



Ask Wizards - December, 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.



December 31, 2007

Q: How do you guys come up with the different week-long themes at magicthegathering.com (eg. the excellent "What if?" Week)? Are they pre-planned or does someone choose them on a regular basis?
--Ryan, Whyalla, South Australia, Australia

A: From **Scott Johns**, site manager of **magicthegathering.com**

Hi Ryan,

Kelly assigned this one to me because, as the site manager for Magicthegathering.com, I'm the one that schedules things like theme weeks and feature articles. Whenever possible I try to schedule them well in advance. My experience has been that for both of those elements, giving writers plenty of time to think about how they want to tackle a theme (or feature article) tends to give us the best results. So, on average, I tend to schedule theme weeks at least a month or two in advance. For example, currently we have all the theme weeks planned through May 28 with one hole that we're still deciding.

How do we choose them? The first consideration is if we have any special promotions or new set releases. Any time a new set releases most of the site will focus on the cards on that set at least somewhat, since exploring new cards is such a big part of what makes **Magic** fun. So the first theme week or two after a new set is when you're most likely to see a theme based on a mechanic, creature type, or other distinctive feature related to the new set. Also, there are many different megacycles going on at any given time, so those need to get worked in. (Examples would be the color weeks, guild weeks, card type weeks, and many more.)

As a set gets better known we tend to use the theme weeks to explore other areas. So, once we're well into a set's release, that's where you're more likely to see a less set-centered theme like "Combo Week." Lastly, every so often we try to mix in particularly creative themes that will potentially change the site completely. Themes like this help keep the site fresh and unpredictable, and make it much more interesting for the writers as well.

One of the tricky parts of setting the theme schedule is how much it affects the site. For any given theme week, roughly half the site or more will explore that theme, so it's important to get a good balance for the audience. We certainly can't please everybody every time on that front, so much like **Magic** itself does, we do our best to mix things up so that over time everybody is getting some percentage of themes that they love. Theme weeks like "The Past Returns Week" and "What If?" Week tend to be pretty polarizing. Many readers *really* loved them and wrote in repeatedly to say how much they appreciated the idea. But some people *really didn't* like either or both of them as well, so there's a balance. In the case of both of those examples, the positive feedback we got far outweighed the negative, so as an occasional kind of thing they worked out well.

So what goes into choosing a theme week? First off, it's important that at least one column each day be able to cover the theme, because any time we have a day that doesn't have a column on-theme that week tends to feel weaker than others. (Some particularly deep themes can support the whole site running with it, but usually it's somewhere around one column per day.) Fortunately, as I mentioned in a previous Ask Wizards, we lay out the column schedule so that it's usually pretty easy to fit any given theme into at least one column each day. After that, there's the question of what we've already covered, what we still want to cover, and particularly how deep or narrow a potential theme is. Narrow themes are those that only have a very limited number of angles you can approach them from. They are fine if used sparingly, but a run of narrow themes all in a row tends to be unsatisfying. So, I do my best to offset narrow themes like "Suspend Week" (which only has so many angles you can try) with much deeper themes like "What If?" Week.

Now, all that said, it's not just me in the process. I often give other people a chance to come up with a theme. Every few months I've been giving different writers a chance to pick one theme of their choice, which is where we've gotten themes as recent as "Bluff Week" (a theme Noah really wanted to speak out on) and as far back as "Mulligan Week" (a theme BDM proposed). From there I often consult with our editor Kelly Digges, as well as the R&D writers on the site since they're such a central part of most theme weeks. Mark Rosewater in particular has helped out several times with fun theme weeks. (He's a pretty creative guy; you may have heard.)

Finally, sometimes theme weeks come the other way around. Rather than starting with a general concept, sometimes somebody comes to me with a specific article they want to do that I realize might lend itself well to a full theme week. Rosewater knew for some time that he wanted to do [some kind of "timeshifted" article for Planar Chaos](#) that would address how something like Arabian Nights or Alpha might have been handled if we had a **Magicthegathering.com** back in those days. Originally he proposed the entire site run on that theme.

While working coverage for Worlds in Paris, Kelly and I spent some time going over the idea. Rosewater's article sounded great, but the problem was that I felt the theme didn't really feel deep enough for the entire site to run with all week. Over a late-night noodle dinner just outside our hotel after a particularly long day of coverage, a conversation with Kelly helped me figure out that the coolest part of Mark's idea was the "What if?" underneath it, which is exactly what *Planar Chaos* is all about. Expanding it that way and letting each of the columnists handle their own "What if?" turned out to be a great way to keep the underlying idea Mark had while translating it to something the whole site could run with.

(This question and answer originally ran on March 22, 2007.)

December 28, 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.

(This question and answer originally ran on May 16, 2007.)

December 27, 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?](#)

What am I? A star.

Now of course, the Zhalfirins never saw the back of a **Magic** card. I don't think it's realistic to assume that they knew the layout of the **Magic** colors in this way, nor that they could have come up with this riddle for the shape you get when you draw lines across them in GURWB order. Ask a Zhalfirin knight, and he'll nod wisely and tell you that the answer to the riddle is "mana."

Ask me, and I'm inclined to tell you the answer is "a star." Thanks for your question.

(Special thanks to resident sphinx Mark Gottlieb.)

(This question and answer originally ran on April 11, 2007.)

December 26, 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.

(This question and answer originally ran on April 4, 2007.)

