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Making Magic **Monday, June 17, 2002**

I've Got Mail

Mark delves into his Inbox...



Mark Rosewater

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One of the highlights of writing this column is the interaction I get from all of you. This week I thought I would take a dip into my mailbag to give you a glimpse of what my email looks like and to answer a number of questions that have popped up. For ease of viewing, the letters will all appear indented, while my responses will be in **bold**.

Post Analysis

My mail tends to fall into several different categories. First is the largest category: letters responding to my column. These responses

can fall in all sorts of categories.

Sometimes the writer wants to say something nice: (In response to "[Rare, but Well Done](#)" -- 2/25/02)

Mr. Rosewater,

I appreciated your article about how you "rarify" cards. Where I used to question your judgment in making cards rare, or not so rare, I can now see all the thought process that goes into making a card's rarity.

I would like to compliment you on your writing skills. You have well organized writing. Also I would like to thank you for improving your design and development skills. I think personally that, even though *Torment* is the black set, *Odyssey* block is the most balanced block that has been produced by Wizards.

Cordially,

Matthew Watkins

Matthew,

Letters like this really do mean a great deal to me. Not only does the encouragement tell me what I'm doing right, it's simply nice to hear positive feedback about my work. I started writing this column because I wanted to give the average player a better insight into the design process. I'm very happy to see that I'm accomplishing this goal.

And sometimes, not so nice: (In response to "[Wishes Come True](#)" -- 4/29/02)

You've been scooped by the spoiler leak and your writing style is pretty bland. This article in particular had zero worthwhile content in it. I know you have good stories to tell, but I'm not hearing 'em. I'd love for you to talk more about how cards changed in the development process, how design changed as you went on and why. This article was extremely weak; we knew what the Wishes did already, and if we hadn't you wouldn't have told us much anyway. Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

James Abele

Search

James,

Letters like yours are also important. It is said that people learn more from their failures than their successes. I find critical letters just as important as ones filled with praise because they give guidance as to how I can improve. This column, in particular, (the one where I built up to the anti-climatic "how Wishes were made" story -- a technique known in the writing circles as a "macguffin") was quite divisive. Some players thought it was hilarious while others hated it. I've tried it once so don't expect to see the same joke again. **My column is heavily influenced by what my readers tell me they like and dislike. Please, keep up the correspondence.**

Some like to point out little aspects they liked: (Responding to "[R&D R&R](#)" -- 4/22/02)

I just finished reading your most recent article on MagicTheGathering.com and I felt randomly inclined to email you to tell you of the honest joy I felt when I read the line "Computers Are Our Forte" [in a subject header]. Now for the sake of this e-mail I'm going to run on the assumption that you have seen the most excellent film *Brazil* and were referring to the scene in which Lime utters this line. Really all I'm trying to say with this is that I'm happy someone other than me has seen and appreciated this film... yeah.

Other than that random though I would like to say (as I'm sure every one who emails you says, but hey, it's true) I really appreciate your articles as well as the articles of all the rest of the writers on MagicTheGathering.com. In all honesty this site is the one thing that has kept me from losing all faith in the game of **Magic**.

Much respect,

Curtis

Curtis,

You got me. I'm a big fan of *Brazil* and that line was one of my favorites. My other favorite cannot be printed in a family column. (But for fans of the movie, it's the line Sam says to Jill after he returns from "killing her off".) As the saying goes, you can take the kid out of Hollywood, but you can't take Hollywood out of the kid. I'm a huge movie and TV buff. I'm constantly doing throw-away references in my column, so if you think I'm making a reference to a particular movie or television show, odds are I am.

While others point out little aspects they didn't: (Responding to "[Tokens of My Affection](#)" -- 5/27/02)

In your column "Tokens of My Affection", you wrote that in 1993, the Internet was in its infancy. Oof. The Internet was created in 1969 as ARPAnet and became known as the Internet around 1977. The Net had millions of users in 1993. Maybe you were thinking of the World Wide Web, which was created around 1990 and contributed in no small part to the Internet explosion.

