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Printer Friendly

Making Magic Monday, June 30, 2003

You Make The Card, Too



Mark Rosewater

The "almost" mechanics

Last week, after a lengthy delay (one last time – sorry), we posted the latest vote for ["You Make the Card 2."](#) In it, we offered ten options for the mechanic for the non-creature artifact. In my column today, I was going to explore the "You Make the Card 2" selection process and examine a number of the cards that just barely missed the cut.

When It Rains, It Pours

I should begin by filling you in on some good news. MagicTheGathering.com is doing wonderfully. In the eighteen months of our existence, we have gone up in total hits and unique visitors every month. And the trend isn't slowing down. To give you a sense of how well we're doing, when the site first started up in January of 2002, we were given goals to try and meet by the year's end. We ended up meeting all of the goals in May.



While this is great news (remember the more readers we get the more resources we're given to do more cool stuff), it does have one downside. Features like "You Make the Card 2" that have reader involvement have exceeded the capabilities of our old processes. As such, we are working to find new ways to continue to provide the same features but in a more timely matter.

The end result of all this is that I read the equivalent of *War and Peace*. The extended, unabridged version. You know, if Tolstoy had written about artifacts instead of the Russian Civil War. Some of you might ask why I even try to read all the submissions myself (and as I mentioned in the last week's update, in the end, I had to get some help). The answer is that it is very insightful for a designer to see what the players design. After all, the players make the cards that they want to see. This is invaluable information, and, as such, I took every effort to read as much of it as I could.

In today's column I wanted to share some of the lessons I learned and walk you through some of the decisions that were made to narrow down the voluminous field.

Tell Me What You Want

So what do the people want to see? Here are the major categories: (these are not in any particular order than what I remembered them in)

#1 – Creature Killing

At least 1 card in 15 was a variant of this: "M (this means pay a mana cost), sacrifice CARDNAME: Destroy target creature." So why didn't a variant of this card end up in the top ten? One, it's kind of boring. And secondly, permanent destruction is something that is very important in defining the colors. In order to make an artifact creature destruction card, we would have to cost it so that's it not too good in the color with the worst creature destruction (which would be green). As such, this means that the artifact would have had to been on the weak side and no one would be

happy with that. We want the “You Make the Card” cards to be good, so we purposefully avoided picking cards that we knew we couldn’t push into constructed.

The lesson – Players like when we bleed cards. And they like killing things.

#2 – More Creature Killing

A lot of players weren’t content with killing only one creature. Their cards were like the last one except it left off the part about sacrificing the card.

The lesson – Players like repeatable effects. And they really like killing things.

#3 – Even More Creature Killing

And other players didn’t want to waste their energy killing only a single creature at a time. They wanted to kill all the creatures. And artifacts. And enchantments. And more often than not, the lands. Ironically, these cards are the most artifact-like as mass permanent removal (like the abilities of *Nevinyrral's Disk* or *Powder Keg*) is an artifact ability. You’ll notice that we did put a weird Keg variant (Mechanic G) into the final ten.

The lesson – Blowing things up is just good ol’ fun.

#4 – Make Me An Akroma

Another popular series of cards read as follows: “M, T: Target creature gains every keyword ability I could think of when submitting this card.” With *Akroma* still on everyone’s mind, we decided it was best to avoid the gain every ability artifact.

The lesson – The more, the merrier. Players like when we layer numerous abilities on one card.

#5 – Onslaught Block Mechanics

Many of you liked *Onslaught* block so much that you gave us more cards for it. Unfortunately, this card is going into *Mirrodin* block so all your cool cards that interacted with morph or cycling had to be put aside.

The lesson – Players like for us to explore a set’s theme in great detail.

#6 – Mirrodin Block Mechanics

I knew the various rumor mills on the 'net were good, but I didn’t realize so many of you had seen *Mirrodin*. That was the only possible answer I could come up with after reading the submissions. Numerous cards were shot down because they played into themes that we’re already doing in the *Mirrodin* block. Certain cards mimicked mechanics from the block. And other submissions were mechanics that were on existing *Mirrodin* cards.

