



# Shadowmoor More More

Mark Rosewater  
Making Magic  
Monday, April 21, 2008



For the last three weeks, I've been talking about the "big picture" of *Shadowmoor*. Today I'm setting my sights a little lower. Every design has a thousand stories and insights. For today's column, I decided to go through the card file and talk about any card that strikes my fancy.

**Blowfly Infestation** – One of the things we like to put into every set are uncommon cards that create interesting build-around-me scenarios for draft (and casual constructed). The idea being that if you open one of these cards in your first pack, it will send you down a very unique path for the rest of the draft. **Blowfly Infestation** was meant to be a card that made the player focus on -1/-1 counters. The -1/-1 counter theme is a strong secondary theme, and I loved the idea of making players want to play as many cards that used -1/-1 counters as possible. **Blowfly Infestation**, by the way, delivers on this goal. If you ever have the chance to play it in Limited along with a significant number of -1/-1 counter cards, I think you'll be more than happy with the card's performance. In early design, by the way, this card's text was "At the beginning of your turn, double the -1/-1 counters on each creature." Then it changed to "At the beginning of your turn, put a -1/-1 counter on each creature with a -1/-1 counter on it." The idea behind both of these cards was that it continued to hurt any creature that had already been hurt. The card had great flavor, but it didn't quite have the oomph we needed to get players to want to draft around it. The current version came about because I knew repeated kill would be a strong incentive.



**Cauldron of Souls** – This card was originally "All creatures you control gain persist." It had the following problem (among potential others—this is just the one that stuck with me). Suppose you had a **Spike Feeder** (a timeshifted *Time Spiral* card, now in Standard). You remove both +1/+1 counters to gain 4 life. The **Spike Feeder** goes to the graveyard but then is returned to play with a -1/-1 counter as it has persist. In addition, it comes into play with two +1/+1 counters as that's just what the card does. Once the card is in play, the -1/-1 counter and one of the +1/+1 counters negate each other according to the "matter/antimatter rule" (my name for it at least). This leaves it as a 0/0—1/1, thanks to its one +1/+1 counter. You may then remove the +1/+1 counter to gain 2 more life, and the whole thing starts over. In the end, it meant that **Cauldron of Souls** + **Spike Feeder** = infinite life (or a really, really high number for those math nerds out there). This was dubbed by the development team to be "a problem" (wimps!), so the card was changed.



PRODUCTS

MAGIC ONLINE

Download MOL III Now!

Top 8 Decklists

2008 City Champs Finals Standard

MESSAGE BOARDS

Magic General Forum

magicthegathering.com Forum

RULES

**Curse of Chains** – One of the challenges of design is figuring out how the environment is going to force the design to compensate for whatever quirkiness it has. In a hybrid world, one of these challenges was finding good creature answers in colors that traditionally have less. You see, hybrid does a wonderful job of enabling mono-color play and as such we had to make sure that every color had answers allowing any monocolored deck to be played. The design for this card came about when I realized that both white and blue have tapping creatures in their part of the color pie.



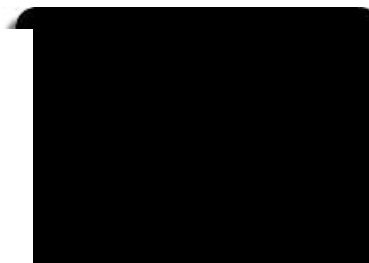
**Din of the Fireherd** – This card was designed by Devin Low as part of a sexy rare cycle. The design team liked this card enough to put the entire cycle into rare, but as time went by we realized that it was this card we loved, not the cycle, so we ditched the other four cards and just kept this one.



**Dire Undercurrents** – When are we going to grow tired of the contrast that blue draws while black discards while making blue-black multicolor cards? Never. Bwah, ha, ha, ha.



**Elemental Mastery** – For some reason I've always been enamored with the idea of red having "creature-based" direct damage. That is, I've always enjoyed the **Ball Lightning** approach to direct damage where a creature comes into play for one turn and attempts to smack the opponent upside the head. When I designed this card I wasn't thinking about the untap symbol (mostly because Gottlieb hadn't yet come up with the idea) but when development later got the idea that this card would be a good untap enabler they wholeheartedly embraced it.





