

Aaron Forsythe
Friday, March 12, 2004

Most of the good development stories surrounding the various Sliver cards we've printed over the years have already been talked about on this site. Have a look:

- "Before the Storm" a Mark Rosewater article that originally appeared in the **Duelist**, discussed the design of *Tempest*.
- "Sliver Me Timbers" was Mark's article this past Monday, and it went into the *Tempest*-era Slivers in more depth.
- "One Part Ophidian, One Part Sliver" by Randy Buehler talks about Synapse Sliver, and how card-drawing creatures have bounced between blue and green.
- "Tales from the Crypt Sliver", also by Randy, gives a card-by-card rundown of each of the *Legions* Slivers.
- "Designing Legends", another Buehler number, talks about Sliver Overlord's creation in detail.



If I was a man of questionable integrity, like, say, Randy Buehler, I would take this opportunity to ignore the theme week, and instead discuss something completely arbitrary, like **Magic Online**. But, lo, I am not Randy Buehler, and I refuse to torment this site's current editorial staff in the same way that Mr. Buehler so often tormented me with his flippancy concerning my carefully chosen themes. *Why do you torture me Randy Buehler of 12 Maple Lane?! Ahem.*

Besides, what could I say about **Magic Online** that Dan Myers hasn't already told us in his hourly streaming updates? So I will be talking Slivers here, ladies and gentlemen.

After perusing our rich archives to see what scraps the other columnists had left me, I came up with an idea. I'd talk about a Sliver so obscure, yet in some ways so beautifully obvious, that each of you would slap yourselves on the forehead while at the same time patting me on the back. I turned to Mark Gottlieb and said, "I figured out which Sliver I'm going to write about! Guess which one?"

"Mistform Ultimus," he responded—immediately and without any hint of emotion.

Drat! Was he that smart, or am I that predictable? Livid at my own transparency, I beat Mark about the head and shoulders with a dowel rod normally reserved for determining line of sight in Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures, and then turned back to my computer to write.

The Blue Hill Giant (Octopus Merfolk Wizard Orgg Slug Chicken People-of-the-Woods, etc.)

Mistform Ultimus was submitted to *Legions* development late in the process as a replacement for another card that didn't work out.

Mistform King

4UU

Creature - ?

4/4

CARDNAME has every creature type except Wall.

Once the card was in the file, R&D was abuzz with discussions about the ramifications of what the ability actually meant.

Was it a legend? Yes, of course. That meant that if two of them were in play at the same time, at least one of them would go to the graveyard. Would players know this? A few would, but not many. Editing suggested either reminder text that said it was a legend, or putting "Legend" on the type line.

The development team opted for the latter, and the Ultimius's type line was changed to say "Creature – Legend."

Could it be a Wall? Was there any good reason for it not to be? Mark Rosewater was a champion for idea that the Ultimius should in fact be a Wall:

MR (5/9/02): Prefer this to have all creature types and have the line "CARDNAME may attack as though it were not a wall". I just thinking having a creature be every creature type is cooler than being every type but one. Also, I think it might be fun to put an asterisk after the legend or some indicator that it has other types.

Often in R&D we try to make cards as "clean" as possible, meaning we try to convey the essence of the card with as simply and with as few words as possible. In the case of the Ultimius, that would mean putting "except Wall" and not adding a new line saying that the Ultimius can attack as though it were not a Wall. As you can see, the shortest and cleanest versions don't always win. Sometimes "coolness" trumps cleanliness. I agree with Mark; the fact that the Ultimius is *everything*, Walls included, does have a certain elegance to it, even if it means more words on the card. The Ultimius may wish to reconsider his Wall-ness, however, when he wants to block an oncoming Juggernaut.

Can I tutor for it with Wirewood Herald? The question was asked several times by several people if the Ultimius had every type when it was in your library or graveyard. After all, rules text on creature cards tends not to apply unless the creature is in play. Paul Barclay, our rules manager, came to the rescue by sitting everyone down and calmly explaining the concept of characteristic-setting text. From the Comprehensive Rules:





402.8. Abilities function only while the permanent with the ability is in play unless the ability is a characteristic-setting ability that sets type or color..

That means the Ultimius is every type no matter where it is, and even if it loses its other abilities due to effects like Humility. Of course, the templating team didn't expect players to get that intuitively, so they added the reminder text "(even if this card isn't in play)". So, yes, you can fetch him up with Sliver Overlord.

How big should it be? Designer Mike Elliott chimed in during development:

ME 5/7 much more interesting as a small 1/1 creature than as a 4/4 for 6.

Mike's contention was that, as a 4/4 for 6, the card was too clunky to be playable. Most "tribal" decks were inherently weenie decks full of small creatures, and if the Ultimius was too unwieldy, no one would ever put him in decks.

