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# The *Un* Starts Now



Mark Rosewater · Making Magic  
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Welcome to the first *Unhinged* Preview Week! That felt good. Let's try that again. Welcome to the first *Unhinged* Preview Week! Still feels awesome. Man, I could probably entertain myself doing this for most of the column, but I think I've used up my allotment of weird columns for the year, so let's get to what everyone wants to hear - the story of the design of *Unhinged*. Oh yes, and I'll preview a card. (And not just any card. One of the most controversial cards of the set.)

Often during preview columns, I wait to show you the preview card until deep into the article. Not today. I want to use the preview card today to set the tone for what *Unhinged* is going to be. If we'll print this card, who knows what else the set might contain. So without further ado:

[Show me the card](#)



Bet you didn't see us breaking that rule. A quick aside – although I chose to use a card with a donkey theme, I want to stress that this theme is not as prevalent as our ad campaign might lead you to believe (the set has eight “ass” cards plus a few additional donkeyfolk that show up in illustrations).

A less quick aside - Ass Whuppin' has the distinction of being the only card ever designed by both Randy Buehler and myself. Here's how it happened. Randy came up with the idea of a *Vindicate* that could destroy any card in *any* game (the original playtest name was Super Vindicate). The problem was that we didn't want “real” games being impacted by *Unhinged* cards. My solution was to limit the destruction to silver-bordered cards to keep the effect restricted to games using *Un* cards. We later added in the “you can see from your seat” clause to keep the effect somewhat more restricted. (“Hey, Bob. Just calling to see what you're up to. So are you playing right now? What's in play? I destroy it! Ha ha!” )

Whew, I'm asided out. Let's get to the meat of the article. How was *Unhinged* designed? I'm glad you asked.

## Ready, Set, Go

The design began the day Randy Buehler approached me and said, "Okay, it's a go. Who do you want on your team?"

Here's the team Randy and I put together:

**Mark Rosewater** – I was Lead Designer for the set. This shouldn't come as a great surprise. I was also Lead Designer of *Unglued* (although for that project I was a team of one). I'm the only designer with a background in comedy writing. And I have unabashedly campaigned for this product for six years. So the second the project got the thumbs up, it was pretty clear that I was going to run it.



**Brady Dommermuth** – Brady is a member of the **Magic** Creative Team.. He is in charge of world development and card concepting. That means he's the guy who has to take all of design's odd ideas and turn them first into a world and then into individual cards. (Brady's job, by the way, is significantly harder than it sounds.) Because *Unhinged* design is so intertwined with the card concept, we felt it was important to have Brady on the team.



**Brandon Bozzi** – Brandon is another member of the **Magic** Creative Team. Brandon is responsible for the names and flavor text. As these were crucial elements of *Unhinged*, we felt it was important to have Brandon on the team. In addition, Brandon was interested in trying out some of his design skills.



**Randy Buehler** – *Unhinged* is dissimilar to most **Magic** sets because it doesn't have a separate design and development team. As such, the design/development team needed someone that could develop the set. Randy ran through a list of possible candidates. In the end, he realized that he was the most qualified person with the least amount of his time already scheduled.



## Oh My Godbook

Once we had a team, it was time to start thinking about how we'd design our set. But before we could do that, we needed to first take a look back at the last *Un-set*, *Unglued*. To better understand what players did and did not like about *Unglued*, we did a godbook study. For those unfamiliar with the term, a godbook study is a research study where we show players all the cards from a particular set and gauge their reactions.



Here's what we learned:

### Pros

- Players liked the jokes that had to do specifically with **Magic**
- Players liked cards that joked about Wizards or aspects surrounding the making of the game
- Players liked unique layouts
- Players greatly enjoyed the humor

### Cons

- Players hated ripping up their cards. (Even the common **Chaos Confetti**.)
- Players strongly disliked dice rolling.
- Players hated clamfolk. (This one is particularly ironic as the Clamfolk is a parody of *Fallen Empire's* much-hated Homarids.)

How did we react to this information? Simple, we avoided doing the things players didn't like and did more of the things they did. Thus, *Unhinged* has no card ripping, no dice-rolling and no Clamfolk, but it has more parody, in-jokes, and offbeat layouts.

