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Today and Tomorrow

Mark Rosewater
Making Magic
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While I often delve into the behind-the-scenes of **Magic** design (after all, it's my column's theme), I most often do so by focusing on a particular project – an expansion, a mechanic or a card. I then spend my column following the development of said project. But that gives a very warped view of my day-to-day job. You see, I don't spend all my time on one project, finish it and then move on to the next one. I work on everything that's relevant all the time, juggling all the various projects. This is something that you seldom see. Well, until today, that is.

Yes, today's column is about my job at a moment in time. Today, to be exact. I want to give you a different vantage point. I'm going to show you **Magic** not from the vantage of any one project but from a point in time. Of course, my present is your future, so this column will double as a little taste of things to come. And before the column is over I am going to give all of you the chance to make a decision that will affect **Magic** design that you won't all see until 2008. (And not to get you over excited, it's not a very significant decision, but one I thought you all might enjoy making.)

Here and Now

So, I'm Head **Magic** Designer. What does that mean exactly? I'm in charge of all **Magic** design. What does *that* mean? It means I have the responsibility of overseeing every aspect of design from initial conceiving to a completed design file that is handed over to development. I then have to keep my eye on all the designs as they wind their way through the rest of the process (development being the most important). Mind you, it's not my job to do all that design work (although I do my share), but rather I have to assign various jobs to different designers and design teams and then oversee that the job gets done properly. My column today is going to give you a peek at all the things I am overseeing right now. Today.

Saviors of Kamigawa (codename: Fire – of Earth, Wind & Fire) – Spring 2005

Brian Tinsman (lead), Brandon Bozzi, Devin Low, Brian Schneider

This expansion, the third in the *Kamigawa* block, comes out next month. My job as the Head Designer is pretty much done. The set has been designed, developed, and printed. All I have left to do now is the final piece of any set, letting you know all about it. What I guess you would call promotion. And starting next week, magicthegathering.com will begin *Saviors of Kamigawa* previews (although the story vignettes start on Wednesday at the Saviors of Kamigawa site). And I'm going to start it off with a doozy of a preview. So, check back next week. But that's next week. Let's get back to today.



The other important significance of *Saviors* is that it marks the first set that I was Head Designer for the length of its design. I stepped into the position during *Betrayers of Kamigawa* design, so *Saviors* was the first set that I handled all on my own. If you paid attention to the design team credits above, you should note that I did not lead nor was on the *Saviors* design team. If you're interested in knowing who any of these guys are, tune in next week when I'll give you a full rundown of the bios of the team members. My job was overseeing their work.

Finally, I should point out that while I can take credit for overseeing *Saviors*, it was following up on the vision of the block set by Bill Rose (my predecessor and the current VP of R&D) when he oversaw *Champions of Kamigawa*. (To see my solo new vision as Head Designer you'll have to wait for *Ravnica: City of Guilds*.) Nonetheless, I am very proud of what we were able to accomplish. Uh oh, I'm slipping into promotion. That's next week.

Ravnica: City of Guilds (codename: Control) – Fall 2005

Mark Rosewater (lead), Tyler Bielman, Mike Elliott, Aaron Forsythe, Richard Garfield

Four of the best **Magic** designers ever. And Tyler. (Poor Tyler.) Good stuff. And yes, having Richard on your team is always cool. *Ravnica: City of Guilds* was a complex set for me. Besides it being my first large set as Head Designer, I was also Lead Designer for the set.

The design's long been handed off. In fact, development is basically done with it. There are a few minor issues dealing with development or creative that I'll chip in my two cents on, but pretty much this boat has sailed. Most of my involvement now is giving input into things like marketing. How is the set going to be sold? What themes

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should be pushed? I'm quite excited for the set, but my work is pretty much done until the promotion stuff happens late this summer.



