



Ask Wizards - November, 2007

Do you have a question about **Magic: The Gathering** or *Wizards of the Coast*? Send it, along with your name and location, to us via this [email form](#). We'll post a new question and answer each day.



November 30, 2007

Q: One of the favorite occupations of today's players and developers is mocking yesterday's players and developers. It seems ludicrous that anyone played with **Healing Salve**, or that R&D thought banding was a solid idea. In ten years, what aspects of today's play environment will players and developers be mocking? —Brian, Fort Myers, FL, USA

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

While it is true that we sometimes enjoy poking fun at our predecessors (I mean, seriously, **Tolarian Academy**?), most of us working on the game these days understand that we are standing on the shoulders of giants. For each card they screwed up on, they got a fifty correct, and the game has thrived because of them. As to your specific points, it isn't ludicrous that people play with **Healing Salve**; after all, we timeshifted it in **Planar Chaos** as **Healing Leaves**, and people played it in Limited. This says to me that it has use in "underpowered" environments, which includes most people's lunchroom and kitchen table games. Also, there was no "R&D" per se when banding was invented, just Richard Garfield and his pals. I can appreciate the attempt to make a flavorful mechanic that captured white's feel of unity and organization in combat, and the fact that it was too cumbersome and confusing was enough reason to eventually retire it. Not a bad process at all.

Just as those before us believed, I can't see any aspect of the game that looks to me like we don't know what we're doing or that we're screwing up on. We're proud of everything we release, and put a ton of effort into every decision we make, all in the best interest of the game. I'm sure players and developers will get even smarter as the years go on, and some stuff that was made in the past few years will be frowned upon in the future, but I can't identify what it is at this moment.

I mean, if I could identify it, I'd fix it!

November 29, 2007

Q: I was just wondering why we haven't seen any of the *Future Sight* timeshifts yet, and what the policy is in dealing with them? For instance, is there any time limit on bringing them into the game in their "real" incarnation, or is it simply a pool of cards that development can use as desired? Judging by the cards, and by their flavor and/or mechanics, it seems as though there will need to be some level of shift in thinking to integrate these cards? —Chris, Colorado Springs, CO, USA

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

Chris,

Yet? There's been one (non-core) set released since *Future Sight*, and it had **Goldmeadow Harrier**. True it wasn't a timeshifted "future reprint," but it was a card that **was hinted at by one**. Your real question, though, seems to be *Will we see "future reprints" from Future Sight in future expansions?* Yes. Part of planning *Future Sight* was coming up with areas of design that we meant to go, allowing us to reprint some of the timeshifted cards in new sets. So yes, some of the *Future Sight* timeshifted cards will return in new sets. It also means that aspects hinted at by future cards might also see print even if the exact card itself doesn't return.

While I don't want to give any secrets away, I can say this: We are very conscious of *Future Sight* as we design new sets. This should be clearly obvious as more sets come out.

November 28, 2007

Q: What would you say is white's most representative race? The vague humans? The aven? The leonin (including Ajani)? Or the newly central kithkin? —Andrés, Renton, WA, USA

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

Although perhaps white was "the human color" way, way back in the game's early years, it's been a long while now since we decided that humans shouldn't belong to any one color—they're versatile enough that they belong to all colors equally. Whereas black has the undead, red has goblins, and green has elves, white and blue don't have super-iconic "main races" that stand out from all others. The race that best embodies blue these days is the vedalken, in my opinion, although over the years we've seen plenty of other options such as

merfolk and metathran. For white, I think the best current representation of the color's values is the leonin race, although like blue, I don't think there's one clear answer.

I know **Magic** players are pattern completers, so for many the initial thought is that if one color has a main race, all five should have one. In reality, though, it's more complex than that—the races on any given plane are determined by overlaying the setting's needs with the five colors and seeing what races fit best, and some colors have more versatility and changeability than others.

November 27, 2007



Q: A while back on this site there was some discussion of the order in which mana symbols are listed for costs. I thought that was . But it seems *Lorwyn* has departed from this order (e.g., *Doran, the Siege Tower*). Has policy changed?

—Jeremy, Clemson, SC, USA

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

Although the questions use different examples, the answer now is the same as it was in [April 2002](#) and [June 2004](#). I can't put it any better than I did before:

As you've noticed, three different systems have been used in the past to order mana symbols on cards. One system always put the colors in the order white-blue-black-red-green, and that ordering was used for *Ice Age*, *Tempest*, and *Chronicles*. Another goes clockwise around the 'pentagon of colors.' *Mirage* block used that ordering, and we've been following it consistently since *Stronghold*. And then there's the *Legends* system, which involved throwing mana symbols into a hat and then pulling them out at random.

