

# TCG Hour: The Magic Storyline Team Discusses *Mercadian Masques*

With Daneen McDermott, Scott McGough, and Jess Lebow

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*Did the cards in Mercadian Masques leave you with questions about the story? Then read on . . .*

**Scott McGough:** I'm Scott McGough, Creative Editor (or just "Story Guy") for **Magic: The Gathering**.

**Daneen McDermott:** And I'm Daneen McDermott, the Continuity Manager.

**Jess Lebow:** Hello, I'm Jess Lebow-**Magic** Line Editor.

**Scott McGough:** I'll start things off. We spent a lot of time building the world of *Mercadian Masques* and constructing a story around it. A lot of cool stuff made it onto cards. I'd prefer to talk about the stuff that you find cool, but if everybody's shy, we can jump-start things.

**The\_Darkmage:** Is that Xcric from the novel on the Cateran Overlord card?

**Scott McGough:** No, Xcric is just an enforcer; the Overlord is the king of the Cateran mountain in Mercadia (so to speak).

**The\_Darkmage:** What's the Cateran Mountain? I didn't see it on the map included in the novel.

**Scott McGough:** Sorry, "Cateran Mountain" is a figure of speech; King of the Mountain, King of the Cateran Mountain. I'm being clever (sorry).

**Jess Lebow:** And Xcric is much too ugly to put on cards!

**TSRO\_Zugran:** Ugly? Only the face a mother could love?

**Jess Lebow:** Even his mother won't have anything to do with him.

**Daneen McDermott:** But you have hit on one of Scott's favorite aspects of the set: the Caterans.

**TSRO\_Zugran:** Can you explain some of the background of the **Magic** storyline for those who do not know much about it like me?

**Daneen McDermott:** That's a big one...

**Aerakon:** Is the storyline affected in part by the card art, or is it the other way around?

**Daneen McDermott:** This set is different for **Magic** in setting, in that it doesn't take place on the primary Plane that we usually are on. So let me tell you some of the basics about Mercadia.

**Scott McGough:** The art often gives us a good idea for scenes to include in the story, but for the most part, the story and the world

dictate what shows up on the card art. The most important thing for cards is the rules; we come up with story and world explanations for the rules before we start laying out and developing the plot with the novel author. There's a lot of give and take before he or she starts writing.

**Roblin:** What comes first, the design of the card, or the plot for the novel?

**Jess Lebow:** We generally have a meeting to discuss the plotline and character development a year and a half before the book or even the card set comes out. We give the outline for the novel to R&D, and they try to come up with rules that will fit with our story. It never works out perfectly, but we get a lot of good give and take. The plot is developed first and is adjusted to fit the rules later.

**The\_Darkmage:** Why were the goblins so in control of Mercadia City?

**Jess Lebow:** Well, it's a lot like Darwin's finches. The goblins outnumbered the humans on Mercadia, and they had better survival skills so they naturally took over. They developed differently than Dominaria's goblins because they had a different environment.

**Jess Lebow:** There will be more on this subject in *The Thran* coming out in December.

**TSRO\_Zugran:** Goblins multiply like rabbits.

*Daneen McDermott thinks Goblins are less fuzzy than rabbits.*

**Scott McGough:** I prefer not to think about such things. Ew.

*Scott McGough thinks rabbits taste better over an open fire.*

*Jess Lebow thinks McGough is a barbarian.*

*Daneen McDermott thinks that goblins make a better "popping" sound over that fire.*

*Jess Lebow thinks fried goblin skins are better than pork rinds.*

*Scott McGough thinks dried camel dung is better than pork rinds.*

**Daneen McDermott:** And who's calling who the barbarian?

*Daneen McDermott thwaps McGough upside the head with a fish.*

*Scott McGough falls over backwards, scales flying everywhere.*

*Jess Lebow laughing that he's not sitting next to those two clowns.*

*Scott McGough thinks, "Jess Lebow can't hide forever. Daneen's got a fish down here with your name on it."*

*Jess Lebow shakes in fear.*

Daneen McDermott thinks, "And it's a bigger fish."

Daneen McDermott sneaks up behind Jess Lebow...

Scott McGough yells "Jess! Watch out for the fish!"

