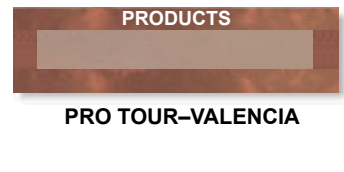


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Enchantment For Better Things, Part One

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Making Magic
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Welcome to Enchantment Week! From time to time we turn our thematic sights on a card type. So far we've done Artifact Week ([Just the Artifacts, Ma'am](#)), Instant Week ([Instant Winners](#)) and Sorcery Week ([Slow and Steady](#), the second one—I somehow used this title twice by accident). In addition, we've had a few subset weeks, including Enchant Creature Week ([Some Enchanted Creature](#)), Non-Basic Land Week ([This Land Is My Land](#)) and more specific creature type weeks than you can throw a stick at ([Mons Made Me Do It](#) from Goblin Week is one of my all-time favorites). But we haven't done a card type week in a while, so it seemed like it was time to pick off one of the few that we hadn't done yet. (And I boldly predict you'll see another card type theme week before the end of the year. You know, since *Lorwyn* is adding one to the game.)

I'm starting the second paragraph and all I've really established so far is that it's Enchantment Week. So what am I'm going to write about? Enchantments are required, and design is kind of a given, which means it's time to talk about designing enchantments. Here's how I've decided to handle it. I've chosen one enchantment that I've designed from each of the past ten blocks (the exact number of blocks I've designed enchantments for—I created a few cards for *Alliances* but none of them were enchantments). For each enchantment, I'm going to walk you through how (and sometimes why) the card got created as well as telling you any tidbits that seem relevant. I will then talk about a design lesson I got from the card.

Cadaverous Bloom (*Mirage*)

My first time on a design team was *Tempest* (which I also led – man, we don't things like that any more). That doesn't mean though that the first cards I designed appeared in *Tempest*. For a year and a half before *Tempest*, I spent all my time working on development teams. (Back in the day **Magic** R&D was small enough that all of us were on every development team.) Often during development, we'll kick out a card. When you do you create what we refer to as a "hole". When a development team gets enough holes, they send out a post to all of **Magic** R&D (usually focused on the designers) and ask them to submit cards to fill the holes. *Cadaverous Bloom* was one such hole filler.

The hole was pretty straightforward. We needed a rare, black-green multicolor card. To get a black-green feel the card needed to have two parts; one part that was black and one part that was green. As I thought about it, I stumbled upon the idea of a card that had an activation cost that fit one color but an effect that fit the other. At the time, discarding a card from your hand wasn't as pervasive as it is now and thus felt more like self inflicted damage. This flavor pushed it towards black and red. Adding mana was very green. Putting the two effects together felt natural. This enchantment would let you trade in cards for mana. At the time I really had no idea how powerful that would be.



One of my favorite stories about *Cadaverous Bloom* was when Pro Tour bad boy (and two-time Hall of Fame vote getter from yours truly) Mike Long talked to me after winning Pro Tour–Paris with a combo deck built around *Cadaverous Bloom* (known as Prosperous Bloom or ProsBloom). Mike walks up to me and says:

Mike: I really have to thank R&D.

Me: For what?

Mike: For this deck. This thing is insane.

Me: Mike, we didn't build this deck. You built it.

Mike: Right. *Cadaverous Bloom* and *Squandered Resources* and *Natural Balance* and *Prosperity* and *Infernal Contract* all just happened to be in *Mirage* and *Visions*.

Me: Um, yeah.

Mike: Mark, I've played the deck. This thing has synergy like no other deck that I've ever seen. I don't even know what cards to bring in from outside *Mirage* and *Visions* to make it better. There's no way this deck just accidentally showed up in the exact two sets that a Pro Tour just happened to be using.

Me: What are you suggesting? That we designed this deck from the ground up and then seeded the necessary cards in the first two sets of the *Mirage* block?

