds coming before the year ends.)

April 24, 2007



Q: What is the weight of a **Magic** card? More specifically, how many cards are currently worth their weight in gold?

--Alex
Orinda, CA, USA

A: From **Kelly Digges**, **Magic** Editor:

This question caused some discussion, Alex, because the weight of a **Magic** card and the status of the gold market are not pieces of information that most people have at the ready. (On a related note, I found that this is a good one for drawing out the closet gold speculators and jewelry makers. And, uh, compulsive card weighers.)

I headed down to our shipping department, where they have a scale for measuring postage. I took with me a stack of one hundred random *Time Spiral* block cards I had left over from drafts (exactly one hundred; how lucky!). I excluded premium cards, just in case the foil layer adds weight (though I checked later, and if that's the case then the difference is too small for our scale to discern).

It turns out that a hundred **Magic** cards weigh four tenths of a pound. Who knew? This puts the weight of a single **Magic** card, of course, at 0.4% of a pound, or 0.064 ounces. Make a note of it for your records. For my part, I'll be using this knowledge to figure out how many organs I'll need to sell when I finally have my whole **Magic** collection shipped out here to Renton from Illinois.

Meanwhile, an Internet romp through various market reports shows that gold bullion is currently trading around US \$690 per ounce. That puts the value of 0.064 ounces of gold at a surprisingly low \$44.16.

Market prices of individual cards vary pretty widely, but you can check in with your local store or favorite online shop for singles prices. I think you'll find that some cards are going for rather more than their weight in gold; try busting out that little fact the next time someone questions your investment in **Magic**!

April 23, 2007



Q: I have always wondered why Italian got the first non-English printing of a **Magic** set (*Legends*). Was there a particularly strong demand amongst Italians for **Magic**, or was the decision completely arbitrary?

--Davide

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

A: From **Ilja Rotelli**, Director of Online Media:

Italians are smarter.

Seriously. It happened because the owner of Stratelibri, Italy's largest publisher/distributor in the hobby games industry, was the first one to recognize **Magic**'s potential. He contacted Wizards of the Coast before everyone else to localize and distribute the product in Italy.

That being said, Italian demand was crazy right away. Italy has always had a very strong RPG community, and that was the environment **Magic** attached to in its early days. Italy, back then and today, is one of the very strongest markets for **Magic** activity after the United States.

April 20, 2007



Q: Why were cards printed that explicitly break the rules? Why would something like **Mirror Gallery** be printed that says outright "ok, now you can break these rules set forth by us"? I just don't get it.

--John

Barrie, Ontario, Canada

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

John,

Why do we print cards that explicitly break the rules? Because, well, that's what we do. Pretty much every card with rules text (aka everything but vanilla creatures) breaks a rule of the game. For example, haste just means ignore the "summoning sickness" rule and vigilance means ignore the "tapping when attacking" rule.

The defining quality of a trading card game is that the game is "bigger than the box". Individual cards are empowered to change the rules of the game because that's what makes a TCG so dynamic and adaptable. Having cards that break rules is the nature of the beast. We do it because **Magic** wouldn't be **Magic** if we didn't.

April 19, 2007



Q: What would you say is the best age to start teaching a child to play **Magic**?

--Geoffroy, Arlon, Belgium

A: From **Elaine Chase**, Senior Brand Manager for **Magic**:

As with most things in life, that really depends upon the person. Our official age-grade is for 13+, which has to do with both the mental skills necessary to comprehend game play as well as the maturity level that is appropriate given some of the card imagery. We find that in general, people get the most out of **Magic** when they start playing in high school. Players younger than 13 (even very intelligent ones) often play a game that is almost the **Magic** we know and love, but with some game play elements ignored. But, there are some extraordinary kids out there who can pick up the full game at a younger age.

April 18, 2007



Q: Let's say the world is about to end and you want to leave the legacy of **Magic** behind in a world-destruction-proof box for possible future generations to see, but the box can only hold 10 cards to ensure their protection. Any more or less and the integrity of the box is compromised. What ten cards would you include and why?

--Eric, Southern California, USA

A: From **Alexis Janson**, **Magic** Design Intern:

Hello, Alexis Janson here, as you may have read on the line above. Let's get started.

