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# Better Off Red?

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Uncommon Knowledge  
Wednesday, October 30, 2002

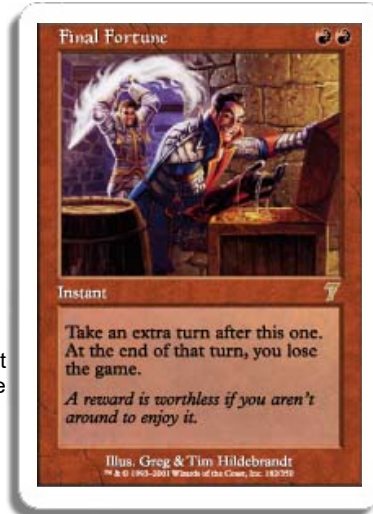


A few weeks ago, I held a contest in which I invited the readers to send in ideas for a create-your-own-column. After many weeks of deliberation (and a whole lot of great ideas!), I narrowed it down to a single winner. I wish I could have picked multiple winners for the contest, but in the end it was a column idea near and dear to my offbeat heart which won out.

J. Stratton wrote to me the following column idea: "The history of red cards with non-red themes (e.g. *Final Fortune*)." "Well," thought I, "just how many red cards have been printed which really just don't fit into red's themes of direct damage, land destruction, Dragons, in-your-face attitude, Goblins and chaos?" As it turns out, quite a few.

## PAINTED RED

There are a notable subset of cards which mimic abilities given to other colors, but have drawbacks which are in flavor for red. *Molten Influence*, *Skullscorch*, *Book Burning*, *Browbeat*, and *Breaking Point* have base abilities that certainly don't fit red – but the Punisher mechanic (do what I want or I'll smash you in the face!) adds an element to each card that is distinctly red. Red and black both often have drawbacks to their spells, but red mages show a particular disregard for their own well-being while in the midst of battle. *Final Fortune* would be another perfect example of this: either the red player wins NOW or he doesn't win at all. Taking an extra turn is not a red concept, but putting the entire game on the line certainly is. So I'd say *Final Fortune* actually *is* in flavor for red.



Red also deals in randomness. Off-kilter cards like *Planar Chaos*, *Search for Survivors*, *Wild Research*, *Goblin Artisans*, and the aptly-named *Gamble* all dip into off-red themes but with a twist. Speaking of gambling, red enjoys games of chance. While the effects of *Mana Clash* and *Game of Chaos* are appropriately red, *Mage's Contest* and *Illicit Auction* are probably not, except for the bidding theme.

So it seems that if you take a non-red card and add uncertainty to the card's outcome through randomness or bidding, you get a red card.

With the shifting of the color wheel, certain formerly non-red abilities have been added to red's repertoire. *Brightstone Ritual*, *Mana Echoes*, and *Skirk Prospector* would be examples of this—all three are mana cards that might have appeared in black in the past, but now fit red's theme of impulse—give up a card now for mana now, and damn the consequences.

The "Tim" mechanic—found formerly on blue cards like *Prodigal Sorcerer* and *Mawcor*—now seems to be rightfully red also, thanks to *Jeska*, *Warrior Adept* and *Lavamancer's Skill*.

## THE OFFENDERS

I'm sure you're tired of hearing about the not-quite-out-of-flavor red cards, especially if you are J. Stratton. So without further delay, I present to you what I consider the thirty-five most non-red red cards in **Magic** history.

Remember, you can click on any card name to read what the card does.

### 35) Aladdin

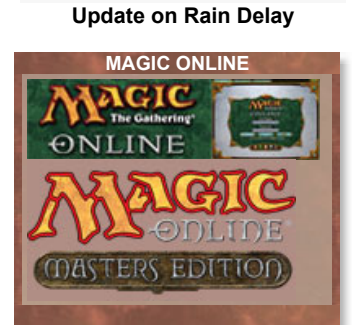
Sure, red loves to deal in destroying artifacts, but stealing them permanently? That's blue's domain, with cards like *Steal Artifact*, *Kukemssa Pirates*, and *Confiscate*. Blue is the color of controlling your opponent's cards permanently (*Control Magic*) while red borrows them temporarily (good sir, I believe your *Thorn Elemental* has a case of *Temporary Insanity* and will momentarily be smashing your face.)