Our current (and final!) system for ordering mana symbols is pretty simple. If you look at the back of a **Magic** card, you'll see the pentagon of colors. Going clockwise, the colors are white, blue, black, red, green, white, blue, black To order a pair of mana symbols, find them in that list, and then put them in whichever order puts the fewest colors between them. For example, white/red has two colors in the middle (blue and black), but red/white has only one (green). That's why *Goblin Legionnaire*'s mana cost is .

Then came the *Apocalypse* 'wedge' cards. Our system breaks down when you're trying to order two friendly colors and their common enemy, and *Apocalypse* has five rares with mana costs that fall into that category. For *Lightning Angel*'s mana cost, and are equally valid options. In the end, I decided to put the enemy color pair first.

(Yes, I know that the *Apocalypse* split cards all violate the color order. It was decided that those five cards would be easier to name that way.)

November 26, 2007 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: Does a card that adds to the cost of another spell affect that card's actual converted mana cost? *Sphere of Resistance*, for example, adds to the cost of all spells played. Does this mean that an enchantment like *Veiled Sentry*, which relies on the converted mana cost of a spell being played, would be affected?

—Andreas, Hudiksvall, Sweden

A: From the **Magic** Rules Corner:

Well, Andreas, when *Gaddock Teeg* and *Thorn of Amethyst* are in play—oh, sorry, your question is about *Sphere of Resistance* and *Veiled Sentry*. But Mr. Teeg should listen up, too, because his presence in *Lorwyn* and on the tournament scene has brought questions about converted mana cost to the forefront.

The quick answer to your question is no, *Veiled Sentry* sees the same value regardless of what was actually paid for the spell. With a few exceptions that we'll get to (ⓧ being the doozy), the *mana cost* of a card—whether it's a permanent in play, a spell on the stack, or a card anywhere else—is exactly what's printed in the upper right-hand corner of the card (or the upper left-hand corner of the art, in the case of *Future Sight* "timeshifted" cards). This is true regardless of what you actually paid for the spell (again, with a few exceptions we'll cover shortly)—cost reducers, cost increasers, additional costs, alternative costs, whatever. Mana cost is mana cost.

Mana cost isn't the same thing as *converted mana cost*, but they're closely related. An object's mana cost includes color, so the mana cost of (say) *Wrath of God* is . An object's converted mana cost is a number equal to the total amount of mana in its mana cost, regardless of color. So *Wrath of God*'s converted mana cost is 4—and that's true no matter where it is and no matter how much was actually paid for it. How much you pay for a spell when playing it is its *total cost*, but that's a term you won't see used outside the Comprehensive Rules.

Confusing the issue somewhat is the fact that older cards such as *Veiled Sentry* use some words we don't use anymore. *Casting cost* is an obsolete term for mana cost, and *total casting cost* is an obsolete term for converted mana cost, which causes some confusion with "total cost."

Okay, on to the exceptions. The converted mana cost of a spell with ⓧ in its mana cost is calculated treating X as zero anywhere but on the stack, and treating X as the value was actually paid for it when the spell is on the stack. So a *Blaze* on the stack with X=3 has a converted mana cost of 4, but the same *Blaze* in your graveyard has a converted mana cost of 1. A *Blaze* with X=3 with a *Thorn of Amethyst* in play has a total cost of but its converted mana cost is still 4. A *Fireball* with X=3 that's dividing X between three targets has a total cost of but its converted mana cost is also 4, because the extra mana paid for multiple targets is an additional cost. So your *Veiled Sentry* would end up as a 4/4 in all of these cases.

(Incidentally, this is why *Gaddock Teeg* prevents noncreature spells with ⓧ in their mana cost from being played entirely—to forgo the rules oddities that would arise if he was trying to keep you from playing a spell

whose converted mana cost was *going to be* 4 or greater.)



The second exception is split cards. A split card on the stack has the mana cost (and name, color(s), etc.) of only whichever side you played—so **Boom** would cause **Veiled Sentry** to become a 2/2, while **Bust** would make it a 6/6. However, and this is where things get weird, a split card anywhere else has the mana cost of both sides. That doesn't mean they're added together—it means that any time you look at a split card's mana cost or converted mana cost, you get both answers. (The same is true for all other qualities of a split card that isn't on the stack.) **Rough // Tumble**'s converted mana cost is 2 *and* 6. That means that if you (for instance) mill it away with **Lammastide Weave**, you'll gain 2 and 6 life, for a total of 8. But if a player plays **Void** and chooses 2, a **Rough // Tumble** in your hand will be discarded, because its converted mana cost is 2.

