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Printer Friendly

**Making Magic** **Monday, June 16, 2003**

## R&D-lightful

### Antics from the researchers and developers



Mark Rosewater

Every once in a while, I like to give you all an insight in what it's like here in R&D. (Past articles include "R&D R&R," "Take This Job and Love It" and "A Day in the Life.") In previous articles, I've talked a great deal about stories from "back in the day." To demonstrate that R&D is as fun as it's ever been, I thought I'd share some stories from the past year. I swear on my three year old daughter that these stories are all 100% true (well, let's say 99% as I want the freedom of 1% embellishment). This stuff really did happen. Honest.

Also, I'd like to point out that this column is light on **Magic** info. It's more of an insight into the people that make the game. If that doesn't sound interesting, I'd skip this column and come back next week when the column will be stuffed to the gills with **Magic**-related info.

### "The Dell Makes a Man Crazy"

As I've talked about before, R&D loves a good prank. (Hell, we even kinda like a bad prank.) So imagine our surprise when we came in one morning to find Henry Stern's desk transformed into a small farm. And I do not use the term "transformed" lightly. For starters the ground was covered with a grass-like green carpet. The ground and desk were then covered in hay complete with several miniature bales. Placed in various places around and on the desk area were:

- a fake cow
- plastic ducks floating in a pool (using actual water in a garbage can)
- miniature pig figures
- a rubber chicken
- postcards of farm scenes
- random vegetables
- assorted other farm paraphernalia

Why was this done? Who did it? Why Henry? We had no idea. While there were many suspects, the identity of the culprit (now called the "Mad Farmer") was, and still is, unknown.

In the days since, the rubber ducks found a home just outside the building. Each week people put the ducks in different positions. Sometimes they're floating in a puddle. Sometimes they're up in a tree. The ducks have become unofficial R&D mascots.

### Nerf and Turf

The average company will let its hair down every once in a while with something like a Casual Day. But every day at Wizards is a casual day so when we want to let off steam, we have to get a little wackier. Several months ago, we had Nerf War Day (organized by R&D member Mike Selinker).

You see, back in the day, we used to have Nerf wars on a regular basis. For those of you unfamiliar with Nerf warfare, let me explain. In a Nerf war, there are two or more teams each armed with [Nerf weaponry](#). (For those unfamiliar with modern-day Nerf weaponry, trust me when I say that the tech has improved drastically from my youth.) The two teams each have an objective like capturing the enemy's flag. Any player hit by a Nerf projectile is "killed" in the current battle. When one team meets their objective, they win. Then everyone comes back to life and the next game begins.

So one morning several months ago, all of R&D showed up for a mandatory R&D meeting. In the meeting, we were informed that it was Nerf War day and were each given a brand new Nerf

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machine gun. (Being part of Hasbro does have its perks.) Each floor (Wizards is a series of four buildings each with two floors – although we don't occupy every floor) was a team. Four teams in all. This meant that R&D was teamed up with Organized Play and Customer Service.

Once an hour, half the teams got a mission that required obtaining something from an enemy's floor. The rules were simple:

1. You only played if you wanted to. Players were required to wear colored armbands that designated their team affiliation. Players without armbands were to be left alone.
2. Players scored points for opponent "kills" and for finishing missions. The latter was more valuable than the former.
3. A player that was "killed" had to go to a pre-selected spot on their own floor to "respawn."
4. The judges were the final authority and they had the ability to change the rules.

The winning team won a pizza party for their floor.



Before I continue, I feel a need to stress that this column does not strive to be journalism. As this is my column, you hear my completely biased report of events. There are others who will claim that what I am about to report is a false and blatant lie. *([Raises hand...] --Aaron)* Just be aware that those peoples are themselves liars. *(What?! --Aaron, insulted)* Now, let's continue.

Our floor was the Purple Team. And we knew we were going to kick ass. We had the analytical skills of R&D combined with the tactical event planning skills of Organized Play and the raw enthusiasm of Customer Service. We couldn't lose. Ah, but we forgot about Rule #4. If you read Rule #4 a little closer, you'll see what it actually says is "The judges get to pick who wins."

As the game began we were smashing all the other teams. So the judges started stacking the tables against us. Instead of one team attacking us, we got two. Then three. The rules were a bit vague so we were constantly asking questions to clarify. Pretty soon the judges stopped answering our questions. They would simply say, "Go ahead."

Then when we broke the unwritten, unexplained rules, they would penalize us. And just us, mind you. Other teams wouldn't be punished for the same offenses. Rather they were egged on by the judges to do them. Then, the judges started firing at us. And when we fired back, we got penalized. You see, there's a rule about firing at the judges.

In the end, we couldn't overcome Rule #4. The judges had decided that we weren't supposed to win. At the end of the day we had significantly more points than any other team. But due to our large number of "penalties," we lost. (As a side note, losing just four "shooting the judge" penalties and we would have won.) The moral of the story is when you fight the law, the law wins.

