

# Casual or hardcore, Magic can still be all about the fun.

## Embracing the Inner Timmy

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- [Laura Mills Archive](#)

When I was initially conferring with our esteemed editor on what turned into the subject matter of this article, I had sent Scott Johns a lengthy list of ideas to which he exuberantly (and paraphrasedly) replied: "That is so Timmy!" I've been labeled many things during my **Magic**-playing career: Laura, Laur, Mrs. Mills, LAM, LAMe, Lambchop, Arena Queen, la\_mills, even Viking Chic. Not once have I ever been referred to as Timmy. In fact, I almost considered this an insult. I don't play with the big spells and big effects that are attributed to the "power gamer". I'd much rather generate a horde of tiny squirrels or design decks based on elementary two-card combos, like Angel of Despair + Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker or Hatching Plans + Read the Runes.

There must be an explanation for why Scott should bestow upon me what I considered such an awkward label, so I decided to probe further. I searched through the [magicthegathering.com](#)'s archives and managed to unearth Mark Rosewater's [original article](#) explaining the mythical characters of Timmy, Johnny and Spike. Right there, in the black-and-white phosphorescent glow of my computer screen, was the familiar explanation of Timmy:

*"Timmy is what we in R&D call the 'power gamer.' Timmy likes to win big. He doesn't want to eke out a last minute victory. Timmy wants to smash his opponents. He likes his cards to be impressive, and he enjoys playing big creatures and big spells."*

I was certainly no Autochthon Wurm-slinging **Magic** player. Since I had agreed to write an article on Timmy somewhere in the excited midst of e-mail chains with Scott, I needed to understand what this persona was about. I sent an innocent reply asking for clarification, which, within the course of a single day, resulted in a personal appointment to speak one-on-one with Mark Rosewater. In the day-to-day offices of the Wizards of the Coast staff, Mark is probably just another run-of-the-mill boss who demands too much and concedes too little. To an everyday **Magic** player like me, though, he is the untouchable, ephemeral face of **Magic**. He is **Magic**'s Wizard of Oz.

At least that was how I felt as I nervously punched in the ten digits that would connect me directly with his cell phone. An eager, yet somewhat meek voice answered. Even a field



mouse wouldn't be frightened of Mark's lilting voice, which put me at ease to ask the crucial questions that needed to be asked – who is the “real” Timmy? How does he relate to me? How can I turn this microscopic adventure into at least a partially intelligent article?

I received a complete lesson on the true psychological profiles of not only the character of Timmy himself, but Johnny and Spike as well, and what distinctive traits separate each personality from the other. By the time I proffered my thanks and hung up the receiver, I had garnered enough information that I could have probably written an entire thesis on the psychological makeup of Timmy.

It turns out that I really didn't need an hour-long conversation on the subtle nuances of Timmy (though I won't deny it helped immensely). Just a short paragraph beyond the one I initially referenced was this:

*“One of the misconceptions is that Timmy has to be young. While it's true that younger players are more apt to fall into this category, players of any age can be a Timmy. What sets Timmy apart from the other two profiles is that Timmy is motivated by fun. He plays **Magic** because it's enjoyable. Timmy is very social. An important part of the game is sitting around with his friends.”*

In short, Timmy loves to play. I had gotten myself wrapped up in the most prominent feature of Timmy, which, in actuality, is not Timmy's personality. Rather, it was an explanation of the types of cards that are created in development to satisfy psychological aspects of Timmy, Johnny and Spike. The article was only an insight into card design, not an insight into Timmy, or even Johnny and Spike. I am sure, however, that Mark Rosewater would be more than willing to expound on each personality in its entirety in a future article.

The true aspect of Timmy is not about big creatures and spells, but about his love of playing. Gigantic creatures and powerful spells are just one facet of **Magic** that evokes a sense of fun. Loving the game and enjoying the social aspect, now *that* I can relate to.

Personally, I think we can all relate to it. I believe we were all Timmies at one point in our **Magic**-playing lives, when we were first introduced to these pocket-sized pieces of art that could be turned into a game. Contrary to our own obsessions and those of the **Magic**-playing community around us, **Magic** doesn't have the household recognition of Monopoly or Scrabble. You didn't start playing **Magic** because it was the current hot fad of the year - it was most likely through a personal introduction by some friends.

