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**Making Magic** Monday, July 21, 2003

# Small Change

## A detailed look at *Eighth Edition* tweaks



Mark Rosewater

Daily Articles

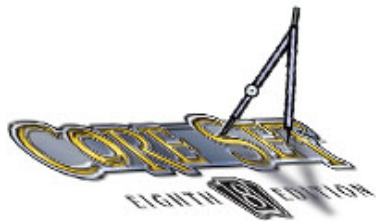
Most of the discussion about *Eighth Edition* has revolved around the larger changes made to the set. This week, I thought I'd take a look at some of the smaller (although no less important) changes made in *Eighth Edition*.

Mon, Aug 11

### Planning Ahead

**True Blue**  
All brains, no brawn  
by Mark Rosewater

Before I get to the specifics, I thought I'd fill you all in on a big secret. There is design work done specifically for the base set. But the base set never has new cards. How is that possible? The key lies in thinking ahead. Whenever a development team works on a base set, they make a wish list of cards they wanted to include but were unable to as the card had the unfortunate problem of not existing yet. In essence, the team orders cards for the next base set (traditionally two years later).



Sat, Aug 9

**Saturday School #38**  
Drop a forest to pay for a madmessed Wurm?  
by Rune Horvik

This means that the *Seventh Edition* development team made a wish list for *Eighth Edition*. Then in the intervening time, the designers created cards from the wish list and stuck them into their designs for different sets. Then when *Eighth Edition* development rolled around, the team had some desired cards to add. This is, for example, why you occasionally see a card like **Fugitive Wizard** in an expert expansion. As a member of both teams, I wish to say both "Thank you" and "You're welcome. I'm glad you liked the cards."

Fri, Aug 8

**Live from Berlin**  
Randy checks in from the World Chapiionships  
by Randy Buehler

Be aware that just because a card goes on the wish list doesn't mean it will be made. There is one card, for example (a semi-popular Alpha card whose color needed to change), that I put on the wish list at the end of *Fifth Edition* development that has yet to be printed even though I've included the card in three different designs. Each time something comes along that makes development push off the card. The card was recently added to "Earth" (the 2004 large expansion - followed by "Wind" and "Fire"). Maybe fourth time's the charm. I have my fingers crossed.

Thu, Aug 7

**The Joy of Decks**  
Ways to use and abuse Eighth Edition  
by Mark Gottlieb

Most of the cards I'm going to talk about today started as cards ordered on the *Eighth Edition* wish list.

Wed, Aug 6

**Core Set at Worlds**  
Will the new cards impact the highest level?  
by Brian David-Marshall

### There's Always Room For Pie

Tue, Aug 5

**Before You Bust Those Packs...**  
Getting the most out of your purchases  
by Anthony Alongi

I've divided the cards today into several sections. The first is cards changed to reflect R&D's latest tweaks to our color philosophies. As I've talked about in this column numerous times, R&D has spent the last few years updating the color wheel (also known as the color pie). We decided we needed to take a step back and make sure that all the mechanics adequately reflected the philosophy of the color they're in. Several cards in *Eighth* are simply old cards changed to the color we believe they should be.

**Howl From Beyond** → **Enrage**

One of the reasons for the color pie redistribution was that the abilities were not evenly spread among the colors. Black and blue were overstuffed while white, red and green each had some room for growth. One of the first things we noted when we studied red, was that the color wheel did not adequately reflect the short-sightedness of red. Being the color of impulse (but oddly not **Impulse**), red

Search

tends to act long before it thinks. R&D felt that mechanically this meant that red should be constantly giving up long term health for short term gain. Red should be the color that exchanged card advantage and board resources for fast threats. This is what led it, for instance, to get the **fast mana cards** (a la **Dark Ritual**) that black used to have.

In addition, R&D wanted to push red's aggressive nature a bit more. This required making more cards that encouraged the red mage to want to overwhelm the opponent quickly. One such card was **Howl from Beyond**. Other than the shade ability and the occasional "growth through sacrifice" creatures, black has moved away from power pumping. Red, on the other hand, as king of firebreathing has always been the +X/+0 color. Moving **Howl from Beyond** to red was just the logical extension of these beliefs.

