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Ask Wizards - April, 2008

*Ask Wizards
Tuesday, April 1, 2008*

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.

April 30, 2008

Q: It seems like *Shadowmoor* has a lot of five-card cycles. (Liegcs, Duos, Scarecrows, Witches, Wisps, Initiates, Mentors, Demigods, common Auras) Is this the most five-card cycle full set you've done?
-Eli, USA

A: From **Devin Low**, **Magic** head developer:

Hi Eli,

By my quick count, *Shadowmoor* has a whopping 23 cycles, ranging from very tight cycles that are easy to spot to very loose cycles that are hard to see. I listed a lot of *Shadowmoor*'s cycles in [my recent article](#) on *Shadowmoor*'s mechanical web, but not all of them. Because some are so hard to spot, it's pretty fun to go through the set and try to find all 23. As for the set with the most five-card cycles of all time, that honor goes to *Invasion*, with an amazing 25 cycles. I pulled this number from [a really cool article](#) Ben Bleiweiss wrote for [magicthegathering.com](#) in 2002 cataloguing all the five-card cycles from Alpha through *Onslaught*. It's an epic research project and a fun trip down memory lane. Good job, Ben.

Part of the reason that *Invasion* wins the cycle crown is that *Invasion* had a hefty helping of "color matters," like *Shadowmoor* does. Gold, "color matters," and hybrid themes are all very focused on how the five colors spin around each other, and so they tend to have significantly more five-card cycles than a big set like *Odyssey* that doesn't have those themes. Since *Invasion* is gold and color matters, it has a lot of cycles. Since *Shadowmoor* is hybrid and color matters, it has a lot of cycles too.

April 29, 2008

Q: Why do cards that produce mana in some sets use text instead of colored mana symbols?
-Adam
Pelham, New Hampshire

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

Just like anything else that relies on technology, the way **Magic** cards are laid out and printed has changed a lot over the past twelve years. For example, Wizards has been through three different design software packages since I joined the company in May 2000. It's part of my job to make sure that these changes can't be detected by the public, but sometimes Editing and Typesetting need to work under some additional constraints.

For the three expert-level sets released in 1999 (*Urza's Legacy*, *Urza's Destiny*, and *Mercadian Masques*), the Production folks decided that colored mana symbols in the text box had to be stored and printed as part of the art rather than as part of the text. Oh, and all eight languages had to use the same art layer. A card like **Hickory Woodlot** obviously isn't going to have ♣♣ in the same place in German that it does in English. The cards had to be retemplated so that mana symbols in the text box appeared only at the beginning of paragraphs. Hence, those sets say "♣: Add one red mana to your mana pool" rather than "♣: Add ♣ to your mana pool."

After the *Mercadian Masques* set was finished, Production decided that they could handle nonanchored mana symbols again. No one I've talked to remembers what changed. The lore that's been passed on to me is, "If someone suggests anchoring mana symbols, smack 'em -- hard."

After *Masques*, **Magic** cards went back to using mana symbols wherever possible. The older cards received errata in Oracle so that they couldn't be affected by color-changing effects like **Mind Bend**.

P.S. I tackled the "add ♣" vs. "add one colorless mana" question in an Ask Wizards on [April 21, 2003](#).

(This question and answer originally ran on January 21, 2005.)

April 23, 2008 – Magic Rules Corner

Q: How would wither combine with lifelink, if a creature had both of them? Does wither work as a replacement effect (preventing the damage and therefore cancelling life gain), or would it put the counters and preserve the

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life gain from lifelink?
—Daniel, Madrid, Spain

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

A creature that has both wither and lifelink (say, a **Knight of Meadowgrain** equipped with **Blight Sickle**) works just like any other creature with lifelink; when it deals damage to a creature (and that many -1/-1 counters are put on the creature as a result), its controller will gain that much life. That's because wither damage is real damage in all respects. Let's take a look at the official rules for damage dealt to a creature from the pending Comprehensive Rules:

212.3g Damage dealt to a creature stays on that creature. If the total accumulated damage on that creature is equal to or greater than its toughness, that creature has been dealt lethal damage and is destroyed as a state-based effect (see rule 420.5c). All damage on a creature is removed when it regenerates (see rule 501.5, "Regenerate") and during the cleanup step (see rule 314.2).

OK. Now let's look at the rules for wither:

502.80. Wither

502.80a Damage dealt to a creature by a source with wither doesn't stay on that creature (see rule 212.3g). Rather, it causes that many -1/-1 counters to be put on that creature.

502.80b Multiple instances of wither on the same object are redundant.

Wither isn't a replacement ability—it doesn't replace dealing damage with something else—precisely because that would interact in potentially confusing ways with abilities such as lifelink and deathtouch. To avoid that, wither changes a variable that's never been altered before: what damage does when it's dealt.

Normally, damage dealt to a creature stays on that creature until the cleanup step (the last step of the turn), when it's removed. Damage dealt to a creature by a source with wither is still damage, but it has a different effect: it causes that many -1/-1 counters to be put on the creature.

