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# Ten Bits from Tenth

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Latest Developments  
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After sets come out, I like to reflect on them. Once we have initial player perceptions and tournament data to go along with the several months of internal post-analysis we do between the time we finish the set and it gets into your hands, I like to go back and read through all the Multiverse comments that I and my coworkers made as the set wound its way through development. What exactly compelled us to make Card X cost what it did? What were we afraid of? What philosophical discussions sprang forth from the development of that set? What cool ideas were cut out and should be reinstated somewhere else? Typically that's all very fascinating. It's amazing how much you don't remember about what you were doing just a year ago.

Sadly, the Multiverse comments for *Tenth Edition* just weren't that interesting. How could they be? After all, we weren't allowed to doctor up any of the individual cards (aside from template refreshes, the discussion of which would be only interesting to the Melvins among you) as we were dealing solely with reprints. Sure, there was some discussion about how good Song of Blood was and that we really shouldn't print it right now (probably something to do with Mogg War Marshal), which common tapper we should have in the set, and if Dross Crocodile and Mass of Ghouls were too similar, but in general the Core Set commentary can't hold a candle to the heated debates that go on for expert-level expansions.

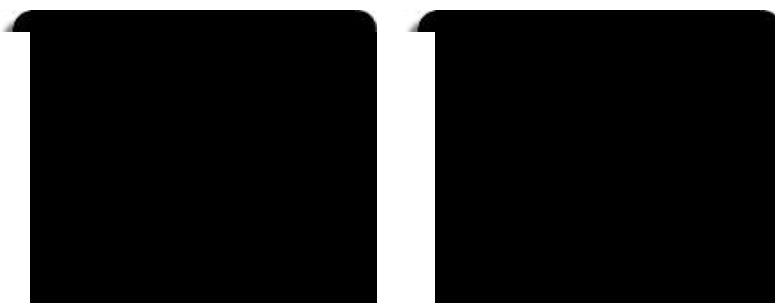


To that end, I started digging through the Multiverse comments of cards in Tenth from the set they first appeared in and, lo and behold, I found some fun stuff. My methodology was a bit random—I just started typing in card names until I ended up with ten sets of comments I liked, but I think you'll find them enjoyable. It is interesting to see how the development team for **Magic** has evolved both in terms of people and philosophy.



In chronological order:

## Squee, Goblin Nabob (*Mercadian Masques*, developed in 1998)



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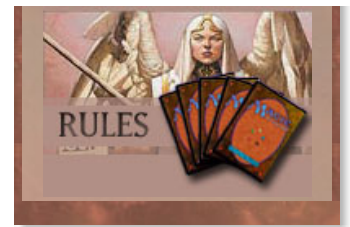
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WJ 7/23: cycle constructed

That's all there is for Squee—a note marking the card as one that will be relevant to Block ("cycle") Constructed.

Is that all anyone had to say about this powerhouse at the time? Veteran Henry Stern assures me that the answer is no. Multiverse used different software at the time, and the "Retired Comments" field for old sets wasn't migrated into the new system. I'm sure someone around here has the original Squee comments on his hard drive, but they aren't available for public consumption.

#### Avatar of Might (Prophecy, developed in 1999)



CC (7/6): Playtested this card in a controlish deck with the instant that makes a land into a creature. Was decent versus most decks and good against weenie decks. I was often able to get one out very fast (turn 3). Mike and I suggest making this be if opponent controls four or more creatures than you.

WJ 7/16: As a general rule, if something is reasonably strong in combination with a very weak card (such as the instant mentioned above), we should weaken it much more than that playtest might suggest, as when comboed with a decent card that works well with it, the "something" will be much stronger.

WJ 7/16: This was completely broken with Varchild's War-Riders. I don't think making it four creatures would have made any difference in that deck. Since Varchild's War-Riders was never a problem card, this suggests to me that you need to radically weaken this Avatar.

cycle constructed

Team 7/28: Redo the playtest starting at the three level as this card changed to cost GG instead of being free.

CC 8/24: Retested this card at 3 with Phelddagrif and Pacifism type cards - was good. It is actually better with the Pacifism type cards than with Phelddagrif. Suggest going to 4.

Was: When CARDNAME comes into play, if you don't have at least 3 fewer creatures than an opponent, pay 6 or sacrifice CARDNAME.

What I can deduce from the above conversation is that the Avatars used to be free to play if their conditions were met as opposed to only being 6 cheaper. Another thing I found fascinating was that the card was playtested with **Varchild's War Riders** from *Alliances*, a card that wasn't in Standard, just to see how it worked with any effect that gives your opponents creatures. Currently we try to deal with real environments, not theoretical ones that include cards that we aren't actually thinking about printing, although I can see the value of testing such speculative situations.

**Recover** (*Invasion*, developed in 1999)



promotable

11/2 ME Very similar to Bone Harvest, and possibly higher power level. The cantrip costing model of plus 2 mana is not always entirely accurate on cards that have intrinsic card advantage or neutrality, since Bone Harvest was a constructed level card, and would you rather draw a random card immediately or possibly put 1 or 2 creatures on top of your deck from your graveyard.

