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Welcome to Sliver Week!

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Welcome to Sliver Week! After several weeks of messing around, I felt its time to roll up my sleeves and give you a down and dirty design column. As its Sliver Week, my topic seemed pretty straight-forward. So, how did slivers come to be? Who designed them? How did they change? What unique challenges did they present? All that and more as I bring you:

“Slivers: The Untold Story”.

Slivers began their life in a **Magic** expansion called “Astral Ways”. Now, I don’t expect you to recognize this name because it wasn’t a set designed at Wizards of the Coast. It was a set designed by a **Magic** player in his spare time who felt that he could make a cool set. The important part of the story is the name of the player who designed the set. His name was Mike Elliott.



For those of you that ever pay attention when I talk about designers, this name should ring a bell. Mike Elliott is one of the most prolific **Magic** designers in the history of the game. Mike and I have an ongoing argument about what person has designed the most **Magic** cards to see print. We’re both sure it’s one of us, but at that point we start deviating in our answer. (The real answer is me if you’re curious, although keep in mind that I have the luxury of writing this column. That said, it’s me.) Nonetheless, Mike’s influence on the design of the game is tremendous. At one point though, Mike was just another **Magic** player who thought it would be cool to design his own set.

In the Beginning

The crux of “Astral Ways” was a world split into two. There was the normal world and then a parallel astral world. The only connection between these two worlds was a doorway. A celestial doorway, if you will. The villain of the story wanted to open the door. I’m not sure if he wanted to let the astral creatures into our world or let our world invade the astral world. Either way, he wanted to open the door. In his way was the hero, a character known as the Controller. In the story, the Controller gets betrayed by a sexy but devious woman and the doorway gets open. The Controller manages to shut the door but in doing so gets sliced into many tiny fragments. These fragments become known as slivers.

The mechanical inspiration for slivers was the card Plague Rat. Mike realized that the card’s mechanic was intriguing and very expandable. Imagine, he thought, an entire race of **Plague Rats**. Thus was born the slivers. Incidentally, that name was coined by Mike in “Astral Ways” and never changed throughout design and development. This was not true of the one other mechanic to make it from “Astral Ways” to *Tempest*. The astral ability would later be renamed shadow.

Mike knew that he needed a cycle of common slivers for two reasons. One, he needed the slivers to show up in great enough number that their synergistic (or "linear") ability would come up in limited play. Two, Mike realized very early the potency of the mechanic and felt the need to divvy it up to all five colors to allow him to set them at an aggressive power level. If the slivers had all been green, for example, the entire mechanic would have to be costed much more conservatively.

Mike then made a number of flavorful rares that represented some of the larger, and more important, pieces of the Controller. Here for the first time are all the slivers as they first appeared: (note that I've added the rarity after the name)

White Sliver (common)

1W
Summon Sliver
White
1/1
Banding
All Slivers in play gain Banding.

Right Hand of Light (rare)

3WW
Summon Legend
White
3/2
Counts as a Sliver.
All Slivers get +0/+1.
T: Chose a color. Target creature gets Protection from that color until end of turn.

Blue Sliver (common)

1U
Summon Sliver
Blue
1/1
Flying
All Slivers gain flying.

Black Sliver (common)

1B
Summon Sliver
Black
1/1
1: Regenerate
All Slivers gain "1:Regenerate".

Left Hand of Darkness (rare)

3BB
Summon Legend
Black
2/3
Counts as a Sliver.
All Slivers get +1/0.
T: Chose a color. Target Creature gains protection from that color until end of turn.

Red Sliver (common)

R
Summon Sliver
Red
1/1
First Strike
All Slivers gain First Strike.

Green Sliver (common)

1G
Summon Sliver
Green
1/1
Trample
All Slivers gain Trample.

Lungs of the Controller (rare)

3GG

Summon Legend

Green

2/2

Counts as a Sliver.

2,T: Put a Sliver from your graveyard into play.

2:+1/+1 until end of turn.