***Guildpact* (codename: *Alt*) – Winter, 2006**

Mike Elliott (lead), Aaron Forsythe, Devin Low, Brian Schneider

Guildpact is currently in development. I peruse the file once or twice a week and give a few comments. And every couple weeks, Henry Stern, the lead developer, will send out a list of holes that I'll design cards for. Designing cards for hole filling, by the way, is one of the most important tasks for any designer. As the development team starts fine tuning the set, cards start falling by the wayside. And the team needs cards with specific needs to take their place. And as development progresses this gets more and more difficult as additional elements of the card get locked in.

Of course, I thrive on restrictions so I love coming up with cards to fit a specific hole. A rare green card that has to be an enchantment and match a finished piece of art? Piece of cake. A common red card that cannot deal damage, destroy anything, involve combat or be a creature? No sweat. An uncommon blue creature that has to tie into a cycle and thus has to have an exact casting cost and power/toughness yet cannot use any ability ever used before on a blue card yet still make sense in the color pie? Let me at it. Designing for a hole is one of the things I find most fun in the design process. (Hmm, perhaps I'll have to dedicate a column to it.)

***Delete* – Spring, 2006**

Aaron Forsythe (lead), Brandon Bozzi, Mark Gottlieb, Mark Rosewater

Yes, *Delete* appears to be the magicthegathering.com design team. This is Aaron Forsythe's first set as lead designer. I'm on the team simply as another member, although I'm also there to help Aaron out when he has questions about how to run the design. Not that he seems to need my help. Aaron's been doing a great job. (So much so that you'll see his name pop up again as lead designer before I'm through today.) And yes, this is Mark Gottlieb's first time on a **Magic** design team. And don't tell him I told you this, but he's proving to be a pretty good designer. (Shh.)

Delete is still in design. We have all the big picture stuff down (for example, we have all our keyword mechanics figured out), but are still working out the many fine details. This is one of the two designs that's eating up most of my time. (I'll get to the other one in a second.) I think this is the set that best personifies what I think most people think I do. Sit down with a team and design cards. And while I do quite a bit of that, I'm hoping today's column demonstrates that the actual making of the cards is just a piece in a much larger puzzle.

***Snap* – Fall, 2006**

Brian Tinsman (lead), Aaron Forsythe, Devin Low, Mark Rosewater

This is the other major design eating up my time right now. Large sets are much harder than the smaller sets as they have to set the vision and tone for the entire block. Once again, I am merely a team member on this set and not the team lead. Although as always, as Head Designer, it is my job to keep checking in with the Lead Designer to make sure that he and I agree with the direction the set is taking.

Brian Tinsman has been the lead designer on numerous sets before (*Judgment*, *Scourge*, *Saviors of Kamigawa*) including one large set (*Champions of Kamigawa*) so he's familiar with the task at hand. Still, I've been asking more from my designers than has been in the past, so I'm keeping Brian on his toes. And he and the team are putting together some really cool stuff. (I know I seem to like everything, but honestly it's not hype. I really am excited by all the stuff coming up. It kills me that I'm going to have to wait years until all these different sets finally see the light of day.)

Snap has taken the biggest chunk of my time recently as setting the vision and tone of the block is the most important task I have to oversee.

Crackle – Winter, 2007

Bill Rose (lead), Mark Rosewater. ???, ???

This team hasn't started up yet. I hope this is apparent by the lack of a finished team. Bill hasn't led a design team since *Torment* (and I think the set before that might have been *Invasion*). This has probably something to do with his busy schedule as the VP of R&D. But Bill expressed to me that he was interested in leading a **Magic** design, so I leapt at the chance to use him.

At this stage, Bill and I are hammering out what the set's going to be about and how it fits into the bigger picture of the *Snap* block. In addition, Bill and I have to hammer out who's going to fill out the team. I'm planning to be on the team as I like having one designer sit on all three sets in any given block. (Last year Aaron Forsythe had this honor.)

Pop – Spring, 2007

Mark Rosewater (lead), ???, ???, ???