That first experience with **Magic** probably wasn't some intricate, wacky combo that a friend demonstrated. Instead, she most likely offered one of her least complex decks, with simple vanilla creatures and some basic spells.

As you tried to memorize the order of “Untap-Upkeep-Draw”, struggled through the concept of attacking players instead of creatures, and took some effort in understanding how to cast spells, your mind probably wasn't focused on mana curves or active-player, non-active player interactions. Instead, you might have been admiring the dragon that you, personally, had just summoned to the table. Maybe you were inwardly squealing with delight at the spell you just cast to foil that same

friend's plans. You might have even been too occupied reading the various cards and understanding the infinite possibilities to notice the chances of winning slip away beneath your fingers.

Eventually, all the creativity condensed into those pieces of cardboard started an explosion of possibilities in your mind. You started building elaborate, complicated decks and soon morphed into the sensibilities of a Johnny. Or you became attracted to the raw power of particular cards. Each new deck was designed to function better than the last, to defeat your opponents quicker and more brutally. As soon as you discovered the tournament scene, Spike replaced the twinkle of Timmy.

For a time, though, it was only about enjoying the game of **Magic**. Some of us still proudly carry that torch of enjoyment, preferring to find venues like **Arena** and friend's houses where we can play and socialize without worrying about some of the overly competitive aspects of the game. If you feel like **Magic** has lost that spark of pleasure or you're intrigued by something different, I encourage you to embrace your inner Timmy.

There are plenty of ways to embrace that Timmy without subjugating yourself to the stereotypical Leviathan-style cards. Timmy, as was noted before, is more about the love of playing the game. There are definitely options that won't force you away from the core of your **Magic**-playing personality, but will allow the focus to be more on the act of playing the game, to once again experience **Magic** through the eyes of Timmy.

The first option I might suggest is to play a simple, yet unpredictable format, where one facet of the environment changes. This change cannot be controlled nor reacted to by a player. Such chaos disrupts the focus of both players and their decks, forcing people out of their comfortable realm of strategy and into the present. Instead of figuring out which perfect combination of cards and actions will allow someone to reassert control over the board, players are forced into sniggers when the dominating Affinity deck is completely incapacitated – lands and all – by a random Shatterstorm event. “Wah-wah,” as my **Magic**-playing friend Paul likes to intone.

I have a few personal favorite unpredictable formats that I find exceptionally pleasing to the Timmy-minded. The first is merely a regular game, where everyone builds and brings her own decks suited to the favorite DCI-regulated format. In addition, have either a separate sheet with a list of twenty random effects, such as “Destroy all creatures” or “Return all creatures to play” or an individual deck comprised entirely of spells that mimics the list. At the start of each player's turn, have the active player roll a six-sided die. On a 1 or 6 result, roll a twenty-sided die and determine which effect occurs. If you opted for the spell deck, flip over the next card. That spell or effect resolves, and cannot be reacted to by anyone still participating in the game. For example, if a Wrath of God is revealed from the effects deck, Mary can't respond by sacrificing all her Goblins to Siege-Gang Commander as a desperate maneuver to inflict some damage on a hapless soul before watching her army march into the graveyard.

For those more entranced by Limited play, there are also several chaotic options. My first and foremost recommendation is to draft *Unhinged*. I've attempted it a few times now, and it is exceedingly difficult to take any game seriously while staring down two size 9½ fuzzy bear slippers attached to the Shoe Tree or engaging in a noble effort to tap Vile Bile without physically touching it. The reward is a night of hilarity, with enticing *Unhinged* lands as the door prize.

For those less prone to the call of the ridiculous, there is the more subdued fallback of the Chaos draft. Instead of everyone starting out with the exact same three sets of boosters, place twenty-four booster packs from at least six different expansions and mix them together in a big bag. Pass the bag around and have everyone take one booster until each person has a complete draft set of three boosters. Start drafting. This activity may seem bland at first blush; however, when sets are paired for draft that no longer have the cohesiveness designed into each block, interesting combinations are discovered every drafter is eager to demonstrate to the rest of the group.

