



Products
 Gameplay
 Rules
 Help
 Learn to Play
 Fun Stuff

Daily Articles

Wed, Jun 25

[Instants at the Right Time](#)
 Finding the window of opportunity
 by Brian David-Marshall

Tue, Jun 24

[Just Adding Water](#)
 Learning the lessons of instants
 by Anthony Alongi

Mon, Jun 23

[Instant Winners](#)
 Just add water
 by Mark Rosewater

Sat, Jun 21

[Saturday School #33](#)
 Double your Drovers, double your fun
 by Rune Horvik

Fri, Jun 20

[The Size of Sets](#)
 What the number 306 will mean to you
 by Randy Buehler

Thu, Jun 19

[Long Live Rock, Part 2](#)
 The rest of the rock & roll theme decks
 by Mark Gottlieb

Search

Making Magic Monday, November 25, 2002

Getting in the Game

Making yourself heard



Mark Rosewater

Before I get into this week's column, I first want to take a look at the poll from last week. So, here's what you all had to say.

What should we do with old creatures that we reprint?		
Keep the old creature type	1959	22.9%
Update the creature type	5947	69.5%
I don't care	656	7.7%
Total	8562	100.0%

A majority of you want us to update the creature types to the times. (I was also in this camp for those interested.) Like I said last column, this issue is very complex. Having a handle on how all of you feel will add some interesting data to our discussions. (Once again, please remember that your input will be one of many factors.) Thanks.

Okay, on with this week. I don't have to segue too much because my little aside actually has to do directly with what I want to talk about this week. Today I'm going to talk about how an individual **Magic** player can impact the game of **Magic**. And I have a secret to share with all of you. It's a lot easier than you think.

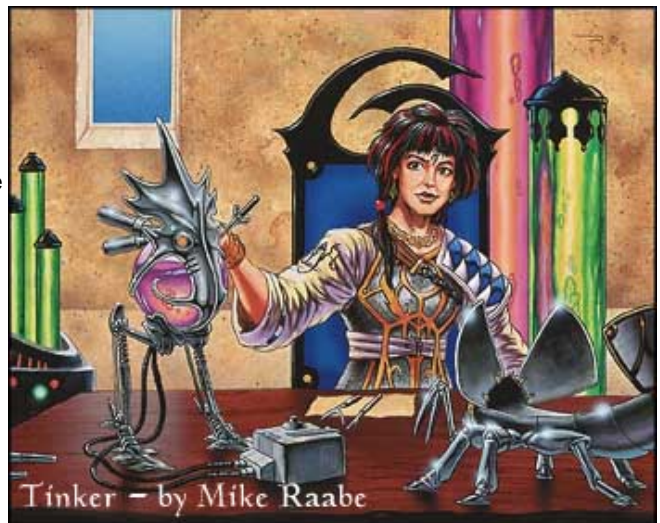
Here are a number of different ways that you can impact the game of **Magic**:

Number One – Learn All You Can About How the Game Is Made

As the saying goes, knowledge is power. If you want to impact the game, you have to start by understanding how **Magic** is made. Reading a column called "Making Magic" is obviously a good start. But don't stop here. MagicTheGathering.com has numerous ways for you all to get a behind-the-scenes peek. Besides my column, I strongly urge you to read Randy Buehler's Friday column "[Latest Developments](#)." Randy's column is to development what my column is to design.

There are also several daily features that can help you learn more behind-the-scenes facts: "[Card of the Day](#)," "[Magic Arcana](#)," and "[Ask Wizards](#)." If you don't read any of them, I strongly urge you to start. In addition, MagicTheGathering.com does feature articles for time to time that will help give you more insight into the **Magic** making process.

A quick comment about "Ask Wizards" before I move on. This feature was designed to give all of you the ability to get specific answers to questions you have. Only a tiny percentage of readers have ever bothered to send a question in. You want to know why Richard Garfield



made a certain choice when designing the game? Ask. You want to know how a particular card came to be? Ask. You want cool behind-the-scenes info? Ask! Based on the number of "Ask Wizards" readers, we have a horrible turnout for questions. This really is a unique opportunity. Take advantage of it. And please feel free to ask weird questions. Over ninety percent of the questions we get are repeats or rules related, which we're handing off to Rune Horvik for his "Saturday School" column.

