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# Snow: Mana Mystery

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Making Magic  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

To celebrate Snow Week, I'm proud to announce that I've managed to acquire part of the upcoming documentary *Snow: Mana Mystery*, an insightful peek into the world of **Magic** mana symbols. Because the documentary is still in post production, I'm going to be using a transcription today. If this little morsel whets your appetite, the full documentary should be making its premiere later this year at the Dominarian Film Festival.

**Narrator:** Did the other mana symbols offer you a warm welcome?

☞: I wouldn't say warm. I mean, it wasn't mean or anything. It's just that they didn't know what to do with me. I don't fit neatly into any of their boxes.

- CUT -

☞: Pretty much the mana symbols fall into one of several categories. First, there's the core five colored symbols. Then there's the colorless symbols. There's the hybrids. And, of course, the *Un*-symbols.

**Narrator:** What group does Snow fit into?

☞: We're working on that.

- CUT -

☞: Are the colored mana symbols a little snobbish? Sure. But why shouldn't we be? We're the backbone of the entire mana system. Without us, what do you have? Artifacts and some lands.

**Narrator:** Is Snow a colored mana?

☞: No. Uh yes, he can be colored. But he's not a colored mana symbol. He's... different.

**Narrator:** Different. Is that bad?

☞: Talk to ☞.

- CUT -

**Narrator:** If the other mana symbols are to be believed, you're something of a wild card.

☞: Of course, I'm a wild card. I'm variable. That makes everyone else nervous. No one knows what exactly I represent.

**Narrator:** And what do you represent?

☞: Whatever I want. But they can't handle that. Oh no. The Mana wants to keep me down. Do you know how many mana costs I've been allowed to be alone in? In over eight thousand cards in existence, how many do you think?

**Narrator:** Twenty?

☞: Five. And I'm sure The Mana resented that. Two of them I couldn't even be alone. I had to chaperone myself. And if you think one X scares people, try two.

- CUT -

☞: It's not that I'm not social. I get along. I just work best on my own. It's funny. The colored symbols think I'm prejudiced against them. *They* think *I'm* prejudiced. Talk about the swamp calling the mana black.

- CUT -

☞: You should have seen the look on all the mana when we first showed up. They looked at us like **Frankenstein's Monster**. Even black. And he was in the mana cost of **Frankenstein's Monster**.

**Narrator:** Did they shun you?

☞: I wouldn't say shun. We were accepted. Eventually. It's not like we were *Un*-symbols.

- CUT -

H: So I get in White's face. And I say, "What makes you so special? Who are you to treat us like dirt?"

H: It was great. You should have seen him go at it.

H: Anyway, White starts backing away but Green gets in my face. He starts saying that I have no right to talk to White like I am. That I'm just some young upstart and that White has been there since the beginning. And then, and then, he says to me, "You're not half the mana that White is." And I'm like, "I'm exactly half the mana he is."

H: He did. He did.

H: And then I'm like "At least I didn't need no plastic surgery during *Ice Age*."

H: You should have seen White's face. It was awesome.

1,000,000: We were quite proud of our little mana.

- CUT -

**Narrator:** So you didn't fit into any of their boxes. What did you do?

☞: I tried to find common ground with each group.

Here's a rundown of where all the mana symbols got introduced:

- Alpha (\*, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, X), 0, 1,
- 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, X)
- Arabian Nights (8, 10\*)
- Antiquities (7, 9)
- Unglued (Y, Z)
- Planeshift (10, 16)
- Darksteel (11)
- Fifth Dawn (12)
- Unhinged (15, 100, 1,000,000,
- 1n, 0i, Hk, Hk)
- Ravnica (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Guildpact (7, 8, 9)
- Dissension (1, 2, 3, 4)
- Coldsnap (☞)

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**Narrator:** And what was that for the colored symbols?

☉: I dwelled on my mana circle. Inside, I don't have a number or letter. I have a picture. I have a snowflake. So I tried to bond there. You know, snowflake to tree or snowflake to skull.

**Narrator:** Did it work?

- CUT -

☉: So Snow walks up to Red and taps him. And red is pissed. He's like, "Don't tap me unless you're ready to use me." I swear. Exact words.

☉: The best part is that Snow holds his ground. He's totally cool.

☉: He *is* Snow.

☉: Just the way he held himself. No one ever stands up to the colored symbols.

☉: You do know that we're colored symbols?

☉: I know.

☉: So either you're dissing us or you're not counting us as colored.

☉: You know what I meant.

☉: I knew what you meant. That's my whole point.

☉: Can we not do this as we're being interviewed? How about we wait until we're off camera. You guys aren't going to use this part, right?

- CUT -

☉: Red has a short temper. Most mana symbols learn the drill. When you see the little swirl of fire start heating up, back away. But not Snow. No, this crazy mana holds his ground. He just stares at Red. And you know what Red does? He starts laughing. Like it's the funniest thing in the world. He looks at Snow and says, "You're okay." It's weird how they bonded. I think that's why Snow showed up on so many red cards in *Coldsnap*.

- CUT -

☉: I'm not sure why Snow even bothered trying to get on the colored mana's good side. They're never going to want to hang around with him. No, he's stuck with us colorless guys.

- CUT -

☉: I know a lot of attention is focused on the colored mana, but I think the colorless mana have an interesting history of their own.

**Narrator:** What do you mean?

☉: I assume you've heard of the Original Thirteen Mana. That's the symbols that showed up in Alpha: me, White, Black, Red, Green, of course, Zero through Six and X. *Arabian Nights* introduced Eight in *Aladdin's Ring* and tried to introduce Ten in *Aladdin's Lamp*. But things didn't quite go as planned.

