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Answers from the "Talk to Me" poll

Mark Rosewater · Making Magic
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A little over a month ago, I wrote a column called "[Talk To Me](#)" where I asked all of you one hundred questions about the current state of **Magic**. As a twist, I restricted you all to one hundred words. And many, many of you took me up on the challenge. I received thousands of responses. It took me over a month, but I've finally read them all. I'm planning to use this column to explain the key messages I learned from the exercise. (In case you forgot, all one hundred questions appear at the end of this column.)

Message #1 – You're Pretty Happy with Magic

Let me start with probably the most positive piece of news for us here in R&D. The majority of you are quite happy with the current state of **Magic**. Mechanics, art and creative environment all scored high marks. You felt all three were both "improving" and "better than the past". The biggest area for improvement was names and flavor text with the former being designated as the item with the greatest room for growth.

The message I walked away with was that R&D's doing something right. Numerous people dedicated a significant portion of their hundred words to stress how happy they are with the last four years (starting with *Invasion*). This isn't to say that there wasn't room for improvement. As you will see, you guys did an excellent job of providing constructive criticism.

Message #2 – You Want Lots Of Things

For most of the questions, there was a definitive majority answer. The one exception was any question that began with "What do you want...". **Magic** is many things to many people and nowhere was it more apparent when I asked you your wishes. To show how diverse your answers were, for example, the most common answer to the question "What kind of cards don't we design enough of?" was just under two percent (with the answer multi-color cards).

The message I walked away from was that R&D's strategy of diversity is an important one. Players wants such a diverse category of things that the best thing we can do is to continue trying to ensure that each expansion has a variety of cards to satisfy the various play groups.

Message #3 – Create More Synergy With The Past

Now comes the first piece of constructive criticism. R&D is doing a good job of making sets where the cards interact. Unfortunately, we often make them interact too well. The majority of you felt that R&D needed to make cards interact a little less well within blocks and a little more between blocks. R&D is taking this message very much to heart.

Message #4 – You Prefer Bad Commons To Bad Rares

Another interesting message to come out of the survey was your thoughts on where the majority of "bad" cards should lie. It seems you dislike opening a bad rare more than you mind seeing the same bad commons, limited game after limited game. Another factoid for R&D to chew on.

Message #5 – Flavor Is Very Important To Mechanics

You like top-down, flavor rich cards. We should do more of them. Even if that means we tweak the color pie a little to do it. (Ironically, this flies in the face of message #8 below.)

Message #6 – You Are Ambivalent On How Wacky Mechanics Should Be

This is one of those topics that split you all in half. Some of you really enjoy the stranger mechanics and want more of it. Others feel that it takes away from the seriousness of the game and want it banned from the **Magic**. In short **Goblin Game** (and cards like it) are loved or hated. This appears to be an issue where R&D will not be able to make everyone happy.



Message #7 – You Like Repeats



R&D's major use of repeats has always been more out of necessity than anything else. There's only so many times you can cleanly do an effect or mechanic. Thus, R&D often chooses to redo things rather than awkwardly tweak them. Up until this survey, I always thought of this practice as a necessary evil (although I was aware that the occasional return of a card like **Juggernaut** could be exciting). But the message that came clearly through was that the vast majority of you consider repeats a positive thing (especially when we bring back something that has been absent for a few years).

Not only do you most of you enjoy us bringing back old cards and mechanics, you seem to be willing to bring them back much sooner than we have

traditionally chosen to do so. R&D, for example, thought we were bringing back cycling very quickly only four years after it first appeared. More than half of the people that responded felt that anything after two years was fair game. This survey has completely changed how I think about repeats. I now see them as a tool that, if used properly, can be used to bring excitement to a set.

Message #8 – You Feel The Color Pie Is Very Important

I spend a great deal of time in my column stressing the importance of the color pie. Imagine my surprise when the survey came back agreeing with me. The vast majority of you (and I swear "vast" is not an exaggeration) feel the color pie is very important to **Magic**. As such, the majority of you don't like seeing us bleed mechanics into other colors and don't want the color pie to shift over time. In addition, you want R&D to do more to explain our color philosophies. As this last part is something I can help with, expect to see more color philosophy covered in "Making **Magic**". (Red Week should be showing up sometime this spring.)

Message #9 – The Color Being Shafted Is... Blue

This is another answer that surprised me. The color that R&D has been working to fix is white so I assumed white would get the top nod in the survey (it was #2 by the way). But no. Many of you have seen R&D's readjusting of the color pie as a major attack against blue. Ironically, even with R&D's negative attention, blue has managed to remain as one of the dominant colors in almost every format.

