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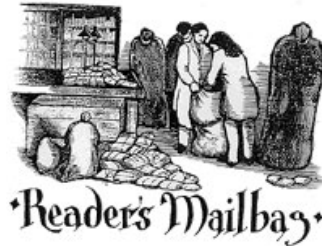


## Direct Mail

Mark Rosewater  
Making Magic  
Monday, April 3, 2006



One of the perks of writing a weekly column is I get a chance to hear from the **Magic** playing public every single day in my mailbox. If there is an issue at foot, a number of you let me know. If I say something that you agree or disagree with, you let me know. If I make a small mistake in one of my columns, you let me know. If I have forever destroyed the game you love, you let me know. If my hard work and dedication have had a positive effect on the game, you let me know. Pretty much regardless of the issue (and at times it doesn't even have anything to do with **Magic** – but often neither does my column, so fair game), you let me know.



And you know what? I'm glad. I love getting mail from all of you. That said, some of you are a lot nicer than others, but regardless, you speak from the heart. And as I read every letter (this isn't a line – I honestly read every letter sent to me – well, as long as I'm being honest, I *start* reading every letter sent to me... some of you have got to learn to get to the point – you don't need twenty pages to stress how much you miss farm animal creature types), it really gives me a good sense of what issues the **Magic** playing public has.

Because I feel my mail is so important, I dedicate a few columns every year to my e-mail. Hence my so-called "mailbag columns" where I take some time to answer several of the many letters sent to me. Today is one of those. Everything you are about to read are actual letters sent to me. I hope this will give you a little taste of what I read every day as I check my e-mail.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,**  
**Regarding your article "Topical Blend #2": I keep trying to read your Tropical Blend #2 article and every time I click I get redirected to the message boards that respond to it. Is this a bug or something b/c I really wanna read the article.**

**--Jeremy Konkol**

Jeremy,

I'm starting with your letter, as it is representative of one I've gotten week in and week out since I wrote "[Topical Blend #2: Mark Rosewater Admits He's %#@ \\$ Insane](#)". I did something a little tricky and it's caused a lot of confusion. In the article, I wanted to parody the forums of an infamous **Magic** humor site so I wrote my entire column as a copy of that site's forums. The forum that you keep getting "redirected to" actually *is* the article. The entire thread about the column is the column. Yes, I can be pretty sneaky. The article posted in the thread exists nowhere but in the thread itself.

In short, I was messing with you. I'd apologize, except that messing with all of you is one of the things I do. (It's like getting mad at the tiger that attacked Roy, of Siegfried & Roy. Attacking humans is one of the things tigers do. To quote Chris Rock, where I stole this bit from, "That tiger didn't go crazy. That tiger went tiger!") So beware that I'll mess with you in the future. I like my readers to be a little paranoid. Next times things seem a little askew, just ask yourself, "What is Rosewater up to now?" (As if you don't already say that all the time.)

**Dear Mark Rosewater,**  
**Regarding Guilds in general:**

**I'm a casual paper Magic player. I just got my first bunch of Guildpact boosters and was disappointed. These new cards from Guildpact don't seem to help me improve any of my Ravnica decks. You see, I don't buy all that many boosters per set and the different multicolored guilds just don't mix that well :( On top of that, my older mono-colored decks gain very little too. It feels like I started collecting Magic from the beginning again, only playing Green because it's the only color I had enough decent cards to build a deck out of. Except now I only play Boros out of all the guilds, not Green. Sure, I could slap some of my old Reds and Blues together and call it Izzet because of the 2 Guildpact cards I have in there, but enemies don't become friends so easily. I consider basic land one of Magic's weaknesses, pushing multicolor is bringing out the worst in Magic... at least for me.**

**I hope there was some sense in that, tried my best to give feedback on my fav. game.**  
**--Oskari Harhakoski**

Oskari,

One of the things that I find most important about my letters is the chance to see vantage points that I would not normally be exposed to. I'll be frank, when I was creating the block plan for *Ravnica*, I wasn't so worried about deck continuity between the sets. In fact, I was focusing on the other end of the spectrum: how do I make each expansion in this block distinct. One of the reasons that I moved towards block design was to move away from



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the "build around a theme, build more around the same theme, continue on yet again with the same theme but have some twist" style of design that R&D had been doing.

I thought it would be neat to make each expansion relevant by isolating certain aspects of the block design to each set. That way, each expansion would have something unique to bring to the table. And I feel I accomplished that goal in spades. But with the success of my goal, I now have to face the other side of the spectrum. Most sets allow you to build a deck through the block that grows as the block grows. *Ravnica* block doesn't really do that, at least not in the way that we have traditionally done it.