December 25, 2007



Q: I found this entry on a popular website for Zuran Orb:
"Standard (Type 2) tournaments (see Rule 804) have banned this card since 1997/01/01 when it left the environment. It was previously restricted from 1995/11/01 to 1997/01/01, and banned from 1997/07/01 through 1997/11/01 when Ice Age temporarily became legal again."

Is this true? Did Ice Age leave Standard for 7 months, then come back for 4? What happened in 1997 with Standard?

--Eric

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

Eric,

This is true. *Ice Age* did leave Standard from January 1997 to June 1997, reappeared in Standard from July 1997 to October 1997, then left Standard for good in November 1997. Here's what happened...

In January 1997, the DCI introduced a new rotation policy for Standard. Up to that time, the Standard format had consisted of "the largest set of currently available cards." There was no real rotation policy – the DCI simply announced when a set would leave Standard. The new rotation policy stated that "base sets" (e.g., *Fourth Edition*) and "stand-alone expansions" (e.g., *Ice Age*, *Mirage*) would leave the Standard format after a new base set or stand-alone expansion was released. "Limited Edition expansions" (e.g., *Alliances*, *Homelands*, *Visions*) would leave the Standard format after about 1 year.

With institution of this new policy, the DCI also announced that *Fallen Empires* and *Ice Age* were to leave the Standard format, the reason being *Fallen Empires* had been out for over 1 year and *Mirage* had already been released – kicking *Ice Age* out of the format. This raised quite a hue and cry from players and organizers. One big reason was that *Alliances* was still legal in Standard, but the snow-covered lands needed for many of the *Alliances* cards were no longer Standard legal due to *Ice Age* leaving the format.

Given these complaints, the DCI decided to revise the policy once again. The new policy introduced in July 1997 is the Standard rotation policy that we have today. Standard would consist of the 2 most recent blocks, plus the most recent base set. In July 1997, the 2 most recent blocks were *Ice Age-Homelands-Alliances* and *Mirage-Visions-Weatherlight*. So *Ice Age* was back in Standard.

With the release of *Tempest* in October 1997, The *Ice Age* block rotated out of Standard in November 1997 to be replaced by the new Rath Block (starting with *Tempest*).

Got all that? Good. There will be a quiz next period.

(This question and answer originally ran on February 2, 2007.)

December 24, 2007



Q: Shivan Meteor...13 damage... ..why?
--Jason Huntsville, TX, USA

A: From **Devin Low**, Planar Chaos Lead Developer:

Good question, Jason. 3 answers:

1) A suspend burn spell was killed in Time Spiral, and the Planar Chaos developers had to fill a hole to match the art you know now as Shivan Meteor. We had people who work in the department design cards, and the PLC development team picked the one that seemed coolest and matched the art best. In this case, the art is an absurdly enormous fireball just demolishing this tiny terrified dude, like blasting him out of his mind.

13 seems pretty appropriate for the sheer size of this devastating blast. Another submission for the hole to match the art that we really liked was "3RRR, Sorcery. Shivan Meteor does 64399753 damage to target Ice Fisherman."

2) 13 is a hilarious amount of damage to deal. 13!!

3) What's the biggest creature in the block you could possibly want to kill with a burn spell? Yup, take it, Krosan Cloudscrapper! Time to die.

(This question and answer originally ran on January 31, 2007.

December 21, 2007



Q: If each color could sit down to play a game of **Magic**, how would each color behave as a player? I'm not asking about the cards they would have in their decks, but more about the idiosyncrasies of the players. As a player, which color gets most frustrated at mana screw? Which color mulligans most often? Which color has a deck where every card is foil?

—Peter, San Francisco, CA, USA

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

Peter,

Here's how I see each color as a Magic player:

White – White is a "rules lawyer." White would revel in the harsh structure of the game and seek whatever advantage he could from understanding what could and could not be done.

Blue – Blue is the kind of player that wants to make sure that he is making each decision with full information. This means he would play very slowly as he is constantly double checking every decision.

Black – Black wants to win. He's willing to take advantage of any aspect of the game to do so. And yes, this includes cheating.

Red – Red doesn't play the cards as much as he plays the player. Red exacts as much advantage as he can from reading the other player and trying to evoke the responses he wants. While red won't break the rules of the game, he will push boundaries when it comes to getting a reaction out of the other player(s).

Green – Green is the quietest of the bunch. Green tends to let everything sink in. Green is the player that tries to constantly read the environment to figure out what's happening in the game. Green will pounce but only when the time is right.

Who gets the most frustrated at mana screw? Red, because red gets the most frustrated in general.

Who mulligans most? Probably blue as blue is the only player who actually takes the time every game to really figure out whether or not mulliganing is the right play.

Which color has a deck where every card is foil? Probably black as black is the biggest showoff of the bunch.

This has been one of the more fun Ask Wizards to answer. If anyone has any more "what color would do what?" type questions, feel free to send them in.

December 20, 2007



Q: What does it take for a boggart to become an Auntie, and what privileges does that actually give you?

—Bjørn, Copenhagen, Denmark

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

Bjørn, your question implies that that there's some kind of rhyme or reason to boggart "society"! Aunties are so called after the famous Auntie Grub, a famous, wise, and clever boggart from their folklore. But each individual warren has its own, mostly random means of choosing an auntie. Auntie Flint of the **Stinkdrinker** Warren, for example, was simply the toughest and meanest. Auntie Jowl became leader of the **Squeaking Pie** Warren through his "delicious" cooking. As for **Wort**, it's unclear how she became Auntie of the **Mudbutton** Warren. It might be that at some point the warren consisted mostly of her own offspring.

