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We here at Wizards of the Coast have been getting a lot of questions lately asking how we feel about poker and the fact that some of the stars of our Pro Tour have been successful in recent poker tournaments. Are we worried about this newly growing competitor to **Magic: The Gathering**? The short answer is "no." Anything that brings more interest and attention to the gaming world is ultimately good for **Magic**, because we've got the best game going. The long answer is more subtle and I want to take the time in this article to answer these questions and lay out our position for those of you who want more details.

For starters, congratulations to Dave Williams. For those of you who haven't heard, Dave came in second place at this year's World Series of Poker. For his accomplishment, Dave earned \$3.5



Congratulations Dave!

million. On the one hand, Wizards of the Coast wasn't happy to see one of its top players running off to seek fame and fortune in the poker world. However an interesting thing happened. It got back to us that despite Dave's recent success and newfound dominance in the poker world, Dave is going to continue to play **Magic**. Why? Because despite the large payout that Dave received, he still enjoys playing **Magic**. Much of this article will focus on examining what makes **Magic** more fun than poker to so many people.

When we look at the big picture for **Magic** right now, everything is going great. 2003 was our best year ever. Those of you who've been around the game for a while should think about what that last sentence really means. When **Magic** first came out in 1993, most people assumed it was just a fad. When I first got into the game it was already a couple years old, and most people acknowledged that it was more than just a flash in the pan, but there was still a general expectation that the bottom would fall out some time in the next couple of years. Well, **Magic** celebrated its 10-year anniversary last year and it seems crystal clear to all of us now that **Magic** is an "evergreen" brand. Year-in, year-out Wizards of the Coast expects to sell a lot of **Magic** cards. The really good news is that not only is the game healthy and vibrant at 10 years old, but it's *still growing*. We sold more cards in 2002 than we did in 2001. We sold more cards in 2003 than we did in 2002. And we've sold more cards so far in 2004 than we did in the first six months of 2003. Our tournament participation numbers have also continued to trend steadily up.



There are a bunch of reasons **Magic** has been so successful and several of them point directly to key differences between **Magic** and poker. Before I get into a direct comparison, though, I should point out that **Magic** has a lot of things going for it that just don't apply to poker. If you're into the fantasy elements of the game, **Magic** is clearly superior. If you really like the art, or you like to build wacky theme decks, or you're into the storyline, or you like to figure out clever card combinations, there's no contest between the two games. **Magic** cards can also be a lot of fun to collect, and some of them are quite valuable. Black Lotus usually sells for over a thousand dollars now and some of you may remember the story of the case of Arabian Nights that sold for \$95,000 last year. For the rest of this article

I'm just going to focus on **Magic** as a pure strategy game. It's a lot more than that, of course, which is why its audience is so diverse, but that's the aspect of **Magic** that is most interesting to compare and contrast with poker, and also the element that is most relevant to discussions about the behavior of Pro Tour players.

One of the cornerstones of **Magic** is that things constantly change. Every four months, we publish a new set full of cards that shake up the environment. New strategies rise and fall regularly, new deck archetypes enter the metagame and leave again not just when new cards are printed, but also when creative deck builders think up new ways to use the old cards. Each year R&D tries to take **Magic** to a whole new world both creatively and mechanically and we're constantly challenging ourselves to think up new and surprising ways to do things. (Some of our favorite cards are the ones that are greeted with cries of "That can't be real – they would never do that!" when you guys first see them.) Deckbuilding in **Magic** allows for a level of customization that was unprecedented in the gaming industry when **Magic** debuted.

Contrast this with poker. In poker you'll use the same 52 cards every time you play for the rest of your life. A full house is always going to beat a flush and the odds against drawing to an inside straight aren't changing no matter how much you might want them to. To be fair, some people like these characteristics of poker. Some people don't want to spend the time necessary to learn what all the new **Magic** cards do, or they get upset when their favorite strategy is no longer the most effective strategy. This is a very important point of differentiation between **Magic** and poker. **Magic** is constantly reinventing itself – our marketing guys call it "evolving depth of game play" and I think they're right to brag about it.

A second key difference between poker and **Magic** is the way each game awards prize money. In poker, you have to risk your own money if you want to win any prize money. In **Magic**, however, there's no gambling. **Magic's** Pro Tour is funded entirely by Wizards of the Coast – all you have to do is earn an invitation. Prizes for winning poker tournaments are obviously much larger than those for winning **Magic** events, but that's only possible because each competitor is putting up thousands of dollars of his or her own money in order to play. Sure you can win more money playing poker than you can playing **Magic**, but only if you have a lot of money that you're willing to risk losing. I'm not saying one system is inherently better than the other, but I am pointing out another important way in which **Magic** is different from poker.

I feel like I should also talk about which game is more fun, but that's such a subjective topic that I can't really analyze it logically. Personally, I think **Magic** is more fun (and I suspect most of you agree with me or you wouldn't be on this website reading this article), but I also know that there are people who think poker is more fun than **Magic**. It's worth noting, however, that most poker players won't play "for fun." If there isn't any money riding on the game, poker isn't really worth playing. In **Magic**, however, the so-called "casual players" vastly outnumber the tournament players.

Another point worth noting while we're talking about which game is more fun is that many of the professional **Magic** players who have made the leap over to poker still play **Magic**. They fully admit that they could make more money if they spent their weekends chained to a laptop, grinding out a few more pots at an online casino. However, they would rather spend their time flying to a Pro Tour where they can hang out with their friends. In my opinion, the social dynamic in the **Magic** community (both on the web and at the events themselves) is far superior to the poker equivalent.

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*In conclusion ...*

At the end of the day **Magic** and poker are fundamentally different games that offer different things to their fans. We fully expect some gamers to prefer **Magic** and others to prefer poker. Meanwhile we also recognize that some people will find themselves attracted to both games. In particular, some of our most competitive **Magic** players play **Magic** in part because they like the thrill of competition and we have no choice but to acknowledge the fact that for some of them poker will do a better job of fulfilling that need. If your primary motivation for choosing a hobby is the opportunity to compete for as much money as possible (and you've got a sizable bankroll), you're going to be happier playing poker than **Magic**.

So what are we going to do in light of Dave's accomplishment? Not much. For all the reasons I outlined above, we think **Magic** is a better strategy game than poker. **Magic** is deeper, more interesting, and more fun than poker. We have a huge fan-base, most of whom are not motivated primarily by money, and we're not going to do anything that might mess that up. Interestingly, the poker world is starting to notice that a lot of its young, smart up-and-comers cut their teeth on a different card game. Maybe some poker players will realize that **Magic** is a better fit for their lifestyle than poker and they'll try us out.

All in all, we don't see poker as a threat any different from other games. We do see it as a competitor for the older and more competitive portion of our audience, but we aren't going to change anything that might affect those of you who like **Magic** just the way it is. In fact, we see the lingering presence at our big events of players who spend most of their time playing poker as evidence that we're doing things right. The gaming industry has been growing dramatically in recent years and we have faced increased competition on all fronts, but **Magic** has nonetheless continued to grow. We're confident that in the future there will continue to be plenty of customers who will look at the differences between **Magic** and other games, including poker, and choose **Magic** (or choose both). We wish the rest of you good luck and we'll still be here if you get bored later.

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