That said, if you are interested in playing three plus colors then there will be some advancement as the block progresses. Plus, we did try hard to make sure that each set had a number of monocolored cards that could be added to any guild that sported that color.

The one promise I can make you is that each block design will be different. The things you dislike (or like) about this block design will be very different from your issues next year or the year after that. And if you paid attention to the [Magic Arcana last Wednesday](#), you'll see that we gave each guild a little extra going away present in *Dissension*.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,**  
**I was wondering if there are any books you'd recommend about game design. Not specifically TCG's, preferably about board and or cardgames. Just no computer games. I have already read "A Whack on the Side of the Head" and loved it.**

Thanks in advance,

Andy  
--Andy Van Der Straeten

Andy,

The book I would most recommend on game design is by none other than former **Magic** designer Brian Tinsman (I say former, since Brian left Wizards to work on other projects). He wrote a book on game design entitled *The Game Inventors Guidebook*. Brian worked extensively at Wizards with new business and has a great insight into the world of game design. And as an extra perk, he quotes me several times. (Okay, that might not be a perk, but I do say a few pithy things.) Check out your favorite online bookseller for more info.

**Dear Mark Rosewater, Regarding your article "Creative Differences":**

**Something I always questioned for a long time was how scientists fit so well solely into the Blue category. Science in general is the study of the natural things around us. A biologist, for example, is a deep intellectual who spends most of their time experimenting or doing calculations. But if it's to understand nature or even animals specifically, doesn't that become a very Green personality trait? It almost seems like a Blue approach to Green.**

**I really hope your article on the Blue/Green guild helps clarify some of this. --Jay Czeisel**

Jay,

The reason that science and Blue are so interwoven is that both have the same goal – they seek information. They want to know why and how and what and who and where and when. Green is less focused on learning unknown information and more on remembering what it knows. Green is more on the history side of academia, trying to put things into context.

That said, biology definitely has aspect of Blue and Green. The Blue part is the aspect trying to learn more while the green part admires what is. Blue wants to know why a tree grows. Green cares about what role that tree plays in the larger world around it. Both are parts of biology.

The weird relationship between the scientist's desire to understand nature and the nature lover's want to appreciate does in fact have the Simic written all over it, so just wait until Simic Week and I'll explain what happens when Blue and Green join forces.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,**  
**Regarding your article "Life Lessons, Part I":**

Dear Mark,

**As a guy who was a bully, I want to apologize. I can't apologize for others, but seeing as how I can't apologize to the people I knew then (they're all living in different places going to different campuses), I want to apologize to you. I was mean to some people, and honestly, it doesn't bother me that much. It isn't that life is "an eye for an eye" or anything, but I just don't regret it. However.**

**There's this one guy from my past. Really nice guy. My friend right now, and friend(?) back then has confirmed it. She says he's a really nice guy now and he was a nice guy then.**



**Anyway, what I'm getting at is that I used to pick on this one guy for no good reason. And yes, he was short.**

**I admire your drive, sir. I'm in college now, and if I had half your motivation...**

**Anyway. Good column.**

**Alvin**

Alvin,

I'm glad my view from the other side helped shed some light on how you can look at your own past actions. One of the hardest things to do as you grow older (although it's one of the most important) is to acknowledge the mistakes of your past. As the expression goes, there is no teacher like experience. The trick is being able to recognize what experience has taught you. Only by understanding what you've done wrong can you begin to learn how to do it right.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,**

**Regarding your article "Life Lessons, Part I":**

**I just thought you didn't spend a lot of time... much time at all... hardly an adequate amount of time justifying the fourth life lesson. It seems to contradict your "Good guy"-ness. Isn't that statement at the very core of ethical and moral debate today?**

**--Jason D'Aquila**

Jason,

To bring everyone else up to date, my fourth lesson was: It's not my job to look out for the welfare of others at the expense of myself. Of my ten lessons, this was the one that seemed to garner the most criticism. It's ironic that you feel it contradicts my "good guy"-ness, as the entire point of the lesson is learning about how to not be so good of a guy that you let people walk all over you.

The essence of the lesson was not that you shouldn't help people or that you shouldn't ever do anything selfless. The lesson talked about a tendency of nice people to put their own needs last. The sentiment can be reworded in a way that perhaps is a little less controversial: Treat yourself as well as you would treat someone you care very much about. Because hopefully you care about yourself (and if you don't, that's a problem that needs some attention if you ever want to be happy).

