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You Can Say That Again

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Making Magic
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

If You're Interested in Working for Wizards of the Coast, Make Sure You Check Out the End of This Column.

Welcome to Echo Week!... to Echo Week... Echo Week... Week. This week is all about the little *Urza's Saga* mechanic that could. We'll be revisiting echo's past and we'll catch up with what it's up to nowadays. I promise you no column this week will have more factoids about echo. (For example, did you know that a duck's quack will not echo? Oh, factoids about the **Magic** echo mechanic. My bad.) Okay, let's start with this factoid. Echo was not designed for *Urza's Saga*. It was in the original design file for *Tempest*. How did that happen and how did it end up in *Urza's Saga*? A fine place to start our story.

The Coming Storm

The day I said the fateful words "I might be willing to move to Seattle" (this was said during one of my many trips up to Renton to do freelance work for Wizards), I went for a walk and talk with the then VP of R&D, a man named Mike Davis. (For trivia buffs, Mike's actual first name was James. Yes, he's the J.M.D. of *Jayemdae Tome* fame.) The point of the walk and talk was for each of us to fill in the other on things we might not know.



During the walk, I explained to Mike that I thought one of the many things I had to offer Wizards R&D was my design skills. I had created a number of games in my spare time and I felt that my skills would be useful to R&D. Mike then informed me that they weren't really looking for designers. They wanted developers. After all, they had Richard Garfield himself doing the vast majority of the design work. And so, I was hired as a developer.

Cut to a year later. I wanted to prove that I had what it took to do **Magic** design. As I was an unknown quantity, I had to bring something to the table. My bargaining chip? I managed to convince Richard to be on a design team with me. (At the time, Richard hadn't done any **Magic** design since *Arabian Nights*.) This was enough to convince Joel Mick, then Head Designer and Developer (the two roles hadn't split into two different jobs yet) that I deserved a shot at designing a set. Joel told me that I could pick who I wanted to round out my team. I decided to take an established developer (Charlie Catino) that had done a little design (he was on the *Mirage/Visions* design team) and a new R&D employee who I believed had potential to be a designer. His name was Mike Elliott.

Mike and I had become fast friends. We were both new to Seattle as we had moved up to work in Wizards R&D. We were both huge fans of **Magic**. We both had aspirations to do game design. And we were both desperate to find a girlfriend. We probably bonded over the last more than any other. Anyway, Mike was eager and hungry and he seemed like a perfect fit for the *Tempest* design team.

Out of the Shadows

My hunch paid off in spades. Mike was filled to the brim with card ideas. As was I. As was Richard. (While Charlie definitely contributed, he was no match for the power design trio of Mike, Richard and myself - note that many years later this would be three-fifths of the *Mirrodin* design team, along with Aaron Forsythe and Tyler Bielman.) We spent a week at Richard's parent's house down in Portland. During that time I wanted the group to come up with as many card ideas as we could. We came back flush with cards - so flush, in fact, that the set was overstuffed with cool ideas.

One of the biggest contributors to this was the fact that Mike brought to the table a complete set that he had already designed. If memory serves me correct, he called it the Astral Set (not to be confused with the Astral Set that were the virtual cards for the original **Magic** Microprose game). Among other things, Mike's set had slivers, shadow and echo although echo was called planeshift at the time; slivers and



Mike Elliot in action.

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shadow would change their name many times to end up back with the names they started with.

So echo started in the Astral Set. It then made it into *Tempest* design. Here, for the first time ever, are the original echo cards as they appeared in the *Tempest* design file handed over to development:

Planeshifting Healer

1W
Summon Healer
White
1/1
Planeshift (*Pay the casting cost the upkeep after creature is summoned or bury it*)
T: Prevent 2 damage to target creature.

Big Fish

3U
Summon Serpent
Blue
6/5
Planeshift (*Pay the casting cost the upkeep after creature is summoned or bury it*)
Islandhome (*If defending player controls no islands, this creature cannot attack. If you control no islands, bury this creature.*)

Phantom Efreet

1UU
Summon Efreet
Blue
4/3
Flying
Planeshift (*Pay the casting cost the upkeep after creature is summoned or bury it*)
Bury Phantom Efreet at the end of any combat it was blocked.

Big Blue Flier

3U
Summon Flier
Blue
5/5
Planeshift (*Pay the casting cost the upkeep after creature is summoned or bury it*)
Cannot be blocked by blue creatures.

