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Law and Order

Mark Rosewater
Making Magic
Monday, June 19, 2006



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

This week I have two different things to talk about that really don't have anything to do with one another. When this happens, I call it an odds and ends week, make some title that loosely ties them together and use a lame segue to link them. Sound like fun?

I wouldn't click away just yet. This week I'll be getting to a topic that I know there's been a lot of anticipation for. Yes I'm finally going to talk about the Rancored Elf lawsuit. And for the second half of the column I'll be filling you in on Aaron's promotion and R&D's newest hire. Turn away now and you'll be left out of the water cooler talk (you know, provided that you work someplace where you co-workers talk about **Magic** in their spare time – I do, so, you know, it happens). The first half is going to be rather serious, while the second half... not so much. Enjoy the tonal shift.



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Law

I want to begin this section by stressing a few things. First, it is my intent to cover as much as possible. But as this is the law, there are going to be things I am not at liberty to say. I will do my best to be as clear as possible, but I cannot be as candid as I often am. That said, I'm going to be as up front as the lawyers allow. Two, I'm not going to pull any punches. I'm going to explain Wizards of the Coast's position on a few issues. I am not going to try and convince you we're correct. I am simply going to tell you how we feel. This part of today's column isn't meant to stir up debate (although I know it will), but rather help all of you understand why we are doing the things we are doing. I understand some people will disagree with our opinion. I am trying to get you to respect it, not necessarily agree with it.



Okay, let's jump right in. Wizards of the Coast is in the entertainment business. We make our money by selling all of you a product that provides entertainment. As such, it is of vital importance to us to create the greatest entertainment experience possible (yes, there are a few caveats to this such as we don't make decisions that burn long term equity for short term gain, but you get the gist). It is our belief that to maximize the release of a new expansion, we have to have control over the messaging of our product. That is, we need to have the ability to decide when and how the audience is going to learn information about our next expansion.



We have the right to do this. This is our product. **Magic** is what we do. Hundreds of people's livelihoods rest on **Magic** being successful, and the law backs us up. Information on unreleased sets is proprietary information, and as such, unreleased sets are protected by copyrights. It is Wizards of the Coast's property. When someone takes the information (or images) and makes them public without our permission, they are breaking the law.

I know that many people believe that leaking information is, in fact, good for the game. We disagree. This isn't to say that we don't believe any information should precede a release, just that we want to be in control of what that information is. We've spent a great deal of time and energy to figure out how to promote a set. When we preview a card, we've taken many hours to figure out exactly what we want to show, why we want to show it, what it hints at, what cool things it doesn't show. The average poster of leaked information doesn't do that, partially because he doesn't have the full information and partially because he's not motivated to care. Releasing information on unreleased sets is one of the most important pieces of marketing we do. Wizards has to care how it's released.

When a card is leaked it has an impact. Hours of work (on magicthegathering.com and elsewhere) are wasted. Magazine and online sites are deprived revenue because exclusive previews they were promised are undercut. Tournament organizers can lose attendance. R&D watches quality sets be maligned because information is inaccurate or comes from an outdated file. Now, maybe you don't care about any of this. But we have to. This is our business. These are our employees and our professional relationships. And first impressions do affect sales. Not worrying about these things would be, quite frankly, negligence.

We care deeply about this issue because we have to. This is what we do. While **Magic** is a game to all of you, to us it's a business and we have to treat it as such. This information is our information and we have the right to do with it what we want. That's what this boils down to: We have the right to protect our property.

So let's move along this conversation and get to Rancored Elf. Rancored Elf, with the assistance of another individual, brokered the straw that broke the camel's back. Last December, after receiving pictures of three *Time Spiral* playtest cards from a third party, Rancored Elf posted them on an online message board. Ironically, he didn't even think that they were real. (Not that it matters, legally speaking.) Let me begin to explain how far over the line this is. At the time, there were three unreleased sets before *Time Spiral*'s release. It wasn't even part of the current block. It's important to Wizards to keep

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the focus on the current set or perhaps on an upcoming set if the release is relatively soon. But the last thing we want after the first release of a block is to have players focusing on the theme of next year's block - something they wouldn't be able to purchase for ten months.

And that's only half the problem. We don't want players seeing material until it's finished. Historically, sets at this point in development have not just changed cards, not just changed mechanics, they've changed themes. They've changed focus. It's one thing for players to see playtest cards after a set's release, because then they get to see them in context. They already understand what the finished product is. But to have your first glimpse be a card that will go through numerous iterations and still might not even make it into the set, is about a bad first impression as we could possibly make.

On top of everything else, the fact that the pictures were of actual playtest cards meant that there had been a horrendous breach of security. We were very upset. No leak of this magnitude had ever happened before. As I said previously, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. We decided that enough was enough. We had to take action.