The development team changed him to a "blue Ogre," meaning a   2/2, and then later upped him to his final stats of   3/3. At that cost and size, he is cheap enough to be playable, yet big enough to tempt certain tribes into trying him out. Face it, 3/3 for four mana is a decent deal in a casual Merfolk deck, and he's no slouch as a Sliver either.



What should go on the type line? Our own Mark Gottlieb chimed in here:

MG 5/30: Can we put Illusion on the type line as well, purely for flavor?

Most of you know Gottlieb as a demented deckbuilder that needs to be smacked with a dowel rod every now and again, but he's actually contributed quite a bit to the game of **Magic** through his excellent names and flavor text. (Perhaps he should take over those roles on **Duel Masters** as well. That game has vanilla 2/2's with names like "Blood-Skull Francona, Death Governor." Weird.) Anyway, Mark has his fingers firmly on the pulse of the flavor of **Magic**, and his suggestion was a sound one. Besides, weren't all the other Mistform creatures Illusions?

Other developers and designers had suggested "Creature - ??", "Creature - Clone", "Creature - *", and just "Creature" with no subtype at all, but the team took Mark up on his suggestion, adding "Illusion" to the "Legend" that editing had already mandated. There was some debate on putting an asterisk at the end, but that was voted down.

There you have it – from design to development to your table. There were lots of questions along the way, but they were all answered, and the result was one very cool Sliver:



Constant Change

Because the list of creature types in **Magic** constantly changes, the Ultimus gains (and loses) creature types quite regularly. For instance, editing recently decided that "Rooster" should not be supported as a type since it is merely a gender change from the "Chicken" type. Important stuff! That means that the Ultimus was a Rooster last year, but isn't any more.

The coolest change the Ultimus underwent, in my opinion, occurred when *Mirrodin* was printed. At that time, the Ultimus acquired a few new types, including Slith, Rogue, and Myr. But the biggest deal was the addition of the type "Human."

That sounds like a funny short story to me: "*The Day Mistform Ultimus Became Human.*" If anyone has free time and wants to take a shot at writing a humorous tale with that title, send it to me at latestdevelopments@wizards.com. I'll put the best ones up in a future column. Keep them short – anything more than a few paragraphs is probably overkill.

For kicks, here's the full list of the Ultimus's current types, taken from the Comprehensive Rules.

The list of creature types, updated through the *Darksteel*TM set, is as follows:

Abomination, Aboroth, Advisor, Aladdin, Albatross, Alchemist, Ali-Baba, Ali-from-Cairo, Alligator,