### 34) Orcish Squatters

Same as the above. Red blows up lands, red doesn't control lands. Plus which, *Orcish Squatters*? Pretty hard to believe, given how well the *Orcish Settlers* end up doing with lands a few sets later.

### 33) Hand to Hand

Ok, so the theme of this card sort of fits into the red mold: you're so caught up in the heat of battle that you're not thinking clearly enough to resort to anything other than brute force. The problem is that turning off abilities goes to one of many other colors, most notably white (*Abeyance*, *Humility*, *Orim's Chant*), blue (*Stupefying Touch*, *Interdict*), and green (*Bind*, *City of Solitude*). The idea was sound, the mechanic was not.



### 32) Rukh Egg

The Egg goes to the graveyard and you get a 4/4 flyer. That sounds an awful lot like some green and black cards I know (*Symbiotic creatures*, *Penumbra creatures*, *Rotlung Reanimator*), but doesn't really feel very red. When red creatures go to the graveyard, they tend to stay there or be reborn like a *Phoenix*. They certainly don't hatch.

### 31) Conquer

Much like *Orcish Squatters*, *Conquer* allows red to steal lands, albeit as an enchantment! Thankfully Wizards rectified this by printing *Annex*. Blue finally has a card which it should have had back in *Ice Age*.

### 30) Boiling Blood

Green forces creatures to block (*Provoke*, *Taunting Elf*, *Lure*) and black forces creatures to attack (*Walking Desecration*, *Nettling Imp*). White keeps creatures from attacking (*Cessation*, *Calming Lcid*) while red keeps creatures from blocking (*Bola Warrior*, *Sluggishness*, *Goblin War Drums*). So why this clearly black card (target creatures must attack this turn if able) has a red mana cost is beyond me.

### 29) Winds of Change

Red isn't quite the color of card drawing; that distinction belongs to blue and black. This card allows both players to redraw their current hands, much like the blue spells *Timetwister*, *Diminishing Returns*, and *Time Spiral*. Compare *Winds of Change* to *Tolarian Winds* to see how this ability is much more in the flavor of the islands.

### 28) Aftershock

Black and white are the colors which can outright destroy a creature, with cards like *Dark Banishing*, *Cruel Revival*, and *Path of Peace*. Red tends to kill things with damage. *Lightning Bolt*, *Earthquake*, *Lightning Rift*—the choices are nearly endless. While *Aftershock* does damage to you, it isn't quite the type of removal spell red is known for.

### 27) Fissure

Where *Aftershock* roams, *Fissure* cannot be far behind. *Fissure* reminds me of *Befoul*, except with an extra mana and as an instant. One of these cards belongs in its color, the other does not. Hint: *Befoul* belongs.

### 26) Dwarven Armory

Red loves to sacrifice lands to damage the opponent (*Fireblast*, *Firecat Blitz*, *Landslide*). Red doesn't particularly like to sacrifice lands to give its existing creatures +2/+2 counters. That would be green's domain (*Wood Elemental*, *Fungus Elemental*, *Terravore*), the creatures which thrive on destroying lands.

### 25) Talruum Piper

As we discussed earlier, green is the color of forcing creature to block. Both green and red share the common trait of being the anti-flyer colors, but in different ways. Red likes to damage flyers, knocking them clear out of the sky (*Vertigo*, *Thunderbolt*, *Earthbind*) while green prefers to use creatures which can block and kill flyers (*Venomspout Brackus*, *Silkflash Spider*, *Spitting Gourna*). Given this divide and the built-in *Lure* of the minotaur, you have the makings of a great green creature.

### 24) Sisters of the Flame

Only one color is supposed to get creatures which can tap for mana without any drawbacks. That color is green. Although the Sisters aren't quite as good as *Llanowar Elves* or *Birds of Paradise*, they still infringe on an ability that doesn't belong to red at all.

### 23) Tooth and Claw

You sacrifice two creatures to get a 3/1. While a creature with this type of lopsided statistics would be in red's flavor, the sacrifice effect is not. Token creature generators that involve sacrificing creatures would fit in a black (reanimation) or green (rebirth) theme.

