



Guildpact: Ten More

Aaron Forsythe
Latest Developments
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I'm back this week with more questions on *Guildpact*. I thought I could get another 20, but so many of the ones that were asked were very similar to the ones I answered in my column two weeks ago, so I just have ten this time.

First, though, I want to address another misconception about development. People generally accept that the earliest **Magic** developers — those that let **Black Lotus**, **Ancestral Recall**, and **Mind Twist** be printed in the same set with **Deathlace** and **Pearled Unicorn** — didn't have firm grasp on power level, so those transgressions were okay (and even good for the game). Similarly, there is an attitude that the development during the Urza's block was also very flawed, and that measures have been put into place to make sure we don't make ridiculous sets like that again (and such measures are in place). But I think that there is a feeling that now that R&D is full of veteran developers with years of Pro Tour experience that we should understand how to cost every single card such that it could be played in Constructed. I mean, how can we seriously think **Frazzle** should cost 3? We must not know what we're doing.

We do know. I don't want to get into the theory of good and bad and power curves and whatnot here, as that is fodder for many, many other articles, but suffice to say that we make all of our decisions very consciously.

Standard-Constructed power is but one of the many factors we have to consider, and there are many cards that won't ever be in Standard that we consider great developmental successes. Take **Abyssal Nocturnus**, for example. He's hardly the picture of efficiency, and most set reviews I've read online bemoan his small size and lack of synergy with **Hypnotic Specter**, and more or less dismiss him outright as a waste of cardboard. But if you follow websites that track sales of singles around the Internet, you'll see that **Abyssal Nocturnus** is in the top five most purchased cards in the set, up there with **Burning-Tree Shaman**, **Rumbling Slum**, and **Niv-Mizzet**. (That doesn't mean it's worth the most money, just that it is sought after.) There is a large segment of the audience that just loves this card, and to us that is just as important as what is showing up at the top tables in tournaments.

On a similar note, here's a letter displaying a sad lack of faith in those of us making the game these days:

I think u should've left the card at three mana or at least reduce it to be a common. I mean, this is ridiculous. Demolish is pretty much the same thing for 3R and Sunder From Within is arcane and also the same thing for 2RR. Who the hell would play this card? And uncommon? I thought multicolored cards are supposed to be good. This card sux more than the unmulticolored versions. This is why ppl r quitting Magic. Seriously, there's a difference between balanced and just plain crappy.



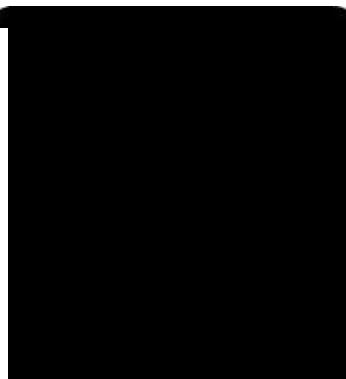
While I've said my piece on **Wreak Havoc**, and noted that we're fully aware when we make cards that not on top of the heap power-wise, I just want to point out that *ppl r not quitting magic* like this fellow implies. Come on. In fact, the attendance at the *Guildpact* prereleases in North America (all the data I have) marks it as the highest ever. Ever! People are coming to **Magic** and enjoying themselves, even if it costs 2 to destroy a land.

Now, on to the questions.

Why is Conjurer's Ban a gold card? The card screams monowhite all along. And besides, don't you think it could have costed a single mana? Just compare it to Cabal Therapy - which gets rid of the card you name rather than delaying it, and also replaces itself in a way.

Please answer this; it's something that has been bugging me from the moment I saw the spoiler (and being a guy who always want to see white control cards that fight other control decks, I was truly disappointed).

Sincerely,
Rick



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In a different block, Rick, **Conjurer's Ban** may have been just White. But when we were developing this block, we were constantly looking for reasons for cards to be multicolored as opposed for reasons for them *not* to be. **Conjurer's Ban** combines elements of **Meddling Mage**, **Cabal Therapy**, **Orim's Chant**, and **Cranial Extraction**, with a hint of **Turf Wound** thrown in for good measure. While there might not be anything specifically Black about the mechanic on the card, it is similar to other Black cards from the past and fit in with the Orzhov mindset well enough that we were fine with making it gold. Not every gold card has to be "ability from color A + ability from color B." Some of the best highlight the overlap in the colors, at least philosophically if not mechanically.



