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# Crossing the Streams

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 Latest Developments  
 Friday, December 23, 2005



Hybrid cards were one of the most innovative things we did in all of 2005—they have a new mechanic and a new look, but still fit right into the “gold world” that is *Ravnica*. I spent many hours working on making these cards come to life, and here's a rundown of all the problems and hurdles it had to overcome before seeing print...

Let's say you're building a white weenie deck, and you have to decide between the following two cards. Which one would you want in your deck?

- **Tundra Wolves**
- a card very similar to **Tundra Wolves**, except it can't block **Paladin en-Vec**.

Why is this relevant? Read on...

## Hybridization

I was one of the champions of the hybrid mechanic—the mechanic that makes **Selesnya Guildmage** look so fabulous—during the design of *Ravnica*, then called “Control.” I, along with Mark Rosewater, felt that there was a lot of room for design of cards that could be cast by one of two different colors, at all rarities.

The mechanic's naysayers felt that by definition, hybrid cards had to be weaker than their monocolored counterparts, as being easier to cast is an inherent advantage. In other words, this card:

```
Ice Rain
2{R/G}
Sorcery
Destroy target land.
```

...is just better than **Stone Rain** and **Ice Storm** straight up. The main reason is that if you are playing it *specifically in a deck with access to red and green mana*, it is easier to play than either of its two predecessors. Note that in a mono-red deck or a black-red deck, it is exactly **Stone Rain**. In a mono-green deck, it is exactly **Ice Storm**. But, as I said before, it becomes more powerful in a deck with both colors.

So, in order to make cards that everyone felt would be fair, we fiddled around with stuff like:

```
Glory Bear
1{G/W}
Creature - Bear Soldier
2/2
```

Yes, it's better than both **Grizzly Bears** and **Glory Seeker**, but we've proven that we're willing to make cards that are just better than those (like **Wild Mongrel** and its less-impressive pal **Patrol Hound**).

Even cards like this one:

```
Wind Griffin
2{W/U}
Creature - Griffin Drake
2/2
Flying
```

...made people nervous for multiple reasons, the main one being that we have never made a creature that is strictly better than **Wind Drake**.

I could have argued the point, but Mark and I figured out the best way to make everyone happy was to come up with new creatures and effects that had no direct comparisons and cost them in some way that would be fair to both colors. So we set about to do just that.



We did good work, but, as you know if you read Mark's design columns during the preview weeks, hybrid was cut from the set even before we had settled on the four-guild model. All of it was shoved under the rug.

## Guess Who's Back...

Late in development, Brian Schneider noted that the set had nothing actually jaw-dropping and never-before-seen on an individual card level. Sure, the structure was all very novel, but any given card (keyword aside) could probably have existed in another set somewhere. He wanted flair. He wanted pizzazz. He wanted... hybrid back!

Whoa. Hey, I was all for it.

Of course, by this point in development the cards were all in place and balanced for the most part. We didn't need new effects. Art was already in the works. In other words, we had to create hybrid cards out of stuff already in the file. Could we do it? I never had any doubt. Here's what we came up with...

**Boros Recruit.** For a while the set contained plain old "red **Tundra Wolves**"—a one-mana red first striker (the art ended up on **Frenzied Goblin**). When looking for potential hybrid candidates, this guy stood out because (a) white and red both get little first strikers; and (b) one-mana hybrid cards are super-cool, because they're the only way to do multicolored cards that cost one mana. And we knew we wanted at least one of those.

Of course, the whole "strictly better than **Tundra Wolves**" argument reared its head again. **Tundra Wolves** is hardly sacred, but people like the card and it does what it's supposed to do fairly well (round out a curve and hold equipment), so there's no great benefit to obsoleting it. But if we made **Tundra Wolves** cost  $\{R\}$  instead of just  $\{R\}$ , would we really be obsoleting it?

If the ability to play it for red mana was simply an additional ability ("You may play **Tundra Wolves** for  $\{R\}$  instead of its normal mana cost.") then yes, it would be strictly better. But the problem with this **Boros Recruit** is that he actually *is* red, which comes with all sorts of baggage. Like I mentioned above, he can't block **Paladin en-Vec**. **Circle of Protection: Red** shuts him down, even if he's in a basically mono-white deck. And in **Ravnica** itself, radiance cards sometimes affect him unwillingly. Now I'm not saying these are "drawbacks" when compared to **Tundra Wolves**, or that they are a particularly big deal, just that they make the Recruit a completely different card than the Wolves. So although they may be "strictly better" by some definitions of the term, we felt that there was enough going on that you wouldn't automatically include them instead of **Tundra Wolves** anywhere you'd play the latter. Hence my introductory question.

And just think, you can play 4x **Tundra Wolves**, 4x **Serra Zealot**, and 4x **Boros Recruit** in Legacy now. Look out.

**Gaze of the Gorgon.** Gaze cost  $\{B\}$  in the file for most of design and development. It combined two black and green abilities into one nifty combat trick. Of course, the fact that both colors shared both abilities ("basilisk" and regeneration) meant that the card was a good candidate to become hybrid.