Message #10 – You Like Keywords; You're A Little Less Crazy about Cycles

Several years ago, R&D made a decision to be more liberal with our use of keywords. Survey says... you agree. In addition, many of you want us to keyword more existing abilities (the top vote getters were: “cannot tap to attack”, “cannot be the target of spell or abilities” and “whenever this creature deals damage, gain that much life”) Expect us to continue with this practice.

Cycles, on the other hand, got a much more lukewarm reception. This isn't to say that you don't like some cycles, but in particular you do not like cycles where it is clear that the cycle was stretched to fit the third, fourth or fifth card. This is something that the designers will keep in mind.

Message #11 – It's Okay As Long As You Like It

One of the most interesting responses was to the question “How small of a segment of the audience can care about a mechanic in order for it to still be okay to make it?”. The most common answers were things like “one percent” or “anything as long as someone likes it”. My best guess to this is that players were saying that anything is okay as long as they like it even if the vast majority of players do not.

I'm not sure what to do with this answer because I believe that players are unhappy if there are too many mechanics they do not like. If only one percent of you like something, ninety-nine do not. That's just too much dissent in my opinion. That said, I do think R&D is okay with making mechanics that have strong appeal to a specific section of the audience. Just one bigger than one percent.

Message #12 – Block Mechanics Should Be Just That

Another interesting large majority opinion. If a mechanic shows up in the large set, it should appear in the two small sets. While R&D is pretty consistent with this, we never realized how significantly you all felt about it. In addition, most of you felt that it was important for the block mechanics to evolve as the block unfolds.



Message #13 – You Like Blocks, But R&D Should Mix It Up More

The majority of you enjoy the block structure. You even enjoy having block themes. The major constructive criticism on this topic was that you felt R&D could explore some themes other than mechanical ones.

Message #14 – Art Is Fundamental To The Game

There was no message in the entire survey as strong as “art is very, very important”. This isn't a surprise to R&D, but it was very enlightening to see the strength of language used in defense of

the importance of art. The art questions, by the way, were the most common questions to see people use all one hundred words on a single question. Very clearly, you all care about art.

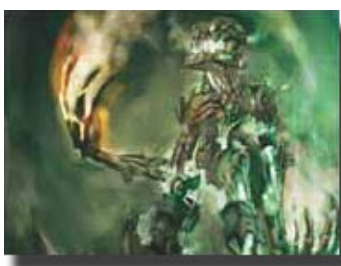
And luckily for us, you're very happy with the current state of art. But we're not planning to rest on our laurels. Jeremy Cranford, **Magic's** Art Director, is very focused on raising the bar for the art as high as possible. And as upcoming sets will demonstrate, he's doing an excellent job.

Message #15 – Variety Is The Spice To Magic

One of the common themes to come up in many different parts of the survey was the important of diversity in **Magic**. Whether you were talking about mechanics or art or worlds or names and flavor text, you stressed that you liked to see a mix of creative expression. This is another message that, while not a surprise, is a pleasant reinforcement.

Message #16 – More Eggs

While this comes as no great surprise, the majority of you loved “Easter eggs” in **Magic**. Just stayed tuned to “[Magic Arcana](#)” to see what they all are.



Message #17 – Keep On Traveling

Starting with *Mirrodin*, R&D decided to return to the new world approach to **Magic** world building. We've only ventured to our first new world and already the majority of you have embraced this approach. As such, we have no plans to change it.

Message #18 – You All Have Issues With Creature Types

Of all the questions, the ones about creature types was the one most critical about some of our recent decisions. First, a number of you (although not a majority) feel that we've gone too far in our condensing of creature types. You want to see less beasts, for example, and more slugs and frogs. Others used the question to condemn our recent abandonment of merfolk. Still others chose to ask for the return of their favorite creature type (everything from squirrels to goats). Yet others voiced their disgust of our new Human creature type.

What do I make of this? That creature types are a very personal issue that players take quite, well, personally. This is an issue that R&D is planning to examine as we know feelings about it run very high.

Message #19 – Names Have Room For Improvement

This isn't to say that you do not like the current names. In fact, most of you thought the names were good, just not great. It is the one area you feel has the greatest potential for improvement. That said, you don't want us to be too experimental (and you do not, not, not want us to repeat names on new cards). In addition, the name being flavorful was more important to you than the name matching the mechanic. You prefer evocative over practical. You like big words and you're just fine with made-up names.

Message #20 – There Is Great Conflict Over Humor In Flavor Text

The biggest issue in flavor text was over how much humor is the right amount. About half of you (that chimed in on the topic) felt that humor was the most important type of flavor text and you wanted to see us raise the percentage of it used. The other half enjoyed the many other types of flavor text (from the poetic to the descriptive) and wished to keep the humor at its current level. Ask about puns and you're opinions move even more to the extremes.