I had two goals: Describe as much of the basic game structure and rules as possible, and try to keep the cards as simple as possible. Unfortunately, these two goals conflict with one another, as the cards that best explain the game structure tend to be much more complex. I made a point of including at least one card of each type and color. I also assume that some extremely intelligent people find these cards—you would have to be both smart and persistent to attempt to puzzle a game out from only ten cards.

1) **Serra Angel** (*Ninth Edition*)

This card is iconic for a reason. Hopefully this hypothetical future generation likes Angels as much as our existing players do. Once you're excited about playing cool big creatures, you can move on to the next card. When you return later, you will learn about flying and vigilance. **Vigilance** implies that most creatures do tap to attack, which also implies that creatures must be untapped to block. You can also assume that creatures normally only attack once per turn, although as of yet, we haven't shown that there's exactly one combat step where everything attacks.

2) **Plains** (*Urza's Saga*)

Our next card starts to explain our resource system. I've chosen an older **Plains**, so that the tap ability is spelled out using the tap symbol. Hopefully, our player will notice that the symbol matches the symbols in the upper right corner of our **Serra Angel**, and surmise that somehow, **Plains** helps us pay for **Serra Angel**.

3) **Marble Diamond** (*Sixth Edition*)

Now we have a card with the exact same ability as **Plains**—tapping for white mana. But this one has a cost in the upper right corner—clearly it serves a different purpose than the land we just saw. Why would we play with a card that costs something to play when we could just play another **Plains**? The implication is that you can only play one land a turn—a very important rule to get across. **Marble Diamond** also mentions coming into play tapped, right before an ability with the tap symbol. This should help explain that ♣ and "tap" are synonymous.

4) **Two-Headed Dragon** (*Eighth Edition*)

Next card up is a Dragon—this game is starting to look exciting! **Two-Headed Dragon** helps explain more of the combat phase. It needs two creatures to block it—therefore "normal" creatures must be able to gang-block. It can block an additional creature—therefore "normal" creatures can only block one creature at a time. The firebreathing ability is pretty easy to link to the numbers in the lower right—but why would one be going up and not the other? It's logical to assume that these numbers are used in combat, and firebreathing is flavorful enough to tell us that the first number is offense and the second is likely to be defense.

5) **Trinisphere** (*Mirrodin*)

Unfortunately, the next few cards are rather complex, but they explain some important core rules of the game. **Trinisphere** tells us that 2♣ is three mana, and that 1♣ is less than three mana. It also tells us that we can use any color or "colorless" mana to pay for this additional mana. This implies that, as a rule, ① and ② (and similar symbols) can be paid with any color of mana, and that ♣ can only be paid with ♣ mana. (I have to give full credit to the board posters for **Trinisphere**—using it to teach the mana system is brilliant.)

6) **Topsy Turvy** (*Unhinged*)

7) **Time Stop** (*Champions of Kamigawa*)

8) **Phyrexian Arena** (*Eighth Edition*)

Now we have to teach our players the structure of a turn. **Topsy Turvy** tells us that we have two main phases and a single combat phase in the middle. It also tells us about the beginning and end phases, but doesn't tell us what they entail.

Time Stop describes the end phase, specifically covering discard and how damage wears off. It also implies that spells and abilities use the stack, although it does not properly describe how the stack works.

Phyrexian Arena, specifically the *Eighth Edition* version, steps in to explain the beginning phase via reminder text. It tells us that we "untap," " upkeep," and "draw." Although it does not specifically say these occur at the beginning of the turn, it's a simple deduction after having read about the end of the turn. It also talks about losing life, which implies players have a life total that is likely attacked somehow. The reader has to deduce that creatures can damage players, but I don't believe this is an unreasonable jump. Using life loss as a drawback also implies that player damage does *not* wear off at end of turn like creatures—otherwise, losing a single life would be meaningless.

9) **Last Stand** (*Apocalypse*)

This card shows us all five mana symbols on a single gold card and names all five basic land types, implying there are exactly five colors. (We already saw **Plains**, so it's reasonable to deduce the other four.) It talks more about losing and gaining life, reinforcing life totals that don't reset at end of turn. It also demonstrates different philosophies for each color.

