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Putting Nostalgia in the Cold

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Latest Developments
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Coldsnap is Magic's 39th tournament-legal expansion. A quick look over all those sets' contents should lead you to believe that the game has lasted as long as it has because we constantly come up with *new* things to add. But the truth is that we have also been very good about reusing cards, mechanics, and creative concepts from the game's past where they make sense.

We have done nods to the past in many ways throughout the lifetime of the game; here are a few examples:

- The bizarre creature *Atoq* from *Antiquities* was such a fan favorite that a second one—*Foratog*—was created for the *Mirage* expansion. Over the following years, a full "cycle" was created, containing *Chronatog* from *Visions*, *Necratog* from *Weatherlight*, and *Auratog* from *Tempest*. Similarly, the popularity of *Ice Age's* *Lhurgoyf* led to a cycle of Lhurgoyf creatures in *Odyssey* (*Magnivore*, *Terravore*, etc.), and *Razormane Masticore* from *Fifth Dawn* played into players' love of the original *Urza's Destiny Masticore*. Reuse of a mechanic and creative concept like this is called an *homage*. Some homages are better disguised; for example, the *Arabian Nights* card *Whirling Dervish* inspired *Slith Firewalker* and the rest of the *Mirrodin* Slith cycle.
- There have been many instances of creative ties to the past that exist only in names and/or flavor text. The *Prophecy* cards *Agent of Shauku* and *Endbringer's Revel*, for instance, reference the powerhouse *Mirage* legend *Shauku*, *Endbringer* in their names. The newer cards don't have any strong mechanical ties to the original, but because *Shauku* was a major force in the *Prophecy* storyline, using her name helped tie the creative together both within the set and between the *Mercadian Masques* block and the *Mirage* block. The best name for these nods is *creative references*.
- Once in a while, we'll *evolve mechanics*. *Cycling* debuted in *Urza's Saga* and came back in *Onslaught*. Similarly, split cards first appeared in *Invasion* and came back again in *Dissension*. In these cases, the mechanics were significantly evolved such that the experience of playing with them in the newer sets was significantly different than that of their first go-around.
- Our Un-sets (*Unglued*, *Unhinged*) let us do some *parodies* of our own work. *Chaos Confetti* and *Greater Morphling* are parodies of the famous *Magic* cards *Chaos Orb* and *Morphling*.



While each of these methods builds upon past successes to make the game more richly interconnected, none of them evoke the purest feelings of *nostalgia* that the next two methods do. What do I mean by nostalgia? Using cards to elicit memories of positive past play experiences, or to capture a feeling of the longed-for past when we began playing the game and things felt simpler and more wondrous. The two best ways to capture nostalgia are:

- Reprints.** Whether it's *Kird Ape* in *Ninth Edition*, *Elves of Deep Shadow* in *Ravnica*, or *Triskelion* in *Mirrodin*, we hope that when we choose to reprint a card that some number of players will say, "Oh, man! I remember playing with that card X years ago, and it was awesome! It's one of my favorite cards of all time!"
- Reusing a mechanic in its original form**, often with only a slight variation in execution. The return of *Slivers* in *Legions* is the most famous example of such a reuse. The goal was not to make *Slivers* significantly different, or to force players to reevaluate them in a new context, but simply to recapture the fun and excitement that they brought to the game several years before in the *Tempest* block.

Nostalgia Applied to Coldsnap

The design team went about creating the initial *Coldsnap* file as if it were actually supposed to be the third set of the *Ice Age* block, meaning that they avoided making cards that were too much like cards in *Ice Age* and *Alliances*, as those cards wouldn't have actually appeared in the same block.

The development team quickly realized that the rules for the third set in a block change significantly when (a) the third set is released a decade after the first two, and (b) only a very small number of players will actually mix the sets together in Limited or Block Constructed play. The huge amount of distance between the beginning and end of the block meant that old concepts and ideas could be more or less blatantly reused with only slight modernization, and they would be well-received thanks to the nostalgic feelings they would evoke.

In other words, the fact that *Coldsnap* was intentionally a throwback to older sets meant we could do direct riffs off old cards that would be met with, "Cool! It's a new version of [blank]! I loved that card!" as opposed to, "Lame! All they did was make a different version of [blank]." It was certainly fun making cards that were *intentionally* like other cards, as opposed to trying to be as different than everything else we've ever done as possible.

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Below I'll illustrate several cards that probably wouldn't have existed if *Coldsnap* had been made ten years ago, but are cool now thanks to their nostalgia factor. And for those of you without a familiarity with the old sets, consider this a history lesson!

Adarkar Valkyrie, as a nod to Seraph



Ice Age already had an expensive Angel that could put your opponent's dead creatures into play on your side, and it would normally be crazy to follow **Seraph** with the Valkyrie just because of how much better the Valkyrie is. But the Valkyrie is a clear home run—a nice homage, but with a power-level more in line with today's *good fatties*, and a way cooler flavor. Valkyrie really captures the setting's Norse influence.

Bull Aurochs, as a nod to Aurochs



The fact that **Aurochs** debuted as the only "Aurochs" in the set leads me to believe that the designers meant the word to be treated as a card name, like **Plague Rats** did, as opposed to a creature type, like Goblin or Kobold. As such, it makes sense that there was only one in the set—after all, there couldn't be any more. However, that lack of clarity allowed us to treat it as a creature type, making a whole herd of Aurochs with the same abilities.

