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A Few Words From R&D



Mark Rosewater · Making Magic
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From time to time in my column I try to give all of my readers a glimpse of what it's like to work in R&D. (Past examples include "R&D R&R", "[Take This Job and Love It](#)", "[A Day in the Life](#)" and "[R&D-lightful](#)".) Today, I thought I'd approach this goal in a very different way. Today I'm going to give you a glimpse of R&D through the words we use. It has been said by some pretty famous anthropologists that you've never heard of that a society can often be summed up by its language. R&D is no different. There are many words we use every day that would mean nothing to anyone outside these walls (okay, perhaps a few as I sneak R&D lingo into my columns whenever I can). Today, I am going to present the very first ever R&D Glossary (it's far from being complete, but I figure that gives me some more material if this column proves popular). I think it will give you insight into a number of different ways R&D functions.



As with any R&D column, let me give my normal warning. This column is not so much about **Magic** in specific as it is about the people who make **Magic**. Response to previous columns has proven to me that the majority of my readers enjoy this, so I think all will be well. But enough of my intro, let's get to the meat of the column. Without any further delay, I present the TCG (Trading Card Games) R&D Glossary, Part I.

Bag-End – This is the largest meeting room near R&D. It is used for big meetings, such as when Bill Rose meets with all of R&D (and not just the TCG subsection that I always talk about). This room is named after the home of the Hobbits in Tolkein's Middle Earth books (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy).

"Bah-roken" – Undercosted, or with an ability that is inherently degenerate. This term was coined by former R&D member William Jockusch. In the early days (you know, around *Urza's Saga* time), the word got used a lot. Not so much any more. This is one of the few pieces of R&D slang to become popular with the general public.

The Bridge – This was the name of the meeting room by Organized Play. The room was named after *Star Trek* by now Managing Producer Monty Ashley, as its previous name "N1 Events Conference Room" was a bit boring. By changing it to "The Bridge", if someone was late for a meeting, they could call them on the PA and tell them to "please report to the bridge", which just sounds cool (well, okay, it sounds cool if you're the kind of person that gets a job at Wizards of the Coast). Also, it let people sometimes "take it to the Bridge," which can be said in kind of a James Brown voice. We lost this meeting room during one of our frequent inter-office moves.

C – R&D terminology for a colored mana of the appropriate color. For example, "That common cycle should all cost 1C." This means that each color should have a card that costs one generic and one colored mana.

The Candle – R&D's nickname for **Isochron Scepter**. This is a shortened version of its playtest name Roman Candle. There are too many card nicknames for today's glossary (perhaps a future column), but I wanted to make a point that a lot of R&D's vocabulary has to do with how



we refer to individual cards. This is the thing that most new hires in R&D claim takes the longest to get up to speed on.

The Cave – This is a small section of The Pit (see The Pit below) that has high walls and is isolated from the rest of the cubicles. This area used to be used for miniatures playtesting but got taken over by TCG R&D during Wizards' latest reorganization. Up until last week, intern Mike Turian's desk was in The Cave.

Celerity – This was R&D's nickname for haste before it got a keyword. R&D actually contemplated using the word "celerity" as the keyword, but chose not to when we realized that no one knew what it meant ("speed" for those that have to but don't want to look it up.)

Clever cards – I like to make cards where both pieces of the trick are on the same card (such as *Urza's Destiny's Yavimaya Elder* or *Odyssey's Stone-Tongue Basilisk*). R&D likes to kid me about it so they came up with this sarcastic nickname.

D – R&D terminology for a second colored mana of the appropriate color. Only used directly after C. For example, the protection bear cycle in *Invasion* (the common 2/2 gold creatures with protection from the shared enemy) costs CD."

