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Home > TCGs > Magic > MagicTheGathering.Com > Columns



Products
Gameplay
Rules
Help
Learn to Play
Fun Stuff

Search

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Day of Judgment



The design stories behind five cards

Mark Rosewater

This week I thought it would be fun to look at how several *Judgment* cards were designed. For variety, I've chosen one card from each color.

Solitary Confinement

One of the interesting aspects of the design process is how long certain cards take to see the light of day. This card started in *Tempest* design, and at that time *Tempest* had a strong poison theme. Anyway, **Solitary Confinement** came to life as the following card:

Protective Bubble
3WW

Enchantment

During your upkeep receive two poison counters or bury Protective Bubble. You may not be the target of spells or effects. All damage done to you by spells or effects controlled by an opponent is reduced to 0.

But, obviously, poison didn't make it through *Tempest* development (for more on that, stay tuned to *Tempest* Week later this year), and the card was killed. For years I toyed around with variants, but none ever made it into a design. Until *Judgment*. (That's actually not 100% correct. Protective Bubble inspired *Mercadian Masques*' **Ivory Mask**.)

Whenever I work on the design of a new set, I often look back at some of my old files for ideas. During *Judgment*, I stumbled upon the old *Tempest* file. I came across Protective Bubble and started thinking about how I could change it. The flavor I liked that I wanted to maintain was that you, the wizard, had cast a protective bubble around yourself that kept you safe. But it required a great deal of energy and it wasn't something you could maintain for a long time.

Since poison obviously wasn't an answer, I turned to other resources. I thought about life, but I didn't like the idea of you losing life while you were protecting yourself. It didn't seem particularly white and besides, **Glacial Chasm** (from *Ice Age*) had been down that path. Next, I looked at the hand. This seemed to have potential. But as you drew a card every turn, I needed to have the cost to upkeep the bubble be greater than your draw. Thus, a new version was born (I have no idea why I changed the name.):

Big Bubble
1WW

Enchantment

At the beginning of your upkeep, discard two cards or sacrifice CARDNAME. You cannot be the target of spells and abilities. All damage to you is reduced to 0.

This is the version that I turned into the design team. During design, we chose to make a few changes. The biggest change was that we lowered the discard to one card but prevented you from drawing new cards. This change came from our concern with how my version interacted with **Howling Mine**. (Basically, you can keep the enchantment going forever.) Also, instead of reducing damage to zero, the team changed the card to prevent the damage in the first place. Besides being cleaner, this fit slightly better with the card's flavor. Below is how the card was turned in from design: (For those that are curious, the name is in brackets because it signifies a playtest name.)

[Big Bubble]
1WW

Enchantment

At the beginning of your upkeep, sacrifice CARDNAME unless you discard a card from your hand.
You can't be the target of spells or abilities.
Prevent all damage that would be dealt to you.
Skip all of your card draws.

The development team then made one small change. Rather than make a player skip all draws, the card only made the player skip his or her draw phase. The development team felt the card was more interesting if a player had the ability to build his deck around the disadvantage. To the right is the card as it saw print.



Mist of Stagnation

One of the common tricks in design is to take an old card and mix in some new element. *Winter Orb* inspired this card. R&D decided a while back that *Winter Orb* made better sense as a blue enchantment and remade the card (more properly costed) in *Nemesis* as *Rising Waters*.

As *Judgment* was the last expansion in the *Odyssey* cycle, the design team was looking for new ways to play up *Odyssey's* graveyard theme. One idea I liked was rewarding a player proportionately for having cards in his graveyard. Every card a player managed to get into his graveyard the better. This mechanic also meant that decks that attacked their opponent's graveyard would gain an advantage.

So I set about trying to create a card with an effect that scaled based on cards in the graveyard. I played around with different X spells until I realized that an enchantment might work better than an instant or sorcery. I then made a series of enchantments that had an ability that counted cards in your graveyard each upkeep. The problem I kept having was that the effect became huge if you had any decent number of cards in the graveyard.

I realized that what I wanted was a card where the first ten or so cards really mattered, but after that the effect was basically the same. And then I stumbled across *Winter Orb*. I forget why; it wasn't for any design reason. I just saw the card and it hit me: untapping was something where a small number mattered but a large number did not. On average, a player only has ten or so permanents in play.



This epiphany led to the following card: (Note the name was a nod to *Rising Waters*.)

