

THE DUELIST

COMPANION

September 1995

The Official Newsletter of the Duelists' Convocation™

Issue 13

ALEXANDER BLUMKE BECOMES 1995 MAGIC™ WORLD CHAMPION

Switzerland's Alexander Blumke defeated French national champion Marc Hernandez 3-2 in the finals of the 1995 Magic: The Gathering™ World Championships to become the new world champion on August 6, 1995.

"I really didn't believe I could win," said Blumke, the 26-year-old Geneva resident. "I didn't have a deck when I got here, so I stayed up late the night before making one. Then the next morning, I realized that what I made would not win, so I changed it right before the competition." When asked what surprised him most about becoming world champion, Blumke replied, "I didn't think I could do it. My deck wasn't good enough and there were so many other good players."

Specifically, Blumke feared facing Hernandez, who was playing a very defensive deck. While Hernandez's deck focused on putting cards into his opponent's hand and then punishing his opponent with Black Vise, Blumke's deck stripped cards from the opponent's hand and then subjected that player to The Rack. According to Blumke, Hernandez's deck was "the antithesis of my deck. It was the very kind of deck I did not want to face."

But Blumke—with a remarkable ability to hang on at 1 or 2 life for long stretches of time—was able to keep Hernandez off-balance throughout the championship match. Using a combination of card denial and big creatures, Blumke was usually able to overwhelm Hernandez before the Frenchman's deck got rolling.

For the first time in the short history of the event, representatives from the United States failed to advance to the championship round, despite a strong showing which landed them two of the four spots in the semifinals. Zak Dolan, the 1994 World Champion, failed to qualify for the semifinals. Blumke eliminated 1995 U.S. champion Mark Justice 3-1, while Hernandez had a tougher time



with Henry Stern, needing all five games to win the match 3-2.

The championships featured teams from nineteen different countries. It was held at the SeaTac Red Lion Inn and spanned the course of three days, with preliminary rounds run Aug. 4-5. The competition consisted of one day of Duelists' Convocation sealed-deck competition and one day of Type II competition. The top eight players then advanced to the final round of competition.

But what Blumke enjoyed most was not winning the world championship, but the camaraderie with other Magic players from all over the world. "Usually, in competitive situations, people can get kind of nasty, but everybody here was so nice," he said.

The points awarded were based on two days of preliminary play (one day of sealed deck and the other of Type II). Each day consisted of a five-round Swiss style competition (three games per round) with the following scoring system: 3 points for a win, 1 point for a draw, 0 points for a loss, 0 points for an unfinished game. The top eight scorers then faced off on the last day in a best-of-five single elimination competition.

MAGIC WORLD TOP EIGHT

Champion - Alexander Blumke (Switzerland), [57]
Finalist - Marc Hernandez (France), [60]
Semi-Finalist - Mark Justice (United States), [60]
Semi-Finalist - Henry Stern (United States), [63]

Quarter-Finalist - Ivan Curina (Italy), [60]
Quarter-Finalist - Andrea Redi (Italy), [57]
Quarter-Finalist - Henri Schildt (Finland), [60]
Quarter-Finalist - Mu Luen Wang (Austria), [63]

NATIONAL TEAM STANDINGS

1. United States (Justice, Stern, Leiber, Long) [57]
2. Finland (Rosendahl, Schildt, Hori, Punakallio) [51.75]
3. Australia (Sbandley, Hubson, Russell, Lieu) [51]
4. France (Hernandez, Moulin, Woïrgard, Lebas) [50.25]
5. Switzerland (Feldmann, Hauser, Robertson, Blumke) [49]
6. Canada (Tam, Davies, Yoon, Speck) [48]
7. Austria (Wang, Grzesiak, Cheng, Rauber) [46.5]
7. Italy (Curina, le Pisicchio, Javaroni, Redi) [46.5]
7. United Kingdom & Ireland (Terry-Britain, Meagher, Abbott, MacDonald) [46.5]
10. The Netherlands (ten Cate, Bol, Bodlaender, Salamons) [45]
10. Zak Dolan (94 World Champion) [45]
12. Germany (Bilsbausen, Wagner, Refsdal, Trummel) [43.5]
12. Sweden (Hornung, Lindback, Gutbrie, Anderson) [43.5]
14. Denmark (Throne, Vivet, Jacobson, Geertsen) [42.5]
15. Norway (Brekhus, Toyomasu, Monson, Olarraud) [41]
16. Greece (Toulis, Petrouriz, Balis, Paraskevopoulos) [40.5]
17. Belgium (Van Uffelen, Paschouer, Vermyyn, Clarys) [39.5]
18. Spain (Jorge, Garcia, Fresnero, Tomás) [39]
19. Czech Republic (Hanka, Janorsky, Korejtko, Chudyba) [37]
20. Brazil (de Castro e Castro) [36]

