

Designing sets by destroying cards

Suppressing Fire: How We Designed *Saviors* with an Axe

Brian Tinsman

Monday, May 30, 2005

- 
- 



- [Brian Tinsman Archive](#)

Welcome to Fire Week! And since *Saviors* was the third set in the block codenamed "Earth, Wind, and Fire," what more appropriate way to celebrate Fire Week than with an insider's view of the Fire set? I'm Brian Tinsman and I was the lead designer of *Saviors of Kamigawa*. Also on the design team were Devin Low, Brian Schneider, and Brandon Bozzi. Together we had a great experience building the final set of the Kamigawa block. But instead of writing about creating *Saviors* cards, I'm going to write about destroying them.

Lots of them.

Early in the design process, every set has more cards than it can possibly include. In fact, for every 165-card set, there are usually *hundreds* of other cards designed that don't make it in or that we cut for one reason or another. Figuring out which cards to cut and which to keep is one of the most important and challenging tasks of designing a set.

In this article I'll give you a glimpse of some actual decisions we made when designing *Saviors of Kamigawa*.

Did I say article? I meant quiz. Here's your chance to step into the shoes of the *Saviors* design team and look at some of the tough choices we had to make when sorting through the masses of cards in the file.

The situation: It's midway through the design process and the FIRE file (we always capitalized *Saviors'* codename, I don't know why) consists of about 350 cards. It's your job to organize the cards into those that belong in the set and those that don't. The cards haven't been through development yet so don't worry about power level. Just think about each card's role in the block. Also, don't rely on the *Saviors* spoiler for the right answer. There are plenty of cards that go into the design file but get cut for development reasons later on.

Keep in mind the primary goals of *Saviors*:

- Let story, characters, and flavor drive the design.

- Support the rest of the block with cards that play especially well with Legends, Soulshift, Splice, Bushido, Arcane, Samurai, and 'spiritcraft'.
- Explore the interesting parts of the new play environment where 'wisdom' cards reward you for having many cards in hand.

Also, keep in mind that these are *design* cards, so elements like the card names are non-final to say the least. And as I said above, power level concerns aren't the focus here (that's development's job). What we're doing at this stage is finding card ideas that best fit the set.

Question 1 of 9

We need a white common creature. Which one do we keep?

A

[Battle Trumpeteer]

3WW

Creature - Soldier

0/2

T, Put a music counter onto CARDNAME.

Remove a music counter from CARDNAME: Regenerate target creature.

For each music counter on CARDNAME, white creatures get +1/+1.

B

[Spirit Guard]

4W

Creature - Spirit

2/4

Soulshift 4

Vigilance

C

[Squee's Ugly Cousin]

2W

Creature - Spirit

2/2

At the beginning of your upkeep, if CARDNAME is in your graveyard, you may return CARDNAME to your hand. If you do, you can't play spells or attack until your next upkeep.

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

Question 2 of 9

We need a 'hand size matters' card. Which one do we keep?

A

[Growing Guy]

1G

Creature - Human Shaman

1/1

At the beginning of your upkeep, if you have more cards than your opponent, put a +1/+1 counter on CARDNAME.

B

[Guess What I'll Do Next]

3

Artifact

At the beginning of your upkeep, if you have more cards than your opponent, CARDNAME deals damage to that opponent equal to the difference.

At the beginning of your upkeep, if you have fewer cards than an opponent, CARDNAME deals damage to that opponent equal to the difference.

C

[Dummy's Delight]

UU

Enchantment

During your upkeep, if any player has fewer cards than all other players, that player draws a card.

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

Question 3 of 9

We need a blue rare. Which one do we keep?

A

[Minds Into Balance]

2UU

Sorcery

Each player who has more cards in his or her library than another player puts cards from the top of that library into his or her graveyard until all players have the same number.

B

[Equal and Opposite]

2UUU

Enchantment

Whenever a permanent an opponent controls becomes tapped, you may untap a permanent you control.

C

[Twins Convention]

3UU

Sorcery

For each creature in play, put a token creature that's a copy of it into play under your control. Sacrifice those tokens at end of turn.

