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Making Magic

Monday, July 15, 2002

Playing to Type 1

Mark speaks on the oldest format



Mark Rosewater

In my mailbag column last month ("[I've Got Mail](#)"), I answered a letter asking about R&D's attitude towards **Type 1**. My brief answer prompted a very vocal response from the Type 1 online community. So much so, that I felt the topic was worthy of a column. My goal today is twofold. First, I want to answer a number of questions about how R&D thinks about Type 1. And second, I want to open up discussion into how to address some of the issues raised by the Type 1 players.

Before we continue on, let me be upfront. I have not played Type 1 in years. I make no claim to have a grasp of the Type 1 metagame. Recently at U.S. Nationals, I discussed the current Type 1 metagame with a pro player (Pat Chapin, for those that care) who I believed had his pulse on the format. That is where my previous comments on Type 1 came from. I apologize, and I promise today to make no claims to understanding the current metagame as I am sure I will get bashed plenty for things I think I *do* understand.

"In My Day..."

To understand the concerns of the Type 1 players, I think it's crucial to first understand some of the history of the format. So, let's jump into our Way Back Machine and set the date for the early 1994. Why is this date important? Because this is where Type 1 was born.



Jon Finkel plays Type 1 at the Sydney *Magic Invitational*.

Before then, **Magic** had no official rules for deck construction. Okay, that's not entirely true. The rulebook contained the official rules but there was no limit on how many of each card could be played, and 40 card decks were the norm. But in late 1993, the Duelist Convocation was created. (For those that care, this is the precursor to the DCI, and yes that is where the "DC" part came from. "I" is for "International.") As part of their first act in the winter of 1994, the Duelist Convocation announced official deck construction rules. Most serious players had agreed to their own rules, but they varied from region to region. The Duelist Convocation was the first to announce a universal set of rules for constructed play.

The deck minimum was set at sixty cards. A card limit of four was instituted. And the first restricted list was announced. Nothing had been banned yet. Thus was born the first constructed format. (Sealed Deck and Draft had already been informally introduced by Wizards employees at various game conventions.) This format was not called Type 1 yet. It was called **Magic Constructed**. Or for short, just **Magic**. And for a year all was good.

But then in the winter of 1995, a very important event occurred. Wizards of the Coast introduced a new format they called **Type 2** (now called **Standard**). Rather than using any cards you wanted, you were now restricted to a subset of printed cards. Retroactively, the existing format was called **Type 1**. Overnight **Magic** split in two. What was the initial reaction of the vast majority of the players? We hated it. Who was Wizards to tell us we couldn't play with our cards? (It's important to remember that back then I was just another player, not a member of R&D.)

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But Wizards insisted, so we tried it. Okay, some of us tried it. Others just continued playing **Type 1**. And you know what, it wasn't that bad. It was different, but it was fun. R&D had learned a bit about power levels so Type 2 was less swingy. To some of us, that was a good thing. To others, well, it just wasn't the **Magic** they knew and loved. Thus began the first schism between the players.

As time went on, other formats popped into existence. Soon the gap between Type 1 and Type 2 grew wide enough that Type 1.5 was created. (Type 1.5 allows all the cards but bans anything restricted in Type 1.) Another schism. Eventually, the gap grew wide enough that a middle-ground format, **Extended**, was created. Another schism. Meanwhile, Limited (including Sealed and Draft), which had been around for a while, became elevated due to the existence of the new Pro Tour. More schisms. Pro Tour - Paris in 1997 introduced an entirely new format, **Block Constructed**. The **Magic** pie continued to splinter. What was once a single game was now sanctioned in eight different formats (Type 1, Type 1.5, Extended, Standard or Type 2, Block Constructed, Sealed Deck, Booster Draft, and Rochester Draft). And I haven't even started on the team formats.

Cut to present day. The Type 1 format has persisted, but it is no longer the powerhouse it once had been. Once *the* format, Type 1 now has a small, but dedicated following.

Out of the Frying Pan

As I promised above, I want to use this column to answer a number of the questions that the Type 1 community has raised. Please be aware that my intent is to illuminate our reasoning behind certain decisions and to explain what restrictions we are bound by in order to help create a dialogue about how to improve the situation.

"Why aren't there more Type 1 tournaments? And why aren't there more high-profile Type 1 tournaments?"