Learn all about how the game is made.

MagicTheGathering.com isn't the only source for behind-the-scenes news. Our sister site run by the Organized Play department is called Sideboard.com. While Sideboard.com puts the emphasis on tournament play, there still are some revealing design and development tidbits to be found. In addition, OP produces a magazine known as *Sideboard Magazine* which can be found in game and hobby shops that sell **Magic**. In it, I write a design column called "Insider Trading" (this is the third incarnation of the column, it appearing previously in *The Duelist* and *TopDeck*) and Mike Donais writes a development column.

Number Two – When We Ask For Your Opinion, Give It

From time to time, we here at MagicTheGathering.com want to know what you think. Other times we go even farther and simply let you all make a decision that affects the game. The best example of the first is our polls. Randy, for example, does a poll every week, while I'll do one every couple of months. Randy and I pick the poll topics carefully. When we ask you a question, it's because we know it's something R&D is interesting in learning about. The input we get from all of you helps shape policy. So, if you at all care about a poll topic, take the time to answer it.

Features like "[You Make the Card](#)" and "[Selecting Eighth Edition](#)," where we let all of you make actual impact the game decisions, best represent the second category. These require a little more hoop-jumping as we force you register to insure no funny stuff happens in the votes. Many players care about the outcome, yet don't take the time to vote. Numerous people wrote to me quite upset that *Crusade* lost out to *Glorious Anthem* for *Eighth Edition*. When I responded to a handful of these letter-writers, I discovered that they hadn't bothered to vote. If you care, you have to take the time to vote.

In short, the game is influenced most by the people who bother to tell us what they think. We give you numerous opportunities to do so. Make use of them!

Number Three – When We Don't Ask Your Opinion, You Can Still Give It

Up to now, I've been talking about how you can give your opinion when we ask for it. Let's get to the real secret of influencing the game--sharing your opinion when no one asks. There are several ways to do this. First is by letter. You'll notice that at the bottom of every column is a link to contact me. My email is very easy to remember: makingmagic@wizards.com. (Randy's email, incidentally, is latestdevelopments@wizards.com.) And I actually read every letter sent to me. Let me stress that time constraints keep me from responding to every letter, but I do in fact read every letter I receive. Randy and I have some influence on the game and any one who takes the time to send in a letter has our respective ears. (And please remember that Anthony, Ben, and Jay do not work for Wizards so complaining to them isn't going to do much to help your cause.)

This is a rare opportunity and I'm always surprised how few players take advantages of it. But, if you want to do it right, let me share with you some tips about writing to Randy or myself:

- **Keep it short** – As a general rule, less is more when it comes to writing. Why? Because you're trying to make an impression. Get in, say your piece, get out. As someone who reads hundreds of letters a week, trust me, my favorite letters are the ones who get to the point and say what they want without rambling on for paragraphs (or pages). And notice that I put this point first. It's important.
- **Don't bury the lead** – This is a term in journalism that basically means "get to the point." If you're writing a story about a fire, let the reader know in the first sentence that it's about a fire. The idea here is that a journalist never knows when a reader is going to put down the paper, so he needs to cram in as much information as fast as he can. You need to think the same way. While I

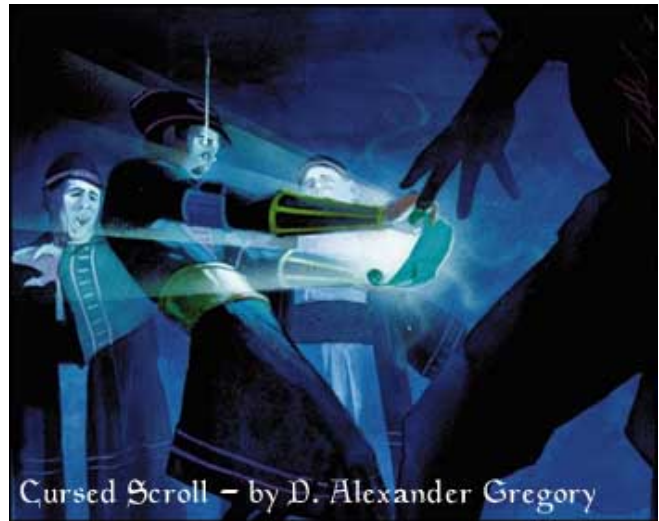
start reading every letter, I there are some I can't bear to finish; some are way too long and get way off track. I have a limited amount of time to read my mail each day. If you can't get to your point, I'll move on to someone who can.

