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In a Teapot

Mark recalls *Tempest* fondly



Mark Rosewater

Daily Articles

Welcome to *Tempest* Week! This week we'll talk about one of my favorite sets. *Tempest* will always hold a special place in my heart, as it was the first set I designed. I had created cards for *Alliances*, *Mirage*, *Visions*, and *Weatherlight*, but *Tempest* was the first set for which I functioned as a designer. In addition, it was the first set for which I ran a design group.

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It's in the Cards

I actually have two columns this week. One is a reprint of an article from *The Duelist* in which I wrote about the design and development of *Tempest* when the set first came out, which will up on the site later this week. The other, this column, looks at individual cards to explain how they were designed. I feel this will give you a good look at *Tempest* design. Note that I've mentioned *Tempest* design a lot in past columns, so I'm trying to tell stories I haven't told yet. (Although I'm sure there are a few repeats.)

Altar of Dementia—This card came about while I was trying to think of **Millstone** variants. At the time, all **Millstone** decks were creatureless. I thought it would be neat to make a milling card that could be played only in a deck that contained creatures.

Ancient Runes—This is a perfect example of taking a popular card and adapting it. I always liked **Karma**. I thought to myself, "Wouldn't it be neat if you could punish other types of cards?" Artifacts were just the first thing that came to mind. Well, what color would punish someone for playing artifacts? The three antiartifact colors are red, green, and white. Green dealing damage seemed a little odd, and I wanted to separate the card from **Karma**, so white was out. That left red, which worked very well from a mechanics standpoint.

Auratog—This card was actually created in *Mirage*. At the time there was a green 1/2 creature that could sacrifice forests to get bigger. In an early development meeting I made the observation that it was a green Atog. The naming guys latched onto the idea, changed the creature type to Atog, and named it **Foratog**. It was then that R&D decided to create a cycle of Atogs. We designed them and then planned to spread them throughout the upcoming sets. *Visions* had the blue one (**Chronatog**). *Weatherlight* had the black one (**Necratog**). That left the white one for *Tempest*.

Carrionette—This card was created with what we in R&D refer to as a "top-down design." That means we came up with the flavor of the card first, and then we designed a mechanic to fit it. I liked the idea that a creature could sit in the graveyard and then leap out and grab a creature in play. The mechanic was tailored to that idea.

Commander Greven il-Vec—This was another top-down design. We knew we needed to have a Legend for Greven. I wanted it to be very scary and deal a lot of damage. To do this at a

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reasonable cost, I needed a drawback. As Greven was constantly killing people in the story, sacrificing a creature cost seemed appropriate.

Coffin Queen—This card owes its existence to **Old Man of the Sea**. For a long time, Old Man was one of my favorite cards. While trying to tweak it, I came up with a variant that could steal creatures out of another player's graveyard. Because players often want to animate their own dead creatures, I made it so the card could steal creatures out of *any* graveyard.

Diabolic Edict—Another one of my favorite cards was **Whirling Dervish**. Back in the day, it was a total beating against a monoblack deck. Black had no way of dealing with it. During *Tempest* design, the team talked about creating a card that would allow black to have some chance against a Dervish. The result was this card. Ironically, this has led **Magic** to an environment in which protection no longer causes black any real headaches.

Dracoplasm—This card started as a sorcery called Meld that allowed you to meld two creatures into one. Originally, you sacrificed two creatures to make a token that had the combined power for power, the combined toughness for toughness, and any ability that either creature had. This caused a bunch of rules issues, so the card was changed to a creature that has you sacrifice creatures to enhance it when it comes into play.

Earthcraft—My original version of this card granted all creatures “T: Untap target land.” In development, the card was changed from text splicing (meaning the ability was given to the creatures) to simply using tapping as a cost of the activation. This difference is important because now it allows you to use creatures that you've just played to activate it. As most combos with this card combine with token generators, this change proved to be huge. Several years later, **Earthcraft** was banned in multiple formats.

Escaped Shapeshifter—This card was influenced by my love of science fiction. A common sci-fi archetype is the alien that gains the abilities of creatures near it. I created this card to capture this flavor. By the way, this creature originally copied all abilities of all creatures in play. Once again, the rules forced us to tinker with the card.

