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During the *Saviors of Kamigawa* previews here on the site, Mark Rosewater showed off Enduring Ideal and discussed the design challenges associated with the cycle of "Epic" spells from that set. Below—cut and pasted from Mark's "Epic Struggle" article—is the list of constraints that each card in this cycle had to follow—quite a daunting list indeed.

- the spell had to have an interesting effect; something this grandiose couldn't just do some bland effect that gets done every set
- the spell had to have play value; that is, it needed to do something that created interesting game situations turn after turn
- the spell had to allow the caster to win without guaranteeing victory; this is a very gentle balance; the team had to make effects that would lead to winning but not instantly win
- the spell had to be worth its cost; not being able to play spells is a huge drawback; the spell's effects had to measure up
- the spell had to allow the player ways to interact with it; just because you're done playing spells doesn't mean there's nothing left to do; there's activated abilities, creatures that can attack and possibly even new keywords that get around the restriction

The design team certainly nailed the spirit of the cycle with what they handed off, but it was up to the developers to actually put each card through the wringer and make sure that they followed in practice what they were designed for in theory.

The cycle's design name? The "All-Ins." Yes, poker terminology has invaded R&D full-bore. We've even started calling Blinding Angel "Big Blind."

Enduring Ideal

Search your library for an enchantment card and put it into play. Then shuffle your library.

Although the current ability on this card was not the first one that the design team came up with, it was the one handed off. And it was the one that underwent the least changes of all of them between design and seeing print. Even its mana cost remained the same.

I love the way this card is set up. Putting cards from your library into play for free is always exciting (as fans of the cards Tinker and Natural Order will attest), but the beauty of the card is that using it to win the game requires some imagination. If you got to put a creature into play every turn, winning wouldn't be that tough. Sorcery every turn for free? Piece of cake. But enchantments? It requires some effort, but the payoff is lots of fun.



In development, the people I faced that most often used this card were Devin Low (who I believe designed it) and Worth Wollpert. Both decks were wacky—lots of colors, a toolbox of powerful enchantments, and a whole lot of inevitability (you'd better win fast against them). What I enjoyed was their choices for "win conditions"—one opted for fully-charged red and green Hondens, whereas the other favored the unexpected Genju of the Realm!

At this time, the team was growing unhappy with the black epic card (see below) and decided to kill it. Randy suggested moving the millstone one from blue to black, citing cards like Cranial Extraction as proof that black can attack the library. A new ability was given to the blue one:

Search target opponent's library for an artifact, creature, enchantment, or land card. Put that card into play under your control. Then that player shuffles his or her library.

Devin suggested removing "enchantment" to create a weird mirror with the white one—the white one would get enchantments from your deck, and the blue one would get everything else from your opponent's deck—but the team decided to leave the blue one alone as a clean "Bribery anything." A hefty mana cost was slapped on it, as this effect is not one we think people would appreciate being top-tier tournament worthy, mostly because the act of tutoring from an opponent's library every turn is pretty distasteful (for instance, I can deduce what you drew each turn by noting what was missing from your deck—very time consuming and frustrating, not to mention potentially rough on your cards). Of course, we had to test it anyway.

Mons made a deck that used all manner of mana acceleration to power this thing out as fast as possible, but his version couldn't stand up to top Standard decks (it was pretty easy to counter the ten-mana spell once you figured out his plan), and the card was deemed safe. Maybe there's something about this card we missed—I'm eager to see if it shows up anywhere.

Neverending Torment

The black epic was a tough nut to crack, and went through several designs. Here are a few the design team tossed around:

Name two cards. Search through target player's deck, graveyard, and hand for all copies of these cards and remove them from the game. That player loses 1 life for each card removed from the game this way.

Target player loses 2 life for each tapped permanent he or she controls. You gain that much life.

Target player loses 1 life for each permanent he or she controls. You gain that much life.

Target player loses half of his or her life, rounded up. You gain that much life.



