

## Nearly a decade of card imagery

# Behind the Canvas: Mark Tedin

Toby Wachter

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Since I started writing this column, I've enjoyed the opportunities I've had to communicate with the fine people who create the visuals for the **Magic** universe. As an old-school player who first picked up a *Revised* starter almost eight years ago, I really wanted to interview the artists who worked on the iconic pieces that started me on the game. Unfortunately, old-school **Magic** artists who still illustrate cards for the game are a dying breed. So, needless to say, I jumped at the opportunity to interview Mark Tedin at Worlds in Sydney, Australia, a few months back. Mark has been with the game from the start and is the man behind such classics as Juzam Djinn and Lord of the Pit, as well as new, memorable pieces like Phyrexian Colossus and Scalpelexis. As this was a special interview, I decided to change the format a little and just let the tape run so that I could transcribe word for word what Mark said.

**Wachter:** What first got you into art?

**Tedin:** That would have to be my brother Christopher. He [is] about three years older than I [am]. He [used to make] pictures, and I thought "Wow, that's really cool! I want to do that too!" So, I went ahead and did that as well. He's also an artist; he teaches computer graphics in Illinois. We both went the art route for that very reason. Also, I think that when I was a little kid I wanted to be an astronaut . . .

**Wachter:** A few artists I've interviewed have said that. They say, "I saw *Star Wars* and wanted to be an astronaut."

**Tedin:** Right. Actually this was before *Star Wars*. My teachers were giving me all these pictures of space shots, and, of course, I was drawing spaceships all the time, and whenever it was on TV I'd be watching it. Pretty soon, instead of wanting to fly spaceships, I just ended up drawing them a lot. So, monsters and spaceships.

**Wachter:** At what point did you realize this was something you could make a career out of?

**Tedin:** Let's see. I was eighteen and I was in college, and I briefly flirted with the idea of being a comic-book artist because I was doing comic book - related art at the time as well. But after college, my friend Anson Maddocks told me about Wizards of the Coast, and a friend of his was the art director for Wizards. They were both still in school at the time. So, he was bringing in some people to do

roleplaying game illustrations. I had just finished grad school in St. Louis, so I decided to just set up camp in Seattle. From then on, it was pretty much doing a lot of stuff for Wizards of the Coast. The **Magic** game started six months later.

**Wachter:** Wow, so that was your first paying gig? You went from student to professional, and Wizards was your springboard?

**Tedin:** Basically it was. I was doing some roleplaying games for Wizards. They had a game called **Talislanta**. This was one of their first products -- they sold it off a few years later once **Magic** snowballed. So [for a while] I was doing that at the same time [as] **Magic**. **Magic** pretty much started at the very end of '92 and the beginning of '93. That's when we first started producing the artwork, and it was ready for **Gen Con** the following fall. It just took off.

**Wachter:** Where did you go for art education? Did it help at all, and if so, how?

**Tedin:** Oh, definitely. I went to four years of undergraduate school at Gonzaga University in Spokane. They had a really good art program there, but it was also liberal arts, so it wasn't just all art. We had history and philosophy and all the liberal arts stuff, which makes it stimulating. Because if you [have] nothing to say with your art, then it's pointless. Then I went for two years of grad school at Washington University in St. Louis, with a focus on painting. I was pretty much doing these four-foot-large oil paintings. Then, when I got to Seattle, of course, the **Magic** art shrunk really small. The electronic scanners at the time weren't that big. We had to make the art smaller because the scanners could only handle so many pixels.

**Wachter:** How would you describe your style?

**Tedin:** I don't know. It's changed over the years. I suppose it's a little impressionistic, although I try to up the focus a bit, especially with larger pieces. But, because the pieces for **Magic** were originally so small, it actually sort of works better if I have a loose style. Although, in the end, I layer it and layer it until it looks like it has a focus to it. It looks like it has more detail than it really does. [For]

*Tedin's reinterpretation of Juzam Djinn for The Duelist. The original card is shown for comparison.*

some of the larger cover pieces of course, you need to focus in and really tighten up the work.

**Wachter:** You mean magazine covers?

**Tedin:** Yeah, *The Duelist* covers. I actually did an advertisement for *The Duelist* with Juzám Djinn, which was a lot more detailed than the original. I was really happy to redo it.

**Wachter:** What do you like about making fantasy art?

**Tedin:** Geez, that's a broad question. I guess it's just being able to do what I've been doing for the longest time. Even in grad school I was making pictures of spaceships and monsters in my sketchbooks. That kind of vexed my professors, but I'm still pretty much doing the same thing. I don't know . . . probably the ability to just go to a different world. It's a bit escapist I suppose.