So there was warfare, backstabbing, plotting and cheating. Suffice to say, we had a blast. The story ends happily though as the winning floor shared their pizza with the entire company. (Hmm, maybe the judges didn't believe R&D could share.)

## Something's Fishy

A little tidbit about the Mad Farmer. He's mad, I tell you. Mad! About a month after Henry's drive-by farming attack, R&D member Andy Collins (who works on **Dungeons & Dragons**) came in to find his desk covered with plastic cups. And when I say covered, I'm talking about every square inch. Each cup was filled to the brim with water. And in each cup of water was a live goldfish.

On his chair was the following note:



Old McHenry Stern had a farm...E...I...E...I...O...

More to come...

The note made the point that these two pranks were connected. As for the goldfish, Andy posted an email internally that announced free goldfish. The fish were gone within two hours.

## Comic Relief

I've made mention in previous columns that I'm a big fan of comic books. While in greater society this might put me in a small minority, not so in R&D. We swap books back and forth a great deal and spend a lot of time discussing/arguing different comics. Two of the biggest fans (after me) are Skaff Elias and Tyler Bielman.

One day, Skaff announced that *Wizard Magazine* (a fun magazine dedicated to comic books by the same guys that produce *InQuest*) had a comic book quiz. The three of us sequestered ourselves in Tyler's office to take it. As Skaff had already seen the quiz, he administered it. The quiz took several sessions (a few attended also by Mike Selinker of Nerf War fame).

But then last month, *Wizard* had a new quiz. This time Skaff hadn't looked at it, so he, Tyler and I could all take it. At the beginning of the quiz they listed the scores of famous comic book personalities and how they did on the test. One name caught our eye: Brian Michael Bendis. As he is currently the favorite comic writer of Tyler and myself, we decided that our goal was to best Bendis.

We were doing pretty well. We did have a couple of painfully close misses though. For example, although I remembered that Batman's dog from the 50's was Ace the Bat Hound and that the super cat and super horse were Streaky and Comet respectively, I falsely named the super monkey as Beepo rather than Beppo. I also missed out on the Challenger of the Unknown question because I couldn't remember that the daredevil's name was Red.

When the dust settled, we were one point behind Bendis. But there was a question in contention. The quiz claimed that the Marvel villain M.O.D.O.K. (for those comic-impaired, it's a giant semi-robotic flying head – no seriously) stood for Mobile Organism Designed Only for Killing. Skaff believed the M stood for Mental and not Mobile. We looked it up on the Internet and found both answers in numerous sources. So, if any of you are well versed in M.O.D.O.K., please let me know so I can live my dream of tying Brian Michael Bendis in a comic trivia quiz (with the help of two other people).

## X Marks the Spot

But the comic stories don't stop there. Several weeks ago was my birthday. (I turned 36 for those that care.) Every year on my birthday for the last twenty-five years, I have gone out with friends and family to a seafood restaurant where I have Alaskan King Crab legs. The tradition started because my birthday was the one meal where I could order whatever I wanted no matter the cost. As Alaskan King Crab legs ain't cheap, that was usually my only opportunity to eat them. By the time I could afford to buy my own crab legs, the tradition had already been established.

This year we went to a great Seattle seafood restaurant called Cutters (this is the restaurant we took the Invitational invitees for a free dinner last October) right near Pike Place Market. About ten R&D members and their significant others showed up. Before the dinner, Worth Wollpert handed me an envelope with "Scourge graveyard art" written on it.

After dinner I opened it up to discover a copy of *Uncanny X-Men* #1. (Once again for the comic-impaired, this is a very expensive comic as it's the first time the X-Men, a very popular superhero team, ever appeared.) I discovered that some thirty people from Wizards (mostly from R&D and Organized Play) pooled together their money to get me a birthday gift as a thank you for all I had done for them over the years. I was very touched both by the sentiment and by the comic (more by the first, but the second was pretty damn cool).

### Egging Me On

The Mad Farmer wasn't done. And this time it was my turn. But I'm getting ahead of myself. This story starts with a frantic phone call. By me. Wait, I haven't gone back far enough yet. Okay, this story actually starts with a Houston Texans home game. What does a football game have to do with a prank involving eggs? Patience, my dear reader.

You see, [Pro Tour - Houston](#) was planned for a particular weekend. After we set the date, the football schedule changed putting a Texans game the same weekend. This meant that we would lose a significant amount of local Houston press. As the Pro Tour has an important marketing aspect, the Organized Play team decided to push the Pro Tour back a week. The problem for me was that it was now the weekend of my wife Lora's birthday. Now I know a majority of my readers aren't married yet, so I'll give you a very valuable marriage tip. In a marriage, there's an invisible item I'll call the "ill will" meter. If it ever gets too high, bad things happen, thus it's both people's job to keep the meter low. Being out of town on a business trip during your wife's birthday: not good for the meter.

