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Ask Wizards
Tuesday, May 1, 2007

Ask Wizards - May, 2007

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May 31, 2007

Q: I was looking through the new Maguses, and I wondered: did Wizards think, for "timeshifted" cards, to make one of them about an enchantment not yet printed?
—TJ, Urbana, Ohio, USA

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

TJ,

We already did that trick with the spellshaper cycle (yes, you may see Goldmeadow Harrier in some future set) and, in general, we don't like repeating the same trick twice in the same set. We did toy, though, with making all five enchantment Magus's enchantments from the future, but we decided that the flavor would be too hard to convey. Plus, we knew people would like seeing enchantment maguses referencing old enchantments.

May 30, 2007

Q: Why do you print instants that summon creature tokens, such as **Sprout** or **Pact of the Titan**? Why not simply print them as creature cards that have flash? Call me picky, but if you're gonna print a card that does nothing but summon a creature, then shouldn't it be a creature card?
—Jeff, Tucson, AZ, USA

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

Jeff,

Some of our site authors have talked about these specific cards—**Sprout** [here](#) and **Pact of the Titan** [here](#)—but we haven't really gotten into the policy behind when and why we do or don't do this.

To recap, both **Sprout** and **Pact of the Titan** began life as creatures, and both were changed to instants, albeit for different reasons. The Creative team felt that a Saproling card would take something away from one of **Magic's** most prominent all-token tribes, and **Pact of the Titan** was just plain busted when you could avoid paying its upkeep cost by, say, sacrificing it to **Greater Gargadon**. Any change to avoid that loophole gives the card weird drawbacks, potentially causing you to lose to **Lava Dart** (if the punishment comes anytime the creature leaves play without its cost being paid) or **Otherworldly Journey** (if the creature has a comes-into-play trigger that sets up pay-or-punishment on your next upkeep). Ultimately it was just cleaner to have **Pact of the Titan** mirror the other Pacts by being an instant.

(The design version of **Sprout** raises the interesting issue of creature tokens with the same name as cards, which is something we do allow—most notably with the *Future Sight* "creatureshapers," but also in weirder cases such as the **Splinter** tokens from **Splintering Wind**.)

So what are the reasons to make an ersatz creature card? There are a few, all centering around the fact that some aspect of the card makes it impossible or unwieldy to print as a creature. Creatures can't have flashback—but **Call of the Herd** and **Beast Attack** can. A creature card can't have buyback or splice, either—but **Pegasus Stampede** and **Spiritual Visit** do. A creature card can't be half of a split card, but **Assault // Battery** is just fine. And of course, the most common reason to use an instant or sorcery instead of a creature card is because the card makes multiple tokens.

So in short, we print instants and sorceries that make creature tokens when there's no way (or no clean way) get the same functionality with a creature card. That means that in effect, cards like this aren't printed instead of creature cards—they're printed instead of killing a neat concept because it isn't workable as a creature. This means that, strange as they are, they increase design space, and that's a Good Thing.

May 29, 2007

Q: Wizards recently stated that a 4/4 for four mana is now standard for green. **Trained Armodon** has now been obsoleted by **Nessian Courser**, and the seemingly over-powered **Thornweald Archer** has just been printed. Can you explain the new design rules and philosophy for the power of green creatures?
—Daniel ("Crazy Owl" Pegaweb), Adelaide, Australia

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



We've always believed that green, as the "creature color," should have the best creatures. Unfortunately, because most of the coolest abilities creatures can have belong to other colors (flying, ability to deal direct damage, haste, etc.), we need to find other ways to make green creatures good.

Everything is currently in a state of minor flux, and we don't have anything written down about exactly what green should get at what mana cost. In general, I don't like having rules like that set in stone anyway, as rules like that make it easy to stop ourselves from making powerful cards. A 4/4 for four is a good guideline, as is a 3/3. We're just going to keep trying stuff until green ends up in the right spot in both Limited and Constructed.

May 25, 2007



Q: How big can **OMRSTPLRLCNSWMTCTHTALCNEE** from *Unhinged* become from being blocked by a single creature?

—Justin, Howard Lake, MN, USA

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

Really, really, really big.

This is one of those questions that, to answer with perfect accuracy, would require some sort of near-future **Magic**-art-trained AI expert system with a photographic memory, searchable by any arbitrary criterion and with enough fuzzy-logic flexibility to answer questions about *Unhinged*. Unfortunately, ours is in the shop right now, so instead you get me.

rolls up sleeves

The situation is this. **OMRSTPLRLCNSWMTCTHTALCNEE** has "Art rampage 2," meaning it gets +2/+2 for each creature depicted in the art of the creature blocking it, beyond the first. So the task is to find the creature in Magic with the most creatures depicted in its art.

Some ground rules here, so we maintain (what I think of as) the spirit of the card. First, the creatures have to be actually shown in the art, not implied. Even though we know there are probably thousands of soldiers inside the buildings in the art of an animated **Boros Garrison**, that doesn't count. We have to see them. And second, the creatures have to be individually countable. **Unyaro Bees** shows a looooot of bees on it, but the foreground bees sort of fade into an uncountable cloud. If I blocked my opponent's **OMRSTPLRLCNSWMTCTHTALCNEE** with **Unyaro Bees**, I would stop counting when I couldn't make out an entire bee body anymore, and then nod sagely, say "Yep, that's lethal," and gently put my **Unyaro Bees** in the graveyard. I'm no judge, but if **OMRSTPLRLCNSWMTCTHTALCNEE** got trample somehow, I would only give it as many +2/+2s as I could make out entire bees.