This means that wither damage interacts with other abilities and effects just like any other damage:

- Lifelink and deathtouch abilities will trigger as a result of wither damage, as will any other abilities that trigger when damage is dealt to a creature.
- If the damage is prevented (by something simple like **Bandage** or something more complicated like **Phantom Centaur's** ability, or even by the protection ability), the -1/-1 counters won't be put on, because no damage was dealt.
- If the damage is replaced by something else—such as by putting that many +1/+1 counters on **Phytohydra** instead—the -1/-1 counters won't be put on, and the something else will happen instead.
- If the damage is redirected (say, by **Kor Dirge**), its source doesn't change, so it will still be wither damage.
- A creature with both wither and trample will deal damage to creatures blocking it as -1/-1 counters. Any damage it deals to the defending player will be dealt normally.
- Wither applies to all damage, not just combat damage. A **Rustrazor Butcher** enchanted with **Power of Fire** can tap to deal 1 damage to target creature in the form of a -1/-1 counter.

There's one other weird case we should cover: **Tatterkite**.



When he says 'in the form of,' that's exactly what he means.

Tatterkite can't have counters placed on it. If a creature with wither deals damage to **Tatterkite**, no -1/-1 counters will be placed on **Tatterkite**. Lifelink will still trigger, because the damage is actually dealt—it just doesn't do anything.

A final word of warning: All of this is true only for wither, not for any other ways of putting -1/-1 counters on creatures. **Incremental Blight** doesn't deal any damage at all—it simply causes -1/-1 counters to be put on creatures directly.

Check out the *Shadowmoor* FAQ on the [Set FAQs Page](#) for answers to other questions about the new cards and mechanics.

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](#).

April 25, 2008



Q: I have a foil **Reflecting Pool** from *Shadowmoor* that has the plains symbol. Is this a print mistake?
—Vic, Philippines

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

Sadly, it is. To ease your pain, here is a bit of a long story:

For a long time, various DCI promos (including [Friday Night Magic](#) prizes) have had foil "knockouts" in their text boxes as a way to make the card feel more special. By "knockout" I mean that the physical colored ink printed on the card is more or less the same as it is on the normal versions of the card, but some extra voodoo is performed on the layer of foil applied to it, allowing a logo to shine through.

When Mark Rosewater was compiling his long list of ways for jokes to be worked into the *Unhinged* set several years ago, he came up with "jokes in the foil," using a trick similar to the one done on the DCI promos. The premium versions of cards such as **Goblin Mime** and **Gleemax** show hidden things in the foiling of the card art, and there are several other such cards in the set.

We had all that in mind when the question came up during *Shadowmoor* development of how obvious it would be that the lands in the **Sapseeep Forest** cycle had basic land types. We wanted a way to show the big mana symbol in the text box similar to the way they appear on normal basic lands. Because these cards have text, the big mana symbol wouldn't look nice in the frame, but art director Jeremy Jarvis was willing to try doing a special foil treatment so that the premium versions of the cards had something special going on that the normal versions do not.

Unfortunately, when you are trying new things, mistakes can easily be made. The premium versions of our cards don't have nearly as many pairs of eyes scrutinizing them as the regular versions do, mostly because we always assume that they are essentially going to be the same. The white mana symbol was inserted into the text box of the premium **Reflecting Pool**, carried over from the premium **Mistveil Plains**, and no one noticed it until the printed cards were in our hands.

All printed versions of the foil *Shadowmoor* **Reflecting Pool** have the white symbol on them, so yours isn't a particularly rare version or anything like that, but rather just a result of an oversight. We certainly know what to check for the next time we do special foil treatments like this.

April 24, 2008



Q: The format of GP–Brussels is Limited, but will it be *Lorwyn + Morningtide*, or *Shadowmoor*? Because if I'm not mistaken, the new set comes out DURING the GP.
—Aris, Santorini, Greece

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

The format for [Grand Prix–Brussels](#) will be *Shadowmoor* Sealed Deck with Day 2 *Shadowmoor* Booster Draft. [Shadowmoor](#) will be released on May 2, the day before the Grand Prix starts.

April 23, 2008



Q: You people at **Magic** build new worlds every year. It must be easier with all those people helping; can you sum it up in a simple maxim? What is the key to building a original fantasy setting?
—Eric, Baytown, TX, USA

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

Wow, that's quite a question. If I could sum it up in a simple maxim, my job would be a whole lot easier! I guess I'd start by asking you what you meant by "original." In some ways "original" and "fantasy" are at odds, because for many fantasy fans, what they expect from a fantasy setting and what they want are one and the same (not all fans of the genre, just many of them). Being totally original would mean intentionally avoiding the known elements: dragons, knights, swords, wizards, elves, trolls, and so on. But assuming you'd reply with, "whoa, whoa, not that original," I'd say that finding a precept—a guiding principle—is the first big step. For example, what would a fantasy world look like if it were built around the concept of a gilded cage (Mirrodin)? Classism and commerce (Mercadia)? African / Caribbean swords-and-sorcery (Jamuraa)? Once you have your precept, you'll find that lots of other decisions sort of make themselves.

April 22, 2008



Q: If you reprinted **Transguild Courier**, would you give it **Reaper King's** frame?

—Anonymous

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

Me? Yes. Yes I would.

There's certainly nothing wrong with **Transguild Courier** as he is, but yes, I feel that the "**Reaper King** treatment" manages to communicate "artifact" as well as color affiliation (gold-gold in this case) rather than relying strictly on text to communicate one of those things. The clear messaging that our *Eighth Edition* frames allows us is a powerful tool, and I like to see it used to its fullest.

JJ

April 21, 2008 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: I have a question regarding the new hybrid cards, such as **Flame Javelin** and **Beseech the Queen**. If I were to pay six colorless mana for the card **Flame Javelin** and target my opponent, would they be able to prevent the damage with a **Circle of Protection: Red**?

