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The release of *Ice Age* was a special time for me. I had only starting playing **Magic** during the time the previous set--*Fallen Empires*--was on shelves, so *Ice Age* marked the first new expert-level expansion that I got to experience. I distinctly remember going to the Comics Crypt with my friend Jim to buy some "starter decks," and playing them against one another (yes, the five-color shuffle-'em-up) in the lobby of a Mailboxes Etc. during a rainstorm that prevented us from making it home. I distinctly remember being shocked that Kjeldoran Frostbeast's ability took down my Wall of Lava; after all, walls were immune to the Frostbeast's predecessor, Thicket Basilisk. *Ice Age* was proving to be a weird world indeed!

Although I wasn't able to purchase packs of older sets, I had done my homework and was relatively familiar with the contents of **Magic's** early expansions, including *Arabian Nights* and *Legends*. Because those sets contained all new cards, I was stunned to find out that *Ice Age* was made up of a significant number of reprints! And not just straight word-for-word reissues of old cards with new art, but some cards with the same stats and abilities as old cards but new names, and some watered-down versions of cards I'd heard about from guys at the store.

Further examination bore out what Wizards was trying to do -- allow *Ice Age* to be played by itself. (For more on what Wizards was *really* trying to do, read Skaff Elias' article.) Many of the repeated cards that were in the set were "staples" of **Magic** by a loose definition of the word, and it just made more sense to include them word-for-word than trying to reinvent the wheel.

## Reprints and Large Expansions

As a developer, I am ever grateful to the *Ice Age* team for using as many reprints as they did. It set a nice precedent for the slew of large sets to follow. By making it generally acceptable to reuse old cards in new sets, it took a lot of stress off of designers and developers to come up with more and more different ways to junk up the game's cleanest, most "necessary" cards. How can you improve on Disenchant?!! (Other than by making it green...)

There are three degrees of reprints in *Ice Age*, all of which we still utilize today. They are the "strict reprint," the "functionally identical reprint," and the "tweaked version."

### Strict Reprints

Disenchant. Dark Ritual. Stone Rain. Swords to Plowshares. Counterspell. Power Sink. Circle of Protection: Red. Hurricane. Fear. Wild Growth. All these cards, plus many others, were taken directly from **Magic's** core set and put into *Ice Age*. Why so many? *Ice Age* was designed to be a stand-alone, meaning it could be played all by itself without any other **Magic** cards, and still be a fun and balanced environment. (*Ice Age* was the first expansion to contain basic lands for this very same reason.) Could the designers have come up with different versions of these cards? Probably, but as I mentioned before, these guys knew good cards when they saw them (and by "good" I don't necessarily mean "powerful," but rather "perfectly made.") Taking a look at *Ice Age* from a developer's standpoint, you get a good idea about which cards were deemed "acceptable" by the power-level standards of that day.

In the years since, our evaluations of many of those cards have diverged from the opinions of the *Ice Age* team. Swords to Plowshares and Dark Ritual have been most likely retired. Disenchant and Howl from Beyond have switched colors. Many of the others, though, are still right on target by today's standards, and will come and go from various sets as we feel we need them.

In my opinion, strict reprints do three things: define play environments, give new players more access to staple cards, and provide sets with links to the past.

Notice that the *Ice Age* team included Hurricane but left Earthquake out of the set. This was more than likely a conscious decision made to *define the play environment* for what would be Ice Age block. Flying was at a premium in the set -- not many creatures had it -- so many games were probably won or lost based on who had the most fliers. Hurricane gave players another way to deal with fliers. Meanwhile, with most of the creatures on the ground, Earthquake would have played like a (painful) Wrath of God, something the developers were probably not interested in. Instead, red got Pyroclasm. Big ground creatures had one less spell to fear!



These days, we do similar tinkering with play environments by including strict reprints.

Counterspell was in *Mercadian Masques*, but not in *Urza's Saga*, and its effect was missed in the latter just as much as it was felt in the former. The *Mirrodin* block contains several environment-defining repeats, including Shatter, Annul, and Relic Barrier.

By including often-played cards like Giant Growth in *Ice Age* and Terror in *Mirrodin*, we are *giving new players more access to older cards*. While these reprints might slightly annoy long-time players (especially those not interested in tournament play), they do a valuable service by getting simple iconic cards into the hands of players faster and easier. Who wants to dig through boxes of commons looking for Terrors when you can get them in packs just as easily?

Finally, while not necessarily true in the days of *Ice Age*, I like that reprints *link old sets to the past*. Imagine a "lapsed player" (one that had quit the game for a while, but was thinking about starting again) opening a pack of *Mirrodin*. The card faces would look strange, the art would be a departure from what he was used to, and the keywords would all be unfamiliar. Then he'd see it: Icy Manipulator! "Wow, Icy! I remember how to play this game..." We all like little nostalgic links to our "youth," and strict reprints can generate those emotions.

## Functionally Identical Reprints

Zuran Spellcaster? What happened to Prodigal Sorcerer? Fyndhorn Elves? Juniper Order Druid? Tor Giant? What are they trying to pull here?

Functionally identical reprints are cards with the same costs, color, stats, and abilities, but with new names. They are usually made for one simple reason: to flesh out the world of the new set.