**Jess Lebow:** I'm going to have nightmares. Stop that.

Daneen McDermott says in a spooky voice... "Don't turn around...."

Daneen McDermott whispers to Jess Lebow, "Fishy, Fishy, Fishy, ooooo..."

Scott McGough thinks, "Oh great, new people are coming in and we're raving about fish. Hi! This is the **Magic** story chat! Really!"

Daneen McDermott pushes the fish's lips against the back of Jess Lebow's head...

Scott McGough yells "Fish got lips!"

Jess Lebow yells YUCK!

**Scott McGough:** Good grief, man! Not Booji!

Daneen McDermott runs screaming around the room "Not Booji!!!!!"

**Jess Lebow:** Booji is my muscle, you know, my enforcer.

**Scott McGough:** Booji is one bad <shut yer mouth!> but I'm talking about Booji....

**Aerakon:** What is *The Thran*, a book?

**Jess Lebow:** Yes. *The Thran* is a novel by J. Robert King. It tells the story of the Thran, Yawgmooth, and the Thran/Phyrexian war.

**Aerakon:** Maybe I'm a bit out of the story... how did Squee get to Mercadia? I started playing during *Urza's Saga*.

**Daneen McDermott:** Squee and all the *Weatherlight* crew (Gerrard, Hanna, Sisay, Tahngarth, Takara, et all) arrived on Mercadia as they fled from Rath through the portal (*Exodus*).

**The\_Darkmage:** How come there was no 'Recreant' card or Ramos card?

**Scott McGough:** There wasn't room enough in the set for an artifact Legend. It was largely an R&D rules requirement, keep the set balanced, etc. The Henge Guardian is pretty close, but in the card set, there is no single dragon engine named Ramos.

**Daneen McDermott:** About Recreant—Not all aspects of the books can make it into cards. The authors need to tell the story the best they can, but the cards set has to be the best card set it can, and both won't always sync up with each other. There will always be cards you don't see in the books, and characters that don't make it onto cards.

**Aerakon:** So do the story people have any influence on the art? Do you decide on what piece of art to use?

**Scott McGough:** We do have a large say in what goes into the art. The Art Director has final say over quality, content and composition. But we initiate the art descriptions by flagging particular cards for story scenes and world development, such as Orim "Renouncing" Gerrard, or showing the inverted Mountain on a land card. Lots of other departments help, too.

**Roblin:** Do you find that some players play the cards in different ways other than was intended, such as mixing card sets, coming up with "killer" decks, and so forth?

**Jess Lebow:** Personally, I want players to come up with new ways to use the cards. We come up with the story, but I always like to see someone use a character in a way we never thought of. The other day, I saw a fellow make a merfolk deck and he used Squee to discard for his Spellshapers. Squee in Rishada or Sapratto seems like an interesting tale to me.

**Aerakon:** Is there a certain group of people working on flavor text, or is it sort of an employee pool of flavor text?

**Daneen McDermott:** That's my job. To coordinate a pool of authors to give us the best possibilities for flavor text. We use anywhere from 8 to 12 authors to give us multiple choices. Not everything they write ends up on the cards.

**The\_Darkmage:** How can the whole 3-set cycle start in Mercadia if the *Weatherlight* left the plane at the end of the first set?

**Scott McGough:** The whole 3-set cycle does NOT take place in Mercadia. What ever gave you that idea?

**The\_Darkmage:** Just curious if it was going to be revisited anytime soon.

**Scott McGough:** We're going to Rath in *Nemesis* and then on to Dominaria in *Prophecy*. As for Mercadia, we have no short-term plans to return there, but we certainly left the door open. It's a cool place. I wouldn't rule out a trip back in the next few years (after we've unleashed the *Invasion* and what's to follow, mwa-ha-ha).

**Aerakon:** In the storybook it said that a person 'revealed' themselves as Volrath.... ummm, how?

**Daneen McDermott:** Volrath is a shapeshifter, and a darn good one. He was disguised and shapeshifted back to his "Volrath" appearance.

**briareos:** Who was he disguised as?

**Daneen McDermott:** Volrath's disguise can be figured from the art on Unmasked, the flavor text on Vendetta and Liability.

