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**Making Magic** Monday, July 22, 2002

# Squirrel of My Dreams



Mark Rosewater

## How the rodents infested Magic

Welcome to Squirrel Week! You have no idea how happy I am to say that. This week is dedicated to my favorite creature type, the lowly squirrel. So why is it my favorite creature type? How did squirrels come to **Magic** in the first place? And why are they now so prolific? All good questions that I'll answer in today's all-squirrel edition of "Making Magic."

## We Interrupt This Silly Column

Before we dive into the not so serious world of squirrels, I need to address a few issues from [last week](#). First, the poll. We asked you if there was any interest in a **Type 1** Championship. The result was an overwhelming "yes":

Should there be a Type 1 Championship tournament?		
Yes	3428	75.6%
No	1106	24.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4534</b>	<b>100%</b>

Organized Play has promised to run a Type 1 Championship at next year's Origins convention. In addition, they've promised to add a Type 1 side event at this year's World Championship in Sydney and they are looking into doing additional Type 1 side events at future Pro Tours. In addition, the [Sideboard](#) has promised to start running occasional articles on competitive Type 1 play. Keep tuned to [www.sideboard.com](http://www.sideboard.com) for Type 1 content.

Second, I received an avalanche of mail concerning Type 1. The many posts (and yes, I read them all) really stressed the enthusiasm this format has among the players. Many writers gave me good ideas for Type 1 design space, some of which I'm exploring in the design for Bacon (the codename for the 2003 fall expansion). Thank you to everyone who took the time to write in.

I'm now stuck with the challenge of segueing from Type 1 to squirrels. This reminds me of my old improvisation days (but that's a story for another day). Okay, from drawing "the nuts" to gathering the nuts, it's time to return to our furry friends.

## All-American Squirrel

So how did it all begin? How did squirrels make their way into **Magic**? The answer goes back to before **Magic**'s release, back to Philadelphia and a group of people known simply as "the playtesters." You see, back in the day, Wizards of the Coast was a role-playing company. They didn't have an R&D department let alone people that specialized in trading card games, which makes a lot of sense as trading card games didn't exist yet.

So when Richard began work on **Magic**, he returned to Philadelphia (he was graduate student at University of Pennsylvania) to work on the game. To help him, he turned to a collection of gamers that he played with regularly. Over time, some of these playtesters became interested in doing **Magic** design. One group (Skaff Elias, Jim Lin, Dave Pettey & Chris Page) designed a set they called "Ice Age." You might know it as the **Magic** expansion of the same name. That group went on to design numerous other expansions (*Antiquities*, *Fallen Empires*, and *Alliances*) One individual, Barry Reich, started work on a multi-color set named *Spectral Chaos*. Parts of this set were used in the design for *Invasion*. The domain mechanic, for example, was called the "barry" mechanic because it was created by Reich.

Finally, there was the team of Bill Rose, Joel Mick, Charlie Catino, Don Felice, Elliot Segal, and Howard Kahlenberg. That group of playtesters began the design of a set they called "Menagerie." It is better known by the **Magic** world as the two sets *Mirage* and *Visions* (the set was so big that it got split in two). In *Menagerie* was a card called "Unseen Wildlife":

**Unseen Wildlife**  
GGG  
Sorcery  
Each player put a squirrel token in play for each forest he or she controls. Treat these tokens as a 1/1 green creatures.

In the fall of 1995, I took a full time job at Wizards of the Coast (I had been freelancing for a year and a half). In the winter of 1996, I was put on the *Mirage* development team (along with Bill Rose, Mike Elliott and William Jockusch). At the time, the set was known under the codename "Sosumi." (Back in the day, all Magic products were codenamed after Macintosh sound files so the computer would make that sound when you opened up the expansion folder. Silly, but true.)



During our first pass on the file, we came across Unseen Wildlife. Now, remember that back then, token production was not a major theme of green. *Legends* allowed a green mage to make 1/1 wolf tokens (with *Master of the Hunt*). *Fallen Empires* introduced saprolings to the world. And *Alliances* had a much-forgotten card called *Splintering Wind* that allowed green to make 1/1 flying Splinter tokens. So for *Mirage*, we felt free to make the token whatever helped the flavor of the card.

The design team, though, did have a preference. They really liked the idea of these small forest creatures lurking in the background. Obviously, they thought, these tokens should be squirrels. The development team was equally amused so we kept the tokens squirrels. Wait a minute, some of you are saying, *Mirage* didn't have any squirrel cards. No, my friends, it did not. Cue: Sad Music.

