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Friday, October 08, 2004

**A**fter my “Combos? What Combos?” article last week, I received a bit of mail along the lines of: “It’s good that you don’t want to give away information on the new set too early, but how about information on old sets?” In general, readers were asking for me to pull the curtain back even *further* than I do already with regards to sets that no longer have a major impact on constructed **Magic**. Well, now that we can bid adieu to the *Onslaught* block in Standard, perhaps a little more information is in order. Not much more, mind you, but at least a little.

## Ranking the Cards

As development for a set comes to an end, each member of the development team (and sometimes additional playtesters) ranks each card in the set in terms of how much of an impact he or she feels the card will make in constructed **Magic**, mainly Standard and Block Constructed, with a slight nod to Extended. The rankings are compiled, and further changes are made to the set to balance out things like the power level of colors. We save the rankings, and sometimes it’s fun to go back and look at them.



*Manny, Moe, and Jack*

My first memories of R&D (I started working at Wizards on the Web Team) are of the final touches being put on *Judgment*, and the very first playtests of the set called “Manny,” which would turn out to be *Onslaught*. I distinctly recall the stickered versions of the cards that would turn out to be Imagecrafter and Sparksmith, and thinking that the set would be really cool.




As R&D developed the set (and later the sets “Moe” and “Jack,” which you know as *Legions* and *Scourge*), the “tribal” theme was foremost in their minds. Making tribal decks relevant to constructed was pretty high on the priority list for the block, so it is no wonder that many of the cards at the top of the constructed rankings were tribal or, at the very least, creatures. I’ll give you parts of the lists at the end, but first, I want to go over five cards from the *Onslaught* block that R&D thought would make a bigger mark in constructed than they actually did.

### 1) Forgotten Ancient

Towards the end of *Scourge* development, Forgotten Ancient was the best card in the set for constructed by far. It cost  at that time, and was hitting the table on turn 2 in a large percentage of games thanks to Llanowar Elves and Birds of Paradise, and then dominating. I was still on the Web Team at that time, and had grown very fond of the card during the weeks I worked on the “You Make The Card” project. When developer Brian Schneider told me the card needed to be changed, I stomped and kicked and threw a little hissy fit, but that didn’t do any good. Brian put forth a list of options to the public, and you as a group decided to go with the increased mana cost as opposed to the decreased size, so the card was printed with a  cost. That change took it out of constructed almost entirely. (When it showed up in the sideboard of Craig Krempels’ US Nationals winning Elf and Nail deck, I danced a small jig.)



Had the votes come in for the  0/1 version, the card might have been played more. But alas, that didn't happen. R&D did think that the four-mana version still had a chance to show up, but it never caught on. A shame, really.

## 2) Planar Guide

With the *Odyssey* block's token creatures (from Call of the Herd, Roar of the Wurm, Squirrel Nest, and others) making a huge impact in Standard, R&D was convinced that a one mana creature that could wipe out all tokens AND protect your team from Wrath of God would be a fantastic deal. Turns out that wasn't true.

As the Standard metagame shaped up in the winter of 2002-2003, decks like Cunning Wake, Psychatog, UG Madness, RG Beatdown, and the early incarnations of Goblins dominated. There was nowhere for a white 1/1 creature to go.

We often believe that the apocryphal tier-one White Weenie deck is just a card or two away from reclaiming its lost power, and so we overrate cool white creatures, thinking that each new one just might be the missing piece. Witness...

## 3) Whipcorder

It's a 2/2 for 2 with morph and the ability to tap creatures. What's not to like? We sure liked it.

While Whipcorder seems like an efficient package on the surface, it really wasn't all that efficient when compared to Psychatog, Goblin Warchief, and Exalted Angel (and later, Arcbound Ravager). The world where Whipcorder is a great card is a fantasy I suppose, although I personally would like to see such a world come to be some day. It would be nice to play in a constructed environment where creature combat mattered enough that you'd want to play a tapper.

## 4) Krosan Warchief

Did you ever wonder why foil Krosan Warchief was a Friday Night **Magic** prize card? Because we thought it would be good.

So good, in fact, that R&D put the smack down on it at the end of development, lowering its power from 3 to 2. Again, the thought process was that this change would leave the card in constructed without having it be too dominant. Unfortunately, the card disappeared altogether. The highest impact it had was in Block Constructed Beast decks at the end of the season, and even then it was a very slight impact.

## 5) Wizards

I'm tired of telling this story. No, really.

Laugh all you want, but we had Willbender, Echo Tracer (with a 2-mana morph cost), and Voidmage Prodigy all near the top of the constructed lists.

We were wrong. Cycling was more powerful than we thought, and cards like Slice and Dice and Lightning Rift could neutralize decks build around Patron Wizard. Blah blah blah... I'm never talking about this again. I'm glad the danged block has rotated out.

Now, for your viewing pleasure are the top 10 and top 5 lists from the three sets in the *Onslaught* block of what cards R&D thought would be the best in constructed. Remember, these are not based on the final versions of the cards, and this was done over a year before the sets were released.



## Onslaught Top 10

1. Fetch Lands - We were right about these!
2. Cycling Lands
3. Naturalize
4. Whipcorder - The siren song of White Weenie is powerful...
5. Ravenous Baloth
6. Smother
7. Voidmage Prodigy - We wouldn't make an Invitational card bad on purpose...
8. Goblin Sharpshooter
9. Mobilization - Control got better tools than this, like Exalted Angel.
10. Shared Triumph



Exalted Angel isn't on the list because it was made better after this list was compiled. Akroma's Vengeance is missing because it didn't become a "bomb" until the arrival of *Mirrodin*. Astral Slide is missing because we overlooked it.

## Legions Top 5

1. Sunstrike Legionnaire - Could originally tap anything; we knew the change made it way worse.
2. Caller of the Claw
3. Planar Guide
4. Echo Tracer
5. Willbender

Goblin Goon, Gempalm Incinerator, and Clickslither were near the top of the list as well.

## Scourge Top 5

1. Forgotten Ancient - Three mana version
2. Eternal Dragon - It cost 4♦♦♦ at this point
3. Krosan Warchief - 3/2 version
4. Silver Knight - More White Weenies, but this one was actually played...
5. Siege-Gang Commander

Mind's Desire was near the bottom of the list. We knew it would be good in Vintage, but it never did anything exciting for us in Standard. Coming seventh place, however, was Parallel Thoughts, which originally allowed you to remove any number of cards from your library—not just seven—which made it play a lot like the once-restricted Doomsday.

## Last Week's Poll:

What kind of combos do you enjoy most?		
Cute two-card interactions that can go in a variety of decks.	5186	34.7%
Goofy combo decks that use about nineteen different cards to execute some goofy trick.	4144	27.7%
Degenerate combos that win the game quickly.	4089	27.3%
No combos please; I prefer the attack phase.	840	5.6%
No combos please; I prefer the Counterspells and the Wraths.	703	4.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14962</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## This Week's Poll:

Have you ever purchased Magic singles (meaning individual cards, as opposed to packs)?

- Yes, from a physical store or person.
- Yes, from an Internet dealer or eBay.
- Yes, from both.
- No.

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