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Friday, April 02, 2004

Last week I talked about cards we undervalued in constructed that subsequently ended up a little better than we'd have liked. This week I'll do the opposite, and show you *Darksteel* cards we "caught" in development. Granted, some of these cards were obviously busted and I'm not patting us on the back for tweaking them, but this will be a nice comparison between what design puts into a set and what development spits out.

## Turn the Tables

Turn the Tables is a bad card, no doubt about it. Sure, it has some decent uses, and sometimes can do what the overpowered Kor Chant from *Exodus* did back in the day. But the card actually started out a *tad* bit cheaper:

```
RW06_LET
[Burner]
WW
Instant
All combat damage that would be dealt to you this turn is
instead dealt to target creature.
WW 1/15: Test me in constructed!
```

Worth had the right idea. The card was too cheap and needed to be put through the wringer. Note that the original version allowed the caster to redirect the damage to *any* creature, not just one that was attacking.



I remember playing games against this card as written, and it was extremely annoying. With these, Wrath of God, and Decree of Justice, it felt that you could never ever hope to beat a white deck by attacking. The concern wasn't just for high-level tournaments, either; cards like these are frustrating to players of all levels when they're pushed this hard.

As the comments below show, Randy Buehler and Brian Schneider (and Brady Dommermuth) were both put off by the card, but lead developer Henry Stern was unconvinced. Henry's changes were slow and gradual.

RB 2/20: I think there's an interesting Con card under here somewhere, but this version seems like we're giving away too much. Instead of fog maybe you just prevent combat damage from one creature or one source.

bs 2/20: agree with randy... seems like too dramatic an effect for too little a cost.

BD 2/23/03: As Charlie put it, you attack me w/ two 5/5s, I kill one and Fog. Yikes. One fix is to redirect the damage only to the creature(s) that dealt it. Compare Repentance, Wave of Reckoning.

HS 2/24 Raised CC to 1WW, may still be too good, but we want to see it tested here.

RB 2/27: I would rather see white redirect all the damage from one target creature. Maybe 2-mana, redirect all the damage from target creature to target creature? Basically, I think there's an interesting Con card here but full fogs are too annoying in Constructed for my tastes

HS 3/1 switched to just targeting attacking creatures

Randy's "full fogs are annoying" comment is understandable when you remember that while this set was in development, Moment's Peace was rearing its foggy head in the real world full-bore.

The little changes proved unsatisfactory to the card's critics (a camp I put myself firmly in), and Henry had to let the card go.

HS 3/31 I guess enough people hate this card so much that we should change it

The card ended up costing **3\*\*\*** and almost certainly out of high-level tournament play. A casualty, sure, but white control doesn't really need help at that level.

## Tangle Spider

There are no great stories with this card, but the original is pretty funny:

CG04\_LET

Quick Spider

4GG

Creature -

5/4

You may play ~ any time you could play an instant.

CN may block as if it had flying.

hs 2/1 : a beating in limited

The actual printed version is a decent trick in limited (one that I have fallen victim to more than I should, for sure). The submitted version would have been an absolute wrecking ball.

Henry commented:

HS 2/7 lowered power by 1 because a) this guy was a total beating in limited, and b) spiders are not usually power&gt;toughness

Over the development life of the set, the power was lowered once more to keep green from having too many gigantic guys at common (counting Tangle Golem as green). The end result is a fine one, as the card is still very playable:



## Trinisphere

Good ol' "Nothing's Cheap." This was one of the first cards I latched onto for deckbuilding in the FFL. It is interesting that whereas *Mirrodin's* Chalice of the Void was created with its implication on Type 1 fully in mind, Nothing's Cheap was created with no desire to impact any format at all, just to create an interesting "build around me" card. The first version certainly was "interesting":

RA22\_LET

Nothing's Cheap

2

Artifact

All spells that cost less than four mana cost four mana. Additional mana in the cost is colorless.

The card rightfully worried many people.

BD 2/4/03: Who loves this card? Yucky. bs 2/4: not a big fan either... I believe Tyler likes it though. tb 2/6: I liked a card where EVERYTHING is four, including things that cost more, not just things that cost less. Now, that might not be doable... HS 2/10 Team felt CC was silly at o2, raised to o4. This seems like an interesting hose vs weenies to us.

At four mana, the card was showing up internally in land destruction decks. Many opponents were unable to cast any spells past turn three or four, and that made for some horrendous play experiences.

