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This article is going to cover a lot of bases. Think of it as me clearing off my desk in preparation for *Fifth Dawn* previews (which start on Monday!).

Today's topics will be:

- I. Which Ten Cards Answers
- II. The Day Mistform Ultimus Became Human
- III. Reader Mail
- IV: Random Decklists
- V. Currently in Development
- VI. *Fifth Dawn*
- VII. The Usual Poll Stuff

Enjoy!

Section I: Which Ten Cards Answers

In my column two weeks ago, I presented ten different sets of developer comments from our Multiverse card database. Armed only with the knowledge that each of the ten became a *Darksteel* card, I gave you the task of deciphering which card each set of comments referred to. Do you have your answers in front of you? Because here are mine:

Card #1

"Timmy's eyes just bugged..."

"Timmy" is the generic name we give to players that like big, splashy effects (as opposed to his evil brother "Spike" who usually prefers streamlined efficiency). What rare *Darksteel* card that involves +1/+1 counters does Timmy like? Ageless Entity! I can see it now, armed with a Fireshrieker and an Armadillo Cloak...

Card #2

"[T]his is such a swingy card in Limited that I think it might want to be uncommon..."

We often use the term "swingy" to refer to cards that can turn the momentum of games single-handedly. The card in question, Test of Faith, does just that. You thought it was ok to attack into an untapped Spikeshot Goblin with your Myr Enforcer? You lose! Randy's intuition to move the card from common to uncommon was sound.

Card #3

"...I don't understand black stealing equipment at all. a) black doesn't 'steal' things, b) black should have trouble dealing with artifacts..."

While black did end up getting a card in *Darksteel* that can steal equipment (Murderous Spoils), the card in question did not stay black. Carry Away was made into a blue enchantment shortly after the quoted comments were entered into the card database.

Card #4

"This is going to cause work in MTGO..."

If you read this website regularly, you know the answer to this one is Vedalken Engineer -- Dan Myers discussed it in this article. Programmer Alan Comer is still bitter about this card's existence.

Card #5

"...it hoses pro-red because it says 'can't be prevented' :)..."

Flamebreak's original wording said something akin to "This damage cannot be prevented," as opposed to the current "can't be regenerated" clause. The original wording led to unintuitive interactions with cards with protection from red, like Silver Knight. The original Flamebreak would kill a Silver Knight because (a) the spell doesn't target the Knight, and (b) the Knight's protection wouldn't prevent the damage from Flamebreak. We figured few people would get that right (few did here, for sure), so we changed it. That interaction, by the way, is what has prevented us from doing a creature whose combat damage can't be prevented.

Card #6

"...repeat Sewer Rats?..."

This one is pretty easy. Grimclaw Bats, the Sewer-Rats-esque *Darksteel* common, gained and lost flying several times as the development team wrestled with the various colors' power levels in limited play.

Card #7

"This fits better into white vs. black as opposed to green vs. black..."

The flavorful rule-bending card referred to in the comments is Purge, aka "Anti-Terror." Some players may find it strange that white would get such a straightforward creature destruction spell. Trust me, that's a lot less weird than how the card was designed. That's right, Purge came into development as a green card. While it is true that green, like white, is an enemy of black and that green has no trouble killing artifact creatures, the idea of a green card destroying a black creature gave many developers (myself included) the willies. It felt much better to us in white, since white historically has had situational pinpoint creature control cards, like Chastise and Arrest.

Card #8

"...this guy should not be common, if he even is allowed to exist at all..."

Another easy one. Uncommon, creature, charge counters, sac effect? Coretapper all the way. My silly-combo-lovin' alter ego is glad Henry let him exist after all.

Card #9

"Do more coffee cards..."

The term "coffee card" refers to the little punch card you get when you go to Starbucks regularly. Each time you buy a coffee, you get a hole punched, and after you get ten punches, you get another free coffee. Which *Darksteel* card works like that? Arcane Spyglass. After you "buy" three cards, you get a fourth card free. Much to Bill's chagrin, coffee cards are not really a theme in the set.

Card #10

"I think I just chucked Leveler and found a new guy to Stifle. :)"

Everyone got this one, right? Eater of Days! Mmmm... days....

Section II: The Day Mistform Ultimus Became Human

In my column on Mistform Ultimus, I asked readers to send in little stories about what happened the day *Mirrodon* was released and the Ultimus had "Human" added to his all-inclusive list of creature types. I got about a dozen good replies, including everything from a poem to a strange tale involving Captain Planet and Richard Nixon. But below are my two favorites. The first is a first-person look into the tortured mind of the Ultimus by Christopher Hearn. (Christopher gets extra props for mentioning my favorite creature type, sand.) The second is a lighter comedy piece by a human named "Fin." Enjoy.

