

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 24, 2003

# Inquiring Minds Want to Know, Part 2



Mark Rosewater

## The conclusion

Welcome back to the interview. (For those that missed the [first half](#), I'm doing an interview in which all the questions come from my readers.) Take a seat and we'll continue.

**Jensen Bohren:** Do you believe there is room for another magazine like *The Duelist* on the shelves? Will the market support it?

**Mark:** I think I would say "no" with a "yes" rider. The reason I say no is that the world is a different place now than it was even ten years ago when the **Magic** game first appeared. The Internet has completely changed the way players gather information. As such, magazines have a number of huge obstacles. First, the game can change so fast that it's hard for a magazine that has to be written months ahead of time to stay current. Second, the Internet is free, which makes players must less willing to plunk down money for a magazine. Wizards' answer to this was the creation of **MagicTheGathering.com**. I believe that together [Sideboard.com](#) and [MagicTheGathering.com](#) can fill the void formerly filled by *The Duelist*. In many ways, I feel it's even better as it allows a two-way communication not available in magazines.

**Raymond Russel, Ph.D.:** Do you think the Internet has had a positive or negative impact on creativity in **Magic** play, overall?

**Mark:** Positive, definitely positive. I remember early **Magic** back in '93 and '94 when the Internet was not as prevalent as it is today. Each city had its own metagame. I remember traveling from Los Angeles to San Francisco and finding out that **Moat** cost four times as much in San Francisco (San Francisco was home to Brian Weissman and "The Deck," the earliest famous deck). While the time was quaint, I actually prefer today's environment, with its global metagames.

The Internet has allowed the **Magic** community to blossom. We are much less tied to geography. Numerous **Magic** sites allow small niches of players to focus on different aspects of the game. And, to me, the fact that a newer player can download a deck from the Internet is more of a positive than a negative. I feel the Internet has allowed **Magic** players to advance much quicker than they used to. Between all the strategy articles and decklists, the newer player has so many more tools to learn.

The Internet is an important part of the **Magic** metagame. If I somehow had the power to change it, I wouldn't.

**Jula:** On average, how long does it take you to think up your little end-of-column sparks of wisdom? Do you think of something, write it in a little black book, and bide your time until you can squeeze it in somewhere relevant? Or do you write the article and spend an hour or two racking your brain for something quirky to say?



**Mark:** My article usually has a theme, so my little "sparks of wisdom" come pretty easily. When my column first started, I was amazed at how much attention my little signature line got.

**John:** You said that with the *Mirrodin* block the **Magic** game will no longer be influenced by the storyline, other than in the artwork. Does this mean that Legends will be no more? Also will there be flavor text? If so, will it be relevant to the current storyline?

**Mark:** I think some of my comments on my flavor article ("[Bursting with Flavor](#)") have been misunderstood. The card game will still have a story with characters. The major shift made by the **Magic** Creative team is that they are no longer trying to tell the story in the cards. The cards will show the pieces of the story (people, places, and things) but will do nothing to connect the dots. Instead it will focus more on defining the environment. Thus, flavor text will still exist, but it will focus less on telling the story and more on explaining aspects of the environment.

**Renn Brown:** Do the art and mechanics complement each other? This usually prompts the question: Which came first, the art or the mechanics? From what I've learned from different articles on the site, a card is developed and then an art description is written from that. My question to you is this: Are cards ever created or inspired by the art? In relation to this, I often read (in [Magic Arcana](#) on [MagicTheGathering.com](#)) that art is sometimes switched to a card that is different from the one for which it was originally intended. How often does this really happen, is it a rare oddity, or is there a period in development in which art is exchanged and matched to different cards?

**Mark:** Most of the time, the art is conceived and assigned after the card's mechanics are created, but there are a number of exceptions:

1. The card changes after the art has come in -- Often when filling holes in a set we have to design a card with the artwork in mind.
2. Graveyard pieces -- Whenever art isn't used for one reason or another, it's stuck into something we call the graveyard. Often when we need an art piece on short notice, we turn to the graveyard. Other times, designers are asked to design around graveyard pieces to use them.
3. Top-down design -- From time to time, we will ask artists to give us art without giving them any guidance. Then we design cards to match the art. This is a good test for the designers and allows the artist occasionally to try something different.