First, I should stress that this is more of an Organized Play issue than an R&D issue, but as I'll do my best to explain the status quo. Wizards of the Coast, as a company, has a limited amount of resources that we can dedicate to promoting **Magic** in all its formats.

Backing up a little, let me clarify what I mean when I use the term "Type 1." I'm talking about Type 1 as a competitive format. Many players refer to Type 1 as casual play that loosely follows the Type 1 Banned and Restricted Lists, a format where they can play with whatever old cards they want, like **Thallids** and **Dakkon Blackblade** and things like that. While this is wonderful and I endorse such play, when we start talking about organized play and support we are talking about the competitive side of the format where only *the* most powerful cards have any impact. Please keep that in mind.

When deciding how to divvy up our resources between formats, we look at two major things:

Popularity – When push comes to shove, the number one determiner of what we focus on is what the public wants to play. If all of you let us know you want to play a certain format, we try to accommodate. In the end, we want to make you, the public as a whole, happy with the game.

This category is the biggest strike against Type 1 (and Type 1.5). To be blunt, according to our data, Type 1 is not that popular. You see, we keep track of how many sanctioned tournaments are run each year. The numbers are broken out into three ratings categories: Constructed (Standard, Extended & Block Constructed), Limited (Sealed, Rochester Draft & Booster Draft), and Vintage (Type 1 & Type 1.5). Here are the numbers (of singles tournaments as opposed to team) for the last five years, rounded to the nearest thousand:

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Constructed Singles (Standard, Extended & Block)	11,000	20,000	20,000	33,000	47,000
Limited Singles (Sealed, Rochester & Booster)	9,000	19,000	24,000	31,000	42,000
Vintage Singles (Type 1 & Type 1.5)	4,000	3,000	2,000	3,000	3,000
Constructed Singles %, by Year	46%	48%	43%	49%	51%
Limited Singles %, by Year	38%	45%	53%	47%	46%
Vintage Singles %, by Year	17%	7%	4%	4%	3%

Not only are Vintage tournaments small in number, but their percentage share is shrinking over time. (To be fair, the lack of support does create a downward spiral.)

This category while Type 1's biggest obstacle is also Type 1's best opportunity. If there is in fact an untapped Vintage crowd out there, let us know. Ask your local tournament organizer to sanction

Type 1 and Type 1.5 events. While playing lots of Type 1 on Apprentice means very little to us, an upswing of Type 1 play on the local level will give us the message that there is untapped potential in the format. Talking about how you play is good. Showing us that you play is even better.

Accessibility – This category has to do with how easy a format is to enter. The four major factors are time, other players/playing space, cost, and availability of the cards. Type 1 does well in the first two categories. It's relatively quick and only requires a single opponent. But the third and fourth categories are a problem. It's by far the most expensive of the formats with single cards (strategically important ones, no less) that cost hundreds of dollars on the secondary market. In addition, the cards were printed in low enough numbers and distributed in a restricted enough area that they are next to impossible to acquire in parts of the **Magic**-playing world.



According to the latest issue of *InQuest*, the median value for these three cards combined is a whopping \$950.00 US.

I have run a Type 1-level format (meaning a format that allows the use of all the old cards) at every **Magic** Invitational (although it will be impossible this year as the event is on *Magic Online*). Each time I do, a number of players complain to me how hard it is to acquire the cards. Remember that these are pro players with extensive connections and paid expenses. If some of *them* have problems, it does not bode well for the average player. While this evidence is anecdotal, it does point out that Type 1 is a hard format to dabble in. It has what we in the game world call a “high barrier to entry.”

For all these reasons, this makes Type 1 very hard to use in international events (defined as events which draw an international player base). Thus, a Type 1 Pro Tour, or even a Type 1 Grand Prix, is not a realistic possibility. This doesn't mean that there aren't opportunities for larger scale Type 1 play, but it does mean that it needs to be focused in areas that have proven to have a strong Vintage following.

In summary, the reason there are not more Type 1 tournaments is that there's not evidence that the public as a whole wants more Type 1 tournaments. But please, show us data that says otherwise. The more you play sanctioned Type 1 play, the more attention we will pay to it. As far as Pro Tours and Grand Prix, I think the small availability of the cards combined with the hefty price tag will keep us from using Type 1 at international events. That said, there are many other opportunities to increase Type 1 play. The key though is to find ways to bring it to the areas where Type 1 is flourishing.