Here's a short bit from the *Lorwyn* style guide that might shed some light:

Boggart social structure is fairly simple. Members of a warren are usually out exploring or gathering food, or else communicating their discoveries to the rest. A warren has a nominal leader, usually the oldest. This leader is always called 'Auntie,' whether male or female (though usually female), and she interprets the meanings of new and confusing experiences brought by the others. The leader usually knows many tales and is expected to recite them at feasts. The role is otherwise largely ceremonial. There is rarely need to resolve conflicts—boggarts fight among themselves all the time, and whoever comes out on top is automatically right. Only in times of war must a leader direct the swarm, and such leadership is rarely more than "kill them all and take their stuff."

December 19, 2007



Q: Why is it, that the Promo for Worlds (this year **Mirari's Wake**, last year **Eternal Dragon**) has written Pro Tour

on it? I understand that Worlds are seen as the fifth Pro Tour every year, but why not give them their own card saying "Worlds" on it? Is there a special policy behind this?

–Nick, Cardiff, UK

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

Nick,

The "Pro Tour" promo card is meant to be a little gift to local players who show up to check out Pro Tours when they come to their city; to that end, one card per year is sufficient seeing as most non-qualified players won't ever get to more than one of these events per year.

We make a whole heck of a lot of promo cards every year, and to make sure each one is desirable we need to limit how many different ones we make. That's why Worlds doesn't get a different card than the other Pro Tours.

I understand that people like yourself (assuming this is, in fact, 2006 Worlds Top 8 competitor Nick Lovett from Wales) attend many Pro Tour events per year and would like different promo cards each time, but, as I hope I explained, you aren't exactly the "target audience." Hopefully you get enough cool benefits as a competitor as it is!

December 18, 2007



Q: What's the difference between soldiers and warriors? How do you choose to make a creature one and not the other? And for that matter, how does a knight differ from a warrior and a soldier? Aren't knights inherently soldiers?

–Adam, Vancouver, BC, Canada

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

The main difference between Soldiers and Warriors lies in their associated mana colors, Adam. "Soldier" is associated with white and blue because it has a connotation of military structure and discipline—a fighter enlisted in an organization. "Warrior" is associated with red and green because it implies less regiment and more self-determination than "soldier" does. A warrior is one who makes war, plain and simple, whereas soldiers often take orders from superiors within their organization. Black can go either way depending on its identity within a given setting. Black is self-serving, to be sure, but can organize when doing so suits its purposes.

As for the Knight type, in **Magic** a Knight is a fighter (usually a mounted fighter) who is sworn to a cause of some kind, not necessarily an enlisted fighter in a larger organization.

December 17, 2007 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: I have been playing **Magic** for just under a year but I am always having trouble what is the difference between activated abilities, normal abilities, and mana abilities.

–Matthew, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia

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

There are many different types of abilities and effects in **Magic**, and keeping them all straight can be difficult. Fortunately, there are some solid rules to help you determine what kind of ability you're looking at. Ordinarily you don't need to know exactly what an ability is called, but with cards such as **Damping Matrix** and **Trickbind** running around, it can occasionally be very relevant.

There are three broad categories of abilities: activated, triggered, and static. Activated and triggered abilities can also be mana abilities—we'll explain how and why.

Activated Abilities

- Activated abilities are written as "[cost]:[effect]."
- Everything before the colon is a cost, which you must pay in order to play the ability.
- Everything after the colon is the effect, which is what happens when the ability resolves.
- Activated abilities are played like spells. They go on the stack, can be responded to, and then resolve. (Mana abilities are an exception to this; see below.)
- Some keywords—such as forecast and ninjutsu—are activated abilities. They have colons in their reminder text.
- Some activated abilities are mana abilities.
- For examples of activated abilities that aren't mana abilities, take a look at **Prodigal Pyromancer**, **Black Poplar Shaman**, or the forecast ability of **Pride of the Clouds**.
- For examples of activated abilities that *are* mana abilities, look at **Auntie's Hovel**, **Temple Garden**, or **Llanowar Elves**.

Triggered Abilities

- Triggered abilities contain the words "when," "whenever," or "at."
- Triggered abilities include a trigger condition and an effect. When the trigger condition is met, the triggered ability goes on the stack, can be responded to, and then resolves. (Again, mana abilities are an exception.)
- You don't "play" a triggered ability.
- Some triggered abilities are mana abilities.
- Some keywords—such as echo and flanking—are triggered abilities. They usually have "when," "whenever," or "at" in their reminder text.

- For examples of triggered abilities that aren't mana abilities, look at [Shriekmaw](#), [Angel's Feather](#), or both abilities of [Colfenor's Urn](#).
- For examples of triggered abilities that *are* mana abilities, look at [Fertile Ground](#) or [Heartbeat of Spring](#).

Potential confusion: Triggered abilities that ask for a payment are often confused with activated abilities. [Bog-Strider Ash](#) is a good example. Although it requires a mana payment, it is a triggered ability, not an activated ability.

Mana Abilities

- A mana ability is either:
 - an activated ability without a target that could put mana into a player's mana pool when it resolves, or
 - a triggered ability without a target that triggers from a mana ability and could produce additional mana.
- If an ability has a target, it's not a mana ability even if it produces mana. See, for instance, [Soulbright Flamekin](#).
- Mana abilities don't use the stack and can't be responded to. As a result, they can't be countered.

