

Mark announces the voting for the Magic Invitational 2006. Thank Your Lucky All-Stars

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Monday, January 30, 2006



- [Mark Rosewater Archive](#)

In September of last year, my eldest (Rachel) began attending kindergarten. Nothing makes you feel older than watching your children hit milestones. Why do I bring this up? Because I'm here to announce the beginning of voting for the [Tenth Annual Magic Invitational](#). You heard me, **Magic's** all-star game turns ten. Ten! You see, while I've had my hands in all sorts of **Magic** behind-the-scenes type things, I've been instrumental in creating only two **Magic** institutions – **magicthegathering.com** (where I share credit with numerous other people) and the **Magic** Invitational (which I pretty much did by myself). So the fact that one of these two items is turning ten (and I have no doubt that **magicthegathering.com** will get there soon enough) makes me feel ancient.

If you want the full rundown on the history of the Invitational, I wrote a rather lengthy feature article (All-Star Studded") several years ago that you can see [here](#). For those that remember it or just don't want to bother, here's the quick summary. The Invitational (originally called the *Duelist* Invitational) was started as an event to hype in the magazine (*The Duelist* was a Wizards of the Coast published magazine about **Magic**). It was left up to me to design the event and I always fancied the idea of **Magic** having an all-star game. If you want people to perceive you as a sport, I felt, act like a sport. And nothing felt more like a sport to me than an all-star game.

The little promotional event had a lucky break and we found ourselves in Hong Kong. Followed by Rio de Janeiro. And on and on until we hit every continent not covered with glaciers. Over time, the event grew and grew until it became one of the premiere events of the year. Which brings us to **Magic** Invitational #10.

For today, I thought I would let you in on how this year's voting is going to work. Then for fun, I'm going to share a number of my favorite **Magic** Invitational moments. Let's start with the basics:

Who's In?

Right now there are three invitees already decided.

Terry Soh, Katsuhiko Mori, Kenji Tsumura

- **Slot #1) Last Year's Invitational Winner - Terry Soh (from Malaysia)**. I often say the winner of the Invitational gets two prizes, his card and an automatic invite to next year's

Invitational. By the way, his card (the one he got for winning) is going to appear in *Dissension* this May.

- **Slot #2) Reigning World Champion - Katsuhiko Mori (from Japan).** There are a lot of cool perks for winning the World Championships. This is one of them.
- **Slot #3) Reigning Pro Player of the Year - Kenji Tsumura (from Japan).** Like World Champion, being Pro Player of the Year comes with a few honors.

What Are The Other Slots?

The **Magic** Invitational is a sixteen-person round robin tournament, which means that we have thirteen slots remaining. Most of these slots are going to be voted on by all of you, the readers of magicthegathering.com. Here's how this is going to work. Each Friday, a ballot will go live (plus an extra one today). You all will then have until the following Wednesday to cast your vote. The results of that ballot will then be posted the following Friday and the fun starts all over again. As I hinted parenthetically above, there is one exception. At the end of today's feature, there will be a link to the first vote. More on that in a moment.

This, of course, leads us right back to the question above, what are the other slots? Without anymore ado, here are the remaining thirteen slots:

- **Slot #4) Road Warrior** – This slot is dedicated to the professional **Magic** player who travels the globe in his quest to become the best there is. **This ballot goes live today and runs through February 1.** (See the end of this article for the link to today's voting.)
- **Slot #5) Resident Genius** – This slot is dedicated to the **Magic** player who excels by his intellect. Who builds the most intriguing decks? Who redefines environments? Who outthinks the thinkers? **This ballot goes live Friday, February 3** (a.k.a. this Friday).
- **Slot #6) The Fanatic** – This slot is a new addition. It is dedicated to the **Magic** player who lives, eats and sleeps **Magic**. Someone who's dedicated himself to the game 24 hours a day. **This ballot goes live February 10.**
- **Slot #7) APAC (Asia PACific) Regional Representative** – The world is broken up into four regions, each one of which gets an slot for an invitee from that region. The first regional vote is for the APAC region. **The ballot goes live February 17.**