**Wachter:** Is there anything you specifically like about making art for **Magic**?

**Tedin:** Probably the semiblend of fantasy, but it's not too Tolkien-esque. That's been done for the past thirty years. Fantasy art had a very specific stamped look to it. With **Magic** it's a bit more open-ended. It's got a slight lean towards science fiction, but with a slight sort of Jules Verne-ian feel to the technology, which can be a lot of fun. It doesn't have to stick to a dark ages hack-and-slay sort of thing.

**Wachter:** The whole cliché dragons and wizards thing.

**Tedin:** Yeah, dragons and dwarves aren't exactly my favorite sort of genre.

**Wachter:** I haven't seen you do many of those actually. How was doing art for **Magic** back when it first started different?

**Tedin:** Well, besides the scale of the art . . . originally the art descriptions were much more open-ended. They didn't have storylines and a lot of the mechanics didn't require so much of a description. So, we'd basically get a title for the card and you'd come up with your own interpretation. The art description name for Lord of the Pit was just called "Balrog." That was just the working title. So, it was easy to come up with a dark image and an interpretation of what I thought a Balrog could look like. But, then of course it got changed to Lord of the Pit during the final run because they couldn't use Balrog.

**Wachter:** Eight, nine years later, how do you compare how things were then to how they are now?

**Tedin:** There's more of a storyline that runs through the cards, which can be okay. Actually, when I was working as one of the style-guide artists on staff, it was easy for me to go ahead and do a lot of the designing and, of course, interpret some of my designs. Some card assignments are still open-ended and leave a lot of room for interpretation, but sometimes the artwork will be very specific with art descriptions. Sometimes it can go too far. If someone gives you an art description where they want five thousand soldiers all having pocket watches inside of their pockets and they want you to visually describe something that just isn't possible, you have to back off and kind of reinterpret again and be ready with an alternate suggestion.

**Wachter:** Can you elaborate a little on being one of the style-guide artists?

**Tedin:** For three and a half years Jesper Myrfors brought myself, Anson Maddocks, Anthony Waters, and Matt Wilson [together] to put together style guides. That was right when *Weatherlight* started. I was actually the only guy to stay on throughout the whole Weatherlight saga. There was a specific

storyline involved with the card game now, and they had to have people make consistent designs for certain characters or environments or artifacts like the *Weatherlight* or Gerrard's costumes or an environment like Rath. So, the style guide would be assembled and would be shipped out to the artists so they had an idea of what the world was like.

**Wachter:** Continuity.

**Tedin:** Right, it was basically continuity.

**Wachter:** And what was that experience like?

**Tedin:** Oh it was great -- it was like working on a minimovie. Although, the deadlines got shorter and shorter later on. But, in the beginning we'd have two months or so with each expansion. It was a lot of fun.

**Wachter:** When you first started doing art for the game, there wasn't any precedent for what it should look like since it was entirely new. How did you decide on a style? Were you aiming to achieve a specific look?

**Tedin:** I'm not sure if I had a specific style in mind when I did the first batch of cards. I think I might have done fifteen cards or so; Anson may have done around twenty-five. We just pulled images out as fast as possible, and I think with the process of accumulation with all the different artists, **Magic** sort of developed a look or feel to it that later on people could emulate or expand on. I'm not sure if there was a conscious decision on my part to make some of the images a certain style. The universe itself was very nebulous. A lot of the early cards were kind of abstract in nature. Then again, it wasn't heavily medieval fantasy looking. It still had the ability to have a science fiction or at least an alchemical flavor.

**Wachter:** In general, looking at the **Magic** universe when the game first started and how things are now, what do you think of the comparison almost ten years later?

**Tedin:** Well, I don't know. The goblins changed. Things like the goblins and the Phyrexians definitely gelled into more specific imagery. How does it compare? I'm not sure. I think the storylines have definitely affected the look and feel of **Magic**.

**Wachter:** In a positive or negative way?

**Tedin:** Mostly positive. Although as a personal opinion, because the storyline sort of ties down some of the freedom . . . I don't think **Magic** has the same variety it did in the beginning, because people know to paint by example. So, it doesn't lend itself to having as much off-the-wall, original artwork.