This is especially bizarre when clashing. If you play **Oaken Brawler** and reveal **Kithkin Greatheart** (converted mana cost 2) while I reveal **Dead // Gone** (converted mana cost 1 and 3), we both win the clash—we each revealed a card that had a higher converted mana cost. That means that your **Oaken Brawler** does get the +1/+1 counter, but I also draw a card off of **Sylvan Echoes**. Everyone's a winner!

And that, hopefully, is more about converted mana cost than you'll ever need to know.

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November 21, 2007



Q: I see that **Wydwen, the Biting Gale** is the legendary card for the fae, but why isn't it Oona? She's the queen of the fae, according to the flavor text of **Secluded Glen**. Thanks.

–Thonzi, Laguna, Philippines

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

Thanks for your question, Thonzi. Oona is a mysterious, elusive character, so her conspicuous absence from the set is actually well-suited to her nature. She shows up in [card names and flavor text](#), as you've observed, so she clearly has far-reaching influence beyond her secretive Glen Elendra. We do have plans for Oona, but it's not yet time for her to take center stage.

November 20, 2007



Q: Let's pretend my opponent is playing an Elf-token deck. Let's also pretend it's the final match of the World Champs, and rules are enforced to the sharpest point. I have **Pyroclasm** in my hand, and I think it would be to my advantage if my opponent knew so. Is it legal for me to just show me opponent a card, for my own personal reason?

–Funkamander, Ashland, OR, USA

A: From **Toby Elliott**, Level 5 Judge:

The [Universal Tournament Rules](#) contains a lot of information about what players can and can't do during a game of **Magic**. Rule 33 says:

Players must keep their cards above the level of the playing surface at all times, including during sideboarding. Revealing your hand to your opponent is not considered a violation of the DCI Universal Tournament Rules.

This is being altered in an upcoming release to cover a few more things, such as revealing face-down morph creatures or cards that have been removed from the game face down. In short, if you are able to see the card face yourself, you are allowed to reveal it to your opponent.

Good luck in that final match. Looks like you're off to a good start!

November 19, 2007 – **Magic Rules Corner**



Q: How does **Profane Command** work with **Wild Ricochet**? My opponent played **Profane Command** for enough

mana to win the game if he targeted me with the "lose X life" effect, but I played **Wild Ricochet** on it, and we're not really sure what happens. He maintains control of the original spell, so he still gets to choose which two of the four will be used. We had been playing the Commands and treating the "choose two" as something that happens on resolution, not when you cast the spell. But I'm not sure when the targets are chosen, and whether or not **Wild Ricochet** can change those targets. On a side note, we were pretty sure that the copy created by **Wild Ricochet** would treat the X in the casting cost of **Profane Command** as 0, but we're not certain on that either.

—Casey, Renton, WA, USA

A: From the **Magic Rules Corner**:

Well, there's a whole lot going on here, Casey. Your scenario brings up three major issues: modes (that's what you choose when you play a Command, or any spell that says "Choose [some number]—"), changing targets, and copying spells (and, in particular, how copying spells interacts with modes and **X** costs). Let's go through them one by one.



Modes: As you noticed, some modes require choosing targets, while others don't (or at least require choosing different kinds of targets). All of **Profane Command's** modes have different targeting requirements—a player, a creature card with converted mana cost X or less in your graveyard, a creature in play, or X creatures in play. Targets are chosen when you play a spell, and that means that **modes are chosen before targets**, not on resolution. In fact, after you announce that you're playing a spell, **choosing modes is almost always the first thing you do** (along with choosing the value of X and announcing your intention to pay any additional or alternative costs). When you play **Profane Command**, you must announce which modes you are choosing (that's rule 409.1b in the Comprehensive Rules), then announce which target(s) you are choosing for each mode (that's rule 409.1c). You can't choose modes for which there are no legal targets.

Changing targets: When you change a spell's targets, **you don't get to choose different modes**. That means that you can choose only legal targets for each of the modes your opponent chose (or leave the targets the same). Of course, you'll notice that **Profane Command's** first mode says "target player," so your opponent is almost always going to be a legal target to lose X life. You can change the targets for the other mode chosen or leave them the same. Note that **Profane Command's** second mode says to return a creature from "your graveyard," so if that mode was chosen, your opponent still gets the creature and the creature card has to be in his graveyard—but you get to pick which creature he gets. In other words, you're correct that "he maintains control of the original spell." (This is all covered in rule 415.7, "Changing Targets.")