A lot of nice people treat themselves horribly because they are always putting the needs of everyone else first. This isn't to say that you should never put another's needs first. I mean, it's hard to have kids with that kind of attitude. But you shouldn't always put your own needs last. Because in the end, even the most helpful selfless person will become ineffectual at helping others if they don't take care of their own needs.

I don't believe that this advice is anywhere close to being unethical. We hear all the time how we're supposed to be good to others. My life lesson was just telling people to also be good to themselves. If you find fault in that advice, then I guess we'll just have to agree to disagree.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,**

**Regarding your article "Life Lessons, Part I":**

**I usually very much enjoy reading about your life and Magic, as I more or less agree with your holistic vision. Your column was interesting, but you must realize that you are speaking to people who might take you and your advice very seriously. That doesn't mean you shouldn't defend what you believe in but be careful of what you say in big bold letters as universal life lessons. Of five you gave, two seemed...incongruous. Let me explain.**

**Things happen for a reason. Things happen for a reason? Are you a physicist trying to explain fundamental interactions? Are you a zealous theologian who tries to convince the world of God's Great Plan? Do you actually believe that the AFS refusal was intentional so that you, Mark Rosewater, could find the right college for you? God plays dice with the world and we should hope he doesn't run out of luck.**

**It's not my job to look out for the welfare of others at the expense of myself. Is it not? I think a loving wife and three small children say otherwise. I don't think I have to stress this point anymore.**

**Decent column. Just remember that there's not only how you say things, but also what you say.**

**--Guillaume TARDIEU**

Guillaume,

I talked about lesson #4 above so I'll address the other life lesson you had issues with: lesson #2: Things happen for a reason; Even disappointments can be opportunities. I was not trying to say that life is deterministic - I'm a big advocate of free will. What I was saying is that bad things do not need to beget bad things. Too often I feel like people turn defeats into future defeats because they feel like they've been sent down a bad path. My life lesson was simply trying to point out that good can come from bad. A mistake can lead to important learning. A missed opportunity might open up other even better opportunities. Being fired from one job might lead to getting an even better one.

I wasn't being deterministic so much as optimistic. The more clichéd version of what I said is: when life gives you lemons make lemonade. Life, like **Magic** designs, constantly throws obstacles in your way. My life lesson says to embrace those obstacles rather than run away from them. When I figure out that some aspect of a design doesn't

work, I use that lesson to empower myself to find another answer. The guild model was the result of a big idea not working (mixing multicolor with large amounts of hybrid cards). I could have let that defeat send me into a tailspin. Instead I used it as inspiration to find something better. That was what I was saying.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,  
Regarding your article "Life Lessons, Part II":**

**Actually, I'm thanking you for the all of your articles but I especially do enjoy the articles on life lessons.**

**I just need to know how's Rachel is doing now? From the family photo it looks like she's doing ok. Being a parent myself, and having a son with a congenital heart disease (he's ok now), reading your article puts me back all those years when me and my wife first found out about it. You are right, I accepted the fact and moved on to find the solution to the problem.**

**In a way, I can empathize with you. I just wish you and your family are always in the best of health.**

**--Fuad S Salleh**

Fuad,

I was quite touched how many readers wrote in about my daughter with supportive words. The quick update on Rachel is that right now things are going well. She hasn't had a relapse since last summer, but I've been through this long enough to know that we're probably not out of the woods yet. This condition commonly relapses. So Lora (my wife) and I are hopeful, but still prepared for the idea that another relapse could happen any day.

To everyone who took the time to drop me your kind words, thank you. It meant a lot to me.

**Dear Mark:**

**I'm going to keep asking until I get an answer - what happened with the nephilim. I'm sure you've seen the article on mtg salvation.com regarding their design and the criticisms made therein. But again - the abilities are random and have nothing to do with the colors of the nephilim themselves. To be brief - wtf?**

**Best,  
Sebastian**

Sebastian,

I was not prepared for the response of the Nephilim. Every set we do online surveys to see what all of you think about each set. One of the things we do is to show you certain cards and have you rank them from 1 to 7. The Nephilim are the first card to have equal values at all seven grading levels, that is each section got essentially one seventh of the vote. What does this mean? We're still trying to figure it out. I think it means that we came up with something that gets a unique reaction from each person who sees it.

My biggest criticism of the Nephilim was that they didn't fit into the guild model yet because they were multicolored, even though they felt like they wanted to. Their goal was to be something that wasn't about the guilds, but I think they ended up too close to not feel like they were supposed to be connected. But that hasn't been the big criticism of the public.

