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# Milk and Cookies With Anthony S. Waters

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Taste the Magic  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Welcome to the first installment of **Milk and Cookies With: [Magic artist name here]**. After writing "[Art on the Fringes](#)", I realized how absolutely smitten I am with the artwork of Anthony Waters. It's fresh and unique and makes me happy when I see it. So, I decided to kick off my gab-with-the-art-nerds forum with Anthony.

Being that this is the first **Milk and Cookies**, things may be a little rough around the edges. There may be some questions that you wish I had asked but did not. Leave suggestions on the message boards and let me know what you think. I'll include quality suggestions in future **Milk and Cookies** articles. Just a note- words in *italics* are my own sneaky comments that were not made during the interview, but later while I was typing all this good stuff up. Anyhoo, let's jump in:



Anthony at San Diego Comic Con 2001

We're at a local watering hole/eatery where we have agreed to meet for our chat. It's a charming place with a kind barkeep and warm torch sconces. Unfortunately, it is overrun by loud and boisterous drunken dwarves! Anthony and I have our swords with us but, after all, we are just a couple of art dorks- we'd stand no chance against a frothing horde of axe-wielding belchers. So we decide to press on with the art chat, adjusting our volume to be heard over the cacophony of ill-performed war ballads and odes to stone. Imagine in your heads that we were yelling through this entire interview.

**MC:** Here's a fat one; What inspired you to become an artist? And why, specifically, a fantasy artist?

**AW:** Honestly? I've no idea what set me on this course. According to mum I started drawing as soon as a crayon was put in my hand. Apparently I ate them too, so maybe there's something in Crayola wax that got me going. I'm told I started sketching around age three.

I went through a series of obsessions as I grew up. More accurately I developed a stockpile of obsessions as I grew up. First it was wildlife. Then I saw *Jaws*. That movie scared the living daylights out of me. It also made me obsess about sharks. Sharks led me to dinosaurs, dinosaurs led me to dragons, and dragons led me here.

Somewhere in there, right around '81 or '82, I started playing **D&D**. Most of my role-playing friends preferred playing characters over running a campaign. I took on the task of Gamesmastering and came to obsess about that, too, which I think is what got me into worldbuilding. I discovered Frank Frazetta around that time. That shook me up. Frazetta led me to Pyle and Wyeth, which led me to Alma-Tedema, Waterhouse, Sargent, the whole Pre-Raphaelite and Orientalist movements. I came back to the Renaissance painters following this big bass-ackwards loop

**MC:** I don't think I know a single **Magic** artist who has not played **D&D**. Dig through your vaults and bust out some drawings of your characters. Come on, you know you have 'em.

**AW:** Egad! I'll search, but honestly if I drew characters they were other people's characters; usually I was too busy preparing campaigns.

**MC:** How long have you been working as an artist?

**AW:** I started working for Microsoft on Encarta in 1992. Wow, it's been 13 years. I'm old. Kinda.

**MC:** Who are your artistic influences/faves outside of fantasy art? Who are your fantasy art influences/faves?

**AW:** Oh man, I love so many kinds of art it's enough to make your head spin. People like Od Nerdrum, Dan Williams, Coop, Shag, Evyind Earle, Eugene Kromschroeder, Richard Schmid, Mark Ryden are among the folks outside fantasy whose work excites me. Within the fantasy world my current top picks are Zlatislaw Bekinski, John Jude Palencar, Phil Hale, Mark Zug, and....I could go on for pages on both tracks.



**"Somewhere in there, right around '81 or '82, I started playing D&D."**

*Sing it, brother! D&D is the most fertile garden for budding creative peeps that I can think of.*



For those of you unfamiliar with the work of these non-Magic artists (with the exception of Mark Zug) I strongly suggest you hunt down their websites or just Google their names- it will be an eye-opener.

**MC:** I hear you had a little period of Boris Vallejo fandom. Why leave him off your list of influences?

**AW:** Jarvis told you that, didn't he. Schwienhund!! I love Boris's early, early stuff, the Conan covers and pen and ink work.

