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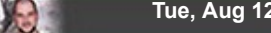


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Making Magic Monday, December 9, 2002

Mail Bonding

Mark cleans out the Inbox



Mark Rosewater

Welcome to my third mailbag column. About every four months, I like to take a look at some of the mail I've received. This will give all of you an idea what kind of responses I got to my various columns.

They Liked It, They Really Liked It

Of all my columns of the last four months, which one caused the most response in email? Was it my controversial column condemning [spoilers](#)? No. How about my column about R&D's "questionable" practice of [condensing creature types](#)? No. Was it my call to arms column encouraging the players to [get involved](#) in the game where I basically dared readers to write in? No.

So what column wins the honor? My Goblin column ("[Mons Made Me Do It](#)") Yes, *that* one. I came in that Monday morning to discover hundreds of emails all saying the same basic thing:



Dear Mr. Rosewater,

You are a bad, bad man!! ;)

That said, R&D needs more people like you.

And please, don't EVER do a Dragons column. I'm afraid to know what'll be the result.

EI-ad Amir

And:

Oh god, you shouldn't do that to a guy at work :)

Good thing my boss is out.

Thanks,

Robert Johns

A few people wrote in to point out my mistake about Charlie Brown never kicking the football:

Hi,

There is a TV episode in which he actually succeeds! It is the one in which Snoopy becomes a magician. He turns Charlie invisible. While walking in a park, Charlie spots Lucy holding the ball (baiting him). He runs and (successfully) kicks the ball.

Such a good moment...

But the best email was the following:

One day your blatant lies & inventions will catch up with you.

Hopefully I might even see the end result.

Mons

Yes, that was the actual Mons. The lesson of my Goblin column is that many of you like it when I loosen up a little bit and get silly. I've heard you and I promise some silly articles in the future.

Down the Middle

The next largest mail generator was my column on leaks ("[The Leak That Was](#)"). Man oh man, did I divide my readers on this one. About half the letters were like this:

First time I have written in regards to one of your articles, so let me start out by stating that I have really enjoyed your articles on a whole. However, I have rarely read an article--such as your leaks one--that completely convinced me to take the opposite position as was intended by said article. If someone had just asked me before reading your article, I probably would have given an opinion that would have been generally negative of the leaks, though not a strong opinion, I admit. After reading your article, I was completely convinced of the desirability of such leaks. The arrogance of your column was extremely surpassing and all I can suggest is that in the future you take a little more time to consider the way your statements will come off sounding. I will give three specific examples of what I found disturbing in your column.

First you start off with the movie trailer comparison. It is pretty audacious to believe that the ruining of a specific story (and the artistic expression thereof), which is indeed the sole and only reason to pay to see the movie is somehow comparable to a **Magic: The Gathering** expansion set, which does not claim to provide a cohesive story nor is its only value in the "first time" viewing of the product. Inviting comparisons to *Citizen Kane* or even *The Empire Strikes Back* does not seem to be a very intelligent move. To put it bluntly, there is nothing positive towards **M:TG** in such a comparison.

Second, you make vague claims to the (never stated quantity) people "hurt" by the leaks. My favorite was, "Also, interesting to note, there is a correlation between leaks and Prerelease attendance: When the set is prematurely leaked, attendance goes down." Wow! Where to even start? Perhaps with the definition of "correlation"? Or perhaps that you make these claims based on supposed statistical information you have but which you do not present? I suggest you have a discussion with Dr. Garfield about what facts are (and are not) to be found in statistical information. I am sure with his background that he could explain to you the inherent dangers in making conclusions based on correlations and statistics.

Finally there is the incredible statement, "So, it personally pains me when our work is lessened because individuals with ill-gotten information take it upon themselves to decide what the public should and shouldn't know." The implication is that YOU are a much better judge of what the public should and shouldn't know! If this was national security or even personal information, I could see the reason for your statement. Once again though, at least to me, you overstepped the bounds of reasonable arguments and used hyperbole that came off as extremely arrogant.

