



MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM

ARTICLES

Related links

Read other articles

TOURNAMENTS

MAGIC ONLINE

Article Search

Top Ten of the Morning



Mark Rosewater · Making Magic
Monday, October 25, 2004

Let me begin this week's column by quickly addressing last week's column. (I got a little bit of mail.) While I might be mad (as in crazy, not angry), there is a method to my madness. My follow-up to "Elegance" will be next week. I think it will answer a number of questions that have popped up. I promise it will have less links and I might even mention the word "Magic" a few times. Until then, I ask you all to debate the following question: Is "Elegance" elegant?

MAKING MAGIC



Elegance

Mark Rosewater

Saying a lot with a little space.

And now, this week's column:

Welcome to Top Ten Week. This week we're broadening our themes a little by trying something a little more experimental and open-ended. This week's theme will be used by all eleven columnists. I, for one, am curious to see what everyone does. I do know though what I'm doing.

I've already done several Top Ten columns ("The Write Stuff" and "Ice Guys Finish First" for example), so I decided that for a Top Ten week I'd do the next obvious thing – A Top Ten Top Ten column. That is, a column of the Top Ten Top Ten Lists (design related, of course) that I had floating around my head. (When I said "obvious" I meant obvious to me – it should be clear that my brain works a little differently.)

Top Ten List #10 – Top Ten Most Used Design Names By Me

Whenever I design a card I give it a design name. Usually, I try to come up with something new and clever. But when I get stuck, I fall back on a number of time-tested staples.

10) Fat Elf

Whenever I make a medium-sized green creature (3/3 or 4/4) with an activated ability, I most often make it an elf and use this name.

9) Throat Wolf

This is an old joke. It goes back to the earliest days of the usenet groups. The more experienced players would have fun with the new players by referring to this supposedly "ultra-rare" card. The abilities always changed but the one constant was that it had "firstest strike" (what this meant also changed with each description). As a nod to this card, I often name small green or red creatures Throat Wolf.

8) Blow to the Head

This is the name that I use whenever I can't come up with a good name for a black discard spell. I had another name I used before this one that is not printable in a family site such as this. Once I realized that playtest names were going to start being seen by the public I changed my default name over to this less controversial one.

7) Man o' Mana

This is the name I use for any creature that taps for mana. Usually it's green or artifact.

6) Aura of Need

This is my default name for a global enchantment, especially if it's white.

5) Chaosorama

I love making crazy, I mean chaotic, rare red enchantments. Whenever I don't have a better name for these, this is my default.

4) Ragnarok

In Norse Mythology, this is the end of the world. Whenever I make global reset buttons, I use this name.

3) Speedy Gonzales

This is my default name for a red creature with haste. This name even showed up as one of the cards I designed specifically for a **Magic** Invitational.

2) Enchanto Lad

I use this name on rare creatures that have some interactions with enchantments. It's a reference to one of my comic book guilty pleasures – The Legion of Super Heroes. For those of you that have not had the pleasure of reading one of their comics, the Legion is a collection of teen-age superheroes in the thirtieth century that band together to do good and thus, of course, fight evil. All the early characters had very stilted names like Lightning Lad or Phantom Girl.

1) Banned In France

Long ago in the early days of **Magic**, Wizards of the Coast made their first banned and restricted list. The French Office felt the list wasn't complete enough so they took it upon themselves to ban any card that cared about what the top card of the library was ([Petra Sphinx](#), [Sindbad](#), [Vexing Arcanix](#), etc.). As a tribute to this, I name any card that cares about the top card of the library Banned in France.

Top Ten List #9 - Top Ten Favorite Codenames for Future Blocks

I know we can't use a number of these. That doesn't mean they're not my favorites

- 10) Peter, Paul & Mary
- 9) Sex, Drugs & Rock n' Roll
- 8) Winkin, Blinkin & Nod
- 7) Beg, Borrow & Steal
- 6) Tom, Dick & Harry
- 5) Larry, Darryl & My Other Brother Darryl
- 4) Dewey, Cheatem & Howe
- 3) Larry, Moe & Curly
- 2) Truth, Justice & The American Way
- 1) Blood, Sweat & Tears

Top Ten List #8 - Top Ten “Making Magic” Columns To Receive the Most Mail

As a columnist, I'm very receptive to feedback, both good and bad. Here are the ten columns that spawned the most mail:

10) [“Inquiring Minds Want to Know I & II”](#)

This was the interview where I answered questions posed by the readers. It's on this list because you guys sent a lot of questions.

