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Before I get into development issues, a few thoughts on mulligans:

- 1) Mulligans in R&D

Do we use the normal mulligan rules in R&D when we playtest? For the most part, yes. In anything that is meant to simulate a real-world environment, including the Future Future League and all of our sealed deck and draft sessions, we stick to real-world mulliganing. Sometimes matches are lost because of bad draws, but that's how the game works. Ignoring that phenomenon in testing would lead to skewed results.

But when we're looking to see how certain individual cards work, we loosen up a bit. Often we'll play the same decks against each other over and over and over, and we feel that we'll get better data if both players get to start with full hands. We often refer to these "free" mulligans as "Schneider Mulligans," named after playtesting patriarch Brian Schneider who popularized them.

Personally, I hate mulliganing. Part of it is that the idea of starting the game down a card infuriates me, and part of it is that when you play as much **Magic** as I do, the time spent reshuffling really starts to add up. I came up with a solution that I liked while playing a few games against Mons Johnson. Worth Wollpert was watching our games and was getting on my case for not mulliganing a sketchy hand. I told him that it would be just as quick for me to lose the game and then start another as it would be to mulligan, but I offered him the following deal. He should build two to three identical copies of each deck I was testing, and have them shuffled and ready so that when I mulliganed, I could simply swap out the old deck for a fresh new one and draw six cards. That way I would make better decisions to mulligan because I'd have no ulterior motives. For some reason he never wanted to do it.



- 2) The Importance of Mulliganing

I think another reason I don't like mulliganing is because I understand how important a decision it is to the outcome of the match, and I get overly nervous. I remember the old days when the rules forced you to keep hands with a single Kjeldoran Outpost. You'd lose horribly, but you'd be able to blame your loss on external factors. Nowadays you have to carefully weigh a hand that contains five land and two creatures, knowing that the wrong decision can sink the game right there. That's a lot of pressure before anyone has even played a card!

Pro Tour winner Sigurd Eskeland once told me that learning how to mulligan better was the advancement in his game that most directly corresponded to winning more. Not learning how to draft better, or how to bluff better, or how to sideboard better, but how to mulligan better. So take it seriously. There is a lot of great stuff on the 'Net—both on this site and external fan sites—about how and when to mulligan certain hands. I recommend absorbing as much as you can and then trying out various theories in actual games.



- 3) What Not to Do

One thing I see many players do is look at the top cards of their decks after deciding to mulligan. That drives me crazy! That information is misleading, nonrepresentative, and can only steer you wrong.

I feel the best way to figure out when you should mulligan is to borrow an idea from quantum physics' most famous illustration: Schrödinger's Cat. Schrödinger's Cat tries to explain something called the "superposition of states," which in essence means that if we do not know what state an object is in, we must assume it is in both.

Using superposition, at any given time the (unknown) top card of your deck is both land and not land. In fact, you can figure out percentages. Assume a 60-card deck with 24 land, and your hand has but one land in it. That means the top card of your deck is 43% land, 57% not-land. The top two cards of your deck are 32% both not-land, 50% one land and one not-land, and 18% both-land. Do you like those odds? If not, mulligan. But don't look. Looking ruins the superposition and sends a false signal.

For instance, if you need three land to play any of your spells and kept a hand with but one, you'd be wrong by the math. So what happens when you decide to mulligan, peek at the top two, and see two lands? Does that mean you should have kept? No, it doesn't. You have to be able to make the right decision every time in the long run, and peeking will only serve to reinforce the wrong decision. If you don't get it, stay away from the poker tables.

That's enough poorly explained science for one day.

The Mulligan Mox

The *Darksteel* card that makes the most sense for me to talk about this week is Serum Powder, formerly known in these parts as "Mulligan Mox." Adrian Sullivan went over some good uses for the card on Wednesday, so I'll just stick to the history lesson.

I mentioned two weeks ago that Autospell Orb started in *Mirrodin* but was later moved to *Darksteel* to become Panoptic Mirror. The hole it left in *Mirrodin* was filled by a card called Mulligan Mox:

Mulligan Mox

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Artifact

At the start of the game, you may remove CARDNAME and the other cards in your hand from the game to draw cards equal to the number of cards in your hand.



Because developers felt that it would be lost in a sea of cooler cards in *Mirrodin*, the Mox, too, was eventually moved to *Darksteel* (opening up a hole that was eventually filled by the under-appreciated Tangleroot), and the functionality never really changed much. Not very exciting so far, I know.

