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Making Magic Monday, April 14, 2003

Jamuraa, the Merrier



Mark Rosewater

A walk down *Mirage* Memory Lane

Welcome to *Mirage* Week! This week we'll be exploring the first set of what I like to call the Silver Age of **Magic**. (The Golden Age of **Magic**, in my opinion, was Alpha through *Alliances* while the Bronze Age starts with *Invasion*.) Why is this the start of the Silver Age? Because *Mirage* was the changing of the guard in R&D. Bill Rose, Mike Elliott, William Jockusch and I all entered R&D just as several of the older R&D members (Dave Pettey, Jim Lin, Skaff Elias, Joel Mick, Charlie Catino) were leaving or moving up to other positions. All of us worked together on the development of *Alliances*, but *Mirage* was solely in the hands of the "new guys."

For today's column I thought I'd flip through my *Mirage* godbook much as someone flips through a photo album. As I come across cards that spur a story, I felt I'd tell it. Some will be design stories. Some development stories. And other stories will simply show what R&D was like back in the winter of 1996.

The Menagerie

Later this week, Bill Rose, the lead designer of *Mirage*, will have an article talking about the set's design, so I'll just do a quick summary to get you up to speed. Back when **Magic** first came out, Richard Garfield asked several different playtesting groups to design **Magic** sets. One group (consisting of Bill Rose, Joel Mick, Charlie Catino, Don Felice, Elliott Segal, and Howard Kahlenberg) designed a set called "Menagerie." This set would later be split into the two sets, *Mirage* and *Visions*.

In the winter of 1996, the then lead designer of **Magic**, Joel Mick put together the *Mirage* development team. This decision wasn't hard as, at the time, there were only four R&D members assigned to **Magic**.

And now a trip down memory lane:

Aleatory – Normally in development, you get attached to certain cards. I refer to these as "pet" cards. You feel very protective. You constantly keep an eye out for any danger. If the card is attacked in a meeting, you leap to its defense. And then you have the "peeve" cards. These are cards that you go out of your way to maim or kill. **Aleatory** was my "peeve" card. For some reason I just hated it. I'm not even sure why. (I'm not anti-coin flip, so it wasn't that.) I tried to kill it at every opportunity.

The development team figured this out (it didn't take a rocket scientist as I said "Kill it, Kill it" every time the card came up.) As such, they would go to great length to mock me while keeping it in the file. At least two or three times a week, Bill would bring up the card and say provocative things like, "Do you think we should make this better?"

As you can see, **Aleatory** won out in the end.


Cadaverous Bloom – At the time of *Mirage* development, I had not yet been on a design team (My first design assignment? Leading the team for *Tempest*. Talk about being thrown into the fire!) As such,



my only chance for design was to fill holes created during development. Now, I have no idea how we ended up with a multi-color black-green hole, but we did. This card came about because I was trying to come up with an area that black and green overlapped.

They both had regeneration, but that didn't get me far. Then I realized that they both created mana. Green had permanents like **Elves**, **Birds**, and **Wild Growth** that permanently gained you mana while black had one shots like **Dark Ritual** that gave you small bursts at some cost. (We have since moved black's fast mana to red.) The idea was to create an enchantment that sat around like green mana fixers do, but required you to make a sacrifice like black did.


I saw the activation as sort of an odd cross between **Dark Ritual** and *Alliances'* **Elvish Spirit Guide**. In addition, I had always loved engines and there wasn't a good way in **Magic** to convert cards in hand to mana. And thus, **Cadaverous Bloom** was born and I began my long trend of making overpowered engines.

Consuming Ferocity  – You take the good, you take the bad, you take them both and there you have... the facts of life. Yes, this is another of my creations. Not quite the winner that **Cadaverous Bloom** was. The idea behind this card was that the creature gained energy up to the point where it exploded.

I actually came up with the idea for this card before I came to Wizards. Yes, I saved it up waiting for a day I could sneak it into a set. Then one day during *Mirage* development, a hole was created in uncommon red and I pounced.