**Sandstorm** → **Rain of Blades**

When Richard Garfield made **Sandstorm** in *Arabian Nights*, he put the mechanic in green as green represented nature's fury. But mechanically the card never made much sense. Other than **Hurricane** and a small handful of random cards, green just doesn't do direct damage. R&D has always had fond memories of the card and decided to put it into the one color that actually deals direct damage to attackers (specifically), white. (Red tends to avoid limitations to its direct damage.)

**Disenchant** → **Naturalize**

Don't let the title of this column fool you. This is no "small change". Our examination into the colors forced a number of bigger changes. Once such change stemmed from the fact that we realized that the king of artifact hate needed to be green. Why? Because when we examined the green/blue conflict, nature versus artifice, it became obvious that part of green's identity is its hatred of things unnatural. And in **Magic**, that's artifacts. This hatred of artifacts is built into the core of green's definition.

At the time we realized this, green was number three at artifact destruction. (Red being first and white being second.) So green got moved up two spaces. This meant white was knocked down to third. What third means is that white can have a little bit of artifact destruction but it has to be a pretty low power level. (In addition, it doesn't get any in the basic set.) No matter how you slice it, **Disenchant** is of a pretty high power level. In fact, some of R&D argued that white was the true number one artifact destruction color solely because of **Disenchant**. Thus, **Disenchant** had to go.

But R&D really liked **Disenchant**. We felt it served a very important function in the game keeping dangerous combo pieces in check. So, we decided to move it. As green was number two at enchantment removal (white's first), it seemed the obvious choice. For those fans of white out there, have no fear. For each area it loses something, it gains it elsewhere. The metamorphosis of white has taken a little longer than the other colors, but I promise, when are shifting is done, white will be equal to the other colors.

**Flying Men** → **Suntail Hawk**

And here's one such example. When looking at things to give white, R&D realized that white needs to have its weenies notched up a little in power. This led to things such as bringing **Savannah Lions** back. In addition, we realized that white as a good creature color (number two, number one with weenies) and good flying color (also number two) should have more constructed fliers. Thus, cards such as the **Suntail Hawk**.

**Not My Type**



The next group of cards were changed because we wanted to alter their creature type.

### Merfolk of the Pearl Trident → Fugitive Wizard

Blue is the weakest color for creatures. As such, it's the best place to have a 1/1 vanilla creature for one mana. But the former blue 1/1 had a problem. It was a merfolk. And merfolk were on the way out. To head off a swarm of angry e-mails let me try to explain what has happened to the merfolk.

At the same time R&D was examining the color wheel, the creative text folks were reexamining the visuals of the game. In the last ten years, **Magic** has been all over the map in its creative vision. The team wanted to figure out the proper way to visually represent the game. After hours of talking, the answer seemed to be obvious. **Magic**, at its heart, is a game about wizards dueling. The creative had to embrace this core concept.

All the spells, the creatures, the artifacts, the land, the enchantments had to reinforce the concept of dueling. They had to make sense in a duel. A wizard fighting for his life needed to want to call forth this spell or item. As an exercise, the creative team looked at past **Magic** cards to examine which spells fit this new mold and which didn't. One of the big problem areas were water based creatures. It just didn't make any sense that a wizard would summon a shark in the middle of a land-based battle.

While merfolk weren't quite as bad as fish, they did provide discontinuity. To prove my point, let me pull an example that shares two of my passions, superheroes and television. Let's assume you're a wizard with the power to summon any one of the Super Friends. Obviously Superman's first. Then Wonder Woman. Then probably Batman and Robin. Next? I guess Jayna. The ability to turn into any kind of animal has to be somewhat useful. And then? I guess I have to go with Zan. There was one episode where he turned into a tidal wave.

Finally, we come to Aquaman who ranks below everyone but Gleek, the space monkey. Why so low? Because the ability to swim well and communicate with sea life is not that useful in a land battle. In fact, the history of Aquaman in the comics has shown that no one knows what to do with him once you take him out of the sea. The same holds true for merfolk. They just don't make a lot of sense when your creative revolves around land-based magical duels.

That is why **Fugitive Wizard** was created.

