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# A Bit of This, a Bit of That

Aaron Forsythe  
Latest Developments  
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## My Promotion

Mark Rosewater gave the details in his article, although I'm sure it was lost in the shuffle to most of you amidst the Rancored Elf business. I will be replacing Brian Schneider as the Lead Developer of Magic starting in August. That means I oversee development and playtesting and get approval over every card's cost, rarity, and mechanics. Heavy stuff.

Brian is a true master, and I'm slightly terrified at our ability to get on without him. No, his isn't as public a face as myself or Mark or Randy Buehler or other R&D members like Mark Gottlieb, Mike Turian, and Matt Place, but that's simply not his MO. Even when he was still playing the game, he was a huge influence and a massive contributor to the Pro Tour without ever calling much attention to himself. And so it is to this day. His understanding of what makes Limited and Constructed environments "work" is on what I consider a higher plane. His refusal to adhere to all the stodgy old R&D mantras has opened up what is possible in individual card sets as well as Constructed metagames.

Once he's gone, I hope I can harness all the little things that he's passed on to myself and all the other developers and somehow replicate all the good work he's done. If we continue producing *Ravnica* and *Time Spiral* style blocks while I'm the one in charge of development, I'll consider myself a rousing success.

## Pro Tour—Charleston

Lots of good things came out of that event for me. The turnout was amazing—the largest Pro Tour ever. Players seemed to enjoy the format, and a variety of decks showed up. Hard work was rewarded—the winning team dispelled some myths about how decks should be built. Their decks contained a total of zero *Loxodon Hierarchs*, considered by many (myself included) to be the only automatic four-of card in the format. They split one color—black—across all three decks, finding the exact right place to squeeze in each black or black-guild-aligned card. And they got amazing mileage out of cards that many teams probably never even considered, like *Convolute*, *Swift Silence*, *Twisted Justice*, *Wit's End*, and *Moroi*. When good players can come to conclusions about a format and adapt in exciting ways to what they anticipate—and then win—I consider the format to be a success.

But *Ravnica* Block Constructed—let alone the team version—isn't going to be used in other high-level events. What should the results mean to you? Well, *Kamigawa* block won't be legal forever. Once *Time Spiral* comes out, *Ravnica* block will make up a huge part of Standard, and new decks will need to spring forth. Hopefully this variety of block decks will plant some seeds in people's minds about what to try down the line. Is there something to *Leyline of the Meek*? Is graft legit? Will *Skeletal Vampire* be the heir apparent to the Throne of Meloku? Hopefully Charleston was an idea factory for those of you that will be looking to get a leg up on the competition for Standard Champs, or Friday Night Magic, or the *Magic Online* queues, when the next block rolls around this fall.

Speaking of Champs, don't forget that *Limited Champs*—a full *Ravnica* block Sealed Deck event—happens tomorrow in North America. A great day of Magic, cool prizes, and an awesome full-art card just for showing up.

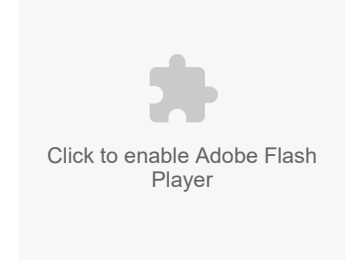
## Last Week's Article

*Cromat* vs. *Squee*. I got a lot of email on this particular matchup, each of which explained a little of why *Cromat* won the fight. The three leading theories are:

- If you are unaware of the historical significance of *Squee*—as a large portion of our web audience probably is—*Squee* looks like little more than a novelty compared to the ability-laden fatty *Cromat*.
- Many people voted as if the two legends were actually fighting a battle, in which case *Cromat* would use some number of his absurd abilities to win.
- Squee* is a cool "card," but not a cool "legend." You never cast him, you never attack with him, and you never have any awesome stories about killing your opponent with *Squee*. *Cromat* at least offers those basic fatty amenities.



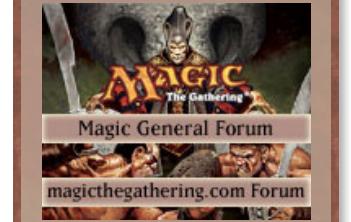
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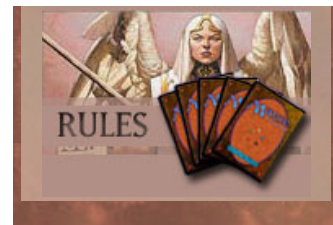


Heir to the Throne of Meloku?

I also listed a bunch of *Ravnica* rares and explained that the secondary market was no help in determining how well-liked the cards were in casual circles. Thanks to you, my readers, I have some more concrete data on those cards now.



**Helldozer** and **Searing Meditation**, as expected, are relative hits. There are a lot of good stories involving these cards, and no one had anything bad to say about them. **Ursapine**, **Concerted Effort**, **Warp World**, **Copy Enchantment**, **Savra**, and **Twilight Drover** all have their fans, and they are clearly net positive additions to the game. In other words, all these cards are in the “D” camp, if not better. The only one on that list that comes in as an “E” is **Molten Sentry**. The rap on it isn't that it's a bad card power-wise—players generally seem to agree that you're getting what you pay for with the card—but that it isn't inspiring and doesn't fit anywhere. That makes it an “E,” but at least an “E” that I can live with. I will, however, be looking for ways to improve similar cards to at least a “D” before we print them in the future.