Copying spells: To copy a spell is to put a copy of it onto the stack. In addition to the original spell's characteristics (color, name, mana cost, effects, etc.), **the copy will also copy all decisions made when the original spell was played, including modes, targets, and the value of X**. (This is different from playing a spell without paying its mana cost, as you would because of **Guile** or **Spinnerock Knoll**.) It's also interesting to note that the copy is put on the stack after the original spell, so unless one of them is countered, the copy will resolve first. All this is from rule 503.10.

So here's the breakdown of what happens when your opponent plays **Profane Command** and you play **Wild Ricochet** targeting it:

1. Your opponent plays **Profane Command**, choosing modes (in this case, "Target player loses X life" and any other mode), the value of X (enough to kill you), and targets (you, and an appropriate target for the second mode). He finishes playing **Profane Command** and puts it on the stack.
2. You play **Wild Ricochet**, choosing **Profane Command** as the target.
3. Assuming your opponent has no responses, **Wild Ricochet** resolves.
4. Although you cannot change the modes your opponent chose for **Profane Command**, you can now change the targets. Let's assume that you change the target player to your opponent and do whatever you want with the other mode.
5. You then get to put a copy of **Profane Command** on the stack. It has the same modes and targets as the original—although in this case it copies the new targets you just chose. Let's assume that you decide to leave your opponent as the target player for the copy and do whatever you want with the other mode.

6. Assuming nobody has any responses, the copy of **Profane Command** resolves. Your opponent loses X life, then the other mode does whatever it says to do (and remember, you control the copy, which matters if the "return target creature card" mode was chosen).
7. Assuming nobody has any responses, the original **Profane Command** resolves. Your opponent loses *another* X life, then the other mode does whatever it says to do (but your opponent controls it this time).

At this point, your opponent has lost X life twice, and you've gotten to perform the other chosen mode twice (giving two creatures -X/-X, giving your own creatures fear on his turn—not too helpful, but it could keep his creatures from swinging in to kill you—or returning the best creature card in your graveyard and the worst one in your opponent's graveyard to play). If you haven't won the game by this time, at the very least you're not dead. (And in a multiplayer game, you could probably kill two players this way...)

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November 16, 2007



Q: In Doug Beyer's Taste the Magic article that was put up a while ago, he had a full-size illustration of every planeswalker at the start of their article... but not my favorite, **Garruk Wildspeaker**! I really love the art on it, and I can't seem to find it anywhere on the site. Do you know where I could find it?

—John, MA, USA

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

That's ridiculous, John. Why would we run full-size art of four of the five planeswalkers and not the fifth one? I'll just [take a look at that article](#) and...

Oh. Right, I remember now. We thought at the time that running the full-size **Garruk Wildspeaker** art right after the full-length sketch of Garruk would be redundant, but it looks like we underestimated the demand for big, meaty images of *Lorwyn's* most savage planeswalker.

A grievous oversight, John. One that I will correct... wait for it... now:



And while we're at it, that article included the full-length art for **Ajani Goldmane**, but not all on its own. For fans of the big leonin 'walker, here's that art, too:



November 15, 2007



Q: What colors do the various staff members who make **Magic** think they are, and why? I know Mark Rosewater has said on several occasions he thinks he's mostly red with some blue. What about the rest of the staff?

—Conrad, Raleigh, NC, USA

A: From **Magic** R&D:

We asked around and heard the following—but bear in mind, self-reporting isn't always accurate...



Aaron Forsythe: red-white



Mark Gottlieb: "At work, I'm blue-white. Not at work, I'm green-black."



Ken Nagle: blue-red



Erik Lauer: blue



Henry Stern: "Red-green, maybe?" (Erik Lauer: "You're black-white.")



Nate Heiss: "I would say green-blue. I don't know... I'm getting more red every day."

Jake Theis: "I'd go mono-red. Of course, that's just a snap judgment, like a mono-red mage"



would make.”

November 14, 2007



Q: I know **Magic** is all about making rules and breaking rules. Are there any rules that you guys have decided would be too much of a hassle to break (e.g. allowing sorceries to be played as instants or letting players skip their upkeep phase)?"

–Mike O.

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

Mike,

The Golden Rule of **Magic** design is that every rule can be broken. Including the Golden Rule. Which means? Well, chaos basically. That said, are there rules that we choose not to break? Yes.

The rules we tend not to break are of a very different kind than your suggestions (which, by the way, are all fair game). For example, one of our current unbreakable rules is that we don't let players put other people's cards in their hands. The reason for this rule is that we don't want to create a situation where one player doesn't like how his opponent handles his cards. (And note that even this rule was broken in *Unglued* with the card **Mirror Mirror**.)

