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Land of the Rising Fun

Mark Rosewater · Making Magic
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Welcome to Japan Week! This week we'll be exploring the impact that **Magic** has had on Japan and the impact Japan has had on **Magic**. This is a quirky topic for a design column so I thought it best to reply with a quirky column. This week is the story about my first trip to Japan. (Don't worry, **Magic's** involved, I swear.) Please don't wait for some big message to this column because there isn't one. Just a little story to tell you some things about me, about **Magic**, and about a little country called Japan.

“Hey Mark, How'd You Like A Free Trip To Japan?”

Ever since I was a little kid, I'd always loved the idea of traveling the world. But before I got to Wizards of the Coast (with the sole exception of a three-week student trip to Europe when I was 13), I hadn't gotten much chance to scratch that itch. And then for the last nine years I've been scratching like a madman. But this story takes place about half a year after I had started working for Wizards. Before traveling around the world had become commonplace. Back then I'd had some opportunity to travel around North America, but I'd yet to go overseas. But **Magic** sold cards in other countries, right? Surely, my chance would come.



One day while I was visiting *The Duelist* (this was before I became editor-in-chief and was merely R&D liaison to *The Duelist*) I was approached by Wendy Noritake, *The Duelist's* publisher. The conversation started with the quote that heads this section. You see, Wendy was trying to convince our Japanese partner to print a Japanese version of *The Duelist*. To help close the deal Wendy was planning on attending the very first Grand Prix in Japan. And then it dawned on her that it might be good PR move to run a *Duelist* sponsored side event at the Grand Prix. But she only had the budget to take one other person. She needed to find a *Duelist* staffer capable of running a side event all by himself. And wouldn't you know it, only one member of the staff had judging experience. Or should I say one liaison to the staff.

You have to understand that not only did I want to travel, but Japan was one of the specific places I was most excited to travel to. So when Wendy asked, I was a little beyond excited. If it had been a scene out of a broad farce, I would have pulled two suitcases from behind my back. I was that eager to go.

But first I needed to come up with a cool side event. Wendy had a very limited budget (basically enough to pay for two tickets to Japan) so I had to put something together with things available in the office. I asked around and stumbled onto a little goldmine. It seems we had a number of cases of *Revised* (aka. *Third Edition*). This might not have seemed like a giant deal as *Revised* had at the time only gone off sale less than a year earlier. But one little detail made *Revised* a perfect choice. The first base set in Japanese was *Fourth Edition*. The Japanese never had a chance to purchase *Revised*.

In the Steps of Godzilla

Next thing you know, I was standing in downtown Tokyo. The Wizards contingent (probably thirty or so in all – a number of which were non-employees we brought in for the event such as artists and pro players) had arrived early to get a chance to adjust to the time difference and see a little of the city. Our Japanese partners were very eager to show us around. The Wizards people broke into several groups. I ended up in the group that was interested in Organized Play. As such, we were taken to Tokyo's DCI Tournament Center. The DCI Tournament Center was at the time the largest center dedicated to card play in, I believe, all of Japan. The DCI Tournament Center is probably best known for this card:

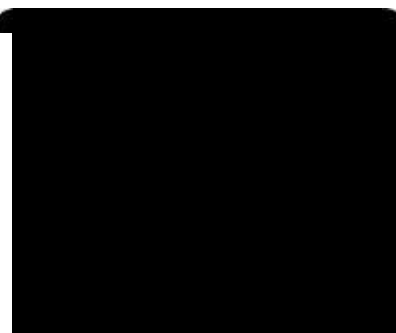


The Shichifukujin Dragon is one of only two unique **Magic** cards in existence (using the original definition of unique, meaning there's only one copy in existence). The other one, if you're interested, is the 1996 World Champion card given to, you guessed it, the 1996 World Champion (Tom Chanpheng of Australia). For those that enjoy useless **Magic** design trivia (and if you don't what are you doing reading this column?), I designed both of the unique cards. As a quick aside, here's how each was made.