Extinction—This card started as a joke card called Insecticide that killed Insects, Spiders, and Faeries. The card was then changed to the card it is now, although it was called Genocide. We actually thought of using the name, as it's an appropriate description of the ability: the card wipes out a race. But we felt that the name had enough negative connotations that we didn't want to unnecessarily upset people, so we changed the name to **Extinction**.

Field of Souls—The interesting story about this card is that the earliest version in design didn't say “nontoken creature.” It took only one playtest to realize that if your creatures all turn into 1/1 fliers that can essentially never die, this card is bah-roken.

Fugitive Druid—My favorite story about this card really has nothing to do with the mechanic. It has to do with its playtest name, Enchanto Lad. You see, when I design a card I try to come up with an appropriate name. If I can't come up with one quickly, I just give the card some silly name that references what the card can do. Such is the case with this card. What makes this card interesting is that it started a little theme that has run through many of my card names. This isn't really a theme any of you would know as you rarely see the design names. That said, what's the theme? As I've mentioned in past columns, I'm a long-time comic book reader. In my youth, my favorite comic book was the Legion of Super-Heroes. For those unaware, the Legion was a group of teenage superheroes that banded together in the thirtieth century to fight the forces of evil. There were a large number of heroes, most of whom had one super power. Their names all tended to be in the following format: descriptor-synonym for boy or girl. For example, the three founders are Cosmic Boy, Saturn Girl, and Lightning Lad. So when I was stuck on a name for **Fugitive Druid**, I decided to name it as if it were in the Legion of Super-Heroes. This naming convention has greatly increased the number of stickered playtest cards with names ending in Lad, Lass, Boy, Kid, and so on. I don't know what you'll learn from this little factoid, except maybe that we designers have our fun wherever we can find it.

Ghost Town—Ah, the card that could have been. **Ghost Town** originally didn't have the sentence “Use this ability only during another player's turn.” During development, the team got scared of its interaction with **Armageddon** (lay three **Ghost Towns** and a plains and then **Armageddon** getting back all your land except your plains) and added the extra line. If it was up to me, I'd probably have let it be, but then I'm not known in R&D for having the best ability to judge power level.

Gravedigger—This card's origin is quite interesting. During early *Tempest* design, we were fooling around with cards that had a triggered ability when they were

drawn. This proved problematic to execute (how do you know when your opponent draws the card—and yes, we thought about having different card backs), so we looked at other ways to have a function built into the card. The most obvious answer seemed to make it an ability that happened when the card came into play. At the time we were working on this, we hadn't yet seen the *Visions* file. So, the *Tempest* design team stumbled onto the same idea that the *Visions* design team had a year or so earlier. This shows how parallel design can end up at the same ideas. Also, **Gravedigger** first



Although *Gravedigger* first appeared in *Portal*, it was designed for *Tempest*.

appeared in *Tempest* design, but Bill Rose borrowed the card for *Portal*. *Portal* came out a few months earlier than *Tempest*, so it ended up being **Gravedigger**'s premiere.

Grindstone—This is one of my favorite cards that I designed for *Tempest*. I had been toying around with cards that had effects with a random element. Too many of the previous random elements had been too stark: heads, something good happens; tails something bad happens. I liked the idea of a card whose effect could grow if the conditions were right. Also, I liked the idea of making a card that punished monocolored decks. (I realized that lands would prevent them from being hosed too badly.)

Hand to Hand—This is the card I always point to when I talk about how some cards get used in ways that the designers don't expect. The idea behind this card was "don't mess with my creatures in combat." It ended up being a sideboard card against decks running *Circles of Protection*. (The card keeps the *Circles* from being activated at the time you would need to activate them.) I was happily surprised. I love creativity, so when players get creative with my cards, I'm usually tickled pink.

Harrow—This card, called *Crop Rotation* in design (ironically we used the name a year later), is an example of a good card that I never saw coming. For *Tempest*, we needed a tweak on **Rampant Growth**, so I designed this card. I didn't think it was anything special power-wise, but it seemed cool. This is an interesting distinction. The designers are focused on making fun cards. The developers are focused on keeping the game balanced. A saying I like is that the designers make the game fun and the developers make it fair. This was just a long-winded way of saying that when I design a card I don't focus too much on the power level. If it's too high or too low, the developers will fix it.