One of the restrictions we put on the hybrid cards in the set was that the commons all had to have only one colored mana symbol in their costs, to alleviate confusion (some people think you have to pay two of the same color of mana for **Selesnya Guildmage**, for instance). The effect of **Gaze of the Gorgon** at  $\{B\}$  is actually strictly better than the effect generated by **Venomous Breath**, an uncommon card from **Ice Age** and **Mercadian Masques**. We didn't want it to cost five mana, so we discussed obsoleting the Breath. We ended up deciding to do so, although not because we felt hybrid makes the card not strictly better (again, you can't "venomize" **Paladin en-Vec**), but because **Venomous Breath** was a weak card that could stand a little more juice.

**Lurking Informant.** This fellow was handed over from design as the following gold card:

```
Information Gremlin (U)
UB
Creature - Gremlin
1/3
T: Look at the top card of target player's library. You may put that card
into that player's graveyard.
```

That fellow was a little too good at his job, and he eventually became a 1/2 and his activation went from " $\{G\}$ " to " $\{G\}$ ". When it came time to choose hybrid cards, nothing in UB common looked like a good candidate, so we shifted this guy down from uncommon and really reduced the colored mana requirements necessary to play and use him. Now he's quite nasty again.



**Centaur Safeguard.** This guy was mono-green in the beginning. Luckily, green and white share the life-gain thing, and 3/1 for three isn't out of bounds for either color. The art on this card was originally meant for **Watchwolf** and vice versa. The creative team felt the Centaur art was a little goofy for a tier-one card and swapped them.




**The Guildmages.** Now these guys are powerful. Originally they all cost two different colors of mana, meaning the **Golgari Guildmage** cost  $\{B\}$ .


When designing hybrid initially, one of Rosewater's discoveries was that interesting hybrid cards could be made that had different levels of functionality based on what deck you put them in. Normally this would be




accomplished by having multiple activated abilities, just like the guildmages. That meant that the cycle of guildmages were perfect candidates.

At two mana we felt these guys had tremendous splash and potential in constructed. That meant that we'd have to switch from  to . Giving every color (blue especially) several two-mana 2/2's with awesome abilities was not something that everyone was comfortable with.

In the end, coolness won out. Sure, blue doesn't get 2/2 for , but what it gets for  is largely undefined. *Lord of Atlantis* and *Voidmage Prodigy* are probably the best known  creatures historically (ok, and *Dandan*), and the guildmages are in the same band of power as those cards.


**Master Warcraft.** This card was originally . Considering that this ability has never appeared on a card before, we were fine with giving it to two colors.

**Shadow of Doubt.** We never found a good candidate for a rare blue-black hybrid card in the existing file. This is the only card in the set specifically designed as a hybrid card. Kudos to Paul Sottosanti for coming up with this wacky effect that has so much upside against lots of popular cards. I believe he submitted it at a very greedy one mana, but it is still awesome at two.

**Privileged Position.** The original card was called *Asceticism*—an obvious homage to *Troll Ascetic*—and cost . Moving it from green to green-white was a bit of a stretch.

The flavor of this card as white fits pretty well—white is all about protecting your stuff. But untargetability has never been white's thing mechanically. So why did we do let white play it?

If it fits philosophically, that's good enough for us. Why not let colors have access to things that make sense flavorwise? And *Privileged Position* will never let you forget that it is a green card, even if you are playing it in a mono-white deck.

**Gleancrawler.** This beast was a 5/6 for  for a long time. Since green and black both have “regrowing” abilities, he was a fine choice for a hybrid card. Because black-green's common hybrid card was the only non-creature, it was convenient that its rare was the only hybrid creature.

When it came time to pick the prerelease card, we wanted a rare hybrid creature. Our choices were a bit limited. *Gleancrawler* it was. Lead developer Brian Schneider was unconvinced that it was a good choice. “Will people like this guy?” he asked. “They'd like him a lot more as a 6/6,” was my reply. And the people rejoiced.

And that's the story of the hybrid cards in *Ravnica*. The design teams for the other two sets in the block knew that hybrid was an official inclusion, and made cards accordingly. I wonder if they'll feel any “different” than the ones that we simply shifted into hybrid.

As for all the cards we made in design when hybrid was still the focus of “Control,” we still have them lying around. If you've ever wondered why we didn't use the “guild logos” as the mana symbols on hybrid cards, it's so we can use the mechanic again later. When? Like I'd tell you.



## Last Week's Poll

Do you ever rearrange the cards in your graveyard during a game?		
No.	13273	64.8%
Yes.	7203	35.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20476</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

I got a lot of mail asking, “Why did you ask this question? The rule is that you aren't allowed to do this, so of course no one does it.”

Yes, that is what the rule is. Do people know that the rule exists? That's what I want to know. Secondly, do people knowingly ignore the rule? We haven't made a card in years that cares about graveyard order, so maybe the rule has faded from people's memory.

The reason for asking is not because we want to abolish the rule, but because we are considering exploring graveyard-order cards again, and we want to know if people are playing in such a way that would allow us to do them easily.

## This Week's Poll

**Which *Ravnica* events will/did you attend?**

- The prerelease only.
- Store release events only.

- Both.
- Neither.

Submit my Vote

Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic R&D**., and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.



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