*Let us reiterate- the early EARLY stuff ;)*

**MC:** What media do you use?

**AW:** These days I'm primarily digital. I work in Photoshop mostly. Sometimes in Painter, when I feel like being scourged by whips and chains, and the occasional, inexplicable crash. I love ball-point and disposable pens, pencils and kneaded erasers, charcoal, conte and chalk pastels. If I had the space and proper ventilation I'd work in oils again.

**Then**



**Now**



*Anthony started out way back using more traditional media (and style, for that matter), as seen here in Ice Age's Gorilla Pack. His new digi-chops can be seen in the likes of Dawn Elemental.*

**MC:** A little change of gears; **Magic** fans seem to be tickled by the fact that **Magic** artists pal around with each other. Do you have any chums who also do **Magic** art?

**AW:** Oh yeah! Rob Alexander's my Oregon Brudda. John Avon's my British Brudda. Lars Grant-West is my East Coast Brudda. Darrell Riche's my Brushmaster Brudda. Jeremy Jarvis is my Funky Blonde Bombshell Brudda. Cara Mitten is my Monstamakea Sista. Mark Tedin's my Main Man of Mighty Hair. Todd Lockwood's my High Priest of Painting Power. Brian Snoddy's my Brilliant Boss of All Things Japanese. Jesper Myrfors guards the Flame of el Pheibo that burns within me. Scott Fischer is my Master Swankypants, who lays smackdown on my excuse for dress sense.

....should I stop now? I probably should stop now.

**MC:** I hear Jeremy Jarvis is your boy. Tell us what a dork he really is.

**AW:** The world is not yet ready to know the true power Jeremy Jarvis holds within his mighty steel-encased superbrain. Jeremy is not my boy, he is my secret weapon against injustice and transfats. He answers to no man.

*At this point, Anthony has riled himself up into a bit of a state. He's become bold enough to challenge one of the noisy dwarves. They brawl a bit and, luckily, the dwarf topples over- passed out on ale. It's a good thing, AW was about to get it. He returns to the table, somehow a bit more collected.*

**MC:** Where else, other than on **Magic** cards and the foreheads of dwarves, might we see your handiwork?

**AW:** I've worked on numerous video games that have subsequently exploded into bright showers of Pixels that Could Have Been. So that's out. I've worked on Jesper Myrfors's game, I've done interior work for *Dragon* magazine and **Dungeons & Dragons**, which was the fulfillment of a boyhood dream, by the way. What else? I've been in a few books, here and there. Better get back to you when I can tell you the titles and stuff.



"Hell Ball" - from [The Epic Level Handbook](#) (*Dungeons & Dragons*)

**MC:** Warning: goober question- Do you know how to play **Magic**?

**AW:** Nope. I'm **Magic**-naive. :P I just don't have the time. Not sure my brain could handle it, either; all those rules. I'd probably just throw my Coke at my opponent and start beating him with a whiffle bat, steal all his cards and declare myself King.

This probably wouldn't go over well.

**MC:** You've been doing **Magic** art a lot longer than I might originally have guessed. What was your very first **Magic** illustration?

**AW:** My very first **Magic** card was for the first iteration of *Ice Age*, about a zillion years ago. (I think it was 1992?) It was called **Pale Bears**, and it was the very first painting I got paid to do. My first published work was for *Legends*, in 1994. Gad, that WAS a long time ago. There I go, I'm old again. Stench.

