

In honor of X Week, read about the creation of the landmark Tenth Edition of Magic¹s core set.

The Making of Number Ten

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Back in the Day

The preparation for *Tenth Edition* began even before R&D had finished with the previous core set, *Ninth Edition*. We had been stockpiling ideas for cards to include, and they couldn't all go in *Ninth*. So once the book was closed on *Ninth Edition*, I immediately logged into our Multiverse database and created the "10E" set, then started populating it with cards that we had talked about.

The very first cards I added to that set were the following:

1) *Urza's Legacy* "Man-Lands"



I'd wanted to include these five very popular lands in a core set for a long time, but there were three things preventing that from happening. One, for a long time the core set didn't include cards with the trample ability. Two, there were concerns about their power level in Standard. Three, the uncommon

land slots in the set were typically taken up by the Urza lands and later [Quicksand](#), and there just wasn't room for more nonbasic lands at uncommon.

Over time, issue one was solved by coming up with good reminder text for trample (essential for the core set, I believe, because players will ultimately run into it later on cards without reminder text, so they need an introduction to how it works) and fitting a few trample cards into the set at uncommon and rare. Issue three was solved when we vowed to retire the Urza lands after *Ninth*. That left only issue two—power level—as a potential roadblock for their return.

We tested them rigorously in the FFL and felt they were powerful but not too much so, and head developer Brian Schneider was willing to print them as long as we could put a colorless answer to them in the set somewhere that any deck could use should the man-lands become dominant in Standard. Our first crack at such an answer was the inclusion of [Dust Bowl](#) in the set, but playtesting proved that card to be obnoxious and oppressive, so we search high and low for something else. The answer Brian came up with and seemed willing to include surprised me: [Pithing Needle](#). Not only was the card incredibly valuable, but it seemed quite complicated for a core set. But Brian convinced me it was a good card to have around just in case any variety of things in the format went wrong. I don't think [Pithing Needle](#) is an ideal core set card by any means, but if it means we can bring back [Treetop Village](#) and friends safely, I'm all for it.

2) Powerful but underplayed *Mirrodin*-block cards

Mirrodin block was full of splashy, powerful, fun artifacts that just never saw the light of day in their Standard environment because of all the artifact hate players were forced to run to deal with that era's Affinity decks. Many of them were clean and exciting, so we wanted to bring them back in a core set where conditions might be friendlier for them to shine. I penciled in [Razormane](#), [Masticore](#), [Sculpting Steel](#), [Platinum Angel](#), [Triskelion](#), [Solemn Simulacrum](#), [Staff of Domination](#), and the non-artifact [March of the Machines](#).

Over time and through lots of playtesting, [Triskelion](#) and [Solemn Simulacrum](#) were cut because far too much of the set's power was concentrated in rare artifacts, and [Staff of Domination](#) was cut for being really annoying and time consuming (we thought [Gauntlet of Power](#) decks were going to be a bigger deal than they actually ended up being). I'd expect to see all three of those cards show up in later core sets. [Platinum Angel](#) was used as part of a web site vote (more on that later).

3) Legends

As we were putting lots of good cards into *Ninth Edition* ([Hypnotic Specter](#) and [Kird Ape](#) leap to mind), Brian wanted to make sure we weren't using up all the cool stuff we had in our back pockets. "What's the hook going to be for *Tenth*?" he asked me. "I think legends would work," I answered, and within a week we had reminder text for the "Legendary" supertype mocked up. Legends are fantastic for **Magic** as they give the game very visible heroes, villains, and characters for players to latch on to. I talked about my views on legends in my [Preserving the Coolness of Legends](#) article.



The initial ten legends I penciled in for the set stayed somewhat in tact as work on the set proceeded—I chose [Reya Dawnbringer](#); [Arcanis the Omnipotent](#); [Kamahl, Fist of Krosa](#); [Squee, Goblin Nabob](#); and [Mirri, Cat Warrior](#). The ones I picked that didn't survive were [Hokori, Dust Drinker](#); [Mistform Ultimus](#); [Visara the Dreadful](#); [Braids, Cabal Minion](#); and [Kodama of the North Tree](#). Here's why:

Hokori and Kodama: We made a conscious decision to stay away from *Kamigawa* block legends for two reasons—one, they hadn't been out of Standard for long enough and two, their flavor contrasted with the "traditional" fantasy feel of the other legends.