THE DUELISTS' CONVOCATION'S NEW RATING SYSTEM EXPLAINED

The basic theory of the new system is to provide a guide for predicting the outcome of a duel between two players based on the difference between their respective ratings. The formula is based on statistical and probability theories; no rating is a precise evaluation of a duelist's strength. The ratings are simply averages of performances and should, for most ratings, be considered approximations within a reasonable range (plus or minus 56 points, standard deviation). Provisional ratings (those based on less than 25 matches) are less reliable than established ratings.

A duelist may approximate his or her new rating by using the appropriate formula. The result will not be precise, as official calculations are based on the most current ratings rather than the last published figures. Extreme fluctuation in provisional ratings makes approximation more difficult for new duelists.

Events are rated in chronological order; ratings produced by each event are used for the calculation of ratings in subsequent events. Published ratings are current as of the date of the publication.

Duelists who have played fewer than 25 matches earn a rating equal to their average performance according to the following equation:

$$R_p = R_c + \frac{400(W - L)}{N}$$

Where R_p is the new rating; R_c is the average rating of the duelist's opponents; W is the number of wins; L is the number of losses; and N is the number of games.

Duelists with established ratings (those based on 25 or more matches) use the following equation:

$$R_n = R_o + K(W - W_e)$$

where R_n is the new rating; R_o is the old (pre-event) rating; K is a constant (32 for ratings of 0-2099, 24 for ratings of 2100-2399, and 16 for ratings of 2400 and up); W is the score in the event; and W_e is the expected score (Win Expectancy), determined from the following formula:

$$W_e = \frac{1}{(10^{\frac{R}{56}} + 1)}$$

where R equals the difference in ratings.

The rating in a given event for any individual player is based on his or her opponent's pre-event ratings in order to take into account chronological changes in ratings during the event. What this means is that if one player has a pre-event rating of 1700, his or her actual rating will change with each chronological match he or she plays in the tournament. During the course of the event, that player's opponents have their ratings figured based upon the player's pre-event rating of 1700, regardless of how it changes during the course of the event. This keeps the ratings fair for all players without concern over the order in which they play their opponents.

The database system corrects for chronological discrepancies when data is entered for complete tournaments. In other words, if we receive a report for an event from one weekend, enter it immediately into the database, then receive a second report regarding another event that occurred prior to the previously entered one, the database will correct all ratings from the second event (doing so by date, not by the time the data was entered into the system), automatically updating the ratings calculations of the event that occurred second. In this way, all ratings are accurate to the chronological order in which they occurred.

SOME EXAMPLES OF THE RATINGS SYSTEM, SIMPLIFIED:

1. Previously Unrated and Provisionally Rated Players

A player is given a rating for each match in his first event. The player's rating for a win is his or her opponent's rating plus 400; for a draw, the rating is simply his or her opponent's rating; and for a loss, the rating is his or her opponent's rating minus 400. These ratings are averaged across all matches until he or she has played 25 matches. This establishes that player's provisional rating.

Example 1:

A player competes against five different opponents in his first sanctioned event. She defeats a player rated 1350, loses to players rated 1700 and 1400, draws with one rated 1600, and loses to one rated 1450. Using the system detailed above—modifying by 400 depending on win or loss—the ratings for each opponent are 1750, 1300, 1000, 1600, and 1050, respectively. Dividing the sum (6700) of these ratings by the number of matches (5) gives the player's initial provisional ratings (in this case, 1340).

The following equation will provide the same end result:

$$R_p = R_c + \frac{400(W - L)}{N} = 1500 + \frac{400(1.5 - 3.5)}{5} = 1340$$

Example 2:

A player plays three games in his next sanctioned event. He beats a player rated 1400, loses to one rated 1580, and draws with one rated 1200. Again, there are two simple ways to calculate the player's new rating:

1) The old rating multiplied by five (for proper weighting) plus these matches, dividing the final figure by eight (total number of matches played during provisional status thus far):

$$R_p = \frac{(1340 \times 5) + 1800 + 1180 + 1200}{8} = \frac{10880}{8} = 1360$$

2) The following equation will provide the same end result:

$$R_p = 1460 + \frac{400(3 - 5)}{8} = 1360$$

Remember to use the average of all opponents' ratings for R_c .