Ambush-Party, Ancestor, Angel, Ant, Antelope, Ape, Archaeologist, Archer, Artificer, Asp, Assassin, Assembly-Worker, Atog, Aurochs, Avatar, Avenger, Avizoa, Badger, Ball-Lightning, Bandit, Banshee, Barbarian, Barishi, Basilisk, Bat, Bear, Beast, Bee, Beeble, Behemoth, Being, Berserker, Bird, Blinkmoth, Boar, Bodyguard, Brood, Brother, Brownie, Brushwagg, Bull, Bureaucrat, Butterfly, Camarid, Camel, Caravan, Caribou, Carnivore, Carriage, Carrier, Cat, Cavalry, Cave-People, Centaur, Cephalid, Cheetah, Chicken, Chimera, Citizen, Clamfolk, Cleric, Clone, Cobra, Cockatrice, Constable, Cow, Crab, Crocodile, Crusader, Dandan, Demon, Dervish, Deserter, Devil, Devouring-Deep, Dinosaur, Djinn, Dog, Doppelganger, Dragon, Dragonfly, Drake, Drill-Sergeant, Drone, Druid, Dryad, Dwarf, Eater, Eel, Effigy, Efreet, Egg, Elder, Elemental, Elephant, Elf, El-Hajjaj, Enchantress, Entity, Erne, Essence, Exorcist, Faerie, Fallen, Farmer, Ferret, Fiend, Fish, Flagbearer, Flying-Men, Force, Fox, Frog, Frostbeast, Fungus, Fungusaur, Gaea's-Avenger, Gaea's-Liege, Gargoyle, Gatekeeper, General, Ghost, Ghoul, Giant, Gnome, Goat, Goblin, Golem, Gorgon, Graveborn, Gremlin, Griffin, Guardian, Gus, Gypsy, Hag, Harlequin, Hell's-Caretaker, Heretic, Hero, Hipparion, Hippo, Homarid, Hornet, Horror, Horse, Horseman, Hound, Human, Hunter, Hydra, Hyena, Illusion, Imp, Incarnation, Infernal-Denizen, Inquisitor, Insect, Island-Fish, Jackal, Jellyfish, Kavu, Keeper, Kelp, King, Kithkin, Knight, Kobold, Kraken, Lady-of-Proper-Etiquette, Leech, Legend, Legionnaire, Lemure, Leper, Leviathan, Lhurgoyf, Lichentrophe, Lcid, Lion, Lizard, Lord, Lurker, Lycanthrope, Mage, Maggot, Maiden, Mammoth, Manticore, Mantis, Marid, Martyr, Master, Medusa, Meerkat, Mercenary, Merchant, Merfolk, Mindsucker, Minion, Minor, Minotaur, Miracle-Worker, Mist, Mistfolk, Mob, Mold-Demon, Monger, Mongoose, Monkey, Monster, Mosquito, Mummy, Murk-Dwellers, Mutant, Myr, Mystic, Nameless-Race, Narwhal, Necrosavant, Nekrataal, Niall-Silvain, Nightmare, Nightstalker, Noble, Nomad, Octopus, Ogre, Ooze, Orb, Orc, Orgg, Ouphe, Ox, Oyster, Paladin, Peacekeeper, Pegasus, Pentavite, People-of-the-Woods, Pest, Phantasm, Phelddagrif, Phoenix, Pig, Pikemen, Pirate, Pixie-Queen, Plant, Poison-Snake, Poltergeist, Pony, Preacher, Priest, Prism, Pyknite, Rabbit, Raider, Ranger, Rat, Rebel, Reflection, Rhino, Robber, Roc, Rock-Sled, Rogue, Rukh, Sage, Salamander, Sand, Saproling, Satyr, Scavenger, Scorpion, Scout, Serf, Serpent, Shade, Shaman, Shapeshifter, Shark, Sheep, Ship, Shyft, Sindbad, Singing-Tree, Sister, Skeleton, Slith, Sliver, Slug, Smith, Snake, Soldier, Sorceress, Spawn, Speaker, Specter, Spellshaper, Sphinx, Spider, Spike, Spirit, Sponge, Sprite, Spuzzem, Spy, Squire, Squirrel, Stangg-Twin, Starfish, Stone, Strider, Survivor, Swarm, Tactician, Tarpan, Taskmaster, Tetravite, Thief, The-Biggest-Baddest-Nastiest-Scariest-Creature-You'll-Ever-See, Thopter, Thrull, Thundermare, Tiger, Titan, Toad, Tombspawn, Tortoise, Townsfolk, Tracker, Treefolk, Troll, Turtle, Twin, Uncle-Istvan, Undead, Unicorn, Vampire, Vedalken, Viashino, Villain, Viper, Volver, Vulture, Walking-Dead, Wall, War-Rider, Warrior, Warthog, Wasp, Wave, Whale, Whippoorwill, Wight, Wilitigo, Wildebeest, Will-o'-the-Wisp, Wirefly, Witch, Wizard, Wolf, Wolverine, Wolverine-Pack, Wolves-of-the-Hunt, Wombat, Wood, Worm, Wraith, Wretched, Wurm, Yeti, Zombie.

Last Week's Poll

Do you enjoy reading about the development of cards?		
Yes. I enjoy the behind-the-scenes look at the development process.	5295	55.7%
Sort of. It's nice once in a while.	3605	37.9%
No. This aspect of the game's creation does not excite me.	612	6.4%
Total	9512	100.0%

Great! I'll mix it up from time to time, but until I've been here a while and acquired lots of dirty secrets, I'll be sticking to what I know.

This Week's Poll

Since Mistform Ultimius is a Wall, let's talk about Walls.

What set did your favorite Wall first appear in?

- Alpha (Wall of Swords, Wall of Air, Living Wall, etc.)
- Early expansions (Carnivorous Plant, Wall of Heat, Wall of Spears, etc.)
- Ice Age* block (Illusionary Wall, Glacial Wall, Shield Sphere, etc.)
- Mirage* block (Wall of Roots, Floodgate, Mindbender Spores, etc.)

- Tempest* block (Wall of Blossoms, Shifting Wall, Wall of Nets, etc.)
- Urza's* block (Fog Bank, Wall of Junk, Mobile Fort, etc.)
- Masques* block (Vine Trellis, Flowstone Wall, Stinging Barrier, etc.)
- Invasion* block (Jungle Barrier, Prison Barricade, Sunscape Familiar)
- Odyssey* block (Angelic Wall, Mirror Wall, Pitchstone Wall)
- Onslaught* block (Wall of Hope, Wall of Deceit, Mistform Ultimius, etc.)
- Mirrodin* block (Steel Wall, Psychic Membrane, Infested Roothold)
- None – Walls are dumb.

Submit

Aaron may be reached at latestdevelopments@wizards.com.

© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

