

TCG Hour: "What's New for Magic in the New Millennium?"

Featuring Joe Hauck, **Magic: The Gathering** Brand Manager

Fri Dec 03 17:47:53 1999

TSRO_Zugran: Welcome all! **Magic: The Gathering** Brand Manager Joe Hauck offers a glimpse of what's in store for fans in the new millennium!

Joe_Hauck: I'm Joe Hauck, one of three Brand Managers for **Magic**. I deal with sales, marketing, tournaments and leagues, and community issues. I have been working on **Magic** since September of last year. Before that, I was the Brand Manager for . . . *Guillotine*, *Filthy Rich*, *What Were You Thinking?*, *Twitch*, *Pivot*, *Go Wild!*, and *AlphaBlitz*. As the Brand Manager, I try to ensure and safeguard the **Magic** brand, to continue to appeal and satisfy the demands of the players in my areas of expertise. So tonight I want to talk about some of the things that we have in store for next year. Any questions?

TSRO_Durst: I haven't gotten it yet, but I'm going to pick up the *Battle Royale* set for **Magic**. Will three- and four-player **Magic** see more attention next year?

Joe_Hauck: Ah, good question. That is the intent. One of the areas that I want to focus on next year is satisfying casual players more than we have in the past. Multi-player **Magic** is a fun environment that plays differently than two player **Magic** does. We will be trying to formalize the rules for multi-player **Magic** and looking into ways to organize games similar to Arena.

TSRO_Durst: So seeing multiplayer **Magic** events for **Gen Con** 2000 is a possibility?

Joe_Hauck: **Gen Con** 2000 is a prime spot for holding such an event.

TSRO_Durst: Great!

TheHans: What are the upcoming plans for WotC in relation to online **Magic**?

Joe_Hauck: Ahhh, another good question. Well, for quite some time we've been planning to support on-line **Magic**. We just released the **Magic** Encyclopedia which contains on-line play capabilities. We will continue to support and expand the development of these capabilities as we go, until such time that we can actually hold secured tournaments on-line if we choose to do so.

Reagulf: Currently your expansions have revolved around Urza versus Phyrexia. Will we be able to see any independent expansions in the near future?

Joe_Hauck: I'm not sure what you mean by independent expansions. Please explain?

Reagulf: Well, will you have expansions that don't rely on any of the Urza history. Ones that have their own separate history. For example, *Homelands*.

Joe_Hauck: Ah. Urza's story is not quite finished. The current storyline goes through June of 2001. So until that time, we will continue to reveal the story as it unfolds in the cards, while we are currently working on future story lines with ties to the past.

TSRO_Durst: Will there be expansion sets that *follow Mercadian Masques*?

Joe_Hauck: Yes. *Nemesis* comes out in February and *Prophecy* comes out in June. Both expansions relate to the inner workings that are moving the story line towards next fall's expansion.

Reagulf: Okay, I like the Urza storyline but I also like to see new storylines as well.

TheHans: I assume you are familiar with the Apprentice program by Dragonstar Software that lets you play **Magic** online. Will Wizards of the Coast continue to allow this program to be legal now that interactive encyclopedia is out?

Joe_Hauck: Dragonstar has a contract with us that expires at some point. When it does we will make a determination as to whether to continue that license or not.

Reagulf: Will future expansions tie in with novels, or was this just the Urza versus Phyrexia trend? I think that's a good idea, as it gives the players a richer storyline.

Joe_Hauck: From this point on, all expansions will be directly tied to novels.

TheHans: When will we see an *Unglued 2*? What about a *Chronicles 2*?

Joe_Hauck: As far as *Unglued 2* is concerned, we currently have a perception issue with players that we release too many sets per year. That problem is exacerbated by the fact that we don't do a good enough job communicating to players as to which sets are for whom. For example, I can't tell you the number of complaints I saw online complaining about too many sets, and then they would mention Portal as being one of them. *Portal* was a Starter level product designed for players who never played **Magic**, had no friends who played **Magic**, and had no store owners or tutors to teach them how to play **Magic**. It was not for expert level players at all. If expert level players feel that they should be purchasing that product then we didn't do a good enough job explaining what that product was. So until we feel that the players could support *Unglued 2* in addition to our normal release schedule, we will keep it on ice.

