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Printer Friendly 

Making Magic Monday, September 2, 2002

Alpha Mail



Mark Rosewater

Mark goes postal

Several months ago, I wrote a [mailbag column](#). I got such great response I've decided to do one on a regular basis. (Every couple of months or so.) Here is mailbag column, number two.

Type 1 and Only

Ironically, my greatest mail over the last few months connects back to my last mailbag column. In it, I answered a question about **Type 1**. My short response started an online chain of events that led to me dedicating an entire column to Type 1 ("[Playing to Type 1](#)"). That column led to a large amount of mail.

The letters fell into two major categories. First, players who were happy to hear what I had to say. And second, players who weren't.

Here are examples of each. As a general rule, those who agree with me tend to write shorter letters than those that don't: *(my responses are in italics)*

I would like to thank you on writing that article. I appreciate that you're trying to cool down these Type 1 players. I was lied to and told I could play T1 with like a \$75 deck. I went and made a Butterknives deck. It was an optimal list, but it got beaten completely by decks that looked like:

14 Counters + The Restricted List + Some Duals

I can't see how T1 is fun. A decent deck is 1 this, 1 that and full of cards that total to over \$2,000 in value (no exaggeration) and is dominated by cards people can't get, or that are just stupid mistakes R&D made that people love to play with.

I can't see how a format where it may take 20 turns to kill you but you know that you can't win after like turn 3 is fun in any way... People complain that T2 or the next 1.x is too [wimpy] but I think a slower game where it can go from you blowing away your opponent to them smashing your face in and then you coming back and winning is MUCH more fun.

*I got numerous letters similar to yours from players who found the entry level of Type 1 to be daunting. (More about this in the response to the next letter.) You are not alone. Many players wrote in to explain why they choose not to play Type 1 (for a surprisingly large number of reasons). I think its important for the Type 1 players to understand, that while they find Type 1 a great format, that opinion is not shared by all **Magic** players.*

Dear Mark,

I am writing to express my disappointment concerning your recent article on Type 1. I believe you had a chance to show Wizards listens to its customers and you could have introduced Type 1 to the wide audience that MagicTheGathering.com has.

The main problems I have with your article are:

1. Type 1 players are portrayed as people unwilling to try new formats, unwilling to move with the times. Find me one player from 1994 who has played only Type 1. Wanting to play with all of my cards is perfectly natural.
2. Type 1 now has a small following. I agree that tournament Type 1 has a small following for a number of reasons. However in terms of games played, I

believe that Type 1 is still the most common format as most casual games are Type 1. Interest in Type 1 articles on the net is high, Oscar Tan won the recent writer's poll writing only about Type 1. Strange considering the small Type 1 following.

3. Your statistical data and interpretation of the data were skewed. 'We don't hold Type 1 tournaments because we haven't held Type 1 tournaments' is not a reasonable argument. DCI tournament rules (no proxies) means that most Type 1 tournaments are unsanctioned. You state that the lack of support creates a downward spiral but you neglect to mention that despite all this, despite all the bias in the data, the number of Type 1 tournaments is not shrinking. Tell me, based on your data, what you would expect the trend to be given a bit of Wizards support. Surely a clear growth in tournaments would be the expected result.
4. You state that it is by far the most expensive format. This is untrue and reinforces the stereotype of Type 1 as all restricted expensive cards. Compare the cost of playing competitive Type 1 with Type 2. How much do **Call of the Herd**, **Shadowmage Infiltrator** and **Urza's Rage** cost? Type 1 has a high initial cost but you can use the cards forever. You also neglect to mention that there are many Type 1 decks that are cheaper than Type 2 decks (Sligh, Stompy, Suicide). Saying that cards are impossible to get in this internet age is also a bit strange.
5. Showing **Lotus**, **Time Walk** and **Mox Sapphire**. You reinforce the idea that Type 1 is all about restricted expensive cards. Why not show **Kird Ape**, **Jackal Pup**, **Rogue Elephant**, **Dark Ritual**, **Hymn to Tourach**, **Duress**?
6. You said that you have run a Type 1 format at every Invitational but the last invitational had a 5-Color format instead of Type 1. Scrapping the only Wizards organized Type 1 event in the calendar isn't exactly support.
7. No reprints or proxies. This is very disappointing as without some movement on this issue there can be no growth in organized Type 1 tournaments. However at least it is clear and understandable.