Moving on.

Most creatures in Magic have only one subject in their art, so **OMRSTPLRLCNSWMTCTHTALCNEE** generally does not get a bonus. So to answer this question, I started looking at pieces of art that represented groups of things. Armies. Crowds. Mobs. Better yet, swarms of things. **Unyaro Bees** was on the right track, but it fades into uncountability. **Phyrexian Battleflies** is a better example—there are definitely 16 individual battleflies shown in that art. **Fire Ants** is even better—34 ants, giving **OMRSTPLRLCNSWMTCTHTALCNEE** +66/+66 until end of turn.

Turns out that 34 is small potatoes. I stopped looking through cards when I found **Xantid Swarm**. Despite being a 0/1, that art has a huuuuuuuuuuuge number of countable bugs.



No, really. You can't see it in this card image. Let's look at the big art.



Xantid Swarm art by David Martin

Holy hymenoptera, Batman! That is a LOT of creatures depicted in one piece of art.

How many are there? Shyeah, right. What, you expect me to spend my work day counting dots on **Xantid Swarm**?

...

Really?

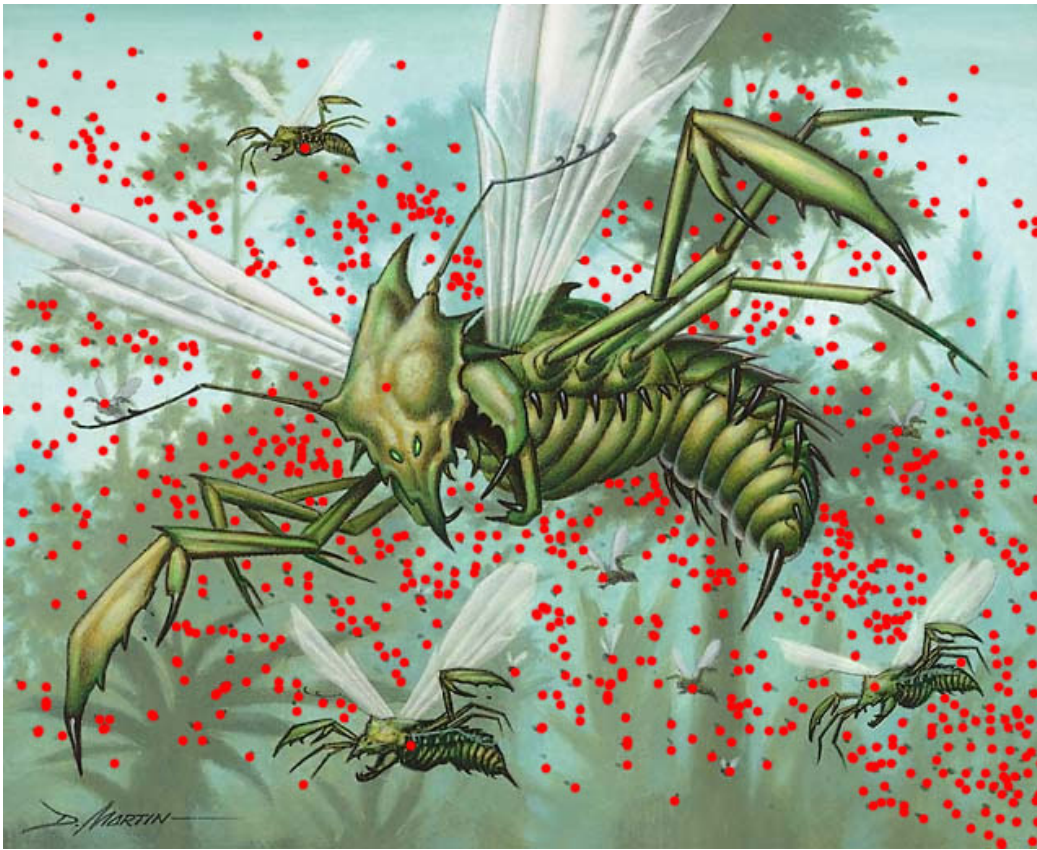
You do?

You expect me to sit here and mark each individual mage-disrupting gnat that flecked from the end of David Martin's paintbrush?

Oh, fine.

There are 725 of them. I think.

Prove me wrong, kids. Prove me wrong:



Yes, I really did it.

So, if OMRSTPLRLCNSWMTCTHTALCNEE is blocked by Xantid Swarm, it gets +1448/+1448 until end of turn, making it a 1450/1450! Wow. Is there any other creature with more creatures in the art than that? Maybe, but I'm thinkin' no.

Thanks for your question, Justin. You'll get my doctor's bills for the carpal tunnel I got from clicking Xantid Swarm 725 times.

May 24, 2007



Q: Why are cards from combo decks the only ones that are ever banned? If **Magic** is a rock/paper/scissors game of control, aggro and combo, why is combo the one that always gets cards banned? Even Ravager Affinity was hated mostly because it could "go off" like a combo deck.

