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Time Heals All Wounds



The "true" story of Muddy Spring

Mark Rosewater · *Making Magic*
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I'm sure most of you turned into today expecting to see the Loose Ends column. You see, last week I asked all of you to scour my old articles for questions that never got answered or references that were never explained. I would collect them all into an article that tied up all these loose ends. The reason I asked for all your help is that with a set of newborn twins, I simply don't have the time to comb through all my articles to collect the loose ends. But I felt it was a topic you all would enjoy. Thus, asking you for help seemed like a perfect answer. Unfortunately, I only got five unique loose ends to talk about. (Although to be fair, a lot of you want to hear about the near-riot at PT LA). This isn't enough for a full article. So, I'm asking one more time for your help. If a loose ends column sounds appealing, I need your help collecting them. No matter what, in two weeks I'll write whatever loose ends I receive. The more I get though, the longer the article. So here's your chance. Let me know at makingmagic@wizards.com what you'd like to hear about.

As for today's column, I've tried something a little different. I've flexed my creative writing muscles to bring you a short story about R&D. The article has provided numerous laughs around here. I hope you all have as much fun with my fictional (or is it?) take on R&D.

There are many cool things about working in R&D. But for Aaron Forsythe nothing was as fun as finally having an opportunity to get a real "behind-the-scenes" peek. He had spent all his spare hours during his first month scouring the Multiverse, **Magic's** extensive database, for comments from the designers and developers. And the results were quite humorous. Some fundamentally "broken" cards were barely discussed while other clunkers had pages of notes.

One day while searching through *Tempest*, Aaron stumbled across **Cursed Scroll**. In the comments field, he found the following:

- 2.4 TW template should be fine, tho we might want "a card chosen at random"
- 2.44 lowered cc from 3 to 1
- 3.05 JLM For flavor/naturalness reasons, it should just do damage to opponent who chooses the card.
- 3.07 MR This card would be horribly weak if it couldn't do damage to creatures.
- 3.07 WJR Not horrible weak, just less "interesting."
- 4.0 JLM--If it just damages players, it becomes a cheaper variant of Vexing Arcanix, which was actually a popular card when it first came out and was initially perceived as being very strong.



Aaron found this interchange quite entertaining. He was just about to click to the next card when he noticed a strange red button sitting on the bottom right of the screen. He had never seen anything like it before in any of the Multiverse files. The button had no writing, merely an icon of a brain in a jar. Aaron thought about asking about the button, but finally decided to just try it. After all, what could possibly happen?

The screen turned red and the words “Gleemax Mode” appeared at the top of the screen. The comments field completely changed:

RG (8/15/96): Team expressed interest in card that will dominate limited and block constructed play and sit at Tier 1 in Standard and Tier 1 in Extended for several years. Here you go.

HS (3/2/97): Dev team ran through metagame simulator. Believe public will take several months to maximize usage.

JM (4/1/97): Consulted with DCI about banning in block constructed in spring of '98.

WJR (4/13/97): Gleemax approved

MR (4/14/97): Guess we won't be needing TM's help. :-)

Aaron was puzzled at first. But then he realized that it must be some practical joke. He had heard all the Gleemax jokes (some claimed that R&D was run by a giant alien brain in a jar). Someone was obviously having some fun with him. The thing he was most puzzled by was Mark Rosewater's (he assumed MR was Rosewater) comment about a TM. To the best of Aaron's knowledge, no one with the initials TM had ever worked in R&D.

Curiosity finally got the best of Aaron. “Hey Mark,” he called across the R&D galley, “Who the hell is TM?”

When Aaron turned around to hear his answer, he found Mark already at his desk. “TM?” Mark began, “What are you...”

Mark's face went white as he saw Aaron's computer monitor. “How did you... What is that?”

“I don't know,” said Aaron, “I was looking through Multiverse when I found this weird red button on the screen for **Cursed Scroll**.”

“For the love of god,” Mark said softly to himself, “We can make addictive ink and hide subliminal messages, but we can't keep a freakin' level one security clearance on Multiverse.”

Aaron was still waiting for the punchline when Mark said, “You better come with me.”

Aaron had a lot of questions, but Mark's body language made it clear that this wasn't the time. Mark shuffled Aaron into the elevator. “Why don't we just walk up the stairs?” Aaron asked.

“Because there aren't stairs to where we're going.”

Aaron had always wondered why a two-story building had an elevator. He got his answer when the elevator went down. As the elevator descended the panel with the buttons rotated to reveal an entire new set of buttons several of which sported mana symbols. Mark punched in a code (the mana cost of **Phelddagrif**). A computer voice then said, “Password please.”

“Bad cards don't really have to exist,” Mark replied.

“Password accepted,” said the computer.

The doors swung open to reveal a giant underground complex. With flashing lights and whizzing computers, the thundering hall looked like a cross between a secret military base and a mad scientist's laboratory. Dozens of white coated employees moved through the room. Aaron turned to face Mark. “Welcome to R&D,” Mark said, “The *real* R&D.”

Aaron's mind was spinning. “I have so many questions,” Aaron told Mark.

“Ask away.”

“Let's start with what is all of this?”

“This room is R&D's Secret Lair,” explained Mark. “This is where all the actual design and development gets done. You didn't think **Magic** was actually created by a bunch of guys sitting around in cubicles?”

