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## Back Issues

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*Making Magic*  
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One of the perks of this column is that it grants me a direct connection to the public through my e-mail. As I have stated many times, while I do not have the time to respond to all my e-mail, I do read every letter sent to me. One of the many reasons I feel this is so important is that I've found my mailbag to be a good barometer for issues that are on the mind of the public. In essence, when Wizards of the Coast does something that upsets you, you guys (well, at least a subset of you guys) are not afraid to let me know. In writing. En masse.

I've always tried to using "Making Magic" as a means to explain decision processes made by R&D and/or Wizards of the Coast. I don't always expect you to agree with me, but I feel it is my duty as "spokesperson" to be honest with all of you and let you know why we are doing the things we are doing. Be it [bad cards](#), [new frames](#), or [unpopular decisions](#), I've always tried to use my column as a means to let you in on the thinking behind the scenes. That's what today is all about. I was recently looking through my mailbag when I realized that there have been a number of issues that have reached a certain threshold, and have never been publicly addressed. That ends today. Before my column is over, I'm going to tackle the issues that have brought me the most mail over these last few months.

## The Pro Player Cards

It all started with [the preview](#). Which boiled down to this:



Off the bat, let me state for the record that this was a poor choice as a preview. While Antonino did have a very strong year performance-wise, his card was not the best one to introduce the concept with. Why? Because the picture is very goofy. Given Antonino *can be* goofy, the picture very much captures that element of him, but a preview card sets the tone for what people are to expect. Therefore Antonino's card was not the best representative of the how the new cards were going to look.

Next, we did a poor job of explaining how exactly the pro player cards were going to be distributed. Many readers thought that they were going to be receiving the pro player cards (which were of no interest to them) in lieu of something else. This is not the case - the pro player cards are an extra bonus. They do not replace any existing card. Nothing was removed from any product in order to include them. They were just gravy.

Now, even this upset some people, because they were upset that Wizards chose to do the pro player cards instead of something else they would have liked better. I believe this misconception comes from a misunderstanding of how the pro player cards came to be. I feel like a lot of readers felt like Wizards found extra money lying around one day and had a meeting on how best to use it. All sorts of wonderful ideas were presented, yet somehow, the powers that be chose to do pro player cards instead.

Here's what really happened. We had money to *promote the Pro Tour*. Rather than do another couple ads in some magazines, we came up with the idea (and by "we" I mean Aaron Forsythe) to do something a little more creative. Something interactive that would get across the message that games are the mental equivalent of sports. Something that would reward the top players and give everyone who opened the card "added value" (that is something that some players would want turning every card into something players could either collect or trade).

You see, pro player cards aren't replacing some other cool thing we could be doing. They're replacing marketing. I mean, they *are* marketing. You know that ad in that magazine you read that you pass on by? Feel free to do the same to the pro cards. If you don't like them, feel free to dispose of them in any way you see fit (you know, as



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long as it doesn't violate any local laws). Or even better, make someone happy who does want them by giving your cards to them.

This, of course, leads to the next question. Why are we glorifying pro players? Why should you have to look at them mixed in with your **Magic** cards? The answer is because they are doing you a great service. One you probably aren't even aware of. What are they doing? Keeping **Magic** healthy and, in turn, ensuring that you continue to have access to the game you know and love (or at least like enough to read a weekly column about its design).

Say what?

Here's how the logic works. The cornerstone of **Magic's** health is organized play. It's not enough to simply provide a good game. We provide a metagame. That is, we don't just give you some cards in a box. We give you an entire experience the centerpiece of which is people to play against and places to play. Our market research shows that this enriches people's play experiences, keeps them in the game longer, encourages them to buy more cards (gasp), and, in general, makes them just feel better about **Magic**. (Yes, the devious "give your customer what they want to make them happier" ploy.)

The next important piece of information is that the main thrust of organized play is competitive play. Why? Because competitive play leads to the most rewarding play experiences in an organized play setting. (This is due to all sorts of factors that I don't have time to explain here. Just trust me on this one. Or if you don't want to trust me, take a look at organized play of any other game or sport. In almost all cases, it's competitive play.)

Thanks to centuries upon centuries of sports, there is a lot of data on what makes competitive play tick. At the center is something known as aspirational messaging. That is, people who enjoy competing like to have benchmarks to compete against. These benchmarks come in two forms. Low-end aspiration and high-end aspiration. Low-end aspirations are tasks that you realistically hope to complete (win a local tournament, be in the top 100 rated of my local area, make top 32 at a PTQ, etc.) High-end aspirations are things that you might never achieve, but that you can dream of achieving (attend a Pro Tour, win a Pro Tour, win the Worlds Championships, etc.).



Sports marketing has taught us that the best motivators are a combination of low-end and high-end aspirations. *But*, and this is the important part, the high-end aspiration works as better marketing. Basically, people enjoy the dream. It's not logical, but then neither is buying a lottery ticket and that's not exactly a business going away anytime soon. Focusing on the top end drives competitive play.

