

The mechanic's designer tells his tale

Initial Stages of Madness

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Monday, January 21, 2002



- **Mike Elliott, R&D senior designer Archive**

When Mark told me he wanted me to discuss how I came up with madness, I started in with the story, "Well, I was playing **Magic** and my girlfriend was distracting me and I dropped a card on the table. (As a game designer, I always have women hanging all over me.) And then it hit me... What if something exciting happened when I discarded a card?" That sounded a lot more exciting than some other implausible story, such as, "I was staring at some old cards like **Elvish Spirit Guide** and got an idea on how to do a twist on an old trick."

The original name of the mechanic from design was "residual," with the idea that the card had some sort of extra effect when it was discarded. The concept I had from a flavor standpoint was that the spell had some sort of mystical charge built up that was active

Mike and the ladies playtest some Extended.

even though the spell didn't go off, similar to static electricity building up on an object. Obviously, residual was too obscure a word to use as the real mechanic name, but thankfully we have a group of people that come up with real names for the random horrible names that the designers submit. In fact, my track record for mechanic names is like 1 in 11. Some of my names got through with minor modifications. A lot of the mechanics never end up with real names, such as the "sleeping" enchantments from *Urza's Saga*. For instance, my original name of "Lice" became "Licids." Only the original name "Slivers" made it through unscathed. Here is a short list of some of my previous early names and the final name they become.

Astral - **Shadow**

Lice - **Licids**

Slivers - **Slivers**

Planeshift - **Echo**

Gating - **Rebel/Mercenary**

Spellcasters - **Spellshapers**

Promotion - **Gating**

Dissolving - **Fading**

New Banding - **en-Kor**

Replacement - **Cycling**

Deathback enchantments - **unnamed**










The madness mechanic went through several iterations before it arrived at the final version. In fact, two concurrent versions of the mechanic were developed at the same time. One version allowed you to pitch the spell for some minor effect as a rider, similar to **Elvish Spirit Guide**, which allows you to discard the card to add 🌱. These had a lot of problems because you can't really get a very large effect




for just discarding a card, since the cost of pitching a card - while important to consider - is not that large compared to the mana costs normally associated with spells and creatures. For instance, no one would play a 1/1 green vanilla creature with no abilities, since it wouldn't be worth the card and the mana cost, but if you could discard the card to play it for free, and we made multiple versions of the card, it would allow someone to play a number of them on turn 1 and pummel his opponent into oblivion before he could react. The restrictions on this mechanic made it so that it was not very reasonable to pursue. But don't be surprised if this shows up on a few cards down the road. There are still a lot of **Magic** cards yet to print.

The precursors to madness.

The second version started as a "discard hoser" (a mechanic meant to specifically foil effects that would make you discard). The idea was that if you were forced to discard the card, you would get an effect from

discarding it, similar to **Psychic Purge**, which was a fairly popular older card dating back to the days of *Legends*. Then I hit on the idea to have you pay mana when you discarded it to get a larger effect, and then decided it was even more interesting if you could do the effect no matter how or why you discarded the card. I thought it was even more interesting if the effect you got was a triggered effect and was therefore unable to be countered, but the rules team didn't want to do uncounterable creatures that involved the card being put into play as a result of the effect. We could have done this version and had the creature cards put tokens into play - legal under the rules - but the development team and rules team opted to change the effect. Now the "discard trigger" results in the spell being played on the stack and subject to normal counter rules (Don't worry, Paul Barclay will go over all of this in a special column on Thursday).

The timing of putting the mechanic in *Torment* was a result of several of the cards in *Odyssey*. There is a cycle of creatures that I did in *Odyssey*, the most well-known of which is **Wild Mongrel**, which allows you to discard a card for some effect. These were designed as cards to help enable threshold, but with these and several other of the threshold enablers, I thought *Torment* was the appropriate time to introduce the madness mechanic, since you could use these same cards that helped you get to threshold to power your madness tricks. In fact, I suggested several other cards to add into *Odyssey*, *Torment*, and *Judgment* to allow more discard tricks to take advantage of this mechanic. I originally submitted three madness creatures along with about 20 spells. The original creatures were a 2/2 for  with madness , a 5/5 for  with madness , and a   2/2 flyer with madness  . The development team ended up cutting the flyer and keeping the creatures restricted to green, and also altered the 1/1 into a **Rootwalla**-type creature with a  madness cost, which is costed aggressively enough that it will probably see Constructed play in a number of deck types. Plus, you certainly always feel good in Limited play when you use a **Cephalid Looter** or similar card to draw a card and discard your creature, putting it into play.

The spells were fairly easy to come up with. I wanted a variety of "tricks" that would come up in combat and a number of simple cheap spells that you could combine with various abilities such as "draw and discard" effects and Wild Mongrel-style effects. I looked at effects that we costed at 1 or 2 mana, added a little to the base cost and then gave them fairly cheap madness costs. For instance, the "modern" costing of **Lightning Bolt** is  . Add a mana to the base cost and give it madness , and voila, **Fiery Temper** is born.

When madness spells were uncounterable, the idea of a madness **Counterspell** that could not itself be countered seemed very interesting to me, and the final version, which is a really good **Force Spike** variant, is still fairly interesting.

The original submission also had some cards that had different effects when you discarded them versus when you played them. For instance, there was a **Wrath of God** for **1***** that simulated **Exile** if it was discarded. The wording on those cards came out very long and it was difficult to make it clear that the discard version only had the limited effect and not the spell's "full" effect once the madness rules were set. It is unfortunate that some cards have to be cut because the text just can't fit on the card, but that happens quite a bit. My old way would have allowed more major usable effects with a minor discard effect. As it is now, you can't really put huge effects on the cards and cost them reasonably for both normal play and madness, so you limit the scope of available effects for this mechanic. *Torment* already had too many cards that needed to be rare, so there was not room for a rare cycle of madness cards; therefore all of the very large effects that we would normally be rare ended up on the cutting room floor. Sadly, no one will ever see the Wrath variant above or the discard **Fireball/Pyroclasm**. In the end, the set ended up with one common and one uncommon madness card in each color. Several of the cards were costed very aggressively so that the mechanic would see use in constructed play, even though it is only a 10-card mechanic. In fact, both **Fiery Temper** and **Basking Rootwalla** see reasonable play in our internal testing, and will likely make an appearance in the real world on the Pro Tour circuit.

There was originally a **Giant Growth** variant and a black -2/-2 variant, both of which were cut from the final set. There was a white madness creature enchantment that put a +1/+1 enchantment into play when discarded, and this was turned into a two-card mirror cycle with and black and white members. Because it was a small set, there was only room for a couple cards in each color with this mechanic, so the Giant Growth variant got kicked out in a numbers crunch during one of the development sessions.

Well, I have to get going. One of the many women that are constantly hanging over me made me spill my drink on the keyboard. Who knows what mechanic that will generate in the future?