—John B., USA

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

Yes, they can. The mana that you pay to play a hybrid or monocolored hybrid spell does not affect what color or colors that spell is—it is always all of the colors of mana in its mana cost, just like any other spell. **Flame Javelin** is always red, even if you play it for six green mana.

To clarify what that means in terms of hybrid cards, is always both a blue mana symbol and a black mana symbol. is always a red mana symbol. That means that any card with a mana cost of is both blue and black, and any card with a mana cost of (and no other colored mana symbols) is red and red only.

For example, both of these cards are red no matter what was actually spent to play either of them:



Both of these cards are black and blue:





And these both of these cards are all five colors, even if you play **Reaper King** for ten colorless mana:



It's also worth noting that you can always choose to pay the higher cost if you wish. For instance, if you have **Mana Reflection** in play, you might choose to tap two **Swamps** and play **Beseech the Queen** for (U)(U)(U)(U). There's no problem with this—you simply choose to play **Beseech the Queen** for (U)(U)(U)(U)—two black mana and two mana of any type—then pay the (U) with (U)(U).

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April 18, 2008



Q: What exactly is an Ouphe? They don't seem to have any real definable characteristics, and no real "archetype." They're kinda like a bunny, but not... right?
—Kevin, Charlotte, NC, USA

A: From **Jenna Helland**, **Magic** creative designer:

Hi Kevin,

Yeah, they're not bunnies, although "ouphe" is a cute word. Pronounced "oof," it means "elf child" or "one left by the fairies" and probably originated from Icelandic and/or Old English.

Magic uses "ouphe" to refer to little nonflying creatures that are connected to the fae in common folklore. You're right—ouphe's vary from place to place: Look at the **Spellwild Ouphe** in *Future Sight* compared to the **Dusk Urchins** in *Shadowmoor*.

Watch for more Ouphes to appear now that the sky has darkened over sunny Lorwyn.

April 17, 2008



Q: I have a question: What is the difference, both thematically, and mechanically between something having "synergy" and something being a "combo"?
—Brian, Tulsa, OK, USA

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


Dear Brian,

While "combos" and "synergy" go hand in hand, the differences are basically just a forum argument over semantics. But I'll do my best to answer this question.

I find combination attacks an extraordinarily fun part of games, as evidenced by my 150 gameplay hours and S-rank Dante Must Die missions in Devil May Cry 4 ("1, 2, BLAH!!"). Even simple games actions like a short sequence of chess moves with pawns, knights, and bishops can be coined a "combo," like a [discovered attack](#) resulting in material gain. In any case, I refer to a combo as a specific series of sequential game actions a player chooses to perform, with a definitive beginning and ending. Expert players oftentimes only think in combos for their respective games, almost like a pianist playing chords and scales instead of "press down this specific key with my right index finger for 1 second" a thousand times.

In contrast, "synergy" is producing a result that is greater than the sum of its parts. We often say that two **Magic** cards both have synergy and are a combo. The specific game-winning sequence of **Mountain, Rite of Flame, Rite of Flame, Rite of Flame, Rite of Flame, Dragonstorm** for four **Kokushos** is just a combo. Two **Kokushos** imploding with each other for profit is synergy. Turn-two **Bramblewood Paragon** into turn-three **Imperious Perfect** is a combo because the two Elves are boosting each other via synergy.

In essence, "combos" are the parts where you are making choices while synergy is the resulting game state of those choices. After all, "good combos" are labeled thusly because they result in huge synergy (such as a large board advantage for you). Consequently, a "bad combo" is one that yields very low synergy or is not very "powerful."

Magic designers build internal synergy into **Magic** sets mechanically, so much so that we are often accused of "building your decks for you" (but it's for the best, we swear!). Just as a deck with no synergy is "a pile," a **Magic** set with no synergy is "just some cards." We design mechanics like *prowl* and  to add set cohesion while enticing players with a new deck to build.

But **Magic** designers needn't work too hard for internal synergy; **Magic: The Gathering** boasts more game pieces that interlock with each other in more ways than any other game ever created. The single most compelling aspect of **Magic** is discovering your own combos and releasing their synergy upon your unsuspecting friends.

Finally, to demonstrate just how dense a **Magic** deck can be with combos and synergy, I'll leave you with [the most complicated 60-card Magic deck](#) I've ever built, made possible by **Urza's Hot Tub**:

Urza's Hot Tub Reanimator

Legacy Legal 

Main Deck
60 cards

1 Caves of Koilos	1 Akroma, Angel of Wrath	4 Beacon of Unrest
1 Grove of the Burnwillows	1 Angel of Despair	1 Life from the Loam
1 Mikokoro, Center of the Sea	1 Bringer of the Red Dawn	1 Night of Souls'
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	1 Infernal Spawn of Infernal Spawn of	Betrayal
1 Miren, the Moaning Well	Evil	1 Oath of Druids
1 Mouth of Ronom	1 Kaervek the Merciless	1 Oath of Ghouls
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds	1 Keiga, the Tide Star	1 Read the Runes
1 Okina, Temple to the	1 Kokusho, the Evening Star	4 Spoils of the Vault
Grandfathers	1 Maralen of the Mornsong	4 Talisman of
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep	1 Oona, Queen of the Fae	Dominance
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	1 Patron of the Kitsune	1 Talisman of Impulse
1 Snow-Covered Forest	1 Sol'kanar the Swamp King	1 Talisman of Progress
1 Snow-Covered Island	1 Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir	4 Urza's Hot Tub
1 Snow-Covered Mountain	1 Visara the Dreadful	
1 Snow-Covered Plains		23 other spells
9 Snow-Covered Swamp	13 creatures	
1 Urborg, Tomb of Yawgmoth		

24 lands

April 16, 2008 

Q: For everyone working on Lorwyn and Shadowmoor, it must have felt bad corrupting the beautiful world you created, right? Seeing its most honored races fall and its own deviants rising to prominence, the staff must have some regrets.