## Plunder Cats

Once we were done looking at *Unglued*, we began looking at *Unglued II*. For those of you that might be unaware of *Unglued II*, let me quickly explain. After we finished *Unglued*, we felt we had a hit on our hands, so I was tasked with designing the follow-up: *Unglued II: The Obligatory Sequel*. It was scheduled to come out the year after *Unglued*. The short version of this story is that the **Magic** brand team of the time felt we were putting out too many sets and had questions about what kind of branding a parody set created. As such, *Unglued II* was put on “indefinite hiatus”.

But this occurred after the vast majority of the art and mechanics had been done. So when we started up *Unhinged* design, it seemed only natural to see what we could plunder from the old set. Right off the bat we found a number of problems. The set's major mechanic was poison. (All of which were anthropomorphized vegetables for those that care.) I had originally put poison in *Unglued II* as I was convinced that R&D would never allow it in “real” **Magic**. But times (and R&D) have changed and I was informed that poison was not acceptable for *Unhinged* as we were most likely going to have poison return one day.

The next largest mechanic was a series of cards with scratch off text boxes. The idea behind these cards was that each card had three different uses and that you didn't know the effect until you played it and scratched off one section of the text box. The idea proved costly and not quite as interesting in gameplay as you might expect.

The third biggest mechanic, the split cards, had been printed in *Invasion*. It became clear pretty clear that the *Unhinged* design team couldn't rely too much on *Unglued II*.

## The Calm Before the Brainstorm

We looked at the player feedback on *Unglued*. We checked out what was available from *Unglued II*. Now it was time to sit down and figure out what *Unhinged* was going to be about. Here's what the team decided:

1. **There needed to be more variety of humor** – *Unglued* had a very silly sensibility. While we wanted to keep that, the team was interested in branching out a little more in the styles of humor.
2. **The set needed to be larger** – One of my biggest gripes about *Unglued* was that, at ninety-four cards, it seemed a little small. *Unhinged*, we felt, should be closer to the size of a normal small set.
3. **The set needed to have some cohesion** - The *Un* sets are a little looser in design than the average set as the overall tone and look & feel of the product tend to give it a strong identity. Nonetheless, the team wanted to have a little more connectivity between the cards than *Unglued*.
4. **The set needed its humor to be denser** – One of my goals during *Unglued's* design was to stuff as many jokes as I could onto each and every card. While I thought I did an admirable job, I knew there was room for improvement.
5. **The set needs to be balanced for limited** – When I designed *Unglued* it was never my intention that the product would be played just by itself. I feel the *Un* sets are like a rich icing that requires cake (aka some non-*Un* cards) to be best enjoyed. But *Unglued* taught us an important lesson: If it's sold in a booster pack, it will be drafted. And no matter what we do, there was some portion of the audience that was just going to play with nothing but *Unhinged*. So, we knew we would have to take steps to ensure that *Unhinged* was balanced both design-wise (i.e. there's the right balance of removal cards) and development-wise (cards are properly costed) for sealed and draft play.
6. **The set needs to pave the way for new technology** – *Unglued* was revolutionary in many different ways. One of the biggest examples was the art box treatment that allowed the art to spill out of the art box. *Unhinged* would need to capitalize on those innovations and find some new innovations of our own. The graphic designer for *Unhinged* is named Brian Dumas. I think you will be pleasantly surprised how many new ways Brian found to spice up the layout of the cards.
7. **The set needs premium (aka “foil”) cards** – *Unglued* is the only set since the introduction of premium cards not to have a premium parallel insert. The majority of R&D felt that was a mistake, so *Unhinged* was given a thumbs up for premium cards.
8. **The set needed to have cool-looking basic lands** – The lands were a huge hit in *Unglued*. It seemed a no-brainer to make a new set of basic lands for *Unhinged*. The interesting question was whether or not to make them look as close as possible in layout to the originals or to try something slightly different. I opted for the latter as I believe the popularity of the lands was more because they were different than because of the choices

of that particular layout. Having seen the finished product, let me just say that I think they look amazing. And in foil? Ten times nicer than that.

9. **The set did not want to have token cards** – The token cards from *Unglued* were popular enough that it generated a new prize for **Magic** Player Rewards. Not wanting to step on the toes of that, the team decided to forego doing tokens this set.

