

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, March 10, 2003

# Inquiring Minds Want to Know, Part 1



Mark Rosewater

## The public interviews Mark

**T**his week, I'm sitting down with the readers of my column to have a personal one-on-thirty-thousand chat. While I have done numerous interviews over the years, I believe this one will hit a few areas I've never talked about before.

Before we begin, I commend all of you. You guys did your homework in spades. I got a ton of questions—so many I wanted to answer, in fact, that I've decided to break the column up into two sections. Today is the first half, and the second half will appear two week from today (as next week is a theme week). Thanks to everyone out there that took the time to send in a question.

Without any further ado, let's begin the interview.

**Till:** How tall are you? How much do you weigh? Married? Kids? Hobbies besides **Magic**? Sports? Do you got any special ideologies? How would you describe your self or your personality (e.g. funny, relaxed, impulsive...)?

**Mark:** Might as well start with some personal questions. I'm 5'5", 170 lbs. I've been married to a lovely woman named Lora (who I met at Wizards) for almost five years. I have a daughter named Rachel who turns three in April. My hobbies outside of **Magic**: writing, comics, television, and, of course, games. I'm not too much into sports although I have been skiing since I was seven. In fact, my father is retired and is now a part-time ski instructor.



Mark, Lora, and Rachel Rosewater.

I have a very optimistic view to life. I'm a "stop and smell the roses" kind of guy. And I value the importance of making and keeping unique memories. At my wedding, Richard Garfield called me "the most aggressively fun person" he's ever met. As I hope my column demonstrates, I have a good sense of humor and I enjoy making the people that matter to me as happy as I can.

**Yannick Van Doosselaere:** What kind of player are you, Timmy, Johnny, or Spike (or which combination)?

**Mark:** A year ago, I wrote a column called "[Timmy, Johnny, and Spike](#)" in which I explained the three psychographic profiles that we use in design and development. The article began with a test. The test revealed what I firmly believed: I'm a Johnny through and through. I have a little Timmy in me and I can appreciate what Spike likes, but if left to my own devices I build decks built around cards like [Sorrow's Path](#) and [Tunnel](#).

**Robert Gruver:** You and I have met twice. Once at Pro Tour – Dallas in 1997, and last year at Pro Tour – Houston. One thing that I noticed is that you smile an awful lot! Is it because you make **Magic** or are you just that nice of a guy?

**Mark:** Well, for starters, I love what I do. Designing **Magic** is my dream job and I don't take it for granted. One of the reasons I attend all the Pro Tours is that I like interacting face to face with the

public. To me, a great perk of my job is that what I do makes others happy. And making all of you happy makes me happy. Also, despite message boards painting me as the devil, I really am a nice guy. Really. (Okay, maybe not humble, but nice.)

**John Golden:** Favorite three movies of all time and why.

**Mark:** All right.

1. *Harold & Maude* – Every person has a film that speaks to him or her. I was really touched by this film the first time I saw it and have since seen it over a hundred times. There are so many nuances to the performances and the script is dead on.
2. *Heathers* – As you can see I like black comedies. This film has amazing art direction, sharp dialogue and captures perfectly how I felt about high school.
3. *Brazil* – The first time I saw this film, I had dreams about it for days. Surreal but clever.

**Max Levin:** On *Look at Me, I'm the DCI*, who did you base the stick figure on? Is it you? Is it an actual DCI? And what's in the cup? Coffee or hot chocolate?

**Mark:** I've been asked this questions numerous times. The person in the picture is none other than Richard Garfield. You see, as an artist, I work with live models. Here, in fact, is the actual picture I used to illustrate the card.

As to the brown fluid in the mug, I can only say that I did actual research and used the beverage most consumed by Organized Play. I am not allowed to reveal the contents, unfortunately.

**Frank Donadio:** How long did it take you to come up with and draw the art for *Look at Me, I'm the DCI*?

**Mark:** I sat down one night with a pad of paper and some crayons. I had figured out what I was going to draw and with what colors. Then I drew sixty versions of the piece and picked the one I liked. I'm assuming this is not a technique used by any other **Magic** artist.