2. Members with Established Ratings

A player's rating is established when he or she has played 25 rated matches, including those in the event being rated.

- a) Subtract each opponent's rating from your own rating. (If using the sample chart, note whether you are rated higher or lower).
- b) Find the W_e from the chart for each opponent, being sure to use the correct column (or use the win expectancy equation).
- c) Sum the W_e values.
- d) Find W by summing the match points earned in the event, ignoring all unrated matches (e.g., matches against non-members).
- e) Subtract W_e from W .
- f) Multiply this difference by your K value (32 if you are rated less than 2100, 24 if rated 2100-2399, and 16 if rated 2400 or up).
- g) Add your pre-event rating (R_o) to this calculation to get your new rating.

Example 3:

You have an established rating of 1500. You play six games against opponents rated 1700, 1600, 1850, 1900, 1800, and 1550, drawing with the first, beating the second, losing to the third, drawing with the fourth, losing to the fifth, and beating the sixth.

- Subtracting each opponent's rating from your own, you obtain the numbers -200, -100, -350, -400, -300, and -50.
- the W_e 's for these are, respectively, 0.240, 0.360, 0.118, 0.091, 0.151, and 0.429.
- Adding the W_e scores together gives 1.389.
- Your W is $0.5 + 1 + 0 + 0.5 + 0 + 1$ (for each of your wins, losses, or draws), equaling 3.
- Subtract 1.389 from 3 to get 1.611.
- Multiply 1.611 by 32 to get 51.552.
- This rounds off to 52. Your new rating is 1500 (your original rating prior to competing) plus 52: 1552.

These examples are a good approximation for public use. The system we use is calculated entirely by computer and is slightly more accurate than this, as the computer system tracks the ratings change for every round throughout the tournament rather than computing the averages.

Using these examples, you can get a fairly accurate idea of what your rating should be at any given time.

Sample Win Expectancies

Difference in rating points	Scoring higher rated	Probability lower rated	Difference in rating points	Scoring higher rated	Probability lower rated	Difference in rating points	Scoring higher rated	Probability lower rated
0	0.5	0.5	170	0.727	0.273	400	0.909	0.091
10	0.514	0.486	180	0.738	0.262	425	0.92	0.08
20	0.529	0.471	190	0.749	0.251	450	0.93	0.07
30	0.557	0.443	210	0.77	0.23	500	0.947	0.053
40	0.557	0.443	210	0.77	0.23	500	0.947	0.053
50	0.571	0.429	220	0.78	0.22	525	0.954	0.046
60	0.585	0.415	230	0.79	0.21	550	0.96	0.04
70	0.599	0.401	240	0.799	0.201	575	0.965	0.035
80	0.613	0.387	250	0.808	0.192	600	0.969	0.031
90	0.627	0.373	260	0.817	0.183	625	0.973	0.027
100	0.64	0.36	270	0.826	0.174	650	0.977	0.023
110	0.653	0.347	280	0.834	0.166	675	0.98	0.02
120	0.666	0.334	290	0.841	0.159	700	0.983	0.017
130	0.679	0.321	300	0.849	0.151	725	0.985	0.015
140	0.691	0.309	325	0.867	0.133	750	0.987	0.013
150	0.703	0.297	350	0.882	0.118	775	0.989	0.011
160	0.715	0.285	375	0.896	0.104	800	0.99	0.01



DC GENERAL UPDATES

The Duelists' Convocation would like to make the following announcements:

- As of July 25, 1995, Steve Bishop is no longer the director of the Duelists' Convocation. Jason Carl will be assuming Steve's position until a qualified replacement is hired.
- The Magic Tournament at Shauncon IX in Kansas City, November 18-20, is not a sanctioned event.
- We would like to apologize to Steve Ferrel for his inclusion on the delinquent tournament list. The report for his tournament held on February 18, 1995, in Salina, Kansas, was submitted within the correct time frame.
- The "Are You in a Band" column will no longer be appearing in the *Companion*.
- Rhias K. Hall has transferred out of the Duelists' Convocation and to Wizards of the Coast's communications team. She will continue to work on *Duelist Companion*, but will also devote herself to several other newsletters as well.
- The cards we sent to you with last issue were in fact German, not Italian. They arrived after *Companion* had been printed, and I didn't feel that delaying the mailing another week while I waited on the correct cards was a good idea.
- That Kennedy thing...it wasn't us.