**Wachter:** What's your favorite piece you've done for **Magic** and why? *Cards signed by Tedin: Fireball, Scalpelexis, Mindstab Thrull.*

**Tedin:** I always say that Mindstab Thrull is an easy one for me to . . .

**Wachter:** There were three versions, but you just did one right?

**Tedin:** Right. Originally it was called Mutant Saboteur, because he has some lockpicks on his arm, but they changed the name to Mindstab Thrull. It worked out well because I had a clear idea in my mind, and the artwork came out exactly the way I wanted it to, which doesn't happen all that frequently. More recently, maybe Red Barbarian (Barbarian Outcast). That's another example of a card that came out close to the way I wanted it to.

**Wachter:** How does it feel to be the artist voted to illustrate the first player-made card?

**Tedin:** I was very honored. It was a pretty close call. There was a lot of great competition. So far, it's been a lot of fun.

**Wachter:** Is there any added pressure because this is the first player-created card?

**Tedin:** Oh, definitely. I always wonder what the other artists' interpretations would have been, and I want to top that. It's not competitive, but I don't want to skimp on it. I just want to make it as good as possible so that the other artists won't feel bad.

**Wachter:** So then you have pressure from the players and your fellow artists?

**Tedin:** I know that Matt Wilson and Matt Cavotta were both close-call contenders. I can only picture what those two would have done and at least want to do something as good as what they would have come up with.

**Wachter:** What work have you done outside **Magic**?

**Tedin:** Lots of illustrations for lots of games, including Vampire, L5R [**Legend of the Five Rings**], LBS [**Legend of the Burning Sands**], **Battletech**, **Netrunner**, and **Doomtown**.

**Wachter:** What experience have you had playing the game, if any?

**Tedin:** When the game first came out way back when, Anson Maddocks and I would try to get the work done for the game and for other projects, and playing **Magic** was taking up so much time from our day. We wouldn't get any work done. Later on, we found out we were playing it wrong. We didn't

read the rules exactly, so a game that should have taken fifteen minutes instead lasted about an hour. I haven't played in a while just because it was either do work for **Magic** or play it all the time.

**Wachter:** Did you find that playing the game helped you with making the art?

**Tedin:** Definitely, because you get a sense of how the card mechanics work. If you had a defensive card, you'd make the art something more neutral, and if the card was aggressive and knocked your opponent down, especially a high-level creature like a 10/10, you definitely know to make those things really big looking.

**Wachter:** Do you have a website or anything you'd like to plug?

**Tedin:** Sure! [www.marktedin.com](http://www.marktedin.com).

**Wachter:** Where do you currently live and do you have any family members you'd like mentioned?

**Tedin:** I currently live in Seattle, my sister Mary Pat lives in nearby Lake Terrance, my brother Michael lives in Renton and [is] working for a distribution company, and my brother Chris teaches CGI at one of the art institute schools. And my mom and dad live up in Linden, Washington. They moved down there to retire from southeast Alaska.

**Wachter:** Is that where you grew up?

**Tedin:** Yeah, Anson and myself grew up there together.

**Wachter:** What was it like living there?

**Tedin:** Oh, it was great!

**Wachter:** Why?

**Tedin:** Lots of nature, lots of twisty trees. Lots of inspirational things to look at. In a place that probably has four times the rainfall of Seattle you need to do things to pass the time indoors, and I guess drawing was one of them.

**Wachter:** This is where we go over three pieces you've done. Usually I'd go over the art description and ask, "Why did you do this, this, and this?" but in this case I don't have any because these are older. So talk to me!

## **Necropotence**



**Tedin:** Necropotence was one of those cards that didn't have an art description at all. It just had the title "Necropotence." I asked what the card mechanic was, and I'm not sure if it helped at all. I experimented with a bunch of images . . . I wanted some sort of powerful death image, and in the end, I just came up with a skull and built a costume around him. I had some sort of glowing energy coming out of his hand that mirrored the glyph on his head. That picture came together pretty quickly. I did it in ballpoint and then topped it off with some watercolor and some wash, so it wasn't an image that took me long to complete.



*On the left is an early concept sketch for Necropotence; to the right is the sketch that became the final card.*

**Wachter:** Are you happy with how it turned out?

**Tedin:** Oh, definitely! I actually got to expand on the picture and design the rest of his costume for a couple of *Duelist* articles. It was fun to elaborate on a creature that just started off as a headshot.

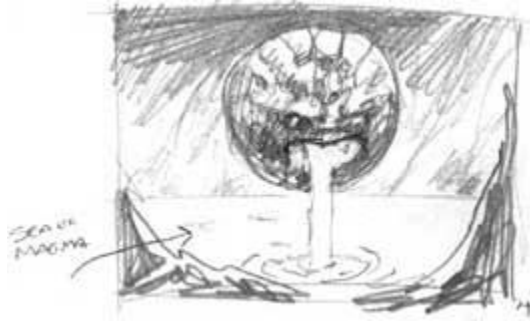
**Wachter:** It probably doesn't hurt that Necropotence is one of the most powerful cards ever printed.