- **Slot #8) Latin American Regional Representative** – Next up is the Latin American region. **The ballot goes live February 24.**
- **Slot #9) European Regional Representative** – The third region represented is the European region (which for the trivia buffs out there, quirkily includes Africa). **The ballot goes live March 3.**
- **Slot #10) North American Regional Representative** – The fourth and final region is the North American region. **The ballot goes live March 10.**
- **Slot #11) Fan Favorite #1** – This slot is dedicated simply to the person all of you most want to see at the event. What's the criteria? Basically, you decide. **The ballot goes live March 17.**
- **Slot #12) Fan Favorite #2** – A vote so important, it's the only one that gets two slots. **This ballot also goes live March 17.**
- **Slot #13) The Judges' Pick** – This slot is based on a combination of skill and sportsmanship as judged by all the judges level 3 and higher. **The result will be announced March 3.**
- **Slot #14) The Writers' Pick** – This slot is based on entertainment value and is voted upon by a panel of writers from **Magic** -oriented websites and magazines. The announcement date of this result is to be determined.
- **Slot #15) The Players' Pick** – This slot is based on playing skill as judged by professional **Magic** players. **The result will be announced during the Sunday webcast of Pro Tour-Honolulu on March 5th.**
- **Slot #16) R&D Pick** – The final slot is selected by the upstanding members of Wizards of the Coast R&D. I would like to point out that every pick we have every selected has gone on to win the Invitational. (Okay, we've only selected one so far, but it's still batting 100%.) **The result will be announced March 24.**

All of balloting will be finished by March 24, setting the field of 16. If you'd like to see how last year's voting went down, feel free to check it out [here](#).



What Are The Formats?

As is tradition, we do not announce the formats until closer to the event. So, I'm not going to tell you. All I can say is that I've expressed concern that the formats are not quite as "wacky" as they were back in the day and that the other members of the format selection committee seemed willing to

“loosen up” a little. Stay tuned to magicthegathering.com for more format news (expect it to come after the ballots are all complete).

When and Where Is The Invitational Being Held?

For the fourth year in a row, the Invitational will be held on **Magic** Online, and for the third year in a row, the players will be playing at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (a.k.a. E3). The tournament will take place on Wednesday, May 10, Thursday, May 11, and Friday, May 12.

That's about all the info I've got for now. But before I leave you, as promised, here are a few of my favorite Invitational stories.

Thanks for the Memories

As I've already written a column about the Invitational's history, I thought I'd use the rest of this feature to share with you some of my favorite Invitational memories. These are not necessarily the highlights of the events. In fact, few are even about game play. They are mostly just little nuggets of something that tickled my funny bone. These stories are mostly to give you a little peek at what the Invitational is like behind the event itself.

To try and keep some sense of organization, I've chosen one of my favorite stories from each event (nine in all if you've been paying attention).

Hong Kong (February, 1997) – Shh, Don't Tell Him

While we have a very organized system of selecting invitees nowadays, the process was a little fuzzier in the beginning. I had all the pro players vote and from the top thirty-two vote getters, a panel I put together (now jokingly referred to as the Secret Cabal) selected the sixteen invitees. The first year was very hard because we had so little data to base our selections on, but Bertrand Lestree seemed like a no-brainer. He had come in second at Worlds '95 and the first Pro Tour. The only problem was that Bertrand was taking a breather from the game.



But when we offered a free trip to Hong Kong, Bertrand was more than happy to pick up the cards. And by pick up the cards, I mean, pick them up to put them into his suitcase. Bertrand (and Amiel Feldman, who was in a similar situation – Amiel would come in dead last) was more into the event as a free trip than as a chance to prove his skill at **Magic**. What this meant was that his performance wasn't exactly up to snuff compared to most of the other competitors. (Although I do want to add in that when Bertrand was on top of his game, he was one of the best in the world.)

