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One part of the card creation process that falls under the watchful eye of development teams, almost by default, is how the final versions of cards will actually look. That is partly because of timing--these issues tend to come to a head during editing and typesetting, during which development is still tuning power level; but mainly because development's role at its core is figuring out the *presentation* of upcoming **Magic** releases. We are constantly trying to perfect the play experience, which goes far beyond card text and rules changes and mana costs. Do themes come through? Does the set make sense? Do the cards communicate exactly what we want them to? These are all questions development tries to answer. So while we're not the ones writing reminder text for new keywords, or coming up with rules changes to accommodate the upcoming set, or designing card frame overhauls like the one for *Eighth Edition*, or coming up with new frames altogether for things like the *Champions of Kamigawa* flip cards, we are the pains-in-the-butt that get to scrutinize them all. We have to look at each change or new idea through the eyes of players to determine how well it will all work.

Don't get me wrong, design thinks about these things as well for sure. In fact, design is usually responsible for brainstorming many of the wacky ideas that are then tuned and implemented by the art team, the templating team, and so on. One big issue that the *Ravnica* design team faced was making sure that players would understand what *Ravnica* was about just from looking at cards. But would they? The overarching structure of the set--"the guild model"--would only be apparent from looking at the set as a whole, not necessarily from opening a few booster packs. The keywords had no thematic connection, and you may not even immediately realize that only four multicolored pairs are represented. We talked long and hard about different ways to give the set a "feel" that would come through even in a small sample size.

At the heart of the issue were multicolored--or "gold"--cards. I knew that we needed each guild to have its own look and feel that was distinct from the other three, and I felt that our existing gold frame did not serve to differentiate different gold cards from one another, but rather made them all feel the same. Let's look at some *Invasion* cards as examples. Here is Llanowar Knight:



Now, looking primarily at the card frame, which of the following three cards does the Knight seem to have the most in common with?



The Knight looks just like Vodalian Zombie and little (other than the palette of the art) like the other two. When you sort your cards, you would naturally put the Knight and Zombie in the same pile. But when it comes time to build a deck, or play a game, the Knight and the Zombie almost never go together. And if you played one of them, your opponent wouldn't really know from the frame what colors your creature was.

A while back, we refined our presentation of two-color nonbasic land frames in such a way that helped communicate very clearly what colors of mana the land was capable of producing. This change made the lands' functions more apparent when you opened them in a pack, sorted them while building decks, or viewed them across the table in game. Just look at the difference between the *Mirage* card Mountain Valley and the *Onslaught* card Wooded Foothills:



Like night and day! The color fade of the text box does so much that it's a wonder we took so long to think of it. In my mind, we needed to do something similar to the gold cards in *Ravnica*--something that made them feel different from one another. The straight gold was fine for *Legends* and the *Invasion* block, as the simple fact that gold cards existed was enough of a big deal in those sets. But *Ravnica* was upping the stakes. Gold was no longer a single entity, but four distinct ones. So I sat down at my computer, started up Photoshop, and made this wacky-looking thing:



At the time, that, in my mind, was what red-green gold cards should have looked like in the *Ravnica* block. It sure was drastic. I showed it around, and it was met with very emotional responses on both sides. Many people really liked the idea and felt it did exactly what *Ravnica* needed. Others really balked at the idea that the so-called "gold set" would have no actual gold card frames in it.



The color gold really does have a powerful effect on **Magic** players. I distinctly remember paying some significant amount of money--somewhere in the \$5-8 range--for a junky *Legends* card called The Lady of the Mountain back in 1994. What did it do? Nothing. It was a 5/5 vanilla for 4 . But it was gold and shiny! And my roommate had no such cards, so it was automatically awesome! I played that thing in several decks, never to any great effect, just because it looked so cool. Years later, with the release of *Invasion*, gold fever once again swept up **Magic** players all over the globe. There's something about that color that woos all of us. The color gold hints at something amazing in **Magic**, and critics of my card frame idea argued that we couldn't lightly toss that aside.