## More Questions

The batch of questions I'll be answering this week all come from the same reader, one Mr. Matthew Lubich. Matthew wrote one gigantic list of questions, all of which seemed well thought-out and fit for publication on our fine website. Matthew asks:

*In regards to Ravnica block,*

1. *Is there any logical reason why the Crime half of **Crime // Punishment** only targets the opponent's graveyard; would it have been too strong, or is it loosely based on flavor? Also, since black and white have an overlap with bringing back artifacts back from the "dead" (**Beacon of Unrest**, **Bringer of the White Dawn**, etc.) is there any reason you didn't want it to bring back artifacts, or was that not really thought of?*

The decision was made totally based on flavor. I figured that reanimating your own card was relatively de rigueur in **Magic**, but robbing an opponent's graveyard was unique enough that it could be flavored as a “Crime.” That half of the card works out really well in my mind because of all the ten guilds, the Orzhov are the ones most associated with crime, and the mechanic gives the impression of stealing something from your opponent—the most obvious expression of “crime” in **Magic** mechanics—without needing blue. The reason why you can't animate artifacts with it is because we like the symmetry of black reanimating creatures and white reanimating enchantments. Letting it target artifact cards wouldn't have been too powerful, but it may have muddied the elegance. (By the way, I saw some nasty Crime plays at PT Charleston. People tend to forget about that half of the card until it wrecks them.)

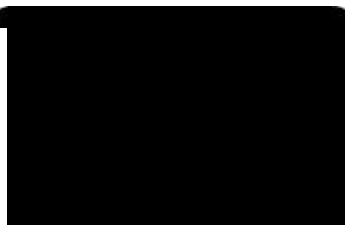


2. *I realize for power reasons, and the fact that enchantments normally don't regenerate, that **Mortify** didn't have the "can't be regenerated" clause. But did the thought of the "remove from the game" clause ever come to mind with a higher mana cost? On a related note, are there any mana stipulations or other restrictions placed on the "remove from the game clause" as opposed to "destroy"?*

To answer the second part first, changing a card's effect from “destroy” to “remove from game” probably wouldn't result in a net addition of a whole mana (although sometimes it does—**Caustic Rain** is a whole mana more than **Rain of Tears**). We tend to make cards remove things from the game as opposed to destroy for one of two reasons: either we're trying to solve a specific problem in the environment, or we want the card to feel really different than other cards for some reason. **Demonfire** is an example of the former; we knew the card would be played a lot, and we liked the idea of it being a solution to things like **Firemane Angel** and dredge creatures. Cards like **Swords to Plowshares** are examples of the latter; white shouldn't feel like it is destroying creatures very often, and so the flavor of removing them from the game fits better. For **Mortify**, we didn't need it to solve specific problems, and we figured the cards was spicy enough that it didn't need any addition text to make it more attractive, so we printed the simplest version possible.

3. *In regards to **Condemn** and the Hide half of **Hide // Seek**, is White gaining the ability to put things on the bottom of libraries aside from its trademark "remove from the game"?*

No, putting things on the bottom is (probably) not going to be a long-term white ability. Each of these cards ended up with that particular clause for very different reasons. Hide—just like Crime mentioned above—was designed to match the name. We needed a Boros card to “hide” something, and Boros didn't have a **Disenchant** effect in the block yet, which seemed weird since red can blow up artifacts and white can blow up enchantments. So we made a Red/White **Disenchant**, but we needed it to “hide” the card instead of simply destroying it. The bottom of the library seemed to be the best place for this hiding to occur, as the card would be



essentially gone forever, but no longer visible in any game zone. **Condemn**, on the other hand, used to remove its target from the game, a la **Swords to Plowshares**. We were really enamored with the card's power level and discussed how we could alter it so that we it would be eligible for reprinting in future Core Sets someday—"removed from game" tends to show up in those sets only at rare. Putting the creature on the bottom of its owner's library seemed like a great way to get rid of it more or less permanently without either destroying it or introducing a new game zone.

4. How did you go about deciding what strategy you wished to express for each color? To put it another way, was there any special way you decided to focus on one aspect of the color combination as opposed to another facet?

At the beginning, design drove a lot of what was going on. We decided to make Dimir focus on milling and Boros be very aggressive, for example. Essentially we wanted each guild to be different from the others around it. For *Ravnica*, milling, tokens, aggro, and graveyard were four themes that offered a variety of play experiences and fit the color combinations well. As the block moved along, creative started having more to do with the guild themes. Most of the *Guildpact* and *Dissension* guilds already had their creative elements fully fleshed out—Izzet are mad scientists, whereas the Simic are cold biomancers, for instance—before we started making mechanics. We had to choose guild themes and mechanics to match the flavor in the small sets.