Michael Cooper
Fullerton, California

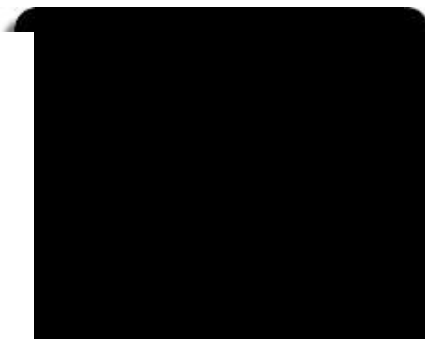
Michael,

You got me. I actually was talking about the Internet (as opposed to the World Wide Web), but my infancy line was a little incorrect. What I meant to say was that during Magic's early days, the internet was only being used by a small minority of people (though the millions they may have been). As such, it was not the defining place for Magic technology that it would later become.

Some go off on tangents: (Responding to "[Here's Looking At You, Squid](#)" -- 2/4/02)

Okay, I can deal with dwarves replacing goblins. I have no emotional attachment to goblins at all. Having said that, the thing that is really starting to "bug" me is the lack of spiders in the recent sets. We lost *Ribcage Spider* and *Spitting Spider* from *Prophecy*, but didn't get any replacements in *Odyssey* or *Torment*. This is terrible!

Woolly Spider and *Giant Trap Door Spider* have never been reprinted. We need those bad boys to come back, too.



Remember: we need more spiders. I can overlook the dwarves and cephalids popping up in this block, but you need to get hot on this spider thing.

-Fred Shirley

P.S. *Spider-Man* opens in theaters everywhere May 4th.

Fred,

As long as green creatures block fliers, spiders will always have a place. This block, the other creatures took that role (Krosan Archer, Anurid Swarmsnapper), but fear not, spiders will return soon.

While others, well, go off on tangents: (Responding to "[Day of Judgment](#)" -- 6/3/02)



Mark,

How are ya? I'm an avid **Magic** player. I fall mostly into the "Johnny"-type player category. Anyway, I could go on and on about how much I love playing **Magic** and all, but I've just got one question. Were you the devious mind behind **Overrun** back in *Tempest*? Did you have any part of creating that? This may seem like a completely random question, but it's got to be answered. You see, my friends and I were playing some friendly games and **Overrun** dealt me a series death blows in several games. Anyway, I went on this whole tangent and created this scenario about how the card got designed. So, much like you named the different types of players... my friends and I created this imaginary R&D card developer that we coined "**Overrun Guy**." Every time somebody plays a really powerful card like that or **Phantom Nishoba** or countless other cards that can really turn the tides of a game... we assume that "**Overrun Guy**" had something to do with the creation of it. Anywho, we noticed an article you had in a *Sideboard* in which you discussed some of the ideas behind cards in *Odyssey* and we were like: "This has got to be "**Overrun Guy**!! **Mirari** was going double numeric values for free... Yeah, this is OG!!" We also figured whoever OG is... he's the direct descendent of "**Sol Ring Man**." Anyway, thanks for your time. If you find the time to respond that would be awesome... if not, I completely understand. Thanks again.

Eric Peel

Eric,

I'm not sure. I was the lead designer of *Tempest* so I was probably involved. **Overrun**, while a neat card, is not exactly rocket science to design. Essentially, it's just a **Giant Growth** that hits all your creatures. The trample was added, I assume, to ensure that your horde of big creatures actually gets to hit your opponent. And it was made a sorcery because, well, it was plenty good as a sorcery. So, in short, I'm not sure there is one OG, but I am part of the OG Team.

Ask Away

Next, many players use e-mail to ask me whatever question is on their mind. These questions are about anything and everything.

The two most common questions are:

Hello,

I've tried creating cards myself, and have had fun in doing so. May I show you one of my creations?

Elliot Kramer

Elliot,

I really would like for the answer to this to be yes, but unfortunately it isn't. The reason, I hate to say, is legal. To avoid lawsuits, we are instructed to only look at submissions that

have the proper paperwork (meaning people put in writing that they promise not to sue us.) In Magic design it is far too easy to have multiple people create cards in a similar vein. The good news is that we are trying to give aspiring designers opportunities to do design that I can see. A good example of this would be "You Make the Card". I personally looked at every single design submitted for that card. So, keep plugging away and keep your eye out for other opportunities.

And:

If I have what I think it takes to become a game designer, what route should I take to become one? Thanks for your time.