**MC:** Let's get down and dirty now. I think we'd all like to hear what the artist himself has to say about his favorite works. (And, since I am running this cookie-fest, we'll hear what he has to say about some of my faves too ;)

In the course of our conversation about AW's art, we hit the subject of the *Ravnica* basic lands. We both agreed that they are really cool, but it was interesting to find out that my two favorites, Mountain and Island, were the ones he liked least. Such is the wonderfulness of art- even the artist cannot predict how people will respond to his/her work. Here's what AW had to say about his goods:

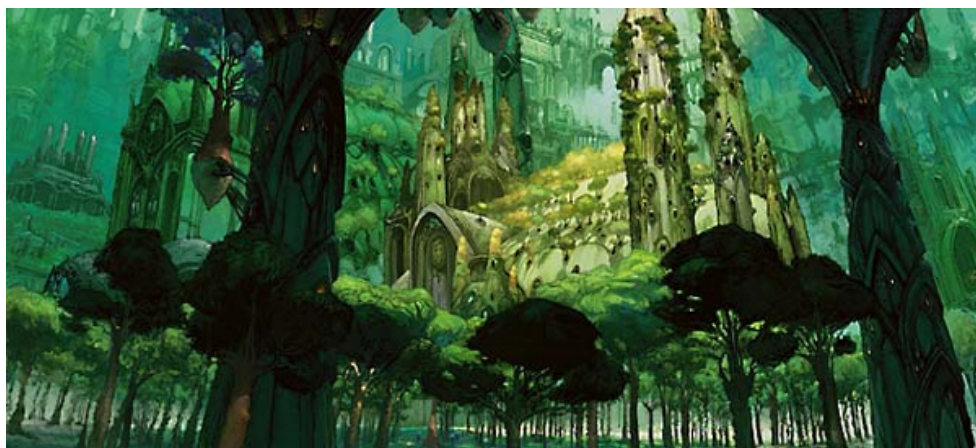


**AW:** Mountain: Oh man. Don't get me started. This painting counts as the longest I've ever been at one piece of art, regardless of whether it was personal or for a client. 119 hours of painting time. That's nothing when it comes to portraiture, I know, but for me it's a lot, and it just about killed me. Everything's in this sucker but the kitchen sink: multiple light sources, warm red light cool shadows/cool red light warm shadows, tons of teeny people, and

more architectural fiddly bits than you can shake a stick at. That said...and this is kinda sad to admit...I could spend another 30 or 40 hours on it. There are all sorts of problems with it that nag at me to this day. I have a lot to learn when it comes to painting.



**AW:** Island: Waterfall wonderland! Blue represents Ravnica's water supply, from processing to transport. It was my chance to pull a trick or two from James Gurney. I plan on trying something like this again, since I didn't grab a hold of those tricks tightly enough. :P



**AW:** Forest: Of all my Land cards for *Ravnica*, this is my favorite. Green's probably my favorite color to work on, since it's so creature-heavy. I love the quality of light you get in forests. Some places have this certain look about them that's magical. Trying to link that forest-light with a cityscape is the kind of challenge I jump at. I think it's a good reminder for me that this painting took the least amount of time of all the Land cards...right around 45 hours or so.



**AW:** Swamp: What made all the lands fun to work on was the fact that so much of my preliminary design work made it all the way through to the final *Ravnica* Styleguide. It's always a serious shot in the arm to find that ideas you came up with way back at the inspiration stage were good enough to stick with to the end. The Swamps for *Ravnica* were a good example of this: I'd come up with the idea of having the architecture of this lowermost level be a knotwork of rusting pipes and conduits. Ducts and outflow were the spots for sculpture, faces twisted in pain

or mourning. There's just something really creepy about sewage pouring out of a statue's mouth and eyes. Jeremy bit on the idea and I got to play with it for my land card, pretty much unfettered.



**AW:** Plains: It's the same story with White as it was with Red, Green and Black--much of my design work from the early days made it all the way through. I'd hit upon the notion of crystal magic for the uppermost layer of Ravnica's territory, huge stones designed to absorb light (or magic) and radiate light, heat, or mana as the user desired. Jeremy wanted a strong Baroque, Eastern European flavor, so I took a page from Moebius and combined the crystals with the architecture, adding an otherworldly element to the familiar shapes of cathedral naves and flying buttresses.