The lesson – You guys are going to freakin’ love Mirrodin.

#7 – Secret Mechanic X

One mechanic showed up so frequently I was shocked, for two reasons. First, it’s an ability we’ve never done, so I was surprised to see it show up in such number. Second, that very ability (with a neat twist) was already on a card in the “Tomato” file. Remind me when Tomato comes out and I’ll tell you which card it was.

The lesson – R&D is slowly becoming psychic.

#8 – Damn The Last Vote



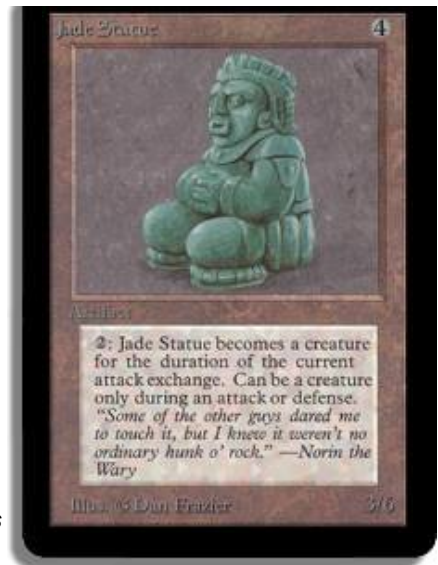
A number of players expressed their discontent with the non-creature vote by submitting artifacts that turned into creatures, most often with an activation cost. As this seemed against the spirit of the last vote, we decided against making a new **Jade Statue**.

The lesson – Players really like creatures. (Something backed up by sales of the *Onslaught* block.)

#9 – Take It, Blue

A theme carried over from the last “You Make the Card” was a strong anti-blue theme. A number of cards either couldn’t be countered or in some way messed blue up. Two of the chosen cards fall in this camp (Mechanic C and I – although I does have a number of other applications).

The lesson – The majority of players are behind R&D’s current blue bashing. (And to those blue lovers out there – don’t worry, blue will come back just like every other color that’s ever sucked at one point or other in the game.)



Making A List, Checking It Twice

After the initial pass, I had a list of ninety-five cards. I promised R&D that I would keep the list to between twenty-five and thirty-five, which in R&D-speak means thirty-five. So, several Tuesdays ago I came to the R&D weekly **Magic** meeting with my list. Note that I tried to pick cards solely on their inventiveness of their design. I did not remove cards based on rules or power issues. That would be the rest of R&D’s job.

Below are the thirty-five cards (with a little censoring) that I brought to the meeting. I’ll discuss each card I can and explain why it did or did not make the cut. (Note that the wording used below was a rough template that Paul Barclay threw together the morning of the meeting.)

Mechanic #1 - REJECTED

At the end of each turn, simultaneously tap all untapped permanents and untap all tapped permanents.

After a bit of discussion, R&D decided that this card was too similar to the *Vision’s* card **Sands of Time**, and would play too similarly to **Seedborn Muse** (and its predecessor **Awakening**).

Mechanic #2 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC A)

You may play lands from your graveyard as though they were in your hand.

We liked the utility of this card. It let you do something that had a wide number of applications.

Mechanic #3 - REJECTED

M, T: Take an extra turn after this one. Target opponent gains control of CARDNAME.

R&D thought this card was pretty cool, but it had two major problems. First, if you had a way to untap artifacts, you could use this card to gain multiple turns in a row. This is because the change of control doesn’t happen until the effect resolves, allowing its controller to untap it and put other copies of the ability on the stack before they lose control of the artifact. With some fiddling, we thought we might be able to fix this problem. (Although it’s not as easy to fix as it might seem.) The second problem was that granting extra turns is a very dangerous ability. Because of that we try hard not to push cards with the ability too hard because we don’t want tournaments dominated by players taking thirty minutes of consecutive turns. We want to push the card chosen for “You Make the Card” and R&D felt that this wasn’t an ability that we would want to push aggressively. Therefore, we would end up creating a card that the public wouldn’t be as happy with as we would like.