“How can you afford all this?”

“**Magic** makes a lot of money, Aaron. A *lot* of money. Where do you think we funnel most of it? We sure don't waste it on frivolous things like television advertising or a monthly magazine.”

"How come no one knows about this?"

"Because we've gone to great lengths to keep it hidden. Could you imagine the public's response if all the crazy rumors turned out to be real? Heck, if you're respond poorly to learning this information, your mind would be wiped before we hit the elevator."

"So what all do you guys do down here?"

"Over there are all the computers. We use them to properly analyze where and how the metagame will adapt. We've created three AI's – Timmy, Johnny and Spike – to help us understand how each card will be received. Next to that is the behavior modification software. Then there's ink generation and modification. Then the internet bots used to create and fan false rumors. There's the formulacolater used to design the chunk of the cards. The subliminal imbuer. The overcoaster. The color pie enforcer. That's the pit for the trained monkeys. Then we have the vault. We keep several thousand copies of every card we've created including all the ones we've released to the public. And finally, the two sealed rooms, the Correcting Room and the Forbidden Room."



"The Correcting Room and the Forbidden Room? What are those?"

"You'll see the former in a minute. And the latter, don't ask again."

"But..."

Mark's stare told Aaron that not all his questions were going to be answered. "So, how are you guys qualified to do all this stuff?"

Aaron followed as Mark started walking. "R&D is filled with only the most highly educated scientific minds. Why do you think we have so many math and science people?"

"But you're a sitcom writer."

"Really? You never stopped to think why I mention my *Roseanne* gig so much?"

"It's a cover?"

"Exactly. I was brought to the team for my expertise in one area."

"Design?"

"Heavens no. Although I am quite proud of the split cards."

"Then why?"

Mark stopped as he arrived at the closed door. He let a small laser scan his retina. "Password," asked the computer.



"**Magic** doesn't *really* need a color pie."

"Password accepted," the computer replied.

The door slid open to reveal a medium-sized room complete with a large silver object. It was clearly a time machine. Aaron followed Mark into the room. "What is this?" Aaron asked.

"This," Mark replied, "is TM."

"R&D has a time machine?!"

"Hey, even we can make mistakes. Anyway, this is why I was hired in R&D. For my expertise in time travel."

"Do you think you'll ever have to use it?"

"Have to? This baby has already saved our butts more times than I can remember."

"But then why didn't you do anything about *Urza's* block?"

"Aaron, Aaron, Aaron. If you think the biggest problem with power level is *Urza's Saga* then we've done our job well. You don't remember the reality where *Homelands* broke the game. Or when *Sorrow's Path* destroyed Standard. Or the Muddy Spring where *Mudhole* twisted the metagame so far someone actually ran over R&D with a bus. Thank god Stern was home sick that day."

"*Mudhole*? How exactly does removing lands from a graveyard warp an environment?"

"It didn't do that then."

"What did it do?"

Mark visibly shivered. "Some mechanics are better left off dead and buried."

"How did R&D end up with a time machine?"

"Richard built it after **Magic** collapsed."

"I don't understand," Aaron said, "**Magic** never collapsed."

"Not in this timeline. But back in Alpha, the original Alpha mind you, the Power Fourteen proved more than the game could handle. "

"Power Fourteen?"

"Yeah, Lotus, the Moxes, *Ancestral Recall*, *Time Walk*, *Timetwister*, and the Laces."

"The Laces?"

A frightened look came to Mark's face. "Look, I'm still not ready to talk about the Laces. Because of them I lost someone very close to me."

"But what could they possibly do...?"

Mark sternly raised his hand. "Dead and buried!"

"How many times have you guys had to use the time machine?"

"Um, the Laces, bands with others, *Sorrow's Path*, snow-covered lands, *Homelands*, *Sword of the Chosen*, *Masques* block, *Carnival of Souls*, the second *Carnival of Souls*, *Mudhole*. Uh, ten. Wait, I forgot about *Chimney Imp*. Eleven."

"What about *Pale Moon*?"

"There are some things even a time machine can't fix."

Aaron didn't know what else to say. In the silence, a tear came to Mark's eye. "Let's get out of here," he said.

As Aaron and Mark walked back to the elevator, Mark finished the tour. "Now that you know the truth, it's time for your indoctrination."

Mark led Aaron towards the second closed door. As Mark was about to open it Aaron asked, "How come this door doesn't have any security on it?"

"Because anyone foolish enough to enter deserves their fate."

"Wait a minute. Where are we going?"



"You'll see."

"This whole Gleemax thing's just a big joke right?"

"R&D's controlled by a giant alien brain in a jar? Does that sound remotely plausible?"

Aaron looked around at the R&D Secret Lab. He felt the knot in his stomach double in size. "Come on," said Mark, "We have an appointment to keep."

And with that comment, the two entered the Forbidden Room.

THE END

I hope you enjoyed my little foray into fiction (or is it? – let me know when this jokes stops being funny. Already?). I'm curious to hear (again: makingmagic@wizards.com) if you'd like to see more fiction of this style in the future.

That's all for this week. Join me next week when I talk about **Plague Rat's** offspring.

Until then, may R&D not need TM's help.

Mark Rosewater

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