## The Squirrel That Got Away

So how did it happen? Well, it all began with an innocent art description. Back then Creative Text was called Continuity and the head of the Continuity Department was a man named Pete Venters. Many of you might know him better as a **Magic** artist (known for such pieces as *Lhurgoyf*, *Baron Sengir*, and *Spelljack*). Pete (or possibly Scott Hungerford, the one other member of Continuity) wrote the following art description (back then, Continuity, not the Art Department, wrote the art descriptions):

"Dozens of small hungry critters scurry in the low undergrowth of the jungle."

Bill, the development lead of *Mirage* (in addition to being the design lead, another practice we stopped several years back) added the following line (**in bold**):

"Dozens of small hungry critters scurry in the low undergrowth of the jungle. **In this picture, we cannot tell what the critters are. We can only see the eyes.**"

Also, at some point around the same time, Continuity decided to name the card "Waiting in the Weeds." The development team was a little bummed as we liked the name Unseen Wildlife better, but we knew we would get our squirrels regardless, so we let the name issue go.

Anyway, the art description was passed along to the **Magic** Art Director, then a woman named Sue Ann Harkey. Sue Ann was a nice woman with a good artistic eye. She's responsible for bringing a number of good artists into the **Magic** fold (including such greats as Kev Walker, Donato Giancola, D. Alexander Gregory, and Paolo Parente). She's also responsible for giving the *Mirage* block its overall look. Her biggest downside was that she didn't know **Magic**. She knew art, but she couldn't play the game to save her life. (I should add that this is a change from present day as the current Art Directors occasionally drop by R&D to play in sealed tournaments.)

Sue Ann assigned the art for *Waiting in the Weeds* to an artist by the name of Susan Van Camp (an early **Magic** artist responsible for such cards as *Old Man of the Sea* and *Wyluli Wolf*). While working on the art, Susan felt it would look better if she showed one of the creatures that was “waiting in the weeds.” So she called Sue Ann and asked if it would be okay to make the change. Sue Ann didn’t have a problem with it, so she told Susan that it was okay. Cue: Moody Foreshadowing Music.

## The Squirrel Next Door

One of my responsibilities during *Mirage* development was to check all the new art and make sure that it matched what the card did mechanically. This is where Sue Ann’s weakness caused me a lot of headaches. Some examples:

**Sunweb** - Originally Sunweb was a 5/6 flying wall that couldn’t block white creatures. But then we got back the illustration, and it was blocking a white dragon. And since the only white-looking dragon in the set (**Pearl Dragon**) was actually *white*, the development team changed Sunweb so it couldn’t block creatures with power 2 or less.

**Goblin Scouts** – Originally called Dwarven Regiment, Goblin Scouts created three 1/2 mountainwalking dwarf tokens. But then we got back an illustration with three goblins. As goblins had a lord in the basic set (**Goblin King**) we changed the card to produce three 1/1 goblins instead.

So one day I’m checking in with Sue Ann when I see *Waiting in the Weeds*’ art for the first time. With a little dramatic license, here’s how the encounter went:

**Me:** (looking at the piece) Looks nice. What card is this?

**Sue Ann:** *Waiting in the Weeds*.

**Me:** This can’t be *Waiting in the Weeds*. It’s got a cat on it.

**Sue Ann:** So?

**Me:** *Waiting in the Weeds* makes squirrels.

**Sue Ann:** What do you mean?

**Me:** The card. In the game. It makes squirrels.

**Sue Ann:** I’m not sure I understand.

**Me:** The card that this art goes on. Its purpose, what it does in the game, is make squirrels.

**Sue Ann:** I don’t think so.

**Me: Yes.** Trust me. It makes squirrels.

**Sue Ann:** Well, it didn’t say that in the art description.

**Me:** That’s because the art description specifically said that you can’t see them! We didn’t think it mattered mentioning since the artist wasn’t going to show them.

**Sue Ann:** Yeah, that wasn’t working.

**Me:** Then why didn’t you call us and ask if it mattered?

**Sue Ann:** Why would it matter?

**Me:** Because... it does!

**Sue Ann:** There aren’t squirrels in Africa.

**Me:** And there aren’t dragons either. Besides this isn’t Africa, it’s Jamuraa. And in Jamuraa, there are squirrels.

**Sue Ann:** How can you be sure?

**Me:** Because there’s a card called *Waiting in the Weeds* that makes squirrels!

**Sue Ann:** Not anymore.

And thus, the tokens on *Waiting in the Weeds* became cats. Cue: Dramatic sting.