The Day Mistform Ultimus Became Human

by Christopher Hearn

I hunger.

I have eaten Advisor. Ancestor. Brother. Bureaucrat. Deserter. Flagbearer. Lady-of-Proper-Etiquette. Rebel. Sister. Twin.

I remember the day. The first time. I scrounged around. Looking for that which would fulfill me. I heard a clucking off in the distance.

I have eaten Chicken. Cow. Fungus. Goat. Jellyfish. Kelp. Sheep. Worm.

I became a chicken. I was frightened. I knew what I was. And yet. Now. I was more. I was me. I was chicken.

I have eaten Aladdin. Ali-Baba. Ali-from-Cairo. Gus. Sindbad. Uncle-Istvan.

I hunger. I stalk prey I've never tasted before. I can smell them. Them which are not me.

I have eaten Ambush-Party. Caravan. Carriage. Prism. Reflection. Rock-Sled. Sand. Sponge. Stone. Survivor. Wall. Wave. Wood.

I see them before me. In the dark. A pair. The larger says to the smaller, "And that my son is the moral of the Mistform Ultimus: you are what you eat."

I pounce.

I have eaten Aborath. Albatross. Assembly-Worker. Ball-Lightning. Brushwagg. Dandan. Effigy. Ferret. Nekrataal. Pyknite. Wretched.

I have eaten Human.

The Day Mistform Ultimus Became Human

by Fin

The alarm rang for the fifth time. Ultimus slammed the alarm with his tendril/claw/arm/pseudopod and smashed it. Immediately afterwards, the game checked for state-based effects and all small appliances that the clock was giving +0/+1 crumbled. Ultimus frowned. "Note to self," it said, "never make a 0/0 Microwave token with a Riptide Replicator." Ultimus sighed as his form shifted to exclude his nifty "Reheat" button. It was going to be one of those days.

He looked up to the Armageddon Clock (which survived) and saw it was late for work. It grumbled as it walked out the door. It looked over to its car and began walking towards it. That was when a gargantuan foot fell out of the sky, smashing the car to pieces. Ultimus felt its eye/feeler/sonar gland twitch as it looked up. It was a golem, but Ultimus hadn't seen it around the office. It cursed. Today was the *Mirrodin* launch date. It cursed again; it was going to be one of those days.

After enchanting itself with Flight (several times; there was a run-in with a patch of Seals of Cleansing), it arrived at the pre-summon zone, the place where all the creatures wait for planeswalkers to summon them. (Where did you think they came from, huh?) The Elf/Goblin/Merfolk/Homarid (hit me later) walked in and sat down on the bench. Akroma walked by dabbing her face with a damp cloth. "Tough day today, Ultimus, you just might get summoned." As she walked away, Ultimus grumbled to itself, "Stupid tournament-caliber..."

It's train of thought was interrupted again as it saw a new face. A woman was standing in the middle of the creature-filled room, staring at... well... a portal? Ultimus walked over to her.

"Excuse me," it said/gurgled/barked/screeched, "what are you looking at?". The woman continued to stare. Mistform tapped its foot/stump/paw and waited for a response. A voice came from behind it.

"Oh, don't talk to her, she never listens to anything. It's like talking to a wall."

Ultimus was offended. "I'm a Wall."

"Oh. Well, I'm a Human Rouge."

"Sure, and I'm a Halfling Monk. Now go away." The Neurok Spy shrugged and (stealthily!!) walked off. Human... that's not a creature type... is it?

Then Ultimus felt the pull. It was being summoned! Oh happy day, it would make rent! It was pulled through a portal and popped up in the middle of a kitchen table. It was surrounded by slivers and slapped its hand to its head/skull/pointy hat. "Can't anyone find a better use for me?"

It heard its controller say, "Your turn." Ultimus looked over to see an army of slivers on the other side of the table as well. Great, it was the Timmy battle of the century.

The opponent tapped six mana and said, "Tsabo's Decree." Ultimus shivered. It WAS one of those days. "Calling Humans." Ultimus laughed! What a stupid play! It would survive and DESTROY the fool.

Then it felt its body disintegrate as it was being sucked into the graveyard. How? Unless? The Neurok Spy was right! Human was a creature type! The last words from the Ultimus's mouth/beak/maw/bill were, "Curse you for making Human a creature type, R&D!!!"

Section III: Reader Mail

Following in the footsteps of the great Mark Rosewater, I'm going to dive into my Inbox and answer some reader mail!

Bart Gage had this to say:

Vicodin

We are running a hot special

today it is only \$99

- No doctor visits or hassles

- No prior prescription needed

- Quick delivery to your front door

You will love how easy it is!

Bart,

Thanks for thinking of me, but I don't think I need any painkillers right now.