—Marty, Imperial Beach, CA, USA

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

Hey Marty,

No and nope. :)

I love Lorwyn. I can't tell you how proud I am of the work we did to give you guys such an immersive setting. To deliver "storybook" without aging down to "children's book." To really swing for the fences on "fun" but without being patronizing or juvenile. I'm not sure people really appreciate how difficult that was. **Magic**, with all its conflict, but with brighter colors and more pleasing shapes.

We knew from day one that the block(s) known as "Peanut" / "Butter" / "Jelly" / "Sandwich" (Later "Peanut" / "Butter" and "Jelly" / "Doughnut") would be creatively and thematically divided in half. We settled on day / night roughly the same time we settled on the *Lorwyn* tribes. That informed what kind of day / night setting it would be. Unending day, always saturated, in which even the shadows are rich with hue... and it would be followed by unnatural night, with mists and fog and phantom lights casting shadows within the shadows.

It's not about "corrupting" anything. It's about playing to the dualities of a "storybook" setting, creating a world canvas that best and most fully resonates with the upbeat side of fairytales and folklore, and then re-imagining that world canvas in a way that best and most fully supports the dark side of cautionary lore and "morality tales" (the Brothers Grimm, etc).

I can tell you love Lorwyn. I'm glad. I love it too. The creative team took serious risks and really busted ass to give you that setting.

The same team that brought you Lorwyn worked just as hard on Shadowmoor, and I love it just as much. It wasn't hijacked, or taken over and "corrupted" by some third party... It's an immersive look at the other aspect of that bright place.

Regrets? No way.

April 15, 2008



Q: I must say, I really rather like the return of hybrid mana, but I have to admit I always think of the color pairs by their guilds in Ravnica. Blue-white will always be Azorius, red-green maintains that distinctively Gruulian feel to it, and blue-red will always maintain that quirky air of eccentricity. Are you concerned players will still refer to the various color combinations by their Ravnica guild names; and if so, have you taken steps to dissociate from the prior set?

—Artigrius, Palm Bay, FL, USA

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

Concerned? Not exactly. Flattered? Definitely. I'm really happy that Ravnica has worked its way so deeply into the player consciousness. Having two-color decks or hybrid cards forever be referred to as Rakdos This or Selesnya That... it's what we call "a nice problem to have." It's still a problem, sure, because those terms are meaningful only to Ravnica and not to, say, Shadowmoor. But I think the only way to dissociate two-color hybrid, for example, from Ravnica would be to provide even "stickier" / more memorable names or labels for them. Needless to say, because Ravnica came first and because Shadowmoor's color divisions are less rigid than Ravnica's guild divisions, that seems unlikely.

April 14, 2008 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: If you have a Vivid land, such as **Vivid Crag**, and a **Reflecting Pool**, can the **Reflecting Pool** add any color mana if the Vivid land has a counter? If it doesn't?

—Scott, St. Louis, MO, USA

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

The answer to both of these questions hinges on what exactly "could produce" means. Let's take a look at the relevant section of the Comprehensive Rules glossary entry for "mana":
















The type of mana a permanent "could produce" is the type of mana that any ability of that permanent can generate, taking into account any applicable replacement effects. If the type of mana can't be defined, there's no type of mana that that permanent could produce. The "type" of mana is its color, or lack thereof (for colorless mana).

There's a lot of information in that paragraph. Let's break it down. (Before we do, however, please note that the glossary entry for "mana" is being changed with the release of *Shadowmoor* for added clarity.)




First, there's the phrase "the type of mana that any ability of that permanent could generate." Note that this doesn't say anything about any conditions or additional costs to generate that mana. **Vivid Crag** has an ability that can produce mana of any color. The fact that that ability has the cost of removing a counter from **Vivid Crag** doesn't matter, nor does it matter whether **Vivid Crag** currently has a counter on it. The Crag has an ability that can produce mana of any color, so your **Reflecting Pool**'s ability can produce mana of any color. By the same principle, it doesn't matter if a **Forest** you control is tapped and can't currently be tapped for mana—the costs for mana abilities of your lands are ignored.

The *Future Sight* dual lands make an interesting study in just how far this extends. **Grove of the Burnwillows** will allow your **Reflecting Pool** to tap for  or , and **Horizon Canopy** will allow it to tap for  or , even



though both of them have additional costs to produce that mana. **Grove of the Burnwillows** also allows you to tap **Reflecting Pool** for  should you have reason to do so. **Nimbus Maze** has three mana abilities, two of which can only be played under certain conditions, but **Reflecting Pool** treats them all the same—**Nimbus Maze** lets you tap **Reflecting Pool** for , , or  even if they are the only two lands you control. **River of Tears** has a mana ability that produces  or  depending on whether you played a land this turn, and this is where the "applicable replacement effects" line comes up. In this case, it's a self-replacement effect that causes **River of Tears** to produce  instead of  if you've played a land this turn, and that replacement effect will also apply if **Reflecting Pool** is tapped for mana. It will produce  if you have played a land this turn and  if you have not, just like **River of Tears**. Lastly, **Graven Cairns** has a mana ability that can produce , , or , and the additional cost to play that ability is ignored. **Graven Cairns** allows **Reflecting Pool** to tap for  or .