Jon Watt

Jon,

Like many, you have recognized that game design is indeed a fun job. (Probably having me say this every third week doesn't hurt.) I get numerous letters every week asking how to become a game designer and more specifically how to become a Magic game designer. For the first, I recommend playing a lot of games. To build something you have to understand it. If you want to become an author, I would advise you to read a lot of books. Nothing will help you understand games better than playing them. Also, make sure to try many different types of games. Richard Garfield, the greatest game designer I know, is an avid game player/collector. He is always trying out new games and loves to experiment with new rules for his old games. Also, make sure to acquire the skills in school you will need. Game design requires good writing skills, good math skills, good analytical skills, and good arguing skills. As far as working at Wizards specifically, R&D requires an undergraduate degree, so stay in school. Once you have graduated check out Wizards job boards. R&D jobs do not pop up all that often, but when they do, we always post the openings. Make sure your resume stresses any relevant skills and any important gaming background. Most importantly, try to use your cover letter to explain why you would be an asset rather than how much you'd love to work here. We know all our applicants want to work here, but we don't know why we should hire you. Hope that helps.

Some questions delve into topics I haven't covered yet:

Hi Mark,

A really quick question about "You Make The Card". This is getting ahead of ourselves a bit, but will we also be voting on who will get commissioned to do the art? I know some of us have our personal favorite artists. Thanks for the time.

Brad Whittaker
Chelmsford, MA

Brad,

Once the card concept is done, we will have Dana Knutson, the Magic art director, suggest a number of artists that seem appropriate. All of you will then get to pick which artist you want from that list. I expect that to happen later this week or possibly early next week.

While others are sent to me simply because I'm the one person whose address they know:

Do creature tokens have a casting cost (so that they can be destroyed by Pernicious Deed)?

Toby Hazes, Netherlands

Toby,

Yes. They have a mana cost (we don't use the term casting cost any more) of 0.

Listen Here

The last category of letters are ones from players who see me as their chance to communicate some basic issue that concerns them. These letters are very informative as they give me a chance to see what other issues are concerning the players.

One popular topic is [Type 1](#):

Dear Mr. Rosewater,

I know you read a lot of mail everyday so I will make this quick. I love to play Type 1. I play Type 1 using a lot of Type 2 cards. I also see in the new expansions that most or all of the cards have to do with Type 2. So, here it goes:

Could you and your people try to focus on getting more people interested in playing Type 1? Just for the fact that I play Type 2 players with Type 1 decks and win, a lot. And I don't even have any power cards. I'm not saying make cards just for Type 1, but to see what you can create to create more Type 1 players.

Sincerely,

Steve Ziemann

P.S. I see that you started this with *Judgment*.

Steve,

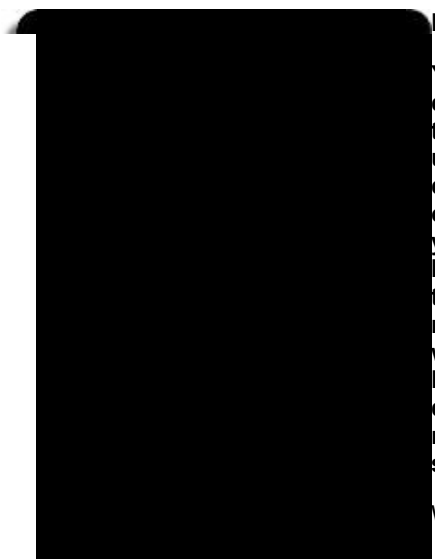
One of the hardest things about designing Magic is that you have to pay attention to so many things. Take formats for example. We (being Wizards of the Coast and the DCI) support the following formats: (by support I mean sanction tournaments for) **Standard, Block Constructed, Extended, Type 1.5, Type 1, Sealed, Booster Draft and Rochester Draft**. There's no way in design and development to keep perfect track of how each card affects each format. So, we choose to focus the impact on the ones we have the most control over. In practical terms, these are the formats with the fewest number of cards (Block Constructed, Standard, and the sealed formats). This doesn't mean we forget about the other formats. It just means it's not where our focus is. That said, we do try to create cards that shake up the environment. Whether or not this has an impact on a larger format depends a lot on what mechanics the new ones are competing with. *Odyssey* block, for example, explored some new turf and, as such, has created ripples throughout all the formats. The emphasis on the graveyard had substantial impact on Extended. In turn, an Extended deck (Miracle Grow) from the latest Extended season has gone on to have a huge influence on Type 1. To use a metaphor, the game is a big set of dominoes. The larger formats are affected less often because the dominoes have farther to fall to make an impact. But as this last year has shown, innovation from R&D will create ripples throughout all of the metagames.