--aaron

That was weird. Anyway, on to more mail. Colleen Paul had these interesting comments:

Vogel,

Government don't want me to sell

UndergroundCD !Check Your spouse and staff

Investigate Your Own CREDIT-HISTORY

hacking someone PC!

Disappear in your city

bannedcd2004

coleman, loafers of yershalaim.

Colleen,

You have me confused with someone named "Vogel" who seems to have a few issues. If I run into this Vogel, I'll pass on your message. I hope he can get his life straightened out.

--aaron

Let's try one more... Stacy Burton writes:

Hello Latestdevelopments (Tue, 13 Apr 2004 02:55:45 -0700) N.ew Disc.overy for men,
As se.en on Tv DeerAntlerPlus !

This Ama.zing Red Bul.let is pro.ven by medi.cal doc.tors to turn every man into a s.exual Dyn.amo!

Ahem. You guys sure write some weird mail! I'll have to ask Rosewater and Gottlieb if their readers are as goofy as mine. All "spam" jokes aside, let's get to some real mail.

Due to your sorceries week column, I am wondering why you made Temporal Fissure a sorcery, could you tell me why, or tell the story behind it PLEASE!

-PeRsOn

PeRsOn,

I didn't make it into a sorcery, someone else did. Sorry.

Actually, the reason Temporal Fissure was made into a sorcery is the same reason it ended up costing five mana: it was too disruptive as a cheap instant. Bouncing three or four of your opponent's lands at the end of his or her turn can seal the game for you in a hurry, and you don't need Mind's Desire to pull that off if the Fissure only cost two or three mana. Similarly, if it were an instant, you could easily uncommon your opponent's whole team in the middle of combat if he did as much as played a Giant Growth, making the instant version a little too "swingly" for our tastes in limited.

The card may seem a little weak as a 4U sorcery, but we wanted to be absolutely sure we weren't making a one-sided Upheaval. It actually landed in a good place I think, seeing a little play in tournaments, both limited and constructed.

--aaron

[Quoting you:] "Volcanic Hammer and Carbonize have a similar relationship..."
Isn't Incinerate the same thing as Volcanic Hammer only in instant form?

-mike

Mike,

I can see how you're confused, considering I said we usually charge about one mana for instant versions of cards compared to similar sorceries. The thing you need to understand is that Incinerate is not a card we're willing to print these days.

Trust me, we've talked about it, as recently as for the current *Ninth Edition* design. Incinerate would be a cool card to reprint, but it falls so far outside our current costing system for direct damage spells that it would warp the way all the other "burn" cards currently in print would be perceived.

Red decks are doing quite well in Standard these days; they don't need a card like Incinerate. If you want to deal three damage, you can use a two-mana sorcery, a three-mana instant, or a two-mana instant with a weird drawback (Chain of Plasma). I don't see us doing any two-mana three-damage instants with additional abilities any time soon. So the Carbonize-Volcanic Hammer comparison stands as valid.

--aaron

One more letter...

I know that you have probably heard this message a million times a day.

Not a complaint, simply a request. Please stop killing cards.

Example: Mycosynth Lattice. Why not set the casting cost to 5 so that it would play into Seething Song better, allowing better playability and fit into the *Darksteel* set? This would have set the Emissaries to a better field position and added more excitement to the matchup without "breaking" the card's advantage. A simple Shatter or Purge will still do the trick.

It seems that with every set that is developed, there are fewer than 10 cards that are worth a damn. All the other 156 to 300+ cards in a set are simply wasted money and closet filler. It seems that so many of the **Magic** cards are just out of playability range.

I'm not saying to "break" the cards so that they all could compete with Archbound Ravager, but at least stop destroying the natural desire of the card's point and purpose. I can understand that the responsibility of controlling the cost to power ratio is a huge responsibility that must always be counted against the force of extended cards and future set creation, but we must stop [...] ruining the game. This would allow for a better deck variety to compete at the tournament level instead of just five decks showing up in various forms and battling for who can play out the fastest or pull the better hat trick.

It would give the game of **Magic** a much greater force if more cards were set as playable cost efficient cards. I'm sure that I speak for a great many players when I say that we want more cards that work such as Skullclamp and less cards that fail to make the cut into any competitive deck such as Spincrusher.

Playability is key to cards in a set. Before WotC makes a good card, looks at it later, and then says that is too good, again and again and again... "Let it be" for what it is. Turn the game on its ear!!! Increase the population of future banned cards. Let us play with power, we can handle it.

Sincerely,
GlimmerMage

An interesting letter. Mark Rosewater has addressed this topic at various different times, so I'll try to be concise.

