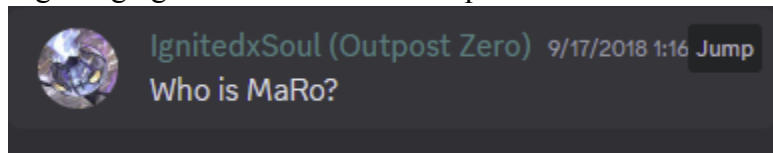


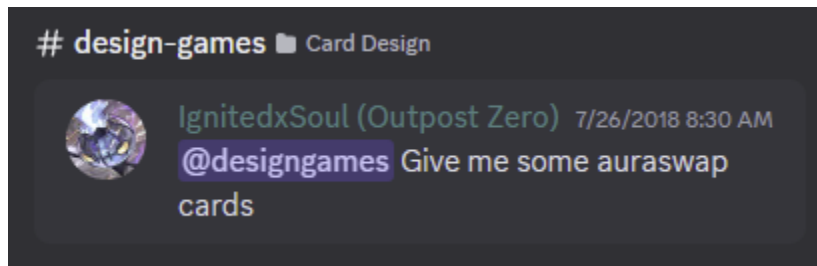
My history

- 1) I joined the Custom Magic server in 2018 with some funny hits such as “Who is MaRo” and asking design games to make Auraswap cards.

i)



ii)



- b) But I spent much of my early time in the community feeling inadequate and not quite capable. So instead of trying to tackle my own projects, I mostly contributed to community projects (Design a Draft in the early days) and then I also joined on as a collaborator for three different sets from 2019 to 2022: Rakoa by Zinnia (formerly Zeu), Hyperpop by platypeople, and Cliques of Nylin by stasisbot.
 - c) I learned an insane amount in my time helping on those projects. I was willing to try a lot of things I was scared to try on my own. The fear of failure or of inadequacy I was struggling with was mitigated by the support I had from those other designers in that time.
 - d) The number one problem I repeatedly faced was that I didn't know how to come up with a compelling set idea. Everything I came up with was either way too broad in scope, or not interesting enough. I didn't know how to come up with a strong concept or pitch.
- 2) I actually took a year long hiatus from custom magic from late 2022 until mid 2023. I slowly worked my way back up to feeling comfortable with custom design until mid 2024 when I started work on a project I've since shelved, Trials of Aenaris. But I did learn something important from that project — I was playing everything too safe. I wasn't willing to take risks or do something new.

Outpost Zero Exploratory Design and Testing

- 1) In December of 2024 something finally clicked for me that for me personally, I needed to approach set design from a single small evocative idea and build up from that. So I sat down and listed the things I like and asked myself what of those things I haven't seen done in custom magic. And I landed on Sci-fi Horror. That's when I started workshopping potential mechanic ideas, starting from the root of body horror with the primary inspiration being *The Thing* and *Alien*.
- 2) The initial mechanical suite I landed on has a lot of the seeds that grew into the set as it is now, but it lacked personality and cohesion. Of these, the only one that still persists exactly as-is is *Desperate*.
 - a) [Image Link](#)
 - b) I had *Exert*, *Foretell*, a very similar variant of *Assimilate*, blood tokens, and *desperate*.
- 3) After a lot of iteration and help from everyone on the Beacon of Creation server, we landed on some more evocative ideas that all have great mechanical cohesion.
 - a) Read those listed in the design doc [here](#)
- 4) From there I adopted the philosophy from the developers at Steam of "test early and test often". I wanted to create the minimum viable product that would allow me to really feel these mechanics out and see how they all work together and what was or wasn't interesting to me. So I made 5 jumpstart packs, 1 per color. Each of the packs featuring at least one card of each mechanic present in those colors.
 - a) This allowed me to rapidly throw together approximately 60 cards and have something I could test. I played with various people online but I also printed the cards out and playtested with family and friends in person.
- 5) The best take-away I took from all of it is just how fun and evocative the set idea was. I wasn't tied to any of the particulars of individual card designs, or even the specific mechanics, but I knew I was onto something people would be interested in.
- 6) From here I decided to make the minimum viable product for draft. Which I calculated to be 153 cards. I made all 96 of the intended commons, since those are the real heart of the limited environment, 36 Uncommons, and 24 rares. I actually mathed this out such that a draft would feature every card at least once, so I would get eyes on everything I had designed so far. At this point I still didn't have my draft archetypes planned exactly, I was just loosely making cards that interacted well with each other. I wanted to see what strategies or decks emerged naturally without too strong of a guiding hand.
- 7) After three drafts I felt even more satisfied with the state of the project and have now progressed onto developing the draft archetypes and building up to the next draftable version which will feature 219 out of the 276 cards. However this step is also going to include a review of all of the existing cards to see how (or even if) they fit into the newly defined draft archetypes. That's the step I'm currently on, reviewing all of the commons and planning any major structural changes to them.