What everyone seems focused on is how the cards don't match their four-color make-up. Why didn't the abilities match the colors? The answer is pretty simple: The color pie doesn't handle four-color cards. There is no such thing, for instance, as a White/Blue/Black/Red ability. We could have included elements from all four colors, but we felt that it would end in poor design. Instead we decided to do weird offbeat effects that weren't particularly assigned to any one color mostly because we hadn't done too much like them. We chose what color combination to match them to more by feel than anything else.

I agree that the cards didn't mesh together as well as I had hoped, but I think it's more an issue of designing four-color cards than these cards in particular. Early in the design, I had recommended giving each of the Nephilim two abilities that each reflected one of the two guilds in the creature's mana cost. That was rejected, as we were trying to make the nephilim non-guild. If I had it to do over again, I'd probably push off the Nephilim to another multicolor set. If I felt I had to include them, I'd try the "two guilds teaming up" approach.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,**

**I know you did an article about the Jimmy, Timmy and Spike Magic personas, but in the article you used cards that are now very outdated. I can't really tell if I'm a Jimmy, Timmy or a Spike. Could you do another article like that with more recent cards?**



--Hayden

Hayden,

Hopefully you were reading this column two weeks ago when I did just that ("[Timmy, Johnny, Spike Revisited](#)"). If not, check out the link.

The reason I did that article, by the way, was the large amount of letters I got like yours. So if any other reader out there is interested in seeing me write something, let me know. When you write a column every week, you're always happy to get suggestions.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,  
Regarding your article "Interlude: When Decks Collide":**

**You're crazy.**

**Sincerely,  
Chris Meyer**

**P.S. I love love love reading your columns**

Chris,

Ah, you figured my secret out. Shh.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,  
Why hasn't Wizards printed any Lycanthropes since 5th edition? (I don't count **Treacherous Werewolf** because a real Werewolf would be a Lycanthrope.)**

**A Gatherer search will show 3 results for 'Werewolf' and 19 for Vampire, with several in recent sets.  
Is it against policy to print a cool creature type? Or are you replacing their little niche with things like **Carrion Howler** and other posers?**

**I personally wish to see an upsurge in Lycanthropes, especially if you continue printing Vampires.  
However, if Lycanthropes don't fit into Magic (for some reason that I can't imagine) I would like to know why.  
Sincerely, the Dullahan**

Dullahan,

We have nothing in particular against lycanthropes (or lichentropes for that matter). The reason you don't see them that often is that they have a lot of mechanical baggage (due to the flavor of transformation inherent in the creature). The last time we did a mechanic that reflected transformation (threshold in *Odyssey* block), we had a few lycanthropes.

But don't worry. We haven't written the werewolves off. We're just waiting to use them until the environment (both flavor and mechanics) is right.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,  
Regarding your article "Aaaargh":**

**I've got a question for you. In several of your "color" columns, you've referenced Seinfeld characters in your pop culture reference section. George was Black, I believe, and Kramer is Red/Green. My question is what colors are Jerry and Elaine? Or will you get to them in future columns?**

--Cory

Cory,

First I did the *Simpsons* family (five members, each a different monocolour. Okay, to stop the letters – Homer – Red, Marge – White, Bart – Black, Lisa – Blue, Maggie – Green). Now it's time for *Seinfeld*. In last week's Orzhov column ("[Playing By Their Own Rules](#)") I outed Jerry as Black/White ("Not that there's anything wrong with that.") I promise to identify Elaine in an upcoming column.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,  
Regarding your article "Now I Know My ABCs": I liked it.**

**Now, the real question: did you work with Joss Whedon when you were on the staff of Roseanne?**

**Thanks,**

**Michael Gosselin**

Michael,



*Not a lycanthrope?*

One of my greatest moments working as a runner (a.k.a. slave) in Hollywood was that I got the chance to meet one of my idols, Jim Henson. During our short meeting, I asked him the one question that had always bugged me about "Sesame Street": were Ernie and Bert named after the cop and cabbie from *It's a Wonderful Life*? (The answer by the way is no, not consciously.) He told me that he gets asked that question all the time.

Your question seems to be the equivalent for me. I get asked the "Did you work on *Roseanne* with Joss Whedon?" question all the time. (By the way, it's my dream that just once someone asks Joss if he worked with me – to which Joss goes, "Who is Mark Rosewater?") The answer is no. He worked first season I believe and I worked the fourth season. With the flux in the *Roseanne* writing staff, I didn't even work with any writers that had worked with Joss.