Now to be more positive, you asked what can be done to improve the situation with Type 1. Here are my suggestions as a player since 1995:

1. Type 1 side events are low cost and easy to organize.
2. Keep Type 1 in the Invitational.
3. Try the Type 1 US National Competition. You'll see what sort of support is out there.
4. Designing Type 1 cards that don't break Type 2 is not that hard with the exception of combo cards. Creatures abilities like untargetability are much stronger in Type 1 than in Type 2. Uncounterability is stronger too. Anti-nonbasic land and cheap artifacts hosers are much better in Type 1 (**Gorilla Shaman** is a good example). A 'breakthrough' mechanic has been suggested at themanadrain.com with a payment to give uncounterability; this seems promising.
5. Allow *Portal* cards. We can handle their complicated mechanics. Type 1 should be all cards (within reason - *Unglued*!!), if I can use cards given away with books why not beginners cards? Stompy would gain **Jungle Lion** but I can't see anything unbalancing in *Portal* (Horsemanship WW decks).
6. Look at the banned and restricted list. Some Type 1 cards there are unnecessary (**Recall**).
7. Issue 'spirit of the card' errata to cards being abused. **Worldgorger Dragon**, **Illusionary Mask**, and **Illusions of Grandeur** spring to mind.
8. Invite someone who knows about Type 1 to write about it, introduce it to those who are unfamiliar with it or at least put in a few links to decent articles.

Note the low cost of these suggestions to implement.

Best regards,

Dan Saunders

Avid player of Sligh, Keeper, Suicide, Academy, Stompy, Monoblue, Void, Reaplace, a really bad Parfait (my version, not his!), highlander single colour decks of every colour (Type 2 and non-Type 2 versions), Slivers, Plague Rats, Goblins (highlander), Life, Thrulls and Type 2 RG beats, UW control, WW, Domain, Black weenie, RBU aggro control, RG LD, UG tempo, U tempo and many more. (These are the decks I have together at the moment!) Open to change but hoping for development.



According to the latest issue of InQuest, the median value for these six cards combined is a whopping \$1.65 US.

Dan,

You have a lot to say, so let me reply point by point.

Problems

1. I agree that I stereotyped Type 1 players and I apologize. I received numerous letters from many different players explaining how they got into Type 1. Some were old-timers but many others were new players who got sucked in. In fact, the letters made me realize that I forgot to stress an important point about Type 1. Type 1 is really two formats, what I'll call Casual Type 1 and Competitive Type 1. Casual Type 1 is all about having the freedom to play with (almost) every card ever printed. Casual Type 1 is not particularly fast or overly powerful as it's more about exploring the infinite space of the game. Competitive Type 1 is about winning at all costs using every tool available. Competitive Type 1 is all about speed and power and that's what it takes to win in the format.
2. I believe Casual Type 1 is very popular among casual players because they do not take the effort to constrain themselves. They merely play with the cards they own. That said, it's unfair to fight for more Type 1 tournaments (which are much more about Competitive Type 1 as tournaments are competitive by nature) by claiming casual players play it. Casual players on average do not play Competitive Type 1, they play Casual Type 1.
3. The issue at hand is whether or not Wizards of the Coast should schedule more Type 1 tournaments through Organized Play. Organized Play only has so many tools available to determine what players want. Looking at actual tournament data to see what players are playing seems perfectly fair to me. As I said in my column, Wizards of the Coast is not going to sanction the use of proxies (we are in the business of selling cards after all). Thus, it doesn't matter how many Type 1 tournaments are run with proxies. The only tournaments we would run are for people able to play without proxies. You can argue that Wizards should do more to support Type 1 in other places (such as in design of new sets), but faulting us for counting how many people will attend tournaments in the only format we support seems unfair.
4. The cost issue was a very touchy one. More letters talked about this point than any other. First, Casual Type 1 need not be expensive. Competitive **Magic**, on the other hand, is not quite so clear cut. Yes, you can build a \$50-\$75 suicide black deck, but even that deck will be better if cards like **Mox Jet** or **Black Lotus** are added. Competitive **Magic** revolves around using the best tools available. Many of the most efficient tools are expensive. Not all of them. And yes, you can build cheaper decks, but they won't be the best they can be. And part of the fun of Type 1 is using the power cards. Second, many players (like yourself) tried to compare the ongoing cost of Type 1 with the ongoing cost of keeping up with Standard. This is missing the point I made. I didn't say Type 1 was more expensive overall, I said it had a higher barrier to entry. That is, when you decide to start playing the format, it costs more money to build your first deck. Yes, there probably exists a substandard Type 1 deck that is cheaper than the most efficient, rare-heavy Standard deck. But on the whole, Type 1 costs more to start. That was my entire point. To use an analogy I saw on the boards, buying a house is more financially beneficial long term than renting an apartment, yet many people rent apartments. Why? Because they can't afford a house.
5. I'll let you in on a little secret. The columnists don't do their own graphics (or captions). Aaron Forsythe, MagicTheGathering.com's editor, does them. Aaron wasn't trying to make a political statement, he was just trying to make sexy pictures. And cards like **Time Walk** and **Black Lotus** are sexy. I got a lot of complaints on that one graphic. I'm sorry. Aaron's sorry. It wasn't supposed to be an editorial comment. On the flipside, it is equally unfair to link Standard with cards like **Call of the Herd**, **Shadowmage Infiltrator**, and **Urza's Rage**, as none of them are particularly heavily played and none of which are necessary to succeed. In fact, none were in the Top 8 decks at Worlds. They just happen to be the most expensive cards, so you pointed them out. Standard could be summed up with **Psychatog**, **Wild Mongrel**, and **Circular Logic**, all of which are very, very affordable.
6. I said that I run a "Type 1-level" event at each Invitational. By Type 1-level I meant that it was a format that allowed the use of (almost) all the cards. 5-Color fits this definition. Last year's event had players casting **Lotuses**, **Moxes**, and **Time Walks**.