The Danger Room – This is one of the meeting rooms near The Pit (yeah, once again see The Pit). Its best asset is that it's not listed on the program that books rooms, so it's solely for R&D's use. How did The Danger Room get its name? Back in the day, Richard Garfield was given an office (see, there are perks for inventing **Magic**). But Richard didn't want an office (he liked his cubicle) so he turned it down. But months later, Richard realized he needed a room for his games (Richard has a rather large game collection). When he was informed that he couldn't have a room for his games, Richard asked for his office back and put his games in it, keeping his cubicle of course. Richard said that the room was fair game to anyone in R&D who needed a room whether it was for a meeting or simply to play a game. Richard named the room after the workout room used by the superheroes the X-Men.

Discriminator card – R&D speak for a card that we feel is not very good but is hard to judge. That is, we believe it's the kind of card that will separate the intermediate player from the novice.

East One – The floor where R&D works. "East" stands for East Building (each of the four buildings is named after the compass direction it faces); "one" stands for the first floor. All of the Wizards' buildings have two floors.

Focus One – This is the big meeting room closest to R&D. The name comes from the fact that it's occasionally used for focus group testing.

Focus Two – The second big meeting room near R&D (although not as close as Focus One).

The Free Table – This is the name of the counter in the R&D Kitchen (well, actually it's the kitchen for the whole floor but it's right next to R&D). Here's how the Free Table works. Any item left on the Free Table is fair game for whoever wants to take it. Thus, this has proven as an excellent place to both get rid of and find things. And you wouldn't believe the kinds of things that have ended up on the free table, from furniture to dishware to lots and lots free Wizards product.



Those frames on the back wall hold uncut sheets of Antiquities and Fallen Empires.

FFL – This the internal league used by development to test what **Magic** will be like a year from now. FFL stands for Future Future League. Why two Futures? Because R&D used to have a league called the FL, or Future League, that looked only six months ahead. That league was disbanded as six months only allowed us to recognize the problems, not fix them. Over time the term FFL has become more and more disconnected from the original term used to name it (much like KFC never uses the word "fried" any more).



Grand Central Station – A meeting room up in production. It's named after the New York Train Station.

Hat Trick – R&D term for a card that appeals to all three players types (see [“Timmy, Johnny and Spike”](#) if you don't know what those are). We stole the term from hockey where it means that one person scored three goals in a single game. I learned after I mentioned this term last time in a column that hockey evidently borrowed the term from cricket.

Incrementals – For each set, R&D gets a certain number of copies of each card for us to use when building playtest decks. This practice started around the time of *Mirage*, so we don't have any copies of **Black Lotus** or the Moxes.

Johnny – This is one of the three player types that R&D uses as a tool to make sure that we're making cards for the various types of players. If you don't know what a Johnny is, go read [“Timmy, Johnny, and Spike”](#).

Johnny Card – R&D term for a card we believe is going to appeal to a Johnny style of player. Used casually, the term most often refers to the kind of card players specifically build a deck around.

The Lab – This is a room with an eight-person LAN where R&D can “research” the latest computer games. Some R&D members are so dedicated to this task that they use their lunchtime and evenings.

Leomund's Tiny Hut – A meeting room deep in the heart of RPG (Role Playing Games) R&D. TCG R&D uses it from time to time. It's named after a wizard's spell in **Dungeons & Dragons**.

The Library – Originally, this was a room where R&D housed all of its games. Several months ago, the Creative Team moved into the library as they were looking for a quiet space to call their own. To make space for the desks, R&D had a giant sale where R&D members could buy games at insanely low prices. Each hour the price dropped. I think the last hour was “4 games for a \$1”. Don't worry, we kept all the important games that R&D actually needs to do its job.



Some 'meeting rooms' are more likely to be empty than others. This one is always in use!

Looter ability – R&D term for a creature activation (most often seen in blue) where a player both draws and discards a card. Named after **Merfolk Looter** from *Exodus*.

The Mad Farmer – A prankster that several years back covered R&D member's desks with [odd themed objects](#). After covering my desk with eggs, he has not pulled another prank and we have never learned his identity.