Who, you may be asking, was the mad genius in R&D that came up with this crazy ability? The same guy that invented Mindslaver? Or Platinum Angel? Actually no. No one in R&D came up with this ability; in fact, no one at Wizards of the Coast can lay claim to this idea. The credit goes to a fellow named Gerald Pfeifer who submitted it for the first "You Make The Card" promotion we ran back in 2002.

Randy Buehler actually discussed Pfeifer's submission in an article called "The 'Almost' Mechanics" on this site many months ago. The original ability simply shuffled the old hand back into the deck, which raised a few eyebrows, so someone here simply changed that part to remove the old hand from the game. The new way felt a little safer to us as it is no longer a pure combo enabler, and the card saw

print eight months after Forgotten Ancient, which was the card Gerald was designing for. A belated congrats to him, and a reminder to all of you out there... If you submit ideas to any of our contests, we do look at them and we will use them where we can!

A New Word

The interesting Multiverse comments for this card are not from the normal development field, but rather from the “templating” field. This is where the people who have to iron out card wordings hang out and argue. Below are comments from Magic lead developer Randy Buehler, lead editor Del Laugel, and rules manager Paul Barclay. I, for one, do not envy their duties.

RB 10/7: desired functionality is that this intermingles with your other (Paris) mulligans.

PB 1/7: Is the templating team willing to use the word “mulligan” on the card? Potential wording would be: Before the first turn starts, if CARDNAME is in your hand, you may remove your hand from the game to draw that many cards. (You can do this in addition to taking mulligans)

DL 1/23: Mulligan already has a glossary entry in the basic rulebook, so it's probably okay to use it on a card. However, I think the text on this card has to be more helpful in explaining *when* I can use this ability. The wording given above isn't clear enough. I'd also prefer to word this card in simple English if at all possible -- nothing that looks like a triggered ability or an intervening-if clause.

DL 2/26: Was "At the start of the game, you may remove CARDNAME and the other cards in your hand from the game to draw cards equal to the number of cards in your hand."

DL 6/6: Moved mulligan ability to the end since it's not relevant while the card is in play.

I want to point out the concern that Paul had over the use of the word “mulligan.” Any game term that has never before appeared on a card raises a red flag in R&D because we run the risk that some segment of the players aren't familiar with the word at all. And who knows how they'd react to it.

The best example of a controversy surrounding the use of a new word on a card would be the appearance of the word “stack” for the first time ever on the Odyssey set's Mirari. Many developers felt that the card was cool enough to cross that line, but some people in R&D resisted, saying that it isn't worth putting the word “stack” on a card no matter what, as it will only confuse people.

It's clear which side won the fight, but the predicted problems did occur—I know from personal experience. I was editing this very website when *Odyssey* was on the shelves, and I invariably got several emails *per day* along the lines of, “I just got the Mirari card from a booster pack and none of my friends know what a stack is. What is it?” I think it's fair to assume that somewhere players are opening up Serum Powders not knowing what “mulligan” means.

Now, you can laugh and say those kids were dumb and needed to learn the rules or whatever you like, but the fact is that **Magic** is a complex game. We need to walk a very fine line of introducing new crazy card abilities without making the entire experience too overwhelming. Sometimes we decide it's worth crossing a line with cards like Mirari and Serum Powder, and sometimes we rein ourselves in. As we get better at making the rules easier to understand and more widely accessible, we may tear down even more walls. Rules are, after all, made to be broken.

In any event, we're always looking closely at every word—both our own, and the stuff you send us.

Last Week's Poll

What complaint do you have about your least favorite set?		
It has cards that are too weak—it doesn't contribute enough to the overall big picture of the game.	3369	35.8%
It has too many linear elements—it makes deckbuilding too obvious.	1867	19.8%
It has cards that are too powerful—it overwhelms the metagame and invalidates the past.	1173	12.5%

It is too derivative—it doesn't add enough new or exciting facets

I have no real complaints—I like all the sets well enough.

None of the above—my complaint is different than any of those.

It has radically different flavor—it departs too much from traditional fantasy.

Total

It comes as no surprise that people dislike weak sets the most. Point taken.

This Week's Poll

When you play Magic, what mulligan rule do you follow?

- The official tournament rule.
- The old all-land/no-land rule.
- The 0-, 1-, 6-, or 7-land rule ("Big Deck" or "5-color" mulligan).
- House rules (your own made-up version).
- We never mulligan.

Submit



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