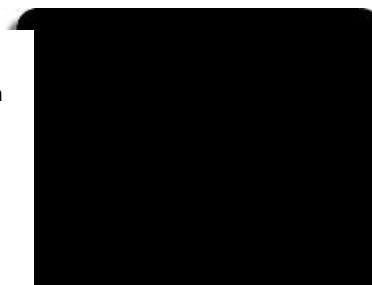
**Fate Transfer** – One of the challenges of designing hybrid cards was finding non-obvious overlap. (Yes, yes, both white and green can destroy enchantments.) The neat thing about this card was that it had an effect that neither color has normally (mostly because -1/-1 counters are not a normal part of the game) yet each color had effects similar to it. Blue has numerous cards that move enchantments from creature to creature and black has many spells that hurt others for its own benefit. Also, as I mentioned above, we were always on the lookout for blue "creature kill."



**Gnarled Effigy** – One of the things I had the design team do when once we decided we were using the -1/-1 theme was to look back at famous cards that used +1/+1 counters and see if we could make a -1/-1 version. This card was a direct result of the team saying, "Yeah, **Dragon Blood** was cool."



**Graven Cairns** – Originally, in *Future Sight* development, this card only tapped to produce 2. I had my eye on it for *Shadowmoor* but I felt it could be a little better. "Change the card to add two mana of any combination of the two colors," I said, "and I'll put it in my set." Mike Turian (the lead developer of *Future Sight*) agreed, and the change was made. During templating, the powers that be realized that it was shorter to just list out all the options, as there were only three.





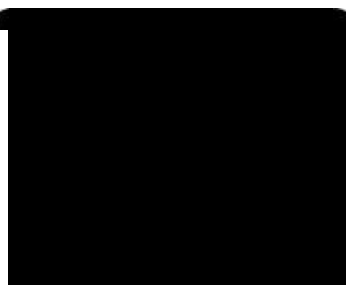
**Grief Tyrant** – Originally this card was part of a vertical cycle in black-red. The common was a 2/2 for  $\text{C}$  that came into play with one counter and the uncommon was a 4/4 for  $\text{C}$  that came into play with two counters. The cards played well but just got "lost to numbers" in development (once again, that's R&D lingo for "there was so much stuff we wanted to fit in that some stuff we liked had to leave to make room"). I was personally very sad to see them go as they were pet favorites of mine. The one other interesting tidbit about this card is that for a little while we toyed with the idea of not restricting the counted counters to -1/-1. The idea being is **Grief Tyrant** went to the graveyard with any kind of counters the card would count them when figuring out how many -1/-1 counters to put on target creature. What we found was that it seldom meant anything and it read very weird, so we changed the card back to just check how many -1/-1 counters **Grief Tyrant** had when it went to the graveyard.



**Grim Poppet** – Let me end all debates. This card was 100% designed to be a -1/-1 counter version of **Triskelion**. The one note I have after reading pages and pages of threads talking about **Grim Poppet** is this: the card is not strictly worse than **Triskelion** (although I am more than willing to admit that it might be worse overall). Unlike **Triskelion**, **Grim Poppet** gets bigger as you use its ability. After you remove three toughness worth of creatures, **Grim Poppet** is a 4/4. Also, **Grim Poppet** combos with any card in the block (and there's quite a bunch of them) that put -1/-1 counters onto creatures.



**Hungry Spriggan** – This card had an interesting origin. Often in design, as lead designer, I have to fill out the mana curve for creatures in a color. What I mean by that is that I have to make sure that in each commonality that there is a spread of mana costs on creatures. For instance, imagine I was looking at green in common. I'd make sure there's one or two creatures who cost one and a few that cost two and a few that cost three and so on. I had a hole and I wanted a three-drop creature but I also wanted something aggressive, something that encouraged the player to attack. How can I make a three mana creature that makes you want to attack? What if I only made the creature big when it attacked? It's a 4/4 for  $\text{C}$  when and only when you attack. The reason I bring up this story is



because it explains how we manage to keep designing new **Magic** cards. The reason I had never come up with this creature before was that I had never been asked to find the mix of requirements that I had put upon my design. These restrictions bred that design.



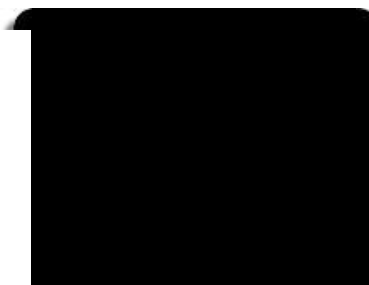
**Illuminated Folio** – This is another one of my cards that I like for the subtlety of its design. The set had a "color matters" theme so I was trying to find different ways to make color relevant. While most other "color matters" cards mention colors by name, this one looks instead for a color relationship. This card predated the conspire mechanic, and I like to think that it subconsciously nudged the development team (yes, conspire was not created during design but added in during development—it got swapped out for another "color matters" mechanic that I will use when the time is right) in its direction.