ME 12/5 Has this comment been addressed yet?

DEV TEAM: Yes, Bone harvest was an INSTANT so it is not a fair comparison, the BEST card to compare to is raise dead, which cost 0B, this is a cantrip raise dead, so cost 02oB

The Invasion dev team called out **Recover** as promotable—meaning it is a good candidate to show up in a Core Set—and eight years later it comes true.

The comparison to **Bone Harvest** is an interesting one—I think current R&D believes **Recover** to be significantly better than **Bone Harvest**, as it gives you an extra card—but neither card has ever made much noise in Constructed.

**Voice of All** (*Planeshift*, developed in 2000)



CC 4/3: Feels more like an uncommon card than a rare card.

WJ 4/9: switched from RW02 because we thought this was an interesting

card in limited.

We moved **Voice of All** from uncommon to rare in Tenth because protection is such a complicated ability—especially in combination with "choose a color"—that we didn't want new players encountering it very often. It is interesting to see that the card used to be rare in *Planeshift*.

### **Sunken Hope** (*Planeshift*, developed in 2000)



WJ 12/22: Nuts. There is no way this can be four mana.

WJ 1/7: Do we really want this card that gives blue the ability to deal with creatures en masse?

Tey(2/3): No! No, we do not! This card really worries me. I'm not sure we want to encourage creatureless lockdown this much.

ME 2/8 This currently would not make the cut in the blue white control deck. It is possible that once story circle leaves it might find a home. If it proves to be too powerful at this level, we can move it up to 5, but this is one of those cards that looks a lot better on paper than in actual play.

Bill (2/9): This certainly will be played in blue control decks once Story Circle leaves. Control decks should not get a good Story Circle replacement in blue.

WJ 2/16: team is awaiting playtest data.

ME 2/28 watched Richard play this in a creature deck, It actually might be good in a 187 deck, but it has the white weenie crusade aspect that it is a card you don't want in a mirror match, and if the 187 cards are very good they will often be played against you. Good comparison data for this deck type is available from Equilibrium style decks, several of which have been posted to the net in the past.

WJ 3/1 moved to 3UU

I'm fascinated by how powerful the development team theorized/determined **Sunken Hope** to be at four mana. It does seem like a powerful tool in a creatureless deck full of counterspells, although at five mana it has yet to materialize in high-level decks.

### **Persuasion** (*Odyssey*, developed in 2000)



10/26: Team notes this could be rare -- we'll decide to swap or not when we look at our constructed lists.

MR (12/5): Be aware that this card was designed for 8th and UBS. It should be at whatever rarity we want to forever print it at.

1/1: Team still waiting for UBS to tell us whether this should be UC or R.

For a long time, R&D had a goal of creating the "UBS"—the Universal Base Set that would be the perfect set of core set cards and would never change. We have since revised our thinking and determined that we *like* changing the contents of the Core Set, so the UBS idea has been abandoned. **Persuasion** was made for that theoretical set, and was initially uncommon before a late switch to rare.

Just as we swapped **Voice of All** back to its design rarity in Tenth, we did so with **Persuasion**, moving it down to uncommon.

### **Ancestor's Chosen** (*Judgment*, developed in 2001)



BR: This could be 1/1 for W

WJ 4/12: moved from Common; changed stats from 1W 1/3 to distance from CW02.

ww: Is there an issue at all with 'return a card' versus 'return target card?'

Bill: As part of a cost it's "return a card" and part of an effect it's "return target card."

WJ 4/25: Changed from 3W, 2/4 as part of balancing the numbers.

HS 5/16 Are we happy with the regrowing mechanic? ...I am not thrilled...

RB 5/18: I've had one game where it's interaction with my opponent's threshold was cool, but I admit I'm not in love with it.

RB 6/11: team is content with this mechanic at its current level

RB 6/14: team has decided to tune this card for Timmy, was 1WW, 2/3, regrower.

RB 6/20: team now worried about stalemates coming from repeatable mass life gaining -- changed to a 1-shot effect.

MR (7/3): We should discuss how much life any one card should net you one Tuesday afternoon

It looks to me like **Ancestor's Chosen** began life as an "[Advocate](#)":

Chosen Advocate

1WW

Creature – Cleric

2/3

T: Return target card in an opponent's graveyard to his or her hand. You gain 1 life for each card in your graveyard.

It eventually got bigger, and then lost the Advocate ability in lieu of a simple comes-into-play ability. Personally I love the change as I feel the Advocates were chessy, confusing, and not particularly fun to play with or against.

### **Arcanis the Omnipotent** (*Onslaught*, developed in 2001)



STORY CARD

RB 10/16: this guy will be an Action Figure.

Bill 10/25: New card.

RB 10/26: this is probably too vanilla for Zandau -- we should add some sort of insane creator ability. Shrouded creatures get +1/+1? Or maybe this is the place to do the flip over a face down creature ability.

