

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Latest Developments

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The Week That Was
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I love doing my column but it's a lot of fun when I get to break from the reportage and do something else. My recent foray into [Deconstructing Famous Decks](#) and my [Swim in the Seine](#) were fun but my favorite break from the norm was during Swap Week when I got the seemingly impossible task of writing Aaron's column for one week. What the heck did I know about developing **Magic** cards? Designing them on the other hand, well who hasn't done that?

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Swap Week can't possibly be tougher on any single columnist than me. Aaron's job each week is to be the voice of R&D. Mike Flores can easily delve into the world of MTGO, Anthony can – well, Anthony can frankly write about anything, Zvi was a multi-player assassin years before he ever made the correct play, and so on. How can I possibly live up to the latter half of the column's title: Latest *Developments*?

The closest I can come is to talk about some of my attempts to get a couple of my card designs through the door at Wizards. After all, none of us have ever played **Magic** without fantasizing about a card design. You only need to look through the sigs in the forums and you will see multiple people who have designed entire fantasy sets – blocks even. I am not that ambitious, but I have tried to get four cards over the transom.

(Something that is getting harder to do since they switched to the new offices; there are no transoms, no pebbled glass doors with stenciled names, or bottles of rotgut in the drawer of each desk. Two out of three, anyway.)

In the Beginning...



The first time I ever suggested a card design was close to ten years ago for Pro Tour-Los Angeles II on the Queen Mary. I was in the room that was set aside for side drafts and general hanging out and sidled up to a conversation Mark Rosewater was having about card design. He was lamenting that **Elephant Graveyard** was not as cool as people originally thought it would be. The hope was that people would actually try to build elephant decks around the *Arabian Nights* land.

I was struck by the idea that it was too bad that people didn't build more decks around it and personally lamented that it wasn't a flexible enough card so that you could choose which race of creatures it could regenerate. And before I knew it, I was interrupting Mark's conversation.

"What if it was a land called Ancestral Graveyard? When it comes into play, players could choose a creature type and then it would be able to regenerate that creature type."

I immediately regretted interrupting Mark and realized he must get that kind of thing all the time. I was quite pleased when he actually took a notepad out of his pocket and wrote something down. He really liked the idea and said he would try and work it into an upcoming design file – and I have to confess that I scanned spoilers for the next few years hoping to

see something resembling my suggestion.

It seemed like a card that could straddle the gulf between casual and competitive. It would easily see play in all sorts of tribal decks featuring anything from **Thalids** to **Merfolk** to **Dragons**. In competitive circles it would make a nice one-of in decks featuring plenty of knights in a field full of **Lightning Bolts** – **Incinerates** not so much.

I hadn't thought about the card in years until it came time to do this column. I decided to ring up Mark and see if he had ever actually done something with the card or had simply made a note in his pad to have a restraining order drawn up in case I ever approached him again.

"I liked that card 10 years ago and I still like it," recalled Mark. "I think I tried to get it into a couple of set and then forgot about it. I think it will make its way into a set in the next few years."

Where have I heard that before?

The Operatives

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My dalliances with card design were put on hold for several years until the months leading up to the 2001 Invitational. Dave Price, as he did every year, put out a call for card designs in his Star City Games column. Now I had an unfair advantage here as I would draft regularly with Dave at Neutral Ground, and I struggled to find a way to make Dave – perhaps the most single-mindedly red player in the history of the game – play with a blue-white card in a 60-card deck.

That train of thought led me down the tracks to an idea where each color could place an operative in the enemy camp; a black creature in green-white, a blue one in red-green, and so on. In Dave's case the card would be a [Goblin Operative](#).

```
UW
Goblin Operative
Creature - Goblin Merfolk Soldier
Protection from Red. You may play Goblin Operative at any time you could
play an instant by discarding a Mountain instead of paying the actual
casting cost.
2/1
```

I mentioned the card to Dave and he was intrigued by the idea of a 2/1 creature that could be played even more cheaply than **Jackal Pup**. I thought it was an elegant card for a number of reasons. It was fast – although admittedly too fast – and it was a foil to both other red decks and to anti-red decks featuring protection from red creatures or red hosers like COP Red. I was eager to see what would happen to it development should Dave win the Invitational as fellow Deadguys Chris Pikula and Jon Finkel had already done.

