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Making Magic Monday, October 28, 2002

Take This Job and Love It



Mark Rosewater

More tales from the R&D gang

About six months ago, I wrote a column called "R&D R&R" where I talked about what the R&D guys do here in our spare time. The article generated a really good response, so I filed away the idea that I would do another "peek into R&D" article later in the year.

It's now later in the year, so I figured it's time to pull the curtain back again to give you all some insight into what kind of shenanigans go on here at Wizards. Today's column is just a collection of behind the scenes stories. Some of these stories are **Magic** related while others are not. But I do think it will give you all a better insight into the guys (and gals) that make your favorite game.

Mission Accomplished

When I first arrived, the **Magic** R&D team consisted of five people: myself, Bill Rose (now head of R&D), Mike Elliott, William Jockusch, and Joel Mick. R&D did have other people, but the five of us were dedicated to doing **Magic**. (R&D works a bit differently today, but that's how it worked back then.) Joel was in charge. The rest of us were the developers. Unlike today where each set gets assigned a unique grouping of developers, we were all on every development team back then.

It didn't take long for each of us to fill a certain role. I was the power gamer. I was the developer who tried to make everything better than before. Better, stronger, faster. Oops, sorry, old television flashback. Anyway, I was the development team member always trying to up the power level of the sets. William was my opposite always trying desperately to keep the power level in check. When push came to shove I usually lost out to William as the team understood the importance of keeping a steady power level (a lesson I would later learn).



But every dog has its day. Mine was while we were working on *Visions*. The set had been extensively playtested and the results were showing that it was coming up a bit low on constructed cards. One day the development team was called to Joel's office. Joel sat the team down and told us that he was worried about the power level of the set. Time was running out, so Joel told us he had a plan. "Here's what I want you to do," Joel said, "Go into the conference room for an hour. Gag William and listen to Mark."

And we did. So the next time you're wondering why *Visions* is slightly above average for set strength, just imagine me with a red pen in my hand smiling devilishly.

They Make The Call

The following event happened about five years ago. This story also concerns William Jockusch, whose start date in R&D was two days before my own. William worked on the development of most of the sets in the last six years. He recently left R&D but his impact on the game will be felt for years to come. This story illustrates one of the many reasons why he'll always be remembered here in R&D.

The following scene actually happened. The names haven't even been changed to protect the innocent. (Who are we kidding, there are no innocents in R&D.):

William Jockusch's phone rings. William picks it up.

William: Hello. Uh, yeah, this is. Yeah, I do. Yeah, pepperoni. Thanks. Bye.

William hangs up the phone.

Bill: Who was that?

William: Pizza Time.

Mike: Why did they call?

William: I hadn't called them yet, so they called me.

Henry Stern: The pizza place called you?

William: They wanted to know if I wanted my usual tonight.

Me: Wait a minute. The *pizza place* called *you*?

William: They were worried. They hadn't heard from me, so they called.

Bill: You've trained the pizza place to call you?

William: Only if I don't call.

There is a short pause and then everyone claps.

R&D Striques Bacqu

While *Mercadian Masques* was in design (at the time codenamed "Archimedes" – see ["Codenames of the Game"](#) for more info), the book department named the book *Mercadian Masques*. I mentioned at the time that it wasn't particularly a good name, but as the name was for the book and not the expansion I felt it wasn't really my issue. But then a number of months later, the **Magic** brand team decided that the expansion and the book should have the same name. At this point it became my issue as I believed it was a horrible expansion name.

You see, we have a list of things that an expansion name needs to have and *Mercadian Masques* missed on several counts. First, we like the names to be one word. It failed that criterion. Next, it's important that the average **Magic** player know what the name means. Also failed. Third, the spelling should be such that players recognize the words. Failed again. And fourth, it has to sound cool. Now this is quite subjective, but I believe it failed this category big time. I felt strongly enough about this that I wrote a petition that I got every member of R&D (including Richard Garfield to sign) stressing that we felt the name was not appropriate for an expansion. While the **Magic** team was sympathetic, they felt adamant that the name of the book and expansion match and the book name had already been locked down. In short, they agreed with me but it was too late.

