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Printer Friendly

Making Magic Monday, August 26, 2002

When They Were Young

Baby pictures of some famous cards



Mark Rosewater

When I talk about design, I usually reference the end of design and talk about cards as they appear when design hands them over to development. Today, I'm going to go back a little further and show you some famous cards as they first looked in design. Be warned--it isn't pretty. Note that I'm going to discuss only sets for which I was lead designer (*Tempest*, *Urza's Destiny*, *Odyssey*), as these are the only sets for which I have early design files. I'll begin each entry by using each card's final name, then discuss what each looked like in design.



Apocalypse (*Tempest*)

End of the World As We Know It (later "Ragnarok")
 3♦♦♦
 Sorcery
 Destroy all permanents in play. Discard all but one of your cards in hand.

Apocalypse ended up near where it started, with just four small changes. First we dropped one mana from the cost. Second, we made the player discard all of his or her cards. (This change, by the way, was made late in development. So late, in fact, that the idea of one thing remaining was left in the art and flavor text.) Third, the cards were removed from the game instead of destroyed. And fourth? Oh, it changed colors. While white does have a history of mass destruction (*Wrath of God*, *Armageddon*, etc.), the development team felt the "blow up the world" card just felt red. We had a few discussions about whether red could destroy enchantments, but in the end felt red could do it if it blew up everything else in the process. (That said, don't expect to see too many future red enchantment-destruction cards.)

Cursed Scroll (*Tempest*)

Joy Buzzer
 3♦
 Artifact
 2♦, 2♣: Name a card. Target opponent chooses a card at random from your hand. If he or she chooses the card you named, Joy Buzzer deals 2 damage to target creature or player.

The *Tempest* design team (Mike Elliott, Richard Garfield, Charlie Catino, and I) went to Portland and spent a week huddled up in a borrowed house. We were working so hard that we felt we deserved to take one night off to see a movie. (We saw *The Frighteners*, for those of you who like obscure trivia.) Walking to the theater, Richard came up with this card. The idea behind it was that it was a bluffing card. For example, a player might name a card, like **Counterspell**, that wasn't even in his or her hand. Development liked the card, but felt it wasn't good enough to actually play, so we juggled the numbers around to create **Cursed Scroll**. Oops.

Furnace of Rath (*Tempest*)

Sudden Death Overtime

Enchantment

For each 1 damage dealt to any source, CARDNAME deals 1 damage to that source. For each 1 life gained, CARDNAME deals 1 damage to all creatures and players.

This card was designed by Mike Elliott. The idea behind it was this: The game's in overtime and it's going to end, dammit; all damage is doubled and don't try any life-gaining. The development team later retemplated the double-damage part and removed the anti-life aspect to simplify the card, which became **Furnace of Rath**.

Mana Severance (*Tempest*)

Library Armageddon



Sorcery

Destroy all land in your library.

I included the precursor to **Mana Severance** because I think it's funny to see how designers sometimes just want to get ideas across, even though their proposed wordings are far from how the cards actually get templated.

Recycle (*Tempest*)

Hand Lock




Artifact

Your hand size is now permanently two cards. If you have fewer than two cards in your hand, you may draw until you have two cards.

Limited Options



Enchantment

When Limited Options comes into play and whenever you draw a card, discard down to two cards. Skip your draw phase. Whenever you have fewer than two cards, draw until you have two cards. You may not voluntarily discard a card unless you pay .

: Discard a card.



This an interesting example of how two cards merged in design. I designed Hand Lock and Mike Elliott designed Limited Options. Mike and I used to comment how freaky it is that we made basically the same card independently of each other. Obviously, we chose to make **Recycle** a green enchantment, but removed Mike's option out if you got stuck in order to keep the risk element I wanted. (Although, to be fair, my version did let you draw more cards.)




Scroll Rack (*Tempest*)

Hand Swapper



Artifact

, : Sacrifice Hand Swapper to swap your hand for a number of cards on top of your library equal to your hand size. Put the cards from your hand on top of your library in any order.

This is an example of a cool card that was too weak in initial design. The design team strengthened it by removing the sacrifice and lowering the activation cost from  to . The development team later lowered **Scroll Rack's** activation cost to .