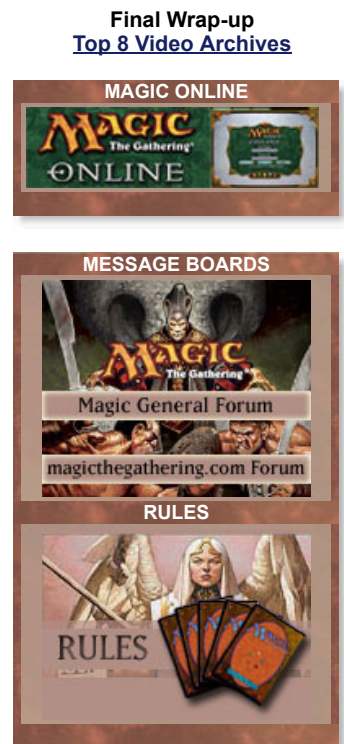
Mike: So you admit it?

Me: No. The opposite actually. I know for a fact that I designed *Cadaverous Bloom*. Mike Elliott designed *Natural Balance*. Bill Rose created *Prosperity*. There was no master conspiracy to create a deck for you to win a PT in Paris.

Mike: I never said you made it for me.

Me: Mike, we didn't make the deck.

Mike: Okay. (wink) Gotcha.



To this day I still think Mike is convinced that there is no other explanation for ProsBloom other than that R&D purposely put it there.

As I explained above, for each card, I'm going to give a little design tip. For **Cadaverous Bloom**, I will warn of the danger of making engine cards (defined as cards that turn one resource into another, such as turning cards into mana) that don't have any cost to use. Converting resources is powerful. Doing it for free is just asking for trouble. Note that the ProsBloom deck got its mana by running two enchantments that abuse the rule above: **Cadaverous Bloom** and **Squandered Resources**. Cards that convert resources into mana are particularly hard as they make it difficult to use mana to help restrict the exchange. The lesson here is that engine cards need to have restrictions built into their design. Freely being able to exchange as much of thing A for as much of thing B is just asking for trouble.

Spirit Mirror (*Tempest*)

Often in design I start with a simple idea. For **Spirit Mirror**, my idea was to create a creature that could only be killed by enchantment destruction. I had toyed with the idea of making an enchantment creature, but that idea seemed a bit too ahead of its time. (I guess you could say I was saving it for the future—and yes, for those that didn't read my other column on this topic, I really wish **Lucent Liminid** had a static effect to make it feel like an enchantment.) I thought about making an enchantment that turned into a creature, but that would be just as vulnerable to creature kill. No, I wanted a creature that said, "If you don't have enchantment removal, I'm going to be a problem."

Then I stumbled upon the idea of an enchantment that made a creature token. If the token was destroyed but the enchantment remained, it could just make a new creature, thus creature kill wouldn't be the answer to this card. In addition, I had to worry about the problem of this card just pumping out an army of token creatures. To avoid this, I added the text that only made the reflection token if there were no other reflections in play. This, by the way, forced the card to create a unique card type. (Reflection would later pop its head up again on *Invasion's Pure Reflection*.) I then realized that I had to have some restriction on how often the enchantment could make a new token because cards with poly activated sacrifice costs could heavily be abused if you could keep making a new creature the moment after you sacrificed one. This is where the triggered token creation part of the card got created.

During the very next playtest, I opened **Spirit Mirror** (which is pretty lucky as it's a rare) and played it. It takes me a few turns to get to four mana but when I do, I plunk **Spirit Mirror** down. During my next upkeep, I make a 2/2 Reflection token and on my opponent's next turn he plays **Pacifism** on it. To which I reply, "Hey that's not supposed to happen."

This is why the last line of text was added. You want to deal with this card, don't mess with the tokens. Destroy it. The mirror/reflection flavor, interestingly enough, actually came much later when Creative was trying to figure out why the card could keep making tokens.

