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Making Magic Monday, March 4, 2002

Designing Under the Influence



Mark Rosewater

Standing on the shoulders of Craw Giants

Welcome to *Legends* week. (That's *Legends*, the expansion as opposed to legends, the creature type.) We've had theme weeks before but this week is not your average theme week. We've pulled out all the stops to explore the many facets of **Magic's** first large expansion. We have Steve Conard, one of the set's designers, to talk about how *Legends* was created. We have a spoiler to let you peruse all the cards. And we have some pretty cool Arcana and behind the scene goodies.

Since Steve is talking about how **Magic** design affected *Legends* (click [here](#) if you'd like to see the article), I thought I would talk about how *Legends* affected **Magic** design. You see, when *Legends* first came out I was just another **Magic** player. Sure I wrote a puzzle column for the *Duelist* but in every other way, I was just a random player.

I remember the day *Legends* came out; it was the summer of '94. A friend and I camped outside a game store in Westwood, California. Back in those days sets sold out within a day, so you had to know when they were coming in. Rumors about the new three hundred and ten card set (over three times larger than any previous **Magic** expansion) had been flying. I was pumped.

I bought three boxes. (Remember that I started playing in *Alpha* so I was pretty entrenched by *Legends*.) I rushed home, opened all my packs and then rushed back to the store to buy another box. Then after ripping open my fourth box, I returned yet again to buy a fifth box that I put away as an investment. (Interestingly, I eventually traded it for ten boxes of *Revised* that I later sold to buy a pretty snazzy television set.)

The reason I bring this story up is that *Legends* had a profound effect on me as a player. Years later, it would have profound influence on me as a designer. In this column I want to take a look through *Legends* to point out cards from the set that inspired me to make other **Magic** cards. Just like a scientist, a designer builds his work on the back of others. My hope is to give you all an idea how much influence *Legends* has had on me and thus see how much it has influenced the game of **Magic**.

Design of the Times

Not sure how to order this list, I ended up deciding to put it alphabetically by title. Here is a sampling of the *Legends* cards that influenced my design:

[A quick note before I begin: Designing cards is a collaborative process. Many of the cards listed below were created in conjunction with other designers.]

Anti-Magic Aura/Spectral Cloak

I have always been a fan of the "cloaks" as we call them in R&D. I liked the idea of the blue mage telling other wizards to stay away from a certain creature. This card inspired me to design numerous other "cloaks". Among them: *Mystic Veil* (*Visions*), *Robe of Mirrors* (*Exodus*), *Diplomatic Immunity* (*Mercadian Masques*), and *Aboshan's Desire* (*Odyssey*).

Arboria

I always found this card to be very annoying as it promotes players sitting around doing nothing. During the design of *Urza's Destiny*, I thought it would be cool to make an enchantment that was the opposite of *Arboria*, it punishes players for not doing anything. The card ended up being *Impatience*.

Search

Cleanse

During *Torment* development, **Major Teroh** had a rather weak special ability. (“**2** ✱, Sacrifice CARDNAME: Remove target black permanent from the game.”) I felt the card needed a better special ability so I started thinking about flavorful white hose blacks effects. Inspired by **Cleanse**, I suggested his new ability.

Cocoon

During the fall that followed *Legends*, **Magic** constructed was all about creatureless decks due, in a large part, to **The Abyss**. One day, while talking with some friends the topic came up that every two color combination was playable except for blue/green. So, of course, the next weekend I show up with a blue/green weenie deck. I played this deck off-and-on for over a year, and emotionally it has a special spot in my heart. For a short period of time, I played **Cocoon** as a cheap means to tap an opponent's creature. (This is before the card was errataed to be playable only on your creatures.) Before I got to Wizards I used to make up cards for fun. One idea I came up with was spawned by tweaking **Cocoon**. Rather than a card that makes you wait and improved you, what if there were a card that evolved you while the creature stayed in play but destroyed it at the end of the three turns. This card ended up being one of the first cards I designed to see print, as **Consuming Ferocity** in *Mirage*. As you can see, not every new variation is a home run (or even a single).



Concordant Crossroads

Unlike **Cocoon**, **Concordant Crossroads** worked perfectly in my blue/green weenie deck (elves and birds were essentially free). It even had the nice side effect of being an Enchant World that could destroy **The Abyss**. I'm such a fan of the card that I continually try to get global haste effects into the game. Both **Fervor** and **Fires of Yavimaya** owe their existences directly to **Concordant Crossroads**.