Tradewind Rider (Tempest)


Hand of Malik



Summon Hand

1/5

Flying

: Tap two target creatures you control to return target creature to owner's hand.

Yes, **Tradewind Rider** started as a multicolored card, neither color of which was blue. But the set had room for only one white-black card, and because **Selenia, Dark Angel** was crucial to the story, she won out. In addition, bounce has always been a blue theme, so the card made more sense as a monobluish card. The cost ended up the same--four--but the toughness was dropped from 5 to 4, and the tapping of creatures was changed to a cost (it was moved before the colon.) Also, the ability was changed to allow the returning of any permanent, not just creatures. That change, more than any other, is probably what pushed Tradewind into tier-one status.



This mid-development version of Tradewind Rider was a blue/white uncommon. This card went through many iterations.



Donate (Urza's Destiny)

Take It



Sorcery

Give control of target permanent to target player.

Donate was actually in numerous sets before it ended up in *Urza's Destiny*. The reason? The development teams thought it was too narrow to ever be played. I kept resubmitting it because I thought that although it would never see tournament play, it would be a fun card. Oops.

Impatience (Urza's Destiny)

Cast or Burn, Baby



Enchantment

During the end of each player's turn, that player must sacrifice a land if he or she did not play a spell that turn.

Despite the name, the original version of **Impatience** did not deal damage. This version of the card proved a little too painful: Each loss of land made it that much harder to play a spell the next turn, so it created a fast downward spiral. To use R&D speak: "Bah-roken."

Opposition (Urza's Destiny)

Touch and Go



Enchantment

Sacrifice a creature: Tap target artifact, creature, or land.


The early **Opposition**, to be blunt, sucked. During design, we decided that tapping a creature was a good enough cost and changed the card. As time has shown, the new version doesn't suck.


Powder Keg (*Urza's Destiny*)

Nevinyrral's Pinpoint Disk



Artifact

: Add a boom counter to CARDNAME.

: Sacrifice CARDNAME: Destroy all permanents in play with a casting cost of X, where X is the number of boom counters on CARDNAME.

Early in design, I felt this card was powerful enough that the card's controller would have to pay to add counters. After playtesting, it became obvious to the design team that the mana cost wasn't necessary. An interesting side note: Development thought about changing the card to destroy creatures of converted mana cost X or less. I defended the card, saying I thought it would be neat to have a card that destroys only a small band of cards. That way, choosing to add a counter would be an interesting decision. The development team agreed to maintain the designer's intent, and **Powder Keg** was born.

Splinter (*Urza's Destiny*)

Artifact Lobotomy

Sorcery

Remove target artifact from the game. Also remove all copies of that card from controller's library and graveyard. Afterwards, shuffle that player's library.

The "lobotomy" cards in *Urza's Destiny* started in design as three cards. Black destroyed and then lobotomied a creature. White did enchantments. And red did artifacts. The development team felt the mechanic was cool enough that it warranted a full cycle. They added **Quash** to stop instants and sorceries. All that remained was land. While green has done some land destruction, the team felt it was more appropriate for red. So green got **Splinter** to destroy artifacts. Note that the original design went after only the library and graveyard. To sync up with the original **Lobotomy**, the cards were later changed to also go after the hand.

Yawgmoth's Bargain (*Urza's Destiny*)




Intolerance

Enchantment

Skip your draw phase.

Pay 2 life: Draw a card.

I have the lovely honor of designing more banned cards than any designer other than Richard Garfield himself. I chalk this up to my love of "engine" cards, cards that allow you to turn one resource into another. You see, when a combo causes problem, R&D tends to go after the engine cards. I remember designing this card as **Yawgmoth's Bargain**, except that it cost   . Looking back at the old file for this article, I was happy to learn that I originally designed the card having the player pay 2 life for each card. The development team raised the mana cost and changed it to 1 life for each card. Hmm, perhaps this is all some big R&D conspiracy to make me look like the "broken card" guy. As a final note I want to point out a very obscure joke in the playtest title for those few of you out there that went to film school like I did. **Yawgmoth's Bargain** is a redone version of the card **Greed**. Both *Greed* and *Intolerance* are famous silent movies.