On top of potentially burning the equity of the color gold, there were other issues. The art team had problems with randomly mashing two things together that were designed to look good in and of themselves. Sure, there was a very blatant functionality to making a half-and-half card frame, but our creative types posited that the card's aesthetics were quite bad. Of course, as a long-time **Magic** player, I couldn't see the forest for the trees. To me (and probably to most of you), the card made *sense*. I couldn't separate the mechanical meaning of seeing two familiar pieces merged into one from the potential ugliness of it. I just had to take their word for it that some kind of design no-no's were being committed. Lastly, there was the issue of future gold cards of three or more colors. While there were no plans to do such cards in the *Ravnica* block, there was a general consensus that any change we made to the gold frame would be one we'd be willing to adopt for the foreseeable future, not just one block. And my plan didn't have a good answer for three-, four-, and five-colored cards. (No one thought Neapolitan ice cream would be a good look for the Fervent Charge's of the world.)

My plan to change stuff at all started to lose steam as design turned into development, but it was revisited once we got our first batch of feedback from our external playtest groups. We have a stable of multiplayer playgroups around the world that we often let try out new sets in advance; the idea is that they'll give us feedback on aspects of the set that we may have missed or taken for granted because we're too close to the material, as well as give some of the multiplayer gems a proper go-

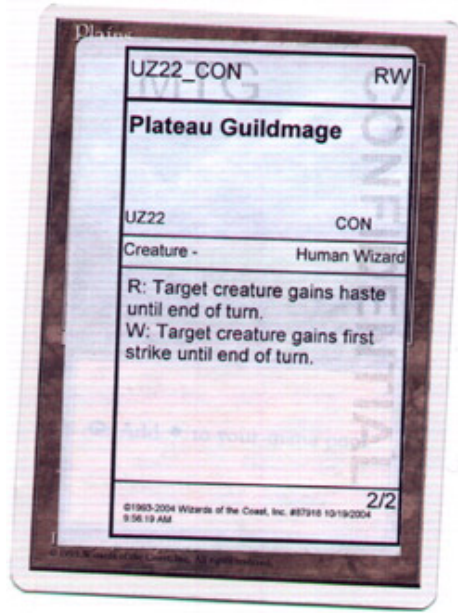
round in playtesting. Unfortunately for us, the biggest initial message that came back from their *Ravnica* experience was, "We don't get what this is about."

Granted, none of the creative elements were in place, which tainted their experience for sure. The words "Dimir," "Selesnya," and so on weren't on any of the cards at that point, the set name was still "Control," and not "*Ravnica: City of Guilds*." There were no ads, posters, websites, deck inserts, or articles to explain to them the basics of the block. They were on their own with a spoiler list and giant stack of playtest stickers and they just didn't get it.

That reaction renewed our desire to convey what the guild model meant in every way possible, including the card frames. The art team was tasked with taking my initial idea and coming up with varying degrees of compromises that still used the elements of traditional gold, and we'd see if any of them conveyed what we wanted.

Art director Jeremy Cranford and his cohorts gave us lots of great options. They ranged from a cleaned up version of my idea to something as subtle as the normal gold frame (the one used on *Inname as One* and *Genju of the Realm*) with a faded two-color pinline (the thin line that runs around the name bars, art box, and text box). There were versions with the faded two-color frame and a gold pinline, a gold frame with faded name bars and text boxes, and everything in between.

After reviewing the slew of choices, opinions were still mixed in R&D. Some people still liked my simple and blunt solution the best. The creative team liked the most subtle change--gold with a faded pinline. Most people, myself included, felt that the correct answer was somewhere in the middle--something that preserved gold but still made the different guilds distinct, even at a distance. We had the art team mock up versions of the gold frame with a faded pinline and faded text boxes in the rich, saturated style of nonbasic lands. The graphics people proceeded with this decision, and eventually we were presented with a collection of "art in frames" for the set using these new layouts, and here's what we saw:



While that card may look decent by itself, pages and pages of them--in all four color combinations--was a bit, shall we say, much. There were too many colors all mashed together, and it was visually overwhelming. Jeremy was hoping we'd come to our senses, and we did, opting to instead use a text

box fade made up of the colors used in the text boxes of spells as opposed to lands. And that's what we ended up with.



Hybrid

Meanwhile, off on the side, Mark Rosewater was pushing for hybrid cards to have a different frame from their gold counterparts. Rules-wise, they didn't need to; a green-white hybrid card is just as green and white as Armadillo Cloak as far as the rules are concerned. But Mark had two good reasons to want them to have their own look. One, the reason for including them in the set was to showcase something new, and nothing says "new" like a stunning-looking frame. Two, when sorting cards and building decks, players should be clued in that *these cards are different*. They don't have the limiting factors that normal gold cards have and should not be carelessly lumped in with them. Mark was always a fan of my original blended frame idea, so it didn't surprise me that his push to use them on hybrid cards worked out.