Magic: The Puzzling

by Mark Rosewater

"NOT QUITE DEAD YET"

Your opponent is Mario. Things were looking good, once you managed to get your Enduring Renewal combination going. Unfortunately, it turned out that Mario had a handful of creatures at the time, and the game quickly turned in his favor. Add to this a bunch of annoying enchantments (Drought, Curse of Marit Lage, Reclamation, Karma, and Brand of Ill Omen) and Mario has been quickly bleeding away your life and generally making things miserable. But then, during Mario's turn, you cast a Visions on yourself and got a chance to see your last five cards. There is a chance for you to defeat Mario, but it has to be done soon. Do whatever you need to defeat Mario this turn without dying yourself.

WARNING

"This puzzle is hard. No, really really hard. No, harder than that. It's hard!"

—Ania Kenneriud, Skyknight

THE FINE PRINT

Brand of Ill Omen 3

Cumulative Upkeep:

Target creature's controller cannot cast summon spells.

Chromatic Armor

When Chromatic Armor comes into play, put a sleight counter on it and choose a color. Any damage dealt to target creature by a source of that color is reduced to 0. X: Put a sleight counter on Chromatic Armor and change the color that it protects against. X is equal to the number of sleight counters on Chromatic Armor.

Demonic Consultation

Name a card. Remove the top six cards of your library from the game and reveal the next card to all players. If it is the card named, put it into your hand. If not, remove that card from the game and continue revealing the top card of your library and removing it from the game until the named card appears.

Drought 2

During your upkeep, pay or destroy Drought. Before a spell that requires as part of its casting cost may be cast or an ability that requires as part of its activation cost may be played, the controller of that spell or ability sacrifices a swamp for each in the spell's casting cost or the ability's activation cost.

Norritt 3

Untap target blue creature.

Force target non-wall creature to attack. If creature cannot attack, destroy it at end of turn. Use this ability only during target creature's turn, before the attack. Cannot target creatures brought under their controller's control this turn.

Mario (White/Green/Red)

20 Life Points Remaining



Drought



Curse of Marit Lage



Plains



Plains



Brushland

You (Black/Blue/White)