[Mistform Ultimus](#): Stolen for the *Time Spiral* "timeshifted" set.

Visara and Braids: Two powerful and/or unfun.

Without the *Kamigawa* legends at our disposal, we had a hard time coming up with suitable replacements for Visara and Braids. [Ascendant Evincar](#) was a decent choice, but we were flummoxed on who to use for the second slot. Late in development, senior editor Del Laugel decided that it wasn't worth putting reminder text for "legendary" on the legend cards because you only need to know that rule in the rare case where two identical legends are in play. Instead of putting that information in the text boxes, we fit it onto a [Tips & Tricks card](#), but the big revelation with this decision was that we could now use legends with crowded text boxes because there was no need to fit on reminder text any more. Welcome to the set, [Phage the Untouchable](#)!

Team Building

After I put together my initial sketch of the set, we formed an actual design team that was led by Matt Place and included myself and Mike Turian. The three of us spent several afternoons in Starbucks coming up with our goals for the set.

Of course, one of our main goals was to bring back cool, unexpected cards for people to get excited about. We scoured older sets thoroughly and found many rares from several years ago that were

never put on the Reserved List—the list of cards we have promised never to reprint. Cards like [Citanul Flute](#), [Abundance](#), and [Angelic Chorus](#) came from this pass. We also scoured the Portal sets—another great source for interesting cards that players probably wouldn't expect to see—and came up with stuff like [Goblin Lore](#) and [Denizen of the Deep](#).

Another goal we had was to show off all sorts of different things that **Magic** cards could do to new players. We wanted to try three types of cards in somewhat significant numbers—modal spells, allied color helpers, and cantrips—all of which show off neat things the game is capable of. The modal spells didn't work out; we couldn't find five one-mana Charms that all had interesting abilities that didn't overlap with other stuff going on in the set. On top of that, the Charms didn't make for great commons from a learning perspective, but they didn't make for great uncommons from a buyer's perspective, either. The cantrips stayed—there are ten commons across all five colors with the words "Draw a card" on them, and those cards really make the *Tenth Edition* draft environment play much differently from the *Ninth Edition* one in addition to "showing off" another



avenue of the game to newer players. As for the allied color helpers, Matt suggested the *Invasion* [Weavers](#), and the five of them stayed in the set all through development as shining example of "Color A loves colors B and C," a great lesson for those just starting out in the game.

To contrast the Weavers, we went with the *Coldsnap* color hosers ([Cryoclash](#), [Deathmark](#), [Flashfreeze](#), [Luminesce](#), and [Karplusan Strider](#)) because they clearly show both of a color's enemies on a single card, unlike the older pairs ([Slay](#) and [Execute](#), [Flashfires](#) and [Boil](#)) that spread the hate across two cards.

Our last big goal as a team was to come up with cool votes for the "Selecting *Tenth Edition*" website promotion. We wanted to try something different that the traditional "Card vs. Card in the Same Color" that we'd done the last two times—I believe we came up with some really interesting twists (my favorite of which was the many-Dragon vote). Here, for reference, is a list of all the card-versus-card votes for Selecting Tenth and what won:

[Week one](#): [Hurricane](#) defeated [Earthquake](#)

[Week two](#): [Paladin en-Vec](#) defeated [Auriok Champion](#)

[Week three](#): [Troll Ascetic](#) defeated [Erhnam Djinn](#) and [Ravenous Baloth](#)

[Week four](#): [Loxodon Warhammer](#) defeated [Empyrial Plate](#)

[Week five](#): [Mogg Fanatic](#) defeated [Kird Ape](#)

[Week six](#): [Crucible of Worlds](#) defeated [Forgotten Ancient](#) and [Time Stop](#) defeated [Spelljack](#)

[Week seven](#): [Shivan Hellkite](#) defeated ten other dragons

[Week eight](#): [Nantuko Husk](#) defeated [Fallen Angel](#)

[Week nine](#): [Mind Stone](#) defeated [Guardian Idol](#)

[Week ten](#): [Platinum Angel](#) took out [Worship](#).