With all this in mind, it was time to start designing cards.

## Design Up Ahead

Finally, it was time to start designing cards. I began by looking in our database for cards that had been moved to the *Un* Folder. You see, from time to time designers come up with cards that get killed for rules or complication issues. If the designer thinks the card is cool, he'll send it off to the one set that might actually be able to print it. Six years have gone by since *Unglued*. The folder was getting full.

Next, I sent out an open call for any cards made by any member of R&D. Designing an *Un* set is a nice breather from day-to-day design, so the majority of the designers will turn in cards. When the dust settled, I had a lot of interesting one-of cards, but not enough mechanics that would be usable on multiple cards. Or was there? It turned out that all the answers were sitting in the file. What the team had to do was recognize which ideas deserved to be on more than one card. What would be the themes and mechanics that defined *Unhinged*?

As this column is as much a preview as a history, I thought it would be fun to look at which themes and mechanics made the cut. Be fair warned that I'm going to do as much teasing as giving information. But hey, that's what the rest of the two preview weeks are for.

- **Gotcha Cards**

*Unhinged* has something that *Unglued* never had – a keyword mechanic. The way Gotcha works is that if the card is sitting in your graveyard and your opponent does the one thing the card says not to do (some are verbal, some are physical, some are mental, etc.), you may say “Gotcha!” and return the card to your hand. What are some of the triggers? You'll have to wait and see on that one.

What I can tell you is that the Gotcha cards were designed to make things difficult. The things that you have to avoid are just the kind of things that happen all the time in a **Magic** game. I'll talk more about the creation of this mechanic in a future column.



- **Matters**

Over the years, the designers have made more and more elements of the **Magic** card matter mechanically. *Unhinged* will demonstrate how much room has been left untouched. All sorts of things will have mechanical impact that have never ever mattered before. Start talking amongst yourselves. I guarantee you won't get them all. But I don't want to leave you completely empty handed. Would you like to know the attribute that gets the most attention? Artists!

- **Fractions**

Whole numbers are for wimps. Nuff said.

- **Donkey Cards**

If you've seen the ads, you might have an inkling of this theme. *Unglued* had its chickens, *Unhinged* has its donkeys. Like I said above, this theme is not as large as our ad campaign might imply, but if you want to casually toss the word “ass” around in gameplay, then *Unhinged* is for you.

- **Monkey Cards**

The chickens of *Unglued* had a sidekick in the clamfolk. Since all of you asked us to ax the clamfolk,



we've found a new sidekick – monkeys! (And other apes.)

- **Mini Games**

This is a cycle of cards that allow you to get a good effect at a cheap price. All you got to do is win a little game. Not **Magic** mind you. Other types of games. Can I give an example? No. I can show you a picture though.



- **Follow-up To Unglued Cards**

Oh, we got some of those. Which ones? You're not getting how this works, are you? This is a teaser column.

- **Parodies of Famous Magic Cards** I already spilled the beans on City of Ass and Necro- Impotence, but there are a number more, many of which were illustrated by the same artist.

- **Miscellaneous**

Don't let the various themes fool you. *Unhinged* is chock full of cool random cards. Like I said, the *Un Folder* had gotten mighty full.

## All For Now

I'm running out of space for today, but have no fear. There are a number of *Unhinged* design columns to come (it will get easier for me to write when you know all the cards). I thought I'd leave you today with an old-fashioned teaser like I used to do in *The Duelist*. Enjoy.

*Unhinged* includes:

- two different cards that let you use an **Unsummon** to draw a card
- a 16/16 that only costs four mana
- a card that has an activated ability that works “anywhere, anytime”
- two cards that care about your shoes
- a card that introduces a brand new zone
- a card that goes in your opponent's deck
- a two-card combination that makes a 27/27 creature (with a new form of rampage to boot)
- a card with a use for **Mudhole**
- a card that can change size without you or your opponent doing anything
- two cards from the past and one that sends you to the future
- and a card so confusing that the FAQ's first entry for it is “Huh?”

Join me next week, when I do this again (but with different pieces of information).

Until then, may you dream of the improbable.

Mark Rosewater



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