**Elliott Mark:** Are there any woodchucks in the **Magic: The Gathering** game?

**Mark:** Not yet. :)

**Chad Saunders:** A long time ago, I was reading a *Duelist* magazine and there was a letter (or article, I can't really remember) that mentioned the card Proposal. You probably know what I'm talking about, so I'll make this short. Because I was collecting Quinton Hoover's artwork at the time, it interested me to see how the art for the card came out. Searches online were no help, so I emailed *Inquest Magazine* with my problem. They told me to check an upcoming issue with an answer. So, I waited, picked up the issue to finally see the art, but what do I get? A short answer about how Richard [Garfield] didn't want the art published. My question to you is why didn't he want the art published?

**Mark:** First let me update the readers who haven't heard of what the card Proposal is. When Richard Garfield asked Lily (now his wife) to marry him, he did it by mocking up a card called Proposal. It was a white sorcery that cost **\*\*\*\*\*** and said something to this effect: "Richard asks Lily for her hand in marriage. Shuffle both libraries together and everyone wins."

As a favor to Richard, Quinton Hoover illustrated the card. The card was mocked up (it wasn't actually printed). It took three games before Richard drew the card and as was able to play it. Lily, of course, said yes. The two are happily married with two children.

So, why won't Richard share the card Proposal? Because it's something personal that he and Lily wish to keep to themselves. It was never intended to be something for the public. The man has done so much for all of us. I think this is a simple request we can respect.

**Mark Cogan:** Does Skaff Elias really think it's worth being dumber to jump higher?

**Mark:** Yes, he does.

**Mark Young:** In your "[Banned on the Run](#)" article, when describing the creation of the card **Frantic Search**, you basically take credit for creating the "free" mechanic. Does this mean you were personally responsible for breaking the **Magic** game so badly that we needed the wretched *Mercadian Masques* block to fix it?

**Mark:** Why, yes I was.

**Anthony Alongi:** I thought I'd save you the trouble of reading your other emails for your interview article. You can just read mine and answer them, and the **Magic** community will no doubt be satisfied. Who is your favorite daily writer at **MagicTheGathering.com**?

**Mark:** Let's see, I have an ego the size of a barn. Uh, me.

**Anthony:** It's Anthony Alongi, isn't it?

**Mark:** No. You're definitely in the top five though.

**Anthony:** No, really. Isn't it Anthony?

**Mark:** Uh, no. It's me.

**Anthony:** I did NOT just hear you say it was yourself, did I?

**Mark:** Well, as this is in writing, I guess technically, no you didn't "hear" it.

**Anthony:** What exactly do you like most about Anthony? Put another way, if you had to pick just one cool thing about Anthony that you wanted everybody to know, what would it be?

**Mark:** I like Anthony's stick-to-itiveness. Once he gets an idea in his head, nothing's going to stop him.

**Anthony:** If you were tree, how could you be more like Anthony?

**Mark:** I'd be less wooden and more careful how I intimidate others with my bark.

**Anthony:** Name five things Anthony has that you don't. For example: rugged good looks. (Answers such as "receding hairline" and "oversized ego" will not amuse us. The people want the truth!)

**Mark:** Oh, I have an oversized ego (remember "big as a barn"). Anyway, let's see . . . Anthony has a multiplayer **Magic** group. I don't. Anthony has a beard. I don't. Anthony has webbed feet. I don't. Anthony has a hit out on him by the KGB. I paid my hit off several years ago. And Anthony has the heart of a child (in a jar in his basement). I lost mine during my last move.

**Anthony:** In this new *Mirrodin* universe, does Anthony run everything? Do all the Merfolk and Dragons and Bears and Penguins dance to his every command? Because you know, Mark, that would be a cool universe. I'm just saying.

**Mark:** Unfortunately at this time, I am not free to comment on the *Mirrodin* world. But, let me say this. If it were up to me, the fall expansion would have been named *Alongi World: When Penguins Attack*.

**Anthony:** All right, buster, time for some hardball. Why doesn't the new *Eighth Edition* card design contain the inscription, "In Alongi we trust"? WHY DIDN'T YOU CHECK WITH ME ON THIS? DON'T YOU CARE WHAT I THINK?!?

**Mark:** For legal reasons we had to put it on a hidden spot on the card.

**Anthony:** Why don't you talk more about your Hollywood days, when you were writing for *Roseanne*?

**Mark:** Yeah, I did a [poll on that very topic](#) that I never posted. Here are the results:

Do I mention my Roseanne writing gig too often?		
The cow eats Froot Loops at midnight.	3735	52.8%
Yes, we get it. Move on.	1485	21.0%
No, but try to restrict it to times when it's actually relevant to what you're talking about.	624	8.8%
No, we are fascinated by your illustrious past.	484	6.8%
No, but could you try to bias this poll a little less?	449	6.3%
No, I like my designers to have a healthy ego.	294	4.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7071</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Mark:** What I've learned from this is that my readers seem to love non sequiturs. The kite burns as Moscow falls. And thank you, Anthony, for a lovely bunch of questions.

