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It's been a while, but I'm back at it. No, I wasn't hiding under a rock after my Skullclamp article. My plate had simply gotten a little too full lately here at work and it was easier for me to recruit Randy to write my column than to find anyone else willing to clean the bathrooms and sort the mail. I'm sure you're all glad I'm back now, though, since I know you all like me much better than Randy. (Humor me here -- today's my birthday.)

Before I start talking about Angels, I would like to put a capper on the Skullclamp discussion. If anyone looked at the Top 8 of US Nationals and concluded from those decklists that the metagame was diverse and healthy, I warn you that draft played as much part in determining Day 3 as Standard did, and that those eight decks are by no means the ones that put up the best records.

Brian David-Marshall included a breakdown of the decks that did the best (all were 6-1 or better) in his nifty blog during the event coverage:

Name	Archetype	Std Points	Skullclamps
Billy Postlethwait	Affinity	19	4
Sameer Merchant	Elf and Nail	18	4
Alex Melnikow	Elf and Nail	18	4
Phimus Pan	Affinity	18	4
Adam Prosak	Affinity	18	4
Zachary Mullen	Affinity	18	4
Alex Majlaton	Affinity	18	4
Robert Dougherty	Affinity	18	4
Mitchell Tamblin	Affinity	18	4
Steven Birkliid	Elf and Nail	18	4

That's two different decks, and 40 out of a possible 40 Skullclamps. Not diverse, not healthy. It was as if Skullclamp knew it was being booted, and was giving us all the finger as it headed for the door. Good riddance!

Angel in the Morning

As a Mariners fan, I don't really like Angels. I'd like to take Troy Percival and Darin Erstad and conk their scruffy little heads together. And don't get me started on Ben Weber. If I have to watch... What? Wrong topic? Hmm.

There's no real science to the development of Angels. As Mark Rosewater mentioned on Monday, we've stopped doing unimpressive stuff like 2/2 Angels and common Angels and have tried to put them back on the pedestal they were on in the days prior to *Urza's Saga*. That means that today's Angels are all 3/3 or larger fliers (usually 4/4), and are usually rare.

Conversely, that means whenever design hands over a large rare white creature with flying, the creative team makes it into an Angel. There's rarely more than one per set. But other than that, what they do, how they do it, and how powerful they are in the big picture all fluctuate wildly.

Here are some development notes on recent Angels:

- The art for *Mirrodon's* Platinum Angel was painted by Brom long before the card had any stats or abilities. The art team wanted an artifact angel to use on packaging, and it was up to the designers to make a card to match. Design tried a Crusade-like ability: "All other white and artifact creatures get +1/+1 and first strike." This was too similar to Leonin Sun Standard, so the development team

came up with the splashy "you can't lose" ability. Anti-reanimation clauses were discussed, but in the end it was decided that being a 4/4 artifact creature made the card vulnerable enough. I'm sure players around the world disagree.



- Luminous Angel from *Mirrodin* didn't always have the "Verdant Force Wanna-Be" ability it has now. It actually started life as an affinity card: **6***** for a 4/4 flier with protection from artifacts and affinity for artifacts. The card was changed to its current form when affinity was reined in during development.
- Blinding Angel was pegged as a perfect candidate for reprinting by the *Eighth Edition* design team, but they were almost talked out of it. While the card has great flavor and an interesting ability, there was concern that it was so annoying to play against that many players would actually be upset to see it return (I'm talking about casual players mainly). The team decided the positives outweighed the potential negatives and put it in the set. Now for *Ninth Edition*, you have the choice to kick her back out.
- The other Core Set stalwart, Serra Angel, was taken out of rotation years ago due to "power lever concerns." Oh, how far we've come. Even though Serra doesn't rule the skies in tournaments any more, she is still as iconic as **Magic** cards get. If I had my way, she'd be given a lifetime pass into the Core Set and never be taken out again.
- Exalted Angel from *Onslaught* had a real impact on the tournament scene, and that can be attributed to the late change made to the card in development. It was changed from a **5***** 4/4 with a morph cost of **2***** to its printed version (**4***** 4/5, morph **2*****) right near the end to give morph more of a presence. I'd say it worked... maybe too well!
- *Darksteel's* Pristine Angel has worked out very well. The card didn't stray much from its initial design, and while some player complain it is a little too "bomby" in limited, it is just about what I'd consider the perfect Angel otherwise--powerful, hard to kill, and very much in the flavor of white in that it can defend you as well as deliver swift justice on your opponent.
- Another Angel that can deliver swift justice is *Legions'* Akroma, Angel of Wrath. The cool thing about this card is that she has so many abilities, but a look back at the card file reveals that she was even more ridiculous at one point:

```
ME 3/12 Changed Rampage 1 to Rampage 6, I assume this was just a typo. You
don't want the card to be that weak, do you?
Bill: fixed. old card -
Flying, first strike, protection from black, protection from red, Trample,
attacking does not cause CARDNAME to tap, haste, Amplify +4/+4, Morph o4oWoW,
Cycling o2, fear, Rampage: 6, islandhome, flanking, shadow, phasing, snow-
covered forestwalk, bands with other Angels.
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- Angel of Mercy showed up in *Eighth Edition* basically by default. We don't normally want to do uncommon Angels, but white should get some 3/3 fliers at uncommon and there wasn't any better options.

From Angels to Dragons

Referring to the above comment on Angel of Mercy... Angels held a mystique in the early days of **Magic** because there were so few of them, and the ones that did exist were awesome. The *Urza* block tossed that mystique to the curb, as it contained such hits as "2/2 flying protection from blue" and "common 1/5 flying" Angels. The *Masques* and *Invasion* blocks also had smaller, more common Angels, but since then we've started making them almost exclusively rare again.

Angels aren't the only type that we don't want to over-populate the world with--another good example is Dragons. The uncommon Furnace Whelp from *Fifth Dawn* was printed, but only after some very long discussions by people in R&D.

The basis of the argument against making a card like Furnace Whelp is that a wimpy 2/2 Dragon makes other Dragons less cool by association. The Whelp changes the perception of Dragons from that of terrifying huge monsters to that of "red fliers, even junky little ones," and comes with an implied, "Who cares about them?"

The argument for making the card a Dragon is that the flavor of a baby dragon is a perfect fit, and that it won't detract to the feel of the bigger Dragons; on the contrary, it will make them seem even more magnificent.

In the end we weren't 100% sure what to do, but we decided to print the card as an uncommon 2/2 Dragon. After all, Dragon Whelp was very popular back in the day! Even if we determine later that the card was in fact a good idea, don't expect us to do this very often--it was a rare "uncommon" exception.



This Week's Poll

Does Furnace Whelp deserve the creature type Dragon?

Yes

No

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