Which brings us to Bertrand's one shining moment in the Hong Kong Invitational, the one event that Bertrand swept: backdraft. Backdraft, for those unfamiliar, is the sort of the opposite of a draft. The idea is to draft the worst deck possible, as your opponent has to play the deck you drafted. Bertrand swept this format. I don't even think he lost a game. Which, of course, led to my favorite joke of the event. Why was Bertrand so good at backdraft? Because no one told him it was backdraft.

Rio de Janeiro (January, 1998) – I Don't Think That's a Warning Level Offense

Different players have different agendas when they attend the Invitational. Some come to earn the right to have a card made. Others just want to prove that they can keep up with the cream of the crop. Some show up trying hard simply to not embarrass themselves. But my favorites are the ones who decide to have a little fun. These players take advantage of the unique opportunity of the Invitational to just enjoy playing the game. In Rio, Terry Borer was just such a man.

For those unfamiliar with Terry Borer, he was six words away from being the second ever Pro Player of the Year ("[Do you have any fast effects?](#)" were the six words for those that don't already know). Terry was an excellent player, but he also had his Johnny/Timmy side. Terry enjoyed playing crazy decks. Now when thousands of dollars are on the line, it's hard to justify playing off-the-wall decks (though not impossible, as Hall-of-Famer Alan Comer proved time and again). But this was the Invitational. Terry, as they say, came to play.

I'm not sure what the format was. I know it was Constructed and I'm pretty sure Terry's deck involved the card Wood Sage from *Tempest*. Anyway, he is paired up against Tommi Hovi.

A quick word about Tommi Hovi. Tommi, as many of you hopefully know, was one of the first five inductees into the **Magic** Hall of Fame. Tommi was the first player to ever win two Pro Tours, but these stories aren't really about things like that.

No, there are two defining moments for me of Tommi Hovi. The first came in an interview I did with him at PT LA#2 (the one he won). I would ask elaborate questions and Tommi would give me one word answers. With each question I tried to make it harder and harder to just give me a one word answer, but Tommi was not wavering. Eventually, I found the entire incident so funny, that I cracked up and they stopped [the interview](#). You see, Tommi, was very, very shy.

Which leads to the second moment. I'm in Helsinki as a guest of Ropecon, the largest gaming convention in Finland. At one point, I get to see Tommi interact with his friends and learn that Tommi is not at all shy. At least not in his home environment. He's actually somewhat of a clown and a prankster (and I mean that in the best possible way). When Tommi is relaxed, it turns out that he's quite a fun guy.

Which leads us back to Rio. So Terry and Tommi are paired up against one another. Remember that Terry's playing a crazy deck. Each time Terry plays a card, Tommi starts laughing. Finally, I'm called over to the table as the Head Judge. At which point Terry utters my favorite line of the event: "Judge, can you please make my opponent stop laughing at me?"

Barcelona (February 1999) – Ever The Scapegoat

For those that don't keep up with these kinds of things, my boss is Randy Buehler. The Barcelona Invitational involves a story that I often tease Randy about. How could I not choose that story as my representative of this Invitational? (What, all of you don't tell embarrassing stories about your boss on the Internet?)

There was a point in time when Randy was the second best **Magic** player on Tour. (The first was Jon Finkel, for those that don't know their timelines.) How did Randy get so good? He practiced. And practiced. And practiced. Randy, simply put, just playtested more than anyone else. But the Invitational, especially back then, was all about throwing formats at the players that they didn't know. This flew in the face of how Randy functioned. How can you practice for the unknown?

Anyway, back in the day, the one constant Invitational format was a format known as Duplicate Sealed. Each year I would hand select a group of cards for the invitees to play Sealed with. The hitch was twofold. First, I would build the card pool to create offbeat environments. And second, everyone had the exact same card pool (which everyone was aware of). For numerous reasons, I always started the event with Duplicate Limited.

In Barcelona, we play the three Duplicate Limited rounds and Randy goes 0-3. After his third loss, Randy is interviewed by the *Duelist* reporter (remember that this event was created originally as a way to create content and awareness for *The Duelist*). They ask him what Randy blames his losses on. His answer? Me. It's my fault. He had assumed that I would balance all the colors equally and the fact that I didn't caused him to lose. (If you can dig up the correct *Duelist*, this quote made it into the magazine.)