5. When designing the *Rakdos Cult*, did anything relating to sacrificing resources emerge as a keyword mechanic? What I mean is, since red now is the color of fast acceleration and black formerly had that domain but still has the ability to give up resources for gain, was there potentially a mechanic similar to the following:

*"Offering: You may play this card any time you could play an instant by sacrificing a creature and paying the difference in mana costs between this and the sacrificed creature. Mana cost includes color."*

or was something like this never brought up?

I think what you're talking about and hellbent both sprung forth from the same idea—that Rakdos is playing for the short game, hoping to win immediately. Because Rakdos was the last guild to get a mechanic, I knew what "kind" of mechanic I wanted before we settled on it. I wanted something akin to threshold, where cards got better based on some shift in game state—the block had no such mechanic to this point. Your idea of offering is a bit too similar to convoke in that you are using creatures as mana to fuel bigger spells. We wanted each keyword to be as different from previous keywords as possible.

6. For *Ravnica* block, was there any thought of adding an indestructible creature? I know you're trying to keep it just to Darksteel, but wouldn't it have been cool to make some "super monster" for the Simic? An invincible defender? Some Rakdos Demon that feels no pain, yet has some drawback that will make it go away in a few turns? I know I speak for many players when I say we like indestructible permanents every now and then.

We'll continue to deliver indestructible cards every now and then, but there wasn't a compelling place to put one in the *Ravnica* block. The word is part of our reusable bag of tricks.

7. What made you choose protection from enchantments on *Azorius First-Wing*? Was it just the *Dissension Seals*, or was there more to it than that? Is there a possibility for a creature in the near future that has protection from lands or other obscure protections?

I wanted Azorius to have a hallmark cheap flier at common, something along the lines of *Gaea's Skyfolk* from *Apocalypse*, but slightly more interesting without necessarily being better. Protection from enchantments can be either negative or positive (yes, it can't be hit with a Seal, but you can't put *Moldervine Cloak* on it, either), which let the First-Wing have the same stats as the Skyfolk in good conscience. The Seals weren't in the front of my mind when I came up with the card, but the general "enchantment subtheme" of the block was. I thought it was neat that the First-Wing couldn't die from *Galvanic Arc* but couldn't wear one either. I'm sure you'll see protection from other bizarre things in the future, as long as they make some sense in the context of the card set.

8. Was there anything you really wanted to do with hybrid mana and couldn't? (you probably can't tell me what that is, so I'll just leave that as a yes or no). Also, if you are permitted to, do you have any idea when we will see hybrid mana again?

Yes, of course there was. There is tons of room left to explore hybrid, and you can bet that it will return in one form or another sometime in the future. We're already stockpiling ideas.

9. Is there one guild you feel could have used a little more work? Is there any guild you feel you made really well? Why?



Azorius ended up being schizophrenic and was one great control card short of being what I wanted it to be, but we were trying to solve so many problems at once, and something fell through the cracks. I also wish Dimir was a little better from a tournament perspective. As for done well, I think Orzhov, Simic, and Selesnya capture flavor with mechanics, and contribute cool decks to Constructed and casual play. Rakdos and Izzet are close behind those.

#### 10. Out of all the guilds, which one is your favorite? Why?

I answered this question in an online chat I did, and I'm sticking with my answer—Rakdos. I like throwing it all out there, putting as much pressure on my opponent as I can and relying on the top of my deck to bail me out. That's a fun way to play. I was happy to see various Rakdos decks doing well in Charleston.

#### 11. Did you ever think about putting a five-color card in Dissension? I know how it wouldn't fit the guild flavor, but maybe something like a supreme Nephilim?

There is a five-color card in *Dissension*—**Transguild Courier**. I thought this was a cute way to make a “gold” card that did all the things a five-color gold card should do in this block—interact with Eidolons, reap the rewards of all the guild lieutenants, go nuts with **Might of the Nephilim**, etc.—without having an unwieldy mana cost. No, it doesn't have the same impact of a “real” five-color card like **Sliver Queen** or, er, **Cromat**, but it would be hard to make a card like that seems amazing on the heels of the *Guildpact* Nephilim and a block full of awesome gold cards.

*I thank you always for your work and for your time.*

*Ever the White Mage,  
Matthew Lubich*

## Going Forward

[Coldsnap](#) previews start on Monday. It's going to be a cold summer! And don't forget that [Selecting Tenth Edition](#) is ongoing on the site as well. These are exciting times to be a fan of **Magic: The Gathering!**

## Last Week's Poll:

Which sanctioned team format do you prefer?		
Two-Headed Giant, where my teammate and I are playing in the same game.	4175	58.1%
Neither.	1560	21.7%
Traditional three-person teams, where my teammates and I are each playing our own games.	1450	20.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7185</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

We've been doing a lot of work recently to figure out how to expand the Two-Headed Giant experience. Expect to hear more on that subject in the future!

## This Week's Poll:

**When you play older cards with your friends or casual playgroup, do you tend to use the printed card text, or refer to updated Oracle wordings?**

I use the original wording most often.

I use the updated wording most often.

I don't play with old cards/I don't play casually.

*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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