Each of those was met with some measure of resistance, and the development team tried to solve the problem by moving the epic Millstone ability from blue to black. That change was also met with resistance—I distinctly remember the Tuesday department meeting wherein we argued how much "anti-library" stuff black was allowed to have. The consensus boiled down to "Milling is blue; Capping is black," meaning black got to remove specific cards from libraries, but blue got to do the random indiscriminate diminishing. So no-go on the epic Millstone in black.

The next suggestion stuck:

Search target player's library for X cards, where X is the number of cards in your hand, and remove them from the game. Then that player shuffles his or her library.

This was a good fit, as it now attacked the library in a "black" way, but it also incorporated the "wisdom" mechanic that is very much a part of *Saviors*.

Whatever testing of this card was done didn't involve me; sorry, I have no anecdotes!

Undying Flames

The first attempt at this card was the following:

Destroy two target lands, then CARDNAME deals one damage to target player for each land card in his or her graveyard.

That ability is both heavy-handed and incredibly mean, so the design team took the road less traveled and came up with this wacky little number:

Add RRRRRRRR to your mana pool.



Now that is out-of-the-box thinking. You get a ton of mana every turn, but without the ability to play spells, what could you possibly do with it? Some players see cards like this as a supreme challenge. But many others—including most of the developers—didn't think we'd get much "bang" out of a card that was this difficult to use. A comment from Paul Sottosanti:

ps 5/6: so if i cast this extravagant spell that is so powerful that it sucks up all my concentration for the rest of the duel, i earn the right to mana burn myself to death? sign me up.

I chipped in with similar snarky disdain:

AF 7/1: An all-in that makes you lose the game instead of win it. Interesting.

The card did have its supporters, however, and various changes to accommodate it were suggested—everything from having it add the mana to target player's pool (allowing you to mana burn your opponents to death) to upping the number of cards in the set that would allow you to repeatedly use eight mana during your upkeep. In the end, though, the team opted for something far more normal.

Remove cards from the top of your library from the game until you remove a nonland card. Undying Flames deals damage to target creature or player equal to that card's converted mana cost. Brian Schneider made some vicious decks with this sucker back when it cost just five mana. He'd Seething Song it out on turn three, then use Sensei's Divining Top to ensure he'd flip over big spells (and draw the small ones). Jiwari and Ghost-Lit Raider played big parts in keeping the board clear, as did Quicksand (from the upcoming *Ninth Edition* set). His deck was the main reason the cost went up from five to six at the end of development.

Endless Swarm

I'm sure the inspiration for the first stab at this card came from the *Invasion* Dragon Rith, the Awakener:

Put a 1/1 green Snake creature token into play for each permanent you control.

Sound powerful? You're right. You essentially kept doubling and doubling the number of creatures you had, as each new resolution created more and more permanents to be counted. I can vaguely remember playing against this version and being flabbergasted.



Lead designed Brian Tinsman quickly changed it to count just the number of lands you had in play as opposed to all permanents. That was close to correct, although it was still making just a few more

tokens per turn than the developers were comfortable with.

As with the black one, the fix came from looking at the rest of the set. So many cards in *Saviors* care about the number of cards in your hand... why shouldn't this? So the epic Snake-maker became a "wisdom" card.

This card did well in testing, so much so that it had to go to eight mana from seven. The development team was hesitant to cost many of the epic spells *too* aggressively, for once they begin opponents are often powerless to stop them.

Will any of these five powerhouses creep into the Block or Standard environments? Have you been able to make them work online or at your local tournaments? I'd be curious to read about your experiences with these cards on the message boards.

Last Week's Poll:

What aspect of the new Pro Tour schedule excites you the most?		
None of it.	2535	36.7%
Plane tickets as PTQ prizes.	1725	25.0%
The advent of Team Constructed.	1254	18.2%
An event in Honolulu and/or a Standard Pro Tour.	962	13.9%
Something else.	339	4.9%
Reorganization from five events to four.	83	1.2%
Total	6898	100.0%

If I was still playing in PTQs, the plane ticket change would have made me jump for joy.

This Week's Poll:

Are there cards that you absolutely cannot stand losing to?

Yes

No

If you clicked "yes," post what those cards are in our forums, or drop me an email using the link below. I'd love to hear what they are.