*The model for Look at Me, I'm the DCI was none other than Richard Garfield.*

**Jonathan Englander:** What is your impression of Richard Garfield?

**Mark:** I talked about this in a column earlier this year. Richard Garfield is a great guy. He has a true love for games and a very playful spirit. Obviously, his creation has had a profound impact on my life. But having him as a friend has also had a wonderful impact.

**Andrew Healy:** I recently read in a column of yours that you have gone back to comic collecting. Being a collector myself, I was wondering if you could please tell me your top five ongoing monthly series that you collect and why? Also, you mentioned that you consider *Watchmen* to be your all-time favorite comic series (I wasn't sure if you meant of anything you have ever read, or limited series). Do you also have a top five limited series, of any length? Say, *Lone Wolf and Cub*, or *Kingdom Come*, or what have you?

**Mark:** This is a toughy. If forced to pick five, I think I would pick, in no particular order: *Powers*, *Y: The Last Man*, *Fables*, *Ultimate Spiderman*, and *Astro City* (which is finally back out – yeah!). My favorite writers currently are Brian Michael Bendis, Mark Millar, Grant Morrison and Greg Rucka. My favorite limited series: *Watchmen*, *Dark Knight Returns*, *Squadron Supreme*, the color run of *Zot!*, and *Astro City: Confessions*. (I know the last two aren't technically mini-series.)

**Laura Mills:** What was your very first experience with **Magic**, and how did it lead into writing for *The Duelist*, and finally in going from Hollywood to **Magic**?

**Mark:** One of the downsides of writing is that it's a very solitary profession. To get out of the house in Los Angeles, I took a part time job at a game store. I figured I could make a few bucks, get out of the house, and do something I thought was fun. My first exposure to **Magic** was from a young

man that came into the store looking for **Magic** cards. He described the game to me. I said it sounded very interesting, but we didn't have them.

Several weeks later at the San Diego Comicon, I finally had a chance to see some cards although I was unable to purchase any. Then later that month at a game convention in Los Angeles I finally got my hands on some Alpha cards. I was hooked very quickly and, in fact, bought two boxes of Beta starters and two boxes of Beta boosters.

I got involved with *The Duelist* because I felt the first issue did not have enough content for the more experienced player. So I sent a letter suggesting an idea for a new puzzle column. After a month of not hearing anything, I called up the editor-in-chief, a lovely woman named Kathryn Haines, to find out that one of my puzzles had already been printed in issue # 1 1/2.

From the puzzle column I started writing other articles. That led me to writing for some **Magic** books. That got me in touch with R&D, for whom I started doing freelance work. And then one day while visiting Seattle I said the fateful words: "Yeah, I might be willing to move here."

Mike Davis, then the head of R&D, responded with, "How soon could you start?"

**Elliott Mark:** What was the first **Magic** card you ever designed? (Maybe even just in your head, before you got to Wizards?)

**Mark:** Both **Scragnoth** and **Duplicity** are cards I made long before I got to Wizards. The first card I designed that ended up in a set was the card **Gustha's Scepter** from *Alliances*.

**Nathan Hurst:** What was the first cool **Magic** card you owned?

**Mark:** The first starter deck I opened contained **Stasis** and **Darkpact**. (Alpha starters only had two rares.) I thought **Stasis** was the bomb for a month or two because I didn't understand that my permanents were also affected by it.



Tempest's *Scragnoth* and *Duplicity*: two Rosewater originals.

**David B. Grau:** My question for you is in response to your most recent article, "[Bursting with Flavor](#)" is what was your first real deck, and what did that deck consist of? Did your deck have a name? Do you remember how well it did (record)? How did it win, if it ever did, (strategy)? When did you redo it, destroy it, or do you still have it?

**Mark:** I don't remember what I called the deck, but the pet deck that I had the earliest and played the longest was a blue/green weenie deck. I guess today it would be called a Type 1 deck but back then it was just a **Magic** deck as the formats had not split yet. The deck would throw down **Scryb Sprites** and **Flying Men** that would be enlarged with **Giant Growths**, **Unstable Mutations** and a single **Berserk**. With a good draw the deck could win on the third turn. With a god draw, the second turn. I tuned the deck for over a year, and many of my tournament wins were with that deck.