Shichifukujin Dragon – To commemorate the opening of the DCI Tournament Center, Wizards was asked if they could design and draw (just as I designed both cards, Chris Rush illustrated both of them – back then he was a full-time Wizards employee) a card called Shichifukujin Dragon. Shichifukujin is the name of the Seven Deities of Good Fortune in Japanese mythology. The card was very symbolic as it was supposed to bring good luck to the DCI Tournament Center. Chris Rush drew a lovely picture. And just as it was about to go off to press, it occurred to someone, “Hmm, perhaps it might be cool to put actual rules text on the card.”

So they came to me. They needed a cool mechanic that matched the name and art. Oh, and I had an hour. As the art had to be a seven-headed dragon, I looked for a mechanic that played into the card's seven-headedness. That is where I came up with the idea of the seven +1/+1 counters. Somehow seven heads got me thinking of hydras and I came up with the idea that it could grow new heads. But to do so it had to make itself more vulnerable for some duration of time. As I played around with the card I came up with the idea of losing two +1/+1 counters to get three... at the end of the turn. I quickly had the rules text templated (by a trained professional – I know better than to get involved in templating) and handed off the card.

1996 World Champion – The 1996 World Championships were going to be held at Wizards of the Coast corporate office. (The one we still work in today.) One of the members of the **Magic** team came up with the brilliant idea of making a one-of-a-kind **Magic** card to give away to the winner (encased in his trophy for those that care – also for those that care, rumor has it Chanpheng sold his trophy years later to a hardcore collector for tens of thousands of



dollars). The card was going to be called 1996 World Champion and the art was to be done by Chris Rush. Again (although this time with a little more time) I was asked to design the mechanic.

I knew I wanted it to be something we hadn't done before and as there was only going to be one, and that one was going to be encased in a trophy, I didn't have to worry about power level concerns. In fact, as this card was going to be seen by a lot of players (we put a picture in *The Duelist*) and wasn't going to be played, it begged to be powerful. In addition, I knew the card had to be splashy. The first thing I decided to do was make it a five-color card. Remember that this was before Sliver Queen so at the time **Magic** didn't have a five-color card. Next I gave it an ability that was sure to win the game. It's power and toughness were equal to your opponent's life. One hit (provided no shenanigans) and you won the game. Then to make sure that someone didn't zap it away, I gave it untargetability.



Finally, I knew I needed a way to get the card into your hand. That's when I came up with the idea of a card that could be activated in your library. I wasn't sure if it would work so I showed it to the Rules Manager (who if memory serves me was Tom Wylie at the time). The conversation went something like this.

Me: What do you think?

Tom: So there's only going to be one of this card ever created?

Me: Yes.

Tom: And that card is going to be imbedded in the trophy?

Me: Yes.

Tom: And it's probably not legal in any official format?

Me: Yes. So, is it doable?

Tom: Heavens no! Are you kidding me? An ability that can be activated in the library? Sweet Christmas.

Me: But can I make it?

Tom: Eh, knock yourself out.

I'm told the card is deadly to any rules guru who lays eyes upon it. Luckily, Tom Changpheng wasn't too much of a rules lawyer. And yes, by the way, I wrote the flavor text.

As I walk into the DCI Tournament, the very first thing I see is the Shichifukujin Dragon. I read the ability on the card (it was printed in English) and think to myself, that's interesting. It takes me a full minute to remember that I designed it. We tour the tournament center and are overwhelmed by the number of players. The center is swamped, mostly, I assumed, to practice for the upcoming Grand Prix.

Besides the Tournament Center, I also get the chance to see a number of Tokyo sites (a lot of shrines in Tokyo), but as this is drifting off into non-**Magic** territory let me end this section by saying that I saw a lot of Tokyo and got a very good close-up look at Japanese culture both past and present. (I'll talk a little bit about Japanese gamer culture in a bit.)

Down By The Old Mil Stream

The Tokyo Grand Prix was the third Grand Prix ever held (the first one was in Amsterdam and the second in Washington D.C.) and the first one to be held in Asia. While we had gotten good turnouts, everyone believed that Tokyo was going to crush the record. In fact, many Wizardsfolk thought that the tournament could reach four digits. There had never been a **Magic** tournament with a thousand players so everyone was

rightfully excited.