I hope to read many more of your fine columns in the future, but I hope to never read one such as this again. Just my opinion, of course. As an aside, I had no intention of attending this Prerelease until someone handed me a spoiler list and pointed out how interesting a set this will be in sealed deck tournaments. Certainly one person is not statistically significant either, but until you present a little more solid support, I guess I will stick with my personal experience and look forward to full spoilers on future sets.

-- Joel Meyers

While the other half were like this:

Please Mark, STOP THE LEAKS!

I have played since the beginning, and until *Invasion* came out, I knew every card a month before the release and I hated it! I avoided everything **Magic** for a month before *Invasion* and it was such a rush to open packs and get that feeling like I did with *Revised* or *Ice Age*. I miss that.

For some reason, the people who agree with me always write shorter letters. Also, I got a number of letters like this:

At the end of your 10th paragraph, you list a number of surprises that occur in famous movies. It seems hypocritical of you to go about doing exactly what you complain about in the first paragraph. Fortunately, I've seen all the movies you reference, but you've probably spoiled surprises in *Citizen Kane* and *Psycho* for some people (I'm guessing the **Magic** audience would be more likely to have seen *The Sixth Sense*, *Return of the Jedi*, and *The Usual Suspects*). You could have just as easily referenced strong **Magic** cards from previous sets that were leaked to make your point. Please take a little more care in your rants.

Sincerely,

Kevin Hwang

Let me take a moment to apologize. My choice of using the movie spoilers was a bad one. I naively assumed that since I didn't reference the movies that people who didn't see them wouldn't know what movie I was talking about. Kevin is dead on in his complaint. I did the very thing I was arguing against. As that is the definition of a "hypocrite," I am uncomfortable having done it. So, once again, sorry. I'll try to be more careful in the future.

If You Write It, They Will Reply

The next most mail-inducing column was "Getting in the Game," my explanation of how the average player can affect the game of **Magic**. Unlike the other columns, this mail was about a variety of things and not the topic of the article itself. Here is a small sampling:

I bet you're getting a gazillion letters after your "making yourself heard" comment, so I figured I'd chime in with a comment.

Please put **Bandage** (from *Stronghold*) back into rotation, preferably the basic set.

Rationale:

1. It's a card many newbies like to play.
2. It fits well into the white theme of healing. White has many cards like this--but very few that are *good*. (Yeah, I have a Spike in me, as well as a bit of Johnny. Almost no Timmy. **Remedy** is for Timmies.)
3. It's underrated, I think it can make constructed if the metagame is right, but until/unless it becomes a staple, it can be a good card for newbies to use against the "Lotus Brigade."
4. It's a fun card to play; it can save your creatures or yourself.
5. It only costs one mana. (That's why all the cards that are "better" than **Giant Growth** [**Muscle Burst** and so on] really aren't, in most decks.)
6. It doesn't waste space in your deck since it's a cantrip.
7. It's not abusible in insane combo decks.
8. It's chancy and adds unpredictability to the game. You can bluff with it.
9. It fits into the mana curve of many decks.
10. It's situational without being narrow--and you can always play it just to pseudo-cycle it if push comes to shove.
11. Unlike **Healing Salve**, it's not modal. (One fewer modal common in the basic set can be a good or a bad thing.)



You can remove **Healing Salve** if you want to. I'll miss it a bit in my heart, but not in my decks. You've removed the blue, black, and red boons already, so the cycle is

already splintered.

Feel free to answer at leisure or not at all. I might write more letters later on.

Sunnanvind Fenderson

As you can see, different players are very passionate about different cards. While I cannot say when **Bandage** will return, it is a pretty simple card that I expect us to someday repeat.

Next:

Hello. My name is Jason Goodman and I am a big **Magic** fan. I read the articles on MagicTheGathering.com each day and enjoy them a lot.

