

## Designing one of the most popular sets in Magic history. Setting the Standard

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**I**nvasion was destined to be great. Simple as that. I know it's a bold claim. The design came together near perfect. The few problems that occurred were solved leaving all happy in the end. Having worked on almost every **Magic** set in some capacity, I have experienced all the ups and downs of **Magic**. *Invasion* is second only to Alpha. (No set can beat Alpha.) The stars were aligned and the gods decided - *Invasion* would be great.

Late winter 2000, Mark Rosewater, Mike Elliott, and I went on a "special offsite retreat" to design *Invasion*. Mark's dad Gene has a house in Tahoe. We spent five days in Tahoe designing *Invasion*, with a little skiing on the side, as Mark mentioned in his [article Monday](#). Large expansions like *Invasion* are typically designed over a six-month period. Designing a set in three months is fast. The bulk of *Invasion* design took only five days.

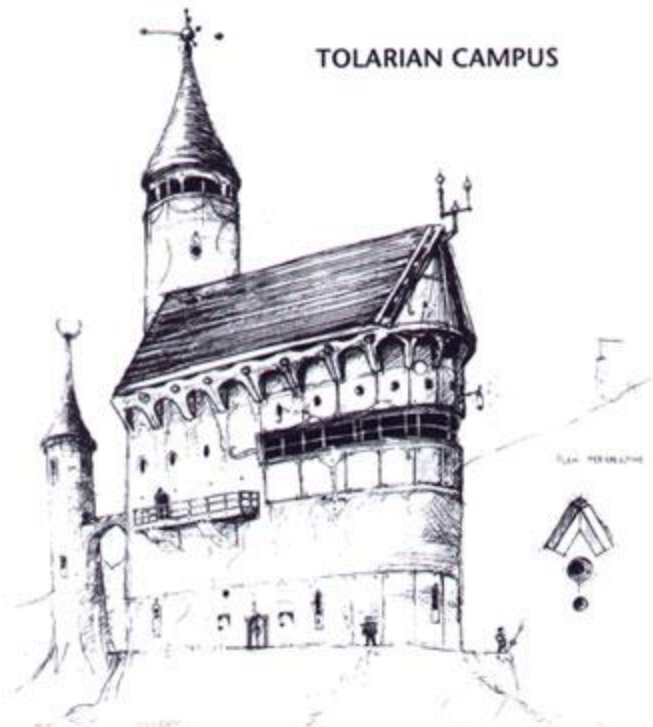
*Invasion's* multi-color theme was decided in late 1998 - long before any actual design began. R&D wanted a multi-color environment. **Magic** had gold cards in its past but never a true multi-color environment. *Ice Age* and *Mirage* dabbled with gold. *Legends* had a large, eclectic pool of gold cards. But no set was focused on multi-color. *Invasion* was the first.