I would be remiss in concluding the format section of this article without mentioning the Backdraft I partook in last week. Instead of drafting normally, each person had to draft the worst possible deck and then hand it to an opponent to play – and win – with. All of the creatures were drafted first to prevent attempts at a creatureless decks, and then anything else was fair game to be picked once the creatures were gone. This actually has not one, but two elements of chaos hiding under its innocent demeanor. First, by being forced to play someone else's creation, you have no control over the quality or style of deck you wish to play – a chance to see **Magic** through someone else's vision. Secondly, in a standard draft, players hone skills around constructing a worthy deck regardless of luck or randomness in packs. If there isn't a Rumbling Slum opened in the first pack, it doesn't mean a definitive loss to the lucky person who does. In Backdraft, however, the groans become audible as that last-pick Wurmweaver Coil is forced into your opponent's deck.

When we abscond from our Timmy nature, it seems every booster pack that is opened is ninety percent disappointment as those coveted rares or high-quality uncommons refuse to appear as each card is carefully slid out behind the last common. When drafting, there are constant rumblings when the “good” cards dry up after the first five picks. Angry e-mails of protestation and complaint are fired off to every Wizards of the Coast employee and representative who was willing to publicly release their contact information. Backdraft provides that refreshing opposite perspective, where even Votary Conclave seems too devastating a card to include in your opponent's deck. Without even trying, the mind reels with the possibility of cards that wouldn't have previously been given a glance. It becomes second nature to slather at the prospect of picking an Infectious Host. Maniacal giggles erupt upon the discovery that your opponent absently picked a pair of mountain-walking Goblin Spelunkers to assist an assortment of Bloodthirsted creatures.

Just as the Timmy persona doesn't care much about adhering to established realms of play, neither does this article. I encourage people to attend large **Magic** tournaments or conventions that host **Magic**. However, don't prepare to attend the main event. Instead, ferret out an events sheet for the weekend from the Tournament Organizer and participate in as many extra-curricular activities as interest you. The big events – Grand Prix, Nationals, even Pro Tours, are chock full of side events that range from the standard all-night drafts to the more exotic old-school drafts and gunslinging with the likes of Richard Garfield. While at large events, I've seen artists draw full-color dragons on personal playmates. I've attended rounds of lightning trivia, and even participated in a bout of Live-Action **Magic**.

The side activities alone speak nothing of the people. With all the hard-core players focused on the main event, most of the other players milling around the side events are either there to offer moral support for a friend or are attending merely for a chance to play and have fun. Partake in a few trades and there might be someone who will proudly display his Affinity deck masterpiece – every card completely blacked out sans the artwork. Another person might reveal a Farseek that he's painstakingly layered with portions of other Farseek cards to create a stunning three-dimensional rendition of the art. There might even be a trio from Texas who are more than willing to oblige with tales of their calamity-ridden, thousand-mile adventure to attend the Grand Prix. It won't take long to discover that the place isn't infested by the rough-and-tumble, high-stake Spikes of the world. Rather, it is a wonderful mix of players who have come together for their love of playing **Magic**.



If a tournament is out of your monetary or physical reach – Mom might not be too keen on the prospect of a four-hour trip merely to play **Magic** – consider hosting your own all-day **Magic** soiree. Invite friends over for an entire day of **Magic**, interspersed with other favorite pastimes, like shooting a few hoops or teaming up on multi-player video games. Get started early so everyone can take a break with a lunch-time cookout or pizza party. With attendance based on the desire for social and general gaming event, **Magic** becomes just one of the many venues that highlights the time you enjoy spending with friends. My group of **Magic**-playing buddies has made an all-day **Magic**-palooza an annual tradition, one that we eagerly look forward to as the spring brightens into summer.

Since the time of his birth in the public eye, Timmy has been ostracized for a reputation replete with oversized tendencies, but it is his love of playing that ignites and spurs on the next generation of **Magic** players. If you're ever feeling disappointed in the game or **Magic** players in general, take a break from your normal **Magic** routine and embrace your inner Timmy. It may reawaken that misplaced passion and a newfound respect for Timmy.