But I wasn't working the Grand Prix. I was in charge of the all-Revised sealed deck side event. And surprise, surprise, it was kind of popular. Actually, a little too popular. You see, getting a



chance to pick up *Revised* cards was such a draw, some people who came to play in the Grand Prix were skipping it to play in *The Duelist* side event. Now remember, the entire event was put together as a PR move to make our Japanese partners happy. But they were very invested in having the Grand Prix hit a thousand players so they weren't too happy seeing *The Duelist* event messing with those plans.

So, I was instructed to stop announcing the tournament, and to take down any and all signs about it. But word of mouth proved to be the best advertising and the numbers kept growing. This is when I stumbled onto the next little problem. When Wendy approached me to come to Japan, she stressed that I wouldn't have any help running the tournament. Not to worry I had told her, I'd run tournaments single-handedly on numerous occasions. Even some pretty large ones even. But this tournament had one wrinkle that I had forgotten to take into account. Everyone playing in it spoke a different language than me!

Oh yes, and all the cards were in English. Now most Japanese people take some English in school (quick tip, in fact the best tip about going to Japan I know – many more Japanese people write and read English than can speak it; if you ever get in a communication bind, try writing down your message), but **Magic**-ese is not exactly normal English. So many people had questions about their cards. Questions in Japanese.

Luckily, we had brought one Wizards employee that actually spoke Japanese. She was in fact from Japan and used the trip as a way to see her mother (who by the way made the best salmon rice balls I have ever had in my life). Seeing the metaphorical quicksand I had gotten myself into, she came to my aid. Now she didn't know much about **Magic** rules. And I knew even less Japanese. But the two of us managed to run a full Swiss tournament with over one hundred competitors by ourselves.

Not So Trivial

Before I worked at Wizards, I lived in Los Angeles. Because I was privy to upcoming cards (I was freelancing at the time – mostly writing articles and puzzles for *The Duelist*), I was banned from sanctioned play. So I got into judging. And every convention after my judging duties were over, I'd run a **Magic** trivia contest (aka a game show). When I started working Pro Tours, I carried the tradition over. Everyone knew me as the **Magic** trivia guy. So when the Japanese heard I was coming, they begged me to do a trivia show. Who was I to say no?

One afternoon after my side event was over, I was scheduled to run a game show. I was provided with numerous prizes and a bevy of Japanese women to help me. The event started out with me being introduced by two rather attractive Japanese women. But rather than talk directly to the audience, they did what could most accurately be described as a little play. I was informed by someone who spoke the language that the entire dialogue was about me. Once I took the stage, the women just kept posing near me.



I said at the beginning of the article that there wasn't going to be a common theme. I guess I lied as the theme appears to be that I make mistake after mistake by not thinking something all the way through. So, I get up on the stage. I have an interpreter by my side. I begin asking my questions, many about early **Magic**. Here's the problem. **Magic** didn't start in Japan until *Fourth Edition*. They never saw early **Magic**. This means I was asking questions that must have sounded something like this:

- Of all the artifacts that you've never seen, which one had a printing error?
- Which five cards you've never seen have a nickname that's only been mentioned in places you've probably never read?
- How is this character you've never heard of related to this other character you've never heard of?

But the early **Magic** questions weren't the painful part. Oh no. The real painful part was the questions I had lined up about the Pro Tour. While *The Duelist* had been providing information

about the Pro Tour and other top events, very little of it was finding its way into Japan. Each question went something like this.

Me: All right, next question. This one is about the Pro Tour. Who won the very first Pro Tour?

(silence)

Guy #1: Mark Justice.

Me: Uh no, Mark did make the Top 8 at the first Pro Tour but he didn't win it. Any other guesses?

(silence)

Guy #2: Alexander Blumke (Wizards brought Alexander to the event as a guest).

Me: No. Alexander is the 1995 World Champion but he's never won a Pro Tour.