Mechanic #4 - REJECTED

Whenever a spell or ability is put onto the stack, if it has a single target, its controller chooses another legal target for it. You choose whether it targets its original target or the new target.

Some of R&D really liked this card. Paul Barclay, the rules manager, did not. Essentially, this card wants to intervene at a time when spells aren’t supposed to intervene. We had a similar problem with the *Unglued* card **Goblin Bookie**, but we let that one slide as we knew it would never be a tournament issue.

Mechanic #5 – REJECTED

If a player would draw a card, instead each player draws a card.

If a player would discard a card instead each player discards a card.

This is one of those cards that looks cool until you start thinking about how it actually works, especially when two or more are in play. For example, in a two player game, if two of these artifacts are in play and a player draws a card, how many cards does each player draw? Two. How about if three are in play? Four cards each. What if it was a four-player game with four copies in play? Sixty-four cards each. And I haven't gotten to cases where a single card causes draws and discards like *Careful Study* does. In the end, R&D believed that the card would cause more confusion than it was worth.

Mechanic #6 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC B)

If a card would come into play with one or more counters on it, it comes into play with one extra counter of each type.

This was another card that had a wide range of versatility. Players had always expressed interest in the *Unglued* card *Giant Fan*, and this had a similar flavor of fiddling with all sorts of counter types. This card was accepted for Johnny to have some fun with.

Mechanic #7 - REJECTED

If any creature has a keyword ability, all creatures that share a creature type with it share those abilities.

The first sign that this card might be problematic was that looks similar to *Escaped Shapeshifter*, a notoriously bad card rules-wise. Imagine this: You have an *Imagecrafter* and a *Goblin Sledder* in play, and you play *Flight* on the Sledder. Then you play an *Embermage Goblin*, which would then fly as well, as the Sledder has flying, which is a keyword ability. So the *Imagecrafter* would also fly, as it shares a type with the *Embermage Goblin*. Then you sacrifice the Sledder. Well, the two Wizards both still fly, because they both continue to give flying to one another, even though a creature that visibly has flying isn't in play anymore. Or at least we think that's how it would work. As Paul put it, there was already one too many *Escaped Shapeshifters* in *Magic*.

Mechanic #8 - REJECTED

M, T: Put the top X cards of target player's library into that player's graveyard, where X is the number of spells or abilities on the stack.

For a long time in R&D we had a rule that said we never mention the word "stack" in rules text. Then along came *Mirari* and we made an exception. *Mirari* taught us that our first line of thinking was correct, and that we had to consider using the word "stack" as a big negative. That doesn't mean we'll never use it, but the card had to be cool enough to be worth it. This card was judged by R&D to not be cool enough. (Note that Mechanic I, Card #31 below, would later pass the threshold when it got retemplated with the word "stack".)

Mechanic #9 - REJECTED

Whenever you play a card, draw a card.

Whenever a card is put into your graveyard, discard a card from your hand.

R&D recognized this card for what it was, a "bah-roken" card drawing engine. Even with an expensive mana cost, R&D felt that this card was too dangerous to print.

Mechanic #10 - REJECTED

Whenever a player taps a land for mana, each of his or her opponents adds that amount of mana of that type to his mana pool at the beginning of that opponent's next main phase.

R&D liked the novelty of this card, but felt that it had a lot of memory issues for not a lot of gain.

Mechanic #11 - REJECTED

You may play spells by paying X life rather than paying their mana cost, where X is equal to their converted mana cost.

Another engine card killed for being "bah-roken." It's like a permanent *Channel* for colored mana. As R&D has learned time after time, allowing players to continually get around normal mana restrictions has disastrous effects (see *Dream Halls*).