Anyway, (getting to the point) I would like to tell you at Making Magic how much I learn in the ways of vocabulary through **Magic**. I know the names of many of the cards, and one thing I am known for at school to do is to tell everyone when a word used by the teacher is a **Magic** card. This happens 4-8 times a day. Don't worry, everyone finds it amusing. What I am saying is that since I play **Magic**, I have an edge over some of my classmates.

The most recent example of this was when my teacher asked the class what the word *valor* meant. I was the first to raise my hand, and very few others knew what it meant. She thought my definition was very good. (I was tempted to say "first strike!"). Some words recently that have come up have been *flotilla*, *duress*, *inferno*, *vindicate*, *haste*, *benevolent*, *advocate*, and many others I can't think of right now.

I think you are doing a great job in developing **Magic** as a game, meeting everyone's needs, so keep up the good work!

I showed this letter to the Creative Text guys. It's always neat to see how **Magic** influences different people.

The most common response was something that I receive all the time:

Hi Mark,

I have a question that's somewhat off the wall. Can you give me any information on what it takes to receive a job with Wizards? Any requirements? I'd appreciate it if you could point me in the right direction. Thanks.

Jeff

I've answered this before in a mailbag column, but I get the question so often I thought it best to answer again. All jobs for R&D (as well as the rest of Wizards) are posted on Wizards' web site. This is updated frequently. As far as R&D jobs in specific, they do not come up all that often. Basically people lucky enough to get an R&D job tend not to leave. Also, there is a lot of competition for the limited slots that do open up.

My best advice is the following:

1. Finish college. We (R&D) tend to hire designers and developers who have finished their undergraduate degrees.
2. Get involved in **Magic** in a major way. There are two basic avenues to do this. First is the competitive route. Most of our recent R&D hires have come from the Pro Tour. If you want to show us that you know **Magic**, prove it by winning a lot. Second is to make your name known for having opinions. The easiest way to do this is to become a regular columnist/contributor to a major **Magic** site. (MagicTheGathering.com, by the way, does not take unsolicited material.) R&D reads the websites daily, so if you have good ideas, this is the best way to demonstrate this to us.
3. When an opportunity arrives, you need to treat it like you would any job interview. Be professional. This means having a well-written résumé handy. Having a good cover letter. Do your homework. If an opportunity arises, you'll only get one shot.

But Wait, There's More

Here are a number of other interesting letters replying to various columns. First, a reply to "[It's Not Easy Being Green](#)," my explanation of the flavor of green:

Mr. Rosewater:

I would like to begin this letter by saying that I am a big fan of yours. I have greatly enjoyed your articles in the past (as a matter of fact, I have the archive of your work for the site bookmarked) and I look forward to more compositions on your part.

I greatly enjoyed your article "It's Not Easy Being Green." I find it to be very informative, and I liked the revelation that R&D does take the nature of each color in **Magic** seriously (as opposed to simply cranking out mechanics for \$). I also intend to set this article and it's future brothers aside, as initial orientation goodies for some friends of mine I am attempting to coerce--that is, convince to play the game with me.

That having been said, I find myself unable to resist the temptation to nit-pick at your team's designations for certain characters in the color wheel. ("Ah!" I hear you say. "First the flattery, then the admonition!" Really, it's not like that. I simply have too much free time on my hands.) I love the concept of laying out characters like this for the purposes of classifying them and also, to better define the color they belong too--very cool. However, there are two characters that were placed in green that I simply can't abide.

Godzilla. Laugh all you like, but I am a fan of Godzilla's, and have been for over ten years now. I favor the new generation movies (902'-present, which are much more serious sci-fi horror, and not kiddie movies with lame rubber costumes). Godzilla was originally (and to some degree, remains) a metaphor for the atomic horror. The basic idea being, if the destruction, misery, pain, suffering, and poisoning of the environment inherent in the use of nuclear weapons had a physical body, it would be Gajira/Godzilla. Godzilla also, to a lesser degree, represents the natural forces that the Japanese live at odds with (this is the reason the entire country is basically made of paper and balsa... live on the coast of a tiny island prone to enormous tsunami, earthquakes and hurricanes, and you damn well better build things like you plan to be able to replace them.) And finally, G is driven by rage--his mutation has given him a dull sort of high anima intelligence, which is what prompts him to lash out at everything around him.