Mind of the Controller (rare)

BUGRW

Summon Legend

Gold

7/7

Trample

All Slivers get +1/+1

Heart of the Controller (rare)

3BR

Summon Legend

Gold

3/3

All Slivers get +1/+0

1: Untap target Sliver

4: Untap Heart of the Controller

Soul of the Controller (rare)

2UGW

Summon Legend

3/3

All Slivers get +0/+1

1: Target Sliver gets Astral until end of turn.

4: gains Astral until end of turn.

As you can see, the mechanic crux of the common sliver cycle was alive and well in "Astral Ways". But as you will see, there were a few changes to be made along the way.

Tempest in a Teapot

A year or so later, Mike met Joel Mick, then Lead **Magic** Designer at a game convention in his hometown of Phoenix. The two hit it off and Joel ended up recommending Mike for a job in R&D. This was the same R&D new hire push that led to Bill Rose, William Jockusch and myself being hired.



About a year after that I had talked my way into being given a chance to demonstrate my design skills. The project was a little expansion named *Tempest*. Joel let me pick my team. Mike and I had bonded a great deal in the previous year over a mutual desire to find a girlfriend. (I'd like to note that Mike and I are both happily married now with five children between us.) Mike had expressed interest in doing some design and hey, he even had an expansion he'd designed before coming to the company.


The slivers were a very early hit among the design team. But they needed a little bit of tweaking.

White Common Sliver – R&D decided to remove banding from the game. The first set to have it go AWOL was going to be *Tempest*. This meant the white sliver had to change. We wanted a simple keyword. After much searching we decided to steal first strike from the red sliver.

Blue Common Sliver – The only sliver to remain untouched throughout the design and development process.

Black Common Sliver – The activation was raised from 1 to 2 after playtesting showed how powerful the ability was. In addition, we realized that the card didn't need its own regeneration as its sliver ability already granted it to itself.

Red Common Sliver – As first strike was stolen away, red ended up grabbing another keyword in its color: haste.

Green Common Sliver – Few creatures in the history of R&D created more discussion than the green common sliver. Many members of the design team liked the idea of a sliver granting +1/+1. Here were the different points of contention: 1) This card differed from every other sliver in that its ability stacked meaning that a second copy of the card had an effect. If all creatures have flying, for instance, what does it matter if they gain flying a second time? But +1/+1 always had an impact. 2) The card at  (and remember all the common slivers were 1/1 for 1C, with C representing any colored mana symbol) obsoleted **Grizzly Bears**. After many lengthy discussions, we decided that we were willing to occasionally obsolete so-so cards. We acknowledged that **Grizzly Bears** was one of those cards and never looked back.

Once the commons were in pace, the design team decided that we wanted a cycle of uncommons. Here's our first pass at the uncommons: (and remember that this was going on simultaneously to us hashing out our common slivers).

Uncommon White Sliver

2WW

Summon Sliver

White

3/3

All Slivers gain "2: +0/+1 until end of turn."

Uncommon Blue Sliver

2UU

Summon Sliver

Blue

3/3

All Slivers gain "2, Sacrifice this Sliver: Draw a card."

Uncommon Black Sliver

2BB

Summon Sliver

Black

3/3

All Slivers gain "2: +1/+0 until end of turn."

Uncommon Red Sliver

2RR

Summon Sliver

3/3

All Slivers are unaffected by summoning sickness.

Uncommon Green Sliver

2GG

Summon Sliver

Green

3/3

All Slivers gain trample.

Here's how the uncommons shook out:

Overall – One of the first changes to the uncommon slivers was changing them from 2CC 3/3 creatures to 2C 2/2 creatures. We knew we had a fast environment and wanted to make sure the sliver deck could keep up.

White Uncommon Sliver – This card never changed (other than abovementioned mana cost and power/toughness switch).

Blue Uncommon Sliver – This card also remained the same.

Black Uncommon Sliver – The ability of this card got moved to the uncommon red sliver. This made us have to create a new ability for black. Discard seemed like an obvious choice.

Red Uncommon Sliver – Red lost haste to its common brethren, so it stole the power-pumping ability from black. After all, firebreathing is red.

