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# A Different Worlds

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Making Magic  
Monday, November 28, 2005



As you read this I am flying on a plane towards Tokyo, Japan. Why? Because later this week (starting on Wednesday - definitely check out the coverage) is the twelfth annual **Magic: the Gathering World Championships** aka Worlds. I've significantly cut back my travel since the birth of my twins, but my wife and I struck a deal where I get to travel twice per year (and three times on any year with an *Un* release - Lora understands a man's need to run a tournament dressed as a large furry animal): once to the **Magic Invitational** (because it's my baby) and once to the World Championship.



Why have I chosen to spend my second slot on Worlds? Because Worlds is the granddaddy of all Organized Play. It started first and it is the premier premier event of the year. Not to mention that this year is having the first ever **Magic: the Gathering Pro Tour Hall of Fame** inductions. But the most important reason is "the streak". You see, there are a small handful of people who have attended every World Championships. The list includes me (this one couldn't come as a shocker) and, uh, that's it. Just me. Richard Garfield has been to all the Worlds, except one. Skaff Elias (the creator of the Pro Tour) has been to every World Championships, except one. This Worlds will be Henry Stern's eleventh consecutive worlds. But he missed the very first one back in 1994.

Ah yes, the very first Worlds. It was a quirky Worlds. I'll even be so bold as to call it the quirkiest Worlds. That Worlds was responsible for so many things, including some key events that led to me getting hired by Wizards of the Coast. So you can see, I have a special place in my heart for that very first World Championships. And in honor of this week's World Championships in Yokohama (really, check it out this Wednesday) I thought I'd use my column today to tell a little story about me, a whole bunch of gamers, a convention known as GenCon, a little company called Wizards of the Coast and the tournament that led to the very first **Magic: the Gathering World Championship**. Sound good?

## Me



I've told pieces of this story but this is the first time that I'm going to lay all the pieces in order (you know, sort of like that storyboard in *The Duelist* that put all the pieces of *Tempest* art in order to show you the story - man, I was proud of that). I started playing **Magic** during the tail end of Alpha (August of 1993). I had heard about it for a month or so before that but it wasn't until a gaming convention in Los Angeles that I actually got my hands on some cards. I bought \$20 worth of cards (a starter and three boosters I think) because I felt that was about how much I was willing to spend on any one game. By the time beta rolled around, I bought two boxes of starters (now called tournament packs) and two boxes of boosters.

I got hooked fast. I started traveling all over southern California to find places to play. I was so into the game that my friends (the non-gamers - yes, I had some of those) used to joke about how obsessed I was. The fact that all this led to what it did is still a source of amusement to my L.A. friends. Anyway, I was so into the game that I hunted down anything and everything about **Magic**. Which back then wasn't much. I remember seeing my first article about **Magic** in an old gaming magazine called *Shadis* (which was the first thing I ever saw that tried guessing at rarities - some of which they got horribly wrong forcing me to falsely overvalue my *Siren's Call* - yes, yes, I understand that being interested in the card at all was kind of overvaluing it - of course, a little man named Zak Dolan is going to think otherwise).

When I heard that Wizards of the Coast was going to put out their very own magazine just about **Magic**, I was -why let the English language get in my way - uber-geeked. I remember the day it came out. I dropped by my local game store to pick up a copy and I read it from cover to cover. I even took it on a date that night to read while I was waiting for my date to show up ("Susan" for those of you that creepily like tracking my life - and yes, I put the magazine away before she showed up). My major reaction - disappointment. The magazine was so focused at the beginning player that I felt there wasn't much there for the advanced player (yes, back in the day I was an "advanced" player). This disappointment led me to write a letter to the editor (a woman named Kathryn Haines - more on her to come) suggesting the idea for a puzzle column that I thought would be something for the type of reader like myself that wanted a little more. I waited for several months but never heard back from anyone at Wizards. Finally, I called and somehow ended up on the phone with Kathryn.