Thus, I feel it is only fair to consider him to be tri-colored: green, for his continuing nature as a predatory animal, and instinct; red, for the rage, bad temper and preponderance for destruction; and black, for the atomic horror--everything around him dies, if not under his onslaught, then slowly in his poisonous wake.

Buffy. ("Criminy!" You say. "This loser has nothing better to do than write a lengthy and extremely pretentious letter to complain about a rubber lizard and a kung-fu cheerleader?! He has utterly no life!" To that, I can say only: You are quite correct, sir.) The nature of Buffy's powers is, as yet, unexplained. The question has been presented on the show, but we still don't know who or what provides a slayer with her power. So, deciding she's green based on that is out. That leaves us with the slayer herself. Buffy, any superficial characteristics aside, is loyal, helpful, and protective of people in general, very white characteristics. She believes in people (not just "human people"), and has a genuinely loving and honorable nature--the things white should be about, at it's very best.

I don't see the correlation of her stalking at night making her green. She stalks at night because that's when her "prey" does the same. As for her being at odds with the council, that is due to their stuffy and overbearing nature. The council should be (and may once have been) "white." But they have, in a sense, lost their mission. One high-ranking member of the group even recently stated, "The council fights evil. The Slayer is a tool, an instrument, which the council uses in that fight." A detached, unemotional view... intellectual to be sure, but removed from compassion and a sense of what is necessarily right... and that's "blue" if ever I heard it. Also, the council is dedicated to the gathering and controlling of knowledge, most particularly that of the occult, supernatural and magic. Hmmm... blue again (or possibly black, depending on how far those last parts go...).

That, sir, in a nutshell, is my complaint. I hope I haven't overly bored you with this... as I said before, it is just something I wanted to nit-pick about. I also feel I have weighed these concepts myself (I am an amateur "house rules" designer, and long ago began work on the "Buffy" expansion set). I will leave you to your laughter over that, and thank you again sir, for your work with **Magic: The Gathering**. It is folks like you that have made it the addictively fun game it is, and I wish you good joss in your continued efforts to do so!

Thanks again!
Silent Lex

It's interesting to note that almost all my mail on my green article talked about the characters I chose to represent green. The characters people had the most issue were Buffy, Wolverine, and Godzilla. Let me talk really quickly about those three.

Buffy – I'm a Buffy fan, so this explanation is going to get into a little detail. I'll try to fill in the uniformed.

Many players like to equate Buffy's fight against evil as being a white quality. I see that as anti-black which is to me is both white and green. White (as you will learn when White Week rolls around) is very focused on structure and rules. This is why I put the Council in the white camp. When Angel (a good vampire, for those unfamiliar with the show) was poisoned at the end of the third season, the Council refused to help him because they "don't help vampires." This inflexibility is very much a white way of functioning.

Buffy does not function in this way at all. If Buffy was rigid in her task of ridding the world of evil, many of her "friends" (including Angel – as Angelus, Anya, and Spike) should be dead. Buffy very much follows her instincts instead of some pre-determined set of guidelines. This instinctual sense is very green. Also, Buffy is by nature a predator. The show has taken great lengths to explore the primal quality of the slayer. (Take a look at the first slayer that we saw at the end of the fourth season.) All of this is green.

In addition, the show plays into the fact that Buffy was chosen by external forces to be the slayer. Nature, essentially, gave her powers. She acts as the slayer because she feels it is her role. This is also very green. I'm not saying that Buffy doesn't have a touch of white. She does. Buffy does have a moral center and that is white. But much more of what defines her character comes from green. She's a predator. She's instinctual. She was born into her role. Thus, I strongly feel she fits in green.

Wolverine – Wolverine isn't angry; he's feral. When he goes into a bloodlust, he becomes an uncontrollable animal. Red is all about embracing one's feelings. Green is about embracing one's instincts.

