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Where Have All The Demons Gone?



Mark Rosewater · *Making Magic*
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This week we'll be exploring one of the darker (and yes, even evil) creature types, the demon. I thought long and hard about what I wanted to write about and I decided that I'd use my column this week to answer two questions that Wizards of the Coast has never publicly broached: Why did demons go away? And why did they come back?

The reason I wanted to talk about this issue was twofold. First, one of the major reasons **magicthegathering.com** was created was to allow Wizards a direct link to the players where we can explain how and why we do what we do to make **Magic**. Explaining the disappearance and reappearance of demons seemed like a perfect topic. Second, it's an interesting insight into an aspect of the game that many of you might never have thought about.

It Was a Dark and Stormy Night

Before I explain "why", let me first fill you all in on the history of demons in **Magic**. When Richard Garfield first created **Magic**, he borrowed from a wide array of fantasy archetypes. One such creature was the demon. Richard chose the demon for several reasons. First, it had a lot of equity built into it. That is, all the players would know what a demon was and would have instant understanding into what it represented. Second, it was uniformly iconic. That is, how demons were seen would vary little from player to player. Third, it did an excellent job of reinforcing many of the key facets of black. And fourth, it just lent itself to cool illustrations.



Richard realized that demons came with a lot of baggage, but he felt **Magic** was better for having them. Alpha had two creature with the creature type Demon (**Demonic Hordes** and **Lord of the Pit**) and two non-creature cards with the word "Demonic" in its title (**Demonic Attorney** and **Demonic Tutor**). The next demon, **Yawgmoth Demon**, showed up in *Antiquities*. *Legends* had one demon (**Mold Demon**), a creature that produced minor demon creature tokens (**Boris Devilboon**) and one "demonic" non-creature spell (**Demonic Torment**). Demons showed up next in *Ice Age* with **Minion of Leshrac** and **Minion of Tevesh Svat** as well as **Demonic Consultation**. And then the demons disappeared. Both the creature type and the word "Demonic" disappeared from the game. The year was 1995.

Flash forward to the fall of 2002. *Onslaught* is released and it contains the first demon (**Grinning Demon**) in seven years! (Not counting **Infernal Spawn of Evil** from *Unglued* that had the creature type "Demon" crossed off and replaced with "Beast".) *Legions* then introduced **Havoc Demon** to the world. The following year *Mirrodin* included the **Reiver Demon** and the sorcery **Promise of**

Power capable of making a demon token. *Darksteel* then had an artifact named **Demon's Horn**. That's sixteen cards with the word demon or demonic in its card title, card type or rules text. Okay, seventeen if you count **Infernal Spawn of Evil**.

So what happened? Where did the demons go? As always, patience. We're getting there.

Let's Start At The Very Beginning

To understand a decision, you need to be able to look at the environment that decision was made in. Wizards of the Coast is currently one of the largest hobby gaming companies in the world. But this wasn't always the case. In the beginning, the early 90's, Wizards was just a teeny tiny role-playing company. Back then it was just five people working out of co-founder Peter Adkison's basement.

And then along came **Magic** and this little company found itself strapped to a rocket. The initial printing for **Magic** (what the world now calls Alpha) that was supposed to fulfill a six-month supply sold out in a matter of weeks. The game spread like wildfire and Wizards was struggling to meet demand. This struggle to keep up went on not for months but for years. Each expansion was printed in larger and larger numbers until supply finally passed demand with the release of *Fallen Empires*.

Unfortunately, *Fallen Empires* was overprinted. This meant that the first expansion to meet actual demand without severely over or undershooting was *Ice Age*. Another interesting factoid about *Ice Age*? It was the last of the old expansions to have demons.

The connection? We're getting there.

A Demon-stration

The next important piece to the puzzle is the demons themselves. So where do demons come from as an archetypal figure? The answer is mythology. Almost every ancient civilization felt a need to provide answers to many unanswerable questions. As such, they created a world of gods to personify concepts they needed to understand. Because the gods were an extension of the people's psyche, it was important for them to represent all aspects of humanity. The earliest demons were figures that represented the darker sides of human emotion. They were sneaky and deceitful tricksters. They were guided by self-interest and were not burdened by any sense of morality.