The *Snap* team came up with a cool idea for the block. Unfortunately, the execution of the final set seemed very tricky. So, I figured it best to step up and just do it myself. I've been doing some preliminary brainstorming and I've been thinking about who I want on the team.

Peanut – Fall, 2007

Aaron Forsythe (lead), ???, ???, ???

The large sets take a much greater lead time than the small sets. As such, Aaron is going to have to start doing early design work on this set and block as soon as he finished with the *Delete* design. As with each large set, I have to work closely with the lead designer. Aaron and I already have a bit of a jump on the theme and structure of the block.

Butter – Winter, 2008

Jelly – Spring, 2008

??? (lead), ???, ???, ???

As the block's theme starts taking shape, I'll have a better idea of where these two sets are going. Probably sometime next year, I'll have to pick lead designers and start putting together the teams.

Large Set - Fall, 2008

Small Set – Winter, 2009

Small Set – Spring, 2009

This block is the impetus for today's column. You see, I've started thinking about these sets (mostly about the theme and lead designer). That means they need codenames. Normally, R&D generates codenames (for history of R&D codenames, see my column "[Codename of the Game](#)"), but as I was putting together the list of candidates for R&D to consider, it dawned on me, why let R&D have all the fun? I have tens of thousands of faithful readers that have proven interested in having input on all aspects of the game. Why not codenames?

So today, I am going to let all of you pick the codenames for the 2008-2009 block. Just don't let it go to your heads. I'll give you the ten choices I was going to give to R&D. But before I reveal the choices, I thought I'd give you a little rundown on what was and wasn't allowed. Here's our current criteria:

- The names must form a natural triplet, that is the three things need to naturally go together
- The order of the three must be obvious (Protos / Terran / Zerg was rejected as there wasn't an obvious order that everyone could agree on/remember)
- The triplet cannot be too obscure, everyone in R&D had to know them (we learned this from Manny / Moe / Jack; Marshall / Will / Holly was rejected on this basis)
- The triplet cannot use **Magic** terms (we learned this one from Control; Game / Set / Match was rejected for this reason)
- The triplet cannot reuse an old codename (Larry / Curly / Moe rejected due to Moe from Manny / Moe / Jack – sad, I know)
- The triplet could not be a brand name (sorry Bed / Bath / Beyond)
- The triplet had to pass what I'll call the "HR Test" (bye, bye Sex / Drugs / Rock & Roll)
- The triplet could not use any hot button topics such as politics or religion (ixnay Father / Son / Holy Ghost)
- The triplet could not be ethnocentric to any one country (we are a global game after all; adios Truth / Justice / American Way)



- The triplets had to be easy to spell and in English (veni / vidi / vici I hardly knew you)
- And finally, it had to tickle R&D's funny bone

Anyway, here's what you get to choose from.

Pick one:

Alvin / Simon / Theodore

Animal / Vegetable / Mineral

Beg / Borrow / Steal

Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner

Friends / Romans / Countrymen

Hook / Line / Sinker

Lights / Camera / Action

Lock / Stock / Barrel

Rock / Paper / Scissors

Shake / Rattle / Roll

Check in next week to see what you all selected.

And a second quick question to solve R&D's curiosity.

Do you know what Marshall / Will / Holly is referring to?

Yes

No

“This Has Been Today”

I hope today's column has given you a better inside into the scope of my job and how far in advance **Magic** design has to work. I can't wait for you to see all the cool things we're planning. Oh, and one last thing – give us a cool set of codenames.

Join me next week when I kick off the *Saviors of Kamigawa* previews with one of the coolest cards in the set.

Until then, may you never have to worry about 2009 in 2005.

Mark Rosewater

*Mark Rosewater is Head **Magic** Designer. What this fancy title means is that he's in charge of **Magic** design. This gets him a lot of mail (which he actually reads). When not alternatively destroying and saving **Magic**, he likes to spend time with his family, do stereotypically geeky things (play games, read comics, watch a lot of science fiction, etc.) and write about himself in third person.*



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