RB 2/20: this card seems dumb. It's something like 'flip a coin and if you win you have a Nether Void' but the people who like coin flips don't like Nether Void so no one is happy and people subjected to it are miserable.

HS 3/1 While the team recognizes the concerns above, we would like to see this card tested more, added 'as long as' clause to give people another out (think the land)

Randy's comment above basically meant that the card acted like Nether Void against some opponents and did nothing against others (those with decks full of expensive spells), meaning half the time one player would be really unhappy with the card. Henry countered by saying it needed more testing, and that if the card became dominant, there were oddball answers like Blinkmoth Well available.

As playtesting continued, the card continually proved to be a headache. How could you beat a land destruction deck that dropped a Nothing's Cheap when Oxidize cost four? And your theoretical Blinkmoth Well would be taken out by LD long before it could do anything useful. So...

bs 3/12: we need to determine where this card should be... we may want to test this at 5 to see if it's still interesting (this is the case with many cards -- we should start testing things at other costs to compare and contrast).

bs 3/24: let's test this at 5...

Rb 3/25: I too would like to see this tested at 5

HS 3/28 team happy to test at 5. but we REALLY like the symmetry between casting cost and restrictions. Not sure that it is worth doing at non 4 casting cost

Symmetry did prevail in the long run, but the all the numbers on the card dropped from 4 to 3. It was amazing how much more "fair" having all spells cost 3 felt than 4 did.

[Orb of Oppression]

o3

Artifact

As long as CARDNAME is untapped, spells with converted mana cost 0 cost o3 more to play, spells with converted mana cost 1 cost o2 more to play, and spells with converted mana cost 2 cost o1 more to play.

DL 6/6: Note that this card stacks very well. With two in play, Savannah Lions costs five and Spellbook six.

Give a round of applause to our lead editor, Del Laugel. She noticed that this template didn't really do what the card was intended to do, so she shopped around some alternatives. Although the card as printed needed reminder text, it made the intent of the card very clear and kept the intended functionality:



## Mana Assistant Producer

Take a look at the following number:

```
CA14_LET
[Mana Asst. Producer]
2
Artifact
Whenever a player plays a spell, you may put a charge counter on ~.
Sacrifice ~: Add X colorless mana to your mana pool, where X is the number of charge counters on ~.
```

Come on now. This card is the Forgotten Ancient of mana. Any time *anyone* plays a spell, you get a counter that you can redeem for a mana later on. I remember playing a few games against Brian Schneider when he had a deck with this card in it and it was *absurd*, especially when he played the second one. We'd both go about our business with his accumulating counters all the while, then FOOM, round about turn 5 or 6 the sky would fall. This card seems like it would be especially silly in Type 1.

Some cards aren't worth saving. To make them fair, you'd have to raise the cost to uncomfortable levels. To be fair, some cards are so interesting that they're still worth printing at 7 mana. Mana Assistant Producer was not that card.

A glance ahead in time to the file a month later reveals:

```
CA14_LET
[HOLE]
was mana assistant producer
```

Excellent! And a month later than that shows:

```
CA14
[Specter Claws]
o1
Artifact - Equipment
Equipped creature gets +1/+0. Whenever equipped creature deals combat damage to an opponent, that player discards a card.
Equip o1 ({o1}): Attach to target creature you control. Equip only as a sorcery. This card comes into play unattached and stays in play if the creature leaves play.)
```

What?! Specter's Shroud was common? And cost 1? Alas, that's a story for another day...

## Last Week's Poll

Which card do you wish we never printed?		
None – all these cards are fine!	6771	43.8%
Astral Slide	2090	13.5%
Exalted Angel	1843	11.9%
Decree of Justice	1259	8.2%
Akroma's Vengeance	1142	7.4%
Eternal Dragon	926	6.0%
Lightning Rift	651	4.2%
Slice and Dice	500	3.2%
Starstorm	265	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15447</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

That's great stuff. As a player, I never had any problems with the cards Wizards put out. But now that I'm on the other side of the fence, I have to be wary of us making too many cards that frustrate large segments of the audience. I'm glad to see that many of you see no problem with any of these cards, and that no one card was the clear egregious one. (Of the chosen cards, I had Exalted Angel pegged as the winner. Close. Henry Stern actually said Astral Slide, which I found hard to believe. Of course, Henry's been developing cards for a long time and knows his audience!)

## This Week's Poll

**When you build your own casual/fun decks, which of these color combinations do you like the best?**

- ⚡ / ♠
- ♠ / ♣
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- ♣ / ♠
- I don't build casual/fun decks.

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