**Adam Eckersley-Waites:** Do you design sets, or even blocks, with particular audiences (for example, casual players, Draft, Constructed powerhouse) in mind? Given the apparent differences between the *Odyssey* and *Onslaught* power levels, I would be interested to know.

**Mark:** We don't tend to start off by designing to a particular group. Normally, we pick a theme, and during design, and sometimes as late as development, we figure out what group will be most attracted to the theme. So no, we don't tend to say, "Hey let's make a set for Johnny."

Instead we look back at what we've done and say, "You know, I think Johnny's really going to like this."

**Boyd Christensen:** In the days of yore, **Magic** has pitted many of its colors against one another by establishing cards that have equal but opposite effects, for example, **White Knight** vs. **Black Knight**, **Roc of Kher Ridges** vs. **Phantom Monster**, or **Blue Elemental Blast** vs. **Red Elemental Blast**. This mirroring effect sometimes puts in a twist to better represent the colors' attributes. **Serra Angel** vs. **Sengir Vampire** for example. While not helping to establish a true difference between the colors, it did help make a flavor of yin vs. yang if you will. Will this flavor of walking the same path but for very different reasons, resurface at any point? Or will it be lost in the strands of differentiation?



**Mark:** We still do cards with that kind of flavor, but not in as great a number.

I know that Richard, for one, is a big fan of reflections. I do believe that we are at a low ebb right now, and as I love to say, I believe the pendulum will eventually swing the other way.

**Anonymous:** You always talk about the color wheel and the flavor of each color. But how did those colors' identities come about? Why is blue knowledge? Why is white orderly? What about the other colors and their significances?

**Mark:** Richard did not create the colors as much as he organized old ideas in an orderly fashion. At the heart of the color wheel are age-old philosophies and conflicts. The genius of the color wheel is how Richard created a nice sense of balance. The colors preexisted **Magic**. The color blue, for instance, has long been associated with the elements of air and water, which in turn, are associated with the mind and thought. (As an example, I am a Gemini, which is an air sign. As such, I am supposed to be very fluid in my mentality and thoughts.)

**Robert Davis:** Why is it that every major ability, except counterspells, seems to be shared among two or three colors? Black is the best at creature destruction, red is next, then white. White is now supposed to have the most efficient weenies, with green coming in second, and either red or black next. I understand that countermagic and bounce are blue's hallmarks and, really, the only things blue can do effectively. But countermagic really hoses red, and there isn't much a red mage can do about it. It seems like red gets hosed very effectively by both blue and white, and there's nothing red can do about it. Because it seems like each color gets a lesser version of the power as you go around the color wheel (the only thing black creature removal usually worries about is whether the creature is black -- red you have to burn it for as many points as its toughness, and white usually has very specific conditions), why isn't countermagic shared around the color wheel? The reason blue magic really irks me a lot of the time is that there is no answer to it except another counterspell, which you have to be playing blue to get. I think other colors should get counterspells, just a lesser version, perhaps usable on only one or two different types of spells. Is this possible?

**Mark:** First off, there are numerous abilities not shared with other colors, such as discard is unique to black, land searching (like **Rampant Growth**) is unique to green, and damage prevention is unique to white. The list is longer than you might think. In addition, there are numerous abilities like direct damage that sit squarely in one color and have very specific bleeds to other colors (**Drain Life** effects in black for example).

As for counterspells, we have bled them in the past. **Illumination** and **Withering Boon** in the *Mirage* set bled limited counterspells to white and black (blue's allies) respectively. The reason we don't bleed it more is that much of blue's identity is defined by the fact that its "permanent removal" is preemptive. All the other colors have destruction effects to deal with problem permanents. Blue does not.

We do want other colors, especially blue's enemies, to have answers to counterspelling, but that does not need to be other counterspells. The "can't be countered" ability on cards like **Scragnoth** and **Urza's Rage** is a move in this direction. In addition, blue's biggest enemy is speed as blue decks usually take time to set up and stabilize.

In short, the game is best when each color has its own distinctive way of handling different problems. If every color had the same answers, I believe the game would become much more repetitive and a lot less fun.