Into Development

Brian Schneider jumped onto the team when it came time to develop the set, and development is where we both playtest Limited and decide exactly how we want the set to impact Standard for the next two years.

As I wrote in my article for [Sealed Deck Week](#), we moved all of our limited playtesting for *Tenth Edition* onto **Magic Online** (on an internal server). That experience was an interesting and refreshing one, and it allowed us to easily include non-developer types in the playtesting, something we often have difficulty doing.

When it comes to what we want Standard to look like for the future, *Tenth Edition* paints an incomplete picture. Yes, many powerful staple cards were removed. But why? Some of them (like [Seething Song](#)) were taken out because we don't want that effect in the environment at that power level any more. Some of them (like [Phyrexian Arena](#)) were taken out because we wanted to include other cards that were far too similar. In the case of [Phyrexian Arena](#), we wanted to include the entire *Legions* Muse cycle, and the black entry into that group—[Graveborn Muse](#)—is far too similar to [Arena](#) to include both in a single set. And some cards were removed from the core set to allow us the freedom to print newer versions of them in upcoming sets without upsetting the balance of tournament play.

But I don't want to tip our hand on those; you'll just have to speculate why we removed [Stone Rain](#), [Mana Leak](#), [Savannah Lions](#), [Persecute](#), [Wildfire](#), [Annex](#), and other such cards. Did we want to remove their effects from the environment totally, or do we plan on bringing them back in some different form in the future?

Tips and Tricks

At some point during development of *Tenth*, Randy Buehler came to me and explained that the Brand department was looking for a way to get more players to know about some of the Organized Play programs we offered, and were thinking of including a sixteenth card in the booster packs of *Tenth Edition*. Their question for me was, "Is there any content R&D wants to put on the other side of the cards?" Heck, yeah! Personally I have been looking for the perfect place to reintroduce token cards ever since Magic Player Rewards stopped doing them. Additionally, we are constantly bombarded with requests for rulebooks to be included our products, so I figured these insert cards would be a great place to explain some of the newer and more complicated aspects of the game to beginning players. And so the Tips and Tricks cards were born.

The tokens appear in packs about half as often as Tips and Tricks cards do, a ratio I feel is correct for the core set as we really want to take every opportunity we can to help newer players learn. We did our best to include cards that made popular and useful token types; [Siege-Gang Commander](#) and [Midnight Ritual](#) were squeezed into the set late just to give us an excuse to make Goblin and Zombie tokens.

We knew we'd be using the token frames that were developed for MPR, but I was wary that we'd be able to make the Tips & Tricks cards look attractive. The vision I kept having in my own head was that of the *Legends* rules card that came in every *Legends* pack back in 1994. That card was just a brick of black text on a white card and looked just hideous. Imagine my surprise when Del showed me the slick design our graphics people came up for the Tips & Tricks cards!



Old and busted



The new hotness

I was so impressed by the Tips & Tricks and token cards that I agreed to continue them in expert-level sets going forward, so expect to see them in *Lorwyn*. The good news for the enfranchised player is that the ratio of Tips to Tokens will be reversed in expert-level sets; you'll get two tokens for every one Tips & Tricks card.

Back in Black

I was in a Magic Strategy Council meeting (a cross-departmental sit-down with all the bigwigs from Brand, OP, Sales, and R&D) the first time I heard someone mention, "*Tenth* is a big milestone, why not do it in black borders?" That's right, the idea for black borders didn't come out of R&D, though I will admit it is an awesome one.

I covered the positives and negatives associated with the change to black in my [Bordering on Lunacy](#) article, and now that I've held the cards in my hands I must say that it was absolutely the right decision. I just find it a bit funny that for all the work that R&D did on *Tenth Edition*, the thing the set will ultimately be remembered for came out of another department.

That's All, Folks

That's my tale of *Tenth Edition*. As always, I really enjoyed working on the product—core sets are my favorite sets to work on, as I get to incorporate all that I loved about the game as a player with the work that my peers and I have done recently into something greater than the sum of its parts. I hope

you will enjoy *Tenth* as well and, guess what? We've already begun preliminary work on the next core set. It's going to be a doozy.