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Printer Friendly

Making Magic Monday, December 2, 2002

There's Always Two Maro

Mark's favorite card... surprised?



Mark Rosewater

Welcome to My Favorite Card Week! The idea behind this week is that each author is going to talk about their favorite card. When Aaron informed me of this, I was a bit dismayed. Here's why: Players have attachments to cards for different reasons. Designers tend to be very attached to the cards they designed. The reason is simple. Creative endeavors require (at least for me) emotional attachment. These are cards that exist because I brought them to life. In many cases they were created because I felt they filled a hole in the game. They were cards I thought were cool and wanted to see in **Magic**. (This, incidentally, is probably the coolest perk of being a designer.)

In short what this means is that my personal favorites are very tied in to cards I've created. Over the years I have designed over a thousand cards. Asking for my favorite card is kind of like asking me to pick out my favorite child. And I have a lot of children. So the task was not easy.

In the end, I decided to follow my heart and talk about the card that has personally meant the most to me. That card is **Maro**. Today I'm going to tell you more about the card **Maro** than many of you might want to know. If you aren't interested in the minutiae of how every facet of **Maro** came to be, make a break for it while you can. But if you like to explore how much goes into the creation of a single card, stay tuned. Because this column, **Maro**... this is your life!

The Mechanic

Maro's creation goes back a long way. I would guess somewhere around 1994. At the time I was freelancing for *The Duelist* making puzzles and writing random articles on **Magic** strategy. I wouldn't join R&D until 1995. Back then I was just another player. Okay, a player who wrote occasional articles for *The Duelist*, but a player nonetheless. Like many players, I tried my hand from time to time at making cards, more for fun than anything else.

Three cards in particular were my favorites. You would know them as **Scragnoth**, **Duplicity**, and **Maro**. (Well, two out of three ain't bad.) At the time there wasn't anything I could do with them, so I filed them away. Flash forward to the winter of 1996. I was working on the **Mirage** development team with Bill Rose, Mike Elliott, and William Jockusch. All four of us had been hired within the last six months and we were sent off to develop the next large expansion (back then known as a "stand-alone.")

During development meetings, the team does what we call a "pass" where we go through the file card by card and make changes and/or notes. Often when we stumble across a card the majority of the team doesn't like, we get rid of it and leave a hole. Now, back in the days of **Mirage**, there wasn't the separation between design and development we have today. As such, whenever we made a hole, we would spend five minutes or so seeing if we could design a card on the spot. At one point we removed a rare green creature and we needed a replacement. I saw my opportunity and pounced. The card I pitched was exactly the card you know today including the mana cost. Obviously, the team liked the idea.

Mark's Favorite Card:



Maro
Mirage rare;
Sixth Edition rare;
Seventh Edition rare

Before we continue, let me address a few issues about the mechanic. First, while I was the first person here to suggest the card, I'll admit it's not the most innovative of card ideas. Numerous other people I've talked to mentioned how they had designed a card similar to **Maro**. At one convention, for example, shortly before *Mirage's* release, I had the chance to play a homemade set in a non-sanctioned tournament (designed by a man named Donald Vaccarino, known as Donald X.) The cards all were stickers with art, names and flavor text. One card whose name I don't remember was a blue **Maro**. I believe it cost 3 and had the flavor text "Knowledge is power... and toughness."

Variable creatures (creatures with a * for power and/or toughness) are an obvious design space and using your hand as a marker isn't exactly revolutionary. So, while I enjoy how **Maro** plays, it's not the card I point to when I want to show my innovation as a card designer. (My first choice is probably the split cards.) That said, I've been very happy with the way **Maro** has worked out. It's a fun card (read: Timmy and Johnny like it) that's not too powerful but occasionally pokes his head in tournaments (meaning that Spike knows who he is).

I've been asked numerous times why **Maro** is in green. Many people (including Donald) feel the mechanic should be blue. I think this stems from the mental flavor we've used for the hand. The reason the card is green is as such. Green is the color of nature. Its end goal as I explained in my green article ("[It's Not Easy Being Green](#)") is growth. Green wins through growth. Mechanically this is reflected in numerous ways. Green, for example, has the best creature curve. And it has the best creature producers (such as **Centaur Glade** or **Squirrel Nest**). It can overwhelm the opponent with creatures. Green has the best spells and creatures to speed up your mana production. It can overwhelm you with its mana growth. Finally, green is king of creatures that grow.