Dakkon Blackblade/Hazon Tamar

I was known as a wacky deck builder. I loved creating decks that defeated my opponents in ways they had never been defeated before. As such, I went through a phase where I played around with decks that interacted with land. One deck involved both **Dakkon Blackblade** and **Hazon Tamar**. *Invasion's* **Molimo**, **Maro-Sorcerer** is an homage to these cards.

Divine Intervention

This card was the direct inspiration for **Celestial Convergence** in *Prophecy*. The one tweak was to have the game end when the counters finally ran out.

Enchantment Alteration

As a designer, I'm known for my love of tricks. This tricky little card is one of my favorites. I'm responsible for it being repeated in *Urza's Saga* and created its sneaky cousin in *Odyssey*, **Aura Graft**.

Eureka

Tempted by the “dark side”, I got lured into this spell’s “cards for free” flavor. This card (along with the **pitch spells**) is directly responsible for *Stronghold’s Dream Halls*. (A card I always feel compelled to point out was named “the worst card in *Stronghold*” by *InQuest* magazine; a year later it was banned.)

Field of Dreams

The card **Think Tank** in *Odyssey* was created as a tweak of this card. Originally, the new enchantment made all opponents also play with the top cards of their libraries face up.

Firestorm Phoenix

While trying to come up for an ability for **Squee** (*Mercadian Masques*) I thought back to this card. I always enjoyed the fact that this card just never died. **Squee** seemed the perfect character for this ability, so I tweaked the ability and made **Squee, Goblin Nabob**.

Gauntlets of Chaos/Juxtapose

As I mentioned in the introduction article to MagicTheGathering.com, these two cards were directly responsible for me creating **Donate** (*Urza’s Destiny*).

Glyph of Destruction

While working on development for *Weatherlight*, I found myself fighting to make **Goblin Bomb** deal 20 damage instead of simply “winning the game.” The effects were very similar, I argued. But **Magic** needs more large numbers in the rules text. “Remember **Glyph of Destruction**,” I said, “It had ‘+10’. **Magic** needs more double-digit numbers on cards.” My argument convinced the team and the card was made to deal 20 damage. That is probably the only time (outside of trivia events) where I mentioned the name of that card.

Heaven’s Gate/Alchor’s Tomb/Dream Coat

Another wacky deck-building phase I went through was decks that revolved around color. One of my favorites was a deck revolving around a **Martyr’s Cry/Heaven’s Gate/Millstone** combo. (I never said my decks were good, just interesting.) This fondness for color changing spells and permanents (something shared by fellow design Mike Elliott) is directly responsible for the entire color shifting theme that runs rampant throughout the *Invasion* block (**Crystal Spray**, **Shifting Sky**, etc.)

Hell’s Caretaker

This card was central to a deck I played in numerous Melee games (this is a multi-player variant where you sit in a circle and can only attack left.) in my pre-Wizards days. My love of this card led me to create a number of cards that swapped a creature in play for one in the graveyard: **Recurring Nightmare** (*Exodus*), **Victimize** (*Urza’s Saga*), **Apprentice Necromancer** (*Urza’s Destiny*), and **Body Snatcher** (*Urza’s Destiny*). It also pushed me to create cards that used other means to return creatures from the graveyard to play: **Shallow Grave** (*Mirage*), **Corpse Dance** (*Tempest*), and **Zombify** (*Odyssey*).

Hyperion Blacksmith/Relic Barrier

Another of my concoctions was an artifact deck that I constantly evolved as new sets came out. These two cards from that deck were my inspiration for **Voltaic Key** (*Urza’s Saga*).

In the Eyes of Chaos

This card was my inspiration for the card **Ice Cave** from *Apocalypse*. I figured if an enchantment could counter a spell unless the opponent paid mana, why not let it counter a spell if the *enchantment’s* controller paid mana? Making the mana amount perfectly match the mana cost just seemed elegant.

Kismet

While I’m explaining to you how certain cards affected others, I felt a need to point out an example where a card did not inspire another card. Many people think **Root Maze** (*Tempest*) was inspired by **Kismet**. In reality, **Root Maze** originally gave all permanents summoning sickness. During

templating, it was decided that putting all artifacts and lands into play tapped captured 99% of the intent of the card with a much shorter and more elegant template.

Knowledge Vault

I always liked the mechanic of a card that put cards underneath it. While thinking about the neat things one could do with this, I came up with the idea of a card that could store cards for you. During *Alliances* development, we had to change an artifact late in the process (playtesting had shown the first version was broken beyond repair) and I suggested this card. Thus, **Gustha's Scepter** was created.

Land's Edge

Sometimes designers just take a cool card from the past and update it. **Seismic Assault** (*Exodus*) was one such card.

Living Plane

Nature's Revolt (*Tempest*) is another such update.