*After a few plates worth of Oreos and a whole can of Quik, AW and I move on to some of his other favorite pieces.*

**AW:** **Cinder Wall:** This piece was a real pleasure to do. It was another educator, too, and my first digital painting using Photoshop as the primary tool. I love Painter, but the program is plagued with instability problems and I am sick and tired of the damn thing crashing on me. It's trickier to paint in Photoshop. The brush engine isn't nearly as powerful as Painter's. Photoshop's nice and stable, though, and the color tools are superb.



**Cinder Wall** was also a fun card because I managed to convince Jeremy that the idea of a towering wall of cinder-faces would get the card mechanics across. He let me run with it and I think that largesse permitted me to make a strong work of art.

*I have to agree, and so would a whole bunch of other peeps who are into good art. Cinder Wall was chosen to be in Spectrum 11, a published anthology of 2004's best fantasy art.*

**AW:** *Petals of Insight:* *Kamigawa* was the first set I got to do concepts for since *Mercadian Masques*. I'd done spot pieces for the Styleguides since *MM*, but for *Kamigawa* I was part of the preconcept stage and the production stage. That was pretty damn cool.



The weird Asian-inspired vibe made it even more exciting since I dig that stuff. Asian history, folklore and pop culture are a rich source of inspiration. Jeremy told us to "go wild", and we did just that. *Petals of Insight* was a dream piece...Jeremy gave me the ultimate latitude: turn in some sketches and he'd find cards that fit. This was the first idea I came up with, a beautiful maiden feeding a giant Kami-beast.

I love doing stuff like this, being given the latitude to get as wild as I dare. Half the fun of this piece was layering all the strange faces over the form of the beast. I can see all sorts of problems now. Yet this piece still represents a turning point for me in both technique and spark.

**MC:** We already looked at a few of my favorite Waters-works in my "Art on the Fringes" article, so we'll let those be. Tell me, instead, about *Seed the Land*. For me, it embodies all I love about your work- an abstract, graphic approach to an art genre that is dominated by the hyper-real muscle love and sword envy.



**AW:** *Seed the Land:* I should start by saying I LOVE Ittoku Seta's concept work. His Orochi-bito count as one of the coolest races ever to appear in *Magic*, as far as I'm concerned. I jumped at every chance to paint them that came my way.

Jeremy gave me the task of designing the Snakefolk's architecture. Their homes are big, inverted egg shapes with vertically-aligned interiors. This made the most sense to me, given their prehensile feet and reptilian lineage.

You climb up into their houses. They have a central shaft where we'd have a central hallway. All of this was meant to play on what I felt their philosophy and faith might be, since these things are major factors in how aesthetics get determined. Practicality is also important, naturally, but when you consider this is a Japanese-inspired block, I decided to pack as much of their design sense into my architecture as I could. Classical Asian architecture (like similar architecture all over the world) has a strong emphasis on beauty and, following the tenets of Zen Buddhism, simplicity. The homes are egg-shaped to suggest the analog of a womb. Communities are clustered like clutches of eggs, held together with bamboo frames that were heavily influenced by Japanese wickerwork.

The concept of **Seed the Land** is that the Snakefolk can turn one Land color to another, just by establishing a village there. I thought it would be nice and dramatic to have the setting be a mountain cleft at sunset. One of these days I plan to revisit this piece and extend the image vertically, since there's a reason why the two characters on the left are spotted that can't be seen as it is.

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Wow, chocolate must be AW's primary fuel, because once those cookies disappeared, he was on fire. That was a lot more insight into these pieces than I was expecting. I was so pleased that I decided to buy him an extra bag of Double Stuff for the road. If you're intrigued by his art, I encourage you to visit his website and explore more. [www.thinktankstudios.com](http://www.thinktankstudios.com). If you do, shoot him an email and thank him for taking the time to give Taste The Magic such a wonderful **Milk and Cookies** kick-off.



*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own **D&D** characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; **D&D** and **Magic**. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



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