10) **Krosan Grip** (*Time Spiral*)

For my final card, I wanted to try and explain the stack a bit more, and I feel split second comes the closest out of the available choices. It implies that spells go onto the stack and come off of the stack soon thereafter—otherwise, players would never be able to play spells again due to Split Second. Between **Krosan Grip** and **Time Stop**, hopefully our future generation can deduce a version of the stack. They may think lands use the stack, or they may believe that creatures are not spells and don't use the stack—but the important gameplay aspects of responding to spells and abilities will be retained.

Some things I would try to improve upon with this set of cards: It is not clear what the difference is between instants and sorceries, or at what "speed" creatures and lands are played. Starting hand size and life total might be useful knowledge, although this seems less important than simply knowing there is a life total and hand size. It isn't clear whether blockers tap to block, but this is also pretty minor. "Summoning sickness" would be nice to cover as well.

Anyway, it's a fun imaginary exercise, but I'm out of time—I've got to get back to the bomb shelter with the rest of R&D. Good luck!

April 17, 2007



Q: Well, just a simple question. When printing actual cards, how is the order of rules text decided? For example, comes-into-play abilities, activated abilities, keyworded abilities, etc.
—Thonzi, Laguna, Philippines

A: From **Kelly Digges**, **Magic** editor:

Thonzi,

The answer is not quite so simple as the question, but there are a few guiding principles—and, naturally, an exception to every one of them. That's why I'll be using a lot of hedgy language like "usually," "generally," "often," and "tends to." These aren't rules, but they are the ideas behind the individual choices we make.

The primary guideline is that abilities should appear in the order in which they're likely to become relevant. A characteristic-setting ability ("**Transquild Courier** is all colors") comes before an ability that tells you how to play a card ("You may remove a blue card in your hand from the game rather than pay **Snapback's** mana cost.") comes before an ability that tells you what it does when it comes into play ("When **Nekrataal** comes into play, destroy target nonartifact, nonblack creature.") comes before an ability that tells you what it does while it's in play ("**Ogre Taskmaster** can't block."). Of course, it's not always that simple, and often there are multiple abilities in each "class." Let's look further.

Keywords usually come first, with the "standard" abilities such as haste and flying tending to float to the top (but not always). For more on the ordering of keyword abilities, see Del Laugel's [excellent answer from June 6th of last year](#). Abilities that affect how the spell is played, including flash, affinity, split second, and additional costs such as buyback, are front-loaded with the other keywords. Alternative play costs or actions taken instead of playing the card, such as suspend, morph, madness, cycling, or flashback tend to come after the card's other abilities (see **Roar of the Wurm** or

Dichotomancy, for instance) but before any abilities that specifically refer to them (such as those on **Shaper Parasite** or **Gempalm Incinerator**).

On instants and sorceries, many of the above rules apply, with the added wrinkle that the order in which the abilities are written out on the card determines the order in which they occur. **Serum Visions** would have been functionally different (and quite a bit better) if "Scry 2" had come before "Draw a card." And if **Burning Wish** started with "Remove **Burning Wish** from the game," it would do that first and then be unable to do anything else.

Static abilities are usually listed before triggered and activated abilities, because they apply as soon as the card is in play. Triggered abilities generally come before activated abilities, unless they're somehow dependent on the activated abilities. Mana abilities on lands usually come before other activated abilities (look at, say, **Academy Ruins**).

So that's a quick and muddled look at the guidelines. Let's see some examples of these philosophies at work in the festival of keywords and abilities that is *Time Spiral* block.



Here we see a keyword, then an attack trigger, then a "becomes blocked" trigger. This is all covered by the guidelines above; we can do better.



Here's a slightly more interesting one. Keywords come before activated abilities. In-play text comes before an ability you can use instead of playing the card (and that you never care about while the card is in play), but it's followed by an ability that's contingent on that one.

Ah, that's more like it! First we have a static ability that applies as **Stuffy Doll** comes into play (a triggered ability that triggers when it comes into play would usually occupy the same position; see **Pentarch Ward**). Then we have a static ability that applies while it's in play. Next we have a triggered ability that could apply at any time while it's in play, and finally we come to an activated ability that is only relevant by the choice of the controller (and only after the Doll can use $\{c\}$ abilities).