7. *This is the stickler, I agree. I hope by being honest with Wizards opinion on this fact that I can at least help explain what limitations we are bound by when looking at what we can do for Type 1.*

Improvements

1. *Constructed events in general are low cost for the tournament organizer.*
2. *As this year's event is on **Magic** Online, it will be impossible as thousand of necessary cards are not programmed. But in future years, yes I plan to have Type 1 (and Type 1-level events) represented.*
3. *It is planned for next summer at Origins.*
4. *I am currently working on putting a few "Type 1" cards in Bacon (the 2003 fall large expansion).*
5. *I'll bring this issue up with Organized Play.*
6. *Ditto.*
7. *Ditto.*
8. *The Sideboard is planning some articles on Type 1 strategy.*

Thank you for taking the time to explain the different issues you had with my column. Often I am unclear or make a statement that I later realize is wrong. Reader input does have a huge influence, so keep it up.

The Codename Remains the Same

One of the most interesting things about my mail is not how much mail I get on controversial columns but how much I get on non-controversial ones. For example, the column that generated my second most amount of mail, was on codenames ("[Codename of the Game](#)"). Codenames. You know, the funny names R&D gives the set before it gets its real name. I chose the topic specifically because I thought it was non-controversial. Well, it appears that whenever I make an opinion of any kind, there are a number of readers out there who strongly disagree with me.

Case in point. In the middle of my codename column I mention that silly codenames came about because R&D had a bad habit of naming sets after their codename regardless of how good the codename was. Thus, some sets were released with bad names. Now I couldn't have just said this without an example, so I used the set that the people here in charge of naming sets believe to be one of our worst names, *The Dark*. Some readers, disagreed:

Mr. Rosewater:

This is the first time I have emailed you and part of me feels slightly silly emailing about something so trivial, but I disagree with your comments concerning the name of *The Dark* as lacking flavor. I think *The Dark* has more flavor than some of the more recent names being created, such as *Planeshift*, *Torment*, and *Urza's Destiny*. I realize those three names I mentioned do have varying degrees of flavor relative to their sets, but I think *The Dark* is an extremely well-chosen name in its own right.

To me, *The Dark* had one of the best flavors of any **Magic** set. The atmosphere of the set is menacing and dangerous and the title of the set describes that atmosphere perfectly. I think *The Dark* connotes a sense of something all-encompassing, perhaps scary (not in the mocking sense you gave it in your article), and... well... dark. The set described an era of time, a dark period of Dominarian life where the plane had fallen from a "golden age" and surviving in the new world became increasingly harsh and more difficult. I think *The Dark* fits that flavor quite well. Since the set's storyline was not explicitly defined, a broad name like *The Dark* is better-suited and more evocative of the set's somber and dreary mood than some of more narrow set names like *Stronghold* and *Weatherlight*. (As an side note, Jeff Grubb was able to create a spectacular [novel](#) based on the set and if you haven't read it, you should.)

I guess there isn't much else to say, other than I disagree with you on this point and think you should reconsider your stance and take a closer look at *The Dark*.