Other examples of unbreakable rules: the text must fit in the text box, we don't repeat card names (unless it's the same card), flavor text doesn't have a game relevant function, cards that search the library for a specific subset must be shown to the opponent to be verified, and nothing works at interrupt speed. As you can see, there are numerous rules we try not to break.

Then again, here's some old unbreakable rules: cards must always be laid out the same, players cannot touch the opponent's library, cards in play must always have their information public, cards cannot have an ability before the first turn, and never let Mark design a card without supervision. What does all this mean? **Magic** is a game in flux. Nothing is truly off limits. Things that seem forbidden today might be normal tomorrow.

(This question and answer originally ran on March 22, 2004.)

November 13, 2007



Q: When the Duel Decks are released on November 16, will the cards in them that are not currently in Standard become part of Standard?

–Mark, West Lafayette, IN, USA

A: From **Scott Larabee**, DCI Program Manager:

No. *Elves vs. Goblins* will not change the format legality of any of the cards reprinted in it. However, all of the cards in the two *Elves vs. Goblins* decks are tournament-legal in Extended, and some of them are Standard-legal. Check the *Elves vs. Goblins* [product page](#) for more information.

November 12, 2007 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: So if I control a card that gives me, the player, shroud, can my opponent still target my planeswalker with spells (like **Shock**)?

–John, Manhattan, KS, USA

A: From the **Magic** Rules Corner:

Last week we covered what happens with your planeswalkers when creatures can't attack you, so it's only fair that this week we cover the analogous situation with spells—especially because these two cases work differently.

First, let's clear up one bit of terminology: A planeswalker can't be chosen as the target of **Shock**. **Shock** can target only a creature or a player, and that hasn't changed. But **Shock** can deal damage to a planeswalker. How? The answer, as with last week, relies on the specifics of the planeswalker rules.

The controller of a source that would deal noncombat damage to a player can choose to redirect that damage to a planeswalker that player controls. This is a replacement effect and follows the usual rules for those (we'll cover what that means in a moment). Remember, this applies to noncombat damage only—combat damage follows the rules for attacking planeswalkers outlined last week.

What all this means is that the answer to your question is *no*. If a player can't be the target of a spell or ability (because of shroud from **True Believer** or protection from **Seht's Tiger**, say), then that spell or ability can't be used to damage a planeswalker that player controls because it can't target the player to be redirected.

This also means that you don't know until a spell resolves whether it's going to hit you or your planeswalker. Once again, that's in sharp contrast to the planeswalker combat rules.

The other strange nuance here has to do with damage prevention effects. Damage prevention effects are also replacement effects. When multiple replacement effects try to apply to the same event, the affected player or the controller of the affected object gets to choose what order to apply them in. This means that if one effect (say, the damage prevention shield from **Bandage**) is attempting to prevent the damage dealt to a player by a

spell or ability and another effect (say, the planeswalker rules) is attempting to redirect that damage, then the player who would be damaged gets to decide whether to prevent the damage or send it along.

You might wonder why the rules work so differently for combat and noncombat damage. It was easy enough to let creatures attack planeswalkers directly (again, the rules for that were based on the "Attack Multiple Players" option for multiplayer), but letting spells target planeswalkers as if they were players would have caused some serious problems. A planeswalker doesn't have a hand, library, or graveyard. It doesn't control any creatures. And most worryingly, it can't make choices. Try asking [Chandra Nalaar](#) which cards she's choosing for [Gifts Ungiven](#). You'll be in for a wait...

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November 9, 2007



Q: How many actual "tribes" are in *Magic*? That is, what are the creature types that have at least one of:

1. A card that counts how many are in play/hand/graveyard, etc.?
2. A card that cares whether one is in play/hand/graveyard, etc.?
3. A card that gives bonuses to some or all of that type?

—David, Kimberly, WI, USA

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

I used to torture Doug Beyer with this sort of thing, but since he took over [Taste the Magic](#) I hear he's been a bit busy. Guess I'll take a stab at some of the grueling "count-'em-up" questions as they come up.

Of the 216 creature types still standing after the [Grand Creature Type Update](#), I count 79 that constitute a "tribe" by those criteria (although please note that I interpreted "cares" to encompass both positive and negative effects, and "etc." to include your library). Because the tribes that are only ever punished are of limited utility, I've marked them with *s in the table below. I'd argue, however, that they still count as tribes in some sense—nothing like the threat of [King Suleiman](#) to bring a tribe together! And anyway, I wouldn't want to leave your [Imagecrafter](#) / [Spirit Mirror](#) deck out in the cold (you know who you are).