Demonic Collusion puts buyback first, because it's a choice made while playing the spell. **Dichotomy** lists its effects in order followed by suspend, which is only relevant if you choose to use it instead of playing the spell. All well and good, but what's up with **Wheel of Fate**? It starts with a characteristic-setting ability that functions anywhere—so far so good—but then suspend cuts in ahead of the spell's other effects instead of waiting for the end. The reasoning is simple—**Wheel of Fate** can't be played normally, so suspend occupies the "choices made while playing" slot rather than the "choices made instead of playing" slot.



When multiple abilities on one card fall into the same "class," some other criterion is necessary. In the case of **Jaya Ballard, Task Mage**, escalation is the way to go, listing three activated abilities in order of mana cost. **Shadow Guildmage**, much like the **Ravnica** guildmages, lists its two abilities in the complicated version of (S)(S)(S)(S) order used to arrange mana costs on multicolored cards. **Wormwood Dryad** has its abilities reversed from that order—look at **Darkheart Sliver** for the usual treatment—because its first ability is useful in any green deck, but its second ability is only useful if you're playing black.

Ultimately, no set of guidelines is going to give the best result 100% of the time, and the ultimate goal is to be as consistent as possible while making each individual card as readable as possible. Occasionally you'll find cards such as **D'Avenant Healer** where we simply have to make a judgment call. In the vast majority of cases, though, the guidelines above, combined with the needs of the card in question, will point the way. Pay attention to order of abilities as you read your cards at the [Future Sight Prerelease](#) this weekend, and you'll see these guidelines—and some exceptions—at work.

April 16, 2007



Q: Let's say the world is about to end and you want to leave the legacy of **Magic** behind in a world-destruction-proof box for possible future generations to see, but the box can only hold 10 cards to ensure their protection. Any more or less and the integrity of the box is compromised. What ten cards would you include and why?
—Eric, Southern California, USA

A: From **Noah Weil, Magic R&D:**

Mark was too busy saving Magic to figure out the "most difficult Ask Wizards" he's ever received. Luckily, that's what interns are for. After a lot of haggling and kicking ideas back and forth, most people came to the conclusion that there were no "perfect" ten cards for encapsulating Magic. The goal is to put in as much of the game as possible, but after that it's finding the cards that contain the elements of **Magic** you want to emphasize. Yes, these are completely subjective criteria. With that being said, here are my ten cards that best teach the game of **Magic** to a post-apocalyptic, English-speaking, zombie-ridden (a deck, friend, and *brainsssss*) planet.

#1 Terror (Sixth Edition)

This is the teaser card of the box. It doesn't explain a whole lot, but it gets people interested. What other colors are there besides black? What's an artifact creature? Are there other kinds? Regeneration...? With numbers, skulls, an iconic name, and thought-provoking rules text, **Terror** is a fine card to get the ball rolling.

#2 Two-Headed Dragon (Eighth Edition)

Dragon?! Well that's cool! Two-Headed Dragon brings a lot of bonuses to the table. It's a new color, and a creature that's not an artifact. It also has some numbers, and an ability that affects one of those numbers. It's not spelled out here, but the firebreathing ability should imply the first numeric is power. In addition, its other abilities indicate how blocking works, and to a lesser extent, attacking. The final bonus is the reminder text for flying, a good segue into...

#3 Serra's Embrace (Urza's Saga)

We don't need to spell out flying anymore, which is good because neither version carries reminder text. In fact, both versions have the un-keyworded vigilance, which is great since now people know that creatures tap to attack. On an enjoyment level, enchanting your creature into something bigger is all kinds of fun, especially for people/humanity just starting. Why Saga version? Better art, better flavor text, and we'll be showing other expansion set cards anyway. As the folks on our boards quickly realized, staying solely with core set cards is an extra limiter this project doesn't need.

#4 Fastbond (Limited Edition Beta)

So far we've shown creatures, creature helpers, and creature killers. Frankly you can have some fun games of **Magic** with that trinity, but we can go further. The next entrant is a little unusual but it does convey good info. Fastbond has the bonus of implying the one land per turn limit. Besides that, it's a non-aura enchantment, which might not otherwise be conceived of. One drawback is that it doesn't tell you can only play lands on your turn. That's unfortunate, but I have to concede the rule isn't strictly necessary to recreate the game. A sacrifice, and not the first for our terra-scoured future.