**James Harmon:** Do you have any concerns or reservations that R&D's current philosophy regarding the color wheel could, in the long run, have the negative effect of limiting card design and stagnating game play?

**Mark:** Your question plays into a common misconception about creativity. Restrictions do not hinder creativity -- rather they help it thrive. Blank slates are very daunting, but established hierarchies allow for much greater exploration. As an example, I feel I get much more creative on **MagicTheGathering.com** theme weeks because I'm forced to think in a direction I might not naturally think. Oh, it's Zombie Week. What can I do for Zombie Week? The color wheel is a great tool that aids us in design, not an albatross around our neck that slows us down.

**Adam Harrison:** I sometimes feel that R&D considers tourney players more than casual players when designing cards. I know you'll say R&D caters to both, but if you really valued the casual players, wouldn't you still be making cards like **Chaos Orb** and **Raging River**? Those are the kinds of cards that add flavor and *fun* to the game, in my opinion. A hundred thousand variations on Goblins get tiring.

**Mark:** If anything, the last few years have found R&D leaning more and more toward casual players. The *Onslaught* block, for example, used a theme that has always been popular with the casual players, race decks. And we have definitely been pushing the boundaries more about what is acceptable for the game. I do acknowledge that having the constraints of Magic being a tournament-viable game does give us some restrictions, but I feel R&D has really made steps toward trying out new ideas. I think you're going to be especially pleased with the *Scourge* set and the *Mirrodin* block. There are some cards coming that I expect to make the players do a double take the first time they see them.

**Kenneth Nagle:** Is gender ever going to matter? For example, will we ever see female Elves being functionally different from male Elves?

**Mark:** During design, *Unglued* had a card that cared about the gender of the card. If I remember correctly, it was an attractive female creature that had to be blocked by males if they were able to block -- the flavor being sexual allure. The reason the card was scrapped was that the only way to determine gender was the art and on too many cards the sex of the creature is vague to say the least. (As an example take a look at **Radjan Spirit**.)

**Nathan Otto:** Hey, I have a question about Dwarves. I happen to have a **Dwarven Bloodboiler** deck, but I can't play with it in Standard because there aren't enough good Dwarves! How come you didn't include Dwarves as a theme in the *Onslaught* set? You have one Dwarf, so they have to exist there.

**Mark:** For the *Onslaught* set to work, we had to focus on a small number of creature types. In red, it was felt that Goblins are more beloved than Dwarves and thus Goblins was the chosen type. I wrote [an entire article about the plight of the Dwarves](#) (during, of all things, Cephalid Week). I feel your pain, and I promise you that the Dwarves will have their day in the sun again, just not in the near future. Sorry.

**David McDougall:** With recent comments about how you have the honor of having the most cards banned and restricted, second to Richard himself, I'm curious about which cards you have made. Is there a way for us to look up who designed which cards? You have made a lot of my favorites, and I like trying to guess at which ones are your creative offspring.

**Mark:** I'm often asked why designers aren't credited on the cards like the artists. There are a number of reasons.

1. We often don't know who the designer is -- I create thousands of cards every year. While I have a pretty good memory, I can't remember everything I made.

Also, cards get tweaked all the time in development making remembering that much harder.

2. Many cards aren't designed by one person -- Oftentimes design is a collaborative process. This means that some cards are the product of a group of people working together. During the design of a set, it is not uncommon for one designer to tweak the work of another designer.
3. Multiple designers can design the same card -- One freaky thing that happens in design is when two people on the same day turn in almost the exact same card. During *Tempest* design, Mike Elliott and I were doing this at least once a week.
4. There are disputes -- There are some cards that multiple designers remember making. Sometimes, this is due to #3 and other times, a designer hears a card and the subconsciously creates it years later unaware where the idea came from.
5. Design credit pulls focus -- There are numerous people who work to make a single card. Even if a single person designed it, there was a team of developers who tweaked it, a creative team who conceived it, an art director who assigned an artist, and an artist who painted the illustration. A lot of work goes into making each card.

As I have a column, I'm much more likely to share design stories than some of the other designers, but we do try to make sure that each of the designers has a chance to tell some of their stories when the appropriate set rolls around. Richard Garfield recently [wrote about Arabian Nights](#), Mike Elliott [wrote about designing Legions](#), and I'm hoping to rope Brian Tinsman into talking about the *Scourge* set in a few months.

The short answer is that if you pay attention, you'll get glimpses here and there of the design of certain cards, but there is no grand system for crediting each individual card.