Sincerely,

Bryan Mabie

Bryan,

You'll be happy to hear that you're not alone. The name The Dark, it appears, has many fans. My problem with the name incidentally wasn't that it didn't tie well to the flavor of the set. Or that the

set didn't have a good flavor. My problem (other than the grammatical "the The Dark card" issue) is that the name doesn't stand on its own well. One of the most important criteria for expansion names is that it is evocative and sounds good as a name in a vacuum. The Dark is a little evocative but is sort of bland as stand-alone word. But hey, that's my opinion. Take it or leave it. I respect that you like the name and I'm glad to see that it evoked such response from you and the other letter writers.

Other writers wrote in to express their appreciation for "in jokes" we put into sets based on the codenames:

The dementia summoners seemed to have a lot of purple going with their bodies in their arts. Argon, when electrons are shot through it in a pressurized tube (like a fluorescent bulb), glows purple (like neon glows orange). Any intentional connection there?

Nick Allmaker

Nick,

You got us. Notice that Torment, the black set, was codenamed Boron. And what color is boron? Black. And speaking of Carbon...



I was reading your article on *Painbringer... dementia summoner... purple... Argon?* codenames and I think it's funny *Judgment* was named Carbon... since carbon is the bases of life and *Judgment* itself is a strong green set... and green stands for life in magic.

It's the only codename since you stopped picking meaningful ones that I thought was coincidentally meaningful.

It's ironic that the scientific codenamed expansion set is also the one that I find the best! Me and science always seem to be meeting up.

Thanks for that little insight into how you guys do things.

lol, something I have to wonder though is, did *Pyromania* have a different name originally? With that picture, people call it all kinds of things!

-Jen Savage

Jen,

See it all makes sense. R&D clearly put great time and energy of weaving the codenames into the set. I can't go on. It's all a lie. R&D didn't even name Argon, Boron or Carbon. But still, how did all these freaky occurrences happen? [Twilight Zone music plays.]

Finally, some people wrote in to help R&D with future codenames: (Note that I mentioned I didn't like guacamole when I talked about how I chose it as a codename for *Urza's Legacy*.)

Guacamole is great, at least, it is when I make it. What's wrong with you?

Suggestions for future block codenames:

Larry, Moe, and Curly
The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly
Ford, Chevy, and Chrysler
Denmark, Norway, and Sweden
Planes, Trains, and Automobiles
Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach
Terminator, Commando, and Predator (though MTG already has *Predator*, *Flagship* as an artifact... perhaps leading to some confusion?)
Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Alice in Chains (you like that Seattle reference?)
Drizzt, Bruenor, and Wulfgar

I could go on for a while here, but you have more important things to read. I'm glad you're having fun at work. Would that we were all so lucky.

Keep at it,

Erik Olson

Erik,

We've actually discussed Larry, Moe and Curly. My other favorite is Planes, Trains, and Automobiles. ("What do you do for a living?" "Right now I'm working on Planes.") Another trio name we discussed and threw out was Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll. Thanks for the suggestions.

Elf Control

My third largest mail-generating column was on the departure of [Llanowar Elves](#) ("[When Bad Things Happen to Good Cards](#)"). Like my Type 1 article, the audience was split.

Some didn't like it:

I've carefully read your 7/29 article on the choice between Birds and Elves. I've seen many different articles talking about how you don't care what the **Magic** community has to say about our game, and how you offer up lame "marketing" excuses for the decisions that R&D makes... for the first time I agree.

The choice between Birds and Elves was offered for one reason and one reason only - Wizards of the Coast wanted an issue that would create controversy and draw attention to their "Selecting Eighth Edition" promotion. Congratulations! You chose a good issue to serve this purpose. Unfortunately by forcing this choice you've also damaged the game. If you really care what the **Magic** community has to say, then offer a vote between [Vine Trellis](#) and [Llanowar Elves](#). Put your money where your mouth is.

I'm not going to quit playing in protest. I love the game too much. I will however begin to agree when I see R&D bashing on the net.

Ken Kilmer

Ken,

I'll be blunt. Both Birds or Elves were not going to go in Eighth Edition. R&D has known this for some time. The decision was made for power reasons, nothing else. When Randy came up with the idea for "Selecting Eighth Edition," it seemed like an elegant solution. We've been talking for months about what the players would rather see. Why not just let all of you decide?

We do care what you have to say, but at the same time, we have a responsibility to balance the game and keep it fresh. The only impact "Selecting Eighth Edition" had on Eighth development was that it allowed all of you to make decisions R&D would have had to make anyway. Cards were not killed simply to drum up excitement.

Others were a little happier:

Mr. R-

I very much enjoyed your farewell to the elf article today. It was a bit poignant, and seemed heartfelt. It speaks volumes for the game when we treat it as an old friend. Keep up the good work.