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"Oh yeah," she said, "We like it. The first one's going into issue 1 \_." "When does that come out?" I asked. "Like two weeks," Kathryn replied.

Ah the early days. My column was accepted and printed before anyone bothered to let me in on the fact. I assume by now some of you are thinking - Worlds, what does this have to do with Worlds? Welcome to my column first time readers. I hope you're having fun so far. I think everyone else can repeat with me: "I'll get there, don't worry".



Before I knew it, I had a puzzle column. And a pretty popular one at that. The type of people that are attracted to **Magic** also seem to really like puzzles. Go figure. And while I enjoyed writing the puzzle column (and the answer column which old Duelist fans might remember was a little twisted unto itself - hmm, maybe I'll let my evil twin write a column one of these days - and no, I haven't already - "Elegance" is all mine) I was eager to get more involved in The Duelist. And so I came up with a plan.



A little research had shown me that Wizards of the Coast went to GenCon. And by Wizards of the Coast, I mean Wizards of the Coast, every last one of them.

Yes, back in the day, the joke goes Wizards of the Coast was good at two things: making **Magic** and spending money. GenCon was the premier gaming convention. How could the entire company not make an appearance?

The importance of this was it meant that Kathryn Haines was going to be there. In person. In Hollywood terms, I had a chance to pitch myself. And after some soul searching (my decision to go was an interesting one all on its own, but I'll save it for a different article - a cool one that I'm doing early next year), I decided that I had to go to GenCon.

## A Whole Bunch of Gamers

**Magic** made its debut at a convention known as Origins (a show put on by GAMA, the Game Manufacturers Association) in July of 1993. The "little fantasy card game" turned the convention on its ear and started down the path of the phenomenon it would become. The wave continued at the 1993 GenCon. Flash forward a year later and **Magic** now had a stable of dedicated players. The GenCon of 1994 wasn't about to be surprised by **Magic**. Rather, the convention had adapted very easily to include **Magic**. More on that in a second.

The importance of this section is that as **Magic's** popularity spread the game was growing its player base at an insane rate (proportionately anyway - availability was still an issue even a year into the game's existence). Gaming had found its "latest thing" (although as time would show this "latest thing" was far from a fad) and all the **Magic** players were waiting to pounce on the largest gaming convention (in the U.S. at least). The joke of the convention was that if there was any horizontal space, **Magic** players were playing on it. As you walked through the convention halls, you could see **Magic** players camped out playing all over the floor. It was a sight to see. No single place before had ever held this many **Magic** players.

And they were loving every minute of it (not so much the non-**Magic** gamers but that's a story for another time). The most exciting thing though was that this GenCon was going to have the biggest **Magic** tournament ever held. And the winner was going to be crowned World Champion.

I had not expected any of this when I showed up. And while I was a bit surprised, I was quite ecstatic about the reception **Magic** was getting. I mean, I was as die-hard as anyone else there. Yes, I had a goal in mind for the weekend, but before I attended to that, it was time to play a little **Magic**. And where better than in the World Championships?

## A Convention Known as GenCon

Yes, I played in the 1994 World Championships. Here's how it worked. There were multiple flights each day. Each flight was a sixty-four person single elimination tournament. You heard me. Swiss tournaments were not yet the norm. To become the World Champion you had to never lose. Ever. The top four I believe from each flight played in the finals, another 64-person single elimination tournament.