TSRO_Durst: That makes me wonder if the complainers were just die-hard collectors.

Joe_Hauck: Perhaps.

TheHans: By the fact that **Magic** is a "collectible" card game, the people that play feel that they must get all of everything.

Joe_Hauck: That is true, although in New York we met a new breed of **Magic** player that was savvy enough to buy one box of *Urza's Legacy* and parlay that into a trip to the Junior Super Series, paying for airfare, hotel, etc. The young players are getting real smart about trading.

TheHans: Do you think there will ever be a *Chronicles 2*?

Joe_Hauck: I was just getting to that. I don't know if there is a need for *Chronicles 2*. A lot of the older cards are on reserve, meaning we have promised not to print them ever again unless certain conditions had been met. The new border policy on our website can give you the full scoop. As far as release cool

past cards into the environment like *Chronicles* did, we are tasking the *7th Edition* team to make sure that it is rock solid. I believe folks will be very happy with that product.

TheHans: The thing that bothers me is that the main reprints of older cards go in the basic set and you have said that the basic set isn't expert level so it will be highly unlikely to see some of the more complicated older cards return, such as Force of Will.

Joe_Hauck: It will be interesting to see if Force of Will is considered to difficult of a mechanic or not. But I understand your concern. The basic set is supposed to be the backbone of basic cards for the tournament environment, as well as a product that developing players can use. I believe that we can get that balance correct with *7th Edition*.

Reagulf: This is a cross-over question, but I was wondering if there are any plans for a **Magic** RPG? I know Wolfgang Bauer was working on one that got scrapped.

Joe_Hauck: We are looking at what other game platforms that **Magic** could go to. The key to putting **Magic** onto other game platforms (RPG, miniatures, electronic) is that in order to do so correctly, we need to include the aspects that make **Magic** great in each of those platforms. So the prospect of an RPG has been considered, but is not currently in the works. In order to do one, it would have to provide a benefit that other game campaigns that existed or rules systems that existed didn't have already. There are a lot of RPGs out there. It's hard to make ours separate beyond name alone so we are being very careful about that

Reagulf: I understand, there's no need to make a **Magic/AD&D** game, because it would just be another **Forgotten Realms**, basically.

TheHans: Tournament attendance seems to have been down a lot lately. What is the general feeling around Wizards of the Coast about why this is?

Joe_Hauck: What types of tourneys are you referring to? Everyday sanctioned tournaments are on the rise around the U.S. and the world, including Pro Tour qualifiers and even regular tourneys.

TheHans: I was not aware of that.

Joe_Hauck: I'm sure that in some areas tourneys will fluctuate depending on the local playing conditions: players, stores, types of events, prizes, etc. On average, attendance is up and more stores are holding them. As far as PTQ's go, I would expect that the numbers would go down, plateau, and then move back up again over time. The initial excitement of having the chance to get into a Pro Tour is huge. Until people go up against heavy competition though. They don't know where they fit into the hierarchy of ability. If I'm great at my local store, or with friends, and than Wizards starts a Pro Tour, you can bet darn well that I believe that I have a legitimate shot, until I get my butt kicked for the first time. So as that realization sets in, people will drop out of that part of the tournament and go to a place where they feel comfortable. As time goes on, and people understand the expectations, more people will rise to the challenge, and try it. We are starting to see those numbers rise again in some areas.

Reagulf: I've noticed that **Magic** seems to be losing popularity. Not many people play it at my school anymore. Do you have any ideas on increasing popularity, perhaps by using **Pokémon** as a vehicle?