Rushing Waters

1UU

Enchantment

Permanents don't untap during their controllers' untap steps.

At the beginning of each player's upkeep, that player untaps a permanent for each card he or she has in his or her graveyard.

The design team made one, tiny change: they added two mana. And the development team didn't touch it. The final card is on the left.

Morality Shift

I made this card because I was trying to come up with a wacky black card. During *Invasion* design we had a hole in rare black and the design team was worried that we didn't have enough "Johnny" cards. (Johnny is R&D's nickname for the creative **Magic** player who enjoys the odd interactions of the cards. For more on this see my column "[Timmy, Johnny, and Spike](#).") In addition, the team felt that rare black needed a little more for Timmy. So I was asked to come up with a rare black Johnny/Timmy card. Also, we had a number of creatures, so I was asked to make it an enchantment, instant, or sorcery.

Filling holes is one of my favorites parts of design. I've always loved puzzles and thus I see filling holes as a sort of creative puzzle. "Here are all the constraints. Solve it. Have fun!"

A quick aside about restrictions and the creative process. I've had numerous emails worrying that our many rules will limit R&D's creativity. I actually believe the opposite to be true. I feel restrictions fuel creativity. As an example, let's go to my former stomping ground, Hollywood. A number of years ago, film director David Lynch was asked to create a television show. Now, Lynch is well known for his love of sex and violence. His films do not shy away from the more graphic elements, instead he embraces them. This proved to be a problem for television as TV (American, at least) shies away from sex, and, to a lesser extent, violence. (Backwards, I know.)

In the pilot (the first show), Lynch wanted to open the series with the body of a naked woman washing ashore. But this was network television. You can't show a naked woman. So Lynch came up with the idea of wrapping the body in plastic. Now, let's assume Lynch had no restrictions. He would simply have had the naked woman. But which is more interesting, creatively speaking: a naked woman washes ashore or a naked woman washes ashore wrapped in plastic? The latter, obviously. The show was called "Twin Peaks" and is believed by many to be Lynch's best work. Forced to deal with restrictions, "Twin Peaks" made Lynch get creative.

Back to design. So, I had to create a Johnny/Timmy rare black non-creature spell. I decided that I wanted to create a huge effect that players could build around. The "big" part would make Timmy happy while the "build around it" part would satisfy Johnny. After some thought, I stumbled upon the idea of swapping two things that had never been swapped before. The idea of swapping the library and graveyard came soon thereafter.

I made the following card that was put into the *Invasion*'s design:

[Yawgmoth's Agenda]

5BBB

Sorcery

Switch your graveyard and your library. Then shuffle your library.

Everyone liked the card and it sailed through development. And then I asked for the card to be killed.

Why? Well, during the tail end of *Invasion*'s development (yes, I was on the development team), I had begun work on *Odyssey*. It was very early in design but I realized that the *Odyssey* block was going to be intricately tied to the graveyard. I simply didn't know how this card was going to interact. The last thing I wanted to do was make a cool, interactive block and have some random rare card from the year before ruin everything. So I asked for the card to be replaced.

Flash forward a year. By the time we were working on *Judgment*, we had a much better grasp on the *Odyssey* block. I pulled the card out, dusted it off, and put it in the *Judgment* design. The team then knocked a black mana off the cost and tweaked the templating. Here is the card we turned in:

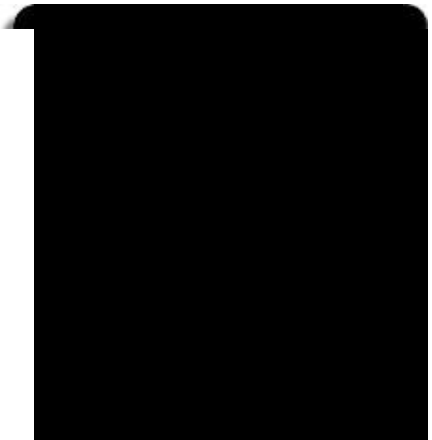
[Switcheroo]

5BB

Sorcery

Set aside all cards in your library. Shuffle all cards in your graveyard and put them on top of your library. Then put the cards set aside into your graveyard.

Development left the card alone save for a little more templating (making use of the word "exchange"). And it was printed as shown to the right.





Shaman's Trance

This card is a good example of what I call "design merge." Often times a designer makes multiple cards that, over time, merge together.