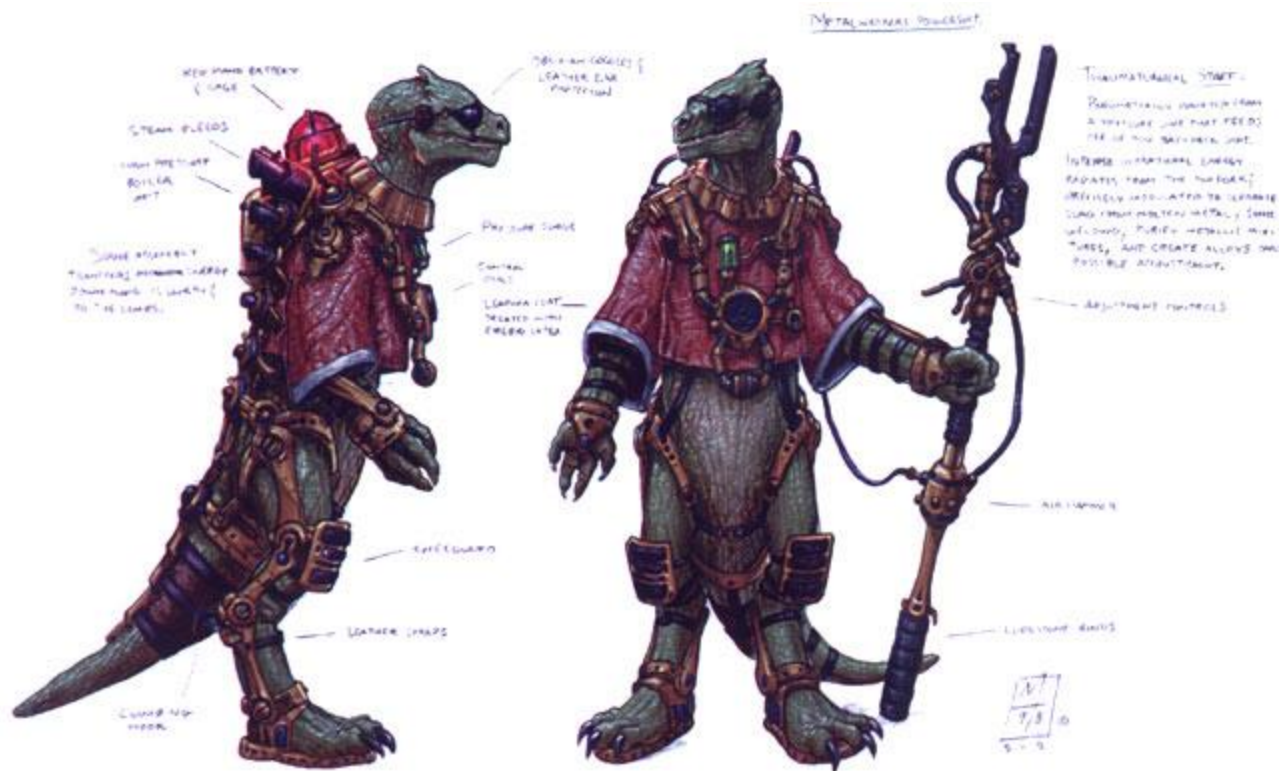
The multi-colored themed environment was agreed upon. How to create that environment was given to Mark, Mike, and me. We've worked on many other sets together in various capacities and combinations, and there are even other sets in which all three of us participated in some portion of design. But *Invasion* remains the only set where the three of us collaborated to produce the initial design file.

Though we arrived in Tahoe with five days to design *Invasion*, we had been thinking about how to create a multi-color environment for years. We came with card and mechanic ideas plus an outside design. Creating a multi-color environment is simple at first. Add more gold cards and - bingo - we have a multi-colored environment. The challenge is that a heavy gold card environment does not play well in



limited. Because of that, gold cards couldn't be the only solution to creating a multi-color environment, so we had to find other answers. Fix limited and you solve the multi-color environment puzzle.

The first mechanic we put in *Invasion* was off-color activation. A red creature with activated fear; a blue creature with regeneration; a white creature with firebreathing. Yes, a white creature with a red activation. In fact, the original *Invasion* design was sent to development containing all ten color-pairs. Shortly after development started working on the set, however, the enemy color-pair cards were pulled from *Invasion* and later became the basis for *Apocalypse*.



The next step was adding *Invasion's* most prominent mechanic - Kicker. Kicker design was inspired by **Fireball**. **Magic** from the beginning has had X-spells that increase in power as your mana increases. **Fireball** is the first card that provided the caster a second ability (addition targets) for a mana cost. The kicker concept is simple - a good, cheap card for the early game that is promoted to a good, expensive card for the late game.

Kicker also plays well in a multi-color environment. In limited you can play a red creature with a green kicker without having green in your deck. Kicker allows cards to be multi-color and mono-color at the same time.