Green Uncommon Sliver – With the +1/+1 ability at common, uncommon green simply stole the trample ability.

At the same time we were creating the uncommon cycle, we made one last sliver.

Artifact Sliver
1
Artifact Creature
Artifact
1/1

The idea behind this card was that the artifact version (aka the fake one) only received the sliver abilities, it didn't grant any.

Most importantly, we created a mechanical identity for the slivers. (For more on card flavor see Rei Nakasawa's article on the flavor of slivers.) Slivers were all creatures that had an ability that enhanced all other slivers in play. This definition is the major reason most of the rare cards from "Astral Ways" never saw print.

Invading the *Stronghold*

After carefully balancing the sliver mechanic in *Tempest*, we found ourselves with a problem. How could we print more slivers without creating the crazy mono-colored deck? And then the answer came to us... multi-colored slivers.

Here is the team's first pass on the slivers in *Stronghold*:

Mind of the Controller

BUGRW
Summon Legend
Gold
7/7
Trample
Counts as a Sliver
3: Put a Sliver token into play. Treat this creature as a 1/1 colorless creature.

Blue-white Sliver

WU
Summon Sliver
Gold
2/2
Slivers cannot be the target of spells or abilities.

Red-green Sliver

RG
Summon Sliver
Gold
2/2
Whenever any Sliver creature is blocked, it gets +1/+1 for each creature blocking it.

White-green Sliver

WG
Summon Sliver
Gold
2/2
Each Sliver gains "Sacrifice this Sliver: Gain 3 life."

Black-red Sliver

BR
Summon Sliver
Gold
Each Sliver gains "1, Sacrifice this Sliver: This Sliver deals 2 damage to target creature or player."

Black-blue Sliver

UB
Summon Sliver
Gold

2/2

Each Sliver gains "Pay 2 life: Return this Sliver to owner's hand."

As you can see, the gold slivers didn't change all that much. **Sliver Queen** lost its old name, lost its trample and lost a mana in its activation cost.

And then slivers went away for a long time.

Come My Legions



Luckily for slivers, they had fans in R&D. We knew we were going to bring them back. We even knew we wanted to do it before *Tempest* rotated out of Extended to allow a time for the two eras of slivers to coexist. The only question was when. And then along came the *Onslaught* block with its tribal theme. And who was *Onslaught's* lead designer? Mike Elliott.

Mike toyed with the idea of putting slivers in *Onslaught* but eventually decided that their return was better suited to a small set. Here is a complete list of slivers that Mike designed in early *Legions* design:

CW01_MOE

Talon Sliver

1W

Summon Sliver

1/1

All Slivers gain first strike.

CW03_MOE

Healing Sliver

1W

Summon Sliver

1/1

Each Sliver gains "1, T: Prevent 1 damage to a creature or player."

UW01_MOE

Spirit Sliver

3W

Summon Sliver

2/2

Each Sliver gains "Whenever this sliver damages an opponent, gain 2 life."

RW01_MOE

Banding Sliver

3WW

Creature - Sliver

4/4

Each sliver gains "1: redirect one point of damage to target sliver."

CU01_MOE

Winged Sliver

1U

Summon Sliver

1/1

All Slivers gain flying.

CU03_MOE

Looter Sliver

2U

Summon Sliver

1/1
Each Sliver gains "1, T: Draw a card, then choose and discard a card."

UU01_MOE

Ophidian Sliver

3U

Summon Sliver

2/2

Each Sliver gains "Whenever this sliver damages an opponent, draw a card."

RU01_MOE

Mimic Sliver

2U

Creature - Sliver

2/2

2: Target creature becomes a sliver until end of turn.

Each Sliver gains "2: This creature becomes the type of your choice until end of turn."

CB01_MOE

Clot Sliver

1B

Summon Sliver

1/1

Each Sliver gains "2: Regenerate this creature."

CB03_MOE

Death Sliver

2B

Summon Sliver

1/1

Each Sliver gains "1, T: Target player loses 1 life."

