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Making Magic Monday, July 28, 2003

Magic Moments



Mark Rosewater

Five anecdotes from Mark's past

Daily Articles

Welcome to Tenth Anniversary Week! In celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of **Magic**, all of the columnist will be using their columns this week to share personal memories of the game. (My promised mailbag column will appear next week.)

When I first heard this assignment, I was taken aback. I've been working for Wizards of the Coast for almost eight years. Freelancing for nine. And playing **Magic** for ten. I have a *lot* of **Magic** memories. As such, I've decided to share my top five **Magic** memories. In addition, I decided for this column to limit my stories about interacting with the game itself as a player and not stories about making the game. (Don't worry; you'll have endless columns on those stories.)

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#5 - Trading Aces

I don't really have a lot of trading stories because I haven't done all that much trading in my life. But I do have one that makes my top five list. The time is December of 1993. I got into **Magic** in August, but I hadn't yet found a steady supply of playing partners. So when I read about a new gaming convention that was going to have a **Magic** tournament, I was quite excited. That is until I got to the convention and discovered about thirty-five people. Not exactly a rocking convention. But still, thirty five was better than nothing.



Between rounds I was approached by a rather attractive woman. She explained to me that she collects **Magic** cards, but doesn't play. You see, her boyfriend played, so she decided to start collecting the cards as something to do when he dragged her to various **Magic** functions. Anyway, she needed only four cards to finish her set (a black bordered Alpha/Beta set – at that time in **Magic** that's all there was). Would I mind showing her my collection?

Back then, it was hard to have to big a collection because getting your hands on new packs was quite difficult. As such, I probably had only a couple hundred cards. She was thrilled to discover that I had three of the four cards she needed: **Balance**, **Mana Short**, and **Volcanic Island**. I told her I really wasn't interested in trading as I had no idea of the value of my cards. In those days, Wizards didn't release card lists, so not being much of a collector, I didn't have a great grasp of what I had that was valuable. Luckily though, I was smart enough to know that I didn't know. And so I said farewell to the pretty lady.

She returned thirty minutes later after she had talked to the other thirty three people in attendance she didn't know. No luck. If she wanted those three cards, I was it. She returned with desperation in her eyes. She wanted those three cards. And she had plenty of cards for trading. I explained that I didn't know the cards well enough to trade. Not dissuaded by my refusal, she opened up her binder and pulled out a handful of cards. This was the first time that I had ever seen an **Ancestral Recall** or a **Time Walk** or a **Timetwister**. And to be honest, while they looked cool, I had no idea if they were any good.

She then explained to me that all she cared about was collecting. She didn't play. Duplicate cards were just extra cards. She was willing to make me a very sweet deal. The irony is that at the time I

thought I was getting played. I knew her boyfriend was a good player, which meant she has to have some idea of what the cards were worth. At this point I had no regular **Magic** playing friends and I was several months from logging onto the Internet for the first time. I knew very little.

Her first offer was something like **Ancestral Recall**, **Time Walk**, **Timetwister**, **Forcefield**, and **Gauntlet of Might** for my **Balance**, **Mana Short**, and **Volcanic Island**. And I turned it down. The trade seemed too high stakes. I didn't feel comfortable. She pleaded and added a few more rares to the mix. (I don't remember all the cards, but I know **Word of Command**, **Raging River**, and **Wheel of Fortune** got added in along the way.) I said no. She added more cards. Every "no" increased her offer.

Finally, I was at a point where she was offering thirteen rares for my three. Now I didn't know how good the cards were, but a number of them looked pretty cool. So, I read over my cards. **Volcanic Island** seemed neat. **Mana Short**? I don't know if I even understood what **Mana Short** did. And **Balance**. I wasn't a very good player but all my instincts said **Balance** seemed really good. So, I turned down the deal. "I don't want to trade away my **Balance**."

"Okay," she replied, "How about we trade just for the other two?" So I did.

And that is the craziest trade I ever made. Kicking and screaming the entire way.



#4 - A Finkel In Time

This story takes place in the spring of 1998 at the Junior Super Series in Orlando, Florida. Wizards flew down all the Pro Tour winners from the 1997-98 season (Randy Buehler, Matt Place, Dave Price, and Jon Finkel) as special guests. Also at the event was the prerelease for *Exodus*.



Each night the pro players were taken out by a different Wizards employee. The final night was my turn. Our discussion turned to *Exodus*. The pros were unhappy with the set, stating that the only tournament worthy card was **Carnophage** (although Matt Place did see potential in **Oath of Druids**). I had played with the set much more than they had, so I was trying my damndest to defend a number of cards. One such card was **Forbid**.

Now Jon Finkel, one of the best **Magic** players of all time and quite arguably the best player in the world at that moment, was at that point known for playing control decks. So I stressed to him how good **Forbid** was. Jon disagreed. He thought the buyback cost was too much. It created card disadvantage. But I was certain. In a bold voice I said, "Jon, you're wrong. Within thirty days, you're going to be playing this card."

Three weeks later at U.S. Nationals, Jon came up to me and said, "Okay, you were right."

Jon went on to earn a place on the U.S. National team with a deck now known as "Forbidian."

#3 - This Land Isn't My Land

It was a Saturday night in the summer of 1994 at the Coast Mesa's Women's center in Orange County, an hour's drive from Los Angeles. This was the center of the L.A. **Magic**

scene. The constructed tournament had just begun (this was before formats existed so everyone was playing what today would be called Type I decks) and I was paired up against my first round opponent.

I drew my opening hand. No lands. Back in the day, the mulligan rule worked as such: you could once show a no-land hand (or all land hand) and reshuffle it drawing a new hand of seven cards. So, I mulliganed. But my new hand also had no lands. Nor any mana producing artifacts. But the mulligan rule of the time said I had to keep the hand.