Any one else?

(silence)

Me: I'll give you a clue. His first name is Michael.

Guy #3: Olle Rade (We also brought Olle to the event.)

Me: Olle did win Pro Tour Columbus but that was the third Pro Tour. And he isn't named Michael.

(silence)

Girl #1: You.

Me: No, I actually haven't ever played in a Pro Tour. I'm not allowed because I work for Wizards of the Coast. And, of course, I'm not named Michael.

Guy #4: Mark Justice.

Me: That's been said. He didn't win. And he's not named Michael.

Girl #2: Michael Justice.

Me: Um, there isn't a Michael Justice. It's Mark Justice.

Guy #5: Mark Justice.

Me: No, he... Okay, Michael L... Last name starts with an L.

(silence)

Me: Lo...

Guy #6: Brian Weissman.

Me: Brian is a very good player. And while he was capable of winning the first Pro Tour, uh, he didn't.

Girl #3: Richard Garfield (Richard was at the event)

Me: The answer is Michael Loconto.

Guy #7: Richard Kane Ferguson (an artist Wizards brought to the event).

Me: Michael Loconto. The answer is Michael Loconto.

Guy #8: Michael Loconto.

Me: Yes, correct. Michael Loconto won the first Pro Tour; (looking at list of questions) And that was the easy one.

Oddly enough, trivia went over quite well.

Top 10 Things I Learned About Japanese Gaming Culture By Watching the Grand Prix

#10 – The Japanese are accustomed to pre-registering for things.

#9 – It is common in Japan to wear a surgical mask if you are sick and want to reduce spreading germs.

#8 – It is customary to determine who goes first by playing Rock, Paper, Scissors (called Jan Ken Pon in Japanese)

#7 – The Japanese smile a lot when they play.

#6 – The Japanese will bow in their seats at the beginning of a game.

#5 – The Japanese in general are very quiet when they play.

#4 – The Japanese love their tokens. (And they get very creative.)

#3 – Most Japanese have poor poker faces (at least back then).

#2 – The Japanese seldom argue with the judge.

#1 – When you tell 800+ Japanese players to sit and be quiet, they sit and are quiet.

The Draft

I thought I'd end by talking about one of my oddest draft experiences. One evening at the event, we decided to run some drafts where players could sign up to booster draft with a Wizards employee. As we had some *Revised* boosters left, the booster draft with me was using *Revised*. Seven Japanese players quickly signed up and the draft began.

To understand how the draft went, I am going to provide you with the card I drafted and the thought that accompanied it.

Pick Number	Card Drafted	Thought Accompanying It
#1	Fireball	This is starting out well.
#2	Disintegrate	What did he take over <i>Disintegrate</i> ? Did he open a Sengir?
#3	Lightning Bolt	Am I the only guy playing red?
#4	Orcish Artillery	Am I the only guy that's ever drafted <i>Revised</i> ?
#5	Lighting Bolt	Am I the only guy that's ever drafted?
#6	Granite Gargoyle	Yes. That would be yes.
#7	Fireball	A big giant, neon YES.
#8	Lightning Bolt	This is going to be embarrassing.

Suffice to say I won the draft. It turned out that the players wanted the *Revised* cards. And yes, none of the seven had ever drafted before. For a short period in time I'd thought they'd wanted to play against me, but I quickly realized that they had no idea who I was. Most of my fame back then was as a writer and puzzle maker in *The Duelist* and there wasn't a *Duelist* in Japanese, although that was soon to change. In fact, the Japanese *Duelist* would outlive its English counterpart. It turns out our trip was a little more successful than we thought.

And So It Goes

While I could go on for pages telling stories (and this is just talking about my first trip to Japan), I think it's time to wrap up this column for today. I know this column was a little off the beaten path so as always I'm eager to hear what you thought of it. Should I do more anecdotal columns or should I make it unique?

Join me next week when I will take a look at elegance in card design in a way that won't generate hundreds of angry letters.

Until then, may you know the joy of visiting a land where you're the foreigner.

Mark Rosewater



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