**Francois Vincent:** What is the reaction of people who don't game when you tell them what your job is? I'm talking about people who have only heard vague references to something called "D&D". How much explaining do you have to do?

**Mark:** Let me give you a sample of the average conversation I have when I explain what I do. (And I swear to God this is as truthful as I could make it.)

**Them:** So what do you do?

**Me:** I'm a game designer.

**Them:** Oh, so you make computer games?

**Me:** No. I make trading card games.

*(They give me a blank stare.)*

**Me:** Do you remember **Pokémon** cards?

**Them:** Yeah.

**Me:** Well, we made those. The game I work on, called **Magic**, is sort of like that, but more for adults.

**Them:** They're cards with pictures of dragons? I've seen those.

**Me:** Exactly.

**Them:** So it's like **Dungeons & Dragons**?

**Me:** It's fantasy like **Dungeons & Dragons**, but it's a completely different game. It's a strategic card game. Sort of a cross between bridge and poker.

*(They give me another blank stare.)*

**Them:** That's nice.

**Anonymous:** How much power do you have when making **Magic**? For example, if everyone likes a card and you hate it how much weight will your decision carry? Will they rethink it or just ditch it? Also vice versa; you like a card that everyone hates. Would you still be able to have it produced as long as it doesn't break any rules?

**Mark:** As I've explained in past articles, there are only a handful of **Magic** designers. Of them, I have seniority to everyone save Bill Rose (who started two weeks before me). As such, in the matters of design I carry some weight. In other matters, I'm just one of numerous voices. What it boils down to is that R&D is made up of people with specialties. When the question is in one of your specialties, you have a higher priority. When it isn't, you are free to chime in your opinion, but it will carry less weight than someone who does specialize in that area.

**Chris Cade:** Do you really talk to yourself out loud, or was that just a humorous anecdote to help readers visualize the thought process when you're creatively thinking?

**Mark:** A little of both. I do actually talk to myself, but most of the dialogues in my column are to illustrate a point in a humorous fashion.

**Dan Banks & Sarah K. Duey:** Do your family/friends ever tell you to get a real job or criticize you for making games for a living? I know if I was writing scripts for television shows and making playing cards all day, my parents would tell me to get a real job.

**Mark:** My family has always been very supportive. My father is the person who got me into games and I think that I have the kind of job he would have loved to have. My job makes me very happy. My loved ones want me to be happy. Thus, they are very supportive of my job.

**Ryan Naylor:** Cookie dough or mint chocolate chip?

**Mark:** Mint chocolate chip.

**Ture Eijsbouts:** Cats or dogs?

**Mark:** Cats. I have a cat named Tabitha.

**Frank Pedota:** Boxers or briefs?

**Mark:** Briefs.

**Hagen Kirk:** What were your favorite moments at the Wizards Invitational? Did you at least have some moral victories?

**Mark:** For those of you that missed this event, it was two weekends ago, and it was a blast. The games are preserved on **Magic Online** for anyone who wants to see them. My favorite matches for anyone wanting to check in:

Round 2 – Two-Headed Giant – Mike Elliott and me versus Alan Comer and Bill McQuillan (lead **Magic** editor). Mike played a **Kilnmouth Dragon** and amplified it by showing an **Imperial Hellkite**. We won that one.

Round 3 – Two-Headed Giant – Bill McQuillan and I lose a game to Elliott and Comer even though we were winning at one point by 37 to 1. The kill was with **Phage**.

Round 5 – Standard – versus Fred Royal (Fred oversees **Magic Online**) At one point in the game with two dragons in play, I ask Fred, "What's worse than two dragons?" to which Fred reluctantly replies "Three dragons?"

Round 7 – Tribal Wars – Playing against Ramon Arjona (a **Magic Online** programmer) I make a comeback that involves animating **Rorix** for the kill.

Round 12 – Preconstructed Decks – Mismatched in both deck and skill, I somehow beat Randy even though I manage to make one of the biggest blunders of the weekend while doing it.