Mechanic #12 - REJECTED

CENSORED

While discussing this card in the meeting, I realized that it was perfect for a design that was in progress. Everyone agreed that it made more sense to put the card in that set. When that set comes out, I'll tip you off on which card it was.

Mechanic #13 - REJECTED

Nontoken creatures with no abilities get +2/+2.

While we liked this card it was ultimately killed because we didn't think the average player would play it correctly. Is a *Grizzly Bear* with a *Flight* enchantment on it a 2/2 or a 4/4? A 2/2. Does the *Grizzly Bear* get +2/+2 if there's a *Fervor* in play? No. How about *Anger* in the graveyard? No. How about *Fecundity* in play? Yes. Does a Kobold get +2/+2? No. Does a vanilla creature with

cycling (such as **Barkhide Mauler**) get +2/+2? No. Does a creature with no abilities until you reach threshold (such as **Krosan Beast**) get this ability? No. There were enough questions like this that were non-intuitive that we killed the card.

Mechanic #14 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC C)

If a permanent would be returned to a player's hand, it stays in play instead.

Magic is filled with cards that shut down a particular aspect of the game. Why should bounce be any different? Also, we wanted to make a nod or two to the strong anti-blue contingent.

Mechanic #15 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC D)

At the beginning of your draw step, draw a card.

Spells you play cost 1 more to play.

We really liked the tension and aesthetics between these two abilities. In addition, it was a Spike-friendly ability. (I promise in a future article to explain how a mechanic is a Spike ability if you don't know its mana cost.)

Mechanic #16 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC E)

Players play with their hands revealed.

Players can't play spells during other players' turns.

Each player may play cards in other players' hands as though they were in his or her hand.

Paul had added the second line because without it all sorts of chaos would ensue. It wasn't that the rules couldn't handle it. We were concerned because the average player doesn't understand the concept of priority well enough to play this card correctly. We really liked the "**Word of Command**" feel of the card and thought it would appeal to a certain segment of the Timmy/Johnny crowd.

Mechanic #17 - REJECTED

M, T: Each player puts all activated abilities of all other artifacts he or she controls onto the stack. Targets and other choices for those abilities are made normally. (The activation costs of those abilities don't have to be paid.)

In case you're confused, the idea behind this card (I believe) is that when you activate this artifact it activated all your other artifacts. While this seemed cool, it was both confusing and caused numerous rules issues. In addition, two of these cards created an infinite loop.

Mechanic #18 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC F)

Pay target creature's mana cost: Gain control of that creature. (Mana cost includes color.)

There was some concern that this card might be stepping on the toes of the stealing colors (blue and red). But in the end, we decided it was okay to bleed the ability a little as artifacts do have some history of stealing permanents. We also added an "M" to the activation cost of this card to prevent tokens from being stolen for free.

Mechanic #19 - REJECTED

Whenever any player puts a token into play, that player draws a card.

On one hand, R&D was concerned that there was just too many cards that comboed with this card to create gross card advantage. On the other hand, we don't like cards that refer to "tokens" as a subset of creatures since that concept is really flavorless. So into the bin it went.

Mechanic #20 - REJECTED

CENSORED

This card had two abilities that had a great tension with one another. Unfortunately, the two effects appeared on two different cards in *Mirrodin*. R&D decided that it was too soon to combine them on a single card.

Mechanic #21 - REJECTED

T: Target permanent has no controller until end of turn.

This card caused the following conversation: (Allowing some wiggle room for dramatic license.)

Paul: No controller? What does that even mean?

Me: I know!

Paul: I meant that as a negative.

Me: Oh.

I fought the rules and the rules won.

Mechanic #22 - REJECTED

CENSORED

This was another card that seemed perfect (with a major tweak) for another design. Once again, I'll let you know what the card it is when it actually sees print.

Mechanic #23 – ACCPETED (MECHANIC G)

M, T, Sacrifice CARDNAME: Each player secretly chooses a number. Reveal the chosen numbers. For each number that only one player chose, destroy all non-land permanents with that converted mana cost.