In addition to the 79 types in the table, there are several types that are referenced only as "[type] tokens" by cards that create tokens of that type:

Caribou
Plant Wall (actually two types, so don't try setting [Volrath's Laboratory](#) to make these)
Prism
Serf
Skeleton

The cards that care about these types interact with, say, [Riptide Replicator](#) tokens, but not with changelings. Note that [Tetravite](#) doesn't make that list because of the way [Tetravus](#) is worded.

One final caveat before the table is that, thanks to the magic of "choose a creature type," cards such as [Urza's Incubator](#) and [Brass Herald](#) can make any creature type a "tribe." Hello, Nephilim tribal deck! Except not really.

And now, the 79 "real tribes" in *Magic*:

Ape†	Coward*	Fox	Knight	Pegasus	Spider
Assembly-Worker	Demon	Fungus	Kobold	Pentavite	Spirit
Atog	Djinn*	Giant	Mercenary	Rat	Squirrel
Aurochs	Dragon	Goat*	Merfolk	Rebel	Thopter
Barbarian	Druid	Goblin	Minion	Reflection*	Thrull
Bat	Dwarf	Gorgon*	Minotaur	Rigger	Treefolk
Beast	Efreet*	Griffin	Moonfolk	Samurai	Vampire
Berserker	Elemental	Homarid*†	Myr	Saproling	Wall
Bird	Elephant	Human	Nightmare	Shaman	Warrior
Blinkmoth	Elf	Illusion	Nightstalker	Shapeshifter	Wizard
Cat	Eye	Insect	Ninja	Sliver	Wolf
Cephalid	Faerie	Kavu	Ogre	Snake	Zombie
Chimera	Flagbearer	Kithkin	Orc	Soldier	Zubera
Cleric					

* denotes types for which none of the existing "tribal" effects are beneficial.

† denotes types whose "tribal" effects appear only in *Unhinged*.

As always, I'm sure you'll let me know in the forums if I callously passed over your beloved [INSERT MISSING TRIBE HERE] deck.

November 8, 2007



Q: Now that we've seen some of the *Lorwyn* tribes in action, I was wondering about the old tribal set and how they played out in the end. So, how you would rank the tribes from the *Onslaught* block?

–Steve, Des Moines, IA, USA

A: From **Ken Nagle, Magic R&D:**

Dear Steve,

I have indeed traded for and built a deck for every *Onslaught* tribe. Some of those decks have even stood the test of time—I have them here at my desk. I shall rank the *Onslaught* block tribes using the ultimate measuring stick for all **Magic** cards: fun. My reason: we can always print more powerful **Magic** cards, but the day **Magic** dies is the day we stop printing fun **Magic** cards.

Dragons

Dragons are the most fun *Onslaught*-supported tribe. Cards like **Imperial Hellkite** and **Bladewing the Risen** make just being a Dragon even better. You'd have difficulty finding a more Timmy experience than dropping a memorable 20/20 **Kilnmouth Dragon**. My Dragon deck survives today, though I've cut the overpowered ones like **Covetous Dragon** because they simply made the deck less fun. I'm truly a deckbuilder by heart, and identifying cases like this where more power does not equal more fun taught me **Magic** design lessons through osmosis (which eventually got me into **Magic R&D!**).

Slivers

Slivers are the next most fun tribe, demanding a colorful manabase while having the danger of backfiring (against say **Woodland Changeling**). I like to play Aggro-Control slivers by mixing the *Tempest*-era slivers with **Quick Sliver** (I curse Randy Buehler's change from ♣ to ♠!) into the bigger *Legions* ones. **Living Wish** holds it all together with a wishboard full of dual lands and every Sliver ever printed.

Elves

Unbeknownst to tournament players, casual Elf decks around the world underwent technological breakthroughs during *Onslaught* block. Elves could splash multiple colors off of **Birchlore Rangers**, outlast by drawing lots more Elves (**Bloodline Shaman**), beatdown with massive Elves (**Elvish Soultiller**, **Elvish Aberration**, **Timberwatch Elf**, **Gempalm Strider**), or go combo with the greenest card ever printed (**Biorhythm**), and all of it fun. Really, who hasn't built an Elf deck?

Walls

Yes, Walls! The Wall tribe received **Wall of Mulch**, its one and only lord! (Those cards that let Walls attack are stupid—Walls aren't supposed to attack, Walls are supposed to block.) However, the Wall tribe is totally messed up now that "defender" technology designates what we used to call "Walls." Even so, it's still very fun to kill you with my Walls using **Kyren Negotiations** into Hidgetsugu's Second Rite.

Beasts

We've now come to the tribes whose decks didn't survive my rigorous standards for fun (carrying around unfun decks does you, your friends, and your back no good). Beasts gain points for being a tribe of large creatures, which are always fun, but lose points for being a creature type that ended up on so many random cards in the past, but gain those points back again for random awesome combos like **Contested Cliffs** + **Spiritmonger**.