Round 14 – Limited – versus Worth Wollpert. In game one I have my craziest draw of the weekend.

I had a blast and ended up 8-7 which for me is pretty good. I strongly urge you to check it out if you can.

**Taylor Tan:** What card is your arch nemesis? Which card has beaten you more times than you can count?

**Mark:** If I had to pick a card, I think I would pick **Desert Twister**, but not for the reason you might think. The place it keeps beating me isn't in the game. You see, I don't believe green should have straightforward creature removal. As such, I'm not a fan of **Desert Twister**. (I'm not against the mechanic. I made the card **Vindicate** in *Apocalypse* that's the same effect but in what I consider the proper colors.) Shortly after I got to Wizards, I valiantly tried to keep it from being included in *Fifth Edition*. Obviously, I lost.

Every time R&D tries to create a new green spell capable of killing a creature, I always try to stop it and the card **Desert Twister** is always brought up. "We put it into the basic set, so obviously we're okay with the card power."

That card is my nemesis. But one day I'll get it. Oh yes, one day.

**Preston Ringrose:** How long does it take to write one of your articles? Do you know what your last name means and where it is from?

**Mark:** The time needed varies depending on the article. This one took longer than normal as I had to sift through all the questions. Anywhere from an hour to three or four hours. My last name is an Americanization of Rosenvasser. My father's family came to America from Germany in the 1820's. Rosenvasser is German for, well, Rosewater. I always assumed that some early ancestor was a gardener.

**Ben Zurbrugg:** So how do you choose what to write about each week? Is it just random or what?

**Mark:** Every other week is a theme week so that helps focus my topic on those weeks. I have no one system. Each week I sit down and I try to figure out what people might want to read. My column does a number of different things, so I also try to shake up the tone and style from week to week. Sometimes the column is silly and other times its very serious. My most popular columns have come when I address a growing player concern, but there isn't enough material for 50 of those a year, so I mix it up.

**Jason Kim:** If you were to characterize yourself as one or more of the colors of **Magic**, what would you be?

**Mark:** While working on the color wheel philosophies, we did this as an exercise. Everyone on the team, including myself, thought I was red. I'm a very impulsive person who tends to act on my emotions.

**Tormod Akeren:** I often catch myself thinking of **Magic** in situations where it doesn't always seem appropriate (during lectures, interviewing patients, and so on). What's it like for you, considering your job and all? Do you think of **Magic** a lot as a private person, when you're "off-duty," so to speak?

**Mark:** I don't think creative people are ever "off duty." I think about design projects all the time. On numerous occasions I've woken from a dead sleep with an idea I have to write down. It's how I got one of the mechanics for *Mirrodin*.

**Frank Donadio:** Do you ever have brilliant ideas that everyone else thinks are crazy?

**Mark:** All the time, Frank. All the time.

**Ryan Carper:** I have always dreamed of having a career in something that I just love to do, but I was never sure if that would be a good thing or a bad thing. How has working for Wizards, specifically on **Magic**, changed your view of the game?

**Mark:** One of the problems of working in television is that sometimes I know more than I should. I can't count the number of times I've said to my wife, "I know what's going to happen" while we're watching a show. Writers use certain tricks that if you're privy to them you see what's coming. **Magic**, though, is not as bad. My theory is that the designers don't create the structure like a writer would. We design the pieces but the players choose how they'll be used. That means I'm constantly surprised by what people do with the cards I design.

The big change probably has to do with my global view of the game. There are things I think about and stress over that I would probably not give a second thought to if I was just a player. But does making **Magic** make playing it any less fun for me? Luckily, no.

**Ryan Carper:** How has the game changed your life?

**Mark:** Let's see. It made me move from Los Angeles to Seattle. I met my wife at Wizards. Most of my savings come from the Hasbro purchase of Wizards. In the last seven years, I have traveled to every continent save Antarctica. I have been the editor-in-chief of a magazine, have had seven different columns in three different magazines and three different websites, been a video producer, become famous in my field, and ran a tournament dressed as a giant chicken. Yeah, I'd say it's had some impact.