My longtime readers should know what deck I played. It was a deck I played almost exclusively for over a year (well, in tournaments anyway). While I've talked about the deck in numerous columns, I've never actually bothered to show it to all of you. Now, I cannot find any written down copy of the deck, and remember it changed over the year or two I played it, but here it is as best as I could reconstruct it: (it had a sideboard but I had no memory of what it was - also remember that back in 1994 there was only one format)



Mark's Little Deck		
60 cards		
6 Forest	2 Argothian Pixies	4 Concordant Crossroads
4 Island	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Giant Growth
4 Mishra's Factory	2 Elvish Archers	1 Ancestral Recall
4 Tropical Island	4 Flying Men	1 Berserk
1 Pendelhaven	4 Llanowar Elves	1 Black Lotus
	4 Scryb Sprites	1 Mox Emerald
19 land		1 Mox Sapphire
	20 creatures	1 Recall
		1 Regrowth
		1 Sol Ring
		1 Time Walk
		4 Unstable Mutation
		21 other spells



This deck might seem a little silly but it was much more dangerous than people realized. I did well in a surprising number of tournaments with it. Some of the cards might seem odd but they had a lot to do with the time. **Concordant Crossroads**, besides letting me chain out my mana producers and attack the turn I played my creatures served the vital role of being an Enchant World. Yes, there was a sliver of time where Enchant Worlds mattered (you can thank **The Abyss** and **Nether Void** for that). The **Argothian Pixies** were there to break through the Mishra's Factories that just about every deck played (I had the other two in my sideboard). Could it be built better today? Of course, but in its day it was a surprisingly effective deck.

The biggest problem with the deck was that while it was generally consistent, it had the problem of occasionally getting a slow opening hand. And as this deck was all about killing the opponent with speed, this proved problematic. Swiss tournaments are kind to a deck like this. Single elimination is not. I won my first two matches only to find myself up against a kid in his late teens. I won the die roll and laid out a hand that had my opponent dead on the second turn. I think I had four creatures on the board, only one of which I needed to win. My opponent, with four different cards no less, got rid of every threat. After he beat me, my opponent told me that his brother played a deck like mine and he built his deck to beat it. Yes, I lost my World Champion hopes and dreams to an anti-deck (as opposed to an ante deck).

And like that I was done with the World Championships. Or so I thought.

## A Little Company Named Wizards of the Coast

With my **Magic** playing hopes smashed to the curb, it was time for me to do what I had come to do in the first place: find Kathryn Haines. Which I did in the Wizards of the Coast booth. She was not at all what I expected. I don't even know what I expected at the time but it wasn't her. She was short. Shorter than me. She had long brown hair and glasses. And she was cute. Stereotypical intelligent girl cute. (And I mean that in the best possible way.) And she just exuded energy. My memory of talking with her always involved us walking. Once I bought my airline ticket I let Kathryn know that I was coming to GenCon. Thus, when I showed up it wasn't a complete surprise. What I hadn't let onto was my secret objective to get more work from The Duelist. So, as far as Kathryn was concerned I was just curious to meet her. And I was, but I had my agenda.

During one of our walks, I laid everything on the line. I told her that I was interested in writing for The Duelist. Not just answer column writing but actual articles. "Okay," she said, "Give me an article."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You want to write an article? Come up with one. If I like it, you get to write it. Easy enough."

And with that the gauntlet had been thrown down. Luckily, I had years of improvisational acting, stand-up comedy and Hollywood pitching on my side. I knew how to think on my feet. "I have several ideas," I said. This is the technique where you state you have something to give you time to come up with something.

"You only need one if it's good enough."

"How about this," I pitched, "I write about GenCon but through the eyes of a **Magic** player."

"Interesting. Continue."

"This is the crème de la crème of game conventions and **Magic** is taking it over. Trading card games are starting to explode out of every gaming pore. And this weekend someone is going to be crowned the very first **Magic** World Champion. I know there are a lot of **Magic** players here. But the majority of Duelist readers aren't here. But

shouldn't they be? Can't we bring them here? I'll even transcribe the finals so that everyone can see how it happened."

Kathryn stopped walking. "You got yourself an article."