“Why won't you just reprint cards? Why don't you allow proxies?”

Whenever we bring up the cost-prohibitive nature of Type 1, we get one of four responses. First, some people simply agree with us. Not much to add there.

Second, some people argue that Type 1 isn't that expensive. That just isn't true. I could comb through Oscar Tan's columns for decklists and print the dollar amount of each deck based on *InQuest* median prices, but we all know what I'd find. The whole point of this column is for me to be honest with all of you. So you need to be honest back. Type 1 is expensive. If Player X decides tomorrow to start playing Type 1, he's going to have to shell out some dough. That's the simple reality.

Third, some players argue that this issue can all be solved if Wizards of the Coast would just break their reprint policy and reprint the Type 1 staples. That is a touchy issue, so let me just jump to the heart of it. The reprint policy exists for a very important reason. **Magic**, besides being a game, is also a collectable. Wizards of the Coast markets and sells **Magic** as such. Many people have invested thousand of dollars in our game. They have done so with the understanding that we would honor this agreement.

One of the ongoing themes of “Making Magic” is that the game exists for many different types of people. One subset cares greatly about the value of their cards (and this is, incidentally, not a small group). Our responsibility to this group prevents us from reprinting a certain subset of cards. That is not negotiable. That said, there are numerous cards we can reprint. As *Torment* and *Judgment* show, R&D is trying to find opportunities to bring back older cards whenever possible. R&D are also fans of the game. Many of us have been playing since the game’s beginning. Some of us, even longer than that. We, too, enjoy sharing **Magic**’s past with today’s players. But there are lines we cannot cross.

Fourth, some players argue that the expense issue can be solved by allowing proxies. My answer to that is simple: **Magic** exists for two reasons. One, it’s a great game (my personal all-time favorite) and R&D, as a bunch of hardcore gamers, feels an obligation to keep it alive. Two, it’s a revenue source for Wizards of the Coast and its parent company Hasbro. If the second doesn’t happen, neither will the first.

If we condone proxies, we start down a road that we don't want to travel. We increase confusion. We affect the secondary market (which we do care about, but that’s a topic for another column). But most importantly, it would directly lead to players buying fewer cards. That is bad for us and, long term, bad for you. The less money we make, the less we have to allocate to things like Organized Play and MagicTheGathering.com. I like to stress the “game” in game company, but the “company” part is also very important.

In summary, both reprinting Type 1 cards and allowing proxies fly in the face of Wizards’ other responsibilities. I am trying today to find areas for discussion. And elsewhere, I will present opportunities to do so. But not here. Neither reprinting nor proxies are open for debate.

“Why are you drifting away from Richard Garfield’s vision?”

I’ve heard this complaint numerous times so I decided to go right to the source and ask Richard. “Richard,” I said, “Has R&D drifted from your vision?”

His answer, “No.”

Magic was designed to be a constantly evolving game, always moving into new uncharted areas. What separates it from most traditional games is that its ever-shifting metagame forces players to constantly adapt. Strategies learned today might not work tomorrow. This flux keeps the game fresh, but it also means that **Magic**, by design, is constantly sloughing its own conventions.

The downside to this is that players like convention. Humans are creatures of habit and fundamentally shun change. In a game of constant flux, there are bound to be hurt feelings as the game moves away from some aspects that players like.

One of the truisms in R&D is that a player’s favorite set is always the first set he played. The first set is always the most special. It’s the time where a player was first exposed to the magic of **Magic**. For many Type 1 players, their first set was Alpha.

I think many Type 1 players glorify Alpha for the wrong reasons. Yes, Richard, as a designer, made interesting choices that resulted in many cool cards. And yes, Alpha as a whole is chock full of goodies. But that isn’t what makes Alpha great. Alpha’s genius was not Richard’s individual card choices but the overall structure it represented. It wasn’t that he made a *certain* decision but that the flexibility of the game would allow designers to constantly make *different* decisions.

The beauty of Alpha is its philosophy for what a game could be. To reject current sets because they differ from Alpha (or *Legends*, or *Revised*, or “Set X”) is missing the whole point of Richard’s vision. **Magic** is a living, breathing entity. Like a child, it’s growing before our eyes. Don’t reject the child of today because he isn’t the baby you remember from yesteryear.