—Jesse, Denver, CO, USA

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

In general, if R&D deems a card too powerful in the rigorous processes that lead up to cards being printed, we don't print the card. Cards that end up banned from tournaments generally have power-level issues that R&D didn't detect (for smaller formats like Standard or Block Constructed), or they combine with older cards to create powerful interactions (most common in larger formats like Extended and Legacy that R&D does not devote resources to testing).

Combo cards are the ones with the highest "danger" potential. We in R&D understand creatures and generally have a good idea about how fast any given creature deck in a format can kill the opponent. We understand control cards (like removal and counterspells) well, too. Combo cards however, are difficult to measure on their own merit—sometimes we miss the problem or the problem manifests itself later.

Additionally, when combo decks are good, they really remove interaction from the game; instead, they try to simply ignore the opponent and win as soon as possible. Decks like those don't make for great environments. When creature and control decks are really good, the games play out like "normal" **Magic** games, where one player is try to kill the other over a series of turns. That's generally what we want environments to look like, with the occasional combo deck showing up now and again.

May 23, 2007






Q: I'm not sure who could answer this question, but how was the mana cost for **Bridge from Below** from *Future Sight* decided upon?

—Gilad, Boston, MA, USA

A: From **Mike Turian**, *Future Sight* Lead Developer:



Hello Gilad,

Mark Rosewater was the designer of **Bridge from Below**. While the mana cost of the card isn't particularly relevant, Mark said he chose    because it's a classic Black casting cost.

There was some debate as to whether or not **Bridge from Below** should have a mana cost at all. Some people argued that there was no reason to play it in the first place, since it didn't do anything while it was in play. At the end of the day, though, I liked that you could play it and then sacrifice it as one more way to get it into your graveyard.

May 22, 2007



Q: For the "timeshifted" dual lands of **Future Sight**, why were those specific color combinations chosen to illustrate each cycle? For instance, why **Grove of the Burnwillows** and **Nimbus Maze** instead of, say, a blue-white "gainland" and a "tap for  if you have a **Forest** or  if you have a **Mountain**" land? Was it lands that made sense flavorwise in that color combination's philosophy, or those that seemed most powerful in those colors, or some other consideration I'm missing?
—Dan, East Lansing, MI, USA

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

The design team for **Future Sight** had some pretty specific goals about what land should be where, but as Development changed the cards and moved them around, a lot of the initial planning fell by the wayside.

We did feel it was crucial for the **River of Tears** mechanic to end up on one of the blue lands, for obvious reasons. Late in development we swapped **Grove of the Burnwillows** and **Graven Cairns** to give red-green the more aggressive of the two. What? Giving the opponent life is aggressive? Not so much, but being able to access either color on turn one certainly is and often makes up for the drawback. White-green, another traditionally aggressive creature based combination, staked an early claim to the cycles-from-play land. **Nimbus Maze** was a late tweak, but we felt it worked well enough in slower blue-white decks.

May 21, 2007



Q: How far in advance are your articles actually written?
—Bifidus, Flagstaff, AZ, USA

A: From **Scott Johns**, **magicthegathering.com** Site Manager:

Generally speaking, columns have deadlines two days before they go live. So, using Frank Karsten as an example, his column runs Wednesdays, which means he gets his articles to us Monday morning. That way, ideally we can work the article up Monday and then get it into the server early Tuesday, which leaves plenty of time to double-check how it looks on the page and finish anything else that may need doing. There are always exceptions of course. Whereas columnists outside the company have a deadline of 9 a.m. our time, internal employees that are also columnists can turn their articles in by 1 p.m. instead. Since they're here, in the building, lateness is less of an issue since it's so easy to get in touch with them if there are any questions or if anything potentially needs reworking.

Other exceptions are feature articles, Magic Academy, and preview articles. Feature articles are typically due one full week before they publish. Since we use rotating authors for those slots, and so many different kinds of topics can get covered there, the extra time helps ensure that if we run into any unexpected issues we can get them handled satisfactorily before the article has to go live. Additionally, anything that requires review by the Creative team (such as flavor text articles from guest authors) gets an additional week added to the deadline so the Creative team has enough time to review things on their end. Magic Academy and preview articles are special cases because those get translated for some of the foreign language versions of **magicthegathering.com**. So we try to pad in some extra time for those articles to allow the foreign offices to finish up any work needed on their end.

And, of course, some articles come in later than the two-day deadline. For authors covering certain events or other time-specific topics, sometimes we need to allow enough time to get everything in and written. So whereas Flores might normally be due Tuesday morning, we move that back a day whenever he's dealing with a giant batch of decklists from a PTQ the weekend previous so that he has enough time to get everything covered well without breaking himself in the process. But, other than that, nothing ever comes in late. As you can imagine, working with a bunch of gamers means everybody works ahead and nothing ever, ever comes in later than it should have!

May 18, 2007



Q: One of my favorite interactions within **Time Spiral** block is the way that morphed creatures can sometimes give you a chance to respond to split second cards. How early on was this realized in the design of the set? Did it have anything to do with the large number of morph creatures in **Time Spiral**?
—Will, New Haven, CT, USA

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

Hi Will,

Morph made it into **Time Spiral** because it's a fun old mechanic, and split second is a fun new mechanic. Both mechanics made it into the set on their own merits.