As part of every design, I put together a list of random cards that I have recently created. On that list for *Judgment* was the following card:

Manipulation
2UU

Enchantment

Opponents may not use activated abilities of non-land permanents they control. You may use activations of all opponents' cards.

The idea behind the card was simple. I play this enchantment and "steal" my opponent's activated abilities. The card kept the opponent from using his or her abilities partly for flavor and partly to avoid some rules issues.

Meanwhile, I also submitted another card:

Viva La Flashback

3R

Enchantment

Cards with flashback go to the graveyard instead of being removed from the game when played out of the graveyard.

The idea with this card was that it made flashback reusable. Unfortunately, the design team was worried that this was simply too good an ability. So, we came up with a restriction: what if every time you used a flashback card, some card had to be removed from the game? This had nice flavor and put a limitation on the reuse of flashback. Here is the card as the design team submitted it:

[Viva La Flashback]

3RR

Enchantment

If a card with flashback is played from the graveyard, its controller may put it into the graveyard instead of removing it from the game. If that player does, he or she removes a card in his or her graveyard from the game.

Anticipating that the development might have problems with this card, the design team came up with an alternate idea. Instead of reusing your flashback spells, what if the card allowed you to steal your opponent's flashback spells. The problem with this idea was that we were worried the average player would get confused when two people went to play the same flashback spell.



But then we remembered Manipulation. It had solved the problem by not allowing the opponent access to the stolen item. We took that idea and applied it to an instant that "stole" the opponent's flashback spells. Note that in our



ongoing attempt to balance the color pie (the thing that determines what colors get what abilities), we've moved temporary stealing (a la *Ray of Command*) from blue to red (blue kept permanent stealing). As Randy explained in a previous [column](#), this was done to add to red and to capture some of red's spontaneous flavor.

The development team shared our concern and the alternate card was adopted.

Grizzly Fate

This is another card that started in *Odyssey* design. Once we had stumbled across the idea of making flashback creatures using creature token technology (for more on tokens, check out last week's [column](#)), we made a variety of different ones. Being limited to vanilla creatures (green doesn't tend to have many creatures that use the two abilities we do use on token creatures, flying and haste), we found ourselves with three knobs to play with. We could make different size creatures. We could do spells as either instants or sorceries. And finally, we could change how many copies of the creature the card created.

This card was our attempt to make a spell that produced two creatures (four with flashback):

Cry of the Wolf

2GG

Sorcery

Salvage 3GGG # (If this card is in your graveyard, you may play it as though it were in your hand.

If you do, its mana cost is 3GGG, and remove it from the game as part of the spell's effect.)#

Put two green 2/2 Wolf creature tokens into play.

The *Odyssey* development team wanted to hold back on one of the three dials and chose to push off flashback (originally called "salvage") spells that created multiple creatures for later in the block. *Torment* introduced this idea with *Acorn Harvest*. So, in *Judgment*, we needed to go the extra step and introduce a new twist.

My first attempt played around with alternate flashback costs:

Cry of the Pack

3G

Sorcery

Put two green 2/2 bear tokens into play.

Flashback: G, Remove three cards in your graveyard from the game.

But during design it became clear that we were missing a more obvious twist: cards that combined flashback with threshold. As green and red were the primary flashback colors (they had more and better flashback cards), it seemed like we needed to make a flashback/threshold spell in each green and red. It also seemed pretty obvious that green's should be a creature and red's a spell. Red's spell became *Lightning Surge*.

Cry of the Pack was thus modified to have threshold. We liked threshold changing the number of bears created as it allowed a player to have the opportunity to make eight bears in one turn. Here is the card as it came out of design:

[Hot Bears]

3G

Sorcery

Put two 2/2 green Bear creature tokens into play.

Threshold - Put four Bear tokens into play rather than two.

Flashback o4oGoG # (You may play this card from your graveyard for its flashback cost. Then remove it from the game.)#

Development's contribution (to improve the card) was to move a colorless mana from the original mana cost to the flashback cost. The clever name -- **Grizzly Fate** -- was one of the names created when we were trying to title **Bearscape**. Creative Text remembered the name and put it on the *Judgment* card.

You can see how the card turned out in the end.




And that, in two-and-a-half thousand words, is how five *Judgment* cards came to be.

Next week, I talk about the foundations of **Magic**.

Until then, may you get eight bears out of your **Grizzly Fate**.

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