This card tended to split R&D into two camps. Some loved it and others hated it. We decided a card that could divide us that strongly was an interesting choice.

Mechanic #24 - REJECTED

T: Until end of turn, abilities of creatures that include the T symbol may be played by paying M rather than by tapping the creature.

This was another card that almost made it. What ended up killing it was the following unintuitive ruling. This card does not allow creatures with a T ability to use the ability while they still have summoning sickness. Just because the ability may be played using the mana cost M doesn't mean the ability doesn't still have a T symbol in it, and thus the creature is still susceptible to summoning sickness.

Mechanic #25 - REJECTED

Nonland permanents' activated abilities cost an additional 1 to play.

This idea was killed mostly because the majority of R&D didn't think it was all that interesting.

Mechanic #26 - REJECTED

CENSORED

A number of us really liked this card until Paul pointed out how the rules kept it from working the way it was supposed to (and the way everyone would assume it worked). Robert Gutschera liked the card enough that he took it to use on the latest Vapor Ops test, a test we use on new hires to test their ability to develop **Magic** cards.

Mechanic #27 - REJECTED

CENSORED

This card was killed for being too similar to a very cool card in Tomato. (We believed the existing card was neater than this card's execution.)

Mechanic #28 - REJECTED

If tapped for mana, lands produce colorless mana instead of their normal type.

2: Add one mana of any color to your mana pool. Any player may play this ability.

R&D went back and forth on this card. In the end, we decided there were other cards we liked better.

Mechanic #29 - REJECTED

At the beginning of each player's upkeep, that player gains life equal to the number of creatures he controls. Then, he or she loses life equal to the number of creatures target player controls.

As written, this card didn't work because a player could simply target himself once the opponent started out-creaturing him. But that change was an easy fix. This card had some supporters but not enough of R&D felt that this card would play as interestingly as it looks.

Mechanic #30 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC H)

There is an additional upkeep phase each turn, before the draw step.

This card also created a lot of debate. In this case, the people who wanted it won out.

Mechanic #31 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC I)

Discard a card from your hand: Counter target spell you control. If you do, put that spell into its owner's hand instead of into that player's graveyard.

R&D appreciated both the subtlety and the flexibility of this card.

Mechanic #32 - REJECTED

CARDNAME can't be the target of spells or abilities.

At end of turn, you lose the game.

Sacrifice a permanent other than CARDNAME: Flip a coin. If you win the flip, target opponent gains control of CARDNAME.

As written, this card causes a fight that ends in one player winning the game. Note the words "at end of turn." This means that once the card is played, the game will end that turn. We tried tweaking it but the card ended up getting very wordy and inelegant.

Mechanic #33 - REJECTED

M, T: Put [up to?] X target cards from your graveyard on the bottom of your library. Put the top X cards from your library into your graveyard.

This was another card that almost made the cut but we felt was less interesting than other cards on the list.

Mechanic #34 - REJECTED

M, T, Sacrifice CARDNAME: Each player returns all creature cards in his or her graveyard to play. CARDNAME deals 1 damage to each player for each creature he or she returns to play this way.

This effect is something we don't like to do too often and we had just done it in *Onslaught* (*Patriarch's Bidding*).

Mechanic #35 – ACCEPTED (MECHANIC J)

T: Add 1 to the mana pool of a player of your choice.

This was yet another card that stirred some debate. Some R&D members really like it while others were lukewarm. Luckily, there were more of the former than the latter.

In The Cards


As you can see, we had a number of interesting cards to choose from (including a number of other cool cards that were killed for being too similar to stuff in the *Mirrodin* block). I was very happy with our final ten cards as I think they represent a nice spectrum, both of styles of play and of different uses for an artifact. I'm curious to see who wins.

Join me next week when I explain how the *Eighth Edition* ended up with one card from every expansion.

Until then, may you someday see your card in print.

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