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# A Mind Is A Wonderful Thing To Waste



## From *Tempest* to *Unglued* to *Mirrodin*

Mark Rosewater · Making Magic  
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In my "[In a Teapot](#)" column about *Tempest* design from December 16, 2002, I wrote:

**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*).

Well, the time has come for me to tell my story. And it's a good one. But first, let me show off today's card, because as you'll see, it's a doozy. As a designer, I love creating cards that force the player to read it twice because they can't believe it does what they thought it said the first time they read it. *Mindslaver* is such a card. So without any further ado, here's the card I'll be talking about:



Although the card does spell it out, let me clarify what happens when you activate this card. On your opponent's next turn, you will essentially be playing the game for your opponent. You'll have the opportunity to see everything he can see such as his hand. You can tap his cards, play his spells, choose if and how his creatures will attack. You have taken complete control of your

opponent for the turn. The only thing you're not allowed to do is mana burn him. (Or force him to concede, but see the formal rules for this card at the end of the article.)

Now that you understand what it does, let's get to the fun part. How in the world did this card ever get created? And then, how did it make its way to print? Finally, how did it end up in *Mirrodin*? All good questions that will be answered before I'm through.

## A Long Time Ago...

To witness the story of this card's creation, we need jump into the Way Back Machine and head for the year 1996. That was the year that I convinced the lead **Magic** designer (then a man named Joel Mick) to give me a shot designing a set. Joel was wavering when I pulled out my ace in the hole. Richard Garfield and I had talked about him being on a design team (at that point he hadn't designed a **Magic** set since *Arabian Nights*) and he said he would be happy to be on a design team with me if I was given the opportunity. Joel was ecstatic at the idea of Richard doing more **Magic** design and gave me my chance with *Tempest*.

I then added Charlie Catino and the newest R&D hire at the time, Mike Elliott, to the design team. The design flowed easily as all of the team was bursting with ideas (Mike and I had never designed a set before and Richard was coming off a three year vacation from **Magic** design) and before we knew it, we had the beginnings of a great set. But something was missing.

You see, during *Mirage* development, I came up with a theory. I called it the "marquee" theory. I felt that every large **Magic** expansion had to have a defining card, called of course the marquee card. A marquee card had to have the following characteristics:

1. The card has to have a mechanic never before seen in **Magic**. It had to let the player do something they had never before had the chance to do.
2. The card's mechanic, beside being new, had to also be flavorful and fun. It had to let the player do something they would be excited to do. It had to be what we in R&D call "sexy" (aka flashy).
3. The card needed to be useful to any player no matter what colors they played. This meant it had to be an artifact (or in theory a colorless land).

I felt that *Ice Age*'s marquee card was *Jester's Cap*. For the first time ever in the game, you had the ability to look through your opponent's deck. And you could remove cards from it! At the time, the card was very radical. During *Mirage*'s development I designed *Grinning Totem* to be that set's marquee card. Not only could you look through your opponent's deck (that was old news), but you could play your opponent's spells. Now with *Tempest*, I needed a new marquee card.

What would be neat I thought? What could you do that would break new boundaries? So, I thought about the previous marquee cards. *Jester's Cap* let you get rid of your opponent's spells. *Grinning Totem* let you use one of your opponent's spells. What, I thought, if I took the idea a step further. Instead of just stealing a single spell, what if you could steal your opponent's entire turn? What if you could take control of your opponent for a turn? That was sexy. That was a marquee mechanic.

So I mocked up the card and built two playtest decks. And then I started playing the decks with the various R&D members. The card proved very interesting. Whenever I took control of my opponent, I had a little **Magic: The Puzzling** moment (for those unaware, **Magic: The Puzzling** is a puzzle column I did that ran in numerous Wizards publications and first brought me in contact with Wizards of the Coast. The column still appears in *Sideboard Magazine* and is currently being created by our Thursday columnist, [Mark Gottlieb](#)). I had one turn. How much damage could I do to my opponent using his own resources against himself?

I was sure we had our marquee mechanic. But, as they say, something happened.

## Maybe Later

I loved the idea so much I built an element into the story to represent it (at that time I was co-writing the story). I gave Volrath a powerful helmet that he was to later use to mentally enslave Sisay and Takara (Starke's daughter). I named my card Helm of Volrath (It would later be renamed the *Helm of Possession*). I made sure that the card was assigned to a good artist since I knew it was going to get a lot of attention. You know, being the marquee mechanic and all.