Moat

Teferi's Moat (*Invasion*) is yet another update. Not that we bothered to hide this fact.



Nebuchadnezzar

When I first saw *Legends*, my eye was drawn to this creature. He had a novel, cool effect. Inspired by this card, years later I designed a spell called "Go Fish." I put into numerous designs until it was finally accepted in *Judgment* as the card... wait a minute. *Judgment* isn't out yet. Ignore this paragraph. You didn't read it.

Nicol Bolas

Originally, the dragon legends in *Invasion* (designed by Mike Elliott) had activated tap abilities. The development team played with them for a while and felt that they were missing something. During one meeting, I suggested we look to the elder dragon legends for inspiration. **Nicol Bolas**, I argued, was the coolest elder dragon legend. Why? Because he rewarded you for doing something you wanted to do anyway: attacking. What fun are dragons if they don't encourage you to attack? The team agreed and we put attacking activated abilities on **Rith** and friends.

Petra Sphinx

I always enjoyed the guessing game this card creates. During *Urza's Destiny*, I thought it might be fun to make a card that had a similar feel. Thus was created **Scrying Glass**.

Puppet Master

I thought it was cool that you could return **Puppet Master** to your hand if the enchanted creature returned to its owner's hand. During *Urza's Destiny*, I played around with a card, that could both return itself and the enchanted creature to its owner's hands. Thus, I created **Disappear**.

Pyrotechnics

This card has led to numerous variants. I'm personally responsible for **Rolling Thunder** in *Tempest* (okay, okay, I shouldn't have made it common).

Rabid Wombat

This card inspired a series of cards in *Urza's Destiny*. I always thought the Wombat was a fun card, so during *Destiny* design I made a number of creatures that got different effects when enchanted (**Fledgling Osprey**; **Metathran Elite**; **Rayne, Academy Chancellor**; and **Thran Golem**).

Rubinia Soulsinger

My love for this mechanic goes back to *Arabian Nights*. At the time I played **Old Man of the Sea** in numerous decks. So when Rubinia came out, I was excited to give this new version a try. Those two cards led me to make **Coffin Queen** (*Tempest*).

Rust

This card was the direct inspiration for **Interdict** (*Tempest*) and **Bind** (*Invasion*).

Storm Seeker

Often times in **Magic's** past, there was a cool card that was created in the wrong color. These cards provide a perfect ability for designers to reintroduce the card in the proper color. This card was redone in the proper color, red, in *Tempest* as the card **Sudden Impact**.

Sword of the Ages

I enjoyed the endgame flavor of this card. Many a game with my artifact deck ended with me sacrificing all my creatures to the sword for the final kill. This inspired me during *Tempest* design to create the card **Goblin Bombardment**. I balanced the ongoing ability of the enchantment by having each sacrificed creature deal much less damage.

Sylvan Library

This card had such a profound effect that it led R&D, for a while at least, to make draw utility (cards that improved your draw) a green ability: **Rowen** (*Visions*), **Mirri's Guile** (*Tempest*), and **Abundance** (*Urza's Saga*).

Time Elemental

This card was the inspiration for **Temporal Adept** in *Urza's Destiny*.



Transmutation

When mining past sets for ideas, designers love to find weak cards that had a cool effect. This card has been revisited (although these days in blue and red) by numerous designers. My contributions: **Dwarven Thaumaturgist** (*Weatherlight*) and **About Face** (*Urza's Legacy*).

Underworld Dreams

In *Mirage* development we were looking to fill a hole for a blue/green multi-colored card. We had talked about wanting to find a way to create a more balanced **Underworld Dreams**. The team hit upon the idea of an enchantment that allowed a player to keep drawing more cards but at the cost of taking damage for each card drawn. This card ended up being **Malignant Growth**.

Venarian Gold

I used this card in the sideboard of my blue/green weenie deck as a way to remove creatures. (With the speed of my deck, tapping a creature for a turn or two was the same as killing it.) Years later, this card inspired me to create another blue creature enchantment that locked down creatures, **Sleeping Potion** from *Planeshift*. It's interesting to note that **Sleeping Potion** was the merging of two old cards, **Venarian Gold** and **Skulking Ghost**.

Wood Elemental


R&D has joked for years about how bad a card this is. During *Weatherlight* development, we thought it might be cool to make a good **Wood Elemental**. The card, **Fungus Elemental**, while obviously better than its *Legends* cousin saw just about as much constructed play.

I hope this has given you all a little insight into how old cards can inspire new ones. Join me next week when I take a look at R&D's three favorite **Magic** players: Timmy, Johnny, and Spike.

Until then, may they not have the counterspell when you call their bluff.

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