Let's back-up and follow the chain. **Magic** wants organized play, which in turn wants competitive play that wants aspirational marketing. What this means is that little card with the pro player on it that you might not like in the end is going to allow **Magic** to do more things that you do like, such as the very website you're reading right now. For example, I guarantee you that if **Magic** had not focused on organized play, it would be nowhere the size that the game is right now and this very website would be a shadow of its current glory.

That is why I feel that the little card really shouldn't bother you so much. This doesn't mean you have to like them. Just understand that it is filling a purpose that in the end rewards everyone who plays the game.

## The Lawsuit

As this column is about all the issues that have been filling up my inbox, I feel I'd be remiss not to mention the lawsuit. (If you have no idea what I'm talking about, [click here](#) to see the press release.) The problem is we are currently in litigation and as such, I can't talk about it (I even had to get permission to tell you that). The important point I want to make is that I recognize that a subset of people very much want me to talk about it. I am not ignoring you. I am not trying to dismiss any issues you have. I simply at this point in time am unable to talk about it. When I can, I will. Until then, you have to respect the fact that I'm not always able to share everything.

## Coldsnap

Okay, I'll be blunt when I admit that this little controversy threw me for a loop. We made up a cute little cover story to add flavor to the "lost set" and suddenly my inbox is filling with letters that accuse us of betraying their trust. In the past, I've claimed to have an evil twin, I constantly write about the alien brain in a jar that runs R&D, and I've talked on multiple occasions about how we use time machines to fix design and development errors. All of that has resulted in zero letters questioning R&D's integrity. But find the legendary, yet never mentioned, lost set of *Ice Age* in Richard Garfield's old file cabinet and all of a sudden, we're trying to pull a fast one on you.

I was definitely taken aback, but as I've learned [from my love life](#) when things go wrong, it's time to step up and figure out how you contributed to the problem. With some introspection, I think I've identified two key errors on our part. But before I explain what I think we did wrong, let me quickly run down how we came up with *Coldsnap* in the first place. (Note that this is the Cliff Notes version, as I have to save something to write about when *Coldsnap* comes out.) Block design is fun, but it has its limitations. Some ideas that would make a wonderful single expansion just won't stretch thematically to fit three sets. So when I (or any other member of R&D) would come up with a cool one-of idea, we were forced to shelve it in the "I guess that won't work" file.

So one day, we're discussing the 2006 schedule when the topic comes up of are we supposed to be doing anything extra. Two years earlier we had done *Unhinged*, and that had gone over well, but it seemed too early for



a third *Un*-set. At which point I brought up that over the years we've come up with some pretty interesting ideas for a single expansion. Such as? My favorite idea was inspired by the "lost episode" phenomenon that hit television a decade back. Imagine, I said, we found a set that should have been made but never was. We could use modern age design technology to create something inspired by designs of long ago.

The idea excited enough people that the ball started rolling. One of the big questions about the whole project was how would we sell it to the public. That's easy, I said, we just sell it tongue-in-cheek as a "lost set". You know, we "found" it one day in the attic or something. Everyone agreed that that was the way to go.

So what went wrong? I believe two things. First, we had the wrong person announce it. Randy is the straight-from-the-source guy. His reputation is built around being a rock of truth. When Randy says it, you know you can believe it. Thus, having him say something that wasn't completely true didn't quite work. In short, we gave the joke to the straight man. Who should have told all of you? Me. Why? Because I'm the one who messes around with the public. I'm the guy that announce *Unhinged* on April Fools. I'm the guy who writes columns supposedly written by inanimate objects. And I'm the guy who keeps telling you all the stories I listed several paragraphs back. (By the way, please don't take me using those as examples as a sign that they are in fact untrue. Gleemax gets really mad when I do things like that.)

The second mistake is that the story was just a little too believable. Yes, it had lots of holes in it if you examined it closely, but the basic story *could* have happened. Unlikely sure, but it's no alien brain in a jar.

So, to make things right, I believe I have but one choice and to try again. Okay, just imagine that what follows was the official announcement. That other one didn't exist. Here is the announcement that should have been:

[Click Here](#) to see the "real" *Coldsnap* announcement.

Hopefully, this will put the issue to rest. We were just having fun. We weren't trying to fool anyone. We weren't trying to undercut the trust and support we've built over the years. We just felt the "lost" set was more fun if it was, well you know, lost. As such, from now until my column where I explain how we actually put the lost set together, I'm officially sticking by the "found it in a file cabinet" story. (And the alien brain in a jar.) ((And the time machine.)) (((And the evil twin thing.))) Why? Because, if it isn't blatantly obvious from this column, I like having fun. And I like having found the lost set. So in my mind, we did. Don't tell me otherwise. La la la la. I'm not listening.

That wraps up today's column. As always, my mailbox is an open door (that metaphor could have worked out better). If you have any issues that upset you, let me know. If we're doing a good job, you can let me know that too. The input I get from the public is invaluable in allowing me to do my job to the best of my ability. So please, if you have something to say, I honestly do want to hear it.

Join me next week, when I talk about something's that's black and white.

Until then, may you find a lost expansion in a dusty old file cabinet in someone's old office as you're moving across the street.

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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