Shadow Giant

RR
Summon Giant
Red
3/3
Planeshift (*Pay the casting cost the upkeep after creature is summoned or bury it*)

Shadow Dragon

2RR
Summon Dragon
Red
5/4
Planeshift (*Pay the casting cost the upkeep after creature is summoned or bury it*)
Flying

Mystic Bears

1G
Summon Bears
Green
3/3
Planeshift (*Pay the casting cost the upkeep after creature is summoned or bury it*)

Mist Golem

2
Artifact Creature
Artifact
3/3
Mist Golem cannot block.
Planeshift (*Pay the casting cost the upkeep after creature is summoned or bury it*)

As you can see, the mechanic was only used on eight cards and in the simplest most straight-forward fashion. The entire *Tempest* development team (led by Henry Stern with me, Mike, Bill Rose and William Jockusch) knew that the mechanic was bigger than it was being given space. Because of this, echo was cut from *Tempest* during development. Also cut during this purging was a mechanic of Richard's called sliding, which would later become cycling.

The Saga Begins

Mike had performed so well on *Tempest* that Joel decided to let Mike lead the design for the next big set, *Urza's Saga*. Mike knew we had a good thing with echo and cycling so he started the design by including those

two mechanics. As the set was fleshed out the decision was made to put echo into red and green (with the one exception being a **rare white angel**) as they seemed like the two that best matched the feel of the mechanic.

Somewhere along the way, the flavor team came up with a name for the mechanic. It was thought that the word "planeshift" would be confusing as it was unclear what exactly the word meant (ironic, as it would later be the name of an expansion). Echo was chosen because it had a nice simple name that eloquently reflected the mechanic.

Normally when we introduce a new mechanic, we try to start with the most basic version of it. Echo was no exception. The majority of the echo creatures in *Urza's Saga* were basically vanilla or French vanilla creatures with echo (the first is R&D-speak for creatures with no rules text and the second is for creatures with basic creature keyword abilities like flying and first strike). The big question was how would we evolve echo over the course of the block.

This is where I stepped up to the plate. As we played around with echo design, I became fascinated with its interaction with creatures that have "comes into play", or "CIP," effects (These are cards that say "When CARDNAME comes into play, do BLAH"). *Urza's Saga* had but one, Crater Hellion, a rare red creature. The reason I was so enamored was that CIP effects gave echo cards a neat twist. Essentially they were spells that allowed you to pay the echo cost to keep the creature. In *Urza's Saga*, echo was used primarily as a way to get bigger creatures out with less land in play. Echo let you spread out the cost over two turns. With this as the major incentive, the player almost always paid the echo cost. But the CIP echo cards allowed the player to sometimes have reasons to not pay the echo cost.

An interesting side note: When we first started designing echo cards, we thought of echo as simply a drawback. But the more we played around with it the more we saw that having echo was sometimes a positive. This was particularly true for echo creatures with CIP effects because much of the value came from playing the creature. With it in the graveyard, you could get it back and play it again. A good example of this phenomenon was *Avalanche Riders*. This card was created by Darwin Kastle when he won the second **Magic** Invitational (then called the *Duelist* Invitational) in Rio de Janeiro. Here's the card he turned in: (well, with modern keywording and templating)

Avalanche Riders

3R
Creature - Nomad
2/1
Haste
When **Avalanche Riders** comes into play, destroy target land.

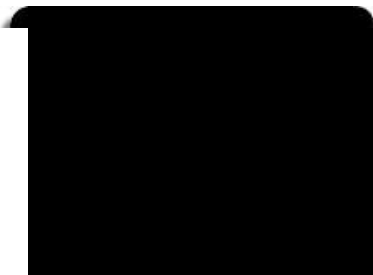
What did R&D change? We changed the 2/1 to 2/2 and added echo. We didn't even change the name. And it turns out that **Avalanche Riders** having echo occasionally was quite handy.

Anyway, I was a huge fan of CIP echo creatures, so much so that I convinced Mike (who was the lead for *Urza's Legacy*) to give the majority of the echo creatures a CIP effect. Then when it came time to do *Urza's Destiny* (I was both the design lead and the rest of the team for that set), I messed around with echo creatures that had "go to graveyard from play" triggers. The "go to graveyard" trigger was quite interesting because it also allowed you to trigger the effect by not paying the echo. I then mixed and matched "go to graveyard" with "comes into play."

And then, the *Urza's Saga* block came to an end. Bye bye, echo. Back then we tended to treat our mechanics more as a disposable resource. After I finished *Urza's Destiny*, I had no idea whether we'd see echo ever again. Obviously, we would.

In the Nick of Time

Flash forward a number of years. Once the *Time Spiral* team realized that nostalgia was going to play a big role in the set, we started looking back at sets to see what mechanics we might want to reuse. Echo held a warm place in a few of the designers' hearts and so a few cards with echo started dribbling into the set. (As we concentrated different mechanics in different colors, it got stuck in one of its original colors, red) Here was one of the cards:





Okay, at the time it was red, but other than that it was pretty much what we ended up with in *Planar Chaos*. The problem was that it broke a cardinal rule of *Time Spiral*. The set was about the past. The idea was to show mechanics as they were. Sure, we used some new effects, but the idea was that we would execute all the returning mechanics as they had been in their first incarnation. Notes were made in multiverse that this card had to move to later in the block.