Unlike the real world where the rules are the rules, in R&D we make the rules. I believe that the "official" split second rules became known a few months before the set was done. We didn't know exactly how split second would work while the set was in design and development. There are always weird corner cases and various rules issues to go through with any mechanic, and split second was no different. So as developers we keep in mind that rules may change as we work with the sets.

May 17, 2007



Q: How was it determined that the most of any non-basic land card allowed in a tournament-legal deck is four? Why not three or five (or some other number)? And how much of an impact does the "no more than four" rule have on card design?

–Jon, Ripon, WI, USA

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

Hey Jon,

The four of rule is almost as old as **Magic** itself. I say almost because originally it didn't exist. When **Magic** was released you only needed to have a forty-card deck to be considered legal. Nobody expected **Magic** to be as popular as it turned out to be, so the designers didn't worry about people putting together broken decks.

When **Magic** turned into a huge hit, many people put together decks like the all-**Lightning Bolt** / **Mountain** deck, or if they had more cards the all-**Channel** / **Black Lotus** / **Fireball** deck. This was clearly a problem.

To solve the problem, Steve Bishop recommended the four-of card rule, as well as the sixty-card deck size rule. R&D member Skaff Elias tried out the rule and found that it solved the problem. As for why it wasn't three or five, it was simply because four was the first number suggested and it worked well.

The fact that the four-of rule exists has a big impact on design. Design knows when it makes a card like **Plague Rats** or **Sinew Sliver** that there is a limit to the number people can add to their deck. Look at the Ripple mechanic as another example of this. If people could play any number of a card, then a turn-two **Surging Flame** would be game over in a deck full of **Surging Flames**. (For fun, try out **Thrumming Stone** and **Relentless Rats**).

The second thing the four-of rule allows design to do is... break the four-of rule! Exciting! Design loves to take rules and break them, and cards like **Relentless Rats** show how design did exactly that to the four-of rule.

May 16, 2007



Q: I remember Mark Rosewater mentioning in his "color pie" articles that although black is not expressly evil, it is the color most likely to commit evil acts. Which colors after black are most likely to commit evil?

–Drew, San Diego, CA, USA

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

It depends on what you mean by evil, Drew. But rather than wade into the tar pits of what "evil" means, I'll just pretend we all agree on its definition. Suffice it to say that if you tweak the meaning of "evil," my answer to your question changes drastically. (Is it all about intent?) Black is defined by its selfishness and desire for power, so it's fair to say that it's most naturally inclined to what most would consider evil. But how many individuals believe themselves to be evil, or to be acting evilly?

Who's next? In my opinion, it's white. White edges out blue for second place in the evil race because white has more than one route to evil. First, there's "mob rule." White values the community over the individual, the needs of the many over the needs of the few. As you know from your history books, societies that suppress or tyrannize minorities or individuals have committed unspeakable evils. Additionally, white has strong laws, morals, and beliefs, and those beliefs can lead groups to act unfathomably evil "for the greater good." The Nazis, the fascists under Mussolini, Hutus during the Rwandan genocide, the Janjawid in Darfur, al-Qaeda . . . all of these groups committed or are committing atrocities in the name of their beliefs. None believed themselves to be evil.

Blue is third on the list. Because of its emotionlessness and desire for omniscience, blue most easily loses sight of the difference between good and evil. Josef Mengele, the Nazi SS officer who conducted despicable experiments on human beings, is an example of a villain who's mainly blue. His primary motivation was knowledge, and that motivation overrode all sense of ethics, morals, compassion, and humanity.

Fourth is red. Red-aligned figures don't care much for laws or belief systems, which can make them dangerous and volatile. Red isn't just about rage, however, but also compassion. Also, red is impulsive and doesn't like thinking ahead, so premeditation is mostly alien to it. Evil acts from red often take the form of "crimes of passion," in which an emotion so overwhelms someone that they commit a terrible act. Some kinds of homicidal insanity could also be considered red, although these usually involve a complete absence of empathy for others, which doesn't fit red very well.

Green gets the honor of being the color least capable of evil. But the reasons for this are tricky. Green pleads the "nonsentient" defense. It does plenty of killing, but does it do any murdering? Green predators kill ruthlessly both individually (like lions, for example) and in groups (like wolves). But this is where the intent issue comes into play. Is it evil for a natural predator to kill its prey? Green becomes evil when it becomes aware of what it's doing and why . . . but then it arguably ceases to be green and becomes some other color instead. Green figures can also become evil when they try to impose natural systems (not belief systems) on others. Some would consider the Earth Liberation Front to be an example of green evil.

So that's my list. It's deeply subjective, of course, and highly dependent on my own conception of evil. Do you think I'm wrong? Make your voice heard on our message boards; I'm eager to hear your view of things.

May 15, 2007



Q: I recall reading that Wizards decided not to print a cycle of cards in *Future Sight* because it was not possible to program into Magic: the Gathering Online. I was just wondering what that cycle looked like during

its making.

—Adam, Circleville, OH, USA

A: From **Mark Rosewater**, **Magic** head designer:

Adam,

I have hope of one day using this mechanic so I don't want to give it away. The problem with it is that it messed around with something that the game with its current coding would not be able to easily handle. As all our resources are focused on getting **Magic Online** 3.0 finished, we didn't feel that spending time to make this mechanic work was a priority. As such, I voluntarily removed it from design. This doesn't mean the mechanic can't ever work, it just can't work right now.