### 22) Mogg Infestation

This card is a sorcery which outright buries all creatures that only one player controls, and puts a ton of goblins into play. *March of Souls*, yes. *Kirtar's Wrath*, yes. *Mogg Infestation*, no. Red doesn't kill creatures en masse with such precision. Red kills all the creatures (*Apocalypse*, *Jokulhaups*, *Obliterate*).

### 21) Anarchy

We're entering the hoser section of off-flavor red cards. Part of the problem with hosers is that each color is supposed to have a drawback, and often that drawback (for instance, not being able to destroy enchantments for red) shouldn't be circumvented with a single card. Red might destroy all Plains to shut down Circle mana (*Flashfires*), turn damage prevention off (*Flaring Pain*), or turn damage colorless (*Ghostly Flame*). Well, *Anarchy* threw that right out the window by allowing red to massacre everything white on the board, enchantments and all.

### 20) Red Elemental Blast

Combine red's penchant for damaging instead of destroying, add in straight counterspell capabilities, and for fun make the two into one very versatile hoser. You've got *Red Elemental Blast*, a card rotated out in favor of...

### 19) Pyroblast

Which was *Red Elemental Blast* which could target non-blue spells and permanents. This allowed for *Pyroblast* to be *Sleight of Minded* to whatever color you wished, making it a weak two card silver bullet for any permanent or spell.

### 18) Goblin Snowman

Red finally took control of the "Tim" effect. However, to this day red hasn't really seized control of *Fog Bank*. "Both deals and receives no damage while blocking?" Sounds like a white, blue, or green card, but definitely not red.

### 17) Imperial Recruiter

Most of the cards from the *Portal* and *Starter* are true red cards. Wizards wants to make sure that in the most basic levels of sets, the flavors of the colors are accurately represented. This little surprise makes the list because it co-opts green. Red has its share of recruiters, but they revolve around their specific races (*Goblin Matron*, *Dwarven Recruiter*). *Imperial Recruiter* allows the player to get ANY creature with power two or less.

#### 16) Feint

A single-creature Fog for red. Wizards got a bit overzealous in *Legends* with fog effects (*Darkness*, *Silhouette*, *Subdue*, *Holy Day*), but that doesn't mean that **Feint** should have been printed.

#### 15) Tahngarth's Glare

Not only is *Tahngarth's Glare* a horrible card, but it should have been a horrible blue card. Since when does red reorder the top of anyone's library? That's clearly blue (*Portent*, *Discombobulate*, *Sage Owl*).

#### 14) An-Zerrin Ruins

We're getting to the completely absurd now, and *An-Zerrin Ruins* leads off the top fifteen. Keeping creatures permanently tapped might be white (*Crackdown*, *Marble Titan*), blue (*Sand Squid*, *Thalakos Dreamsower*, *Somnophore*), black (*Paralyze*, *Mind Whip*) or Green (*Roots*, *Root Cage*, *Elvish Hunter*). Even artifacts get into the big show (*Amber Prison*, *Arena of the Ancients*). But red? Red keeps things from block. Red blows things up. Red does not hold down sissy elves and keep them from untapping.

#### 13) Retribution

Killing two creatures at once with impunity: black (*Ashes to Ashes*, *Dead Ringers*). Killing a creature and bouncing another: Black/blue (*Barrin's Spite*). Killing a creature and giving another one a -1/-1 counter? Certainly black, certainly not red.

#### 12) Goblin Welder

Goblins blow things up. Goblins make general messes of artifacts (*Goblin Artisans*, *Goblin Vandal*, *Goblin Tinkerer*). Goblins do not sit at engineering school, studying the intricate workings of various artifacts in order to retool them into other artifacts. A Goblin would never be able to turn a *Grim Monolith* into a *Masticore*. Leave that transformation to blue (*Tinker*, *Transmute Artifact*).

#### 11) Windseeker Centaur

There's a single color which should get all does-not-tap-to-attack creatures. That color has *Serra Angel*, *Steadfast Guard*, and *Standing Troops*. White and red share first strike. White and red do not share this ability. Plus, green owns the centaurs in **Magic**. Wrong race, wrong ability, wrong color.

#### 10) Eternal Warrior

Ah, the top ten. See *Windseeker Centaur* for an explanation of this pick. In addition, this is a card which should exist for white but does not yet. How's that for adding insult to injury?