Static Abilities

- A static ability does something all the time rather than being activated or triggered. The ability isn't played—it just "exists."
- Many keywords—such as protection and landwalk—are static abilities.
- Static abilities that modify the colors, subtypes, power, or toughness of the card they're on are called characteristic-defining abilities. They function in all zones. Examples include the abilities of [Woodland Changeling](#), [Tarmogoyf](#), and [Transguild Courier](#).
- Static abilities that aren't characteristic-defining abilities only function while the object they're on is in play, unless they say otherwise (like [Wonder's](#) ability) or couldn't function otherwise (like [Haakon, Stromgald Scourge's](#) first ability).

Potential confusion: Some keywords that have costs associated with them look like activated abilities but are actually static abilities. Morph and evoke are good examples of this—they're both static abilities that modify how you can play the card in question. Evoking a [Mulldrifter](#) or turning a [Willbender](#) face-up are not activated abilities.

Potential confusion: Abilities that generate replacement effects look a lot like triggered abilities, but they're static abilities as well. Abilities that generate replacement effects generally include the words "instead" or "as." [Hostility](#) provides a nice study of contrast between the two. Its second ability is a replacement ability; if one thing would happen, a different thing happens instead. This can't be responded to, and it can't happen multiple times. Its third ability, however, is a triggered ability that triggers any time [Hostility](#) is put into a graveyard. It can be responded to—say, with [Extirpate](#) or [Stifle](#). [Clone's](#) ability is also a replacement ability that modifies how [Clone](#) comes into play.

*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](#).*

December 14, 2007



Q: Okay, so... Cube drafting is where you get an arbitrary number of "the best cards" in every color, including multi/artifacts. And then you make a deck, there are some question marks, and then everyone profits.

...Wait.

How the bleep does "cube drafting" work again? From the top, please.
—Stephen, Damascus, MD, USA

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

Our apologies, Stephen. Cube drafting has become so ubiquitous here at Wizards that when Alexis answered the question about our Cube, we made the classic mistake of the experienced and did not explain or define our starting terms.

Cube Draft (also called Box Draft) was one of this year's formats at the [Magic Invitational](#), and since then there's been increasing interest in the format. It didn't start there, however. According to Cube connoisseur Tom LaPille, the Cube originated in Toronto, Canada many years ago and spread from there.

The Cube is, simply put, a collection of fun, powerful, exciting, and absurd **Magic** cards assembled for the purposes of Limited. What exactly meets these criteria is very much open to your collection and personal preference. Some people feel that resolving powerhouses such as [Black Lotus](#), [Mana Drain](#), and [Winter Orb](#) is a key component of the thrill and enjoyment of the Cube; others would rather not play games in which their opponent uses [Upheaval](#), [Sol Ring](#), and [Mana Vault](#) to end turn four with an [Adarkar Valkyrie](#) facing an empty board (Alan Comer actually did this).

In addition to power level, you'll have to make decisions regarding content. How many Constructed-level cards (say, [Masticore](#), [Umezawa's Jitte](#), and [Garruk Wildspeaker](#)), and how many more Limited-oriented power cards (such as [Vedalken Dismissal](#) or [Oblivion Ring](#))? How much mana-fixing, and how many multicolored cards? How many combo cards (think [High Tide](#) or [Brain Freeze](#)) and how many straightforward ones (such as [Lightning Bolt](#))? Will you use only cards in Vintage? Legacy? Extended? *Un-* cards or no? There are a lot of decisions to make—and the fun part is, you can always play with it one way for a while, then go back and change it up.

Finished Cubes can come in a wide variety of contents and sizes. Most are at least 360 cards to make sure that eight-person Booster Draft and Rotisserie Draft are practical. The one used at the Invitational was 720 cards for two simultaneous eight-person drafts. Some Cubes are even bigger; the bigger your Cube is, the more the experience will vary from draft to draft. Of course, with so many cards—and most Cubes including only one copy of any given card—the experience varies quite a bit even with a relatively small Cube.

As far as how to actually draft, the usual way is to pack the Cube cards into draft sets of 15, making some allowance for color balance (say, two cards of each color, two multicolored cards, and three artifacts / lands). However, some people vary the pack size depending on the number of players. Some like to [Rotisserie Draft](#) the Cube, while others assemble Cubes for the express purpose of [Type Four](#). Around our office, where groups of six or eight are often difficult to come by, we have (as Alexis mentioned) increasingly turned to [Winston Draft](#), a good format for two players or two Two-Headed Giant teams. The exact number of cards to use for this varies depending on the power level of your Cube; we've been using the usual six packs for two-player Winston but only ten (rather than twelve) for Two-Headed Giant.

Around the office, Mark Gottlieb's new rogue Cube is supposedly optimized for Winston (few combo cards, more Limited-level cards), whereas the Draft Club Cube is better for eight-person draft. Tom LaPille and Evan Erwin organized five eight-person Cube draft pods Saturday night at Worlds, and the differences between the Cubes involved greatly influenced the drafts and games that played out.

In the end, the best answer I can give you is what many before me have said: Cube Draft is, hands-down, the single most enjoyable way to play **Magic**. It's difficult to put a good Cube together, and I wouldn't want to do it all the time any more than I'd want to eat chocolate cake all the time. But every once in a while, it's fantastic fun to have the power and fun of **Magic's** past and present distilled, bottled, and delivered to my desk.