May 14, 2007



Q: Why is it that tribal is a type and not a supertype like legendary? Since it is an adjective, and because it seems more like an augmentation of the original card than an actual type of card, it seems strange and a little awkward to fit it as a type. Does this mean there will be tribal cards that are just tribal, or will they be like **Bound in Silence**, alterations of existing noncreature card types that allow them to have creature types? On that note, why did **Bound in Silence** have to be tribal at all? Why not just make it an Enchantment — Rebel Aura? Why can't the rebel subtype be used on noncreatures?

—Jacob, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

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

Rulesmeister Mark Gottlieb is out today tending his wombats, so I'll field your questions, which have appeared in the Ask Wizards box... oh, let's say "a few times."

Fair warning, though—the following is a feast for Melvin, and not for the faint of heart.

I'll start with the last question. Why was Tribal necessary at all? Why not just print an enchantment with the Rebel and Aura subtypes? That single card might seem innocuous, but the deeper issue here has to do with some very important rules that prevent some very silly things. See, rule 205.3d in the [Comprehensive Rules](#) states that—stop me if you've heard this one—each card type has its own possible list of subtypes, except for two pairs of types that share their list of subtypes. One such pair is instant and sorcery, allowing both of those to be Arcane; the other is creature and tribal.

If 205.3d didn't exist, we'd have a lot more freedom in adding subtypes to things. Instead of Arcane, we could have just made instants and sorceries that were Spirits! (That's ignoring the obvious problems that arise with splice.) Of course, we can't just have a generic list of subtypes, because it seems clear that **Imagecrafter** shouldn't turn things into Shrines or Equipment. So we could just define "creature types" as those subtypes that have been printed on a creature, right? (Well, or given to a creature, or created as a creature token...) That way **Volrath's Laboratory** can't make **Forests**. Oh, wait, crud, what about **Dryad Arbor** and **Life and Limb**? Now **Mistform Ultimius** taps for **♣**, because **Forest** has been printed on a creature! This is what we call a Bad Thing, and we avoid the whole mess by keeping discrete lists of subtypes.

So we have 205.3d to keep the lists of subtypes separate (except the ones that share nice), and we have 205.3e to state explicitly that for cards with multiple types (such as **Bound in Silence**), each subtype gets correlated to the correct type. That second one keeps us from landing in the exact same trouble that 205.3d is meant to prevent.

Of course, that leaves the question of why tribal couldn't be a supertype like legendary or basic. The issue here is that subtypes are correlated with types, while supertypes aren't (205.3d again, in a big-ticket team-up with 205.4a). So what exactly would the tribal supertype mean? Would it mean that this object can have creature subtypes, or would it mean that this object's types can have creature subtypes correlated with them? The first causes big problems with 205.3d, and the second gets weird if the permanent starts losing types, as with **Neurok Transmuter** or **Soul Sculptor**. You could argue that tribal still applies to the new types, so the subtypes are kept, but then you've got something that works differently than other cards do when types change... These issues aren't necessarily intractable, but they're messy and counterintuitive either way, and everything works a lot more cleanly if tribal is a type. The rules do specify, however, that tribal always appears on cards that have at least one other type (that's 212.8a, for those keeping score at home).

So why does it "sound like" a supertype? I can't speak to this one as easily, as I wasn't here yet when the decision was made, but as I understand it the name "tribal" was chosen because it's evocative and descriptive, and it's already associated with creature types for established players. Some people argue that it should be a noun, because all types are nouns (like instant... well, in some definitions), and not an adjective the way supertypes are (like snow and, um, world...).

Okay, I'm being a little tongue-in-cheek there, but what I'm saying is that these are "rules" we bend when the actual rules and creative needs dictate. Most players can play the game thinking that tribal is a supertype, or ignoring it entirely, and not be affected at all. If you need to know that tribal is a card type, odds are you already do.

Whew! We're done, and I didn't even have to say "tribals."

May 11, 2007



Q: Say that you are late in a set's development. You have just discovered that a card in the set is massively overpowered, but it's too late to cut it from the set. What do you do?

—Alastair, Dunedin, New Zealand

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

Ah, the doomsday scenario. Way to go with a classic, Alastair. Before we get into the options, let's see how many checks there are in the system to prevent "massively overpowered" cards from seeing print. Set development from beginning to end:

- Ken Nagle and Mark Rosewater go into the woods. Three days later they emerge with a new set's theme and mechanical identity. They present these ideas to members of a design team. Mark and Ken avoid making eye contact.

The team is encouraged to object to any aspect of a new set's premise.

- Assuming the ideas presented are sound, the design team gets to work filling out the common/uncommon/rare slots and entering the cards into Multiverse, the **Magic** set database.

The R&D department is encouraged to enter comments about cards in the file, which are recorded for all time. These comments are considered private and sacred unless Aaron can't think of an article topic.

- After designs, redesigns, and months of meetings, the team prints stickers for playtest purposes.

Many games are played (and many versions of the stickers are printed), comments are logged, and revisions executed until finally the set is ready to enter the development stage and FFL. By this point, many mechanics and cards have been culled. Some were axed for complexity, some for unfunitude, and (inevitably) some for being obscenely broken.

- Development meets two to three times a week to discuss cards in the set, while continuously building decks and smashing them against each other.