Zombies

Zombies hold the distinction of being the most flavorful tribe in *Onslaught*. They emerge from the graveyard, living things fear them, they can walk across swamps, and they want to eat your brains. All that flavorful stuff translates well into **Magic** cards.

Soldiers

Soldiers have the whole buddy system going on, and there's plenty of them, but Soldiers always felt like they were never the best at anything (what we in R&D call a "strong mechanical identity"). They weren't as good at attacking as Beasts, they weren't as good at blocking as Walls, and they weren't as good at what I call "doing lots of stuff for no good reason" as Elves.

Clerics

Be warned, we've passed into "unfun" territory. Clerics feel the need to just sit around, never die (**Rotlung Reanimator**), gain life (**Ancestor's Prophet**), and in general make sure nothing interesting happens.

Birds

Birds fly. That's nice. Moving on.

Wizards

Wizards is a blue tribe that draws cards (**Riptide Director**) and counters spells (**Voidmage Prodigy**). It's almost like this tribe is trying to remove fun from the game.

Goblins

I know there are Goblin fans out there. I'm not one of them. My Elf deck was massacred over and over simply because **Goblin Sharpshooter** was printed. Thanks to cards like **Goblin Warchief**, **Skirk Prospector**, **Goblin Piledriver**, and **Gempalm Incinerator**, Goblins are by far the most powerful tribe ever, and the despairing truth is they always will be. The only saving grace of the Goblin tribe is its testament that power corrupts...and fun in **Magic** is paramount.

November 7, 2007



Q: Why do some creatures like **Mistform Ultimus** or **Chub Toad** not get their unique abilities errataed when they become keyworded abilities in later sets?

–Kaj, Sacramento, CA, USA

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

Keyword abilities come in two varieties:

- Evergreen keywords like flying, first strike, lifelink, and reach can appear in any set. Every **Magic** player should learn what these keywords do. If you're teaching someone how to play, be sure to give him or her a copy of the Keyword Cheat Sheet, available on the [Magic Rules Page](#). (I'm going to start taking copies to the Employee Prereleases here at Wizards.)
- Block-specific keywords like buyback, storm, dredge, and evoke only appear in certain sets or blocks. R&D will occasionally bring back popular or versatile keyword abilities. For example, both Urza Block and *Onslaught* Block had cards with cycling. In general, though, you won't see a singleton card with a keyword from another block. That's why **Mistform Ultimus** doesn't have changeling, **Chub Toad** doesn't have bushido, and **Tawnos's Coffin** doesn't phase things out.

The *Time Spiral* block blurred the distinction between the two kinds of keywords. Almost every block-specific keyword that could return in that block did. If you started playing with *Ravnica*, then dredge has been in every block you've known! In the same block, five new evergreen keywords were introduced: flash, deathtouch, lifelink, reach, and shroud. And until the *Lorwyn* release, deathtouch appeared on fewer cards than delve!

As time goes by and more sets are released, the distinction between evergreen and block-specific keywords will reemerge.

November 6, 2007



Q: Will Duel Decks be online?

–Russell, Branson, MO, USA

A: From **Worth Wollpert**, **Magic Online** brand manager:

Hi Russell,

Duel Decks: Elves vs. Goblins will definitely be available on **Magic Online**. The exact date is still to be decided right now, but we're shooting for late November, shortly after the paper release.

When we have a firm date, the *Elves vs. Goblins* product page found [here](#) will be updated to reflect that, and we will make announcements both in **Magic Online** and on our forums.

Thanks for inquiring. We're looking forward to adding *Elves vs. Goblins* to the online catalog and offering players a chance to get in on the tribal fun!

November 5, 2007 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: Cards like **Chronomantic Escape** or **Blazing Archon** say that creatures can't attack YOU. Does this mean that if you have a planeswalker your opponent can attack it nevertheless?

–Davide, Grenoble, France

A: From the **Magic** Rules Corner:

That's exactly what it means. When your opponent declares attackers, he or she chooses what each creature is attacking: you, or a planeswalker you control (and if you have more than one, which one). These rules are similar to the "Attack Multiple Players" optional multiplayer rules. (They also work with those rules—in a multiplayer game using those rules, the controller of an attacking creature chooses which player or planeswalker each creature will attack.)

If a creature is attacking a planeswalker, it isn't attacking a player—it's attacking a planeswalker instead. So it can attack a planeswalker even if it couldn't attack that planeswalker's controller. Similarly, if you control a *Ghostly Prison* or *Propaganda*, the controller of a creature doesn't have to pay 2 in order for that creature to attack one of your planeswalkers.