#### 9) Bulwark

Not exactly the color of keeping cards in its hand, red isn't well suited at all for this type of metaphysical **Magic** card. Red punishes other players for keeping cards in their hands (*Sudden Impact*, *Blood Oath*), so printing a card which punishes players for having fewer cards, while rewarding red for having more, goes completely opposite red's themes entirely.

#### 8) Storm World

Much like *Bulwark*, this card damages opponents for having less cards in hand. It also hurts you as well. When I think of cards that mimic *The Rack*, I think of black (*Dark Suspicions*). Red damage people for action or inaction (*Manabarbs/Power Surge*, *Impatience/Spellshock*.) Red doesn't penalize players for having too few cards in hand.

#### 7) Aliban's Tower

Red and blocking don't mix. *Goblin Raider*. *Pygmy Pyrosaur*. *Charging Slateback*. *Hulking Cyclops*. *Craven Giant*. *Ogre Taskmaster*. *Bedlam*. *Ironclaw Orcs*. *Brassclaw Orcs*. *Orcish Conscripts*. *Orgg*. *Ydwen Efreet*. *Monstrous Hounds*. *Orcish Veteran*. *Goblin Mutant*. *Mogg Flunkies*. *Ember Beast*. *Okk*.

Need I continue?

#### 6) Glacial Crevasses

Fog, except over and over again. Clearly a green card which prevents combat from taking place doesn't fit the red themes of "Let's all fight to see who's the strongest", "Might makes right, fight fight fight!" and "If I'm bigger than you, I'm your boss." Red thrives on making everyone join the field of battle (*Grand Melee*, *Total War*).

#### 5) Nalathni Dragon

Dragons: Definitely a red theme. Firebreathing: Of course! It's a staple ability of the color. Limited firebreathing: Why not, it works for *Dragon Whelp* and *Fire Drake*. Four mana for a 1/1 flyers: *Firefly* suited me just fine. Banding: Houston, we have a problem. Let's count the number of non-white, non-artifact banding creatures in **Magic**. Done? The answer is four: *Timber Wolves*, *Master of the Hunt* (makes bands-with-others tokens), *Dire Wolves* (which require Plains to gain banding) and this little promotional guy. Can you imagine a Dragon organizing a cadre of troops for battle, so that they make selflessly sacrifice to take one for the team? Dragons get in their and roast people on their own, thank you very much. They don't need that sort of help from other people.

#### 4) Collapsing Borders

I can just imagine how the development for this card went.

R&D Member #1: We need another domain card for red.

R&D Member #2: Wouldn't it be wacky if we gave red a life gain card?

R&D Member #1: You got your peanut butter in my chocolate.

Red life gain? That'd be like giving red a card which allows all players to draw seven cards for only three mana.

#### 3) Wheel of Fortune

Oh wait, that card did see print. Earlier I mentioned that blue gets the draw seven cards effects (*Timetwister*, etc.). At no point in **Magic** history has mono red been given a consistent, solid card drawing spell. That *Wheel of Fortune* should appear in this color shows how the themes of each color weren't as clearly defined during early

**Magic** as some people would lead you to believe. Yes, it can almost be considered chaotic, which would almost make it red. But if you've ever played with the card, you know the outcome is rarely in question.

## 2) Shaman's Trance

I really for the life of me would like to understand how this card saw print with red in the cost instead of black, but I really can't. Black is the color of mucking with graveyards (*Reanimate*, *Yawgmoth's Will*, *Ill-Gotten Gains*), so why give this ability to red? Red doesn't care about what you've already done, red cares about what you're doing right now!

## 1) Ali from Cairo

I don't think that the number one out-of-flavor red card in **Magic** history will come as much of a surprise to anyone. Here's a fellow who can keep you alive nigh indefinitely, by putting you on life support. Didn't we see this card years later as *Sustaining Spirit*? How about as an enchantment (*Worship*)? In the confines of the color pie, there's no rational explanation for the printing of this card, so I'm not even going to try to make one up. Congratulations, *Ali from Cairo*. You're the grand prize winner of today's column.

Next week: What do *Maze of Ith*, *Horseshoe Crab*, and *Recurring Nightmare* have in common?

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*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by *StarCityGames.com*, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



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