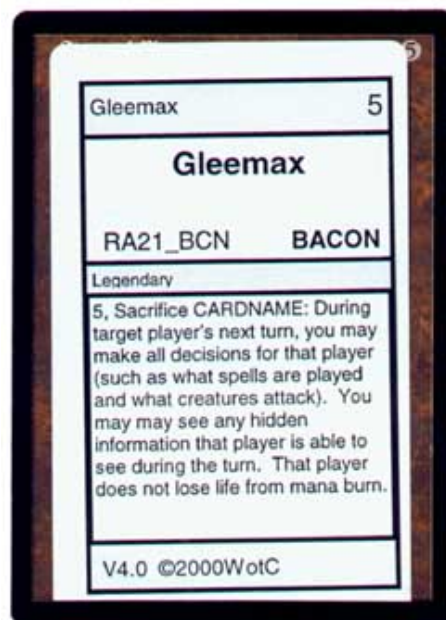
The only thing left was to get R&D to sign-off on the card. But I figured that would be easy. I would just sit down and play with them. The card clearly spoke for itself. And then the problems

began. First was the mana burn issue. Joel figured out quickly that the best thing to do with the stolen turn was to deal a lot of damage to the opponent by tapping all their lands and letting them mana burn.

This was obviously way out of spirit for the card. The idea was to create a card that allowed one player to make another player sabotage himself. Burning the opponent equal to the number of lands he had in play was boring. So, I suggested the card just tell you can't mana burn while your opponent while his turn was being stolen. Most of R&D felt this exception was clunky.

Next, Bill deduced that by stealing the opponent's turn, you could win by concession. Just make your opponent quit. I felt that too could be fixed with a little band-aid, but in R&D's eyes the card was just getting clunkier and clunkier. In addition, they were skeptical about the entire mechanic. It seemed cool, but they were concerned that it would end up being a mess to template. And that was without all the little holes that were popping up.

I kept plugging away though. I knew this card was cool. I knew there was a way to template it. (Not that I knew how. The *Mirrodin* templating team would finally crack this problem with "gain control of target player's next turn".) All I had to do was get them to see what I saw. As this card did not appear in *Tempest*, it's pretty clear I failed in my quest. But as my faithful readers know, I'm a stubborn man. A very, very stubborn man. I might have lost the battle, but I still had hopes for the war.



## Strange New World

R&D seemed uninterested in printing Helm of Volrath. During the first *Unglued* design it never dawned on me to try and use the card. But during *Unglued 2*, fate would point my head back in its direction. I was designing a legendary artifact called Gleemax (Gleemax is the brain in a jar that runs R&D). Now Gleemax has very strong mind control, so I was trying to find an *Unglued* mechanic to reflect this quality. Mind control made me think of the Helm of Volrath. If R&D didn't want the mechanic in real **Magic**, then this was the perfect home. Gleemax would take the baton from Helm of Volrath.

The best part was that I was the development team for the set meaning that there was no one to remove it. The artifact was finally going to see the light of day. Nothing could stop it. Several weeks later, *Unglued 2* was put on indefinite hiatus.

## Third Time's The Charm

Now we're finally caught up to *Mirrodin* design. While looking over unused mechanics, I decided to take a look at *Unglued 2*. Over time, **Magic's** boundaries tend to widen as we break new sets of rules. Perhaps I could find a cool card or two that had crossed over to "tournament legal" **Magic**. While scanning through a file, I ran across Gleemax. It was a little offbeat, but I thought it wasn't crazy. Maybe non-*Unglued Magic* could handle it. So, I put it into the file.

The design team really liked the card, so we left it in the file. They way we figured it, if the card was going to be killed (again) it wouldn't be at our hands. Development can often surprise you. In fact, the development team took a liking to this card pretty quickly. They recognized the coolness factor of the card. Paul Barclay, the rules manager, was also on board early. Yes, the card was going to require a few new rules, but it was nothing the game couldn't handle.

Thus, from Helm of Volrath to Gleemax to Mindslayer. It took seven years, but the little card that could finally gets to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I hope the card proves to be worth the wait.