While this is happening, I hear him. Now, I am the Head Judge and I guess technically I'm supposed to stay detached, but I simply am unable to not respond. "Randy, it's Duplicate Limited. You all have the same cards. There's no hidden information. If you couldn't figure it out, it's not my fault."

Randy's reply, "We'll just have to agree to disagree."

I would later recommend Randy for a job in R&D, so as you can see, it's all water under the bridge. That doesn't mean, of course, I can't share the story with fifty thousand or so of my closest friends.

Kuala Lumpur (March 2000) – The Deal

Chris Pikula, who would go on to win the event, almost didn't attend. Chris had been to several other Invitationals and wasn't sure he wanted to go to another one. But when his close friends Dave Price and Jon Finkel both got invited, Chris decided that it would be fun. The problem though was that Chris took so long to decide that he hadn't prepared for the event. But Chris believed the Invitational was his tournament to win. His line at the time was, "I'm really good against good players."

So Chris set out to get some deck tech for the event. Which led him to Dave Humpherys. Dave is a top-notch deck builder and Dave had clearly prepared for the event. Now, Chris was a huge fan of Dave's and was eager to work out an arrangement. Which they did. Chris got Dave's deck in turn for a

promise that if Chris won and Dave wasn't invited to the next year's Invitational, Chris would fly him to wherever the event was being held.

And as the story goes, Chris wins the event. And the following year's Invitational is held in Sydney, Australia. And Dave isn't invited. So, true to his word, Chris ponies up the money and flies Dave out. Chris' comment: "Only I would find a way to win a tournament that costs me two grand."

Sydney (November 2000) – When It Rains, It Pours

Whenever possible, I took my family with me to the Invitational. For Sydney that meant bringing my wife and my six-month old daughter. We arrived a week early so that we could sightsee. The weather was wonderful. Then a week later the players arrived and it rained non-stop until our departure.

One of the Invitational traditions (at least when we traveled to exotic lands) was that we always had a tour day before the event began. There were three reasons for this. One, the players needed time to adjust to the time difference. Two, it gave everyone a chance to get to know one another (despite beliefs to the contrary, all the pro players don't know each other that well). And three, it gave us a chance to do our photos that we used for coverage.

Anyway, for the Sydney Invitational, we had our tour on a bus. We would drive around to famous sites. Or at least that's what the bus driver said. It was raining so hard that we couldn't see anything. Finally, at the end of the tour, we stop across from the Sydney Opera House to take our pictures. The only problem was that it hadn't stopped raining. But this was the only time we had budgeted for our pictures, so we decided to take them anyway. Now I don't know if any of you remember any of the pictures from Sydney, but you'll notice that in some of them, the players are very, very wet.

The best part of this story is that we had the best time. We quickly gave up any hope of getting normal pictures and just embraced the rain. The results are some of my favorite Invitational pictures ever.

Cape Town (October 2001) – If Looks Could Kill

My Cape Town story also involves the tour day. The Cape Town tour was one of the best tours ever. We got to pet a cheetah. We went to numerous wine tastings (where reporter Matt Vienneau got, shall we say, "slightly inebriated"). And we ended it all off by going on a boat ride for some shark viewing. The important part of this story is that the boat ride was the last part of the day, and the tour lasted all day.

What's so important about the boat ride, you ask? Well, somehow (and I need to stress that this factoid was completely false) a rumor started that there existed an option for the waitress on the boat to be topless and that Wizards had chosen not to choose that option. As the most obvious representative of Wizards, I was the target of the players all day long who tried to convince me that I needed to step up on Wizards' behalf and "upgrade" the waitress.

I kept explaining that there was no such option and that the rumor was, in fact, just a rumor. The players didn't believe me. So they kept at it, hounding me all day long. Eventually, they pooled together money claiming they they'd pay for it. At which point I stated yet again that they can't pay for it as there isn't an "it" to pay for. There existed no such option. But, of course, they say, I'm just spouting the "company line".