A 6-9 finish in Cape Town was not enough for Dave to derail the departure of **Voidmage Prodigy** to the development team, keeping the Goblin Operative in deep cover. If anyone going to this year's Invitational needs a card, the Operative is still in play...

Library Card

Probably my all-time favorite card is **Sylvan Library**, and with so many cool old cards being reprinted in the most recent core set I entertained some fantasy about being able to pay eight life for two extra cards in Constructed for the first time in years. I'm not sure if it was at U.S. Nationals in Kansas City or some other Pro Tour around that time but I started pestering Aaron Forsythe – another biblio-tech – about the possibility of Sylvan's reappearance. He explained that it was impossible to reprint given the restrictions of the color pie – that kind of card drawing and life payment were just not green abilities.

I had to agree with him. In fact they seemed downright blue and black respectively.

"What about a functional reprint that cost **♣♣**?" I suggested.

Aaron cocked his head and I am pretty sure I saw his pupils dilate – little did I know that there was a gold set in development. "You should mention that to Mark."

When I mentioned it to Rosewater, he also seemed intrigued. "Have you mentioned this idea to Randy?"

When I mentioned it to Randy Buehler, his response was, "Aaron just mentioned it to me."

Now I was really excited. When *Ravnica* was announced and the word came down that there would be a blue-black guild introduced, I could barely contain myself.

What happened? **Psionic Blast** gets to come back but not the Library? I asked Mark for some explanation and he confirmed that the card did make it in initially but it became quickly apparent that it could not see print.

"We always like to do stuff where there was something cool about a card from the past and update it," Mark explained. "The green mana flare took me seven years to get it into a set. Every single set I ever led design included that card and it was always killed – same thing with **Char**. The new Sylvan was in *Ravnica* as a Dimir card. It was in the design file. What we basically found out was that it was too fucking good. It was either way too broken at black-blue or we were going to upset people by making it cost too much."

Sigh, back to the drawing board. Good thing there is another Invitational coming up.

Geniuses at Work

I knew Mike Flores was trying to figure out what his submission was going to be for this year's Invitational. He had talked in the past about a **Dark Ritual** reprint that could only be used to summon creatures but wanted to come up with something that was a creature itself.

While playing at a Neutral Ground draft, I had an opponent cast **Farseek** in a very aggressive manner. He held the card out between his index and middle finger and pointed it at me as he announced it. His presentation was more like the way someone would announce **Duress** or **Cabal Therapy** than a land fetch spell.



Once again – for only the fourth time in 10 years – my **Seedborn Muse** spoke to me. I immediately started toying with the idea of a card that would not only combine the abilities of **Duress** and **Rampant Growth** but would also appeal to Mike enough for him to submit it as his Invitational card.

```
GB1
Greedy's Grasp
Creature - Spider
When Greedy's Grasp comes into play, target opponent reveals his or her
hand. You may choose a land card and put it into play tapped under your
control.
Greedy's Grasp may not - under any circumstances - block fliers.
1/3
```

I think this card has a decent chance to make it through development should Mike win the Invitational. I toyed with the idea at costing it at **2** but if it permanently gave you control of the land that seemed way too good. I thought about making it a nightmare a la **Mesmeric Fiend** with imprint a la **Chrome Mox** but that seemed way too complicated. Besides, at three mana the card does not seem grossly unfair and with an elf or bird you could still reasonably cast it on turn two.

You may be wondering about the incongruity between the creature type and the second line of rules text. That is because Jon Becker is one of my favorite reluctant writers in the game. It seems that the only time he writes these days is to protest the mistreatment of his beloved spiders. I figure that if this saw print as is it would actually prompt him to produce a couple thousand words.

I don't know what will happen with my latest attempt to sneak in a card, but you can at least let me know which of these card you like the best in this week's poll.

This Week's Poll:

Which of BDM's card designs would you most like to see in print?

- Ancestral Graveyard
- Goblin Operative
- Dimir Library
- Greedy's Grasp

*Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is **Top8Magic.com**, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.*



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