**Incremental Blight** – When we knew we were going to have a -1/-1 counter theme, several of the designers checked out every *Lorwyn* block card with +1/+1 counters and saw if we could make a -1/-1 version. **Incremental Growth** was the first result of this exploration. The card proved to be extremely strong in Limited and there was talk of killing the card but so many people liked the reflection that we decided to let it stay and just be one of the (if not the) best black cards at creature destruction in the set (for Limited).



**Kulrath Knight** – One of the themes that I was very focused on was finding ways to make -1/-1 counters have a meaning beside their ability to shrink power and toughness by 1. What I liked about this design was that the wither on this and other creatures, as well as any spell that created -1/-1 counters, took on a new meaning with this card in play. It's cards like this that make **Puncture Bolt** much more versatile than it might first appear.





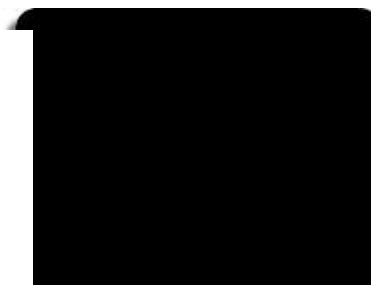
**Leech Bonder** – More blue "creature kill." Hee hee. I should also point out that I love creatures that make use of their -1/-1 counters for effects. I might have designed a few. (And yes, *Eventide* has more.)



**Mass Calcify** – Yes, the four-word white rare. One of the things going on in this set was that we tried to sneak in color words whenever we could. One of the subtler ways to do that is to have cards that don't affect a particular color, usually their own. That way the card feels more like a "help my own kind" card and less a "color matters" one.



**Medicine Runner** – This card originally specifically removed a -1/-1 counter, but we broadened it to remove any counter in our attempt to create more interactions between the *Lorwyn* and *Shadowmoor* blocks (and, one could argue, **Magic** in general)





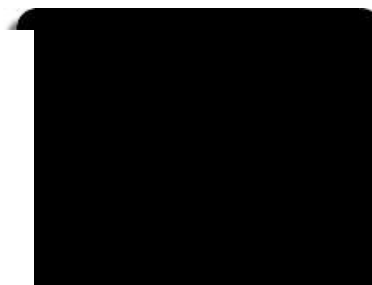
**Mercy Killing** – This is another area that I keep goofing around in. I like trading creatures for other stuff that may or may not be worth more than what you traded away. (Although let me be clear that this particular card was designed by Alexis Janson, winner of the Great Designer Search, and not myself.) Sometimes it acts as "creature kill" and other times it's a way to trade up your own creatures.



**Merrow Grimeblotter** – This card started as a card called Octopus Hurler. Early version were -3/-0 for only one mana (and it costs 2). It was insanely good. So much, in fact, that in early drafts we'd brag by saying how many Octopus Hurlers we'd drafted. While still decent, it's not the crazy bomb it once was.



**Midnight Banshee** – I want to quickly correct my faulty memory from last week. While we did combine two black rare cards into a singular card in design, that card didn't make it to print. **Midnight Banshee** was designed by Ken Nagle, associate designer extraordinaire, to fill a hole during development.





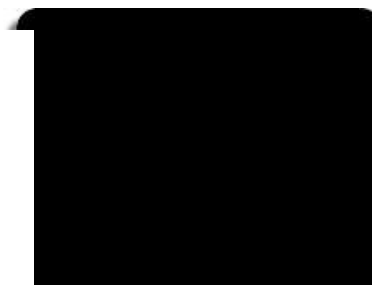
**Mirrorweave** – I'm often asked if I feel that I will at some point run out of ideas. How long can I keep working on the same game, I'm asked, before I just burn out? It is cards like Mirrorweave that make me feel as though I have lots of cool undiscovered cards within me. I've been designing **Magic** cards for thirteen years and I've never designed anything remotely like this card. In fact, as a designer, this is my favorite card I designed in the set. Okay, okay, my Johnny roots are showing. I just love how this card allows you to do so many different things—many of them silly and completely unlikely to actually win games, but then for some players it's the discovery of such crazy combos that makes the game so fun.



**Painter's Servant** – Would it surprise you to know that the same person who designed this card also designed the card **Conspiracy**? (Yes, it was me. Surprise, surprise.) Whenever we have a "\_\_\_\_\_ matters" theme, I'm compelled to make the card that lets you turn everything into a \_\_\_\_\_.