Oh, and one other piece of advice should you decide to assemble your own Cube: you're going to need a *lot* of matching sleeves....

December 13, 2007



Q: Some artists were new to **Magic** art with *Lorwyn* as far as I know:

Larry McDougal
Omar Rayyan

Are these incorrectly up there? Are there any that I'm missing?
—KingAlanI, [magicthegathering.com](#) forums

A: From Jeremy Jarvis, **Magic** art director:

One is incorrect and you're actually missing several. Here are *Lorwyn's* high-octane newbies:

[Larry MacDougall](#)
[John Howe](#) (the *Lord of the Rings* one, not the one who's been doing **Magic** art for years)
[Brandon Dorman](#)
[Paul Chadwick](#)
[Dominick Domingo](#)
[Chuck Lukacs](#)
[Thomas Denmark](#)
[Howard Lyon](#)
[Jesper Ejsing](#)
[Philip Tan](#) (who worked with Terese Nielsen)

Omar Rayyan and Eric Fortune were both previewed in *Future Sight* specifically because I knew I wanted them in reappear *Lorwyn* (artists from the FUTURE!...).

JJ

December 12, 2007



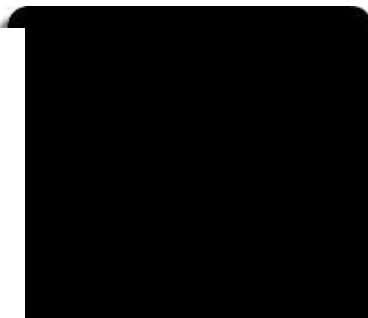
Q: I noticed while going through Gatherer that **Void Maw** had, at some point, received a change to its wording to include 'corpse counters'. While seemingly invisible, it seems unnecessary, and lets people feed a **Void Maw's** removed cards to another, something that couldn't have been done before. What warranted this unusual errata?

—Brandon, Milwaukie, OR, USA

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

I was in the templating meeting where this was decided, and I'll agree that the errata is a little weird. Here's **Void Maw** as printed, alongside its current Oracle text:

4BB
Creature - Horror
4/5
Trample
If another creature would be put into a graveyard from play, remove it from the game with a corpse counter instead.
Put a card removed from the game with a corpse counter on it into its owner's graveyard: **Void Maw** gets +2/+2 until end of turn.



This does represent a functional change—**Void Maw** can now "eat" cards removed from the game by a different **Void Maw**, even one you don't control. We usually try to avoid functional changes in Oracle text—we're even removing functional changes created for power-level reasons—so why the change?

The problem with **Void Maw's** printed functionality is that it doesn't actually function. Unlike triggered abilities, activated abilities, and damage, replacement effects don't have sources. **Void Maw's** ability generates a replacement effect that replaces creatures going to the graveyard with removing them from the game. However, the creatures weren't removed from the game with **Void Maw**, they were removed from the game instead of being put in the graveyard by whatever effect (such as that of **Terror**) or rule (such as the "legend rule") caused them to leave play. Rules gurus stepped in and pointed out that **Void Maw's** second ability didn't really refer to anything, and so a fix was sought.



Once we determined that there was no rules tweak available that would keep **Void Maw's** functionality exactly the same, we settled on the template involving corpse counters as an acceptable functional change that worked within the rules.

That raised the potential problem of **Void Maw's** interaction with **Planar Void** or **Leyline of the Void**—if **Void Maw** tried to put a creature card into its owner's graveyard but the card was removed from the game instead, would it just stay removed from the game with a corpse counter on it, letting **Void Maw's** controller do this as many times as he or she wanted?

Obviously that seemed bad, so I suggested what would become the rather odd-looking rule 217.1f:

If an object in the removed-from-the-game zone is removed from the game, it doesn't change zones, but it is treated as a new object that has just been removed from the game.

December 11, 2007



Q: What does **Ice Cauldron** do?

—Fabian Rockwell, San Diego, CA, USA

A: From **Monty Ashley**, Web Site Manager:

Excellent question! I've always kind of wondered that myself. Let's take a look at it:



Hmm. Okay, that text is kind of small, isn't it? It says this:

X, ♠: Put a charge counter on Ice Cauldron, and put a spell card face up on Ice Cauldron. Note the type and amount of mana used to pay this activation cost. Use this ability only if there are no charge counters on Ice Cauldron. You may play that spell card as though it were in your hand.
♠: Remove the charge counter from Ice Cauldron to add mana of the type and amount last used to put a charge counter on Ice Cauldron to your mana pool. This mana is usable only to cast the spell on top of Ice Cauldron.

The Oracle text might be a little clearer. Let's check:

X, ♠: Put a charge counter on Ice Cauldron and remove a nonland card in your hand from the game. As long as that card remains removed from the game, you may play it. Note the type and amount of mana used to pay this activation cost. Play this ability only if there are no charge counters on Ice Cauldron.

☞, Remove a charge counter from Ice Cauldron: Add to your mana pool mana of the type and amount last used to put a charge counter on Ice Cauldron. Spend this mana only to play the last card removed from the game with Ice Cauldron.

The first ability lets you remove a nonland card from the game while paying an amount of mana. The second ability gives you that mana back and lets you play the card you removed.

So you can think of it as paying for a spell now to go off later. In fact, you don't even need to pay up front for that to happen; you could just pay 0 mana for the X and then pay the whole mana cost "out of pocket" when the time comes, if you see my meaning. Unfortunately, you can't make a sorcery happen in your opponent's upkeep or anything silly like that. Phooey.