Needless to say, many more cards are deleted or reworked to make them less egregious. Fun is still the number one priority here. Power is examined, but a card deemed dull or annoying receives the kiss of death. If a card is both fun and broken, numbers can be tweaked to keep it around. Obviously, a too-powerful card makes games unfun. No matter how flashy **Skullclamp** looks on paper, they're just too swingly for enjoyable games.

- Results are analyzed and further modifications to the set are made.

People are *strongly* encouraged to chime in with their thoughts on individual cards. There are a lot of eyes trained on the set at this point.

- After a certain point, the files become harder to change. Cards can be revised, but they must adhere to the art concept. Cards are also given to editing to finalize templating and typesetting.

Months and months in, cards can and have been altered at this point. Numbers are easiest, abilities less so. Changes to a card start to intrude on more and more departments, but on the priority tree the quality of the experience supersedes all. In fact, a card in *Lorwyn* did receive a change at this point, literally a day before the...

- Magic Meeting Slideshow!

The art is in place and the cards are typeset and framed up. The department gets to see the whole set in its full glory. This is yet another opportunity for people to point out nutty text or costs. It's seriously unlikely a change would occur here, but it's not impossible.

Now let's assume the cards are locked in, getting localized and getting printed. If by chance a card was discovered that, as you say, was massively overpowered what's the next step? There are a number of options:

1. Do nothing.

Running around like a decapitated Chicken Little sounds fun, but without hard evidence it's really just fear-mongering. Making a major move based solely on speculation is not going to be done lightly. Keep in mind that development usually has an answer to some theme in an upcoming set. These are known as [safety valves](#). Crafting general-purpose hosers is SOP, and it's possible one of those is good enough to defeat card X.

2. Specifically craft a response towards the overpowered card.

"**Rishadan Port**, hmmm? **Teferi**, would you like to respond?"

This has been done before, although it's left folk 'round here with a bad taste in their mouths. **Magic** is lauded as a game with many interlocking parts. We very, very rarely name specific cards on other cards. The reason for that, and the reason we rarely print extremely narrow silver bullets, is because, well, they're narrow. They're good in very specific situations and no where else. **Magic** is a [modular game](#), and part of that is making open-ended pieces and counter-pieces. That being said, if the overpowered card could be easily solved with an elegant answer in the next set (hopefully something more subtle than **Tsabo's Web**), that option would be explored. By the way, this means there would be some playtime with the overpowered card, which isn't precisely a bad thing (see below).

3. Ban the card.

Now we're pulling out the big guns. This is an option—only taken at one of four times each year, on March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1—when the overpowered card either surprises R&D or is much more dominating than originally expected. Even then, a lot of things have to come together for a card to be banned. It has to not only show up in gigantic numbers, it has to create unfun experiences. Cards that warp the metagame aren't inherently bad; it's when there's nowhere for the metagame to go

that things get messy. Banning is an option here, although it's wholly unpopular and a concession of a failure of the department. Amputation is better than letting the patient die, but that's a decision we'd rather not have to make. Still, the health of the game and the enjoyment of the players is more important than any single card. For more detail on the reasoning behind a semi-recent banning, check [this](#) out.

4. Emergency ban the card.

The tactical nuclear strike, this option has been [invoked exactly once](#) in the history of the DCI. **Memory Jar** received errata to come into play banned. **Memory Jar** had the distinction of showing up in an already combo-laden environment; an environment that had already driven many players away. The card was clearly broken, yet even today some people in-office debate the necessity of that emergency ban. There are a lot of strikes against an emergency ban, not the least of which is that it prevents players from playing with a card *ever*. The implicit promise of quarterly B&R announcements is that you get to play with your cards *at least* until those dates. There would have to be an extreme set of circumstances to go back on that, and these days there are enough gatekeepers to prevent that from ever occurring.

I hope this answers your question, Alastair. "Overpowered" is tricky to determine, as each set and each local metagame shifts the definition wildly. The number of emails the bigwigs receive from people asking for bannings (or unbannings) is larger than you might think. From a big-picture perspective, letting people play with the cards they own is worth a lot, hence the internal unpopularity of any ban. A big part of this department's job is to create fun cards, and allow the players to use them. Be confident that if a mistake does slip through there are protocols in place to deal with them. First people get to play with what they own. If a problem is proven then action will be taken.

May 10, 2007



Q: I realize that you may not be able to answer my question, but is **Spellshift** my card? It seems a lot like my "Polyspell" card that I submitted for the Great Designer Search contest, I was curious if the card was inspired by the concept I presented to you. Likewise, will we see any more cards submitted in the Great Designer Search?

—Matthew Lubich, Concord, NC, USA

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

Matthew,

Planar Chaos and *Future Sight* were both done with design by the time of the [Great Designer Search](#), so any similarities between cards in those sets and cards from GDS submissions are in fact coincidental.

That said, we don't have a system for tracking where card designs come from. Basically, we rely on the memory of the designers. I will say that I was impressed by the card designs in both the various You Make the Cards and the Great Designer Search, and I believe cards from them will make their way into **Magic** in one of three ways:

#1 – Some designer saw a card from one of those two things, remembers it, and submits it where it seems appropriate.

#2 – Some designer saw a card from one of those two things and doesn't consciously remember it but unconsciously recreates the card.

#3 – Some designer never saw the submission but travels down similar paths to parallel design the card.