I'm not sure there's an easy answer to this feedback as the two groups are somewhat opposed in what they want. But I promise this is a topic the Creative Text team will spend more time studying.

I'm Not Done Yet

Before I bid you all adieu for this week, I wanted to take a moment to plug the Auction of the People deck challenge for this year's **Magic** Invitational. The **Magic** Invitational is **Magic's** version of the all-star game where sixteen of the top players from around the world are brought together to compete for the chance to design a **Magic** card. The event is a round robin tournament (everyone plays everyone else once) with five different formats. One of those formats is called Auction of the People. The way it works is that we ask the public to build decks based on some criteria. We then pick the seventeen most interesting decks up for auction at the event. The invitees bid on the decks by offering to start with less life and/or a smaller starting hand size.



The theme of this year's Auction of the People is artist decks. That is, every card in the deck (other than the basic land) must be illustrated by the same artist. The card pool is all the cards available on-line as the event is played on **Magic Online**. For more details and to register your deck (there is a limit of one deck submission per person) make sure to read [the official announcement](#). This is your chance to show us your deck building skills. Show us what you got!

Where Do We Go From Here?

I want to take one last moment to thank everyone who took time to take the survey. There is no tool more important than input from the players. After all, our job is to make a game you all want to play. If you have any other feedback (and this time I'm not limiting you to a hundred words) I can always be reached at makingmagic@wizards.com. As always, I cannot reply to every letter but I do promise to read every post sent to me. If you want a chance to affect the game you love, you have the ear of the Lead **Magic** Designer.

I hope today's column has given you all some insight into what the majority feels about the game. Join me next week when I explore one of the undiscovered cards of the *Mirrodin* block.

Until then, may you see the power of feedback.

Mark Rosewater

General Design

- 1) Are you happy with current **Magic** design?
- 2) Is the quality of **Magic** design improving, staying the same, or declining?
- 3) Is current **Magic** design better, the same or worse than **Magic** designs of the past?
- 4) What kinds of cards don't we design enough of?
- 5) What kinds of cards do we design too much of?
- 6) How do you feel about the current size of expansions? (remember *Mirrodin* block has decreased to 288 cards for a large expansion and increased to 165 cards for a small expansion)?
- 7) Is there too little, enough, or too much synergy in **Magic** design (synergy defined as interconnectivity between elements of the set)? Does current **Magic** design require too much thinking, just enough thinking, or not enough thinking?
- 8) Is current **Magic** design too predictable, just right or not predictable enough?
- 9) Is current **Magic** design too aggressive, just right or not aggressive enough in breaking new boundaries?
- 10) How well does current **Magic** design play with the cards of the past?
- 11) In what percentages do you believe the top cards should be divided among rarity (meaning what percentage should be common, how many uncommon and how many rare)?
- 12) Do you believe R&D designs too little, just enough or too many narrow cards (that is cards that are powerful in a very narrow function)?
- 13) If bad cards have to exist (and trust me they do), at what rarity do you believe the majority should go?
- 14) How do you feel about cards that are slightly awkward mechanically but drip with flavor?

15) In real **Magic**, should we design more, the same amount, or less cards that feel like they could possibly go in an *Unglued*-like set.

Repeats

- 16) Do we currently do too little, just enough, or too many repeats?
- 17) Should we repeat cards in expansions that appear in the current base set?
- 18) Do you prefer a simple repeat or a tweak?
- 19) How quickly is it okay to repeat a card?
- 20) How quickly is it okay to repeat a keyword mechanic?
- 21) When we bring back a keyword mechanic must we find a new tweak for it?
- 22) Do you like R&D reprinting old powerful cards with adjusted mana costs (such as **Time Warp**)?

Color Pie

- 23) How important is the color pie to you?
- 24) Does R&D put too much, just enough, or not enough emphasis on the color pie?
- 25) Should the color pie continually shift over time?
- 26) How often should we bleed an ability?
- 27) Should R&D do a better job of explaining our current color wheel philosophies?
- 28) What color is currently getting shafted?
- 29) What color has too much and needs to be knocked down?
- 30) What ability is currently in a color it shouldn't be?
- 31) What ability needs to be in an additional color?