### Scavenger Folk → Elvish Scrapper

This is another example where R&D shifted a card towards a creature type we want to support. When the Scavenger creature type was first created back in *The Dark*, not much thought was given to creature types. Thus **Scavenger Folk** was destined to be either a scavenger or a folk. I guess heads won. R&D decided that this was a staple enough card (and remember we've moved artifact hate to green) that we'd rather have a version that supported one of green's iconic races, elves.

### Feral Shadow → Dusk Imp

One of the frustrating parts about working on a base set development team is that you often are not allowed to repeat the card you want mechanically for other reasons. **Feral Shadow** is one such card. It's a nice simple common flier for black. The problem is the card was designed in *Mirage* as part of a three-card combo that called forth the **Spirit of the Night**. For flavor reasons it was a night stalker.


(I'd make a Kolchak joke here if I thought more than five readers would get it.) But night stalker isn't the greatest creature type for the base set. It's confusing and it alludes to something that doesn't exist in the base set.



What the *Seventh Edition* team really wanted was the same card but remade as an imp. So we put it on our wish list and when *Odyssey* design rolled around, I tossed it in.

## Mana of the People

Sometimes it's color philosophy. Sometimes it's flavor. And sometimes its simply mana cost.

**Pillage**  → **Demolish** 

R&D has a strange relationship with land destruction. We want it to exist because it adds interesting elements to gameplay, but experience has shown us that land destruction-themed decks piss off the majority of our players. So, we reached a happy compromise. We'll keep doing land destruction but we rein it in so the deck exists but mostly in a non-tournament viable form. **Pillage** was a cool card but having a second **Stone Rain** for three pushed land destruction harder than we liked. **Demolish** is simply a slightly weaker **Pillage**.

**Demonic Tutor**  → **Diabolic Tutor** 

**Demonic Tutor** is a cool spell. But at two mana it's simply two good. We tried replacing it with **Vampiric Tutor**, but that also proved too good. So, the *Seventh Edition* team added "properly costed **Demonic Tutor**" to the *Eighth Edition* wish list. Viola.



**Animate Dead**  → **Zombify** 

Another card on the *Eighth Edition* wish list was "a basic re-animator spell". Nothing tricky. Not a creature enchantment or something that costs life. Just a black version of **Resurrection** costed appropriately. Because I was one of the creators of the *Eighth Edition* wish list and the lead designer of *Odyssey*, you'll notice that the set has a number of wish list cards.



## Lots of Reasons

The following swaps happen for a variety of different reasons.

**Fresh Volunteers**  → **Glory Seeker** 

To be blunt, we didn't like the name **Fresh Volunteers**. What does that name even mean? They're not the stale, left over volunteers? As this was a nice simple vanilla card, we wanted a nice simply vanilla name.

**Disenchant**  → **Demystify** 

Once we knew that **Disenchant** was leaving, we wanted to make sure to give white a simple enchantment removal spell.

**Exile**  → **Chastise** 

**Exile** was the kind of card we always eyed for the basic set. We liked giving white some defensive creature kill, but **Exile** had a few problems. First, it removed the creature from the game and we avoid "remove from game" effects in the base set. Second, "non-white" is a bit clunky. Third, the flavor seemed to want to gain life off the power rather than the toughness. **Chastise** was a fixed version of **Exile** that answered these three issues.

**Opportunity**  → **Concentrate** 

As I talked about in my instant column ("[Instant Winners](#)"), instants that are primarily used at the end of the

opponent's turn often create more interesting game play decisions if they are turned into sorceries. In addition, mass card drawing (defined as drawing more than two cards) has proven a problem child in the past. For these reasons, R&D has decided as a default (and remember we do make exceptions from time to time) that mass card drawing spells should all be sorceries.

## Zombie Master → Lord of the Undead

As Ga'Aark eloquently pointed out in my zombie column ("I cc: [Dead People](#)"), Zombie Master sucks. In an attempt to right this wrong, we made Lord of the Undead. If we weaken the strong cards, it's only fair that we occasionally strengthen the weak ones.

## And So It Goes

As you can see, creating a base set is as much about the small details as it is the big ones. For each [Rukh Egg](#) or [Underworld Dreams](#) we add is another card subtly tweaking some aspect of the base set we want to incrementally improve.

Join me next week when I dust off my mailbag.


Until then, may you appreciate the little things in life (and **Magic**).

Mark Rosewater

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