Okay, I said, could we at least spell "Masques" with the more traditional spelling "Masks"? Once again I was told no. Realizing that we couldn't change brand's decision, we went to a time-tested R&D tradition of making fun of the decision in a future design. The classic story of such behavior is *Alliances*. The people in charge of the story (then called continuity) decided that *Alliances* would have a race of sentient gorillas. The design team (Skaff Elias, Jim Lin, Dave Pettey, and Chris Page) of *Alliances* thought intelligent gorillas were a silly idea so they renamed all the cards in *Alliances* to have the word gorilla in them as a protest. (*Force of Will*'s early name was "Gorilla, Gorilla, Gorilla, Gorilla, Stop That!")

The *Invasion* design team (Bill Rose, Mike Elliott, and myself) decided it was time for a similar stunt. So in every *Invasion* design name we globally replaced "k" with "qu". Thus a simple card name like "Blacker Knight" read as "Blaquer Qunight". Finally, during development the names were changed back because numerous people complained that they simply couldn't read the cards.

Promises, Promises

Every holiday has its traditions. For New Year's Day, people make resolutions for things they will do for the new year only to give them up a few months later. R&D does this except our resolutions are a little more quirky than most. My favorite new year's resolution was made by Bill Rose. You see, Bill is a fan of brownies. He often bakes them at home. One day late December, Bill commented on how he could eat a brownie every day.

That New Year's Bill decided to put his money where his mouth was and made the following resolution: he would eat a brownie every day. Bill's reasoning was that he loved brownies so much that having one each day could only raise his overall happiness level. Each day we would check in with Bill and each day he would show off his brownie for the day. This continued for several months. Finally, Bill came to an important discovery. Brownies weren't as special if you had them every day, so Bill vowed to cut back to having a brownie at least once a week. To the best of knowledge Bill has kept this resolution ever since. By the way, if you ever have the chance to try one of Bill's brownies, I highly recommend them. They're quite good.

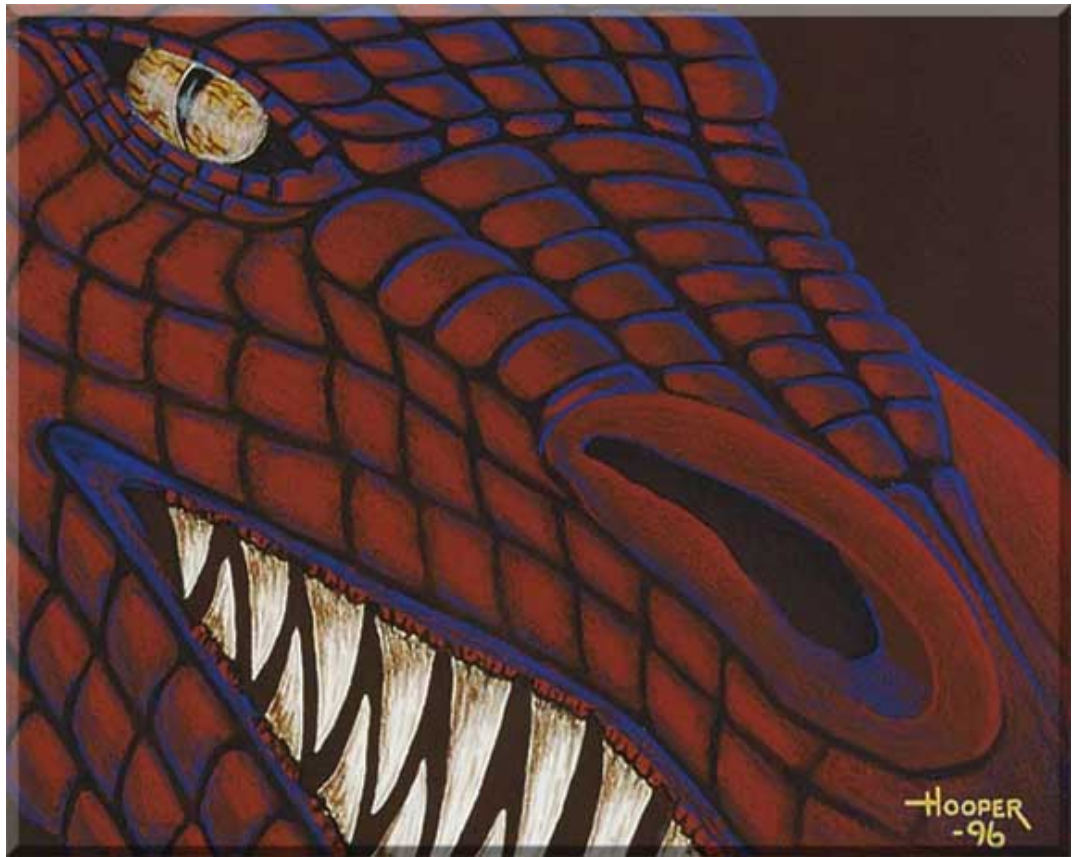
Another one of Bill's resolutions happened late into the year. It was around October when Bill and Joel Mick, then the **Magic** brand manager, were out to lunch. Now understand that Wizards is in the middle of a suburb of Seattle called Renton, and as such, our choice of eating establishments is somewhat limited. At lunch Bill and Joel talked about how they always eat at the same restaurant. They then vowed that for the remainder of the year they would not eat at the same restaurant twice. It was fun watching Bill pick out where to go for lunch because he had to always decide if today was one of the day's to cross off a known restaurant or whether he wanted to venture out to someplace new. For the record, Bill and Joel succeeded to make it through the end of the year, but come January, they were happy to be back at their old haunts.