They're actually a perfect fit there. There are times where you can basically treat Centaur Safeguard as a mono-white card--while building a deck or determining if you should mulligan your opening hand--and times you can treat it like a mono-green card. These frames really hammer that home. Personally, I'm glad that my initial idea found a worthy home. As we worked through the gold card issues, I came to the realization that they really didn't belong there, but the hybrid mechanic definitely benefits from these frames in my mind.

Watermarks

We knew early in design that the individual guilds were going to encompass more than just gold cards. We wanted mono-colored cards with the guild keywords to also be lumped in as "guild cards" somehow, and we were trying to figure out how to make them matter mechanically. For instance, we discussed a card that, in essence, would say, "Search your library for a Golgari card." How could we label the Golgari cards cleanly? There certainly isn't lots of extra real estate lying around on the card face for extra icons. My idea was to use the expansion symbol in a way that communicated a card's guild.

Imagine if the expansion symbol for the set was a shield, or crest. The outline of the shield would be black, silver, or gold to communicate rarity, and the interior of the shield would show the card's guild. A blank shield would be un-guilded. Here are some examples:



With such a system in place, we could use the symbol in card text, such as, "Search your library for a card with the [black-green shield] symbol." Pretty neat.

The first problem with this system is that it is completely insular. We'd like people to experiment combining old gold cards with *Ravnica* ones--such as putting some Spiritmongers and Pernicious Deeds into a Golgari deck--but the mechanics that look for guild crests wouldn't find these cards. The subset of that problem is that we couldn't do reprints from older sets as guild cards, or ever reprint guild cards in later sets. Elves of Deep Shadow from *The Dark* did not have a black-green guild crest, so we couldn't just pretend that it did and reprint it. The two versions would be mechanically different. And any later reprintings of simple cards like Watchwolf would obviously have different expansion symbols than *Ravnica*--most likely ones that weren't guild crests.

The other problem was that the space for the expansion symbol is not quite big enough to easily handle all the required information (and the graphic designers really weren't keen on it anyway). So we tabled the idea of a mechanical link for guild cards.

Later, as we were brainstorming ways to make the guilds more blatantly obvious to the player with limited access to cards, Mike Turian suggested the idea of a watermark, similar to the one that we use in the text boxes of cards in the **Duel Masters** game. I don't think anyone was immediately sold on the idea, but it was certainly worth a try.

The results were fantastic. Not only do they tie all the guild cards together neatly, but they give the guild symbols themselves a lot more "face time." Players would quickly learn to associate the sun-tree with the Selesnya Guild, the flaming fist with the Boros, and so on. The icing on the cake for me was seeing guild cards in foil, with the symbol "knocked out" so that it shines beautifully.

The Future

The watermarks are a *Ravnica*-block only feature, but the rest of our changes are permanent parts of **Magic** going forward. Two-colored gold cards will have colored pinlines and faded text boxes. Hybrid cards, a shoo-in to return someday, will have the "half-and-half" frames. (That's why we gave the hybrid cards "split" mana symbols as opposed to using little guild insignias--we knew we'd want to

use the mechanic again someday.) We'll tackle the issue of three-colored cards when we need to, although I imagine we'll use "normal" gold frames for them with no color fading. The cool part about that is that the two-colored cards and three-colored cards will have a lot of elements in common, just how the two-colored cards have elements in common with their related mono-colored cards.

Did we need to make any of these changes? Not at all. Would the game play any differently if we left all the frames alone? Sure. But we're constantly looking at every piece of the puzzle trying to find ways to heighten the **Magic** experience.

I hope you agree that it's working.

Last Week's Poll

Do you plan to play in <i>Ravnica</i> release events on <i>Magic Online</i> ?		
No, but I played in the real prerelease/release events.	3304	42.5%
No, and I didn't play in the real events either.	2407	30.9%
Yes, and I didn't play in the real events.	1065	13.7%
Yes, and I also played in the real prerelease/release events.	1005	12.9%
Total	7781	100.0%

We've seen an increase in activity on **Magic Online** in recent months. Hopefully *Ravnica* is dragging people out of the woodwork!

This Week's Poll

Approximately how many theme decks (online or paper) do you purchase?

- One of each, every time.
- Average of 1-3 per set.
- A couple here and there.
- One, rarely.
- None, ever.