## You Go, Squirrel

I walked away from Sue Ann’s desk a little upset. Okay, a lot upset. The entire development team was upset. We had been promised a squirrel and we had to walk away empty-handed. But now we were men with a mission. That mission: get a squirrel into **Magic**.

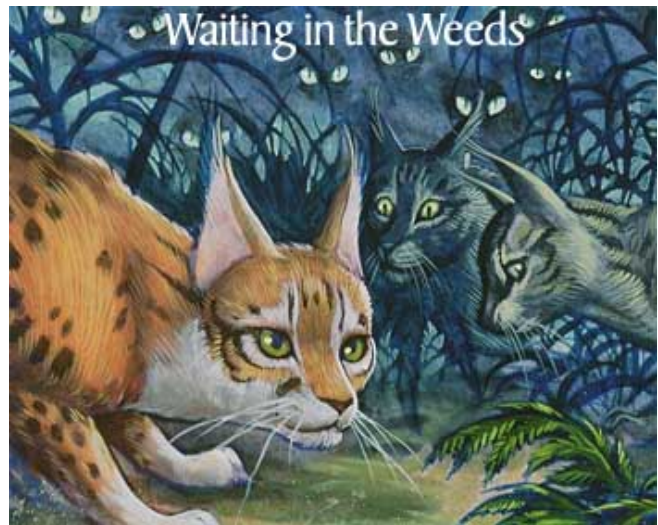
*Visions* didn’t prove too helpful as the only green token was a 1/1 flying butterfly token (made by **Giant Caterpillar**) which obviously couldn’t be a squirrel. But *Weatherlight* was being designed in-house. And surprise, surprise, the following card appeared (designed I believe by Mike Elliott but influenced by me constantly saying, “We have to make a squirrel card”):

**Squirrelly Guy**  
2GG

Summon Guy  
3/3

If Squirrely Guy is put into the graveyard from play, each player may pay any amount of mana to put an equal amount of Squirrel tokens into play under his or her control. Treat these tokens as 1/1 green creatures.

This card was later tweaked and renamed **Liege of the Hollows**. We had our squirrel. But somehow, I wasn't satisfied. My pent-up squirrel desire wasn't satiated by a single squirrel card. My job was not yet done.



Next, I stuck a squirrel card in *Unglued* called **Squirrel Farm**. And since it created squirrel tokens, I was also able to put a squirrel token card in *Unglued* as well. Still I was not satiated. My next opportunity was in *Urza's Legacy*. On a mission to create echo creatures with comes-into-play effects (since they created some neat upkeep choices), I made a green creature that created 1/1 tokens when it came into play. Why couldn't they be squirrels? Thus was born **Deranged Hermit**. [And I am eternally grateful. --Aaron]

Meanwhile, I was in charge of the art descriptions for *Urza's Legacy* (another long story for another day). While working on the art description for **Might of Oaks**, I realized that I needed a small woodland creature that I could grow to giant proportions to show how big it had become. Hmm, small woodland creature...

Somehow my constant squirrel-mongering only fueled my frenzy. The one-card fixes weren't quite the buzz they were before (**Squirrel Wrangler** was fun, but it didn't have the same rush). Then came *Odyssey*. Due to the presence of flashback, we knew that we would be having more tokens in the *Odyssey* block than normal. And we decided to keep each different size constant throughout the block. The 3/3 tokens were elephants. The 2/2's were bears. The 1/1's had to be squirrels. Wasn't it obvious?



## Question Mark

So why are squirrels my favorite creature type? I'm not exactly sure why. I think it has to do with the idea of a powerful wizard overrunning his opponent with small, furry rodents. It makes me smile. And isn't **Magic** supposed to be fun?

How did squirrels come to **Magic** in the first place? See above.

And why are they now so prolific? Because Sue Ann Harkey didn't know how to play **Magic**. That's my theory. If **Waiting in the Weeds** had simply come back with appropriate art, we would have made our squirrel card and I would have moved on. But I was denied and thus we have the world of **Magic** we know today.

Hopefully, this column will go to show you that **Magic** sometimes turns on the oddest of reasons. Five years ago, Susan Van Camp got an inkling for cats so today you're being overrun by

squirrels. Funny how that works.

Join me next week when I dip my toe into the Birds and Elves discussion.


Until then, may you play your next squirrel with a grin on your face.

Mark Rosewater

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