

Wizards Profiles: Richard Garfield

Featuring Richard Garfield, **Magic: The Gathering** game designer

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TSRO_Zugran: Come one, come all to the Wizards Presents room. We'll ask Richard Garfield what his favorite **Magic: The Gathering** card is, why he mismatches his socks, what he's working on now, did he *really* design Cursed Scroll, and so on. These questions are among many that you can expect answered during this Q&A with the designer of the **Magic: The Gathering** trading card game

TSRO_Paradox: Welcome, Richard.

Richard Garfield: Hi! Sorry I am late--we had some tech problems.

TSRO_Zugran: Richard, would you like to make any opening statements/comments? Then we will go to questions.

Richard Garfield: I'm afraid I haven't got any opening statements. I am super lagged from a trip to Europe. The time zones didn't lag me so much as a two-year-old!

TSRO_Zugran: Ah, bummer. I will say I saw the World Tour of **Magic: The Gathering** on ESPN2 the other night.

Richard Garfield: How was it?

TSRO_Zugran: It looked interesting. They were talking with the German lad who has won a few tournaments two or three times . . . two first-places and a second I think.

Richard Garfield: Yeah, he has an incredible record.

TSRO_Wyzo: What was involved in the original creation process for **Magic: The Gathering**?

Richard Garfield: The **Magic** TCG evolved over a long period of time. The first step was my interest in a game in which each card broke the rules. This phase was inspired by Cosmic Encounter. I worked on this concept off and on for six years or so before I came up with the idea that not everyone had to have the same cards to play. This was a game designer's dream, because it meant that I could make ALL the wacky cards I wanted to make . . . and the game wouldn't be forced to a \$1,000 price tag with a huge box.

TSRO_Paradox: Do you own a copy of every **Magic** card ever printed?

Richard Garfield: No, I don't think so. But maybe I stopped sorting them after *Arabian Nights* . . .

The_Red_Wizard: Did you or anyone else know or even think the **Magic: The Gathering** TCG would become so popular? And how does it feel to have created such a landmark product that took the world by storm?

Richard Garfield: I don't think anyone could have predicted the success of **Magic**. I certainly didn't. I knew it was a good game and it held people's attention for a long time. But that doesn't make a game a success necessarily, as anyone who follows games knows.

TSRO_Wyzo: Has the popularity of trading card games in general surprised you?

Richard Garfield: Yes, it has surprised me, certainly. Though I knew that I had potentially come up with a new game form with **Magic**. I could see that there were tons of games you could do with the TCG principal.

SkyKnight: Do you see any possible attempts in the future to combine **Magic** sets with novels, like the whole Urza series?

Richard Garfield: I don't know the state of novel/card interaction with **Magic**. My interest in this area is that the game should be the first interest, that cards which don't enhance play aren't made to satisfy a story need, and that flavor text by and large should be interesting to someone who wants to play the game with no story interest. If that set of priorities is maintained, I am happy.

TSRO_Paradox: There was speculation on **Magic/D&D** crossovers. Will there be an Elminster card, or an RPG based on Dominia?

Richard Garfield: I doubt there will be **D&D Magic** cards any time soon. Ever since *Arabian Nights*, **Magic** has attempted to create its own consistent world, and melding it with **D&D** wouldn't further that cause. That doesn't mean it won't happen; there is still talk of doing a Norse set, Tolkien sets, Egyptian sets (pun!) . . . but it would be a change of strategy since they are trying to create a world which is appropriate for novels. As far as the other way around goes, I think **D&D** settings for Dominia are much more likely. **D&D** has lots of settings that don't necessarily overlap, and so that wouldn't be thrusting fungusaur into **Ravenloft**, it would be creating its own setting.

TSRO_Wyzo: Wizards of the Coast has been working on RPG crossover deals with the makers of **Warcraft** and **Starcraft** computer games. Do you see possibilities with **Magic** or possible future sci-fi or other fantasy-based TCGs in the future along these avenues (sort of like what happened with the **Pokémon**TM* cards, only for a more mature audience)?