UB01_MOE

Spectre Sliver

3B

Summon Sliver

2/2

Each Sliver gains "Whenever this sliver damages an opponent, that opponent chooses and discards a card."

RB01_MOE

Basilisk Sliver

3BB

Creature - Sliver

4/4

Each Sliver gains "Destroy any creature blocked or blocking this creature at end of combat."

RB03_MOE

Sliver Mancer

3B

Creature - Sliver

2/2

T: Return target sliver from your graveyard to your hand.

Pay 3 life, T: Search your library for a sliver card, reveal it, and put it into your hand.

CR01_MOE

Heart Sliver

1R

Summon Sliver

1/1

All Slivers are unaffected by summoning sickness.

CR03_MOE

Prodigal Sliver

2R

Summon Sliver

1/1
Each Sliver gains "1, T: Deal 1 damage to target creature."

UR01_MOE

Vigilante Sliver

3R

Summon Sliver

2/2

Each Sliver gains "Whenever this sliver damages an opponent, CARDNAME deals 2 damage to target creature that opponent controls."

RR01_MOE

Firecoat Sliver

2RR

Creature - Sliver

2/2

Each sliver gets +X/+0, where X is the number of slivers in play.

CG01_MOE

Muscle Sliver

1G

Summon Sliver

1/1

All Slivers get +1/+1.

CG03_MOE

Gaseous Sliver

2G

Summon Sliver

1/1

Each Sliver gains "1, T: Target creature neither deals or receives combat damage this turn."

UG01_MOE

Multiplication Sliver

3G

Creature - Sliver

2/2

Each sliver gains "Whenever this creature damages an opponent, put a 1/1 sliver token into play."

RG01_MOE

Big Fat Spider Sliver

4GG

Creature - Sliver

5/5

Shroud 3GG

Slivers can block flying creatures.

RG02_MOE

Instant Sliver

3G

Summon Sliver

2/2

CARDNAME can be played as an instant.

Slivers can be played as instants.

UA01_MOE

Fat Artifact Sliver

3G

Artifact Creature Sliver

3/3

RA01_MOE

Warlord Sliver

5

Artifact Creature Sliver

/

CARDNAME has power and toughness each equal to the number of slivers in play.

Shard Sliver

6

Artifact Creature Sliver

4/4

X, T, sacrifice: Put X sliver tokens into play.

As you can see, Mike originally created four cycles: a common cycle which was a repeat of the common *Tempest* slivers, a common cycle of slivers that graft a tap ability onto all slivers, an uncommon sliver with a saboteur ability (an ability that triggers when it damages the opponent), and a cycle of offbeat rares.

After collecting the feedback Mike (and later the development team) made a few key changes. First, he got rid of the common repeats. Then he moved the uncommon saboteur abilities to rare. And finally, he got rid of any slivers that didn't have the key sliver feeling ("creatures that had an ability that enhanced all other slivers in play"). It's interesting to note that Mike kept a few slivers (such as the "play as instant" or "cannot be countered" abilities) that didn't technically conform to the sliver guidelines but felt like they did. Sure, **Quick Sliver** doesn't actually grant slivers in play the ability to be played as instants, but does that really matter?

What The Future Holds

What does the future hold for slivers? As a twice-popular mechanic, I feel very confident in saying slivers will one day be back. What I can't answer is when. Hopefully today's column gave you a little better peek into how a mechanic is created and how it evolves over time.

Before I go, I'd like to do my good deed of the week. You see, one of the luxuries of being a columnist is that I got a steady stream of feedback. When I have a success (like, say, *Mirrodin*), I got many kind letters saying all sorts of sweet things. But this is not true of the majority of R&D. So what can all of you do? As I explained in the column, the man responsible for 90% of all slivers is Mike Elliott. If you like slivers (or to be fair, if you hate them) write a letter to Mike via me (makingmagic@wizards.com) and I'll make sure he gets it.

That's all I got for today. Join me next week when I tie up loose ends. (No, really. I mean it this time.)

Until then, may you know the joy of an army of 2/2 fliers with haste, first strike and regeneration.

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