The designer (as it wasn't me it was either Brian Tinsman, Aaron Forsythe or Devin Low - the three other members of the *Time Spiral* design team) argued that the set also had a "time as a resource" theme and that this card played nicely into that theme. I agreed and said that luckily the entire block had the "time as a resource" theme. It should move. But no one knew where it was going to go, so it stayed in the file - that is, until *Planar Chaos* design got into full swing.

Steal Away

The *Planar Chaos* design team (Bill Rose was the lead, with myself, Paul Sottosanti, and Matt Place on the team) liked the idea of taking old mechanics that we felt weren't executed perfectly and updating how they worked. During one of our design meetings, it was pointed out that echo fell into this camp. What was the problem? A classic early design error. We created the mechanic to specifically fit our need rather than make it adaptable to allow us innovation in the future. Why'd we do this? As I explained earlier, our mindset back then was to think of mechanics more as a disposable resource. Why make the mechanic more flexible if this set was never going to use that flexibility? The ironic thing is that we chose to use a number with cycling that did allow us to adapt. Why one mechanic and not the other? I honestly don't know.

Once we realized that the revamped echo fit into our *Planar Chaos* mold, we took it from *Time Spiral*. Another quick aside to explain a little game we play in R&D. Any set can take a card from another set in design or development if it can properly justify why it makes more sense in that set, the idea being that cards should be put where they do the most good. Sometimes this means moving a card to a set that has more synergy with it. Other times it means sending a mechanic to another set because it's problematic with the current set. In the case of echo, it was an easy argument. Mechanics weren't supposed to evolve. This one did. Oh and by the way, it evolved in a way exactly like what *Planar Chaos* was looking for.

Everyone was in agreement that this was a fine plan. There was just one little wrinkle. Mark Gottlieb, the rules manager (and my arch-nemesis) explained that making this change would require us to rewrite how echo works. No problem, we said. And it would have to change how echo is written on the card. *Avalanche Riders*, for example, would now say echo 3 ♣ rather than just echo. No problem. And that change would have to happen in *Time Spiral*. No... what?



Gottlieb argued that we don't make changes mid-block. Yes, we were introducing some new versions of mechanics in *Planar Chaos* but in every case, other than echo, it would be the first time it was showing up in the block. If echo showed up in *Time Spiral* (and it was going to), we'd have to write it the new way. As much as I hated to admit that Gottlieb was right, his words did ring true. I argued that it would be rather subtle and that many players might not even realize the change as all the cards would work as echo always has. It would be a little hint of things to come for those astute enough to notice.

Embracing the *Chaos*

As the *Planar Chaos* team played around with the new echo cards we came to several conclusions. First, we chose to keep the mechanic to the two colors it first appeared in, red and green. Next, we decided that cards with higher echo costs were more interesting than the reverse. Finally, we made sure that each of the cards could do something even if you never paid the echo cost. This meant that all of them either had a CIP effect or had haste (which is kind of like "When CARDNAME comes into play, smash your opponent's face").

While we are planning to make use of very little of *Planar Chaos*' color-shifts in "real" **Magic**, almost all the updates to the old mechanics are things that we're planning to stick with. Echo will be written like this from now on, you'll see vanishing again but not fading, "gating" will now bounce any creature, etc. How soon before we see echo again? Very soon. For those familiar with the Rule of Three (read [this column](#) if you're not), if we do something in the first two sets, odds are you'll see it in the third set. Echo showed up in its staid old version in *Time Spiral*. We got to see it mix it up in *Planar Chaos*. That must mean *Future Sight* is going to show us some places that echo is going to go in the future. And it will. (Check back in a few months to see how.)



One More Time

And thus we come to the end of echo's little tale. From a set that never saw print to the design card file of a set that did to one of the most broken blocks ever to the nostalgia block of today, echo has come a long way. Will we see more of echo (after *Future Sight*, that is)? While it isn't planned for any of the blocks in the near future, I can say with good authority that it is a mechanic that I expect to return again, probably many times over **Magic**'s long history.

That's all I got on echo for today. Join me next week when I bust some myths.

Until then, may you find how to turn your negatives into positives.

Mark Rosewater

So You Want to Work at Wizards...

As a service to my readers, I try to mention **Magic**-related job openings at Wizards of the Coast whenever they pop up. Today is such a day. The **Magic** Brand Team has just had a vacancy and they are very eager to find a **Magic** player to fill the position.

Here's what they want: Someone that loves the game yet has an understanding of the fundamentals of marketing. (Note that this position has less stringent restrictions than the last Brand position I linked to, meaning you don't need an MBA to apply.) What they're looking for is someone who straddles the world of **Magic** and the world of corporate business.

If this job sounds at all interesting, I strongly urge you to go take a peek at the listing. People always ask me how they can get a job at Wizards. The simple answer is take advantage of opportunities like this. You can check out the listing [here](#) and the rest of our job opportunities [here](#).

See one of you soon.

*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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