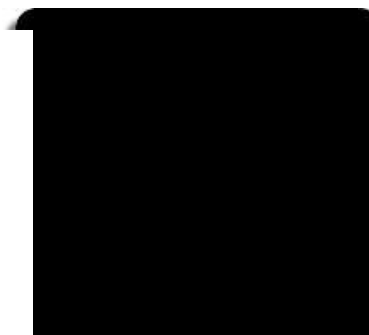
As a designer, what I enjoy about this card is that it has a great deal of utility. Some players use it as a very hard-to-destroy creature. Other decks make use of it as a means to create a 2/2 token every turn. (Usually this means the creature is sacrificed each turn for some other gain.) Yet others have taken the ability to destroy things for no mana to heart. I've seen a number of different decks that use **Spirit Mirror** as creature (and sometimes permanent) destruction. (Normally this is accompanied by a card that can turn other creatures and/or permanents into Reflections.)

My designer note on this card is to not be afraid of how players might use the card. The fact that so many players use **Spirit Mirror** in a way other than what I originally intended makes me happy. This fits into my recurring "designs as tools" metaphor. When a craftsman creates a tool, he has some idea what the end user is going to do with it, but his real goal is not accomplishing the one task but making the tool useful enough that the end user finds many ways to use it. Card design is the same. Designers seldom create cards to go into a particular deck. Rather we create cards that do particular things and let them naturally gravitate to where they'll prove most effective.

Sneak Attack (*Urza's Saga*)

I created this card because I was trying to design cards that oozed the flavor of its color. For red, I latched onto the idea of making a card that was all about "short term gain, long term disadvantage." Red is the color that acts impulsively and does things before thinking out the long-term ramifications. I felt it would be cool to tap into this flavor. How could red allow you to get something now at the cost of giving up something later? In addition, to stay true to red's flavor, I wanted the effect the card created to be aggressive. Red was giving up long term advantage to get something cool and in the opponent's face—now.

One of my early trains of thought led me to think about creatures. How could I use creatures quicker than normal? What if I was able to pay some mana to just put them into play (with haste, of course; they had to be able



to attack. We are talking about red after all)? That seemed like a very powerful effect. What was the drawback? It seemed pretty obvious. The creatures die at end of turn. Now that felt red.

As this card is pretty old and many of you might not have had the opportunity to play with or against it, let me fill you in on what happened when we printed the card. It was good. But not quite in the way I anticipated. What made the card so good was that some creatures have most of their advantage stuffed into their first turn. For example, creatures with comes-into-play effects (or leaves-play effect for that matter) worked great with **Sneak Attack** as they got most of bang from the one turn in play. Other cards like **Ball Lightning** (which sacrifices at the end of the turn normally) also seemed more than happy to trade additional turns for less mana to play. Finally, because the card had a red activation, it allowed red decks to get creatures of other colors into play, if only for a turn.

The interesting design lesson of this card has come from the many years I've spent trying to recreate **Sneak Attack** in a form that isn't too good. (And I feel like there have been a few moderate successes but nothing approaching the coolness of **Sneak Attack**.) Designers need to understand what parts make a card powerful—not so that they can recreate the power (although that need does arise) as much as a need to be able to make things that are reasonable to playtest. So what part of **Sneak Attack** was too good? (And yes, conventional wisdom says **Sneak Attack** was over the line; that's why we've never reprinted the card—and it has come up for the core set and as a reprint in an expert set and for the "timeshifted" sheet.) The biggest problem is a common one in **Magic**: We let the players circumvent the mana cost, the key control on a card. And we let them do it too easily without enough of a drawback. Only getting the creature for one turn has proven to be nowhere near the drawback I first thought it would be. Second, allowing players to easily play cards off-color also proved to raise the power level of the card. Finally, I learned how much value the first turn is to many creatures.