Like Buffy, Wolverine is a predator. His two superpowers are also both green-centric. He has enhanced senses (the better to hunt with) and a healing factor (the better to heal with). The flavor of green regeneration has also been that of enhanced healing. (Black's regeneration, in contrast, is flavored as reanimation).

So we have an animalistic predator with enhanced senses and the ability to quickly heal. As I said before, he's even named after an animal. That's pretty green in my book.

Godzilla – Godzilla is the one I've been most swayed on by letters. I think we stuck him green originally as we were looking for characters that were instinctual creatures. That is how King Kong got on the list. The letters have made me realize that we didn't take Godzilla's origin into account. He is not a natural being like King Kong. Godzilla was created by mutation. This definitely pulls Godzilla towards black. He also has some red traits (he is a giant fire breathing lizard) in that he is guided by emotion much more than solely instinct. In short, you all have convinced me that Godzilla shouldn't be on our green list. (Although to be fair, he does have a little green in him.)

Next we have a letter in response to my **Maro** column last week ("[There's Always Two Maro](#)"). By the way, I had some people ask about the title. The two **Maro** in question were my card and me. This doesn't make it any less of a bad pun, but it does explain what I meant. Anyway, here is the question I received most from my column:

Hello, Mark...

You mentioned that you had "even had the chance to illustrate a card."
I was wondering, if you would be so kind as to tell me, what that card is?

-Chris

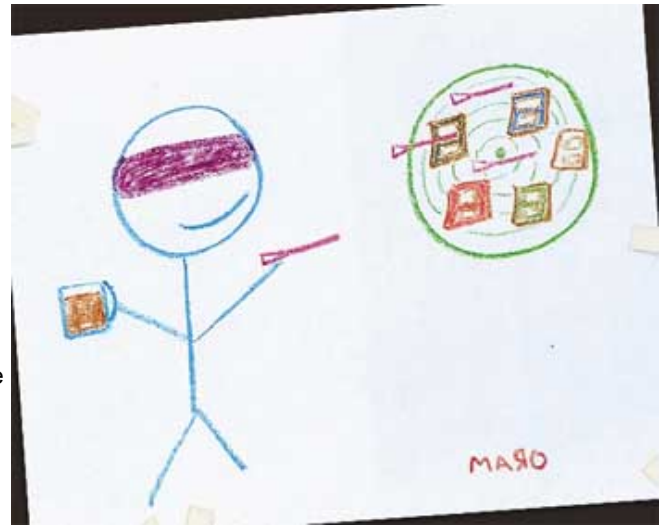
For some reason I thought this fact was pretty well known, but I keep forgetting that *Unglued* is no longer as readily available as it once was. The card is from *Unglued* and is called **Look at Me, I'm the DCI**. I thought I'd take a paragraph or two (or six) to explain how I ended up a **Magic** artist.

During *Unglued*, we were brainstorming about some of the fun things we could do with the art. We could have one card that was two cards put together (B.F.M.). We could have art knocked off one card onto another (*Free-for-All* and *I'm Rubber, You're Glue*). We could have the art be tiny (*Spark Fiend*). Or sideways (*Burning Cinder Fury of Crimson Chaos Fire*). One idea we came up with was the idea of doing a crayon drawing.

Magic is well known for its art so we thought it would be fun to poke at that with a clearly inferior picture. It was then that a light bulb popped above my head. You see, it's always been my dream

to illustrate a **Magic** card. The big stumbling block has always been that I can't draw. But a crayon sketch? Even I could do that. In addition, the crayon sketch being drawn by me seemed like a funny addition to the joke.

So I went to Jesper Myrfors, who was not only the art director for Alpha but for *Unglued* as well, and asked nicely. But wait, the story doesn't stop there. So I went to the store and bought a giant box of Crayola crayons. I believe my artistic approach is a technique unique to me. I drew sixty copies of my art and then picked the best one.