Commandeer, as a nod to Force of Will





It is unlikely, although not impossible, that a second cycle of pitch cards would follow the first just a set later, but because **Force of Will**, **Contagion**, and the rest were such an integral part of the *Alliances* experience, we decided to rehash them in *Coldsnap*. The new cycle has a definite tweak, but they play quite similarly (especially from the other side of the table).

Frostweb Spider, as a nod to Woolly Spider



The Pro Tour-winning block deck contained both **Woolly Spider** and **Giant Trap Door Spider**, forever linking *Ice Age* with Spiders in players' minds.

Greater Stone Spirit, as a nod to Stone Spirit and Stonehands



Few players realize that this guy is a **Stone Spirit** that casts **Stonehands**, which is a hilariously absurd pair of cards to combine. It's safe to say that this card would have never existed if *Coldsnap* came out right after *Alliances*.

Jester's Scepter, as a nod to Jester's Cap and Jester's Mask



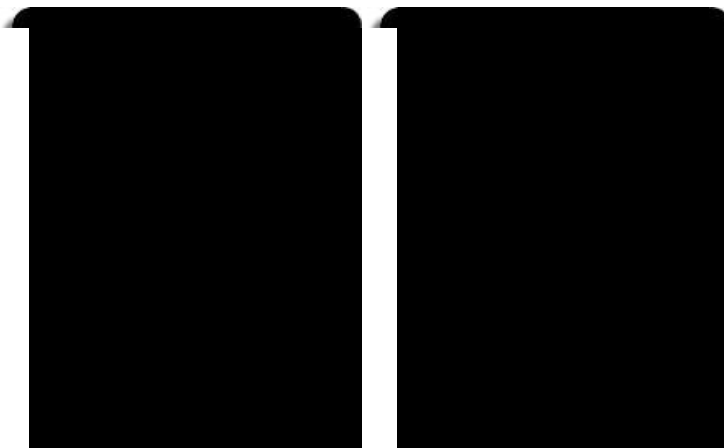
The two Jester's cards from *Ice Age* were quirky and memorable, and it made sense to try to add a third to their pantheon. As Brady Dommermuth noted in *Ask Wizards*, there was no jester in the set's storyline; the cards were merely conceived as Jester accoutrements to highlight the "messing with your opponents" mechanic. Our new one fits in quite well.

Jokulmorder, as a nod to Polar Kraken



In *Magic's* early years, there was a bit of slow one-upmanship regarding the largest creature in the game in every other set. Alpha's 8/8 *Force of Nature* was one-upped by *Antiquities'* 9/9 *Colossus of Sardia*, and then *The Dark's* 10/10 *Leviathan* and *Ice Age's* 11/11 *Polar Kraken*. *Jokulmorder* fits the pattern, jumping in line ahead of *Mirage's* *Phyrexian Dreadnought*.

Mishra's Bauble, as a nod to Urza's Bauble





Mishra's Bauble is the most overt nostalgic homage. There's no way it would have existed if the set was printed in 1996, and it exists here only to recapture the experience of playing with a 0-mana cantrip artifact.

Phyrexian Etchings, as a nod to Necropotence



Necropotence has turned out to be *the* card most associated with *Ice Age*, so it made sense to try to make another card-drawing enchantment that cost ♠♠♠ .

Sek'Kuar, Deathkeeper, as a nod to Balduvian Dead



Balduvian Dead makes a weird kind of token—so weird that we had the urge to make a second card that made 3/1 Graveborns. (You can see the two cards in action side-by-side in the *Beyond the Grave* theme deck).

Shape of the Wiitigo, as a nod to Wiitigo



Another amusing card along the lines of [Greater Stone Spirit](#), the Shape calls out the quirkiness of one of *Ice Age*'s more memorable creatures. Again, this is not a card that would ever have made it into the block proper, but it is a fun homage.

Stromgald Crusader, as a nod to Knight of Stromgald



It's not inconceivable that this card would have been made in the same block as [Stromgald Crusader](#), considering the Crusader was legal in Standard at the same times as the identical [Order of the Ebon Hand](#). The "pump knights" were well-loved creatures from early in [Magic](#), and remaking them as "jump knights" was an obvious choice.

Ursine Fylgja, as a nod to Fylgja



The bears are another fun homage to a flavorful but confusing *Ice Age* card. *Fylgja*'s weird name and complicated minor abilities really embody *Ice Age*, and by making *Ursine Fylgja*, we were able to make similarly wacky cards with the "excuse" that we were channeling the past.

I hope you enjoyed this look at nostalgia... I'm warning you now that we're on kind of a nostalgia kick here in R&D. Stay tuned...

Last Week's Poll:

Do you like the snow mechanic in <i>Coldsnap</i> ?		
Yes, it's cool.	5512	69.7%
No, sorry.	1457	18.4%
I don't care.	944	11.9%
Total	7913	100.0%

Yes! We succeeded in taking of the most ridiculed mechanics in *Magic*'s history and making it somewhat respectable.

This Week's Poll:

Which of the nostalgic cards I talked about best embodies "Ice Age" to you?

- Adarkar Valkyrie
- Bull Aurochs
- Commandeer
- Frostweb Spider
- Greater Stone Spirit
- Jester's Scepter
- Jokulmorder
- Mishra's Bauble
- Phyrexian Etchings
- Sek'Kuar, Deathkeeper
- Shape of the Wiitigo
- Stromgald Crusader
- Ursine Fylgja

*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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