**George Davis:** Why do all the other columnists slag you off so much?

**Mark:** Let me start by translating for those not from England. I've been informed by Rules Manager (and Englishman) Paul Barclay that slag off is English slang for "to put down in a derogatory manner." So why am I put down so much by other columnists? I'm not sure. Perhaps jealousy?

The real reason is that I make myself such an easy target. Heck, even I put myself from time to time. The columnist all get along quite well so realize that it's not done in a malevolent way. Now, some of the message boards? There I'm not so sure.

**Ken Kilmer:** Because of your position in **Magic** R&D, and because you write a weekly column that details and discusses controversial decisions, I suspect that you often receive criticism from discontented players who are unhappy with decisions that you may not have made or may not even completely agree with. Do you ever tire of being **Magic's** premier scapegoat?

**Mark:** It comes with the job, so I've learned to live with it. Does it ever get me down? From time to time. No one likes reading nasty things said about them. But overall, I'm used to it, so it doesn't bother me day to day. The people who seem more upset are friends and family. One day, for example, a good friend of mine and his wife came over for dinner. My friend's wife likes to "Google" people when she's bored at work, so that afternoon she had put my name into the search engine. When she walked in the door, she asked, "Do you know a guy named..." and told me a name.

I said, "Yeah. He doesn't like me very much."

She was fuming. How dare he write the inflammatory things that he did! He doesn't even know me! I explained that one of the things I loved about working on **Magic** was how passionate people get about the game. The downsides of this passion was that occasionally I become the focus of it. Her reply, "I don't know how you do it."

So yes, it's not the selling point of the job or anything. But I enjoy being one of the spokesmen of the game. If that means I have to wear a target on my chest, well then bring it on!

**Mikael Pelletier:** What's most satisfying about being employee of R&D? Being creative, being published, having an impact on the game, seeing others play with your work, or what?

**Mark:** My job has an endless number of perks. In one tiny corner of the world, I'm a celebrity. I get to write a column that tens of thousands of people read every week. I travel all over the globe. But my most satisfying moment happened late at night one year at a convention called DragonCon (that takes place in Atlanta each summer).

It was near midnight and I was sitting in the open play room. Sitting at a table was a mother who was obviously there with her kids. I sat down to talk and it came out that I worked on **Magic**. She held my hand and said, "Thank you."

I asked why. She explained that she had two sons; her youngest son was very bright but lacked focus and was socially isolated, and her older son has a learning disability and was having problems in school. Then along came **Magic**. For the younger son it was finally something that was bigger than he could comprehend in one sitting. It actually provided a challenge for him. Also, it brought him in contact with other kids his age that he could bond with. The older brother's drive to learn the game helped him overcome some of his learning disabilities. It was so successful that his teacher asked the mother for some cards so she could use them with some of the other children.

"So you see," she said, "To me, **Magic** is a godsend. And for that, I am eternally grateful."

## The Question Remains

Well, that's all the space I have for today's column. Join me in two weeks when I run the remainder of the interview.


Join me next week I discuss a mechanic that has burned R&D on more than one occasion.  
Until then, may you have all the answers to your own questions.

Mark Rosewater

---

Mark may be reached at [makingmagic@wizards.com](mailto:makingmagic@wizards.com).

---

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

**MagicTheGathering.com Recent Content**

- Instants at the Right Time *Wed, Jun 25*
- Eighth Edition Rollout - *Fallen Empires Wed, Jun 25*
- Eighth Edition Rollout - *The Dark Wed, Jun 25*
- Style Guide: Akroma *Wed, Jun 25*
- Just Adding Water *Tue, Jun 24*
- Eighth Edition Rollout - *Homelands Tue, Jun 24*
- Eighth Edition Rollout - *Ice Age Tue, Jun 24*

**Full Archive**



[WHAT'S NEW](#) [CORPORATE INFO](#) [WHERE TO BUY](#) [INTERNATIONAL](#) [SUPPORT](#) [SITEMAP](#) [PRODUCT LIBRARY](#)

© 1995-2003 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
[Wizards is headquartered in Renton, Washington, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057.](#)  
[PRIVACY STATEMENT](#)