The big problem for the designers of these cards is that we have no way of knowing which of the above three happened. This, coupled with the fact that we don't identify designers on the cards (as we do with artists—and no, it's not a good idea; this from a man who's designed more **Magic** cards than anyone), means that there is no definitive way to let amateur designers know we've used their card. I feel that anyone who's designed a card that ends up in print should be proud, either because we did use your card or because you were able to figure out a good design space before we did.

Finally, I know we'll see more cards from You Make the Card and The Great Designer Search in future sets. Why? Because good cards always find a way to make it to print.

May 9, 2007



Q: **Flash** and **Protean Hulk** now make a combo that's one heck of an elephant in the Legacy room, and I fear for GP—Columbus. Are there any plans to fix this at the last second before the Grand Prix?
—Kevin, Iowa USA

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

We will be sticking to the normal Banned & Restricted list update schedule; as a rule, we do not ban cards at other times. You can read Randy Buehler's old article [Extended Thoughts](#) for more insights into the B&R policy and our avoidance of "emergency bans."

For those who aren't aware, **Flash** was given power-level errata in 2000. We removed that power-level errata, as is our policy, when it was found during the most recent Oracle update. We will not be reissuing errata for the card **Flash** or any other cards changed during the *Future Sight* Oracle update.

All the attention paid to the recent functionality change of **Flash** has caused us to reevaluate how we disseminate such information, however, so we are working on a much more public and visible method of highlighting Oracle and Comprehensive Rules changes going forward.

May 8, 2007



Q: Are the new keywords for old abilities (like lifelink and shroud) going to stick around, as in cards with those abilities get new oracle text, sets in the immediate future use these keywords, etc.?

–Dan, Mt. Crawford, VA, USA

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

As you may have seen by now, [lifelink](#), [shroud](#), and [reach](#) are permanent additions to the game's lexicon. Click the links above for Gatherer searches showing all the cards whose Oracle text now includes those abilities (plus a few amusing misses such as [Treacherous Vampire](#) and some funny hits as well... [Cephalid Inkshrouder](#) now gains shroud!).

Deathtouch is a somewhat stickier issue, as that exact ability—a variation on the "Basilisk" effect—appears on no card other than [Thornweald Archer](#) (though [Cruel Deceiver](#) can gain it and [Venomous Fangs](#) can grant it). Poisonous is in the same camp, with many creatures giving poison counters but none giving them with that exact trigger condition ([Swamp Mosquito](#), for instance, would not enjoy having poisonous). Time will tell whether those two abilities are carried forward.

While we're on the subject, let me clear up a few other things:

- Lifelink isn't called "spirit link," as many maintain it should be, because the card [Spirit Link](#)—ironically the most famous, though not the first, inspiration for this effect—doesn't have or grant this ability. [Spirit Link](#)'s controller, not the creature's controller, gains the life. "Lifelink" was chosen because it evokes the ability and the connection to [Spirit Link](#) without mentioning that card specifically. Oddly, I haven't heard anyone saying that the keyword should have been [El-Hajjâj](#).
- Creatures such as [Troll Ascetic](#) that have the more selective variant of shroud retain their original wording.
- Reach wasn't called "web" because that flavor works only for Spiders—not for, say, [Selesnya Sagittars](#).
- Note that reach represents a functional change to the "spider" ability, finally ending years of madness in which creatures that "can block" as though they had flying were actually treated as though they did have flying for the purposes of blocking. [Silhana Starfletcher](#) can no longer block [Silhana Ledgewalker](#), [Giant Spider](#) can block a creature enchanted with [Dust Corona](#) but can't block one enchanted with [Treetop Bracers](#), and [Talruum Piper](#)'s long reign of terror over spiders is finally at an end. Rejoice!

May 7, 2007



Q: Green and white. That is the colors of [Glittering Wish](#), but why is it those colors, both from a flavor perspective and a mechanic perspective.

–Rob, San Marcos, TX, USA

A: From **Devin Low**, **Magic** Head Developer:

Hi Rob,

[Glittering Wish](#) is the "completion" of *Judgment's* Wish cycle. We wanted [Glittering Wish](#) to be gold, both because it gets gold cards and so that it wouldn't overlap any of *Judgment's* Wishes. That left *Future Sight* with exactly three multicolored cards: five-color [Sliver Legion](#), blue-red [Jhoira of the Ghitu](#), and [Glittering Wish](#). Since Jhoira had already taken blue and red, we wanted [Glittering Wish](#) to be two of the remaining three colors. As the best mana-fixing color, green was a natural choice for a Wish that fetches all kinds of multicolored cards. That left black and white as choices for the second color. There was a proposal to go green-black, since black is the traditional color of [Diabolic Tutor](#). But *Future Sight* lead developer Mike Turian eventually settled on green-white, on the basis that white would more appreciate the tasty little nugget that you know as [Glittering Wish](#).

May 4, 2007



Q: Is Wizards planning to make more "Ask Wizards" based on questions posted in the forums? If so, whose idea was it?

–Neo Deus, Wizards.com forums

A: From **Kelly Digges**, editor of [magicthegathering.com](#)

Ah, you noticed! Yes, this is something that we plan to do very occasionally when we spot juicy questions (or implied questions) posed in the forums.