Turn one, no play. Turn two, no play. Turn three, I draw my one **Black Lotus**. I play and sacrifice it to get three green mana. **Concordant Crossroads**. **Birds**. **Birds**. **Elves**. **Elves**. And I was off. I defeated my opponent two turns later having never drawn a mana source other than the **Black Lotus**. As my opponent is shuffling up his cards, he moaned, "He never even played a land."

And that is my story of my only landless, Mox-less win.



#2 - Finding Maro

As I explained in my column on **Maro** ("[There's Always Two Maro](#)"), the card will always have a special place in my heart. So when *Mirage* came out, suffice to say I was dying to open up a **Maro**. I had already seen the card in its final state. I just wanted to feel the joy of opening up a real **Magic** booster and getting *my* card. Back then, Wizards employees got one of every product we produced. (Today we get a series of points that can be used in the company store to buy Wizards products.) So, I received my box and started tearing packs open.

Thirty-six packs later, I had no **Maro**. So I bought a box off an employee that didn't play **Magic**. Still no **Maro**. I got a third box. No **Maro**. A fourth box. Statistically speaking, I should get a **Maro** in four boxes. Nope. Stupid statistics. At this point, I ran out of people willing to sell me an entire box. So I began begging people who played **Magic** for individual packs. Each time I opened a non-**Maro** bearing booster, I went and begged for another pack. Until finally, the well ran dry.

But then I was informed that as a member of the flavor text team ("**Sorry I burned down your village. Here's some gold.**" is mine - for more see "[The Write Stuff](#)", my column on flavor text) I got some small number of packs. Five, if I remember correctly. For some reason I knew that I was about to have a "Charlie and the golden ticket" moment. Pack #1 - No **Maro**. Pack #2 - No **Maro**. Let's just skip to Pack #5. This was it. I was down to one pack. The chance of the pack having a **Maro** was 110 to 1.

Be aware that I was attracting an audience while this was going on because, well, I was acting like a crazy man. So, I put the sealed *Mirage* booster in my shirt pocket (I have a thing for flannel) and said, "I'm so sure that there's a **Maro** in here that I don't even feel a need to open it."



R&D wasn't going to have any of that. They stressed that walking off with the pack unopened would be like turning off a movie two minutes before it ends. The pack must be opened. "Okay," I said, "I'll open it. But be aware that one of two things is going to happen. One, I'm going to be angry and I'm going to vent at the top of my lungs (and as R&D will attest, I have a healthy pair of lungs) how I opened eight billion and one packs (hyperbole alert, hyperbole alert) and didn't get one freakin' **Maro**. Or two, I'm going to do a happy dance."

As I pulled the pack out of my pocket, everyone gathered around me. I ripped open the pack shifting the rare to the last slot. I quickly flipped through the eleven commons. I then slow-rolled the three uncommons. I had everyone count to ten as I revealed the last card.... a **Maro**!



And I proceeded to dance the longest happiest dance of my thirty-six years.

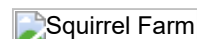
#1 - Acting Squirrel-y

In the summer of 1998, I attended GenCon for the pre-release of *Unglued*. I had somehow agreed to head judge the event dressed as a chicken (but that's a story for another time). As *Unglued* was being premiered I thought it would be fun to bring some *Unglued* decks to gunslinging with. For those unfamiliar with the term "gunslinging," it refers to a practice where Wizards employees or pro players play any takers, giving away prizes (almost always booster packs) to anyone who defeats them.

I had all sorts of goofy decks: a chicken deck, an **Incoming!** deck with a **B.F.M.** kill, a **Goblin Bookie/Giant Fan** coin flipping/counter deck that killed with **Goblin Bomb**, and a **Censorship/Ow!** deck. But my pride and joy was my **Squirrel Farm** deck. **Squirrel Farm** is probably my favorite card in *Unglued*. I just love how everything about it came together.

So, I'm in the middle of gunslinging with my **Squirrel Farm** deck and I'm in trouble. You see, none of the public had access to *Unglued* cards yet (it was the prerelease weekend after all) so I was playing my wacky decks against normal decks. And this particular deck was beating me down. I did have an unblockable Beeble that was lethal in three turns, but my opponent had three big attackers, any one of which would kill me if it touched me.

My only chance rested on **Squirrel Farm**. For those of you unfamiliar with **Squirrel Farm** (and shame on you), it's a green enchantment that lets you make a Squirrel for   assuming your opponent cannot name the artist of a card you reveal from your hand. The good news was that my opponent knew nothing about artists. The bad news was that I needed to make three Squirrels to survive the attack (I had exactly enough mana to activate the card three times) and I only had two cards in my hand.



What this meant was that in order to live I had to somehow get my opponent to miss guessing an artist, reveal it to him, and then a minute or so later get him to miss the artist a second time. Providing I somehow pulled this off, I would have to get him to miss six more times with only two new cards ever added into the mix. A lesser man might have just quit, but I was up to the challenge.

Of the two new cards I drew, one was a copy of a land in play and the other was illustrated by the same artist as another one of the cards. But somehow with a lot of distracting chit-chat on my behalf I managed to make three Squirrels a turn for three turns in a row. I even got my opponent to miss one card four times. In my ten years of gaming, this is my pick for my best **Magic** playing ever.

Ten and Counting


I hope today's column will show you a little different side of my relationship with **Magic**. As much as I enjoy creating the game, I also like playing it. I don't believe I can do the first without properly appreciating the second.

Join me next week when I dive into my mail bag. (No really, this time.)

Until then, may you take a moment to think of your own top five **Magic** moments.

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