While I still like the flavor, this card mechanically is just clunky. You know how you look back at some essay you wrote in high school and you think to yourself, "Man, this sucks."

Well that's how I feel when I see this card.

Crash of Rhinos  – While watching *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* several years ago, I watched as some man's \$250,000 question was, "What is the collective term for rhinoceros?" And I remember thinking, "Oh my god. If this man plays **Magic**, he's going to win a quarter of a million dollars."

Unfortunately he didn't, so he lost. Let that be a lesson to all of you out there of what happens if you don't play **Magic**. That said, how did this card get its name?

Mirage was the first set that I served on the name and flavor text team. You see, I had just left a career as a writer (I used to write for... well, you know) so it seemed only naturally to stick me on the team that involved words. (The rest of R&D studied math in college.)


Another member of the team was a man named [Michael Ryan](#) who was the editor for *Mirage*. Michael and I were, and still are, very good friends. So, when we hung out, we would often talk shop. Michael had been doing research and had checked out a number of books about Africa from the library. You see, Michael has always loved Africa (he went on a safari there last year) and was psyched to have a reason to study Africa.


Along his study, he stumbled upon a book of collective names for animals. For some reason Michael became entranced with the collective terms. So much so that he constantly suggested them as card names. This was the beginning of a trend of using collective animal names as card titles.


Michael particularly wanted to use **Crash of Rhinos** on the 8/4 trampling green common creature. Thus, did **Magic** get its second Rhino. In all fairness, I can now reveal that Michael had an ulterior motive. He loved rhinos. So much so that the artist of **Ebony Rhino**, Amy Weber, gave him the original art for his birthday.


After **Crash of Rhinos'** art was assigned, Michael called up the artist to try to buy the piece (Michael was planning on owning the original art of every rhino in **Magic**). This was the artist's first set illustrating **Magic** and he was so blown away that someone wanted his art that he simply gave it to Michael (in Michael's defense, Michael later sent him money). For years the pictures hung on Michael's wall unframed, but he eventually got married and his wife framed the pieces as a holiday present.




Crimson Hellkite  – I told an amusing story about this card in my column "[Take This Job and Love It.](#)"

Daring Apprentice  – This card has the lovely distinction of being errataed before it was released. The templating team forgot to include the line that said that the effect worked as an interrupt (back in the day, counterspells operated at a quicker "speed" than instants). Ironically, under *Sixth Edition* rules, interrupts were all made instants, making the original wording correct.

Dissipate  – This is another card I created in development. Its creation was pretty straightforward. A slot opened up for a counterspell. **Dissipate** was designed with one clear goal: blue needed an answer to another card in the set, **Hammer of Bogardan**. After running through the options, I liked the idea that the spell just simply didn't put the Hammer in the graveyard.

Dwarven Miner  – His flavor text has a good story that I already covered in a previous article. ("[The Write Stuff](#)")


Foratog  – Let me start by stressing that I have always been a big **Atog** fan. Before **Maro** was printed, I used to use the name "Atog" online. In the early days, **Atog** was not very beloved. In fact, he would be more the opposite of beloved. He was hated... with a passion. I wrote an article in an early issue of *The Duelist* where I picked him as the most underrated card in **Magic**.

How did this happen? Throughout **Magic's** history there have always been sets that a section of the **Magic** playing public has chosen to hate. The first such set was *Antiquities*? Why? I really have no idea as it was my favorite set for a long time. My best guess is that it hit a theme a little too hard at a time where such a thing wasn't done.

Atog was a common in the set. It was then repeated in Revised at common. For a period of time, it was, in fact, the most-printed card, not counting the basic lands. There were stories of people wallpapering their rooms with **Atogs**. Tech was slower back then and most people hadn't realized that **Atog** was good. In addition, common was an odd place for him as the basic set didn't have common artifacts. So, in short, people were sick and tired of seeing a card that they thought was unplayable all the time.