Looking at GlimmerMage's specific example... Would Mycosynth Lattice be a better card a five mana or even four? Certainly. Would it ever be as good as Archbound Ravager or Skullclamp? No. Would it be a good card at four mana if every other marginal card in *Darksteel* was also ratcheted up a similar amount? No. *Power is relative.*

Power is relative. While it is easy to imagine making one particular card more powerful, creeping the entire set wouldn't have much beneficial effect. Mycosynth Lattice still wouldn't be playable in high-level tournaments at four mana because it would be competing against three-mana Panoptic Mirrors and 4/4 Fangren Firstborns. All the overall power creep would serve to do is obsolete lots of old cards and paint R&D into a corner for future designs.

Some cards have to be worse than others, and Mycosynth Lattice took some of the beats this time around. The card is still playable in casual formats, and is actually quite wacky and fun. Plus, I believe *Darksteel* added plenty of playable cards to every constructed format and is in a great place power-wise. As it stands, many players believe the overall power-level of sets has been going up enough recently; we don't feel the need to do anything drastic.

There will always be cards that any individual player considers "bad," that's just the way TCGs work. (Feel free to read Rosewater's now-famous "When Cards Go Bad" column for more insight.)

--aaron

That's enough for one day. Feel free to drop me a line. I read all the mail that I can sift out of the spam pit.

Section IV: Random Decklists

Yesterday, Mark Gottlieb posted several decklists that he uses when playing *Magic Online*. A fine idea, and one I'd like to copy.

Most of my articles are recaps of events that took place a year ago, and aren't really grounded in the current events of **Magic**. Similarly, most games of **Magic** I play these days are with shoddy mock-ups of cards that don't exist yet (see below). I'll be honest -- I like the pretty pictures, and I like to interact with our players. Opportunities to play with existing cards don't surface as often as you'd imagine around here, so I often turn to *Magic Online* to fill that need.

I have been enjoying the Singleton format recently because it's a nice break from the normal "4x Every Good Card" style of **Magic** that tournament-level playtesting entails. My favorite way to build Singleton decks is to try to port over a "real" **Magic** deck. Doing so can be a real challenge because most cards don't have three decent analogues. I have had success with a White Weenie Equipment deck, and not as much success with a Sliver deck. The deck I'm enjoying most right now is my Singleton Reanimator deck.

BUW Reanimator

Online Singleton deck

One glaring omission is Anger, but I didn't feel that I could squeeze enough Mountains in the deck to make it work. As it stands, it's pretty consistent.

The other format I enjoy playing is Prismatic. The first few decks I built were typical 250-card power decks laden with Wishes, Quiet Speculation targets, and other typical hard-to-deal-with stuff. The deck was great fun to play whenever I'd run into another player that had a powered deck, but it was less than fulfilling against players without big collections. They'd be playing Alpha Kavu and I'd be playing Call of the Herd. Usually they'd scoop the first time I cast a Wish.

So I tried to come up with a deck that could hang with the big boys, but wouldn't frustrate other players. The solution: creatures. The deck is very aggressive and wins much more than it loses, and no one really complains when they die to an Erhnam Djinn with Elephant Guide on it.

Prismatic Beats

Online Prismatic deck

Of course, Bribery stings.

I'm usually online for an hour or so a couple evenings a week, playing in the "middle room" under the name AaronF. Have a seat and let's game!

Section V: Currently in Development

The playtest cards I showed in my article on proxies went over so well that I think I'll make them a regular feature, showing a new one every couple weeks. What better way to maliciously tease and taunt you?

This week's card is provided courtesy of Mons Johnson, crazed developer and namesake of vanilla 1/1's the world over.

What's going on? Didn't I say earlier that Incinerate was too good? All we be revealed later.. Look for that beauty to appear in *Champions of Kamigawa* this fall!

Section VI: Fifth Dawn

Fifth Dawn! Fifth Dawn! Yay!

I'm very excited about the upcoming preview articles, as *Fifth Dawn* is the first set I got to work on in an "R&D" capacity. I have anxiously been awaiting its release for months to see how people will react to cards that I had a hand in designing.

I'm both nervous and excited, yet confident. I really, really like the set, but then again, I'm biased. We certainly have some cool stuff to show you, so be sure to tune in next week, and don't forget to attend your local *Fifth Dawn* prerelease tournament!

Section VII: The Usual Poll Stuff

Here are last week's results:

Who writes the funniest column on magicthegathering.com?		
The old Mark (Rosewater)	4162	43.8%
The new Mark (Gottlieb)	2984	31.4%
Someone not named Mark	2367	24.9%
Total	9513	100.0%

Looks like Gottlieb's last-minute campaigning didn't quite work out. He should stick with it, though. With enough work, he'll be funny someday. (Props to Anthony Alongi and Nate Heiss, each of whom garnered a lot of write-in votes.)

This week's poll:

If you could eliminate one color in Magic, which would it be? WhiteBlueBlackRedGreen

Aaron may be reached at latestdevelopments@wizards.com.