As a designer I am forced to look to the past to learn, both to see what we've done right and what we've done wrong. I'm sure some of you will call me a heretic, but Alpha isn't perfect. It has flaws. Richard is the first to admit this. The original rules had more holes than Swiss cheese. Certain cards were way out of flavor. And the power curve was the steepest it's ever been.

But those flaws don't take away from the genius of Alpha. As a parallel example, the U.S. Constitution is an amazing document, but somewhat imperfect. Just because people of today don't believe a slave is worth 3/5 of a person or that only wealthy, white male landowners should vote does not take away from the grand ideals it set forth.

In addition, it's important to note that Richard designed Alpha making a few assumptions that turned out to be way off base. The biggest one was the assumption that players would buy the equivalent of five starter decks and would only trade within their own small play group. In that scenario, cards like **Ancestral Recall** or the **Moxes** are nowhere nearly as degenerate.

Don't get me wrong. I love Alpha. It was my first set. It's a strong contender for the title of best **Magic** set ever. But it's not perfect and players need to stop glorifying it as if it is.

But you know what? If I had a time machine and had the ability to go back and change Alpha, I wouldn't touch a thing. Why? Because Alpha is what the game needed to be when it premiered. It was messy, it was chaotic, and it was damn exciting. I have great memories of **Magic** back in the early days.

Magic of today, though, is not set in the world of 1993. The **Magic** community is much wiser as to how the game works. Cards that previously took years to break are figured out in a weekend. And Organized Play is now fundamental to how the game functions. A degenerate set is no longer fun. Alpha released today with **Magic** in its current state would not be nearly as enjoyable.

The Type 1 players that bemoan the change from the days of yesteryear need to understand that **Magic** is a different game that it was nine years ago. And that isn't a bad thing. The child has matured and as it has, it has shifted to fill new roles and responsibilities.

Still, we shouldn't forget about what **Magic** used to be. The game's history is an important aspect of its character. As one of the game's most fervent historians (and trivia buffs), I love to share the game's past with those that did not experience it first hand. But it's important to keep it in context.

The joy of Type 1 is its ability to share the past with the present. To remember the child at all stages of its development. But babies will grow and change. To ignore their metamorphosis is to ignore what makes them so special.

“Why don't you design more Type 1 cards?”



Competitive Type 1 matches resemble rogues galleries of the most powerful cards in the game's history.

The answer to that question is closely tied to why I don't keep abreast of the Type 1 metagame. There really isn't much I can do in design to affect Type 1. With each new release, the power level of Type 1 goes up. This means that it becomes harder and harder to create a card that doesn't unbalance **Standard** that can impact Type 1.

It's not impossible but I have to choose where to focus my energies. Knowledge of the **Standard** metagame helps me see where we need to steer the game. And learning about how a particular **Block Constructed** environment works has a huge impact on the design of future blocks.


This isn't to say that I can't improve my design to have more affinity with Type 1, but I need your help. Let's cut to the chase. What does Type 1 need now that it's missing? What kinds of realistically-printable cards would shake things up? Please write to me at makingmagic@wizards.com and fill

me in. Be aware that I'm not looking for individual card ideas but rather areas that I could explore that would have a positive impact on Type 1. Would you like to affect the future of Type 1? Here's your chance.

In Summary

There are far too many issues for me to hit in a single column (although Lord knows I've tried), but I hope I've given you all a little better insight into where you can make a difference. I've laid out some areas for improvement as well as others that aren't open for debate. Please remember that my mailbox is always open. If you have specific issues about Type 1 (or any other topic for that matter), please write to me. As always, I can't respond to every letter but I do promise to read them all.

I'd like to end on a positive note, so here are two final issues to chew on. First, I agree that there is a dearth of written material on Type 1 so I will look into getting some actual articles on Type 1 either on MagicTheGathering.com or the Sideboard. Second, there has been talk in the past of having Wizards sponsor a yearly Type 1 Championship. I thought I'd end with a vote to see how much interest there is out there for such a thing.

Would you like us to sponsor a Type 1 Championship each year? 

Yes


No

That's all for this week. Join me next week when I talk about my favorite creature type. (Here's a hint: I wrote the art description for the original [Right of Oaks](#).)

Until then, may you draw your [Black Lotus](#) in your opening hand.

Mark Rosewater

Mark may be reached at makingmagic@wizards.com.

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