9) [“Dear Diary”](#)

For some reason, this article seems to be very popular. As such, I got a significant amount of mail from readers letting me know that he or she liked the article.

8) [“Type I, Take II”](#)

This was my second column on Type I. I got less mail on this column than the first one, but still enough to make this list.

7) [“Unhinged or No?”](#)

Readers were very excited by the news of *Unhinged*. Very, very, very excited. Many of you shared your joy in a letter.

6) [“A Day in the Life”](#)

I think the Choose-Your-Own-Adventure is the most popular article I've done. The fact that it was

so different I believe inspired a lot more people to write in about it.

5) “[Elegance](#)”

This one was a “love it or hate it” column. And when people love or hate something, they like to let you know about it. As I said above, check in next week for the follow-up to “Elegance”.

4) “[When Good Cards Go Bad](#)”

If “Day in the Life” is my most popular column, this is probably my most respected. Many people read back issues and write to me about past columns. This column gets more current mail than any other column I’ve done.

3) “[Playing to Type 1](#)”

If you want to get bombarded by e-mail, I suggest you include the words Type 1 somewhere in your column. Make one or two critical comments and boom – a very full mailbox.

2) “[Mons Made Me Do It](#)”

This is probably the third most popular column I’ve done. The gimmick of this article, for some reason, made people have to write in and tell me how it affected them.

1) “[Talk To Me](#)”

Hopefully it comes to no surprise that my column where I asked for feedback about the game has the highest e-mail response.



Top Ten List #7 - Top Ten R&D Members Who Have Worked On The Most Magic Expansions

A little list for the trivia buffs. This is a list talking about what people have worked (on design and/or development) for the most sets. My long-term goal? Get to number one.

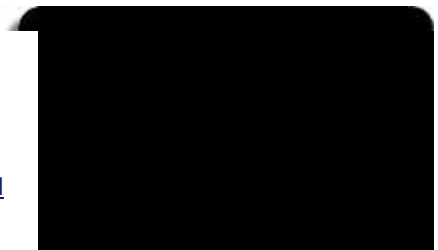
- 10) Joel Mick
- 9) Brian Schneider
- 8) Richard Garfield
- 7) Randy Buehler
- 6) William Jockusch
- 5) Charlie Catino
- 4) Henry Stern
- 3) Mark Rosewater
- 2) Mike Elliott
- 1) Bill Rose

Top Ten List #6 - Top Ten Cards That Took The Longest To See Print

To be a good **Magic** designer, you need a number of tricks in your bag. Here's one of my favorite: If you design a card you really like and you're interested in seeing it get printed, keep submitting it. Eventually some development group has to let it by. Here are the ten cards that took the most re-submitting.

10) **Soul Foundry** (*Mirrodin*)

This card, named Clone Machine in design, was first designed for *Urza's Saga*. The rules team shot it down. But I liked the card, so every time we got a new rules manager I would show him the card. Paul Barclay finally said “okay”, so I put the card in *Mirrodin*. (If you want to read more about this card, see “[Someday My Imprints Will Come](#)”.)



9) Mindslaver (Mirrodin)

This card began as a splashy card in *Tempest*. When it was knocked out of development for rules issues, I kept the idea in my back pocket. I put it into *Unglued 2* but the project was put on hiatus soon after. As with **Soul Foundry**, the climate was right to push cards with weird and wacky rules interactions. (For more on **Mindslaver's** story, take a look at my column "[A Mind Is A Wonderful Thing To Waste](#)".)

8) Moonring Mirror (Champions of Kamigawa)

Before I came to Wizards of the Coast, I had a cool idea for a card that allowed a player to have two hands (of cards that is) that they could swap back and forth. That card ended up being called **Duplicity** and it was printed in *Tempest*. Unfortunately, **Duplicity** ended up being a dud and no one except for a few eager Johnnies ever played with it.

So I was determined to remake **Duplicity**; this time doing it right. I tried various versions, some artifacts and others enchantments. But it wasn't until *Champions of Kamigawa* that I was finally successful.

7) March of the Machines (Mirrodin)

One of R&D's jobs is to monitor the ever-shifting color pie. When I come across a mechanic in the wrong color, I make a mental note to remake the card into the proper color. Such was the case with **Titania's Song**. The card just felt like it wanted to be blue, not green. It took a few tries to get it made, but when *Mirrodin* came around the time was clearly right.

6) Titania's Chosen (Urza's Saga)

This is a perfect example of a card that took a while to get printed for no other reason than simple bad luck. Everyone in R&D liked the card, but there always seemed to be an excuse to push it off. After sitting in four consecutive sets (*Tempest* through *Urza's Saga*), **Titania's Chosen** finally made it to the big leagues.