And then along came a very important introduction, the concepts of good and evil. The gods starting shifting from a pantheon of personalities, each individually capable of committing helpful and hurtful acts, to a duality representing the two sides of the new moral scale. In the land of good and evil, the demon shifted from being a trickster into a much more malicious creature. Demons became not just the embodiment of evil but a force whose job it was to shift creatures of good to evil's ways. Demons became tempters.

The reason demons proved to be such a perfect fit for fantasy is that the genre at its core is all about morality. And who better to fulfill the role of evil than the demon.

So that explains why demons ended up in **Magic**. Why did they leave?

There's Nothing To Fear

What happened around the time of *Ice Age* that drove the demons away? The answer is that **Magic's** growth, and more important its stability, had brought the game to an important step: mass market sales. **Magic** was on the cusp of being sold in the big chains. And while that brought a great deal of excitement, it also brought a great deal of worry. With greater presence came greater scrutiny.

In the hobby game industry, there have been several big innovations (known as waves). Each one launched a new hobby gaming genre. The First Wave was war games. This led to the creation of the miniatures genre. Then in the 70's was the Second Wave, role-playing games. This genre was spearheaded by a little other Wizards game (then produced by a company named TSR) known as **Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)**. The trading card game (spearheaded by **Magic**) is the Third Wave.

The reason I bring up the waves is that the best indicator of **Magic's** growth as a genre setting game was **Dungeons and Dragons**. As such, the **Magic** Brand Team spent a great deal of time studying **D&D's** early days. One of the great pitfalls that **D&D** had when it reached the higher

levels of public awareness was a huge backlash against certain parts of its fantasy elements. (TiVo a movie called "Mazes and Monsters" starring a young Tom Hanks to see what I'm talking about.)

This brings us back to the demons. Because demons had become personifications of evil, they proved very useful as religious archetypes. Mythology blended into theology. Now remember, the demon archetype is much older than almost all modern religions, but their role has become so intertwined that the religious connotation is what most people are aware of. As such, they hit one of the two cultural hot buttons (religion and politics). This increases their chances of stirring people up.



Back in the day, when TSR was trying to lessen its maelstrom, it realized that one of the answers might rest in altering its terminology. By labeling the demon (and devil) archetype with new words, TSR hoped to keep the essence of the creatures without the unnecessary religious baggage. Thus, "devils" became "Baatezu" while "demons" became "Tanari".

So why did demons go away in **Magic**? Because it seemed like a safe choice in a very unsafe time. **Magic** was on the cusp of becoming a highly public game. Wizards knew what had happened to **D&D** when it went through that phase. And remember, at the time, Wizards of the Coast's welfare rested squarely on the shoulders of **Magic**. We had not yet bought TSR and thus **D&D**. We had not yet had successes in other trading card games. Wizards was about to make the biggest gamble of its life. And so, it took some precautions.

In the end, very little was sacrificed. We lost the word demon (and once again I stress, not the concept – we just started calling them horrors), and we pulled back on some imagery that we felt might push similar buttons (this, for example, is why the pentagram got removed from the Fourth Edition **Unholy Strength**).

"They're back!"

I've explained why demons went away. Now it's time to talk about why they came back. The answer is threefold. First, the world has changed. **D&D** was introduced in the 70's. That's thirty years ago. Times are different. When we stopped and looked around at other popular entertainment (from *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* to *Lord of the Rings* to *Hellboy*) we realized that the concept of "demons" was becoming commonplace in the market (I should point out that this wasn't true in 1995 when we first removed demons from the game).

Second, in 1995 **Magic** was a fledgling game. And the trading card game genre had yet to really prove itself. Being conservative made sense back then. But **Magic** is now ten years old and healthier than ever. Games like *Pokemon* and *Yu Gi Oh* have shown that trading card games have tremendous potential. And Wizards is a much larger, healthier company with numerous lucrative games. It was clear that **Magic** had the license to start getting a little edgier.

Third, we realized that there was a lot of equity in demons both in the cultural identity and the imagery they bring. **Magic** was losing something by not using demons, and as factors had changed, it seemed wasteful not to bring them back. (Note that **D&D** came to the same conclusion and has also since returned the terms "demon" and "devil" to the game.)



And Now You Know

One of the themes of my column is that R&D (and in this case Wizards) has a lot of hard choices to make in creating **Magic**. I hope my column today showed how decisions are based on factors at the time of the decision. And that we are willing to re-examine decisions when those factors change.

Join me next week when **Magic** design class returns to town.

Until then, enjoy your demons (or at least learn to live with them).

Mark Rosewater

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