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

Question 4 of 9

We need a black uncommon creature. Which one do we keep?

A

[Killdebeest]

2B

Creature - Spirit

3/3

During your upkeep, return a black creature you control to owner's hand.

B

[Who's Who]

2BB

Creature - Demon Spirit

2/2

When CARDNAME comes into play, target opponent names a card. If that card is in your hand, sacrifice CARDNAME. If not you may reveal another card and put two +1/+1 counters on CARDNAME.

C

[Evil Ratfolk]

2B

Creature - Rat Rogue

2/1

Target opponent loses 1 life for each damage dealt to CARDNAME.

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

Question 5 of 9

Which one do we keep?

A

[Mr. Burn]

2RR

1/1

X, T: Deal X to target creature or player, where X is equal to the number of cards in your hand.

B

[Garden of Good and Evil]

2

Artifact

2: Target player draws a card. Any player may use this ability.

2: Target player discards a card. Any player may use this ability.

C

[Corpse Tango]

B

Sorcery – Arcane

Return target creature in your graveyard to play. Sacrifice it at end of turn.

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

Question 6 of 9

We need a keyworded card. Which one do we keep?

A

[Sucker of the Blood]

2BB

Creature – Human Ninja

1/3

Ninjutsu 1BB

Whenever CARDNAME deals combat damage to a player, that player loses 3 life and you gain 3 life.

B

[Purge Sinker]

2U

Creature - Spirit

1/1

T: Counter target spell unless its controller pays 1.

Purge - 2U, Discard CARDNAME: Counter target spell unless its controller pays 3.

C

[Possessing Demon]

2BB

Creature - Demon Spirit

2/2

Possess 1B: (Pay 1B: Target creature becomes possessed. CARDNAME can't attack, block, or activate abilities until its target leaves play.)

Possessed creature deals 3 damage to its controller during your upkeep.

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

Question 7 of 9

Which one do we keep?

A

[Super Maro Brothers]

4RRGG

Creature - Spirit

/

CARDNAME has power and toughness equal to the number of cards in your hand.

2, return a permanent you control to owner's hand: CARDNAME gains one of the following - trample, or can't be the target of spells and abilities until end of turn.

2, discard a card: CARDNAME gets one of the following - first strike or haste until end of turn.

B

[Ultimate Army of the North]

4RR

Sorcery

Remove the top 3 cards of your library from the game. If the last card removed is not a land, repeat this until the last card removed is a land.

Put a red 1/1 barbarian creature token into play for each card removed from the game this way.

C

[Binding Eternity]

X3RR

Legendary Sorcery

Skip X turns.

CARDNAME deals X damage to each creature target player controls. CARDNAME deals X damage to that player for each creature damaged this way.

CARDNAME may not be played if there is another CARDNAME in any graveyard.

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

Question 8 of 9

We need a 'hand size matters' card. Which one do we keep?

A

[Fiery Ritual]

3R

Sorcery

Add R to your mana pool for each card in your hand.

B

[Wrath of Alexandria]

1WW

Sorcery

If you have seven cards in your hand, destroy all creatures.

C

[Temporal Inept]

2U

Creature

1/2

If you have more cards in hand than an opponent, CARDNAME has "T, UU: return target permanent to owner's hand."

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

Question 9 of 9

We need a "bad rare". Which one do we keep?

A

[Narrowhead]
B
Sorcery
Discard your hand.

B

[Unwelcome Guests]
2BB
Sorcery
Whenever you play a creature this turn, each player discards a card.

C

[Power Siphon]
1B
Enchantment
Whenever an opponent splices a card, add BBB to your mana pool.

Correct answer: [\[reveal answer\]](#)

One With Cement.

Ow.

But the set is great, so sometimes even when you lose, you win.

I hope you had fun learning about some of the decisions we had to make when we built the *Saviors of Kamigawa* set. If I did my job I gave you a deeper appreciation of the fact that designing a set is not just about inventing interesting new cards. It's about destroying them too.