*My real concern is with **Izzet Guildmage**. While the **Orzhov Guildmage** offers nothing new to his guild, he can at least support its goals. The **Izzet Guildmage** allows you to replicate a spell--this is nothing new to Izzet, as many of their spells already have Replicate. Furthermore the Izzet spells you'd like to replicate either cost 3 and are invalid targets or already have replicate at a cheaper cost. Seriously, I checked: there are exactly ZERO red or blue instants or sorceries that cost 2 or less that this ability benefits in Guildpact.*
 --Jay Treat



There was a lot of anguish internally about the lack of copyable targets for the **Izzet Guildmage** in his own guild. But with Red being pinched for space and most of the base Blue effects (card drawing, bounce, and tapping) being used on replicate cards, there just weren't that many options. Sure, you can copy **Quicken** for an extra card. We discussed having **Cerebral Vortex** cost 2, but that was a bit absurd—just one copy of it with the Guildmage would result in 8 damage to the opponent, and the second would bring the total to 15. Because the design of the Guildmage was so sleek and he held so much open-ended potential outside of *Guildpact*, we left him alone. Luckily *Ravnica* has a few nice targets (like **Telling Time** and **Lightning Helix**), and *Ninth Edition* and *Kamigawa* offer even more.

*Regarding your article "[Guildpact: Twenty Questions](#)": I really appreciate this *very* candid look into the set's development, it was fascinating.*

*I hate to think I'm punishing you for it, but I did get the feeling that this set was a bit slapped together. The change on the **Solifuge**, the limitations on replicate and the changes surrounding **Seize the Soul** strike me as last minute decisions that wouldn't, ideally, be taken lightly.*

Was this pretty standard compared to other sets, and we just don't normally hear about it?

For what its worth, I love the set, and wholly agree with most of the decisions you discussed in the article.

*Thanks regardless,
 Alex*

Well, Alex, the truth is that we do make decisions at the last minute that affect the set. We also make decisions at the first minute, and during every minute in between. A **Magic** set is always undergoing what we call "CQI" — Continuous Quality Improvement. We are constantly meeting, talking, theorizing, playtesting, drafting, building decks, tweaking cards, shifting rarities, altering templates, swapping art, and so on for every set up until we are told by our production department that we are physically unable to make further improvements because the cards need printed. If we had another several months on each set, we'd probably make even more changes. So, yes, there are changes made at the end, but such changes are usually well-informed and come on the heels of several hundred other changes that took place in the previous months.

*Will you expand all the guild mechanics in *Dissension*?
 --Eric*

No, Eric, *Dissension* has its own guilds to promote. If you've been following, you should be aware that *Guildpact* was so squeezed for space that we had to cut back ever-so-slightly on the gold cards per guild. *Dissension* has a handful of extra cards in it, but that just allows us to return to normal. There isn't room in the set to give the new guilds all the cards they need and expand on the old ones.

*There is a badly defined collection of cards known as the 'power uncommons.' This collection always includes **Putrefy**, **Mortify**, and **Lightning Helix**. Sometimes it includes **Electrolyze** and **Watchwolf**. Was there any R&D intention behind this group, or any intention for this to be a group?
 --John Koziar*

We certainly wanted to make exciting gold uncommons wherever we could, but we didn't force a cycle. So the answer is "sort of." We were definitely aware of a vague "cycle," but if there wasn't a good fit for a guild or one of the cards needed to change in development, we didn't feel the need to adhere to any design constraints.

Regarding casting costs and I quote: So on the "fairness" meter, 1UU and 3U are pretty darn close. Why are you being hypocritical? You were the one who said when *Forgotten Ancient* cost 3G from 1GG it took it out of constructed entirely, which is true. So now you expect us to believe that 3U and 1UU are the same? Are you kidding me? *Frazzle* could have easily cost 1 mana less. And will you just reprint counterspell at 1UU already?

--Daniel

I'm not being hypocritical. Just because two costs are approximately equivalent from an R&D "fairness" standpoint doesn't mean they both end up played in Constructed. Just look at my previous examples. *Boomerang* and *Vicious Hunger* are Constructed-level cards. *Regress* was not, and I suspect *Douse in Gloom* won't show up either. The former cards, while more restrictive, are just more efficient overall, and that's the real benchmark for whether or not a card sees play in Constructed usually. But that doesn't mean the more expensive, less color intensive cost is wrong, either.

You know, I think *Ogre Savant* sticks out to me because there's really nothing Red about it. If we can get *Kiri-Onna* for 4U, surely we can trade the spiritcraft ability for an extra point of power and get a Blue "Ogre Savant" for 4U (cf. also *Covert Operative*). Maybe *Ogre Savant* could have had haste also?

--Mark S. Cipolone

The "redness" of *Ogre Savant* is pretty subtle, I'll admit. For the enhanced creatures, we wanted to have each creature's stats feel like its main color, and have the ability feel like the secondary color. The ability part (in general) worked out great. The stats part doesn't exactly shine through, but that doesn't mean it isn't there. *Ogre Savant*'s 3/2 stats are much more Red than *Steamcore Weird*'s 1/3. *Revenant Patriarch* is a 4/3 that can't block - very Black. *Shrieking Grottesque*'s 2/1 flying is definitely White, although not uniquely so (a 2/1 flying Black creature is not at all strange). The Gruul pair *Tin-Street Hooligan* and *Gruul Scrapper* don't have bodies that couldn't appear in the other color. Overall, this cycle is a little underwhelming compared to the enhanced spells in *Ravnica* (*Ribbons of Night*, *Boros Fury-Shield*, etc.), but I'm happy to say that the continuation of this theme in *Dissension* worked out much better.