Helm of Possession—There's a great story about the design of this card that I can't tell until after "Bacon" (the code name for the 2003 fall large expansion) is released. All I can say is, the story will involve the following words: Gleemax, concession, **Magic: The Puzzling**, marquee, and *Unglued 2*. The current card, incidentally, was one of the first two cards ever designed by Henry Stern (the other *Tempest* card being *Excavator*).

Interdict—My only comment about this card was that it was inspired by **Rust**. Not a card we link to all that much on MagicTheGathering.com.

Jinxed Idol—This is another *Tempest* design that I'm very proud of. Originally called *Hot Potato* in design, **Jinxed Idol** was created as a card that would force interaction. I like to think that when you play **Jinxed Idol**, you start a little subgame that's concurrent with the rest of the game. Basically, it's a game of "who's willing to sacrifice more." Also, this is an early card of mine that shows my fondness for mechanics that give stuff to your opponent.

Krakilin—The original version of this card was called *Creatureball* and cost $\{X\}$ for an X/X creature. Development thought it was too strong and the card was changed to an $\{X\}$ creature with regeneration. The interesting part is that *Odyssey* has a card called *Ivy Elemental* that is exactly the original version of **Krakilin**. I should note that I'm wrong way more than I'm right in situations like these, but what fun is there in having your own column if you can't look back at the few times you were correct and say, "See, I was right"?

Legerdemain—Okay, I might have played a lot with **Juxtapose**.

Lotus Petal—It seemed so innocent when we made this card. And yes, the flavor text was on purpose. It was written by Brady Dommermuth, one of the leads for the Creative Text team.

The **Medallions**—This cycle came from my love of **Stone Calendar**. Before I came to Wizards, I had numerous decks that made use of the **Stone Calendar**. While designing *Tempest*, I wanted to create a cycle of cards that were more limited but cheaper.

Mirri's Guile—Quite often in design, we take a card that we feel has problems and rework it. The card in question was **Sylvan Library**. The problem with the original card was that paying life for cards was very out of green's flavor. In addition, R&D felt that the power level was a touch high. This card was supposed to be a new **Sylvan Library**—it never really caught on though.

Mongrel Pack—Do you like the Symbiotic cards in *Onslaught*? Here's their grandpappy. Originally called Splinter Beast, **Mongrel Pack** was designed as a top-down card. I liked the idea of a creature that split apart when it was damaged and then would attack with each of its separate parts. This was a common fantasy archetype that I hadn't really seen explored in **Magic** (although Richard touched upon it with **Rock Hydra** but used a different mechanic).

Precognition—I designed this card to be an opposite version of **Preferred Selection**. Instead of choosing which of two cards you draw, you choose which of two cards your opponent draws. Originally, by the way, the card had you look at two cards and put one on top and one on the bottom, but it looked clunky when written out. It seemed cleaner just to have you make your decision off one card. Also, it made it slightly harder to completely screw your opponent out of his or her good draws.

Propaganda—This card is a good example of how a card is designed by mining an area of design space. At the time, blue was king of taxing, taxing being defined as cards that forced your opponent to pay some form of cost before they could do something. (Taxing, by the way, has been shifted to white in the current color pie shuffle—it made more sense because white is the “play by my rules” color.) I was looking for some new way to tax the opponent. I simply walked through a turn step and looked at what we had and hadn't taxed before. I realized that other than **Brainwash** (which, it's interesting to note, is white), a pretty weak creature enchantment, we hadn't taxed attacking. Thus, **Propaganda** was born.

Ranger en-Vec—This card was supposed to have banding and regeneration, but banding was killed as of *Tempest* so we had to change it. I'm always sorry that I didn't sneak this card into an earlier set as I think a banding regenerator is really cool.

Repentance—I designed this card first, and then I figured out which color to put it into. The card was neat in that it worked only on a creature with toughness equal to or less than its power. This meant, for example, that it was much weaker against white than any other color. That fact, along with the potential name and flavor, swayed me to white. In retrospect, though, I think I chose the wrong color. If I were making the card today, I would have placed it in black. I don't like white unconditionally killing things. White destruction is much more defensive (what we in R&D jokingly refer to as “don't mess with me and my boys”). This card seems to take pleasure out of making someone harm him or herself. That has black written all over it.