Creatures can grow in a number of ways. First there are creatures like **Fungusaur** and **Whirling Dervish** that get bigger as certain events happen. There are creature like the original **Rootwalla** and its **Basking** offspring that can spend mana to temporarily grow themselves. There are creatures like **Mongrel Pack** and **Symbiotic Wurm** that can turn into lots of little creatures. There are creatures like **Verdant Force** and **Nut Collector** that grow your overall creature force by creating tokens each turn. And finally, there are variable creatures--creatures that change (most often growing) as the game progresses. Examples would be **Terravore**, **Uktabi Wildcats**, **Caller of the Hunt**, and of course, **Maro**.

In addition, **Maro** does a number of things we don't want in blue. First, blue is not about big ground creatures. With the exception of the Serpents (big blue creatures that have islandhome or "new islandhome"), blue doesn't get big groundpounders. Blue's bigger creatures fly. Also, blue is a color that keeps a large hand of cards. Making a creature that grows based on card size isn't really that interesting. You want to put the creature in a color where the stress of keeping cards makes the game play interesting. If **Maro** was a blue creature, it wouldn't have any impact on the way most blue decks play.

The Name

Bill was the lead developer for *Mirage*, so he was taking notes in that meeting. He wrote down my card and wrote **Maro** on top of it. Why **Maro**? Back then we were using an internal email program called First Class. At the time, everyone in the company used Macs. (This has changed in recent years, but I am one of the few Mac hold-outs in R&D.) One of the features of First Class was that it would complete names based on the letters typed in. Bill had figured out the shortest unique combination of letters to get each person he commonly wrote email to. For me, that was the first two letters of my first name and the first two letters of my last.

At some point the file got handed over to Continuity (known today as Creative Text) at the time led by Pete Venters (yes, the artist). Whenever they ran across a card with a decent name, they would leave it. They assumed **Maro** was a made-up name, they thought it sounded okay and so they left it. At some point someone let them in on the joke, but I believe the name would have gotten through regardless. I guess only Pete would know for sure.

The Art

The art director of *Mirage* was a woman named Sue Ann Harkey. *Mirage* was her first set as **Magic's** art director, so she spent a great deal of time hunting down new talent. She is responsible for discovering a number of now **Magic** staple artists such as Kev Walker, Donato Giancola

and Paolo Parente. To accomplish this, she took a trip to several art shows in Europe. At one show, she came upon the work of an English artist named Stuart Griffin. One of his pieces was entitled "The Green Man." Sue Ann loved it, so much so that she bought the rights to the image and put Griffin on her list of freelancers.

Sue Ann came home with rights to "The Green Man" and began looking for a place to put it. At some point she stumbled upon a rare green creature with the following art description:

RG02 Maro

This earth spirit is a creature of the soil. It seems to be the epitome of the fertility of the fresh ground and it thrives on that still unseen. In many ways it is the avatar of the seedlings, maybe plants randomly sprout from Maro's body.

A perfect fit, she thought. And thus, **Maro** had an image. A side note for trivia buffs. I believe **Maro** is the only **Magic** illustration not drawn specifically to be a **Magic** card. (Although technically, I'm sure there's an artist or two out there that used a piece he or she had already created.)



"The Green Man" by Stuart Griffin

The biggest upside of this came when I bought the art to **Maro**. Many other Wizards employees owned original **Magic** art and **Maro** seemed too good to pass up. Not only was the card named after me but I really liked the art. In addition, because it was not created to be a **Magic** card, it was a full size piece of art. (About 12" x 18".) You see, most **Magic** art is pretty tiny (about 4" x 6" to 8" x 10") because, simply put, art for **Magic** doesn't need to be all that big.

For those interested, I purchased the art from Stuart Griffin for \$800. I got a great price for **Magic** art, particularly for a piece that big. **Magic** art, for those interested, can be as cheap as several hundred and as much as several thousand dollars for popular pieces. If these kind of prices don't make you balk, I would recommend looking into acquiring a piece of **Magic** art. Many of **Magic**'s artist have their own website. Try putting their names with a ".com" after them or search Google. It's a cool way to fit your hobby into your décor and if you're willing to be flexible, you can find some real bargains. Just remember though to find out ahead of time how big the piece is so you aren't disappointed when it arrives.