So could *Ogre Savant* have had haste? Theoretically, yes. That definitely would have helped it feel "Red." But who knows what it would have cost then... a hasty *Man-o-War* is quite the tempo swing.

How is *Nivix, Aerie of the Firemind* intended to be used? I don't understand the point of being able to cast something that's removed from the game instead of from my hand.

--Darrin Katz

The ability on *Nivix* is there to help Red/Blue spell-based decks to generate some late-game card advantage. You need a ton of mana in play for it to be effective. You activate the land by paying "2 blue, red", and then if the card you reveal is an instant or sorcery, you can play that card more or less right away by paying its mana cost. So if you flip up a *Remand*, you can play it. Granted, the total cost for playing said *Remand* is the equivalent of seven mana, but how much should cantrip counterspells that you play right out of your library cost?

Were there seven gold/hybrid rares per guild in design? What were the missing ones?

--Todd K.

To answer this question, I consulted the actual design handoff file for *Guildpact*, which was still known as "Alt" at the time. Surprising to me was the fact that we handed off the file with only six gold/hybrid rares per guild. The decision to reduce the number of gold rares per guild must have happened during the "devign" phase, where development starts commenting on the set but allows the design team to make all the changes. So I wouldn't worry that development cut some cool or interesting card when they shrunk the guild size in this set. Design made the change, salvaged all the key cards, and shifted anything worth saving into monocolored slots.

The gold rares didn't change all that much in development, either. Looking at what was turned over for Orzhov... *Ghost Council*, a three-mana legend that became *Teysa*, a three-mana haunt creature that became the *Pontiff*, a *Living Death* variant that became *Debtor's Knell*, *Angel of Despair*, and *Culling Sun*. Speaking of which...

Why does *Culling Sun* cost so much compared to *Wrath of God*?

--Mike S.

Culling Sun, if I recall correctly, was designed with a converted mana cost of 3 (and was called "Smotherall"). The goal of the card was to give control-based Orzhov decks an answer to the swarm of White weenies and Boros weenies and Gruul weenies and *Dark Confidants* and guildmages and Saprolings and whatnot that we anticipated would be running rampant in Standard. Of course, after significant testing, we found that (a) said weenies were not going to be the scourge of the format, and (b) even if they were, Orzhov would have no problem handling them even without this card being the pinnacle of efficiency. But the card did have some fans here in the department, so we recosted it and tried thinking of it as something you would play in lieu of *Wrath* in decks that featured slower, bigger monsters like the *Ghost Council*, *Angel of Despair*, and/or *Kamigawa Dragons*. It does a very good job of that, and I personally enjoy this card for what it is — something to build a deck around, not just another sleek and vicious mass-removal card. Sticking with the Orzhov theme...

Why didn't you just reprint *Vindicate* instead of *Angel of Despair*? All my friends love *Vindicate*.

--William Hong



We made a conscious decision early on in this block design to keep away from iconic *Invasion* block cards. With the return of gold, we wanted to give *Ravnica* its own identity and not just make *Invasion II*. One good way of doing this was by avoiding any of the "lay-ups" that the *Invasion* block offered—meaning we didn't want to reprint **Terminate** or **Undermine** or **Vindicate** or **Pernicious Deed**, but instead give players all-new gold cards to go crazy for. We liked that Black/White could get the effect of **Vindicate**, so we came up with a splashy new way of implementing it.

I hope you enjoyed these two recent questions columns. In general, questions like these make for great "Ask Wizards" submissions, so feel free to send them there, at least until *Dissension* comes out, at which point I'll probably run columns

similar to these again.

Last Week's Poll

Have you played our new version of Two-Headed Giant yet?		
No, but I will some day soon.	3177	47.9%
No way.	1597	24.1%
Yes, and I like it better than the old version.	969	14.6%
Yes, and I never played the old version.	676	10.2%
Yes, and I liked the old version better.	210	3.2%
Total	6629	100.0%

Most of you haven't played it, but those of you that did liked it better than the old way. Good times.

If you haven't tried it yet, check out the format at the upcoming [2HG Limited Champs](#).

This Week's Poll

When you started playing, where did you get land for your decks?

- Buying and opening tournament packs or starter decks
- Playing in limited events
- Buying theme decks
- Buying land from stores or dealers
- Friends gave it to me
- Other

*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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