#5 Dismiss (Tempest)

The fifth color, with new terminology mixed into old. We haven't gone into the differences between instants and sorceries yet, but entering "spell" to the lexicon has benefits. You'll note that Dismiss says "counter target spell" and "draw a card," implying they are not one and the same. Thus, what isn't a spell? Who knows, but hopefully they'll pick up land and nonland being utilized differently. Fastbond has already said that lands have special rules attached, and Dismiss may very well further differentiate. Is it possible that despite all this, future people will think they can counterspell land cards? Maybe... but at least it will cost them four mana to try!

#6 Forest (Limited Edition Beta)

Finally we have a land. How do cards get played but with these mythical "land" effects alluded to above? Purposely I skipped the tap symbol and the big whopping mana symbol on newer editions. Flavorful and cool they are, but the concept of tap was already given via **Serra's Embrace**. Now they know that creatures tap to attack, lands tap for mana, lands aren't spells, and (hopefully) that you can only play one land per turn. That's a fine foundation, but we're not done yet.

#7 Timetwister (Limited Edition Beta)

Lots of terms added here. In particular I like the "new hand of seven cards," along with library and graveyard. How else would they know an opening hand? This is one of the points that's not critical to the game, but done wrong would be really unfun. Don't forget, it's not just about teaching them **Magic**, it's about them *wanting* to learn. Starting hands of zero or thirty would be unpleasant for a game standard. Seven is a nice number that should give the brave souls that start to play the game a good balance between exciting topdecks and being able to "do stuff" early on. Plus, we've added sorcery to the picture. This particular card actually tells you what to do with the sorcery after it's finished resolving. Will that show all sorceries work that way, or this card gets extra text because it works differently than the rest? I'm betting on the former.

#8 Dominaria's Judgment (Planeshift)

Mark graciously suggested that the future populace receive cards that have the five colors and the five basic lands. Efficiently, I've provided a card that has both. While protection isn't spelled out here, the concept is quite flavorful. There's no chance that the future will get all the subtle associations with our modern "protection from X," but they don't really need to, either. "Protection" means "safe" and after that, the five land types and the five colors. So *that's* why there are those five symbols on the back of the cards. But what's with that blue dash over the "t" in "Deckmaster"?

#9 Blinkmoth Urn (Mirrodin)

Fairly complex, but it's time to bring out a biggie. The Urn comes into play with the windfall of "precombat main phase." What does that mean precisely? It means there's a combat phase, and a postcombat main phase. That seems like good info to have, instead of the people responding to **Terror** with "attack you." After that bit of data, **Blinkmoth Urn** is an artifact that's not a creature, and another source of mana. More of these sounds like fertile design space for the re-creators of **Magic**.

#10 Force of Nature (Ninth Edition)

Ending on a high note, **Force of Nature** has an exceptional amount of information to impart. Upkeep? That sounds like a place to maintain certain cards. While they might not get its placement in the turn, the fact that it exists at all as a stable place is full of positives. That trample reminder text is fine for trample itself, but what I really like here is "defending player" portion. Hmm, an attacking player and a defending player? That sounds extremely helpful for understanding our combat system. Finally, **Force of Nature** is 8/8. I don't care what kind of barren semi-life you're clawing to, those are cool stats.

With that, a grand end to a challenging exercise. Nice question, Eric from Southern California. We'll see if any of my fellow Wizards want to chime in.

April 13, 2007



Q: Let's say the world is about to end and you want to leave the legacy of **Magic** behind in a world-destruction-proof box for possible future generations to see, but the box can only hold 10 cards to ensure their protection. Any more or less and the integrity of the box is compromised. What ten cards would you include and why?

–Eric, Southern California, USA

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

Eric,

This might just be the hardest Ask Wizards question I've ever received. After thinking about it, I realized that my task would be to include ten cards that would allow gamers of the future the best ability to backward design the game. This means I would want to make sure to include all five colors and all six card types (for the purposes of this exercise, I'll assume that neither of those numbers will change). I would make sure to get as many basic keywords in as well.

Because of my desire to communicate the game, I would probably restrict my cards to the base set, as the reminder text is crucial to my plan. The only exception is that I would probably look for one card that mentions all five colors by name and one that mentions all five basic land types by name.