Finally, we get on the boat. And the waitress is drop-dead gorgeous. All the players just looked at me with daggers in their eyes. Now the waitress picks up on the fact that I've become very unpopular and asks me what's wrong? Behind her back, multiple players are mouthing "tell her" and making money gestures with their hands.

My response to her, "I think it's just best you don't know."

Seattle (October 2002) – Not A Shocker

This Invitational was the first year that we held the event online. To make sure that everything ran smoothly, we decided to run the event at the Wizards corporate offices. Since this was a little less exotic than the previous years, I went out of my way to try and provide as many amenities as possible to make the event as nice as possible.

One of the things I did was supply the tournament with every possible food I could think of for the players to snack on. Randy came with me for our trip to the grocery store. I'm walking down each aisle dumping junk food after junk food in the cart. At some point, Randy says, we should get something healthy. After all, some of the players might want something a little healthier. At which point I laughed, but I agreed that we should definitely encourage that kind of behavior and so we got a veggie tray.

When we get to the register, Randy comments that he thinks I got too much food. I claim that I'm confident it will get eaten. Except the veggie tray I joke.

Cut forward to the end of the event. I go into the snack room (it was a room just next to the lab where the event was being played to clean up. Every box, every bag, every scrap of food was gone with just mere crumbs left behind. With one exception. In the middle of the junk food devastation was the veggie tray. It looked almost as it had when we first took the plastic lid off of it.

As I'm noticing this, Randy walks in. I point to all the missing food. And then I point to the veggie tray. All Randy could say was, "You were right."

Los Angeles (May 2004) – Messing With The Supernatural

The first Invitational at E3 was unique, as it bumped up against a Pro Tour (in San Diego). To solve this problem, we held the fifteen preliminary rounds at E3 and then held the finals on Sunday at the

Pro Tour. This meant that we were responsible for getting the sixteen players and any staff members from Los Angeles to San Diego. How did we accomplish this? We rented a bus.

The interesting part about the story though is not how we got there but what we did while getting there. You see, E3 has all sorts of different

Do NOT mess with 20Q.

giveaways. One of them was for a new handheld device known as 20Q (as in Twenty Questions). By answering twenty questions (and five back-up questions), the device could tell you what the object you were thinking was. Justin Gary had picked one up and we were playing with it.

But the more we asked it, the scarier it got. Lava? Time? A fart? It figured each of them out. So we tried messing with it. No matter what it asked, we always answered no. After fifteen or more questions it just said, "Are you messing with me?"

This led to players betting whether or not certain items could be properly guessed. This lasted for the entire three hours it took to get to San Diego.

Los Angeles (May 2005) – The Force Was With Us

As luck would have it, *Star Wars, Episode III:*

Revenge of the Sith opened during last year's

Invitational. Realizing that there might be some overlap between *Star Wars* fans and **Magic** players, we planned an excursion to see the movie on opening night. With the exception of the two players who weren't fluent in English, all the invitees (as well as many of the staff) came to the movie.

The reason I picked this memory was that it's a neat experience to see **Magic** players in a different environment. As we sat in the theater waiting for the movie to start (we got there early to get good seats), it was fun to hear all the players discussing *Star Wars* issues rather than **Magic** cards. It is times like these that I realized why I hold the Invitational so dearly. It is the one high profile tournament of the year where the players let down their proverbial hair. While they come to win, they equally come to have a good time and enjoy one another's company. And that, in my mind, makes the Invitational a special insight into the top players. It's the one chance to see them not just as players but as people. That is an experience I have relished all nine times. I look forward to the tenth.

That is all the news and stories I have for you this fine day. (Well, except for [my column](#).) I hope you participate in all the votes. Stay tuned for news on the formats. And make sure to check in on May 10-12 to watch the live coverage of the Tenth Annual **Magic** Invitational.

[VOTE FOR THE MAGIC INVITATIONAL 2006 "ROAD WARRIOR" NOW!](#)