**Prison Term** – Another one of the challenges of design is finding new tweaks on old cards. **Pacifism** / **Arrest** has become a staple effect for common white so we are always looking for new ways to do it (that is, when we don't just outright reprint **Pacifism** or **Arrest**). **Prison Term** came about when I was thinking about how to make the card more flexible. I liked the idea of being able to move it because it allowed a player to play the card right away without fear that some bigger threat was going to come out a turn later.





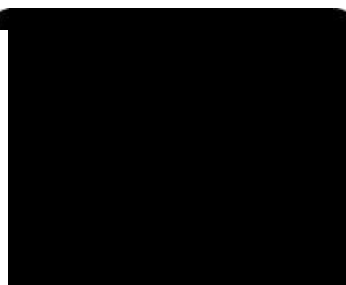
**Puncture Bolt** – This card was originally designed by Mark Gottlieb and said something akin to "CARDNAME deals 2 damage to target creature. If that creature is not put into the graveyard from play, put a -1/-1 counter on it at end of turn." I loved the idea Mark was going for in that this direct damage spell permanently hurt the creature it hit. The problem was that it was unnecessarily wordy and more complex in execution than the basic idea wanted. I kept trying different versions of the card until I found this solution—what if we made the -1/-1 counter part of the effect and then added enough damage to equal the total amount of damage we wanted. This would result in exactly the feel Mark wanted but with much cleaner text. I also want to point out to all the naysayers who feel this card is too weak that it has a lot more flexibility than you might realize at first blush. -1/-1 counters can mean multiple things in this environment.



**Runed Halo** – This card is yet another in my quest to allow players to do things formerly reserved for just creatures. So when's "Destroy target player" coming? Don't laugh, I already tried to do it once (on *Fifth Dawn's Door to Nothingness*).



**Scar** – This card has a fun story that I'm not going to tell you because design team member Sean Fletcher is going to tell it a week from today in the feature article. If you're interested in what it's like for a normal **Magic** player to all of sudden find himself on a design team, definitely check it out. What I am going to do, though, is use this card to answer a question I've seen all over the boards. Why is red putting -1/-1 counters on creatures? Isn't that a black thing? In normal **Magic**, yes it is, but when you come to new environments, you have to adapt. Red is the color of direct damage. When -1/-1 counters become one of the major means of damaging creatures, red has to be able to horn in on the action. That's



why red has these effects in *Shadowmoor* block—because many direct damage spells in this world often leave a mark.



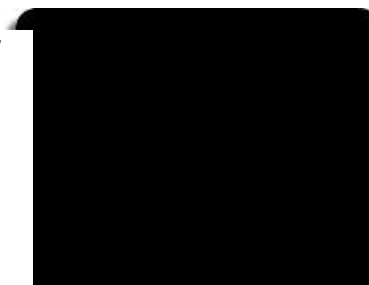
**Scarscale Ritual** – I am a huge fan of -1/-1 counters as a cost. I designed way more of these types of cards than development allowed in the set. I did manage to squeeze a few more into *Eventide*. (It's good to be lead designer in back-to-back sets.)



**Scuttlemutt** – For a long time in design this was just an artifact. The problem was that the ability to change colors of things proved to be very powerful. The solution was to turn this into a creature to make it more vulnerable, and thus give other players additional ways to get rid of it.



**Tatterkite** – For a while in design we used the text "CARDNAME cannot be countered." Then templating told us that some other ability was already using that string of words. My response? Hey, if both "counter" and "play" can have multiple meanings, why not full sentences?





**Torture** – When we decided to run with the -1/-1 counter theme, we started looking for interesting cards to reprint that used -1/-1 counters. As we looked back we discovered how few there actually were. Ken suggested **Torture** and then designed **Daily Regimen** to be its opposite in *Morningtide*. Also in **Torture**'s favor was how mean the name sounded. It fit right into *Shadowmoor*.



**Wildslayer Elves** – An interesting tidbit about this card was that it was one of the cards I created in my original batch of cards to show off the wither mechanic (then called "curse"). As I talked about [last week](#), the wither mechanic went through some major changes. As such, this was the only card that made it from the very first write-up all the way to print.



That's all the insights I got for today. I hope you enjoyed my little jaunt through the cards.

Join me next week when I mix it up (manwise that is).

Until then, may you take the time to stop and smell the roses of whatever garden you've been tending.

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.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Mark Rosewater](#) archive

---

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#)

---

© 1995-2008 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