Conspiracy (Mercadian Masques)

This card owes its existence to Mercenaries. (I don't mean in R&D. We've cut way back on the number of mercenaries we hire. Although who can forget *The Great Mercenary Search*?) No, I'm talking about the creatures in *Mercadian Masques* block that could go get one another out of the library and put them into play. Not Rebels. No, Rebels were the powerful version of this mechanic that warped numerous formats. No, I'm talking about the other half of this mechanic. You see, Rebels chained up. The smaller guys got the bigger guys. For some reason, the Mercenaries worked the other direction. The smaller guys got even smaller guys.

Anyway, during playtest it became clear that the Rebels were a tad better than the Mercenaries. And by "a tad better" I mean "better in just about every possible way." As a designer I was trying to find ways to help out the Mercenaries deck. That is when I stumbled upon the idea of turning all the cards in your deck into Mercenaries. This way, you could use your Mercenaries in play to go get any creature in your deck. Okay, any cheaper creature in your deck—there's only so much I could fix. But having a card that said "All creature cards in your deck are Mercenaries" seemed a little narrow.

What if, I said, it just turned all of your cards, not just the ones in your library, into any creature type, not just Mercenaries? While we were still a few years away from *Onslaught* and the advent of a tribal block, there were still plenty of cards that cared about creature types. All seemed good. Well, except for one problem. Why was black changing all your creature types? Isn't that more something blue would do? Yes, I admitted, but the point of the card was to help Mercenaries. Turning the card blue would completely defeat that purpose, so I argued that we could solve it with flavor. You see, the cause of the change was a conspiracy. Ooh, a conspiracy. That sounded black.

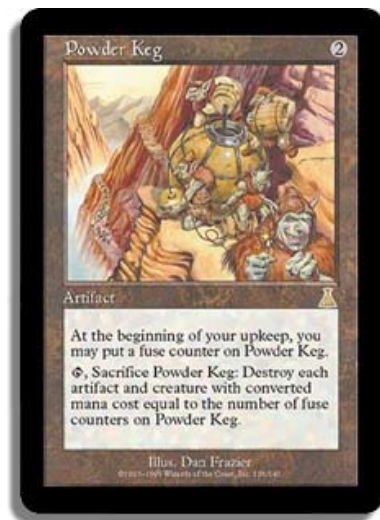
My design lesson for this card is how much I regret that decision. This mechanic doesn't belong in black (the closest black gets is overwriting everything to a pre-stated black creature type and even then, there probably wants to be some additional effect that ties into why everything's becoming a zombie or whatever). Forcing mechanics with flavor rationalization is lazy and poor design. Instead of finding a blue way to help mercenaries I should have found a black one.



Pernicious Deed (Apocalypse)

One of the interesting things about **Magic** design is watching how cards keep begetting other cards. Case in point—Alpha had *Nevinyrral's Disk*. The card was simple and efficient—so much so that it started showing up in places where it was being used to offset weaknesses of certain colors. Blue, for instance, had a problem with destroying permanents. Armed with *Nevinyrral's Disk*, though, blue had much less of a problem. In addition, the card's power level was high enough that it was starting to warp metagames. And thus, *Larry Niven's Disk* was put out to pasture.

Over the years, different designers tried to find new ways to capture the essence of *Nevinyrral's Disk*. I was no exception. During *Urza's Destiny* design, I decided that I wanted to try my hand at a new *Disk*. My solution was the card **Powder Keg**:



The idea behind the card was that while it had some ability to reset, it was more about destroying a subset of cards rather than everything. During development of the set, there was a lot of discussion about whether the card should say "equal to the number of fuse counters" or "equal to or less than the number of fuse counters." At the time I fought that the two cards were both interesting but that the design intent was specifically the former. I liked the idea that the card only threatened a certain band of cards at any one time. I felt that this would both play interestingly and create cool tension when deciding when to add counters to the card. I won the development fight (which means I convinced enough of the developers to side with me) and **Powder Keg** was printed as-was. But in the back of my head, I knew that the other execution was worthy of a card.