If that wasn't a complicated enough puzzle, I also would need to have to make sure that my card pool hints at things like combat and mana. Of course, if I was in a cheaty mood, I'd design a new card whose art is the relevant parts of the rulebook and whose rules text was "This is a game called **Magic: the Gathering**—one of the best games ever made. The rules are on this card. Help us, future man—You're our only hope."

I'll leave the exact card choices as an exercise for the readers who don't have any pressing deadlines (such as the design of the next set).

April 12, 2007

Q: Looking at the recent two "[10 decks in 10 weeks](#)" articles, the Black in the UB and WB decks played a smaller role than Blue and White respectively. This got me thinking perhaps Black doesn't play well with others? My experience in draft (since Kamigawa Block) tells me that Black often doesn't play well with others, usually because of double- or triple-Black mana casting costs on cards.
--Emmeline, London, UK

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

Dear Emmeline,

Black clearly has the hardest time working with others mechanically. As you pointed out, it tends to have the most colored mana in its mana costs, making it harder to blend with another color. Also, black's abilities tend to help itself more than they help others. Black is also king of sacrificing things for effects.

From a flavor perspective, black has no problem making use of others. Where it has the biggest problem is cooperating, because black's all about doing what is best for itself. From time to time this might mean cooperating, but in the end no one who teams up with black should ever get complacent. Any team-up with black will last only as long as it's in black's advantage to team up.

So yes, black doesn't play all that well with others.

April 11, 2007

Q: What is the answer to the riddle in the flavor text of **Ersatz Gnomes**? I believe it to be either water, minerals, or oxygen, but I'm not sure. It's been bothering me ever since I read it about 7 years ago.
--Travis, Panorama City, CA, USA

A: From Doug Beyer, **Magic** Creative team:

A good question, Travis. The answer you find most satisfying may depend on how much credit you give to the Zhalfirin people. But I'll get to all that. Let's start with the riddle:

From jungle to sea, from sea to stone, from stone to field, from field to bone. What am I? —Zhalfirin riddle

First of all, we have to see what's going on with the word choice. The riddle is a progression of nouns—five of them. Now whenever there are five of something on a **Magic** card, that's a big clue. Five nouns, five colors...

In fact, the riddle is a progression of words aligned with the colors and land types of **Magic**:

Jungle: Green (Forests)
Sea: Blue (Islands)
Stone: Red (Mountains)
Field: White (Plains)
Bone: Black (Swamps)

Of course, one of the most fundamental features of **Magic** is closely tied to these five types of basic land: mana. One good answer to the riddle is "mana," a substance that actually does flow from jungles, to seas, to stony mountains, to fields, and to bone-littered swamps. Mechanically, **Ersatz Gnomes** has a lot to do with color (colorlessness, actually), so a riddle about mana is definitely relevant to the card.

However, I suspect the riddle goes deeper than that.

As a flavor guy, I must mention that we're on less steady ground from here on out. Certainly the peoples of Zhalfir, a militaristic nation in the continent of Jamuraa, were sophisticated enough to know about the five different types of magic and that mana flowed from different types of lands and could realistically have provided the answer "mana." In fact, one **ancient court mage of Zhalfir** rose to prominence as an extremely powerful planeswalker—he could certainly have answered "mana" to this old Zhalfirin riddle.

But if you're willing to look a bit past the flavor of the card—past the bronze-chained knights of Zhalfir, past the italics of the flavor text, past the card face itself—you may find an even more inspired answer. Shall we?

Remember that order again—jungle (green), sea (blue), stone (red), field (white), bone (black)—and flip the card over.





Take a pen. Start at green. (Or if you don't have a card you're willing to deface—I prefer [Dripping Dead](#), but your mileage may vary—click the links below instead.)

[From jungle to sea.](#)
[From sea to stone.](#)
[From stone to field.](#)
[From field to bone.](#)

Complete [the last link in the chain](#), back over to "jungle" again, and [what do you have?](#)

(Special thanks to resident sphinx Mark Gottlieb.)

April 10, 2007



Q: When I first started playing **Magic** (*Fourth Edition*), I played because it was cool to imagine myself as a "planeswalker dueling another planeswalker in a fight to the end." Years later, I still play **Magic** (I'm 26) but for a different reason. I feel disconnected from the fantasy world and play for the card mechanics and how the cards interact with each other to defeat a person in a game of skill. How does a card designer feel about people who have lost playing for the fantasy aspect of the game and play more for the game on a design level?
--Aaron, Cleveland, OH, USA

A: From **Aaron Forsythe**, Director of **Magic** R&D:

Your experience is a common one, Aaron (nice name). The fantasy feel of **Magic** is a great way to get people to try the game, and it is an effective 'skin' for the mechanics of the game once you understand how to play it.