## The Tournament That Led To The Very First Magic: The Gathering World Champion

And so, Sunday afternoon I found myself sitting at the table of the very first **Magic** World Championships finals. On one side was Bertrand Lestree, the French National Champion. Back in 1994 only three countries held Nationals: The U.S., France and Belgium. The finals was U.S. versus France. The two semi-finalists? One from France and the other from Belgium. Bertrand was a very serious player. In early **Magic**, the one country that rivaled the U.S. was France (although they did have a long run of always coming in second at high-profile events). Bertrand was playing a red/green weenie deck. The deck was very fast and very consistent. And Bertrand clearly was one of the best (and arguably the best) in the world.



Bertrand Lestree's Deck		Finalist - World Championships #1	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
2 City of Brass	4 Fireball	1 City in a Bottle	
4 Taiga	4 Lightning Bolt	1 Control Magic	
2 Bayou	4 Chain Lightning	3 Disintegrate	
4 Tropical Island	1 Channel	1 Flashfires	
4 Mishra's Factory	1 Ancestral Recall	1 Forcefield	
4 Volcanic Island	1 Time Walk	2 Lifeforce	
20 land	1 Regrowth	4 Serendib Efreet	
3 Argothian Pixies	1 Control Magic	2 Tsunami	
4 Kird Ape	1 Demonic Tutor		
3 Birds of Paradise	1 Mox Emerald	15 sideboard cards	
2 Whirling Dervish	1 Mox Jet		
12 creatures	1 Mox Ruby		
	1 Black Lotus		
	1 Chaos Orb		
	1 Icy Manipulator		
	2 Psionic Blast		
	1 Mind Twist		
	1 Mox Sapphire		
	28 other spells		

Bertrand's opponent was a man named Zak Dolan. An American, Zak had taken a major road trip to come to the World Championships. In the final stages of the trip his car broke down. He had no money to his name but was drawn by the chance to play against the very best. Zak's deck was almost the opposite of Bertrand's. While Bertrand's deck was tight with four of all its key cards, Zak's deck was quirky with lots of one-ofs. Although to Zak's credit, when Jon Finkel played Zak's deck in an Auction of Champions format at the **Magic** Invitational in Sydney, he commented that the deck "had a lot of janky cards but they work really well together".

Zak Dolan's Deck		Winner - World Championships #1	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
1 Library of Alexandria	1 Ancestral Recall	1 Chaos Orb	
4 Savannah	1 Control Magic	1 Circle of Protection: Red	
4 Tropical Island	1 Mana Drain	1 Copy Artifact	
	1 Recall	1 Diamond Valley	

4 Tundra	1 Siren's Call	1 In the Eye of Chaos
2 Strip Mine	2 Stasis	1 Floral Spuzzem
15 land	1 Timetwister	2 Karma
1 Clone	1 Time Walk	1 Magical Hack
2 Old Man of the Sea	1 Regrowth	1 Power Sink
1 Time Elemental	1 Armageddon	1 Presence of the Master
1 Vesuvan Doppelganger	2 Disenchant	1 Reverse Damage
1 Birds of Paradise	1 Kismet	1 Sleight of Mind
1 Ley Druid	4 Swords to Plowshares	1 Kismet
4 Serra Angel	1 Wrath of God	1 Winter Blast
11 creatures	1 Black Lotus	15 sideboard cards
	1 Black Vise	
	1 Howling Mine	
	1 Icy Manipulator	
	1 Ivory Tower	
	1 Mana Vault	
	2 Meekstone	
	1 Mox Emerald	
	1 Mox Jet	
	1 Mox Pearl	
	1 Mox Ruby	
	1 Mox Sapphire	
	1 Sol Ring	
	1 Winter Orb	
	34 other spells	

Today the finals of a World Championship (or any Pro Tour) are held on a big stage with cameras and commentators. The first World Championships was held on a dirty wooden table with staples sticking out of it (and yes, players weren't playing in sleeves yet). The entire event was almost the polar opposite of the tight production it is today.