One final resolution was made by a former head of R&D, Jim Lin. One year, Jim realized that his movie-going put him on pace to see 100 movies that year. He vowed that he would in fact see 100 movies by December 31st. Come December, Jim had gotten a little behind, so on most nights he would invite other R&D members to go see some new movie he hadn't seen yet. Come year's end, he not only saw 100 movies but he wrote up a document that reviewed them all. That tradition continues to this day.

The Flavor Text Often Tells Two Stories

Many years ago (around the time of *Alliances*), Wizards of the Coast made a game called **Netrunner**. It was Richard Garfield's third trading card game (after **Magic** and **Jyhad/Vampire: the Eternal Struggle**). The art director for **Netrunner** was a man named Craig Hooper. Working at Wizards has its advantages, and Craig used his connections to ask a favor of Sue Ann Harkey, then the art director for **Magic**. Craig was an artist and he really wanted a chance to get a piece of his art in **Magic**. Sue Ann said sure.

So when the next set rolled around (*Mirage*), Sue Ann assigned a piece of art to Craig. The piece was called Crimson Hellkite. It was one of the big Dragons in the set. And in **Magic**, Dragons are very important. They are one of the few creature types (along with Angel and, to a lesser extent, Vampire) that inflate the value of a card. When people see a Dragon, they get excited. This means that the art for our Dragons is very important. We want to see a dynamic Dragon in a cool pose looking imposing yet vicious. Craig turned the following piece of art in:



It wasn't quite what we wanted. The art was way too close up and the Dragon had sort of a goofy grin. It was a bad match for the showcase Dragon of the set. So R&D rejected it. Sue Ann defended the piece, but in the end it became clear that it just wasn't going to work. So Sue Ann commissioned a new piece by Gerry Grace:



This one was much more what we wanted, so we used it on *Crimson Hellkite*. But the story doesn't end here. The set after *Mirage* was *Visions*. Sue Ann came to R&D and said that while

she understood why we had to change the Hellkite art, she insisted that we find a place for Craig's art in *Visions*. She had promised him the chance to have a piece of **Magic** art and she wasn't planning to back down on her promise.

This put R&D in a real bind as we just didn't feel Craig's art made sense on a Dragon as it didn't match the qualities we needed for Dragon art. During an early *Visions* development meeting, we talked about what to do. We did have two Dragons in the set, **Firestorm Hellkite** and **Viashivan Dragon**, but we knew that the piece wouldn't work for either. We needed to make a card that matched the art. So if it wasn't a Dragon, what was it? Then I came up with the solution. What if the card was an object that was supposed to look like a Dragon. What if it was a Dragon Mask?!

The solution worked perfectly. When I relayed this story to the flavor text team, we came up with a finishing touch for the card. In the *Visions* story, we forced **Rashida Scalebane**, a woman with a great hatred of Dragons (thus her card's power), to put on the **Dragon Mask** to save the day. This allowed us to include flavor text that hinted at not one but two different stories:

"With no further options, I was forced to don the mask."
—Rashida Scalebane


And They Lived Happily Ever After

I hope you enjoyed my stories for today. Join me next week when I explore infinity in **Magic**.

Until then, may you have many **Magic** stories of your own.

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