But what keeps people coming back and playing more is the depth and the strategy, both of which have little to do with fantasy. We understand that. We do our best to make sure that flavor and mechanics have some connection, but cards and sets are designed for the most part mechanically, as we know that's what keeps the game going. Of course, we love it when the flavor and the mechanics go hand-in-hand so that it feels like one cohesive whole, like the guilds of *Ravnica* or the hive mind of Slivers, and we look for cards and mechanics that can accomplish that.

April 9, 2007



Q: I have always tried to figure out the banner every week. For instance last week it was all boons. Who decides what every week will be?
--Tedd, Washington, USA

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

Tedd, the person who currently does our banners is new media designer Thom Beckman. Thom works for Jen Page (who we've [mentioned before](#) on the site), and he is the current artist handling things like the weekly banners, wallpapers, and any random Photoshop requests for article images.

For banners, whenever we have a theme week Thom picks the images himself when possible. Otherwise he asks me for a list of suggestions if it's a theme he's not familiar with, like Tempo Week. So, for Fatty Week, he used [Gatherer](#) to find huge monsters, then ran with my suggestion to slip [Little Girl](#) somewhere in the background. (This is a site about a game, so we watch for chances to keep things fun!)

When there isn't a theme week in place, Thom will often look somewhere else for inspiration. As you noticed, last week's banner featured only art from cards with "boon" somewhere in the title, including [Ravenous Baboons](#). In this case, the idea

came from the wallpaper. Thom had just finished putting together the [wallpaper](#) for *Serra's Boon* so, before starting on the next week's banner, he looked in Gatherer to find out what else might have "boon" in it. (And baboon fans the world over rejoiced soon after.)


For those interested, Thom also plays in a rockabilly/surf band, ['63 Burnout](#). (They don't have any new shows booked until June, but they're recording a new album as I write this.)

April 6, 2007

Q: I've always been curious how R&D pick cards for the core sets – not cards like *Glory Seeker*, *Mana Leak*, etc., but more unusual cards like *Biorhythm*, *Battle of Wits*, *Plow Under*, etc. Do you print *Plow Under* because you wanted to push green-based control, for instance, or a more simple reason?

--Jack, Penarth, UK

A: From **Aaron Forsythe**, Director of **Magic** R&D:

We start by making sure the "skeleton" is in place... No, not the  *regenerator* (although we make sure he is there, too), but the batch of staple cards that illustrate the color pie and game mechanics at their simplest level. You mentioned *Glory Seeker*; others include *Blaze*, *Giant Growth*, *Horned Turtle*, *Giant Spider*, and *Fear*.

After that's done, we get to do the fun part, which is putting in all the quirkiest stuff. We try to answer a few different questions, like: "What can we do to make this set stand out from the previous one?" "What can we do to shake up Standard?" and "What cards might excite players that haven't seen them before?" A card like *Plow Under* or *Kird Ape* answers more than one of those questions at once. Something like *Time Stop* or *Final Punishment* fits mainly into the "exciting to those that have never seen it" category. Amusing cards like *Zodiac Monkey* fit the "feels different than last time" criterion. Every card has a role; every card is thought about.

April 5, 2007

Q: What is the relation between *Toshiro Umezawa* of the Kamigawa Block and *Tetsuo Umezawa* of the *Legends* set?

--Sebastian, Medellin, Antioquia, Colombia

A: From **Brady Dommermuth**, **Magic** Creative Director:

In the Kamigawa storyline, the *Myojin of Night's Reach* aids Toshiro in return for his fealty. Toshiro agrees but takes some liberties with the power *Night's Reach* grants him. At the end of the story, as punishment for abusing her gifts, *Night's Reach* banishes Toshiro from Kamigawa—she sends him to Dominaria. The Umezawa line continues there for an unknown number of generations. In other words, Tetsuo is a descendant of Toshiro.

April 4, 2007

Q: Do you allow your employees to wear their shirts untucked?