*Head of the Duelists' Convocation Steve Bishop presiding over the finals, 1994.*



*By contrast, the finals stage from Worlds 2002, Sydney Australia*

For example, today the World Championship is run by high-level judges that have worked years to prove their ability to handle high-stakes tournaments. The 1994 World Championships was run by a man named Steve Bishop. Steve Bishop was best known around the office as the guy who always wore black leather pants. Which he always wore to the tournaments he ran. I'm not sure exactly how Steve came to work for Wizards, but odds are he was a friend of an employee (that's how it worked back in the day) that got sucked into the company

during its crazy "hire hire hire" mode. My guess is that no one realized that the Duelist Convocation (sort of a player's club) would evolve into the modern day Organized Play Department.

You see, the biggest strike against Steve was that he was in charge of running **Magic** events, high profile ones no less, and Steve didn't really know much about running tournaments. For that matter, he didn't know much about **Magic**. To the best of my knowledge, he did, in fact, know how to play, but nowhere close to the level of the players at the tournaments. Almost any rules question was beyond his ability to answer. But in Steve's defense, he tried. He did the best he could. But he was just in way over his head.

I realized this for the first time as I sat down to transcribe the finals. The site was unimpressive. The organization was quite muddled (We used to joke that the reason that the Organized Play department was originally called Events was that it wasn't yet organized play. Events, at least, was factually accurate). And there was a taint of chaos that seeped into every aspect of the tournament. But none of it really mattered. Bertrand and Zak had both come to take home the title and only a best two out of three match stood between one of them and claiming it. The intensity between these two players provided all the drama necessary for a true moment in **Magic** history. I'm going to give a very brief rundown, but feel free to [look here](#) for the actual transcribed game. In short, here's what happened.

Game 1 - Bertrand's deck does what his deck does and attacks aggressively. Zak is able to get out an early **Ivory Tower**, but it isn't enough to stop the onslaught. Game 2 - Zak uses a **Library of Alexandria** to draw a lot of answers to Bertrand's threats. Zak stalls him long enough for his deck to gain control of the game. Game 3 - This game Zak gets both **Ivory Tower** and **Library of Alexandria**. The combination of these two cards wrecks Bertrand. He would later state that those two cards (in particular the Library) cost him the title.



For winning, Zak got a trophy and more packs than a man his size (and Zak's a big guy) could carry. Ironically, if Zak had kept his prize intact, it might be worth more than the cash prize today's World Champions win! Zak was half in ecstatic and half in shock. But both halves of him were very, very happy.

My work ended up in an article entitled "[An MTGer at Gencon](#)" (in Duelist #2). (I made up the term MTGer as I was trying to coin a phrase. Didn't exactly take off.) In addition, I created a transcription that Duelist Convocation members could write in to receive. Kathryn was impressed enough with the article that I became a regular writer for the magazine. This would lead to me working with many different sections of the company (book publishing, international, **Magic** brand, R&D - I believe I had worked with over ten sections of the company during my freelance stage). This, in turn, led to me getting to know the R&D guys and saying the fateful words "I'm willing to move to Seattle" at just the right time.



## See the Worlds

The first Worlds had a lot of strikes against it, but it still stands out in my head as one of the golden moments in **Magic** history. It was raw and unorganized but in many ways it was the beginning of a very important facet of the game. Everyone could sense the potential that **Magic** had for tournaments, but the first World Championships brought it all to an emotional boil. I was surprised how much e-mail I got about the transcription. Players really cared. Everyone seemed to get that this was the beginning of the road. And as one of the travelers that's ridden this road the longest, I have to say it's been (and hopefully will continue to be for many, many years) quite a trip.

I urge (yes, a third urging for those keeping track) you to check out the coverage of this year's World Championships later this week, especially if you've never had a chance to check out tournament coverage on [magicthegathering.com](#). It's quite exciting, and Worlds only comes around once per year.

Join me next week when we look in on the final guild of *Ravnica*. Until then, may you recognize the value of being first.

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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