This is the part where I have to start being extra careful with my words. We sued Rancored Elf (along with ten unnamed individuals). I can't talk about the lawsuit itself, but I can say that we settled the lawsuit with Rancored Elf out of court to both parties' satisfaction. We have been able to and continue to identify sources of multiple leaks and have taken appropriate action to prevent them from happening again.

Here's the important takeaway. We know that opportunities for new leaks will continue to arise. Please understand that Wizards of the Coast does not condone spoilers of any type, except what we specifically authorize. (And I'm not just talking about playtest cards.) If you find yourself in the position of having such information – unreleased information of any kind - please think very hard before sharing it with the world. Wizards of the Coast will take action if it deems it necessary.

Let me follow up that pretty hard-edged corporate paragraph with a little more personal one. Instead of talking about this topic as a figurehead of the company, let me take a moment to talk about my personal feelings. This is just me talking about how I, one of many people working on **Magic**, feels about spoilers. I pour my heart and soul into my designs. I care greatly about how people perceive my work. I want players to anticipate new products. I love the excitement that builds with good promotion. I want to withhold things such that I get to surprise players when they open the packs. There are all sorts of things that I spend hours doing to make the experience the best I possibly can.

When someone undoes a piece of that because they have to show off that they somehow learned something they weren't supposed to know, it boils me. You should have heard me the day that split cards were leaked. We were trying to not talk about them publicly so that players would have the chance to see them without any pre-knowledge. Then someone goes and sells a stolen cardsheet on eBay. I think I invented some new swear words.

It's very easy to see Wizards as some faceless corporate monster, but the reality is that we are a bunch of people making our living off of making all of you as happy as we can. We spend hours and hours debating the smallest of points because we care about the quality of our work. And I think it shows. I consider *Ravnica* block to be the finest block we've ever created from design to development to creative. And the fact that I'm excited for *Time Spiral* block to come out knowing what it has to follow is a sign to me that we've really hit our stride. So when I speak, please be aware that I take my responsibilities quite seriously.

I firmly believe that unsupervised spoilers take away fun from the experience for most players. (I wrote [a whole column on this](#) if you want to read more.) I know that many of you disagree with me, but I can't do my job based on what other people think. I have to do what I think is right. And luckily, the rest of the people making **Magic** agree with me. I love this game. My goal is the same as yours: I want it to be the most fun, most amazing, most memorable experience ever. I want to make the game as an important a part of your life as it is a part of mine.

To do that, I have to take the steps that I (and once again, all the other people making **Magic**) feel are right. That means making bad cards on purpose. That means banning cards. That means occasionally shifting the color pie. That means removing cards you like from the base set. And that means stopping spoilers any way we can.

This is why the lawsuit occurred: Because Wizards of the Coast needs to protect its property in order to deliver the best overall game experience it can. This is our call. Disagree all you like with our decision, but please respect that we have the right to make it.

Whew! That was a little heavier than I originally planned. As always, I'm interested to hear what you all think (and I'm guessing this is going to be one of those heavy e-mail weeks).

I don't think you'll get a report more direct than that from me on this topic.

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Order

Speaking of direct reports (I told you the segue would be lame), when last we talked about the topic, I had six different employees reporting up through me. As of next month, I'll have zero. Hey, what happened? Corporate shake-up? Mutiny? Dilbert-level management? None of the above.

The change is actually a result of all of them being very successful.

Let's start with the **Magic** Creative Team. A year and a half ago, R&D decided that the best way to integrate **Magic** design and creative would be to have one person overseeing both parts. (That would be me.) As *Ravnica* was a result of this decision, it appears mission accomplished. So why the shake-up? Essentially, the **Magic** Creative Team was doing such a good job on **Magic** that R&D decided to group all of the various creative teams (from different Wizards games – every intellectual property we own, save **Dungeons & Dragons**) together to help the expertise of the **Magic** Creative Team rub off on other products. In addition, by grouping the various creative teams together, it made it easier for R&D to better identify and provide things that would help the creative teams continue to prosper. Including a new manager, but we'll get there in a moment.

Wait. Things were working well so they broke it up? Huh? Nothing's been broken up. The same people who were doing the creative work for **Magic** last month will be doing it next month (okay, save Jeremy Cranford, who's since left Wizards – [click here to meet Jeremy Jarvis](#), the new art director). In addition, I'll still be overseeing the blending of design and creative. What has changed is that the team now gets a manager dedicated to just creative issues. I felt that my time overseeing the team was fruitful, but I was doing so while also having another full-time job running **Magic** design. Moving forward, my time with the creative team will be spent improving synergy between design and creative rather than actually managing the people.