Joe_Hauck: Well, **Pokémon** will bring more people into the TCG category by raising awareness of what a TCG is and why it is fun. **Pokémon** is aimed at younger players. As those players get older, they will naturally look for games that fit their current lifestyle so that as they get older, they will play other TCGs as well. So, you should be encouraging players to actually play **Pokémon**. If they enjoy trading card games (**Pokémon**) there's a good chance that they will continue to enjoy other TCGs.

Lightsorce: So, what you're saying that current **Pokémon** players are tomorrow's **Magic** players.

TheHans: I went to the **Pokémon** tour thing and they wouldn't let me get cards or anything because they said I was too old! It is ok to aim it at kids, but you shouldn't turn away adults that are honestly interested.

Lightsorce: How can you be sure that the **Pokémon** players will want to play **Magic**? You might be making a mistake by promoting **Magic** with **Pokémon** stuff.

Joe_Hauck: Where have you seen us promote **Magic** with **Pokémon**? I said that **Pokémon** players who are satisfied with the TCG game will most likely continue with other TCGs if they get bored with **Pokémon**.

Lightsorce: Will these be trading card games that we have today?

Joe_Hauck: There may be new TCGs in the future and they might like the current TCGs.

Reagulf: This is a gripe I hold with most of Wizards conventions and tours: will a Pro Tour ever come to Australia?

Joe_Hauck: Probably. Grand Prix Sydney is next November. I know it is not an official Pro Tour, but it is the next best thing.

TheHans: What do you think of the E-League?

Joe_Hauck: I have had nothing but trouble trying to get on to IRC games. So from personal experience, I'm not happy with it, but others are getting on, so I can only assume that it provides a service to some players effectively.

TheHans: We had 145 people in a tournament tonight, if you ever want a personal lesson on getting on there just let me know.

TSRO_Durst: 145 people...good gosh.

Yawgatog: The question we all have in mind: where is **Magic** heading in the new millennium? Any proposed major changes to certain aspects of the game you can reveal?

Joe_Hauck: Yes. Purple and pink will be new colors. :)

Yawgatog: *InQuest* was right all along!

Joe_Hauck: Just kidding. Sorry, I couldn't resist! Well let's see. The **Magic** Encyclopedia is essentially our first shot towards the electronic platform ourselves and with Hasbro Interactive behind us now, we have some interesting opportunities available. We are looking at other game platforms, but nothing for next year per se. You will certainly see a tighter interaction between story, cards, mechanics, licensed products and advertising next year. Our Starter product will be in line with the brand. In other words, it will be a subset of *6th Edition* so all of the cards are tournament legal.

Yawgatog: Wonderful!

Yawgatog: That is a major reason I would now not use Starter to teach . . . mostly worthless cards, simplified rules.

Joe_Hauck: It will teach you how to play all they way to Expert level and will include a CD-ROM to help new players how to learn the game better. From now on, each small expansion set, *Nemesis* and **Prophecy** for example, will introduce what we call mini-mechanics or even full-fledged mechanics instead of just updating what was released with the large set expansion (*Mercadian Masques*). The box sets will be more in line with *Battle Royale*, taking a look at how to better satisfy more casual players. And dammit, we're going to make action figures if it kills us!

TheHans: I want a Joe Hauck action figure!

Joe_Hauck: Just one thing to remember about the starter product: it has to satisfy the ability to teach someone who has no friends, tutors, or store owners that can teach them how to play, which is not easy. An Expert level player could probably teach a new player with an Expert theme deck but not everybody has that luxury. So, until I can figure out how to put one of you in every box . . . :)

TheHans: You heard it here first! You no longer need a brain, a friend, and a deck! The friend has become optional!

Reagulf: Why has the mana text changed to just a big mana symbol?

Joe_Hauck: It looks cooler.

Reagulf: I actually think that the *Unglued* lands look the coolest.

TSRO_Durst: Any final comments, Joe?

Joe_Hauck: We'll have upcoming chats on how to work for Wizards. Stay tuned. Thanks to you all it was a lot of fun. I'll be back in January for another chat.

TSRO_Zugran: Thanks for chatting, Joe.