"If the type of mana can't be defined, there's no type of mana that that permanent could produce." This means that if the only lands you control are one or more **Reflecting Pools**, none of them will be able to produce any mana, because the mana they could produce is currently undefined.

Note also that, as per the last sentence from the paragraph quoted above, "type" includes only the color (or colorlessness) of the mana, not anything else. "Snow," for example, is not a type of mana, but a supertype of the permanent that produced the mana. If you control a **Snow-Covered Forest** and a **Reflecting Pool**, the **Reflecting Pool** can tap for , but only mana from the **Snow-Covered Forest** could be used to pay a cost of  (which must be paid with mana from a snow permanent). If the **Reflecting Pool** becomes a snow permanent (say, due to **Thermal Flux**), then any mana it produces will be able to pay a cost of , regardless of whether you control any other snow lands.

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](#).

April 11, 2008



Q: Is there an API for access to the oracle card reference (Gatherer)? If not, is there a chance that there will be one? I'd love to create a fan site that has access to actual oracle data?

—Jay, Omaha, NE, USA

A: From **Dave Guskin**, [magicthegathering.com](#) Web Developer:

Hey Jay,

Unfortunately, we don't have an external API for Gatherer with our current system. (For those who are going "huh?" API stands for application programming interface, similar to the way many websites query Google's search directly for their own search mash-ups. External APIs, meaning interfaces that anyone on the web can use, take a bit longer to develop and put additional strain on servers, but do allow the community the freedom to develop their own look and feel around the services.)

There are no current plans to implement an API like this in the near future, but it's certainly something we'll keep in mind when developing out improvements to the Gatherer system and other tools we have in the works that build on top of it.

April 10, 2008



Q: In the article "[Shadowmoor than Meets The Eye, Part II](#)" the card Safehold Elite is referred to but that card isn't included in the Shadowmoor preview archive. Is this a mistake or are there more cards spread out in the pages that aren't in the archive?

—Peter, Linköping, Sweden

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

Peter,

All officially spoiled cards appear in the [Card Preview Archive](#). This includes all cards from preview articles here on [magicthegathering.com](#), all cards shown in daily previews on the right side of the page, and all official previews in magazines and on other web sites. Safehold Elite, however, wasn't any of these things. If you read [Mark's article](#), this is what you saw:



Mark was previewing Shield of the Oversoul and wanted to clearly demonstrate its effects on a green 2/2 for 1G , a white 2/2 for 1W , and a hybrid green and white 2/2 for 1GW . Of course, the list of 2/2 green-white hybrid creatures prior to *Shadowmoor* is a short one: **Selesnya Guildmage** is the only one, and it has a different mana cost and two extra abilities.

Mark instead asked to show a *Shadowmoor* card that cost exactly 1GW , but there was a problem. Safehold Elite wasn't on the preview list, and it has a keyword ability that we haven't yet discussed on the site (although it does appear on a card in the Card Preview Archive). We decided to go ahead with this unplanned preview but "whited out" the card's text box, leaving it completely blank as a visual cue that there was something missing from the card.

When will you hear more about this new keyword? Any day now. There's still more than a week of *Shadowmoor* previews left before the [Prerelease](#) on April 19-20, so stay tuned to magicthegathering.com for more surprises and sneak peeks.

April 9, 2008



Q: Hey, I was wondering if we could possibly get a 'What the Hell Was Jarvis Thinking?!' on **Negate**. I can see there's some sort of muscular figure in the background, but it doesn't seem to be any specific creature. Also, it has some kind of glowing steel gadgetry that doesn't seem to belong in Lorwyn. Then there's the light show in the foreground, which doesn't look much like a reactive, suppressive counterspell. Whatever I'm seeing, it's fantastic... I'd just like to know what it was.

—Phil, Leeds, UK

A: From **Jeremy Jarvis**, Magic Art Director:

Hi Phil,

Absolutely.

What the Hell Was Jarvis Thinking?! #5: **Negate**

Here's the art description I wrote for the mechanic:

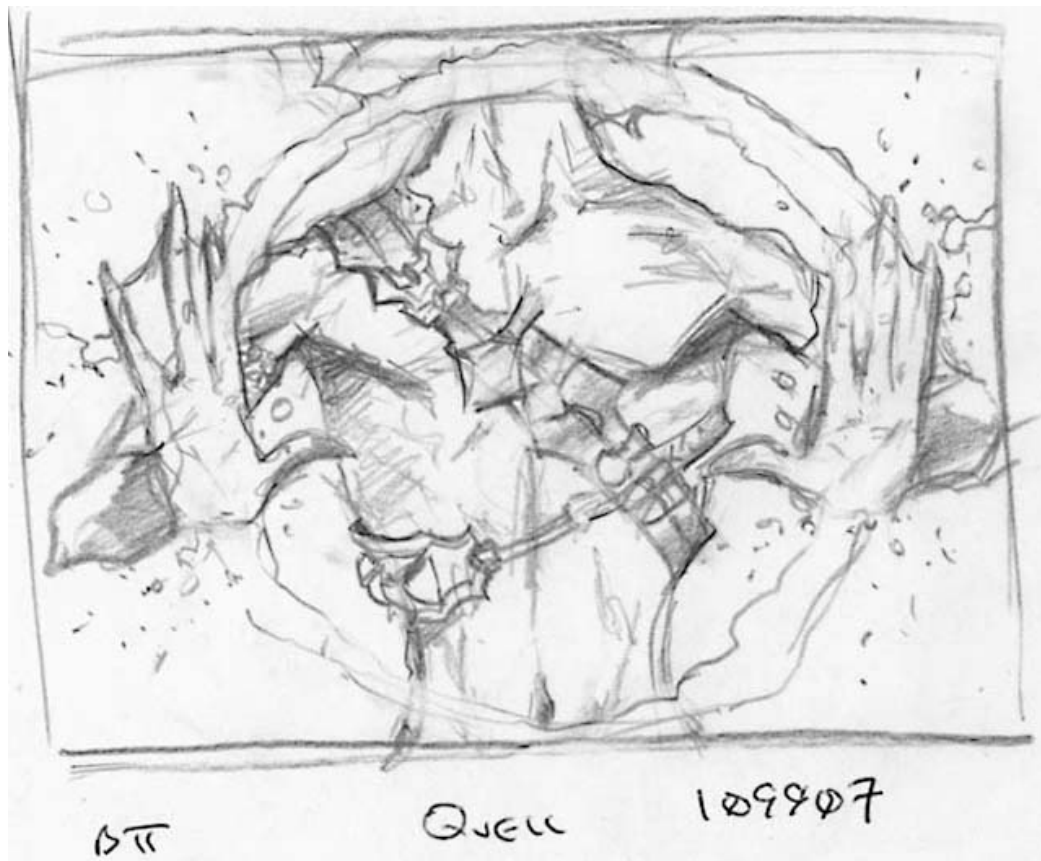
Color: blue spell

Action: Show a closeup of a merfolk's chest. The merfolk's hands are up, palm out, about to block and disperse a ring of fire that was about to strike the merfolk's chest. A bandolier of small vials around the merfolk's chest faintly glows blue as this "spell block" occurs.

Over the next few days I realized I had a pretty solid visual idea in mind, and as with *Tenth Edition's* **Regeneration**, should probably just do it myself as to not irritate another artist with overly tight direction.

Here's my classically dookie sketch (the working title was Quell):





Here's what the rest of Creative commented (CBD is Brady and DB is Doug):

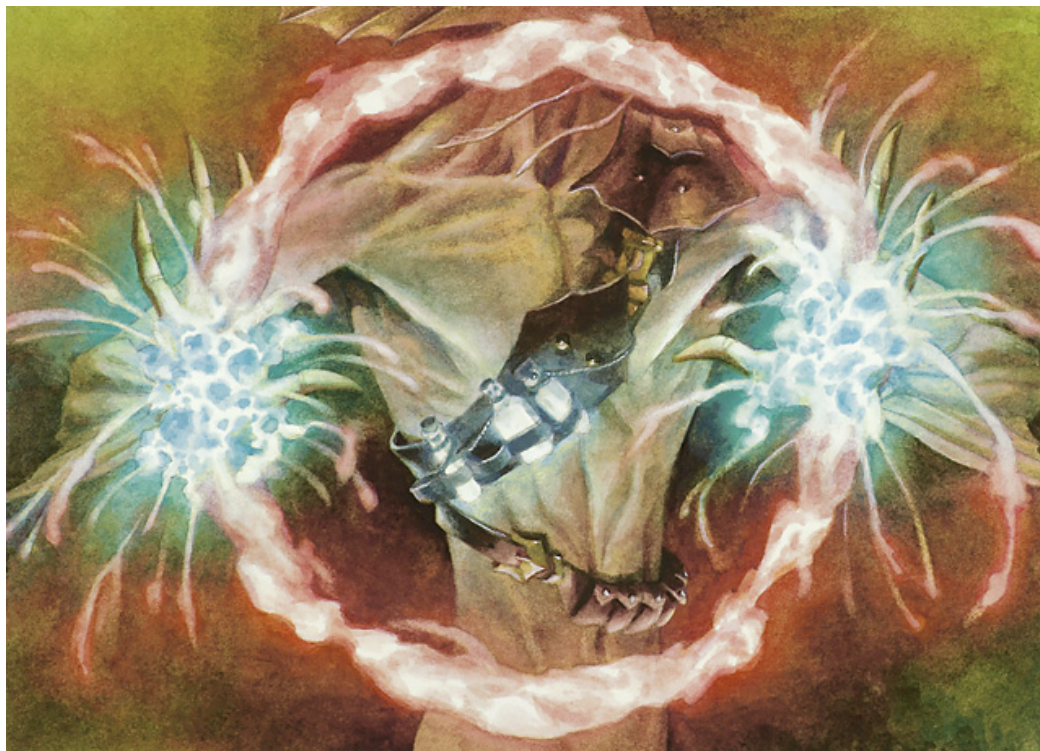
CBD 5/15/07: Okay. More "fire splashing away" around hands?

DB 5/16/07: Yeah, something to show us the merfolk is stopping rather than casting the fire-ring.

JJ 5/16: might not be fire.. not sure. but it will be more obvious that its splashing off his hands.

Brady was right, needed more "splashing away" from his hands, plus I knew that I was going to push for very saturated color cues at final.