As the [Planeswalker Rules Page](#) puts it:

As the declare attackers step begins, if the defending player controls a planeswalker, the active player declares who or what each attacking creature is attacking: the defending player or one of that player's planeswalkers.

You may notice that the planeswalker rules still refer to the controller of a planeswalker being attacked as the "defending player." The reason for this is simple: There has to be a defending player. There are just too many effects in **Magic** that refer to the "defending player" to let that be a null set. This is why, for instance, landwalk abilities still work when a creature attacks a planeswalker.

So when a creature attacks your planeswalker, you aren't being attacked, but you're still the defending player. Neat, huh?

Note that all of this applies only to creatures attacking planeswalkers—the rules for planeswalkers being damaged outside of combat work quite differently. If you have any questions, check out the [Planeswalker Rules Page](#).

The **Magic Rules Corner** is a weekly feature dedicated to answering your rules questions. For more help with **Magic** rules, check out the [rules page](#) and the [Rules Q&A Forum](#).

November 2, 2007



Q: Is it legal to alter cards for tournaments? I'm talking about updating old cards that got e.g. creature type or wording update in Oracle with their new types / wordings. Technically I don't see what's the harm of that, but as far as I understand, a card is illegal if a rules-impacting part of it is somehow covered. So, how's it with cards that have obsolete information written on them?

—Jarno, Finland

A: From John Carter, DCI-Certified Level 4 Judge:

Technically, this isn't legal, but check with your head judge.

Alteration of cards is covered by Universal Tournament Rule #28:

Cards used in a tournament may not have writing on their faces other than signatures or artistic modifications. Modifications may not obscure the artwork so as to make the card unrecognizable. If modifications to a card are deemed by the Head Judge to constitute outside notes or unsporting conduct, the player using such cards will be subject to the appropriate provisions of the DCI Penalty Guidelines.

The head judge of an event has final authority to determine the legality of modifications. The lower the rule enforcement level (level of competition), the more discretion a judge will generally allow. Noting errata may seem innocent and helpful to both players, but it can still be disallowed. One concern is that the notation may look like outside notes. Another is that by altering the cards you are representing what looks like all current errata. If a player makes a mistake or misses a detail, this looks bad for the player.

In all cases, I encourage you to ask the head judge before the start of a tournament—receiving outside assistance, even with the best intentions, can cause removal from the tournament. Be sure to ask every head judge as they may feel differently.

Don't be too worried though. If you ever have a question about a card you or your opponent controls, you can ask the judge for the current wording—no graffiti necessary.

November 1, 2007



Q: What went into the decision not to make the *Lorwyn* changeling's type line simply read "Creature"?

—Will, Concord, NH, US

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

There was a pretty big fork in the road when concepting the changelings, Will. One fork (we'll call it "left") is to embrace the fact that a changeling is all creatures, all at once, all the time, so every changeling card should show a creature that's a crazy conglomeration of different creatures, the more the better, like a turbo-hallucinogenic chimera! The other fork ("right") is to decide that although changelings are mechanically all creature types at once, in the conceptualization of a fantasy world they are only one thing at a time.

We took the right fork for some good reasons. I'll list five, because even though Rosewater says things work in threes, Magic works in fives.

1. If we had taken the left fork, all changeling cards would look more or less identical, because all of them have all the same creature types. We like it when cards are distinct from each other. (For example, I thought **Ramosian Sergeant** / **Lieutenant** / **Captain** / **Commander** were really pushing it. Who can remember which is which?)
2. *Lorwyn*'s elementals are already weird conglomerations, most of which contain animal elements. We didn't want changelings and elementals stepping on each other's toes.
3. Artists get pretty annoyed when you ask them to paint a creature comprised of a hundred separate things, let alone a hundred different things. **Painting** a simple thing really well is hard enough.
4. Crazy, chaotic turboglomerations of many different creatures—things that make the elementals look like cute little plush toys—wouldn't be at home in the idyllic, storybook-inspired world of *Lorwyn*.
5. The fact that the changelings' mechanics do not reflect every creature type presents a pretty big problem. For example, any given changeling is a Bird, a Bat, a Dragon, and an Angel, but only two of the nineteen changeling cards should be shown flying: **Avian Changeling** and **Wings of Velis Vel**.

So by choosing the right fork, we had committed to the idea that the changelings were one thing at a time—that they changed shape. From there, it just seemed silly not to call them shapeshifters, since shifting shape is how the changeling ability was conceived. Even though it isn't game-functional, having the word "Shapeshifter" on the type line gives an important cue to how the flavor of the changeling ability works.



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