--Patrick, Longmont, CO, USA

A: From **Aaron Forsythe**, Director of **Magic** R&D:

Here is the dress code I've laid out for Magic R&D, as outlined in section 427.1 in the Wizards Employee Handbook:

- Shirt – Mandatory, tucked or untucked, preferably clean. You may wear Pro Tour T-shirts only if you made money at that event.
- Pants – Mandatory, should be kept up and fastened at all times.
- Shoes – Preferred.
- Hats – Optional. Yankees hats strictly forbidden. If your hat includes canned beverages, your manager may request samples at any time.
- Capes – Optional. Mandatory for employees level 10 and higher.
- Armor – Class restrictions apply.
 - Designers – leather and cloth.
 - Developers – chain.
 - Editors / Rules Managers – plate.
- Rainbow Afro Wigs – Only on your birthday.

April 3, 2007

Q: I've been playing Magic casually since 1995, both online and in real life, but I've never gone past playing with friends. Lately, I've been thinking about trying to hone my skills; what's the next step? How does someone move up in the ranks of Magic?

--Clint, Surabaya, Indonesia

A: From **Noah Weil**, **Magic** Development Intern:

Hi Clint, great question! There's always been a lot of interest in, as you say, moving up the ranks of Magic. Independent sites such as [StarCityGames.com](#) focus on this topic a lot. Indeed, our own [magicthegathering.com](#) has [Quentin Martin](#), [Mike Flores](#), [Frank Karsten](#), and [Brian David-Marshall](#) penning weekly columns that report the results and the strategies of top-level Magic players around the world. There is certainly a lot of reading material out there for those interested!

However, I've found the absolute best way to improve one's self in the realm of Magic is what's known as *effortful study*. Essentially, this means frequently squaring off against opposition of a higher skill level. Continually throwing yourself against strong opponents is an exceptionally efficient and effective method of reaching those same skill levels. Once you do reach that stage, you then find players of greater skill and begin again. I discussed this process in further detail [here](#).

By the way, don't think you *physically* have to find the best opponents to combat. Many people live in areas of the world where paper-based Magic is an infrequent activity. There are still plenty of opportunities to play against quality competition via Magic Online – in the eight-man queues, Premiere Events, and even the practice rooms. Don't let the lack of a local scene prevent you from this effortful study.

Further benefits to your skill level can be achieved by *observation* and *discussion*. Even when you're not personally involved in a game, there's plenty of value in observing capable players go at it. Trying to predict moves in advance and discovering hidden stratagems is a fun activity for the spectator. Afterwards, if a player made a move that surprised you, try to figure out why he or she acted in that way. Asking that player questions about a game is an excellent method of learning

new methods of play. Some very strong players were born out of a group of friends getting together solely for the purpose of discussing Magic.

The key to all this is *active participation*. Skill does generally rise with experience, but it's a slow process without your help. By taking an active interest in getting better, you make the process that much smoother and more fruitful. Considering your question, Clint, you certainly have active interest in this already, which is great.

One caveat to Clint, or anyone who's considering making the jump from casual to competitive: This shift can change the game on a personal level. There's quite a distance from casual kitchen table fun to an environment where take-backs are not only self-damaging, they're illegal. As we like to say here, people play this game for different reasons. Personally, I enjoy learning new methods and techniques to add to my bag of tricks, but I know that's not everyone's cup of tea. Make sure on the way to moving up the ranks of Magic that you continue to have a good time. That's still why we play, right? Good luck!

April 2, 2007



Q: I'm wondering why – from a flavor perspective – **Konda, Lord of Eiganjo** is indestructible. I know that the respective artifacts are indestructible because of the unusual resistance of Darksteel and the the Myojins are hard to kill because of their divine nature but none of those fits Konda.

--Fabian, Frankfurt, Hessen, Germany

A: From **Brady Dommermuth, Magic** Creative Coordinator:

The main plotline of the *Kamigawa* block, the war between the kami and the material world, starts with a single act. With the help of moonfolk collaborators, the daimyo Konda kidnaps and imprisons an aspect of O-Kagachi, the kami of all things. He does so because he truly believes that his own immortality and invulnerability will ensure lasting peace and happiness for his lands. It's the power of **That Which Was Taken** that grants Konda indestructibility.



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