5) Psychogenic Probe (Mirrodin)

For a long time this was a red enchantment called **Shuffle Hoser**. I submitted it for numerous sets but development always found a reason not to include it. Then in *Mirrodin* design, I decided to try again with one small change. I made it an artifact. And lo and behold, it made it into the set.

4) Tel-Jilad Chosen (Mirrodin)

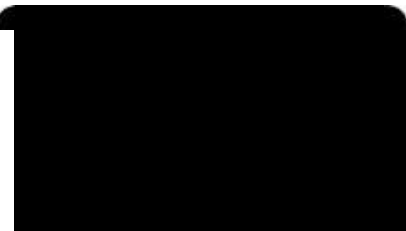
Back in the day, my favorite deck was a little blue and green weenie deck. And one of the MVPs was a card called **Argothian Pixies**. I always felt that the Pixies deserved to have a less clunky version (a straight "protection from artifacts" rather than the hodgepodge of templates that existed back then. Each time I put it in the design, development removed them because "protection from artifact" didn't seem too relevant. Then along came *Mirrodin* and all of a sudden protection from artifacts was a pretty strong ability.

3) Mass Hysteria (Mirrodin)

The key component of my blue/green deck was a green enchantment called **Concordant Crossroads**. But green didn't quite seem right. Red was the king of haste. If any color should have a revamped Crossroads (the old version was an enchant world – a mechanic we didn't make any more) it should be red. I made this card five or so years ago. It took until *Mirrodin* to finally see the light of day.

2) Donate (Urza's Destiny)

I had a goofy deck where I won by giving my opponents control of things they couldn't handle. One of the annoying parts about the deck was that the only spells that allowed me to give my opponent stuff forced me to take stuff back in exchange. Why couldn't there just be a card that let you give things away? What possible problem could that cause?



This card has the distinction of appearing in the largest number of consecutive sets (six in all – *Tempest* through *Urza's Destiny*) before it saw print. It's my theory that R&D was sick of seeing it and left it in *Urza's Destiny* just to get rid of it.

1) **Heartbeat of Spring** (*Champions of Kamigawa*)

During the development of *Fifth Edition* (back in something like 1997), the team made a wish list of cards it wanted to see in future base sets. The list was for cards that didn't yet exist but that the team wanted to see get designed. One such card was a "green mana flare". I stuck it in *Tempest*. And *Urza's Saga*. And *Mercadian Masques*. And *Invasion*. And *Odyssey*. (I skipped *Onslaught*.) And *Mirrodin*. And finally *Champions of Kamigawa*. Seven years later it has *finally* seen print.



"What possible problem could that cause?"

Top Ten List #5 - Top Ten Cards R&D Has Designed That Guarantees the Rules People The Most Job Security

- 10) Split Cards
- 9) Illusionary Mask
- 8) Mycosynth Lattice
- 7) Ice Cauldron
- 6) Fork (and Fork's children)
- 5) Volrath's Shapeshifter
- 4) The Licids
- 3) Vesuvan Doppelganger
- 2) Opalescence
- 1) Humility

Top Ten List #4 - Top Ten Cards I'm Proudest of Having Designed

Whenever I'm interviewed, I always get asked what is my favorite card that I've designed. I always reply, "Are you asking me which one of my children is my favorite?"

Here are the ten cards/mechanics that at this moment I'm proudest of.

10) **Kindle**

This card started as a simple idea – A Plague Rat Lightning Bolt. The fact that it ended up working so well and spawned so many other cards makes me very happy.

9) **Cabal Therapy**

Named "Go Fish" I tried getting this cards into numerous sets. The trick was adding flashback. All of a sudden, the card got pretty good.

8) **Quirion Ranger**

I love the fact that this card had more tricks than I even thought was possible out of one card. Ironically, it started as a simple hoser for *Stasis* and ended up being much, much more.

7) **Squirrel Farm**

I consider this the perfect *Unglued* card. Every aspect of it from the mechanic to the name to the flavor text to the art just tickles my funny bone. Few memories will top gunslinging with my Squirrel Farm deck at the Gen Con which held the *Unglued* prerelease.

6) **Soul Foundry**

This card spawned the Imprint mechanic. Plus, it's just fun to play.

5) **Maro**

This card will always hold a warm spot in my heart. The

simplicity of the design (dare I say elegance) still shines through today.