Here's the finished painting:



So, it's a Merrow (note the head and arm fins, and chin 'whiskers' trailing across, if you look closely). He's blocking a red spell... Diffusing it at his palms with the explosive 'pom-poms' of blue magic.

The 'steel gadgetry' you referred to are actually glowing potions or vials, either alight with the power of his spell, or part of what he uses to cast, or maybe part of absorbing the brunt of the otherwise harmful magic. It's not uncommon, since I have the luxury of being in-house and seeing all art as it comes in, that I see something in a painting and reference it in one of my own to get some synergy going between cards, and make it feel like more of a deliberate throughline of worldbuilding, even if only in touches here and there. That's why the vials are glowing, because Matt Cavotta established it as part of the Merrow tribe's 'visual vocabulary' in this painting:



Silvergill Adept art by Matt Cavotta

There ya go!

Negate bonus trivia! My mom was in town visiting when I painted this. Poor Mom. Watching me paint is like watching grass grow, only with more swearing and furniture throwing.

April 8, 2008



Q: What kind of art descriptions do you give to the artists for dual lands? (Example: Rob Alexander and the *Ravnica* dual land cycle.)

—John, Slippery Rock, PA, USA

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

It really depends on the setting.

The standard answer is that we in Creative decide what place should be shown and then strongly reiterate the importance of color cues to the artist. "This is a black-green dual land. We need to see lots of green and purple or gray."

The richness and/or needs of the setting can trump that, though. The *Lorwyn* duals, for example, were all matched to their appropriate tribe. **Gilt-Leaf Palace** just needed to show an example of elf architecture. The Lorwyn Elves are green-black, they live there, it makes sense that it produces green or black mana.

Here was Chris's art description for **Gilt-Leaf Palace**:

Color: Green (and black) land

Location: see below

Action: Show Dawn's Light Palace, the most glorious elvish gathering place in the Gilt-Leaf Wood. (The Gilt-Leaf Wood is the forest considered most beautiful by the elves. The trees have a sap that elegantly coats the spaces between the bark, and when the sun hits it just right, it seems to be golden and shimmers as if gilded.) This palace is where elvish courtiers and aristocrats come to see and be seen. It is the pinnacle of elvish beauty and perfection.

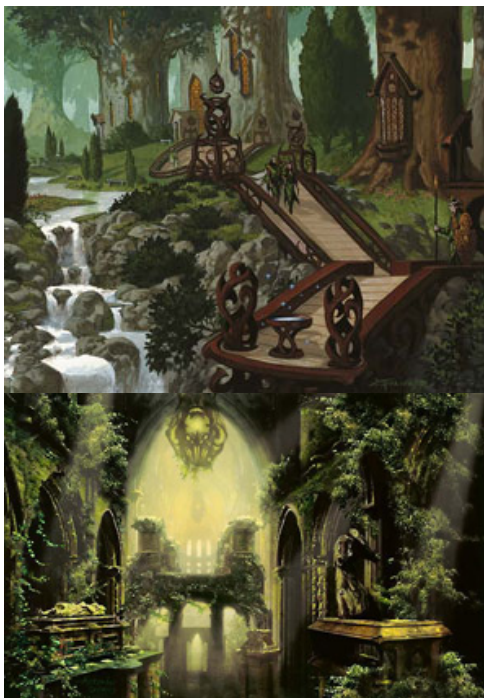
Mood: Flawless beauty integrated flawlessly with nature.

Ravnica was fairly similar inasmuch as the duals were aligned to a particular guild. Color cues are still important (we of course make sure the hue of the painting isn't misleading) but the guild affiliation was really more important concept-wise.

Here's what Rob was given for *Ravnica's* **Overgrown Tomb**:

Color: Black/green guild
Location: See below
Action: This is the interior of a massive ancient stone mausoleum that has been completely overtaken by roots, vines, and other natural growth. Vines run up and down the walls, under sarcophagus lids, through exposed skeletons.
Focus: the tomb being slowly permutated with growth
Mood: Very creepy -- the BG guild is at work here

There ya have it!



April 7, 2008 – Magic Rules Corner



Q: Do -1/-1 counters negate +1/+1 counters, or do they simply exist side by side? If I were to have a creature (lets say a 1/1) with two +1/+1 counters and add a -1/-1 would the creature have one +1/+1 counters with a -1/-1 counter making it a 2/2 with 2 +1/+1 counters to remove (if it had an ability that removed the +1/+1 counters to do something), or would I have a 2/2 with one +1/+1 counter to remove?

–Eric, Glassboro, NJ, USA

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

Usually, R&D is careful to print only +1/+1 or -1/-1 counters within any given block, not both, and for a long time, -1/-1 counters were considered obsolete anyway. *Shadowmoor* features the return of -1/-1 counters, but it doesn't include any +1/+1 counters at all. *Time Spiral*, as usual, was another story, featuring throwback **Spike Tiller** alongside the "timeshifted" **Giant Oyster**—a situation that could arise around any casual table as well. In order to keep people from having to differentiate the two counter types on a single creature, a rule was introduced that would cause +1/+1 counters and -1/-1 counters to "cancel out" in the way you describe:

420.5n If a permanent has both a +1/+1 counter and a -1/-1 counter on it, N +1/+1 and N -1/-1 counters are removed from it, where N is the smaller of the number of +1/+1 and -1/-1 counters on it.