Creature Type

When **Maro** was in development it's creature type was Earth Spirit. Not wanting to reference Earth (an obvious "Earth reference"), the Continuity team changed **Maro** to a Nature Spirit. When *Sixth Edition* came along, R&D was trying to clean up the card types and Nature Spirit seemed like a synonym for Elemental so the card was changed to an Elemental. (For more on R&D's cleaning creature types check my article, "[Beast of Show](#)" from two weeks ago.) For the trivia buffs, the *Mirage* **Maro** is the only green creature to ever have the word "nature" in its creature type. Its not the only green spirit though as **Magic** has had six others (**Radjan Spirit**, **Elvish Spirit Guide**, **Liege of the Hollows**, **Phantom Tiger**, **Phantom Nantuko**, and **Phantom Centaur**). That number incidentally goes up by one when the next expansion comes out.

The Flavor Text

By the time flavor text rolled around, I was a man with a mission. I had created **Maro**'s mechanic. The card had been named after me. I was determined to write its flavor text. In fact, I went to the rest of the *Mirage* flavor text team and asked to write **Maro**'s flavor text. Normally, flavor text for a

particular card is given to numerous writers to increase diversity for flavor text selection. "Just give me the card," I promised, "I'll come up with something good."

While writing this article I dug into my old files and found my old flavor text submissions. Here is the first set of flavor text I sent to the team: (note that I had to list my three favorites)

1. "I did nothing, yet the Maro kept growing."
 2. To understand the Maro is to comprehend the incomprehensible - Femeref proverb
 3. Many a Maro has died with only a Zhalfarin mind for nourishment - Femeref taunt
- There are many theories regarding the Maro. None make any sense.
 - The Maro feeds simply on the thoughts of those around it.
 - "If dependent on the minds of the Zhalfarin for nourishment, the Maro would long be extinct." - Femeref taunt

Wait a minute, I'm sure you're saying. None of those are the flavor text to **Maro**. The reason? The flavor text team didn't uniformly like any of them. I was sent back to the drawing board. I decided to focus on the flavor of the card that I thought was the most interesting. A **Maro** is a nature elemental. Its body is created up of whatever natural elements are around when it forms itself. When it moves any distance, it dives back into the natural aether and reforms itself at its new point. (This idea, incidentally, was heavily influenced by Alan Moore's take on the Swamp Thing. Yes, I'm a big fan of comic books.)

The idea that I latched onto was that the **Maro** does not have a body in a traditional sense. Whenever it requires a corporeal form, it borrows what it needs from nature. From a flavor standpoint this is unique because it means that each version of the **Maro** is different from the next. If you and I were to see the **Maro** at different times, we'd be looking at completely different creatures. From this idea, I got my flavor text: "No two see the same **Maro**."

I knew I'd hit the nail on the head and my next submission was solely that piece. The flavor text team liked it and, as you all know, it ended up on the card.

What Maro Means To Me

I thought I'd end today's column by being a little sappy. Here's your cue to flee if you don't want to hear me get all mushy. (I don't write too many columns where I give the audience two chances to flee.)

What does **Maro** mean to me? First off, I have had a number of wonderful opportunities with **Magic**. Besides designing and developing sets, I've written names and flavor text, I've attending every Pro Tour except one (when my daughter was born), I've traveled around the world, I've been editor-in-chief of a magazine, I've produced videos, and I've even had the chance to illustrate a card (okay, I probably win "worst artist in the history of **Magic**" award, but I did only get paid a buck). So when I walk away from **Magic** (no time soon, I promise), I will have many fond memories. But the one that I think will mean the most to me is the making of **Maro**.

Why? Because it was the one time I became part of **Magic**. Fifty years from now, I might be a distant memory, but my card will always be a part of the game. **Magic** immortality if you will. In addition, having my own card has had numerous perks. I got a nickname. And people know what card they want me to sign. (Before **Maro** came out players used to agonize over what to have me sign.) So please, if you ever get a chance to come to a Pro Tour, feel free to have me sign your **Maro**. As is my tradition, besides my signature I'll draw random things on the **Maro**'s face (glasses, scars, earrings, eye patches, etc.)

My experience with **Maro** led me to choose the "make a card" prize for the **Magic** Invitational. I've enjoyed the experience so much I wanted to share it with some of the pros. I remember Chris



Two other Maros you may or may not have seen: the Mirage playtest version and the Seventh Edition version with new art.

Pikula (who won the Invitational in Kuala Lumpur) saying that he'll forget where the prize money went in years to come, but he'll never forget **Meddling Mage**.


Thanks for indulging me. I think Aaron chose this week as it was a chance to show all of you that each of the columnists has a strong tie to the game. Hopefully, my love of **Maro** (and **Magic**) came shining through.

Join me next week when I dig back into my mailbag.

Until then, may you find your own way to become part of the game.

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