**Tedin:** Yeah, it's one of those images that people ask me to make sketches of constantly. But it's nice because I never draw him the same way twice.

**Wachter:** Let's take a look at this one . . .

## **Chaos Orb**





**Click the image** for a look at all the various Chaos Orb sketches Tedin attempted.

**Tedin:** Ah, Chaos Orb! This was originally called Sphere of Annihilation, which gave me a hint of what exactly this thing was supposed to do. I must have made a page of eight or nine sketches, quick ideas, and then just picked the best one to expand on. [On] this one, the final image looks a lot like the thumbnail image I came up with originally. Some of the pictures had just a sphere with some glyphs on it. Another had black lightning shooting off it. I may have been inspired by a movie I never saw called *Zardoz*, where there was a big floating head. So I was thinking, "What's the worst thing a big floating head could do to you?" and the first thing I thought of was to drop a bunch of lava on you. Better yet, vomit lava! It's one of those things soldiers on a battlefield would want to see the least. It was done pretty quickly, just watercolor with some colored pencil.

**Johan**



**Wachter:** [(pulls out Johan)]

For *Legends*, were the instructions to just draw a bunch of legends?

**Tedin:** They pretty much wanted these memorable heroic or antiheroic personalities, and I think the previous sets didn't have much of that.

**Wachter:** Do you think that goal was accomplished?

**Tedin:** I think so. Some of the cards are pretty memorable. A lot of the artists turned in some interesting stuff.

**Wachter:** Anything else on Johan?



*The preliminary sketch for Johan.*

**Tedin:** Every once in a while when someone asks me to sketch on their card, I'll put a lightsaber in his hand. I hope when people saw the book that came out recently that was based on Johan that they didn't think it was a Darth Maul ripoff, because it was quite the opposite!

<b>Mark Tedin Card Gallery</b>			
(Click each cardname to view)			
Card	Expansion	Card	Expansion
Charging Slateback	<i>Onslaught</i>	Deep Spawn	<i>Fallen Empires</i>
Grassland Crusader	<i>Onslaught</i>	Delif's Cone	<i>Fallen Empires</i>
Nameless One	<i>Onslaught</i>	Delif's Cube	<i>Fallen Empires</i>
Slipstream Eel	<i>Onslaught</i>	Homarid	<i>Fallen Empires</i>
Browbeat	<i>Judgment</i>	Mindstab Thrull	<i>Fallen Empires</i>
Guiltfeeder	<i>Judgment</i>	Orcish Captain	<i>Fallen Empires</i>
		Thorn Thallid	<i>Fallen Empires</i>
Scalpelexis	<i>Judgment</i>	Brothers of Fire	<i>The Dark</i>
Treacherous Werewolf	<i>Judgment</i>	Curse Artifact	<i>The Dark</i>
Barbarian Outcast	<i>Torment</i>	Dark Sphere	<i>The Dark</i>
Vengeful Dreams	<i>Torment</i>	Goblin Hero	<i>The Dark</i>
Ashen Firebeast	<i>Odyssey</i>	Leviathan	<i>The Dark</i>
Gallantry	<i>Odyssey</i>	Mana Clash	<i>The Dark</i>
Limestone Golem	<i>Odyssey</i>	Mind Bomb	<i>The Dark</i>
Repentant Vampire	<i>Odyssey</i>	Psychic Allergy	<i>The Dark</i>
Wayward Angel	<i>Odyssey</i>	Abomination	<i>Legends</i>
Fervent Charge	<i>Apocalypse</i>	Cocoon	<i>Legends</i>
Living Airship	<i>Apocalypse</i>	Horror of Horrors	<i>Legends</i>
Phyrexian Rager	<i>Apocalypse</i>	Johan	<i>Legends</i>
Ertai, the Corrupted	<i>Planeshift</i>	Lifeblood	<i>Legends</i>
Phyrexian Bloodstock	<i>Planeshift</i>	Lord Magnus	<i>Legends</i>
Skyship Weatherlight	<i>Planeshift</i>	Mana Drain	<i>Legends</i>
Angel of Mercy	<i>Invasion</i>	Mana Matrix	<i>Legends</i>
Dismantling Blow	<i>Invasion</i>	Rebirth	<i>Legends</i>
Planar Portal	<i>Invasion</i>	Red Mana Battery	<i>Legends</i>