The next ingredient in the recipe was gold cards. The inclusion of gold cards had been part of *Invasion's* design specs from the



beginning. How to create meaningful gold cards wasn't addressed until actual design started. Some gold cards in *Legends* bothered me. Some cards were strictly worse than their mono-color counterparts. Other gold cards in *Legends* inspired the **Magic** community and me. I think that's why we all love *Legends*. *Invasion* gold cards needed to more than mono-color cards with a second color of mana attached. *Invasion* gold cards blended the strengths of two colors to produce a card that neither of the colors could get on its own, or if the color could, the color couldn't get the card as cheaply as the gold card.

Tying the multi-color theme together was a focus on "color matters". Color matters didn't have a keyword like Kicker or the visual pop of gold cards or off-color activation but was as essential. Color matters rewarded players for expanding into an additional color as well as penalizing player for plays too few colors. The color matters theme meant players had to think about card color during play, not just when drafting or building their deck.

Kicker, off-color activation, and gold cards blended well together. From day one *Invasion* was fun to play in limited and constructed. (Having all ten color-pairs was at times overwhelming in draft, which is part of why the enemy-color pairs were ultimately pushed off to *Apocalypse*.)

In addition to its multi-color focus, *Invasion* is creature focused. All of **Magic**'s lead designers have design traits. Mine is the love of creature, especially big creature. I am a Timmy-Spike and proud of it. The Timmy in me shows whenever I lead a design group. *Invasion* is great in limited because it give you gold cards, lots of creatures, and big creatures and spells.



*Invasion* design incorporated a **Magic** design from outside designer Barry Reich. (Ok, so I kind of stretched the truth when I said *Invasion* was designed in five days.) Barry was one of the original playtesters back in Philadelphia.

Barry's **Magic** resume includes playtesting Alpha, *Ice Age*, and *Mirage* and playing Richard Garfield in the first game of **Magic**. Barry created Domain cards. (As Mark mentioned, to this day I and others in R&D still call them Barry cards. When someone says "Domain cards" I think, "what the hell is that" and then I remember "oh yeah, Barry cards.") Reading through Barry's design file I immediately loved the Domain card idea. Domain cards fit my style of multi-color play. Play all five colors, play one of each basic land on my first five turns, then have fun playing all the good stuff. Domain cards are the icing on the cake. My one regret about domain is that the **sixth basic land** didn't make it through development. We had a land that tapped for colorless and counted as a basic land, so it counted as a sixth land type for Domain purposes. Perhaps one day Domain will return with its sixth basic land.



(Barry not pictured above)

The craziest idea for an *Invasion* card mechanic came from who else - Rosewater. Mark pitched the concept of split cards to me and I knew on the spot that split cards were going into *Invasion*. As for the rest of Wizards, the reception wasn't as warm. A true *Ripley's Believe It or Not* fact is that R&D disliked split cards at first. *Invasion* developers wanted split card pulled before development even started. The majority of the **Magic** Brand team despised split cards. I never truly understood why so many hate split cards so much. I can't recall specifically why they didn't want split cards. All the rules-manager types were against split cards, but that's true in the beginning with most new concepts. The rest of **Magic** R&D just didn't like split cards. To be fair to present-day **Magic** R&D, many developers were not at Wizards for *Invasion* development. As for those **Magic** developers still working at Wizards, I can't find one who admits to have been against split cards. Over the years I've tried to talk with developers about their initial dislike of split cards. Now no one claims to have been against split cards in the beginning. I do remember (and Mark concurs) Mark and I fighting with *Invasion* developers over split cards - a lot. The *Invasion* design team forced the *Invasion* development team to play *Invasion* as designed for a couple of weeks before the development team could make changes. Split cards won over the developers in that time and never left the set.

I think I wrote that *Mirage* is my favorite set when I wrote my **lead designer's article** for *Mirage*. For the record, *Mirage* was my first set, so I will always look back upon it fondly. However, *Invasion* is the set I'm most proud of. It's also the set I have the most fun playing. It makes me happy *Invasion* is the standard against which all sets are ultimately measured.