In order for Wizards of the Coast to own the art, they have to pay me for it. Now, I knew that the quality of my art was low. So, I asked to skip the minimum fee and instead be paid a dollar. You would think this would make everyone happy. But no. Here's a dialogue I had with one of our finance persons who, for the sake of dramatic license, I will call Henrietta: (this occurred on the phone).

Me: Hi, this is Mark Rosewater. I haven't gotten my check yet for illustrating a card in *Unglued*.

Henrietta: One moment. Oh. Would you mind if you just came down and we gave you a dollar bill?

Me: Well yes, actually. I want a check.

Henrietta: For one dollar? Do you know how much it costs us to process a check? A lot more than a dollar.

Me: Yes, but I was supposed to be paid a larger sum of money and instead I asked only for a dollar. Thus, I am saving the company money.

Henrietta: But you're wasting money by not just taking a dollar bill.

Me: Think of it this way. I did work for Wizards and I want to be paid for it. My payment is a one-dollar check that might cost more than a dollar.

Henrietta: But why does it have to be a check?

Me: So I can frame it with my original art.

Henrietta: You're not even going to cash it?

Me: Yes, I'll be throwing all of Wizards books off by a dollar.

Two days later, I had my check. It is now framed with my original art in my den next to my framed **Maro**.

Next, we have the response to my article on condensing creature types ("Beast of Show"). I got a lot of mail from players responding to my poll question (about what to do when we reprint a creature with an out of date creature type) all giving the same solution:

Why not make reprints of the **Longbow Archer** a "Soldier Archer" creature type and **Clergy of the Holy Nimbus** a "Cleric Priest" creature type, then they inherit the original flavor and get condensed at the same time. So when there's a **Tsabo's Decree** for Archers or Priests it'll still work. **Abu Ja'far** could become a "Leper Nomad?" The problem of less efficient Decrees (calling Archer because an old card is being played) when there are other Soldiers around must already happen now (except to people who are up-to-date on the Oracle text changes) so this solution wouldn't make that any worse. The multiple creature type could even be useful in mirror matches, when a player can Share the Triumph with Archers instead of Soldiers to minimize symmetrical boost to the opponent's soldiers. How about "Beast Harpy Bird" for the **Cavern Harpy**? :)

I printed this letter because I want to let you all know that I've heard your message and this option is being added to the mix when we talk about the issue.

Finally, a letter in response to "[Mistakes, I've Made a Few](#)," my column on learning from my past mistakes:

Hi!

I've just got a question I'd like to ask, perhaps to be answered in your column... regarding cards like **Duplicity**, where a card that "might have been cool" turns out to be unusable, do you ever return to these ideas and "try again" later? Perhaps (in the case of **Duplicity**) make a similar card that forces you to switch every turn as the

drawback, more in keeping with the original concept? Or, do you just "sweep them under the carpet" and move on to something else permanently?

Similarly, when a card such as **Donate** turns out to be way too powerful, do you avoid a similar concept altogether in the future, or do you allow yourself to consider a variation that may offset the power level with a drawback of some sort (loss of life, or maybe some sort of "tap and hold" temporary **Donate**)?

Thanks!

--Jefferson Gilkey
Lebanon, MO

The short answer is yes, we return to old ideas. Part of being a good designer is constantly feeding the **Magic** beast. To do this we always look to our past for good ideas. Quite often a poorly executed card makes for an exciting new card. Now, if the idea caused problems, such as **Donate**, we are more cautious when we re-explore that area. But will you see new cards influenced by **Duplicity** and **Donate** in the future? Yes. When? Well, I can't tell you everything.

Almost Five Thousand Words Later


My mailbag columns always seem to be my longest. I really like including as much mail as possible and I like to print the letters in their entirety, so I hope you'll excuse the length.

Join me next week when I talk about "my first time."

Until then, may you find a job where hundreds of people write to you every week with feedback.

Mark Rosewater

Mark may be reached at makingmagic@wizards.com.

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

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