The Mana Pool – The pool and fountain in the courtyard between the four buildings that make up Wizards of the Coast (note that we aren't in every part of each of the four office buildings).

Mark's Donut – A Krispy Kreme chocolate covered kreme filled donut. You see, every once in a while Andrew Finch (the man in charge of R&D's New Business, among other things) travels half an hour away for lunch at a restaurant called Fatburger (a very decadent burger joint). Next door to the Fatburger is a Krispy Kreme Donuts (my pick for the best donut chain). The first time Andrew went, I asked him to pick up a two dozen special (a dozen plain glazed and one dozen variety) that Krispy Kreme carries very cheaply. My reasons for doing this were two-fold. First, I thought it would be nice to buy R&D some Krispy Kreme donuts. And second, I wanted my favorite donut of all time – yes, a Krispy Kreme chocolate covered kreme filled. Not the inferior second cousin custard filled, mind you. Andrew dropped the donuts at my desk and by the time I found them, someone had eaten “my donut”. So, I laid down the law. Twenty three of the donuts were for R&D. The twenty fourth donut was for me. And if anyone ate it, they risked me never buying donuts again. It's taken a little training, but R&D now knows which donut not to eat.

Multiverse – The name of the database that we use for all card games at Wizards.

Nth Edition – This is an R&D term talking about an indefinite base set. Often when we are talking about a card, we don't for various reasons know what specific base set applies, so we use this term meaning the relevant base set.

The Old War Room – This meeting room is half of what used to be a giant meeting room called the War Room. I have meetings here occasionally, and I keep trying to find a way to work in the line: "Gentlemen, you can't fight here. This is the War Room." As you can see from the picture, the room was originally named "The WOR Room," with the initials standing for "Weekly Operating Report," but ever since it stopped being used for that, it's been renamed by an anonymous person with a pen.



Ophidian ability – R&D term for a creature ability that allows players to draw cards when that creature deals combat damage. Named after the *Exodus* card **Ophidian** (which means "snake"). It's interesting to note that **Ophidian's** ability requires you to give up dealing the damage to draw the card, yet R&D uses the term to refer to the ability found on the **Thieving Magpie**.



Packing Material – A Shawn Carnes-ism (a former R&D member). It means a worthless card. Another Shawn Carnes-ism was "Bad Touch" (meaning "inappropriate") that got anagrammed into **Chub Toad**.

The Pit – This is the area where the vast majority of TCG R&D (Trading Card Game Research & Development for the acronym impaired) sits. Other than the Cave (a subset of the Pit), all the inner walls are at a low level, allowing everyone to see and talk to another. The outer walls are all six feet high giving the whole area, well, sort of a pit-like feel.

Promotable – R&D term meaning we believe the card could one day go into a base set.

Pseudo-repeat – R&D term for a card that's almost a repeat but with a change minor enough that it fulfills the role of a repeat. Minor changes might include a change in name, creature type, or template.

Rangestrike – R&D's nickname for "T: Deal N damage to target attacking or blocking creature" (most often found on white creatures).

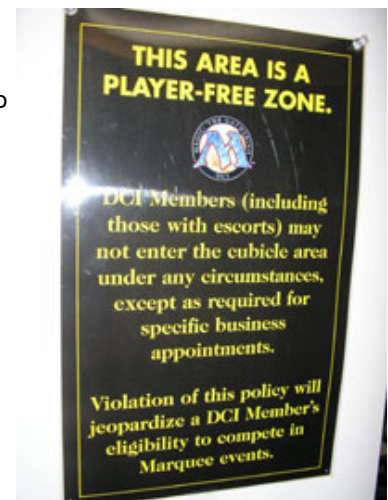
Repeatable – R&D term for a card we feel we could reprint multiple times again in the future.

Rootwalla ability – R&D's nickname for activated power and toughness pumping that can only be used once per turn.

Scepter ability – R&D term for an activated ability (usually with a tap) that causes the player to discard a card. Named after the Alpha card **Disrupting Scepter**.