RB 10/29: New Zandau created at RU07 -- this goes back to just one of the cycle.

RB 11/13: raised to 4/4 to increase splash.

RB 12/19: trimmed a mana and a power, added unsummon ability

DL 3/8: Name was Arcanus the Omnipotent.

The name "Zandau" above refers to Ixidor, the villain of the Onslaught storyline. He was originally slated to be the blue member of the "Pit Fighter" cycle, and was going to be made into an action figure—an endeavor that never really materialized. Eventually Zandau/Ixidor was given a card outside of the cycle, making room for a different blue Pit Fighter.

My favorite comment is the final one. "Arc" what?

**Phage the Untouchable (Legions, developed in 2002)**



STORY CARD

ACTION FIGURE

BB 1/18: The first ability is great, but her second doesn't make much sense in story terms.

BD 1/21: Because half of Clerics in block are black, she would kill her allies. Best to replace or drop 2nd ability. Also, why doesn't basilisk ability work on blocking?

MR (2/14/02): Phage would be a perfect fit for the "player loses the game if CARDNAME damages them" idea

HS 2/20 I think Phage is cool enough as is. Let's save Mark's power (which I like, btw) for a creature that needs it.

WJ 2/27: Team adopted Mark's idea. This totally fits in with Phage in

story. Also, set needs more simple, cool creatures. This comes a lot closer to that ideal with the new power. Also removed first strike; added B to cost. was:

Whenever CARDNAME becomes blocked, destroy all creatures blocking it and all creatures that share a creature type with those creatures, at end of combat. They can't be regenerated.

When CARDNAME comes into play, destroy all soldiers.

RB 2/27: test me in reanimator and similar strategies. I agree this is splashy, but it might also be too easy to hit someone once, esp in Extended w/ Shallow Grave.

ME 3/4 Seems like it would be too easy to get a turn 2 kill in extended.

Might want to add Serra Avatar shuffle in text

PB 3/12: How about "When Phage comes into play, if you didn't play it from your hand, you lose the game/sacrifice all permanents you control."

- maybe that would be a more flavorful ability

WJ 3/15: added that.

ww 3/18: I like that a lot Paul, that can work templating wise etc?

RB 3/18: I agree this is a nice reanimator hose

PT 4/8: Noted as a card a playtetser was initially interested in playing with.

WJ 4/17: Changed cost from 4BBB to 3BBBB because Phage is a very bad individual and we think it's cooler.

DL 5/2: This + opponent's white flicker creature = really bad news.

MG 5/6: Or this plus Faceless Butcher, Flicker, etc. It's a wonky side effect of preventing this from being reanimated, and I don't know if it's desirable or intended. Another way to prevent reanimation: Make Phage cost B, and change its first ability to "When Phage the Untouchable comes into play, sacrifice it unless you pay 3BBB."

MR (5/9/02): I don't think the first line is clear with flicker effects. When it returns, I believe most players will believe they're okay because they did originally play it from their hand. I would prefer to find a cleaner way to prevent reanimation.

RB 5/9: I do like the flavor of "you lose the game" -- Phage is a very scary individual and the power level of losing to Flicker seems ok. I wonder if we can clarify the functionality in some way.

Another potential action figure, Phage began life with a totally different set of abilities than what you're familiar with. "Destroy all Soldiers?" Really? I can't tell if that's top-down design or a bunch of random weirdness. It was Mark Rosewater that came up with the player-killing ability that wound up on the final card, and Paul Barclay that came up with the "you-killing" ability that prevents Phage from being cheated into play. The result was one of the most beloved legends in recent memory.

### Commune with Nature (*Champions of Kamigawa*, developed in 2003)



PB 9/1: Isn't this Impulse for G?

RB 9/27: Cut "You may return another Giyan's card of converted mana cost 1 or less from your graveyard to your hand." because these need to wind down.

ps 12/15: i liked this card at G because it was a new effect for constructed creature-based decks. now it's only good in combo decks that use creatures, like the old Giyan deck.

Here's one from a relatively recent set. I find this record fascinating because it reminds me of all the wacky parasitic stuff that Champions had in it at various times. This card used to either have "Giyan" in its name or subtype ("Giyan" became "lname") and there were a series of spells that essentially had "soulshift"—if you played a Giyan spell, you could regrow another Giyan spell that was cheaper. This card lost that clause because,

according to the pattern, it would only let you regrow 0-mana spells. Cutting that made the card much cleaner and promotable, and was a harbinger of things to come—eventually all the "Giyant spell" text was cut from the set.



## Last Week's Poll

How often do you trade with other players?		
Once in a while.	3287	43.4%
A decent amount.	2104	27.8%
All the time—that's my primary source for new cards.	1255	16.6%
Never.	927	12.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7573</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## This Week's Poll

**How many other TCGs do you play currently?**

- None—just **Magic**.
- None—and I don't even really play **Magic** anymore.
- One.
- More than one.

*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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