Fan and occasional player (when the kids and wife let me),
John Cochrane

John,

*Negative feedback can spur change. Positive feedback does something even more important; it energizes the recipient. I spend forty plus hours every week dedicated to making **Magic** the best game possible. It's letters like this that make me redouble my efforts. Thanks.*

And Now For Something Completely Different

Finally, a few random letters to give you a flavor of the smorgasbord of email I receive each and every day.

Dear MaRo,

I enjoyed reading some of the mail you have gotten, and was inspired to write you myself.

Looking back on your thought process for the *Odyssey* block, I loved the idea. Giving dwarves, centaurs, nomads, and cephalids a chance to shine is great. However, I believe you dropped the ball in your inclusion of under-used creature types. The greatest injustice is exemplified by the printing of **Dwarven Grunt**. There is a far superior red creature type that is much less used than Dwarf. No grinning anagram will do. I want goats, and I want them, well, in about year seems reasonable.



Mountain Goat and Zodiac Goat: two of a kind.

Throughout the history of **Magic**, there have only been two goats printed. Those of the Mountain and Zodiac variety. A perfect opportunity to bring back the almighty **Mountain Goat** presents itself, and yet some midget steals the job. Why spark mage when there is the fearsome Spark Goat to be had. There are so many possibilities to be had with the goats. I wouldn't mind having card bearing my name. If you need any inspiration, this picture may provide:

www.dublinproductions.com/pages/promo/vendagoatpage.html

Sincerely,
GoatLord

GoatLord,

*I'll see what I can do. Unfortunately, I have to break it to you that there are no goats in the Onslaught block. But do not give up hope. Goats are hardy animals and I'm sure they'll find a way to claw their way back into **Magic**.*

Dear Mark Rosewater,

I just wanted to know what happened with **Avatar of Woe**. I love the card but isn't it a little too good? Shouldn't it not be able to hit black and artifact creatures or at least not have that evasive ability? Or shouldn't it have an activation cost? It just seems overpowered especially since black can get ten creatures dead without too much problem.

-Andy

P.S.: I opened up two **Avatar of Wills**. Couldn't he have gotten some of Woe's power? It's just 8 to summon 5/6 flyer. Couldn't he at least be 7/6 or even 7/5?

Andy,

*While **Avatar of Woe** has seen a little bit of constructed play, it seems to be balanced. That said, if you and your friends have a problem with it, you can always make a "house rule" and ban it. As for **Avatar of Will**, well, not every card's a winner. Think of it as two mana for a 5/6 flier, at least sometimes, and it doesn't look quite as bad.*

[Quoting "[It Happened One Nights](#)":] "Many newer cards, such as like **Grindstone**, **Tainted Pact**, and **Scalpelexis**, owe their existences to Richard's fondness for coin flips."

Huh? I think you got confused. These aren't coin flip cards.

Charles

Charles,

What I meant was that coin flip cards inspired other cards that had a random element. These are cards where the person playing the card never knows how good the effect will be.

Mr. Rosewater,

Check out this passage from Pope's "Essay on Criticism" (written in 1711!) Lines 130-155, in light of your theory on rules:

"When first young Maro in his boundless mind
A work t' outlast immortal Rome designed,
And but from Nature's fountains scorned to draw:
But when t' examine every part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.
Convinced, amazed, he checks the bold design;
And rules as strict his laboured work confine,
As if the Stagirite o'erlooked each line.
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy nature is to copy them.
Some beauties yet no Precepts can declare,
For there's a happiness as well as care.
Music resembles Poetry, in each
Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
And which a master-hand alone can reach.
If, where the rules not far enough extend,
(Since rules were made but to promote their end)
Some lucky Licence answer to the full
Th' intent proposed, that Licence is a rule.
Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take,
May boldly deviate from the common track;
From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,
And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,
Which without passing through the judgment, gains
The heart, and all its end at once attains."

I got a chuckle out of seeing **Maro** in there while reading last week, then read your article and did a double take. I guess great minds think alike...

God's grace,

David

David,

A little scary, but very cool. Thanks.

That's All They Wrote

That's all we have for this week. I hope you enjoyed the latest peek inside my mailbag.

Join me next week, when we begin our *Onslaught* preview coverage where I explain how the rules team impacted an entire block.

Until then, may your mailbox have as many kind words as mine (and a few less unkind ones).

Let me end with a final letter:


Hi my name is martin price.
I half to go by.

Martin,

Thanks for writing. I have to go, too. Bye.

Mark Rosewater

Mark may be reached at makingmagic@wizards.com.

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

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