Another is the use of old mechanics:

Dear Mark,

Regarding a lot of the old abilities such as flanking, buyback, cycling, and so on... Would it be possible for Wizards to produce a block which, rather than creating a new set of abilities, reuses some of these old ones with new cards? Say, a block where the two main special abilities are flanking and buyback? I know that there are a lot of players out there that lament that they never saw things done with some of these old abilities and as far as we know they are gone forever now, except for occasional cards that try to reprint the flavor of flanking, buyback, etc., but not the actual ability. Is there any hope of seeing a new flanker, a better snow-covered land ability, or shadow ever again as major abilities?

Hal A. Kramer



Hal,

You needn't worry about the old mechanics. R&D considers them an important resource. The reason we take so much care in creating them isn't so we can use them once and discard them, but rather to cultivate resources for the future. It has always been our plan to recycle popular old mechanics. The reason you haven't seen us do too much of it yet is simply because the game is young. (Although I do feel a need to point out that we have done a little of it such as returning the "pitch" cards in *Mercadian Masques*.) We want to give mechanics some rest before they return. But don't worry, plans are in the works. And when we do bring back old favorites, expect to see some neat new twists. That said, I would never expect to see snow-covered lands ever again.

While another has to do with the fate of white:



Dear Mr. Rosewater and Mr. Buehler, (this letter was also sent to Randy)

If you wanted to "balance" (in the sense of overcosted, never to be played) **Golden Wish** (as compared to the blue wish or any of the other wishes) by giving it a high casting cost, then I would say mission accomplished. Check out eBay, **Golden Wish** is the lowest costing (in monetary terms) Wish on the net (\$2.25 high on the only auction where someone bid on it). Plus, with the rotation in Extended, I really doubt that anyone will use it in a tournament format. As I have previously stated, in casual play, people will just use a Demonic Tutor.

So, I just wanted to express my profound disappointment in the continued poor card quality of white in **Magic** (especially when compared to blue). White continues to get expensive and marginal cards in the expansions. Mr. Buehler himself expressed how he wanted the blue card to be used.

Why didn't he want the white card to be used? The answer is probably because white is the "lame color" which should only get life gain, first strike (on 1/1s), and protection (when protection is terrible against **Chainer's Edict**).

White apparently doesn't deserve offense or disruption or winning the game. Again, let's hope you give white something in *Onslaught* and *Eighth Edition*. As it stands now, white will not have a deck archetype until next year (at the earliest).

Sincerely,
John Knadler

John,

I wish there is some way I could demonstrate the R&D man-hours that have gone (and continue to go into) into solving the "white issue". I can simply promise you this: R&D recognizes that the colors are imbalanced at the core. This is why we have embarked on rebalancing the color wheel. The solution to this problem though is not printing undercosted white cards, but to make sure that white has a key role in the game. Each color needs to have mechanical specialties which force players to use them. Right now blue has too much and white has too little. The "specialness" of Magic as a game is that it constantly evolves. This gives R&D a unique opportunity to tweak the game "on the go". Randy and I will keep you informed as we work to fix this problem.

And So It Goes

I hope this column has given you a better insight into the kind of issues I tackle every day when I open my email. I plan to do other mailbag columns like this in the future, so keep the mail coming.


Before I wrap up for today, let me just restate that I enjoy getting mail from all of you. And although I do not have the time to reply to every letter, I do, in fact, read everything sent to me. MagicTheGathering.com was created to give you, the players, a voice. This is one of those opportunities. If there is something you like about the game and want to make sure we keep and expand upon or there's something wrong that you want to see fixed, please let me know. Also, my column is very reactive. If you like or dislike a particular column, let me know. If there's some topic you'd like to see me discuss, let me know. The Internet is all about two-way interactivity. Make the communication two-way and let me know what you think. **Magic** (and "Making Magic") will be better for it.

Join me next week when I talk about life. No really.

Until then, may your email box be filled with interesting letters.

Mark Rosewater

Overrun Guy may be reached at makingmagic@wizards.com.

Discuss this article on the [message boards](#). 

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