**Jess Lebow:** Hey, I'd like to know who everyone's favorite characters are. Anyone care to share?

**Aerakon:** In *Mercadian Masques*? 'Cause I like the beebles ;)

**The\_Darkmage:** Ertai's the most like me, but he's in Rath. =[ I liked the Phyrexians.

**briareos:** I want the thallids back :)

**Scott McGough:** How about this, then? What's everyone's favorite creature in the set? Either from an art or rules POV?

**Jess Lebow:** Or who is your favorite character in the **Magic** universe?

**briareos:** Tidal Kraken of course :)

**The\_Darkmage:** Cateran Overlord, definitely.

**Aerakon:** One of the Cateran dudes.

**Roblin:** What's next in the storyline, if you can tell us?

**Scott McGough:** I can tell you a bit about *Nemesis*, but that's all and not here. This is the *Masques* chat, and the TSRO will bop me with a fish if I go off-topic.

**The\_Darkmage:** How come on the art Puppet's Verdict, the magistrate had to flip a coin to see who's decision to pick, The Phyrexians or the Kyren?

**Scott McGough:** They're not parties in the decision; they're just watching him to keep him in line. If the decision really mattered they would have told him how to decide.

**briareos:** I got lost with the Uzra cycle. It seemed like everyone just disappeared off the planet (I don't read the novels) and then came back with *Mercadian Masques*. Karn is the only one mentioned in the whole Uzra's cycle.

**Daneen McDermott:** Here's how it goes—*Weatherlight*, *Tempest*, *Stronghold* and *Exodus* were the stories of our intrepid crew making their way to Rath in 4205 AR. Then we flash back in time to see how the *Weatherlight* (eventually) came into being. *Urza's Saga* started back in 64 AR and move (slowly) forward to 3346 as Urza discovers the Mana rig in Shiv. *Urza's Legacy* tells a great deal more about *Weatherlight's* creation. (3346-3360) And *Urza's Destiny* brings us closer to "present day" to 4179. Now we jump back to the present in *Mercadian Masques*.

**briareos:** OK, and can I take it that the thallid's eventually took over all of sarpadia and became the Verdant Force? Sorry I have thallid's on the brain ;)

**Scott McGough:** Briareos, a good strong ointment will help with that.

**Daneen McDermott:** Travel agents to Sarpadia assure us it is not so.

**Scott McGough:** Ahem. Short form: The Urza Block was a flashback.

**briareos:** Thank you for clearing that up. I didn't realize Urza cycle was a flashback :)

**The\_Darkmage:** When was Karn created and how many captains were there before Sisay (like Jhoira de Vivre or Ilsa Braven)?

**Scott McGough:** "Jhoira de Vivre" is a joke name. A JOKE NAME! And it's a French joke, at that. Let it go. Jhoira was and is a character. But her name is not now, nor has it ever been, a French pun.

**The\_Darkmage:** Wha? It's not the real name? Just when I expected *Duelist* material to be official...

*Scott McGough laughs*

**Daneen McDermott:** Joie de Vivre means Joy of Life. The title of the article was a play on words.

**Roblin:** This has been informative, thank you!

**Scott McGough:** In all seriousness, we must do this again. And often. Thanks, everyone!

**TSRO\_Zugran:** Thanks for coming to Wizards Presents, Daneen McDermott, Scott McGough, and Jess Lebow.

**Jess Lebow:** Thank you for a pleasant evening. Elvis has left the building.

**Aerakon:** Thanks y'all.

**TSRO\_Zugran:** The three of you need to visit the site more often, you are great.

**Daneen McDermott:** To all you who haven't read the books. "Read the books!" No really, they're good.

**Scott McGough:** Only that we're putting a lot more of the detailed plot into the novels where it belongs, so read the books!

**Jess Lebow:** Yes, please, please read the books, or I'll send Booji out to get you.

**Daneen McDermott:** Or worse, he'll send the Delraich after you.

**briareos:** No, the TIDAL KRAKEN.

**TSRO\_Zugran:** Thanks again, it was great listening....

**Scott McGough:** To be honest, I've never heard of anything called a Booji. I think the fish did more damage than we realize.

**Daneen McDermott:** Three letters: BFM

**Scott McGough:** Take care, y'all and have a nice weekend.

**Jess Lebow:** Goodnight, and don't let the Booji bite.

*Scott McGough does a graceful soft-shoe off into the sunset.*