- **Be professional** – This actually means several things. First, be polite. You start your letter by calling me names, I'm less inclined to read on. Second, take the time to proofread your letter. Spelling mistakes and bad grammar do have a negative impact on the reader. (And if English isn't your first language, please let me know so I can give you a little extra slack.) And third, take the time to figure out what you want to say. Too many letters were dashed off so quickly that I can't understand what point the reader is trying to make.

- **Use examples to make your point** – Notice that in my articles I always make a point to give examples when I'm explaining something. The reason I do this is that it helps to clarify what I'm talking about. The same holds true for letters. If you're trying to explain something you do or don't like, give me a clear example so I understand what you're talking about. Again, a common problem I have with letters is that I don't understand what exactly the reader is trying to say.

- **Reinforce the good and the bad** – If you have a problem with something, let me know. Also, if you *like* something, let me know. Too often I only hear from the disgruntled players. If we did something right, that's also important information to pass along. We constantly try new things. If we don't realize one of them clicked with the audience, we are much less likely to do it again.

- **Be realistic about what response you will get** – Many people write to me demanding that I respond. (Not a great strategy by the way.) They then start sending me a series of letters each one madder than the one before it. As I said above, I simply do not have the time to respond to hundreds of letters every week. I do respond to some, but I do so based on the content of the letter. Also, just because I don't respond doesn't mean I haven't read your letter or that it didn't have an impact. It simply means that I was busy doing other things, like you know, designing **Magic** cards.



Mark's Inbox is often filled with nasty surprises...

Number Four - Do It Yourself

Besides writing letters, there is another way to create an impact: writing an article. While we don't take unsolicited articles here at MagicTheGathering.com, there are many **Magic** sites--such as starcitygames.com and brainburst.com--that make a living allowing players to share their opinions and issues with the world. The advantage of writing an article is twofold. First, most of R&D reads the **Magic** sites every day and this is a chance for you to be heard by numerous designers and developers. (For the record, I read a majority of the articles on the major sites, but I promise to specifically read anything with my name or "R&D" in the title.)

Second, you get a chance for other players to hear what you have to say. If you hit a chord, you'll spur others to write on the same issue. When the topic reaches a high enough level, R&D often starts talking about it internally. Sometimes, someone like Randy or myself will dedicate an article to it. This in turn raises the issue even more and we get even more discussion.

This leads into the last opportunity, the bulletin boards. Many sites (including MagicTheGathering.com) have [message boards](#). R&D reads many of these boards because it's a chance for us to watch you talk amongst yourselves. So if you have an opinion on a topic, speak your mind. Also remember that most articles on MagicTheGathering.com have a link to a thread on the message boards. If you like or don't like something an author has said or have a point about the issue raised, please post. And a quick hello to the faithful posters on the "Making Magic" threads. You guys always keep the threads quite interesting.

Last Word

The goal of my column today is simple, I want to drive home a single point: If you want to have an impact on this game you love (or at least really like), just do it. There are numerous ways to make a difference. Pick one (or more than one) and just do it. Write a letter. Post an article. Speak up on the message boards. If you want to get involved, you need to take the first step. We here at


MagicTheGathering.com are trying to create numerous ways for you to do this. Please, take advantage of it.

Join me next week, when I wax poetically about a card close to my heart.

Until then, may you let the world know how you feel about whatever it is you care most about.

Mark Rosewater

Mark may be reached at makingmagic@wizards.com.

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

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