It just so happens that Lora and I had been talking about her coming to a Pro Tour. With the exception of a few World Championships in Seattle (and a number of Invitationals), Lora had never been to a Pro Tour. So I thought I'd massacre two living creatures with a single weapon – I mean kill two birds with one stone – and have Lora and Rachel (my daughter) come with me to Houston.

As it was now a family trip, we decided to leave a few days early. On a Monday morning actually. This is where the frantic phone call comes. Brian Tinsman was supposed to drive us to the airport. We were going to meet him at Wizards and he was going to drive us to the airport and then return with our car. But we were running late, so I called Brian and asked him to meet us out front.

So we arrive at Wizards and there's no Brian. I call Brian's desk. No answer. I call Brian's cell phone. No answer. I look at my watch. Traveling with a small child is a slow task. We really couldn't afford to be much later. "I'll go find him," I said to Lora.

As I'm frantically running around looking for Brian, I notice a number of people gathered near my desk. After a double take, I realize one of them is Brian. "Brian," I yell, "We gotta go."

Brian doesn't budge. "Brian," I yell again, "We gotta go."

Brian still doesn't budge. "There's something you have to see," he says.

I walk over to my desk and see the following:

Everyone in R&D is waiting to see my reaction. Unfortunately, I'm still in panic mode about being late. So, I run over to my desk. It is covered in eggs, complete with a live bird in a cage. After a beat, I say, "Huh."

Then I turn to Brian and say, "Okay, we gotta go."

And I left. That was the only major prank that I was ever on the receiving end of and I got to enjoy it for all of five seconds. As I was running out the door I did make the mental note that the Mad Farmer, as a gifted prankster, would never have chosen me if he knew I wasn't going to be in the



office that day. That meant anyone who knew I was out of the office was scratched of my list... except Brian, as he forced me into the building by not answering his cell phone. Hmm.

## Let 'Em Eat Cake

In many of my stories of the day of old I talk about how R&D was a bunch of single guys that stayed late every night playing various office sports. A lot has changed since then. Now, about three quarters of the TCG R&D folk are married and over a fourth have kids. And this number keeps growing.

One day we come back from lunch to find a cake sitting on a table in the middle of R&D. The cake said "Someone in R&D's going to be a daddy. Guess who."

The cake stirred some discussion, but no one knew how we were supposed to find out the answer. So we did what any good puzzle-solver would do: we ate the cake. As the pieces started disappearing, we realized the name was written in large letters on the cardboard tray under the cake. Dedicated as we were, we continued gnawing at the cake until we got a "W." Now Worth Wollpert is the only member of R&D whose name starts with a "W," but we needed to be sure.

More cake led to an "O." We ate on. Then an "R." Then a "T." And finally an "H." Worth was going to be a daddy. As a father myself, I'm always excited to see other R&D members join the "club." And hey, who can argue with free cake?

## Something's Rotten in the State of Mark's Desk

Let me start by saying that in the spectrum of R&D desk cleanliness, I have always gravitates towards one extreme. And not the good one. But several months back, we were having a fire inspection so I thoroughly cleaned it. This was around November shortly before Pro Tour - Houston.

Then came the egg prank. As I explained above, I left immediately so I wasn't around to clean the eggs off of my desk. A few R&D members (led once again by Mike Selinker - Mike is many people's first suspect as the Mad Farmer, but my instinct says no) cleaned it up and donated all the eggs (over sixty dozen) to a local church.

Flash forward to March. The next thing you need to know is that I have a horrible sense of smell. You know how some people are hard of hearing? I'm hard of smell. This causes a number of problems especially with a child in diapers. ("How can you not smell that?")

Little by little though I started noticing a smell at my desk. Ironically, others had noticed it but attributed it to Worth's basketball clothes (a bunch of the R&D guys, along with other Wizards people, play basketball at lunch). Worth went so far as holding out the clothes for people to smell. This led Rob Heinsoo, an R&D member that works on miniatures games, to start sniffing around the cubicles. His nose led him to a long card box on my desk. He went to move it and it wouldn't move. Then he smelled it.

The Mad Farmer, it turns out, had filled the card box with eggs. The people who cleaned my desk didn't know this and thus never removed them. The eggs had been sitting in the box for four months. When I touched the box, I heard a loud pop. We all backed away.

In the end Charlie Catino and I managed to get the box into a garbage can. Charlie was forced to go home and change his clothes (he spilled some "juice" on them) and the Facilities team was called to clean up the mess we made getting it there.

R&D was then vacated for over an hour as no one, except me, could work with the smell.

## Playing Hard For the Money

As you can see, R&D is still a fun place to work. I hope these stories will give you a little glimpse in what shapes the people that shape **Magic**.

Join me next week when I talk about instant gratification.


Until then, may you have your own Mad Farmer moments.

Mark Rosewater

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