Design Snags

- 1) One of the major issues people bring up when they first look at the set is a dislike of how the Experiment mechanic is nested into the Specimen tokens (like how Explore is on Map tokens). Many people have approached me and asked me to change this, but I have loved the way Specimen felt in practice so much that I am unwilling to change it at this point. I'm standing my ground that this is the right thing for this project.
- 2) Another pain point is designing for Desperate. I have found that when a card with desperate is on the battlefield, it has the potential to stall or slow down the game. On one hand I'm happy with this because I do want a slower, grindier format. But there were times when it felt unfun and players didn't desire to interact. So the middle ground I've landed on recently is that permanents that care about being desperate only either do it on ETB or care about it on your turn. That way your opponent can still attack into you without too much fear. But I still allow nonpermanent cards to care about being desperate at instant speed, so there is still a little bit of interplay.
- 3) The current thing I'm struggling with is picking the draft archetypes. As I mentioned earlier, I have in the past been afraid of taking risks and often played it very safe with my design decisions. So for my draft archetypes I've decided I want at least a couple of them to be either new ideas, or at least rarely done ones.
 - a) As a result I've landed on Simic Surveil, Selesnya Stompy, and Dimir Reanimator as the linchpins. These I am fairly confident I want to keep as is.
 - b) Other, less unique ones I'm pretty confident in are Izzet Improvise, Gruul Self-fatigue Aggro, and Boros Artifact Creatures
 - c) The ones I'm least confident in are Azorius Fatigue Control, Orzhov tokens go-wide, Rakdos Mercenaries, and Golgari Assimilate Midrange.
 - d) Azorius - The white/blue tap-down archetypes from Wilds of Eldraine is regarded as rather weak and struggles from relying pretty heavily on the opponents board state to get off the ground. I've determined that to mitigate this is that the cards in the archetype needs to be valuable outside of whether or not you're able to fatigue opponents creatures. I haven't started determining what shape this should take though. One benefit my Fatigue archetypes has over the Wilds of Eldraine tap archetype is that you can fatigue already tapped creatures, which will hopefully help.
 - e) Orzhov - With a lot of the mechanics surrounding this archetype, Assimilate and Desperate especially, it's hard to have this land firmly as a go-wide archetypes. People frequently fall into thinking it's meant to be aristocrats. This is a problem I still need to tackle. It's possible that WB go-wide tokens just isn't the right move, or I need to work harder to sell the idea.
 - f) Rakdos Mercenaries - I really adore how the mercenaries from OTJ function so I've taken them verbatim here. Mercenaries are extremely flavorful in the Sci-fi horror setting with IPs like Doom, Pitch Black, and Resident Evil all featuring them prominently. The problem is figuring out

how to make them relevant as a draft archetype without doing explicitly Mercenary Typal stuff, because I want people using the Mercenary tokens to do their cool thing (tapping them down to buff another creature). So I'm relying on a work around that I think is going to work, which is caring about creatures you have tapped when you go into combat. This can both reward you for tapping your mercenaries, but also for having fatigued your aggressive creatures on a previous turn, or in some circumstances, for using vehicles. So I'm hoping this compromise will work but we will see.

- g) Golgari Assimilate - Part of the issue here lies in how similar Golgari Assimilate and Dimir Reanimator are in both flavor and mechanics. How they are different conceptually is that the Dimir one would be more control, delaying the game until you reanimate a big body the opponent can't get over, and the Golgari one being about an unstoppable tide of creatures that seem to keep coming back. However, despite that they still feel too similar to me. I'm considering changing the Golgari deck to just being focused on Desperate and shift some of the Assimilate gameplay more into Dimir. But I'm still uncertain.

If I get to plug myself...

I write literary horror and contemporary short fiction. I'm self-published on Amazon under the name Dylan Tyler Ward. You can find me on most social media as IgnitedxSoul or you can check out my website dylan-tyler-ward.com