3 Life Points Remaining



Snow-Covered Swamp



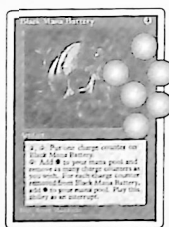
Swamp



Swamp



Underground River



Black Mana Battery
with six counters



Time Bomb
with seventeen counters



Balduvian

Your Hand



Howl from Beyond



Wings of Aesthir



Brainstorm



Magical Hack



Blinking Spirit 2/2



Chromatic Armor

MAGIC: THE PUZZLING



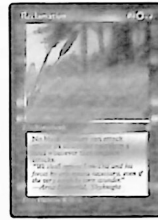
Ivan Dragon 5/5



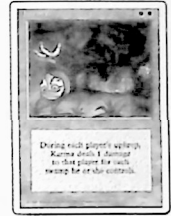
Cockatrice 2/4



Osai Vultures 1/1



Reclamation



Karma



Forest



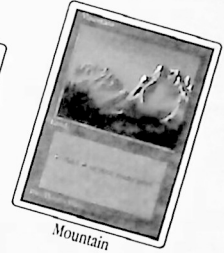
Forest



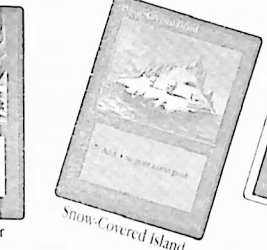
Karplusan Forest



Mountain



Mountain



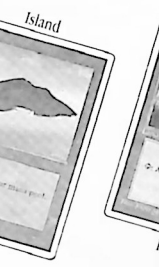
Snow-Covered Island



Island



Island



Island



Plains



Adarkar Wastes



Iceberg with eleven counters



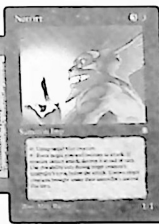
Conjuror 0/2



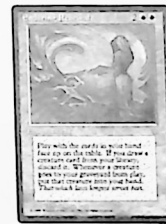
Merike Ri Berit 1/1



Brand of Ill Omen



Norrit 1/1



Enduring Renewal



Library of Leng

Drawn This Turn



Demonic Consultation



First: Mind Twist



Second: Hecatomb



Third: Elkin Bottle



Fourth: Illusions of Grandeur

SANCTIONED EVENTS SEPTEMBER 1995

Montana Magic Weekend Timber Crest Girl Scout Camp Red Lodge, MT Sept. 1 John L. Spencer, Coordinator (406) 446-1875	TYPE I	Two Wizards & a Sage Closed Universe St. John's Episcopal Church Fords, NJ Sept. 9 Robert Kron, Coordinator (908) 821-7422	SEALED DECK	Shore Con '95 Berkley Carteret Hotel Asbury Park, NJ Sept. 22-24 Nicholas Sauer, Coordinator (908) 949-7076	TYPE I, TYPE II, and SEALED DECK
Mage Con South X Sioux City Hilton Sioux City, IA Sept. 3 Carol Gundrum, Coordinator (605) 334-2855	TYPE I	The September Gathering Silverdale Community Center Silverdale, WA Sept. 10 Pete Steinmetz, Coordinator (360) 697-7238	TYPE II and SEALED DECK	SPAM's Summer Spellslinging Spectacular VFW Sun Prairie Sun Prairie, WI Sept. 23 Steve Port, Coordinator (414) 623-3058	TYPE I
Microcon 11 Woodinville, WA Sept. 2 Robert Mushell, Coordinator (206) 485-7295	TYPE I and SEALED DECK	Caffeine & Conquest Tri-Espresso Cafe Honolulu, HI Sept. 10 Michael Eaton, Coordinator (808) 596-7531	TYPE II	Moo-U Magic Tournament Kellogg Center East Lansing, MI Sept. 23 Barrat Moy, Coordinator (517) 351-5811	TYPE I
Gateway '95 LAX Hyatt Los Angeles, CA Sept. 2 Paul Matsumoto, Coordinator (714) 671-1270	TYPE I	Shaka-Con Bellmead Civic Center Waco, TX Sept. 10 Randy Keenan, Coordinator (817) 755-1177	TYPE I	Magicide Oddfellows Hall Hudson, MA Sept. 23 Doug Wolfe, Coordinator (508) 562-7898	TYPE II and TYPE II
Duel for Olympia South Sound Mall Lacey, WA Sept. 2 Gabrielle Sheppard Drew Morby, Coordinators (360) 459-7721	TYPE II	DefCon II Adams Mark Hotel Tulsa, OK Sept. 16 Jim Jarmen, Coordinator (918) 250-2077	TYPE I	Emerald City Magic Tournament The Auction House Eugene, OR Sept. 23 Edward Gerdes, Coordinator (503) 687-1394	TYPE I, TYPE II, and SEALED DECK
Kineticon Comfort Inn Darien, CT Sept. 8-10 Thomas Richardson, Coordinator (203) 323-0410	TYPE II and SEALED DECK	The Player's Gathering Bethesda Residence Inn Bethesda, MD Sept. 17 John Hardinon, Coordinator (202) 363-1810	TYPE I and TYPE II	Quest Con Montclair St. University Montclair, NJ Sept. 23 Ken Doremus, Coordinator (908) 477-9107	TYPE I, TYPE II, and SEALED DECK
Card Con I Wind Gap Fire Hall Wind Gap, PA Sept. 9 Michael Griffith, Coordinator (610) 863-5178	TYPE I	Our Big One Pizza Inn Hobbs, NM Sept. 17 Christian Germany, Coordinator (505) 392-6707	TYPE II	Cog Con III Miner Recreation Building Rolla, MO Sept. 23 Keith Weepie, Coordinator (314) 364-8968	TYPE II
Magic Tournament Utah Valley State College student Center Orem, UT Sept. 9 Karl Batdorff, Coordinator (801) 378-6691	TYPE I	Ice Age Tournament Grouse Mountain Lodge Whitefish, MT Sept. 18-20 David Blythe/Toby Reynolds, Coordinators (406) 862-3000	SEALED DECK	Caffeine & Conquest Tri-Espresso Cafe Honolulu, HI Sept. 24 Michael Eaton, Coordinator (808) 596-7531	TYPE II