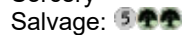


Call of the Herd (Odyssey)

Call of the Herd



Sorcery

Salvage: 

Put a 3/3 green Elephant token into play. If **CALLNAME** was played from your graveyard, remove it from the game.

The design team wanted **Call of the Herd** to be an average card for Limited play. The development team liked it so much that they went to town and made it a top-level Constructed card. I also chose this card to point out that every once in a while the design name makes it all the way through the process.

Haunting Echoes (Odyssey)

Highlander's Curse



Sorcery

Target player reveals his or her library. Remove all copies of cards that appear both in the graveyard and in the library from the game. Afterwards, shuffle that player's library.




This card demonstrates a common mistake that happens in early design. I wanted to make a card that encouraged players to play fewer copies of the same card. (Thus the name: Highlander is a format in which players play only one of each card, not counting basic lands.) My first attempt had the player match his or her graveyard and library and remove any matches. This had several problems. First, it took forever. And second, it didn't have as nice an interaction with the graveyard. By removing all cards and then removing duplicates in the library, **Haunting Echoes** played faster and had more interaction with other *Odyssey* block cards.

Holistic Wisdom (Odyssey)

Exchanger



Artifact

  , Remove a card in your hand from the game: Return target card of the same card type as the removed card from your graveyard to your hand.

Holistic Wisdom started out as an artifact. The **Regrowth** aspect of the card pushed the development team to change it to a green enchantment. Also, to improve the card, they lowered the activation cost and made it a "poly" effect, meaning it could be used multiple times per turn.

Mirari (Odyssey)

Mirror of Desires



Legendary Artifact

Whenever you play a spell with a number in its text,

double that number. (For example, a card that lets you draw 2 cards would instead let you draw 4 cards.)

Side note: I started writing this section when I realized that I already had written about it many months ago in my "Insider Trading" column in *Sideboard* magazine (associated with sideboard.com; check it out if you're at all interested in any facet of Organized Play) *Sideboard* magazine can be found at premiere events and at select hobby stores. Here's what the section said:

While designing *Odyssey*, I knew that the story revolved around a superpowerful artifact that enhanced the spellcasting of any person who controlled it. This meant I needed to create an exciting artifact that reflected this flavor. My first attempt was an artifact that doubled the numerical values/effects of cards (other than their mana costs). For example, **Ancestral Recall** would draw six cards, **Shock** would deal 4 damage, and **Blastoderm** would be a 10/10 creature.



I went to the rules team to see what can of worms *The Exchanger* they thought I was opening. Collin Jackson, a level 4 certified judge and rules team member, was concerned. Our conversation went as follows:

Me: What do you think?

Collin: It's going to be ugly. Couldn't you just have the artifact **Fork** everything?

Me: I can do that?

Collin: Sure.

Me: Done.

And thus the **Mirari** was born. The original **Mirari**, incidentally, cost 8 but **Forked** everything for free. The development team, fearing broken combos, reduced its mana cost to 5 but added a cost of 3 to use the ability.

Nantuko Shrine (*Odyssey*)

Bazaar of Fungus

1

Enchantment

Whenever a spell is played, if a copy of that spell is in any graveyard, the player of the spell must sacrifice a land for each copy of that spell.

Nantuko Shrine is an example in which the design card was much stronger than the final version. The Shrines, then called the Bazaars (named after **Bazaar of Wonders**), were originally designed to be cards that punished duplicate cards (see a theme?). They proved annoying enough in development that they were lowered in power level. In addition, several were changed to reward duplicates.

Time Stretch (*Odyssey*)

Stretch of Time

5

Sorcery

Salvage 9


Target player takes another turn after this one.

The original version of this card might answer how this card ended up in *Odyssey*. Yes, **Time Stretch** was originally a flashback card (again, back then the mechanic was known as "salvage"). I designed the card when I was trying to create bigger, quirkier flashback effects. The card caused numerous problems in development (I'm told a number of degenerate recursive decks were built), forcing the team to raise the initial cost. Eventually, the cost was high enough that the team felt it was just neater as a double **Time Walk**.

Ta Ta For Now

That's all for this week. I hope you had fun taking a look at some cards in their younger days. Join me next week when I revisit my mailbag. Until then, may my "oops" be kept to a minimum.

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