So during *Invasion* design, I created **Pernicious Deed**. I knew I wanted it to destroy artifacts, creatures and enchantments. (I didn't want to destroy lands because like *Disk* I liked the idea that it reset things without having to cripple the mana and thus allow players to quickly rebound.) Blue was obviously out of place, and I felt it was weird for white to pick and choose what got destroyed when doing mass destruction. That left black, red and green. Green was necessary because neither black nor red can destroy enchantments. Black was better than red as creature destruction that wasn't damage based didn't feel all that red to me. Black couldn't destroy artifacts like red, but luckily green could, so that wasn't a problem. So, it was decided, **Pernicious Deed** was a black-green card.

One small problem: During *Invasion's* design, we decided that it would be cool to save all the enemy multicolored cards until the last set. This meant that **Pernicious Deed** had to be stuck into a "Waiting For The *Apocalypse*" file. Often cards that get pushed off tend to get lost in limbo as the new design team forges their own path, but the *Apocalypse* design team was filled with a lot of first time designers that Bill was trying out and they were very eager to look at cards the *Invasion* design team had created. Thus, **Pernicious Deed** made its way back into a set.

My favorite story about **Pernicious Deed** was that its name had to be changed at the last minute. The Creative team was going through some growing pains and I was asked to oversee names and flavor text until more people could be hired. As part of this, I had to look through *Apocalypse* and see if there were any last minute name problems. A quick glance said there were. One, there was a card called Spirit Lynx that didn't have the **Spirit Link** ability (a.k.a. lifelink). This was bound to cause enough confusion that I said it had to be changed. Second was **Pernicious Deed**, then called Planar Bombardment. The problem was that it had nothing to do with **Planar Portal** or **Planar Overlay**, both earlier in the block, and so I made the decision to change it at the last minute.



Here was the problem. It was so late in the process that the card numbers had been locked down. That meant that we had to change the names but stay within the parameters of the card names before and after in its color (counting multicolor as a single color). Spirit Lynx's new name had to fall between **Shield of Duty and Reason** and **Standard Bearer**. Luckily, the solution, **Spectral Lynx**, came quite easily.

Pernicious Deed, though, was a tougher nut to crack. We had to be between **Overgrown Estate** and **Powerstone Minefield**. Unlike Spirit Lynx, no answer easily came to mind. As if often the case when this happens (and it happens much more than you might think), we turned to the dictionary. I started with **Overgrown** and began reading. When I got to "pernicious," I read the definition, because I had honestly never heard the word before. It's definition was "causing insidious harm or ruin; deadly; fatal." Exactly what we needed. There was a little skepticism from others as the word is not that well known. My response: "It's a rare and the word 'pernicious' sounds cool. Besides, expanding our players' vocabulary isn't a bad thing."

Numerous years later I got a letter from a player who had just taken his SATs (important college entrance exams, for those not in the United States). He wrote in to say that he had "pernicious" in the vocabulary section and he would never had gotten it if it weren't for **Magic**. (By the way, if any of my readers have a good "this is how **Magic** helped me academically" stories, I would love to hear them.)

My lesson for this card is that you need to pay attention to things you reject for other cards. Often the idea that won't solve a particular problem still has merit for a different card. Part of good design is keeping track of the solutions that didn't help the problem but were solid nonetheless.

But Wait, There's More

When I started this column I had every intent of writing about ten enchantments. After all, I've designed enchantments for ten different blocks. But after I finished the fifth one, I checked my word count and realized that I was over three thousand words. Now, I love writing as much as the next columnist (maybe more), but I have to do this every week. Killing myself to get out a six-thousand-plus-word column seems odd when I have to write another column next week. So, I turned this into a two-parter. Next week, I'll examine an enchantment from each of the last five blocks and share some more design stories. Hopefully, you guys like this kind of column. That means that's all for this week.

Join me next week, when I... weren't you paying attention? I just said what I'm doing next week.

Until then, may you have fun looking through your work of days gone by.

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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