- CUT -

☉: I'm all set for *Aladdin's Lamp*. I mean this is my big premiere. So I get to the mana cost and the freakin' mana circle's too small. See, back in the day, no one ever thought about us double digits. They fit 1 or 2 and we're done with it. Five had to double up and take my place. It was embarrassing.

- CUT -

☉: At first the 55 jokes were kind of funny, but then after a while it just got repetitive. Then it got mind numbing. Then it just set me off. Really. Someone could just come up to me and say 55 and I'd attack them.

- CUT -

100: We've come a long way since *Arabian Nights*. Numbers of a certain size have a little more wiggle space than they used to.

1,000,000: Amen to that brother.

- CUT -

☉: *Antiquities* introduced both Seven and Nine. In *Mishra's War Machine* and *Colossus of Sardis*, respectively. And then there was a gap. A long gap.

**Narrator:** When did the next symbol show up?

☉: It wasn't until *Unglued*. A little card known as *The Ultimate Nightmare of Wizards of the Coast Customer Service*. It introduced Y and Z.

-CUT-

**Narrator:** What do you attribute to your unpopularity?

Y: They just didn't get us.

Z: I think what we offered was just over the heads of most of our audience.

Y: I tried making a comeback during *Beatdown*, but it was made clear that I wasn't wanted.

- CUT -

☉: No new symbols appeared until *Planeshift* if you can believe it. *Draco* brought us Sixteen and *Stratodon* made an honest mana out of Ten. As the story goes though, Sixteen didn't show up until development.

- CUT -

16: *Draco* came in from design with a mana cost of 20. But R&D knew that they'd want the freedom to make spells that cared about converted mana cost and that having a card whose converted mana cost equaled the player's base score seemed dangerous. So they lowered the cost to weaken it. How often does that happen? Anyway, that's how I came to be the grand spokesman of the mana.

**Narrator:** You do understand that you're no longer the highest mana symbol.

16: X is seldom double digits.

**Narrator:** I was referring to Hundred, Million, and Infinity.

16: Those don't count. They don't count. Infinity isn't even a number. And it's an *Un*-set.

- CUT -

☉: Next up was *Darksteel*. In it *Darksteel Colossus* introduced Eleven. Then the very next set, *Fifth Dawn*, introduces Twelve. In *Blinkmoth Infusion*. Then nothing happens until *Unhinged*. That's when the chaos ensued.



- CUT -

1E: R&D thought it would be a good idea if the *Un*-symbols got a chance to meet the regular mana symbols. So they set up a time and invited all of us to a gathering. A **Magic: The Gathering**. Sorry, couldn't resist. The problem was that no one told the mana symbols what set we were from. We were just some future mystery set at the time. So, I show up first. And everyone is a little surprised, but no one really bats an eye. Then Hundred shows up and everyone's jaw drops open. Then Million shows up. And then Infinity. By the time the half mana symbols show up, the majority of the mana symbols were hyperventilating.

- CUT -

Int: The other mana symbols don't even think of us as being real. We're a temporary amusement. We don't get any kind of serious consideration. In my wisdom, I've decided to stop caring what they all think. Although if one more kid asks why the eight is sideways, I might just have to go infinite on his...

- CUT -

Or: All we wanted was a little acknowledgement. Was that so hard? It's hard enough being a fraction. I didn't need to also be fractionalized.

- CUT -

☞: Most sets that have a new mana symbol only introduce one or two. Not *Ravnica* block. Oh no. Hybrid came in force.

- CUT -

☞: We weren't as intimidated as some of the mana symbols that came before us. We were ten strong and we knew we packed a punch. The weirdest thing was how unsure we were about how we were going to look. R&D okayed us long before our appearance was solved. We were square for a while. Then oblong. They even toyed with making up ten brand new symbols for us, but they stopped when they realized that they lost all this equity if we didn't read as the two colors we represented. Ironically, in the end we came full circle.

- CUT -

☞: Which leads us back to Snow.

**Narrator:** How was Snow's appearance different from when other new symbols have shown up?

☞: I know a lot of the other mana symbols don't like to think about this, but Snow is really a step in the next evolution. Sort of a mutant, if you will. Snow is very conceptual. Snow is about the quality of the mana. It's actually quite revolutionary if you stop to think about it.

**Narrator:** What do you mean?

☞: Previously, mana symbols did one of two things. It referenced color or quantity. Now maybe one day R&D will toy with the idea of a sixth color, but until they do, there's no expanding in the color arena. And while the colorless number pool is bigger, it's clear that there's not too much design space built around adding new numbers to the system. But qualities of mana. That's wide open. That's a meaty vein of design space. It's where the future lies.

- CUT -

**Narrator:** If we flash forward fifty years, how do you think history will see you?

☞: I'm hoping for still alive. But seriously, I don't know. I just do what I do. If that inspires others, then great. If not, then, well, at least I made some *Ice Age*, *Alliances* and/or *Coldsnap* decks a little better. I'll be happy when people just get what I do.

**Narrator:** So you just want to be understood?

☞: Doesn't everybody?

END OF TRANSCRIPT

That's all I got for today. I hope you enjoyed this little foray into Manaville. As this was a little more offbeat, I'm interested to hear what you think. (Good or bad.) Join me next week when I take a peek in an unfamiliar place.

Until then, may you be understood.

Mark Rosewater

*Mark Rosewater is Head Magic Designer. What this fancy title means is that he's in charge of Magic design. This gets him a lot of mail (which he actually reads). When not alternatively destroying and saving Magic, he likes to spend time with his family, do stereotypically geeky things (play games, read comics, watch a lot of science fiction, etc.) and write about himself in third person.*



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