So who is managing the people? I'm glad you asked because here's the part where I get to introduce him. Now, I'll be blunt. The first half of today's column took more than its allotted share of writing time. Because of this, I decided to seek a little help introducing Ken Troop. (He's the new guy.) And who better than Ken himself? Here's the letter I sent him.

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From: Rosewater, Mark
Sent: Friday, June 09, 2006 2:01 PM
To: Troop, Ken
Subject: Your Intro
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Ken,

I have two options when I introduce you in my column. I could:

- 1) Do a lot of research
- or
- 2) Send you this e-mail and ask you to introduce yourself

Perhaps you can see how this turned out.

Thanks,

Mark

This is what Ken sent back:

```
From: Troop, Ken
Sent: Wednesday, June 14, 2006 12:30 PM
To: Rosewater, Mark
Subject: RE: Your Intro
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Ken: Hi, I'm Ken Troop, managing the Creative team for **Magic**. In a previous life I worked in software game development, as Lead Designer for *Asheron's Call: Dark Majesty* and most recently Lead Designer and Creative Director for *Dungeons and Dragons Online: Stormreach*. One of my favorite aspects of working in games is combining flavor and mechanics so that the two sides feel an integral part of the whole; such that the reader or player believes the element could not have come out any other way. After years spent working that alchemical craft digitally, the opportunity to do it for a game I love and in its purest form – art and text on a card – is a blessed dream.

The **Magic** Creative team is incredibly strong and it's a privilege to become a part of it. Plus I get to work with the many talented artists and writers who contribute to each set and do a fantastic job making each world come to life.

Even before coming here I was an unabashed fanboy of the look and feel of the *Ravnica* block - it did such a good job blending flavor and mechanics - and the new worlds coming rival *Ravnica* in the strength and identity of the setting.

Thanks,

Ken

Let me just add that I've spent a good amount of time interacting with Ken during the team's transition and he's a good guy. The Creative Team is doing such excellent work that they deserve someone of Ken's experience who can focus on their needs. In addition, Ken is pumped for this opportunity. He moved his family across the country because he couldn't pass up the chance to work on **Magic**. I'm excited to see what new things the team can do under Ken's leadership.

After the dust settled I was left with one direct report: Aaron Forsythe. Yes, as I assume most of you don't know, I've been Aaron's boss for a little over a year. Without the Creative Team to manage, I figured that I could focus all my managerial energies on Aaron. But then he had to go and get himself promoted. Aaron hinted about this last week in his column. So what bigger and better position has Aaron snagged for himself? It's a doozy.

Starting later this summer, Aaron becomes Head **Magic** Developer. It's what I do, except on the other side of the fence. The Head **Magic** Developer is the person who oversees **Magic** development and makes sure that all the designs are cleaned up before you get to see them. It's also his job to make sure each set is balanced and watch over the metagames of all the different formats.



How did Aaron land this wonderful opportunity? Brian Schneider, the current Head **Magic** Developer, is leaving the company (by his own choice) to pursue some other opportunities. This opened up the position and Aaron was one of several qualified candidates who applied. I will note that with Aaron's promotion, magicthegathering.com will now for the first time have the Head Designer writing the design column and the Head Developer writing the development column at the same time. (Randy was the Head Developer when he started writing "Latest Developments" but I had not yet received my promotion.)

I would like to take a paragraph to bid farewell to Brian (who's not actually leaving for another month or so). While he is a little less public a figure than Aaron or myself, his contributions to the game have been tremendous. You don't see the mistakes of me or my designers because Brian and his team catches and fixes them. The current health of every format (and there's a lot of them) is the result of Brian's hard work. The beauty that is *Ravnica* block draft is due to the many hours Brian and his team put into making a rather complicated interaction of sets work. While you might not know Brian, if you've enjoyed **Magic** during the last few years, it's in big part a result of Brian's hard work.

Aaron has some big shoes to fill but I believe he is up to the task. Aaron has been intimately involved with **Magic** development for years. He's been on numerous development teams and is always involved in the playtesting. He is also the organized play liaison for R&D and oversees the group that makes banning and restriction recommendations. Because of this, Aaron has spent a lot of time and energy to have his pulse on the various metagames. If anyone can live up to Brian's legacy, it's Aaron. And all of you (well at least those of you that read "[Latest Developments](#)") have ringside seats to watch it happen.

So that's all I got for today. Once again, if you have any feedback for either portion (although I'm guessing the first half might produce more mail), please drop me an e-mail. While I cannot respond to every letter, I do, in fact, read them all.



Join me next week when things start getting cold.

Until then, may you fight the good fight.

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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