Join me next week when I'll share some more *Mirrodin* design stories.

Until then, may your opponent make some horrible, horrible plays.

Mark Rosewater

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## Rules for Mindslayer

### From the forthcoming *Mirrodin* FAQ

- \* You can see everything that player can see but you normally could not. This includes that player's hand, face-down creatures, and any cards in his or her library that he or she looks at.
- \* You control the entire turn, from the untap step to the cleanup step. The other player doesn't lose life because of mana burn at any time during that turn.
- \* You could gain control of your own turn using Mindslayer, but gaining control of your own turn doesn't really do anything and you can still lose life to mana burn.
- \* You don't control any of the other player's permanents, spells, or abilities.
- \* You can't make the other player concede. A player can choose to concede at any time.
- \* You get to make every decision the other player would have made during that turn. You can't make any illegal decisions or illegal choices -- you can't do anything that player couldn't do. You can spend mana in the player's mana pool only on that player's spells and abilities. The mana in your mana pool can be spent only on your spells and abilities.
- \* You choose which spells the other player plays, and make all decisions as those spells are played and when they resolve. For example, you choose the target for that player's Shock, and what card that player gets with Diabolic Tutor.
- \* You choose which activated abilities the other player plays, and make all decisions as those abilities are played and when they resolve. For example, you can have your opponent sacrifice his or her creatures to his or her Nantuko Husk or have your opponent's Timberwatch Elf give your blocking creature +X/+X.
- \* You make all decisions for the other player's triggered abilities, including what they target and any decisions made when they resolve.
- \* You choose which creatures attack and how those attacking creatures assign their combat damage.
- \* You also make choices for your own permanents, spells, and abilities as usual.
- \* You can't make any decisions that aren't called for or allowed by the game rules, or by any cards, permanents, spells, abilities, and so on.
- \* If you make another player play Shahrazad, you don't control any of that player's turns in the subgame, but you continue to control the current turn once the subgame is completed.

The following section has been added to the **Magic** [Comprehensive Rules](#) to cover Mindslayer:

#### 507. Controlling Another Player's Turn

507.1. One card (Mindslayer) allows a player's turn to be controlled by another player. This effect applies to the next turn that the affected player actually takes. The entire turn is controlled; the effect doesn't end until the beginning of the next turn.

507.1a Multiple turn-controlling effects that affect the same player overwrite each other. The last one to be created is the one that works.

507.1b If a turn is skipped, any pending turn-controlling effects wait until the player who would be affected actually takes a turn.

507.1c Only the control of the turn changes. All objects are controlled by their normal controllers.

507.2. If information about an object would be visible to the player whose turn is controlled, it's visible to both that player and the controller of the turn.

Example: The controller of a player's turn can see that player's hand and the identity of any face-down creatures he or she controls.

507.3. The controller of another player's turn makes all choices and decisions that player is allowed to make or is told to make during that turn by the rules or by any objects. This includes choices and decisions about what to play, and choices and decisions called for by spells and abilities.

Example: The controller of the turn decides which spells to play and what those spells target, and makes any required decisions when those spells resolve.

Example: The controller of the turn decides which of the player's creatures attack, and how those creatures assign their combat damage.

Example: The controller of the turn decides which card the player chooses from outside the game with one of the Judgment Wishes. The player can't choose a card of the wrong type.

507.3a The controller of another player's turn can use only that player's resources (cards, mana, and so on) to pay costs for that player.

Example: If the controller of the turn decides that the player will play a spell with an additional cost of discarding cards from hand, the cards are discarded from the player's hand.

507.3b The controller of another player's turn can't make that player concede. A player may concede the game at any time, even if his or her turn is controlled by another player. See rule 102.7.

507.3c The controller of another player's turn can't make choices or decisions for that player that aren't called for by the rules, or by any objects. The controller also can't make any choices or decisions for the player that would be called for by the tournament rules.

Example: The player whose turn it is still chooses whether he or she leaves to visit the restroom, trades a card to someone else, takes an intentional draw, or calls a judge about an error or infraction.

507.3d A player who controls another player's turn also continues to make his or her own choices and decisions.

507.4. A player doesn't lose life due to mana burn while another player controls his or her turn. (Unused mana in players' mana pools is still lost when a phase ends. See rule 300.3.)

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