A few months ago, art director Jeremy Jarvis came to me with a question he'd spotted in the storyline forums and said he'd like to answer it. It was a good question, so I consulted with site manager Scott Johns, and we decided that there was no reason to turn down a satisfying, answerable question just because it didn't come through the usual channels. The point of Ask Wizards is reader participation, and the forums are a natural place to look. Jeremy's answer was posted on February 12.

That discussion quickly led us to apply the same logic to any question asked in the forums, provided that it's a good question, it hasn't been asked in the Ask Wizards box, and we happen to see it. Submitting a question via Ask Wizards is still the surest way to get it considered, but now and then you'll see a forum post crop up... maybe one of your own.

May 3, 2007



Q: Is there any real logic behind what creatures in Time Spiral block got the type Rebel?

–Josh, Stuart, FL, USA

A: From **Devin Low**, **Magic** Head Developer:

Hi Josh,

Because the Rebel searching mechanic allows you to tutor for any Rebel you want, the Time Spiral development team decided it would be cool to give players a "toolbox" of Rebels with very different utility effects. We found it was much more fun to be able to search up "the perfect answer" any particular situation than it would be to search up random guys that just fight. If you need to ping little creatures, search up **Zealot //Vec**. If you need to kill huge creatures, search up **Big Game Hunter**. You can search up **protection from green**, **protection from black**, **lifegain**, **flying**, and now even **pacifism**. The Rebels are pretty much ready for anything.

Creature types can come either from Development or from Creative. This time around, the direction came from Development, with a check by Creative to make sure we didn't do anything too insane. "**Rebel Imp**" is pushing the limits of plausibility, but at least it makes a little more sense than our next insane suggestion: **Rebel Zombie Cyclops!**

May 2, 2007



Q: Aw what the heck, "FUT"? I don't want to play a set named "Fut"! What ever happened to 2-letter set abbreviations? I can understand that *Planar Chaos* had to be PLC because PC means not one but several things already, but I am aware of no abbreviation FS anywhere in the English language {EDIT: er, except for first strike I guess, but I'm still standing by my sentiment}, so this was clearly the correct choice for Future Sight's code.

–WillPell, Wizards.com forums

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

Magic expansion codes switched from two letters to three starting with the Torment set. The change applied to all Wizards product lines, which explains why such a major change would happen in the middle of a block. The *Odyssey* set hadn't been released yet, so I was able to get the updated ODY code into **Magic Online** for that release. It wasn't feasible to update all the records for all the older sets. This means that older sets really have two codes: a two-letter code that everybody knows and a three-letter code that's buried in our secret records. There were several reasons why Wizards made this change:

- With only two letters (and no numbers), there are 676 possible expansion codes. That sounds like a lot, but how likely is it that a set's name will lend itself to ZZ? With three letters, that number goes up to 17,576.
- Three-digit codes also allow for more comprehensible abbreviations most of the time. With only two letters, it would be difficult to distinguish between *Mirage* (MI/MIR), *Mirrodin* (MRD), and *Morningtide* (MOR). Note that *Legends* (LE/LEG) and *Legions* (LGN) are doomed no matter what we do. Obviously, the whole *Time Spiral* block is an exception, which is what prompted your question.
- Wizards was working on some sports games back in 2001. Sports games need at least two digits to represent the release year, plus another spot to distinguish between multiple sets in the same year.
- We try to avoid using the same expansion code for different product lines. It makes it easier for people to carry on conversations and know that they're talking about the same thing.

And because lists are fun, here's a bonus list of fun facts I came across today while writing this response:

- The codename of Fourth Edition was "Francesca." The file name of the Fourth Edition rulebook shortens that to "Franny." Naming conventions were obviously a lot more casual back in the day. Imagine a time when, after Alpha, Beta, *Unlimited*, and *Revised*, you really didn't know what the name of the next core set would be!
- Multani's Blessing was one of the last twenty cards in *Urza's Legacy* to be named. Its playtest name was "Maro's Mojo." Rejected names included Surging Might, Essence of the Maro, and Antlers.
- Early files handed off to typesetting used codes to define the artist credits. For example, the "\kmj" below means "Illus. Ken Meyer, Jr."

```
+CARD w1&
Abu Ja'far
W
Summon Leper
White
\kmj
0/1
```

```
If Abu dies without regenerating while participating in an
attack or defense, all creatures Abu is blocking or being
blocked by are also killed and may not regenerate.
+ENDCARD
```

- Lepers are now called people who suffer from Hansen's disease.

May 1, 2007



Q: There have been so many **Magic** sets and cards over the years that it seems like Wizards has to be running short on ideas for new cards. How long do you think **Magic** can continue? Won't there come a time when all the cards that can be made have been made?

–Trevor, Cincinnati, OH, USA

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

Trevor,

I get asked this question quite a bit. How much more time does **Magic** design have? Should people keep buying packs or do we run out of ideas next year? :) My answer is that **Magic** design is insanely deep, and while we've definitely explored certain areas in great detail, there are other veins that are yet untapped.

Also remember that I feel mechanics are tools that can be reused and reinterpreted. Part of future design isn't just finding new things but finding new ways to reuse old things or, as *Future Sight* demonstrates, finding ways to mix and match things we've already done.

What this means is that **Magic** design, in my opinion, is healthy enough to outlive anyone reading this Ask Wizards question.



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