Mechanics

- 32) How many keyword mechanics should be in a large set and how many in each small set?
- 33) Do you like R&D's recent strategy of being more liberal with using keywords?
- 34) Do you believe the level of keywords in the game right now is too high, just right, or too low?
- 35) What abilities that currently do not have keywords should have them?
- 36) Do you consider an ability a mechanic if it doesn't have a keyword?
- 37) Is it okay to carry over mechanics between blocks?
- 38) Is it okay to have mechanics that cannot be explained on the card and require additional rulebook support?
- 39) Do you enjoy when mechanics are teased (that is, one that shows up in the expansion directly before it – a la *Tempest's* Spike Drone)?
- 40) How small a segment of the audience can care about a mechanic in order for it to still be okay to make it?
- 41) Do you like cycles?
- 42) Do we do too many, just enough or not enough cycles?
- 43) How do you feel about cycles that run across multiple expansions?

Block Design

- 44) Do you enjoy the current block structure?
- 45) Do you enjoy the strong themes of the blocks of the last few years (such as the *Odyssey's* graveyard theme or *Onslaught's* tribal theme)?
- 46) Would you like to see a block with a theme other than a mechanic-based theme?
- 47) Are the blocks interconnected mechanically too much, just right or not enough?
- 48) Should a keyword mechanic that appears in the large expansion appear in both small expansions in that block?
- 49) Should mechanics in a block evolve as the block evolves or is it okay for them to stay the same?

Art

- 50) How important is the art to **Magic**?
- 51) Is the quality of the current **Magic** art better than the past, equal to the past or worse than the past?
- 52) Is it good to have artists that polarize the players (some hate it, some love it)?
- 53) Is it better to have the same consistent pool of artists or a constant churn of new artists?
- 54) Is there too little, just enough, or not enough non-representational art (defined as art that

- doesn't simply show a straight-forward scene)?
- 55) Is the current variety of **Magic** artists too small, just right or too great?
 - 56) Does similarity of art ever cause you confusion in game play?
 - 57) Should there be more variety in how each color is represented in the art?
 - 58) Should magic of a certain color be of that color's palette when represented in the art (i.e. should red magic actually have to appear as some shade of red)?
 - 59) Which artists do you love?
 - 60) Which artists do you hate?
 - 61) Do you like "Easter eggs" (visual references to older **Magic** cards) in art?

Card Concepts

- 62) How do you feel about the *Mirrodin* creative environment?
- 63) Is the current world development (meaning the look and feel of the world) better, the same or worse than previous world development?
- 64) What qualities do you look for in **Magic** world environments?
- 65) Are you happier visiting different planes every year or would you rather stay on the same plane for multiple years in a row?
- 66) Should planes be revisited, and if so, how often?
- 67) How much of a fantasy look should **Magic** have?
- 68) Should **Magic** ever visit real world inspired settings (a la *Arabian Nights*)?
- 69) Do you prefer having the same creature types every year or do you prefer having them ebb and flow (meaning each type sits certain blocks out)?
- 70) Is there a creature type that shouldn't exist?
- 71) Is there a creature type we've stopped using or simply don't use enough that should get more use?
- 72) Which is more important, having the art match the mechanic or having the art unto itself be as cool as possible?
- 73) Is any element currently being overdone in the current **Magic** card concepts?

Names

- 74) How important are the names to **Magic**?
- 75) How is the current quality of **Magic** names?
- 76) Is the current quality of names better, the same, or worse than previous **Magic** names?
- 77) How do you feel about modern sounding words in **Magic** names?
- 78) How do you feel about real world slang in **Magic** names?
- 79) Should we be more experimental in our names?
- 80) How similar can two different names be?
- 81) Should we ever consider re-using good names from bad (and forgotten) cards printed years ago?
- 82) How important is it that the name matches the mechanic
- 83) Which is more important, that the name match the mechanic of the card or the name unto itself be as cool as possible?
- 84) Which do you like better, cards that describe what they are (a la *Goblin Soldier*) or cards that are more evocative but less explanatory (a la *Keeper of the Nine Gales*)?
- 85) How do you feel about big words (words most players do not know the meaning of) used in names?
- 86) Do we have too much, just enough, or not enough made-up names?
- 87) How is the quality of our made-up names?
- 88) How important is it that names be easily pronounceable?
- 89) Do you like very long names (four plus words)?

Flavor Text

- 90) How important do you feel flavor text is to **Magic**?
- 91) How is the current quality of **Magic** flavor text?
- 92) Is the current quality of names better, the same, or worse than previous **Magic** flavor text?
- 93) Which do you prefer, real world quotations or fictional flavor text?
- 94) Would you like to see real world flavor text in expansions?
- 95) What percentage of cards with flavor text should be humorous?
- 96) What percentage of cards with flavor text should be poetic?
- 97) What percentage of cards with flavor text should be about the environment/cosmology of the plane?
- 98) Do we do too many, just enough, or not enough puns?
- 99) Are puns important to flavor text?
- 100) What card has your favorite flavor text?

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