Serra ability – R&D's longtime nickname for vigilance before it got a keyword. Named after **Serra Angel**, of course.

Sexy – R&D term meaning that a particular card will be very appealing to a vast majority of players. Sexy cards in particular are the types of cards we expect that certain players will have a



We'd show you what The Pit looks like, but, well, read the sign...

longtime attachment to.

Sleeper card – R&D term for a powerful card that will not appear good at first glance. This term comes from the movies where a sleeper is a successful movie that no one expected to do well.

Spike – This is one of the three player types that R&D uses as a tool to make sure that we're making cards for the various types of players. (See Johnny)

Spike Card – R&D term for a card we believe is going to appeal to a Spike style of player. Used casually, the term most often refers to a card that we think will have an impact on tournament play.

Spirit Link – R&D's nickname for, well, you know what the card **Spirit Link** does.

Splashy – R&D term meaning that a particular card will be very appealing to a vast majority of players. Splashy cards in particular are expected to have a very good first impression.

Sticker Stock – We get an equal number of copies of every card, but many cards aren't needed in great numbers for playtesting. Many of these cards get stuck in a box that we can use to sticker playtest cards for cards that haven't been printed yet.

Sucker card – R&D term for a card that looks very good on the surface, but turns out to be not nearly as good once you play with it. This term comes from magic (the thing magicians perform, not **Magic: the Gathering**). A sucker trick is a trick where the audience thinks they know how it works only to discover that the magician was a step ahead of them the whole time.

Tim ability – R&D term for an activated creature ability that deals damage (usually just one) to a creature or player. Named after the nickname for **Prodigal Sorcerer** which itself is a reference to the movie "Monty Python and the Holy Grail".

Timmy – This is one of the three player types that R&D uses as a tool to make sure that we're making cards for the various types of players. (See Johnny)

Timmy Card – R&D term for a card we believe is going to appeal to a Timmy style of player. Used casually, the term most often refers to a big, powerful creature or a spell with a huge effect.

Tweak – R&D term for a card that is similar to an old card with one minor change. This term is also a verb, meaning to make this type of card. For example: "We should Tweak a **Stone Rain** for common."

Untargetability – R&D's nickname for "cannot be the target of spells or abilities". I know, duh.

Vanilla creature – A creature with no rules text. The one interesting exception is flying. R&D will often refer to a creature with nothing but flying as a vanilla creature (most often as a "vanilla flier").

Wapner – This was the meeting room by the legal department. We lost Wapner during one of our many inter-office moves.

The White Board – While there are many white boards at Wizards, *The White Board* is a board in R&D that always has a quirky or funny topic on it. (This is the board [made famous](#) by the "[Is Gum Food?](#)" argument.)

Wombo Combo – R&D terminology for a very cool combo that should excite players. The term comes from the name of a pizza at Round Table Pizza. There is a Round Table Pizza very close to work that many R&D members frequent. I'm such a regular customer that I no longer have to tell them my order.

WotC – Pronounced "watzee", this was the popular nickname for Wizards of the Coast during the early years and it still gets used from time to time.

WotC Time – The practice of starting every meeting at ten after rather than exactly on the hour. This was regular practice at Wizards for many years. Our current CEO, Loren Greenwood, put a stop to the practice when he took over.



WUBRG – Pronounced “wooberg”. This means one mana of each color as in “**Sliver Queen** costs WUBRG”. WUBRG stands for White, Blue, Black, Red, Green - the five colors in R&D order (the order by which we list the colors in our files).

Wyluli ability – R&D's nickname for “T: Target creature gets +N/+N until end of turn”. Named after *Arabian Night's Wyluli Wolf*.

I'm curious if you enjoyed today's column. It was a little different approach to looking behind the curtain at R&D. Let me know what you think.

Join me next time when I explore ninjas in **Magic**.

Until then, may you find the opportunity to sound like an R&D member.

Mark Rosewater



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