Nuke Con V

1214 N. Monroe
Papillon/Omaha, NE
Sept. 29-30
John Geistdoerfer, Coordinator
(402) 896-8564

TYPE I, TYPE II, and SEALED DECK

SilverCon IV

Mardi Gras Inn, 3500 Paradise Road
Las Vegas, NV
Sept. 29
Thomas Kurilla, Coordinator
(702) 878-1698

TYPE I and TYPE II

Kettering Con

Kettering Recreation Center
Kettering, OH
Sept. 30
Thomas Brewster, Coordinator
(513) 298-9964

TYPE II and SEALED DECK

Win Con

Winnipeg Convention Centre
Winnipeg, MB, Canada
Sept. 30-Oct. 1
Michael MacKinnon, Coordinator
(204) 488-1267

TYPE II and SEALED DECK

HAWAIIAN LEAGUE GETS GOING

by Michael Eaton

The Hawaii Gamers Guild is a non-profit organization formed in 1995 to help bring together Hawaii's gaming community. You might think that in a small state like Hawaii, everyone who is a gaming enthusiast already knows everyone else who is also interested in gaming. That just isn't the case—most hobby and game shops in Hawaii simply don't have the physical space necessary to stage tournaments, and hotel space is, of course, at a premium—well beyond the means of most would-be conventioners. Add to this the universal problem of finding mainstream acceptance for gaming as a hobby, and you will soon find that Hawaii isn't exactly a gamers' paradise. That's where the Hawaii Gamers Guild steps in; we are dedicated to making Hawaiian gaming a reality. We work with stores and the general public toward creating a better environment for gamers in general. We also strive to educate the public about gaming in an effort to reduce the stereotypes and prejudices to which gamers have long been subjected.

The HGG's first event was an eighteen-player Vampire LARP that took place in conjunction with a local nightclub. Since then, we have been focusing on many types of games, including holding a sanctioned Magic tournament and making arrangements with a local coffee shop to allow us to hold biweekly Magic events on its premises.

The HGG is very interested in working closely with other groups that support gamers, as well as with anyone who has practical gaming experience and would like to run local games. So, if you are looking for help in finding a place to play or a place to run games in Hawaii, drop us a line—we're here to help.

The Hawaii Gamer's Guild
PO BOX 11431
Honolulu, HI 96828
(808) 596-7531
hgg@aloha.net

THE VOICE OF THE (DC) PEOPLE

In addition to the U.S. National Championships at Origins this year, we also conducted our first annual DC national membership meeting. Held immediately following the U.S. title tournament, the meeting lasted for about two hours and was, I feel, a really great vehicle by which the membership was able to express their concerns as well as to provide us with some insight into what they would like to see from the Convocation.

Several members expressed concerns with the sealed-deck format and many differing viewpoints were aired. It is no secret that not all decks are created equal, and though we do our best to maximize the players' potential for building a successful deck within the environment, we also realize that that in Magic (as in any game) luck is often a deciding factor. Several different solutions are being looked into, including the possibility of printing special "sealed-decks" for use in future Regional, National, and World Championship events. Most members present at the meeting said that they enjoyed the sealed-deck environment but objected to using it as-is in regional, national, and world championship-caliber events.

Other concerns included the difficulty of finding other members to play in order to remove ratings from the provisional stages. We are currently considering several options to remedy this. Our foremost concern will be to increase our membership base; we plan to do this in several ways. First, you will be seeing much more advertising for the DC in the future. We have held off on this somewhat in the past because we wanted to be able to offer members a little bit more than just *The Duelist* and the *Duelist Companion* as benefits for joining. Now, with our new logo design in the works, we will be offering members-only merchandise and some other cool benefits as well. Watch for this in the late fall.

Other suggestions which were made by members were a reduced rate membership for those only interested in receiving rating points. This membership would not include any magazine subscriptions, merchandise options, etc., and would be available for those whose sole interest is in being a rated player. This would increase the number of DC players participating on the tournament circuit and would make it easier for players to be ranked. We are considering this, and if we do decide to go with it, we will probably implement it at the beginning of 1996.

Other ways we plan on increasing public awareness are through magazines such as *Scrye*, *Inquest*, and the like. Keep watching those pages to see what we come up with.

At the end of the meeting, we talked about the *Duelist Companion* and what you folks would like to see here. I got a lot of really great feedback, and I am looking forward to improving the publication in some pretty major ways. As soon as we get past the provisional ratings, the top 25 list will start appearing quarterly. I am also looking into getting someone from our staff to compile a regular News From the Net Column. Finally, I will also try get you all the latest information from our Rules Team meetings, more card lists as they become available, and more articles by the members.