Richard Garfield: We have talked about it. I see it as a possibility, though not a strong one. This harks back to my observation that TCGs have such a large investment. You can get the **Starcraft** RPG and have some pals over and play a few evenings and not waste your money. You KNOW this when you read the package--and decide 'yes, I want to roleplay **Starcraft**' (provided you have like-minded friends). With TCGs, unless you have like-minded friends who are going to invest money and time into making decks, you may not get your entertainment value. It is harder to get critical mass for the product, so to speak. But nonetheless, it is possible.

TSRO_Paradox: What is your thought on all the other card games that saturated the market after **Magic** was a success?

Richard Garfield: Well, I have many feelings about it. Mostly feelings one might have while watching a hurricane . . . not anger or happiness just seeing a force of nature. Maybe more like a forest fire . . . that I set :) Anyway, it was exciting and flattering to see all these games and to see the technological innovations that people made to stand apart. It was very difficult in those days to make a TCG that wasn't a clone of **Magic**. The reason being that **Magic** was the only example out there! This is reflected on my own design as well. I tried to make my second TCG, **Vampire: The Eternal Struggle™**, as different from **Magic** as I could. It was different, but it still had many of the conventions established by **Magic**. I was quite proud of my third game, the **Netrunner®** trading card game. It was VERY different from **Magic** (if you haven't tried it, you should!) But it wasn't designed in a vacuum. Nothing is. The reason it was so good (in my mind) had a lot to do with the hurricane of card games that followed **Magic**.

TSRO_Zugran: Richard, any closing statements/comments?

Richard Garfield: Perhaps some insight I came up with recently. At the Game Fair in Essen I saw a product that I *really* am interested in: *Zillions of Games*, a piece of software where you program a game and the computer can play the game against you using its own general game-playing algorithm. The range of games it can play is pretty limited so far (no hidden info, for example). But it struck me that this is exactly the sort of thing we need with **Magic**: not a specific AI for playing **Magic**, but an AI for playing the family of games that **Magic** is.

Talinthas: Sorry, I forgot all about this . . . I've been playing **Magic** since *The Dark®* expansion, and I was wondering which variants of **Magic** do you play (like the old rules where a card in the graveyard is shredded and such)?

Richard Garfield: I play Sixth Edition; I play Constructed (all sorts-- Standard, Block Constructed, and so on); I play Draft (all sorts of wacky drafts); I play sealed and leagues of various types; and I play some weirder versions, like Back Draft. Favorite expansion? Probably *Alliances*, though there are elements of each expansion I like.

Talinthas: Who thought up the Elder Dragons? They are my favorite cards, and why did they lose the Elder Dragon Legend name in *Chronicles*?

Richard Garfield: What was it changed to in *Chronicles*?

Talinthas: Just a normal Legend card . . . meaning under the picture.

Richard Garfield: Oh, Summon Legend versus Summon Elder Dragon Legend?

Talinthas: Yeah.

Richard Garfield: The less 'types' of things you can summon for the most part makes the game more interesting. They have been trying to find the perfect balance--now there are a lot of beasts, clerics, elves, etc.

Talinthas: Elder Dragons were cool, though . . . they were almost otherworldly as opposed to the run of the mill legend.

Richard Garfield: That makes for cool theme decks and cards like Coat of Arms, which have a lot more meaning than if each creature had its own type. And Elder Dragons were the brainchild of Steve Conard, one of the principal designers of *Legends*. I think it was felt that the name reflected that.

Talinthas: *Legends* to me was the height of **Magic** . . . matched only by *Ice Age*[™].

Richard Garfield: Just like Fungusaur: Summon Fungusaur going to Fungusaur: Summon Beast would still be recognizable as a mushroom monster.

Talinthas: True.

Richard Garfield: But I understand your point--these tradeoffs are made and they try to make the best calls. Anyway, I gotta get out of here.

TSRO_Paradox: Thanks for stopping by, Richard! And feel free to come by the site anytime! We'd love to chat with you.

TSRO_Zugran: Thank you, Richard Garfield, for coming tonight. It was nice chatting with you.

Richard Garfield: Thanks for the interest. Bye!

Talinthas: Thanks a lot for stopping by . . . I've had many hours of fun from **Magic: The Gathering**.