So why do I bring this up? Because when I first saw this card, it wasn't an **Atog**. Oh, it was a 1/2 that sacrificed something to give it +2/+2, but it didn't have the creature type **Atog**. So, in the very first meeting I brought up this fact. "This card is an **Atog**," I said, "masquerading as something else. It is our duty to bring pride back to the **Atog** fold."


Luckily my love for **Atogs** was not alone. While the world reviled the **Atog**, R&D liked him. So, my pleas were met with much support. So much so that we concocted a plan where we would create an **Atog** in every color in consecutive sets, which led to an **Atog** resurgence, which led to **Atogatog** and the other the multi-color **Atogs** in *Odyssey* (including **Psychatog**). All because of **Foratog**.

Goblin Scouts  – This card was originally called "Dwarven Scouts" and created three 1/2 Dwarf tokens. So what happened? The following art came in:






As you can see, they weren't Dwarves. So, we changed the card to reflect the art.

Grinning Totem  – During *Mirage* development I came up with a theory. I believed that every large set should have what I call a "marquee" card: a splashy rare that did something unique to make it stand out. The card had to be an artifact as I felt it needed to be playable by any player regardless of his color preference. At the time, *Mirage* did not have one, so I made **Grinning Totem**.

I had always liked the card **Word of Command**. This was my attempt to capture the flavor in a way that didn't cause the rules problems of **Word**.

Also, this is an example of one of the many art swaps made in *Mirage*. The art for **Grinning Totem** originally appeared on **Cursed Totem** and vice versa. The problem was the entire flavor of **Cursed Totem** was that the totem did something bad and the smiley totem just didn't work. The other totem art though seemed evil, so we swapped the pieces.



Hammer of Bogardan  – The development team knew early on that this was one of *Mirage*'s best cards. So when we got back the art we were a bit disappointed. You see, the art you all know and love, was the second piece commissioned for the Hammer. We were so unhappy with the first piece that we never used it on a card. In fact, the piece still sits in the art graveyard (the place where unused pieces go) to this day.

WARNING: Mark is about to reference his old career. If mentions of popular eighties sitcoms offend you, turn away now. You have been warned.

This card is the bridge between my career as a writer on *Roseanne* and my job as a **Magic** card designer. Huh? In television writing, the writing staff spends most of their time camped out in the office of the head writer. Much of this time is spent trying to improve the jokes in the current week's script. In Hollywood lingo, "you work the room punching up the beats and blows."

Television comedy writers are an odd bunch with an even odder sense of humor. And you sit in the room for long stretches, so you come up with ways to entertain yourselves. One day two of the writers, Sid and Joel, were telling the room about their visit to the zoo. Much of the discussion was about the visit to the meerkat cage.

You see, for some reason, one meerkat would stand up, bringing his arms up in front him like so:

Once one meerkat did this, all of the other meerkats would copy him until the entire herd was perched as such. Then after some short period of time, they would all stop simultaneously and go about their business.

Later that day, in the middle of working on a scene, Sid rose up in his seat in the meerkat stance. Joel did the same. One by one, everyone else followed along. As soon as everyone was perched like that, we all stopped.


Well, that soon became a popular game. At any time if any person did the meerkat stance, everyone would do it. Once everyone in the room did it, we all would break from the pose and continue as if it never happened. It got fun was when new people were in the room. One of my favorite instances involves Martin Mull (an actor who was a semi-regular on the show), who was sitting in the room helping with that week's show. The meerkat stance started until everyone but Martin was in full meerkat hunch. Martin gazed around the room quite puzzled. He waited a beat and then struck the meerkat pose. After another beat, we all dropped the pose and continued the meeting. After a third beat, Martin said, "Do I want to ask?"




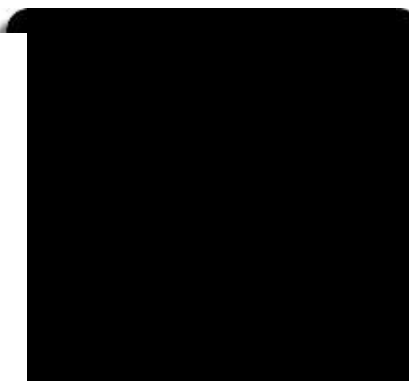
Mark strikes a pose!