Root Maze—This is an example of a cool card gone awry. The original card was simply “All permanents have summoning sickness.” Seems cool enough. But in development, we realized that it really only affects artifacts and lands. Enchantments don't have tapping activation so the summoning sickness would be irrelevant. And creatures already have summoning sickness. If the artifacts and lands came into play tapped, it would have the same effect. So it was changed to the simpler wording. Looking back, I think this was a mistake. Even if the original text was slightly more confusing, it seemed a lot cooler. While simplicity is important, I think we need to be careful when we let it take us to the point that a card is stripped of its original flavor.

Rootwater Matriarch—I actually created this card because I thought it would encourage creature enchantments. My thought was that it would encourage deckbuilders to play with creature enchantments so that they could occasionally use them on their opponents' creatures and steal them with **Rootwater Matriarch**.



Sadistic Glee—This card was created as a tribute to one of my old-time favorites: **Khabal Ghoul**, which is one of the few creatures with power and toughness in three digits that I've had the pleasure of attacking.

Sarcomancy—This card started as a 2/2 creature for ☠ that dealt 1 damage to its owner if it started the turn in his or her graveyard. During design, we decided that it would work better as an enchantment that created a token because the enchantment would remain around in play reminding you of the damage. An interesting side effect of this change is that you can now avoid the damage by having any **Zombie** in play. This card now encourages you to play with other **Zombies**. See, we were thinking in terms of the “tribal” theme way back in *Tempest*.

Scragnoth—I created this card years before I came to Wizards. It always bothered me that every card had a foil except for counterspells. How do you fight a spell that can stop any spell? The answer was obvious: Make the spell uncounterable. Once I had this idea, I tried to figure out what kind of spell would give blue a headache if it got into play. Blue has problems with permanents. The only way for blue to deal with a permanent that has come into play is to bounce it with some form of boomerang. That meant a permanent that had protection from blue and had some way to end the game would cause blue fits. Because one of blue's enemies is green, and green is the creature color, and creatures have a built-in clock (meaning they make the game end in a finite number of turns), everything came together beautifully to make **Scragnoth**.

Sky Spirit—I always felt that **Thunder Spirit** was an excellent card. But before I arrived at Wizards, it was stuck on a reserved list, meaning it could never be reprinted. Then, during *Tempest* design, it hit me. We could reprint it if we made one small change—turn a white mana in its mana cost to blue. We even kept the creature a Spirit as a nod to **Thunder Spirit**.

Telethopter—This card's claim to fame is that it's the only card ever designed by my dad, Gene. During design, I had a chance to see my dad, and I asked him for ideas for cards. His one suggestion was a radio-controlled creature. From that idea, he and I created this card. The flavor is that you're using another creature to fly the **Telethopter**.

Tooth and Claw—I don't know what I was thinking when I made this card. I guess it had to do with my fondness for **Goblin Warrens**. Anyway, here's proof that designing is hit and miss.

Trumpeting Armodon—One of the tricks when creating new creature abilities is to simply look at spells in that color. One obvious choice for a green creature was **Lure**. But *Alliances* had already done **Elvish Bard**. So I was looking for a **Lure** tweak. How about a creature that could pick which creature must block it? This ability interestingly enough would later lead to the card **Provoke** in the next set, *Stronghold*.

Watchdog—I think that so much emphasis is put onto the splashy cards that people miss the design subtlety of a card like **Watchdog**. It has two simple abilities with synergy. In addition, it also has a very nice flavor that adds to the card. As a designer, I'm quite happy if I can put a few subtle cards like this into each set. Not every card has to stand on its head and say, “Look at me!”

Wasteland—Here's the mindset that went into making this card: “Hmm, **Strip Mine** is cool, but it's too good. It would be nice to have a card that had the utility of **Strip Mine** without the ability to completely hose someone that's mana screwed. Well, what if it destroyed only nonbasic lands? That way it could still deal with troublesome lands without being able to stop normal early-game land development. Yeah, that would be good. A **Strip Mine** that isn't broken.” Oh well.

Winds of Rath—We had a big fight in development whether this should destroy all enchanted creatures or all nonenchanted creatures. (The card came in from design as all nonenchanted creatures.) In the end, I was able to defend the original card by stressing that we want to make cards that encourage playing creature enchantments on your own creatures.




Sky Spirit was an attempt to recreate Legends' Thunder Spirit.

All That's Fit to Print

That's all my design stories for today. Join me next week when I explain why we do something that some people complain about. (It's about time to stir up a little controversy.)

Until then, may you know the pleasure of defeating a blue player with a **Scragnoth**.

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