Since it was getting late, we decided to call it a night and retired to the hotel bar. After four days of running tournaments, we were exhausted and decided it was time to relax. Imagine our surprise when a bunch of DC members who had been at the meeting took over the table next to ours and started playing Magic.

Now that's a way to end a meeting!

Rbias K. Hall

DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC?

"When David Meets Goliath"

by Mark Rosewater

You enjoy playing *Magic*; you play whenever you get the chance. You purposely hang around spots where you can pick up games. You find yourself dreaming about different cards. In short, you're somewhat of a *Magic* junkie. (There are support groups for this, but we'll save that for a future column.) And as a result, you've gotten to be pretty good.

This is no problem when you're playing other *Magic* fanatics, but what happens when you run into a player that actually just plays *Magic* as an occasional hobby (yes, there are actually people who just play a *little Magic*)? Their card collection is significantly smaller, their decks are not quite as fine tuned, and, most important, their playing skills, well, reflect the amount of time they've chosen to dedicate to the game.

In short, how can you play an opponent that just doesn't have a prayer of beating you? Is there a way to both give your opponent a chance while providing yourself with some challenge to keep the game interesting? Why, yes there is. And, as luck would have it, this very column you're reading answers these questions. (Boy, what were the odds?)

There are actually three different ways to tackle this problem: handicapping, deck design, and goal orientation. Each of these creates an environment in which the playing field is leveled by giving you, the experienced player, some additional concerns to worry about.

We'll begin with handicapping. There are two ways to do this. First, add extra rules which restrict either what you can do or what resources you may have. For example, a common handicap is to reduce the life total of the better player. Can you win if you only start with fifteen life? How about ten? Or five? Or one?

Remember that any element of the game can be tweaked to make the duel more of a challenge. You can reduce your hand size to four. You can play without a graveyard, meaning that all of your cards leave the game when they leave play. You can be forced to destroy one of your permanents whenever you destroy one of your opponent's. Anything is fair game, just as long as it makes the duel challenging.

The second way to handicap is to give the novice player a rule change that gives him or her an advantage. For instance, your opponent could draw an extra card (if he or she wishes) every turn. He or she can cast all cards for one colorless mana less or have a hand size as large as he or she wants. Just as with the self-imposed restrictions, any added element is fine as long as the person playing with the new rules is happy about it.

But handicapping does have a big downside: by its very nature, it constantly reminds the novice that he or she is not as good as you. And living in an ego-driven society, a lot of people will have a problem with this. So, we take a look at method number two—deck design.

The idea behind this strategy is to build a deck that, by design, is somehow handicapped (this fact needn't be public knowledge). This can be done in several ways. First, you can make that weird but interesting deck that you've always wanted to but which you shied away from since you knew it could never consistently win. For example, I have a deck that wins by giving permanents to my opponent that they would rather not control (things like Force of Nature or Demonic Hordes). It will most often lose to a well-built tournament deck, but it is nonetheless fun to play; however, like most weird decks, it needs a chance to evolve, and novices make the perfect opponent for such a deck, as novices often take quite a while to beat you.

Second, you can build a deck with a built-in challenge to it. You can test some hypothesis or question certain deck-building fundamentals. For instance, I built one deck to see if it was possible to win by attacking only with animated lands. (It was.) I built another deck the sole goal of which was "How fast can I bring out a Scaled Wurm?" (the answer was round two, but it happened very infrequently—I'll leave figuring out how to you). I even built a deck to see if I could kill my opponent by doing nothing but Juxtaposing walls which I Creature Bonded and then Tunneled (The answer to this one is yeah, but only once). None of these decks won often, but they did allow me to experiment a little while my novice opponent was busy trying to kill me.

The last method to equalizing games is an offshoot of the final deck-design idea: Make the game interesting by changing the goal of the game. (Mind you, you needn't tell the person you're playing this.) Perhaps the goal is to always have an odd number of cards in play at the end of your turn. Or maybe you are going to try to only reduce your opponent's life to prime numbers. You could even play your cards only in alphabetical order. Just choose some goal that forces you to play in a way that tests your skills. Best of all, this final option actually allows both players to win the game!

However you choose to equalize the game is up to you. Just remember to give yourself enough of a challenge that winning is not guaranteed. More often than not, you will find that overcoming the greater obstacle often makes winning that much sweeter.

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