So what does this have to do with **Magic**? I'm getting there. Anyway, during my first month at Wizards, I told this story to R&D. They thought it was so entertaining that we started playing the game at Wizards. The lesson I've learned from it is if everyone else does something--no matter how silly--the last person will always do it.


The card is an inside joke referring to the meerkat game.


Leering Gargoyle  – This art is an example of us making fun of something in the art. The card was designed such that it couldn't be killed with a **Lightning Bolt** if untapped. To hammer this point home, we show the gargoyle laughing off a lightning bolt.


Lion's Eye Diamond  – This card was designed by Charlie Catino in his quest to make an extra bad card. Originally it produced three colorless mana. My contribution to this card is that I convinced the development team that the card should produce colored mana as it were a take-off on **Black Lotus**. The card, I



argued, would still be plenty bad. Oops.


Maro  – I wrote an entire column on this card. ("[There's Always Two Maro](#)") Check it out if you want to know every possible thing there is to know about the card.


Memory Lapse  – While this card appeared first in *Homelands*, it is in fact a *Mirage*-designed card. (You can see the "put on top of the library theme" in cards like *Ether Well* and *Fallow Earth*) So how did it get into *Homelands*, a set that came out a year earlier? Well, when Bill Rose came out for his interview, he got sucked into a last-minute meeting trying to juice up *Homelands*. They needed to fill a blue hole, so Bill gave them a card from *Mirage*.

Mist Dragon  – This card is my contribution to phasing. No, I had nothing to do with the design of the mechanic. And no, I didn't design this card. What I did was convince the development to add a third activated ability "3♦♦♦: Phases out."




You see, I thought phasing could be interesting as a defensive activated ability. There was much debate on that suggestion. In the end, the team put it on the card but made the cost very expensive so we left ourselves room to improve upon it in the expansions. As an afterthought, Bill made a blue-red card that flipped a coin to sometimes phase itself out. (*Frenetic Efreet*). Oops.

Pacifism  – The story of this card's flavor text is told in my column "[The Write Stuff](#)."

Phyrexian Dreadnought  – Alpha had an 8/8 (*Force of Nature*). *Antiquities* had a 9/9 (*Colossus of Sardia*). *The Dark* had a 10/10 (*Leviathan*). *Ice Age* had an 11/11 (*Polar Kraken*). I thought this little game of one-upmanship was cool, so I really wanted to make a 12/12. Bill said he would consider it but only if I made something cool. I came back with *Phyrexian Dreadnought*. "How about a 12/12 trampling artifact creature for 1?"


It proved cool enough.


Reparations  – The story of this card's flavor text was also covered in my column "[The Write Stuff](#)."

Sunweb  – This creature was originally designed to not be able to block white creatures. But then we got the following art:



Obviously it was blocking a white creature, so we changed it so it couldn't block little creatures.

Teferi's Isle  – The story of this card is explained well in a [Magic Arcana](#).

Telim'Tor's Darts  – During all of development, this card was known as El Timtor's Tiny Rod. El Timtor and Telim'Tor are both anagrams of "Mr. Toilet," a nickname for one of the *Mirage* designers, Elliott Segal. Why Mr. Toilet? As the story goes, Elliott was talking about football player William "The Refrigerator" Perry. Elliott commented how he would like to be named after a household appliances to which Bill replied, "How about Mr. Toilet?"

This was R&D's favorite playtest name and led to no end of giggling.

Waiting in the Weeds  – I told a funny story about this card in my column "[Squirrel of My Dreams](#)."

It Was Just a Mirage


Hopefully, you enjoyed my trip down memory lane. Watch this week for more tidbits about *Mirage*.

Join me next week when I examine popular mistakes.

Until then, may all your **Magic** cards hold equally interesting stories.

Mark Rosewater

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Tee hee!

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