Or you could use it to pay for an expensive spell, since you could put 50% of the mana down this turn, then untap and pay the other 50%. And note that "As long as that card remains removed from the game, you may play it." is in the first ability. That means that if you're not planning on using the Cauldron's mana, you can go ahead and use that removed-from-game card (which is immune to being discarded, I guess, so there's some advantage there) whenever you want, even if the Cauldron gets destroyed.

In theory, you could remove a card in your hand from the game every other turn, by tapping the Cauldron with X=0 for the first ability, then tapping the Cauldron to remove the zero mana (and charge counter) and choosing not to play the spell. Then, after a few turns, you'd have cards that are effectively in your hand without *actually* being there. There's got to be some advantage to be had by doing that. Maybe using [Lion's Eye Diamond](#)? Or playing for some sort of [Barren Glory](#)/[Apocalypse](#) win?

Okay, I admit it's a stretch. Anyway, that's what it does. Enjoy!

December 10, 2007 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: Okay, I'm confused. How exactly does [Guile](#)'s second ability work? Now, I thought that meant, when I counter a spell, I got that spell in reserve, to play when I chose to. However, according to Oracle, "You have the option to play it immediately upon its removal. If you choose not to, it remains removed from the game and you don't get another chance to play it." Does this mean that this ability really only works with instants and spells with flash, or does [Guile](#) let me play an opponent's sorcery / enchantment / artifact / creature immediately?

—Kim, Aurora, CO, USA

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

This has been a point of much confusion regarding both [Guile](#) and the [hideaway lands](#).

There are, as far as we can tell, two major causes for confusion: first, [Guile](#) and the hideaway lands tell you to play a card at a time when ordinarily nothing can be played (during the resolution of an ability); and second, there is a very similar template used on cards such as [Intet, the Dreamer](#) that does something quite different.

We usually give a short version of the answer, but in this case things are muddy enough that we'll just have to wade in. We'll get to the answer eventually.

Let's start by taking a look at the two 6/6s side by side:



Both cards tell you that you may play a card in the removed-from-game zone without paying its mana cost, but there's a crucial difference: [Guile](#) just tells you that you may play that card, whereas [Intet](#) tells you that you may play that card *as long as* [Intet](#) remains in play.

When an effect tells you that you may play a card from somewhere unusual, **the timing is determined by whether or not it lists a duration.**

(Note that whether or not you have to pay for the spell is a separate issue decided entirely by whether the effect in question says "without paying its mana cost"—as, for instance, [Guile](#) and [Intet](#) do, but [Muse Vessel](#)

and **Magus of the Future** don't.)

If an effect tells you that you may play a card and lists a duration—look for "as long as" or "until"—then playing the card obeys all of the normal timing restrictions. The only thing that's different from normal, unless the effect says otherwise, is that you can play the card from this unusual place.

If an effect tells you that you may play a card and does not give a duration, then you choose immediately whether to play the card or not. If you choose to play it, you do so immediately, *during the resolution* of the spell or ability that tells you to do so. It doesn't matter when the spell could ordinarily be played.

(Note, however, that an effect like this won't let you play **Serra Avenger** during your first, second, or third turn—**Guile** can trump the usual rules for playing spells, but **Serra Avenger's** "can't" beats anything that tells you otherwise.)

So, in summary, **Guile does not work like Intet, the Dreamer**. **Guile** lets you play the spell at exactly one time: when it tells you to, and that means that you can play anything you steal—instant, sorcery, planeswalker, whatever—at any point in the turn. The same goes for the hideaway lands—although it's important to note in their case that they won't let you play more than one land a turn, nor will they let you play a land on an opponent's turn (there's a rule that prevents this).

If you want more examples, other cards that list a duration include **Aerial Caravan**, **Mind's Desire**, **Nivix**, **Aerie of the Firemind**, and **Ornate Kanzashi** (be sure to look at their Oracle texts—the Caravan and **Mind's Desire** use the old "as though it were in your hand" wording in their printed text, which confuses the issue).

Other cards that don't list a duration include **Spellshift** and **Sunforger**.

The similarity of the two templates is confusing, we admit, but now you know what to look for.

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](#).

December 7, 2007



Q: I'm collecting the *Weatherlight* crew and the *Predator* flagship crew. I asked on several forums but they can't agree completely which characters were on it and who weren't. I would appreciate it if you could answer my questions."

—Ronald Huveneers

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

Ronald, what is this "Weatherlight" you speak of? Wait, I think I remember . . . yes, it's all coming back now. The *Weatherlight* was a flying ship! Its crew sought the artifacts of the Legacy to combat the evils of Phyrexial Boy, that's ancient history, huh?

Which cards you'd need to complete a collection of the crew really depends on how far you want to go. For example, **Master of Arms** represents Gerrard, but it's not his Legend card. And there are all the Vanguard cards to think of. Anyhow, here's what I'd collect if I were you:

Weatherlight crew:	Predator crew:
Skyship Weatherlight	Predator, Flagship
Legacy Weapon	Greven il-Vec
Gerrard Capashen	Vhati il-Dal
Captain Sisay	
Orim, Samite Healer	
Hanna, Ship's Navigator	
Tahngarth, Talruum Hero	
Crovax the Cursed	
(Ascendant Evinca?)	
Starke of Rath	
Squee, Goblin Nabob	
Ertai, Wizard Adept	
(Ertai the Corrupted?)	
Mirri, Cat Warrior	
Karn, Silver Golem	
Multani, Maro-Sorcerer	
Rofellos, Llanowar Emissary	

And for you storyline gurus out there:
Volrath the Fallen
(disguised as Starke's daughter Takara)

*(This question and answer originally ran on January 13, 2004. Since then, Time Spiral block added former Weatherlight captain **Jhoira of the Ghitu** to the list, as well as alternate-timeline crew members **Crovax**,*

December 6, 2007



Q: Was there any concern about how "[Elves vs. Goblins](#)" pits red against green when those are "friendly" colors?