**David Brain:** What do you do with ideas that clearly don't belong in **Magic**, or even in another Wizards trading card game (TCG)? Do you try and force them until they do? (For example, there have been several attempts at a pseudo-Auction mechanic in **Magic**, an idea that doesn't really work but feels as though a designer refused to admit defeat.)

**Mark:** A good designer should never force a mechanic. If it's meant for Magic, it's meant for **Magic**. If not, we can always use it in one of the many other games we design.

**Troels Vastrup:** Every block introduces new mechanics and then uses those mechanics on cards that are just variants of basic spells (like **Stone Rain**, **Giant Growth**, **Dark Banishing**, and so on). For example, **Lay Waste** is **Stone Rain** with cycling, **Earth Rift** is **Stone Rain** with flashback, and **Shaleskin Plower** is a "morph trigger" **Stone Rain**. Some think that that is boring and take it as proof of "R&D has run out of ideas." Comments?

**Mark:** That's like faulting a carpenter for using wood and nails. The basic effects of the colors are the tools of a **Magic** designer. The creativity comes in how you use them. Sure, **Skirk Marauder** and **Firebolt** both hail from **Shock**, but I'd be hard pressed to call them the same card. Every house has a similar foundation. A good carpenter is judged not by the wood used to build the house, but by the finished product.

**Ken Scott:** With the rebalancing of the color wheel, where does that leave artifacts in terms of flavor? Is there anything that is inherently artifact as opposed to any of the colors?

**Mark:** In our talk on the color wheel, we have brought up the topic of the role of artifacts. We are still fleshing out what exactly artifacts do that sets them apart from the colors. Thus, while I don't have an answer I can tell you we're thinking about the issue.

**Spencer Bogan:** Why is fast **Magic** worse than slow **Magic**?

**Mark:** I think you're taking a [comment I made](#) out of context. I was talking about how fast combo is worse than slow combo. My point was that **Magic** is about interactivity. Fast combo is just solitaire and thus not interactive. I have no problem with fast **Magic** strategies as long as they allow interactivity.

**Yannick Van Doosselaere:** Which did you vote for (or would you have voted for): **Llanowar Elves/Utopia Tree** or **Birds of Paradise/Vine Trellis**, and why?

**Mark:** A very good question. I would have chosen the **Llanowar Elves**. I feel it is one of the key cards that define green's flavor. The **Birds** on the other hand has several strikes against it. First, green is bad at flying so it's odd that its best creature flies. Second, the Bird creature type is an odd fit in green. So, if left up to me, the **Birds of Paradise** would have flown the coop in *Eighth Edition*. With that said, I wouldn't count out the Elves. They'll be back someday.

**Adam Harrison:** **Magic** is nearing its tenth anniversary. To what do you credit its staying power (considering how most other trading card games came and went)?

**Mark:** I would say several factors. First and foremost, it's a great game. I believe **Magic** is the best trading card game ever created. Second, it has what they call in business "first mover advantage." That is, we were here first and reaped the rewards of becoming the defining TCG. Third, I think R&D has done a good job of not resting on its laurels. We have worked very hard to keep the new expansions up to the highest standard possible.



**Ben Hawkins:** Dude, I got one for you. It may sound silly, but what is the long-term viability for **Magic**? To me, the game *seems* to be solid. We aren't in any danger of our game going away anytime soon, right? I see other card games fail all the time. I'd hate to lose **Magic**.

**Mark:** **Magic** is as healthy as it ever was. The numbers on everything (sales, tournament attendance, secondary card prices, and so on) look good. And on the creativity front, things are just as sunny. Richard created a very robust game. I'm constantly surprised how often we find new pockets to explore. In addition, remember that old mechanics and cards can be brought back allowing us even greater freedom. R&D has a very long-term vision for **Magic**. Let's hope that the ten-year anniversary shows that this isn't just a fad that will dissipate in a year or two.

As far as what lies in the **Magic** game's future, I'm not sure. One of the things about working on **Magic** is how often I've been surprised by where the game takes us. The two latest innovations, **Magic Online** and **MagicTheGathering.com**, show that we have our pulse on the future. What lies ahead? I'm as eager as all of you to find out.

And that's all I got for this interview. I want to thank all of you that took the time for sending in your questions. While I didn't get to answer all the letters I received, I did send a number of questions I liked, but didn't have time to answer, to "Ask Wizards."

Join me next week when I talk about how land is designed.


Until then, may people care enough to ask your opinion.

Mark Rosewater

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