For example, Llanowar is not part of the geography of the *Ice Age* set, so it doesn't make much sense to call the 1/1 green elf "Llanowar Elves." By switching to Fyndhorn Elves, they suddenly fit in! So what about Ley Druid and Prodigal Sorcerer? They aren't nominally attached to any specific place! True. But because *Ice Age* had a rich story developed for it, the design and development teams felt it necessary to make the cards as evocative of the world as possible. So "Tim" became Zuran Spellcaster, servant of Zur the Enchanter. And Ley Druid became Juniper Order Druid, toiling under the watch of the ancient Kolbjorn. These subtle changes really help bring a set to life.

Of course, it's not all that well planned. Rumor has it that the art on Moor Fiend was a leftover "Thrull" piece from *Fallen Empires*. The art department wanted to use it, so they put it on *Ice Age's* Bog Wraith. Because it didn't look like a wraith any more, the name was changed.

We continue to do functionally identical reprints to this day. *Mirrodin's* Viridian Shaman is a redo of Uktabi Orangutan from *Visions*. *Onslaught's* Goblin Sky Raider is a new version of *Arabian Nights'* Bird Maiden. And *Darksteel's* Ur-Golem's Eye is a thinly-veiled Sisay's Ring, also from *Visions*.

Players that grumble about strict reprints tend not to mind functionally identical reprints as much, simply because it creates deck building situations where you are basically allowed eight copies of the same card. While this doesn't really matter often as far as tournaments go, we have to be careful when we make another version of a good card (such as the Llanowar and Fyndhorn Elves).



*Moor Fiend, art by Anson Maddocks*

## Tweaked Versions

Looking closely at *Ice Age*, you can see that the designers and developers were very conscious of trying to correct old wrongs in **Magic**, and made "fixed" versions of lots of cards. Weak cards got better, powerful cards got weaker, and boring cards got more interesting. Even by today's standards, it is a marvelous first attempt at a standalone. (Contrast the evident care the *Ice Age* guys took compared to what the people simultaneously putting *Fourth Edition* together did. Not only did the *4E* team neglect to take Mind Twist and Balance, among others, out of the core set, they added in absurd cards like Strip Mine and Land Tax.)

There are many toned-down analogues to Alpha-era cards visible in *Ice Age*. Hypnotic Specter became the non-random Abyssal Specter. The Moxes were condensed into Jeweled Amulet. Regrowth morphed into the unwieldy Forgotten Lore. Even the Alpha dual lands themselves, at one time slated for inclusion in *Ice Age*, became the five allied painlands and the five allied (and horrible!) depletion lands. Just as looking at the strict reprints shows you what cards were deemed ok at the time, a look at the weakened cards gives you a glimpse into what was not. It's interesting to note that in the years since, R&D has continued to wrestle with many of these concepts, trying to find the perfectly balanced Specter, artifact mana, Regrowth effect, and dual lands.

Just as many cards were toned down, others were "turned up." Ashen Ghoul is a far superior version of Nether Shadow. Glacial Wall is Wall of Ice in a color that needs it. And the introduction of "cantrips" (cards that replace themselves) made a whole swath of unplayable cards start to look tempting. Jump? No way. Updraft? I just might...

The last tweak introduced--and the one we use the most these days--is changing staple cards slightly to make them fit the theme of the set. *Ice Age* had a subtle allied-color interaction going on, so several cards were changed to fit that model. Word of Undoing is Unsummon that works better in white decks. Norritt is a Nettling Imp that goes well with blue. Tinder Wall is Wall of Wood that benefits red. And so on.

Other *Ice Age* themes also produced tweaked versions of old cards--Illusionary Forces is Air Elemental with cumulative upkeep, and Thermokarst is an Ice Storm that interacts with snow-covered lands. As we come up with new mechanics in each **Magic** block, the tweaked cards allow us to put staple effects on cards, but still have them feel new enough--Stone Rain is different than Lay Waste, which is in turn different than Flowstone Flood and Pain/Suffering.

## Reprints and the Future

As you can see, we have taken *Ice Age's* idea of using reprints and run with it. We have done a good job of mixing up what kinds of reprints we do in expert level expansions, though. *Ice Age* and *Mirage* had tons of strict reprints, then we got away from that for a few years, and then *Mirrodin* had quite a few as well. Every block has had a few functionally identical reprints and a whole bunch of tweaks.

What about *Champions of Kamigawa*? The exotic setting has led us to do very few strict reprints--probably the lowest number of any large set ever! To make up for it, there are a couple more functionally identical cards than usual, and a ton more tweaks, most of which are very very interesting! But all things in time...

### This Week's Poll

**I view functionally identical reprints in expansions (meaning old cards with new names) as:**

- A very cool thing.
- A necessary evil.
- Something I wish you'd stop doing.

Submit

### Last Week's Poll

What card would you <i>most</i> like to weaken if you could?		
Disciple of the Vault	1671	22.2%
Arcbound Ravager	1661	22.1%
Cranial Plating	1290	17.1%
None	1286	17.1%
Shrapnel Blast	603	8.0%
Artifact Lands	585	7.8%
Myr Enforcer	204	2.7%
Thoughtcast	143	1.9%
Frogmite	86	1.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7529</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The responses varied, but these results present an awesome representation of what I consider to be the power hierarchy in the current Ravager Affinity decks. Fascinating! Of note—the three "least guilty" cards on the list are the ones with affinity!