—Conrad, Raleigh, NC

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

Hi Conrad,

The concept of "allied colors" in **Magic** is often expressed by cycles where two colors that are adjacent in the color wheel (allied colors) work together more effectively or more frequently than colors that aren't adjacent (enemy colors). Sometimes enemy colors get cycles of their own, but often the enemy-color relationship is expressed by cards like Deathmark that are effective against their enemy colors. For a visual reference to the order of the color wheel, just flip over any **Magic** card.

However, just because allied colors sometimes work effectively together doesn't mean they don't fight each other. Look around any group of **Magic** players and you'll see black decks fighting blue decks, blue-white decks fighting green-white decks, and even mono-white fighting mono-white. So it doesn't seem weird to us to have the green Elves fighting the red Goblins. In other words, red and green are "friendly" colors... but not too friendly.

December 5, 2007



Q: My friends and I absolutely love cube drafting. We've kept up with Evan Erwin's discussions and new web page that discusses this incredibly fun format.

I was wondering if Wizards is interested in maintaining a cube draft list. The card list used at the Invitational was awesome, and I think having a list that updates with each set would be great, even if it were always one set behind (giving time for you guys to decide which cards to add/drop).

—Chad, Salt Lake City, UT, USA

A: From Alexis Janson:

Chad,

Although R&D dismantled the "official" cube, we [Draft Club](#) regulars decided to pool our personal collections towards making our own Cube. One might say that I am the official maintainer of the Draft Club Cube. With the input of the players, I'm constantly rotating cards in the Cube in an attempt to introduce new and interesting interactions and maximize the variety of play. Although we started with the original [Invitational Cube list](#), we have made quite a few changes since. Some thoughts:

- We like the more open-ended combo cards such as reanimation spells, but have slowly been removing really narrow combo cards like Dragonstorm. We're still on the fence regarding cards like Replenish—there's a lot of cards that work with it, but it's still hard to reach a viable critical mass during a draft.
- Really narrow spells in general are slowly disappearing, although we like having a few pinpoint answer cards like Tormod's Crypt and Pithing Needle.
- We've introduced enough mana-fixing to make more decks viable. Being able to fit colors together more freely ends up enabling more interesting interactions.
- We want to keep various flavors of beatdown viable. Kelly Digges has theorized that we should minimize the number of creatures costing **♦♦** in favor of those that cost **♠♦**, so that beatdown can play multiple colors and therefore becomes easier (and more interesting) to build; however, we haven't tried that yet.
- There have been enough complaints about Stasis and Winter Orb that it has started a discussion about whether "excessively unfun" cards belong in the Cube. So far, they've stayed, on the theory that any card so reviled is clearly an extremely game warping card, and therefore fits all our other definitions of what belongs in the Cube.
- We are currently playing without the original **Lotus** and **Moxen**. Contrary to popular belief, we don't have stacks of them lying around! After a brief and unpopular test of proxies, we decided to leave them out for the time being. You may notice a few other notable cards missing due to holes in our collective collections—we didn't randomly decide to just include three of the five *Onslaught* fetchlands, for example.
- We've recently tossed in a handful of silver-bordered cards. So far, the consensus seems to be nonexistent... except for Yet Another Æther Vortex, which always pops up when Mark Gottlieb drafts, much to his chagrin.

Currently, my favorite format is 2HG Cube Winston, followed closely by 1v1 Cube Winston. In my mind, Cube Winston is in contention for the best **Magic** format ever invented- I highly recommend you give it a try if you get the chance.

The list is [here](#).

December 4, 2007



Q: In *Lorwyn* development, how much debate went into picking secondary colors for each race? I am thinking specifically of Merfolk, who seem better suited to Blue/Black than Blue/White. Merfolk have always been a bit devious. Did they get booted to white just so faeries could be devious? Or was it never even discussed?

—Corey, Provo, UT, USA

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

We did talk a fair amount about into which colors the *Lorwyn* tribes should "bleed" and why. In the case of most of the races, including merfolk and faeries, it was mostly about those creatures' roles and associations in real-world folklore. In most mythologies, merfolk are relatively benevolent, and one of *Lorwyn's* themes is an embracing of traditional fantasy elements. Likewise, old faerie stories often cast faeries as capricious at best and malevolent and manipulative at worst.

December 3, 2007 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: I recently built a Pandemonium deck around the evoke Elementals. Let's say I evoke a **Briarhorn**. Can I have it give itself +3/+3 before **Pandemonium** checks its power, having it deal 6 instead of 3? Alternatively, could I play another creature and respond to its **Pandemonium** trigger with an evoked **Briarhorn**, giving the other creature +3/+3 before Pandemonium checks its power?

—Andrew, Coral Springs, FL, USA

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

Yes, and yes. For why, let's talk about triggered abilities (remember, those are the ones that begin with "when," "whenever," or "at"). The Reader's Digest version is that when more than one of them triggers at once, you get to pick what order to put them on the stack.