4) Artifact Lands

This will probably be the most controversial card(s) on my list, but I thought it was an excellent solution to an interesting problem. I know they pushed Affinity for Artifacts over the edge, but I believe there could have been a way to solve the problem without losing these lands.

3) Ivory Mask

This is one of those cards that seemed so obvious yet just didn't exist. I would like to see white get more proactive spells like this.

2) Mindslaver

A cool effect, a neat flavor, a fun mechanic. The fact that it generates stories is just icing on the cake.

1) Split Cards

Still my favorite. I only hope I work on **Magic** long enough to come up with something equally cool.



Top Ten List #3 - The Top Ten Mechanics I Most Want To See Come Back

This is the kind of list that you see posted on the net from time to time. As the Head Designer of **Magic**, I'm guessing that my list will spur a little more conversation. Note that there are many mechanics not listed below that have a good chance of returning. And just because I list it below doesn't mean it's going to show up any time soon. Bringing back a mechanic involves finding the right environment for it, so it's not something we plan so much as something we happily discover. This is merely my personal list of what mechanics I would be happiest to find a new home for.

10) Provoke (*Legions*)

I think this mechanic has what it takes to show up more frequently than a block mechanic. It's simple yet flavorful. And it allows the players to do something they love: makes creatures fight.

9) Morph (*Onslaught*, *Legions*, *Scourge*)

I think this was a very innovative mechanic and I'm looking forward to the day it returns. I even have some cool ideas how to give it a new tweak.

8) Affinity (*Mirrodin*, *Darksteel*, *Fifth Dawn*)

Some of you might be shocked to hear this, but affinity will be back. Maybe not for artifacts, but for some card type or sub type that isn't so easy to get five out on the first turn.

7) Spikes (*Tempest*, *Stronghold*)

I love the Spikes. And I plan to bring them back some day. In fact, the spikes were in early *Mirrodin* design. They actually had an interesting synergy with all the +1/+1 counters. But, in the end, they were cut to make space for other mechanics.

6) Flashback

I think next time you see this mechanic it will be in a set that isn't so focused on the graveyard.

5) Echo

I think this mechanic still has some room to play around with.

4) Buyback

We've been receptive to redoing this mechanic for years, but the right environment hasn't come up yet.

3) Imprint

I think this mechanic needs more exploration. Its open-endedness allows for a lot of possibilities.

2) Poison

I've said it before and I'll say it again. Someday it will return. I promise.

1) Split Cards

How can my personal favorite design not rear its head again? I'm not sure how to tweak them yet, but I know I'll find something very cool.

Top Ten List #2 - Top Ten Coolest Things About Working in R&D



- 10) Regularly scheduled Nerf Wars
- 9) The dress code (or, more accurately, the lack of one)
- 8) Working with a group of people that are all as smart as you.
- 7) Your boss tells you it's okay to take the morning off to see the latest *Lord of the Rings* film.
- 6) Access to the R&D vault, I mean library.
- 5) Having people around willing to spend an hour debating things like "Are ears part of the face?"
- 4) Being a celebrity in a little tiny corner of the world.
- 3) People write you letters about what they think of your work. (And the vast majority says very nice things.)
- 2) Thinking "You know what, wouldn't it be cool if the game had blah?" and then just adding blah to the game.
- 1) Being paid to play **Magic**

Top Ten List #1 - Top Ten Odd Questions I Had To Answer in the Unhinged FAQ

I can't comment on this Top Ten list other than to say that the *Unhinged* previews start Monday, November 8th and the *Unhinged* FAQ (which will be posted on magicthegathering.com) is over forty pages long.

- 10) What counts as an insult?
- 9) Are negative numbers allowed?
- 8) Can I borrow other people's shoes?
- 7) How much of their body can a creature be missing in the art and still count?
- 6) Whose job is it to keep track of time?
- 5) Does nothing come alphabetically first or last?
- 4) [Is gum food?](#)
- 3) Do fingernails count?
- 2) How does the card work if actress Kate Bosworth is playing it?
- 1) Do I have to scream at the end of every turn or just my turn?



Top Ten Little Indians

I hope today's column was as much fun to read as it was to write.

Join me next week when we learn if the emperor has any clothes.

Until then, may you find a job worthy of its own Top Ten list.

Mark Rosewater



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Mark Rosewater](#) archive

[WHAT'S NEW](#) [CORPORATE INFO](#) [WHERE TO BUY](#) [INTERNATIONAL](#) [SUPPORT](#) [SITMAP](#) [PRODUCTS](#)

[© 1995-2005 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.](#)
[Wizards is headquartered in Renton, Washington, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057.](#)
[PRIVACY STATEMENT](#)