That said, I am a huge Joss Whedon fan (as if that's not obvious from my *Buffy/Angel* reference every fourth column) and hope one day to meet him. You know, to find out if anyone's asked about me.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,  
Regarding your article "Just The Ten of Us":**

**You said that 'Zen and the Art of Cycle Maintenance' is based off of an unknown 80s sitcom. Unfortunately, I believe you're a little off... There was a book during the mid 70s called 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance' which was based off the title of a book called 'Zen in the Art of Archery'.**

**This is just a mention whenever you make any factual errors. I'm sure you get tonnes of them. The only reason I bother with this one is that I went through 2 weeks of 400 page Hell at my university, so I figure you can use the little prod.**

**Thanks for choosing the preview card. It's pretty crazy.**

**Sincerely,  
--Tyler Savoy**

Tyler,

My modifiers could have been a little better. I wasn't saying that "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" was a sitcom. I was referring to the column's title *Just the Ten of Us*. I do find it funny though how many letters I got correcting me that assumed that "Zen" was a sitcom and chiding me for acknowledging that fact without pointing out that it was first a book.



**Dear Mark Rosewater,  
I am currently watching the 2002 version of Spider-Man, directed by Sam Raimi. In one of the early scenes, you can see a poster for Invasion on the wall of Peter Parker's room. There is also a D&D poster, but it was mostly covered up.**

**I thought you would like this little tidbit, it's not much of a Christmas gift, but I hope I managed to make you smile just the same.**

**Merry Christmas from one of your biggest fans, Nathan Saucier.**

**P.S. I think I was so excited by Topical Blend 2 that I forgot to e-mail you about it, so I'll make sure to say that it rocked just incase.**

**Oh, and Spider-man is Green/Blue, bye!  
--Nathan Saucier**

Nathan,

So one day we get a call from the production offices for *Spider-Man*. Turns out the set designer (or possibly the prop mater) felt like **Magic** was the kind of thing Peter Parker would play, so they asked us if we could send them a poster. I believe the PR people left skid marks mailing the poster off. For all of you out there with a copy of *Spider-Man*, make sure to have your finger on the pause button - it goes by very quickly.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,  
Regarding your articles on Unhinged, what are the odd words next to Unhinged collector numbers --ben**

Ben,

Now that you mentioned it, I went back and looked and you're right. There is a word next to the legal text on every card. (*Unglued* too.) Now if there were a set a little less dignified than *Unhinged*, I might assume that the words could be put together in some way to spell out a pithy-but-funny message. But something like that would probably be beneath a set with such integrity as *Unhinged*. I guess it just must be a huge number of errors on the part of the printer.

**Dear Mark Rosewater,**

**I'm a Magic fan, and I've played in 1998 during the time of the Stronghold expansion and to cut the long story short, I've seen the BURY keyword (if its a keyword at**



all). I think it's been used to denote destruction of something and that that something cannot be regenerated after the destruction... It made a lot of sense for me back then.

I've gotten back and started to play again. Now, I've been seeing card texts that say -

"Destroy this. It can't be regenerated." In place of "BURY this."

So I'm wondering --- What's wrong with BURY? Why did it go away?

I've seen that for everything you do in Magic, there had been very good reasons. (I mean, for the Demons for example, it was your expanding audience, right?) And if you'd allow it, I'd like to hear BURY's story.

Thanks  
--Goshen M. Jimenez



Goshen,

It only seems right to end the column on a letter that asks a classic question: What happened to "bury"? The short answer is that R&D didn't feel it was carrying its weight. We didn't use it enough and it didn't save enough text to keep supporting.

The longer answer has to do with the complications of overseeing a TCG. By nature, trading card games keep adding new cards. New cards mean new keywords and new abilities. In short, new cards keep adding to the overall complication of the game. To help slow this down, R&D is constantly looking for ways to expel elements of the game that aren't necessary. "Bury" saved us four words on a handful of cards each block. That simply wasn't enough savings to keep it around.

Another way to think of this is to imagine that every phrase that we use more than once per block was keyworded/given a vocabulary term. Imagine the game with hundreds of keywords/vocabulary terms each year. That obviously couldn't work. We have to draw the line on keywords and vocabulary terms somewhere. That line, in R&D's opinion falls on the other side of "bury".

## Letter Days

That rounds up this issue of "Mail Mark Actually Receives". Let me stress once again that I read everything sent to me. If you have something to say about the game, you have the ear of the Head Designer. All you need to do is take the time to write in. (Just please, try to be short and to the point.) The letters have more impact on the game than you realize, so please take a moment to let me know what you think of the game. Tell me what you like or don't like. Suggest improvements, rant about your pet corner of the game, or just say hi. All are good.

Join me next week as we begin our descent into *Dissension*.

Until then, may you take the time to let your voice be heard.

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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