Triggered abilities aren't played—instead, they *trigger* when their *trigger event* occurs. This can happen any time, including during the resolution of a spell or ability, but the triggered ability isn't put on the stack until a player would receive priority (in other words, triggered abilities go on the stack before anyone can decide to do anything).

The relevant rule for handling multiple triggered abilities is 410.3, which reads in part:

If multiple abilities have triggered since the last time a player received priority, each player, in APNAP order, puts triggered abilities he or she controls on the stack in any order he or she chooses. (See rule 103.4.)

(It's not vital to your question, but "APNAP" stands for "Active Player, Non-Active Player"—or, in multiplayer, "Active Player, Next Active Player." In other words, the player whose turn it is puts all of his or her triggered abilities on the stack, then the next player in the normal turn order, until all players have put their triggered abilities on the stack. Bear in mind that this means that the active player's triggered abilities will resolve last.)

The part of 410.3 that helps answer your question is "in any order he or she chooses." Since you control **Briarhorn**, **Pandemonium**, and the other creature in your examples, you control all of the triggered abilities involved. Thus, you get to put them on the stack in any order.


It's also important to know that **Pandemonium's** triggered ability checks the creature's power when the ability resolves, not when it triggers. (The only case in which this would not be true is an ability that divides damage—but that's a Rules Corner for another Monday).



In your first example, there are three triggered abilities, all of which trigger on **Briarhorn** coming into play: one on **Pandemonium** and two on **Briarhorn**. Remember, all players have to pass priority before anything can resolve, which means everyone gets a chance to respond to each of these triggers. Let's look more closely at the sequence of events:

1. You play **Briarhorn** for its evoke cost. It resolves and comes into play. This triggers three triggered abilities.
2. You choose in what order to put these triggered abilities on the stack. Remember, the first one on the stack will be the last one to resolve. To do what you want, put them on the stack like this:
 1. **Briarhorn's** evoke triggered ability (From the Comp. Rules: "When this permanent comes into play, if its evoke cost was paid, its controller sacrifices it.") *
 2. **Pandemonium's** triggered ability, choosing any legal target ("Whenever a creature comes into play, that creature's controller may have it deal damage equal to its power to target creature or player of his or her choice.")

3. **Briarhorn's** other comes-into-play triggered ability, choosing itself as the target ("When **Briarhorn** comes into play, target creature gets +3/+3 until end of turn.")
3. **Briarhorn's** non-voke comes-into-play ability resolves. Since you chose **Briarhorn** as the target, **Briarhorn** gets +3/+3. It's now 6/6.
4. **Pandemonium's** triggered ability resolves and deals damage equal to **Briarhorn's** power—which is now 6—to the target you chose. Once again, if for any reason **Briarhorn** is no longer in play, **Pandemonium** will use whatever its power was when it left play (in your example this is 6, but don't forget to take into account any other changes, such as from **Nameless Inversion** or **Ego Erasure**).
5. **Briarhorn's** evoke triggered ability resolves. Because you paid the evoke cost, you sacrifice **Briarhorn**.

Presto! 6 damage for . Your second example has more steps, but is the same in essence. Let's walk through it briefly.

1. You play a creature. For this example, let's say it's **Axegrinder Giant**—a simple creature without any triggered abilities of its own to confuse the issue. The creature spell resolves, and the creature comes into play. This trigger's **Pandemonium's** ability.
2. You put **Pandemonium's** triggered ability on the stack, choosing any legal target.
3. With that ability on the stack, you play **Briarhorn** for its evoke cost. (You can do this because it has flash.) This triggers three triggered abilities—the same three as the first example—all of which will go on the stack above the **Pandemonium** trigger for **Axegrinder Giant**. In this case it doesn't matter what order you put them on the stack, because you're not planning on changing **Briarhorn's** power before **Pandemonium's** triggered ability resolves.
4. These triggered abilities all resolve one by one. Regardless of the order you chose, the end result is that **Briarhorn** deals 3 damage to whatever target you chose for **Pandemonium's** ability, **Briarhorn** is sacrificed, and **Axegrinder Giant** gets +3/+3. **Axegrinder Giant** is 9/7.
5. The instance of **Pandemonium's** triggered ability that triggered when **Axegrinder Giant** came into play resolves. **Axegrinder Giant** deals 9 damage to whatever target you chose.

These same principles can help with all sorts of interactions, from **Wild Pair / Primal Forcemage** (you can choose to search with **Wild Pair** before or after the creature gets +3/+3) to **Oblivion Ring / Vedalken Mastermind** (you can return **Oblivion Ring** to owner's hand with its comes-into-play trigger still on the stack, triggering its leaves-play ability with nothing to return and removing your target from the game indefinitely).

Whenever you have a question about triggers, you may look at rules 404, "Triggered Abilities," and 410, "Handling Triggered Abilities," in the Comp. Rules. If you do, hopefully they'll answer your question.

(Just a little triggered ability humor there, folks. See you next week.)

* You can actually put **Briarhorn's** sacrifice ability and **Pandemonium's** triggered ability on the stack in either order. If **Briarhorn** is not in play when **Pandemonium's** triggered ability resolves, **Pandemonium** will use "last known information" about **Briarhorn**, including what its power was when it left play. The important thing here is that **Briarhorn's** +3/+3 trigger resolves before either of the other two.

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