Scorching Lava	<i>Invasion</i>	Serpent Generator	<i>Legends</i>
Chimeric Idol	<i>Prophecy</i>	Ashnod's Transmogrant	<i>Antiquities</i>
Whipstitched Zombie	<i>Prophecy</i>	Feldon's Cane	<i>Antiquities</i>
Belbe's Portal	<i>Nemesis</i>	Priest of Yawgmoth	<i>Antiquities</i>
Predator, Flagship	<i>Nemesis</i>	Tetravus	<i>Antiquities</i>
Rathi Fiend	<i>Nemesis</i>	Urza's Power Plant	<i>Antiquities</i>
Rootwater Commando	<i>Nemesis</i>	Urza's Power Plant (version 2)	<i>Antiquities</i>
Battle Squadron	<i>Mercadian Masques</i>	Urza's Power Plant (version 3)	<i>Antiquities</i>
Cave-In	<i>Mercadian Masques</i>	Urza's Power Plant (version 4)	<i>Antiquities</i>
Pangosaur	<i>Mercadian Masques</i>	Aladdin's Lamp	<i>Arabian Nights</i>
Wall of Distortion	<i>Mercadian Masques</i>	City of Brass	<i>Arabian Nights</i>
Extruder	<i>Urza's Destiny</i>	Cyclone	<i>Arabian Nights</i>
Keldon Champion	<i>Urza's Destiny</i>	Flying Carpet	<i>Arabian Nights</i>
Defense Grid	<i>Urza's Legacy</i>	Juzam Djinn	<i>Arabian Nights</i>
No Mercy	<i>Urza's Legacy</i>	Phyrexian Colossus	<i>Seventh Edition</i>
Phyrexian Debaser	<i>Urza's Legacy</i>	Telepathy	<i>Seventh Edition</i>
Ring of Gix	<i>Urza's Legacy</i>	Braingeyser	Alpha
Second Chance	<i>Urza's Legacy</i>	Chaos Orb	Alpha
Endoskeleton	<i>Urza's Saga</i>	Circle of Protection: Red	Alpha
Mobile Fort	<i>Urza's Saga</i>	Fireball	Alpha
Phyrexian Colossus	<i>Urza's Saga</i>	Helm of Chatzuk	Alpha
Reprocess	<i>Urza's Saga</i>	Jayemdae Tome	Alpha
Smoldering Crater	<i>Urza's Saga</i>	Lord of the Pit	Alpha
Abyssal Gatekeeper	<i>Weatherlight</i>	Mana Vault	Alpha
Death Spark	<i>Alliances</i>	Nevinyrral's Disk	Alpha
Phantasmal Sphere	<i>Alliances</i>	Sol Ring	Alpha

Phyrexian Boon	<i>Alliances</i>	Time Vault	Alpha
Phyrexian Boon (version 2)	<i>Alliances</i>	Timetwister	Alpha
Phyrexian Devourer	<i>Alliances</i>	Wall of Swords	Alpha
Thought Lash	<i>Alliances</i>	Wall of Wood	Alpha
Aether Storm	<i>Homelands</i>	Winter Orb	Alpha
Memory Lapse	<i>Homelands</i>	Wooden Sphere	Alpha
Memory Lapse (version 2)	<i>Homelands</i>	Nightstalker Engine	<i>Portal Second Age</i>
Retribution	<i>Homelands</i>	Steam Catapult	<i>Portal Second Age</i>
Torture	<i>Homelands</i>	Steam Frigate	<i>Portal Second Age</i>
Torture (version 2)	<i>Homelands</i>	Talas Air Ship	<i>Portal Second Age</i>
Balduvian Conjurer	<i>Ice Age</i>	Cinder Storm	<i>Starter 1999</i>
Force Void	<i>Ice Age</i>	Grim Tutor	<i>Starter 1999</i>
Freyalise's Winds	<i>Ice Age</i>	Volrath's Motion Sensor	<i>Unglued</i>
Glaciers	<i>Ice Age</i>	Mana Crypt	<i>Promotional</i>
Heal	<i>Ice Age</i>		
Mind Ravel	<i>Ice Age</i>		
Nacre Talisman	<i>Ice Age</i>		
Naked Singularity	<i>Ice Age</i>		
Necropotence	<i>Ice Age</i>		
Polar Kraken	<i>Ice Age</i>		
Stench of Evil	<i>Ice Age</i>		
Thoughtleech	<i>Ice Age</i>		

Send questions and comments to [editor@wizards.com](mailto:editor@wizards.com).