To put it another way, each +1/+1 counter cancels out a -1/-1 counter until only counters of a single type are left. This is a state-based effect—much like a creature with 0 toughness being put into the graveyard or a player with 0 or less life losing the game—which means that once the additional counters are put on, this canceling out happens before any player has a chance to do anything.

So, let's take a look at theoretical example about a 1/1 with an ability that removed +1/+1 counters—we'll use **Twilight Drover**.



Your **Twilight Drove** has two +1/+1 counters on it when some hypothetical *Shadowmoor* card puts a single -1/-1 counter on it. It now has two +1/+1 counters and one -1/-1 counter on it. Before any player receives priority, state-based effects are checked, and they "see" counters of both types on a single creature. One -1/-1 counter and one +1/+1 counter are removed, so one +1/+1 counter remains on the Drove that can be removed to pay for its ability.

However, it's important to note if a creature with both +1/+1 counters and -1/-1 counters has 0 or less toughness, it will be put into the graveyard immediately, with all of those counters still on it. This matters if an ability cares whether a creature had +1/+1 or -1/-1 counters on it when it died—for example, the *Shadowmoor* card **Dusk Urchins** cares about how many -1/-1 counters it had on it when it was put into a graveyard, and the *Morningtide* card **Kinsbaile Borderguard** does the same thing, but counts *any* counters:



Suppose **Kinsbaile Borderguard** has two +1/+1 counters on it when a hypothetical *Shadowmoor* card puts three -1/-1 counters on it. It is now a 0/0 creature with two +1/+1 counters and three -1/-1 counters on it. It's put into the graveyard as a state-based effect for having 0 or less toughness, but all of those counters are still on it. This means, in this case, that you will put five 1/1 Kithkin Soldier creature tokens into play.

Note also that none of this applies to the dizzying profusion of counters that were used before all power-and-toughness-altering counters were consolidated (+0/+1, +1/+0, +0/+2, +2/+0, +1/+2, +2/+2, -0/-1, -1/-0, -0/-2, and -2/-1). Only +1/+1 counters and -1/-1 counters cancel out this way.

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](#).

April 4, 2008



Q: Is there a formal way to greet an opponent in a tournament?
—Brock, Davenport, IA, USA

A: From **Andy Heckt**, DCI Judge Manager:

There is no formal greeting. Tournaments are held worldwide and adhere to regional customs. It's sporting to greet your opponent as an equal and to share names (to ensure you are playing the correct opponent).

April 3, 2008



Q: My brother's favorite block is Kamigawa. When I saw your (excellent) [recent Taste the Magic article](#) on all the planes, it brought up an old question: Who the heck WON that war between men and spirits, anyhow?
—Christopher, Menart, USA

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

Christopher, I'm glad you liked the article! You can probably predict my answer to your question: Read the books to find out! All three are written by Scott McGough, and I think they're pretty damn captivating. They are: [Outlaw: Champions of Kamigawa](#), [Heretic: Betrayers of Kamigawa](#), and [Guardian: Saviors of Kamigawa](#). Sample chapters are available on our site at those links. Here's a slightly longer answer: When a plane goes to war against its own gods, no one wins. The novels do, however, tell the story of how the war actually began as well as how denizens of the *utsushiyo* and *kakuriyo* brought it to an end.

April 2, 2008



Q: What is **Knight of Meadowgrain** riding? Why is he/she riding it? Thanks!
—Levi

A: From **Jenna Helland**, **Magic** creative designer:

Hi Levi,

That's a springjack—a kithkin's primary source of milk, mutton, and wool. Kithkin ride springjacks to visit kin in far-flung places or to **guard their villages** against bands of boggart thieves. Those who watch over flocks of springjacks are called **jackherds**.

In addition to **Knight of Meadowgrain**, **Order of the Golden Cricket** and **Springjack Knight**, you can see another springjack rider pictured on *Morningtide's Kinsbaile Cavalier*:



April 1, 2008



Q: After his success at PT–Kuala Lumpur, Jon Finkel has a Limited rating of 2307. Has anyone ever had a higher Limited rating?

–Falko Gürres, Greifswald, Germany

A: From **Jon Brichoux**, Organized Play

Short Answer: Nicolai Herzog, highest non-event-final **Magic** ELO rating of 2351 (Limited), highest event-final **Magic** ELO rating of 2350 (Limited).

Long answer:

The highest **Magic** ELO rating ever according to current records is 2351 (Limited) for Nicolai Herzog, attained in Round 3 of EU Prerelease *Fifth Dawn* – Oslo on 2004-05-23. However, this is not an event-final rating—he had fallen to 2341 by the end of that event.

Herzog does hold the record for the highest event-final **Magic** ELO rating—2350 (Limited) after his win at Pro Tour–San Diego on 2004-05-14. He also claims the second- and third-highest event-final **Magic** ELO ratings: 2341 (Limited) at EU Prerelease *Fifth Dawn* – Oslo mentioned above, and 2334 (Limited) at Booster Draft – 6/24/2004 – Outland – Oslo a month later.

Finkel's 2307 (Limited) comes in fourth among event-final **Magic** ELO ratings.

Besides Finkel and Herzog, no-one has ever attained an event-final **Magic** ELO rating over 2300. However two other players have attained non-event-final **Magic** ELO ratings over 2300: Michael Turian (currently a Wizards employee) with a personal best of 2325 (Limited) in round 16 of Pro Tour–San Diego in May 2004, and Gabriel Nassif with a personal best of 2318 (Constructed) in round 18 of Pro Tour–Kobe in February 2004.



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