

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Milk and Cookies with Drew Tucker

Matt Cavotta
Taste the Magic
Thursday, November 9, 2006



PRODUCTS

PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

So I was walking through the arid salt plains near old Trokair when I was knocked to the hard, gritty ground by a sudden burst of wind. Then, through the cloud of dust and salt, right before me, I could see a bluish swirling vortex silently whirling and opening wider. As it grew I could start to make out a tumultuous scene within it. In stark contrast to the vast emptiness of the salt plains, the blue rift revealed a burgeoning woodland teeming with beasts of all shapes and sizes. The buzzing scene was dominated by a giant blue flightless bird loping toward the opening, toward me! It was only when it got closer that I noticed the human, fleeing frantically, mouth agape and eyes bulging. I was too frightened to get up and flee, too enthralled at what I was seeing to care. Then, in an instant, the silence was broken by screams as the human seemed to puncture the film between the silent chaos of that forest and the echoing emptiness of Trokair. The human continued to run and howl, though the rift closed quickly behind him. He ran, and he howled, for quite a while. He did not stop until he was a few hundred feet past me - long enough, I guessed, to realize he had absolutely no idea where he was. Then he spotted me, and all the tension and fear in his posture seemed to melt away. He trotted back over to me and said, "Hey Matt." To which I replied, "Hey Drew, let's head over to the 'Thirsty Icatian' for drinks, sweets, and freedom from angry Moas."



Final Wrap-up
[Top 8 Video Archives](#)

MAGIC ONLINE



And that was how our Milk and Cookies interview began. And it was an appropriate beginning. After all, the *Time Spiral* time rifts did not just bring back elements of **Magic's** gaming past, but elements from the actual past as well. Wonderful elements, such as today's guest of honor, Mr. Drew Tucker.

MC: They say artists are slow, lazy weaklings. If this is the case, how did you outfox that deadly Moa?

DT: It was all the flailing screaming and kicking that did it - or maybe my little bit of hiding - calling on my masterful evasion techniques passed down from the mountain hermits of old.

MC: Are you referring to the **Cave People**? Whoever it is, I am glad they helped you stay unkilld by the deadly pecker. Now the **Magic** fans get to be re-introduced to Drew Tucker, artist

and scourge of bird-beasts. Can you start us out with a Tucker overview?

DT: My amazingly understanding wife, Kati, children, Griffin and Maeve, and I are currently living in Olney, IL - home of the infamous white squirrel. It's tucked away in the cornfields of the Midwest (the town, not the squirrel), two and a half hours from either St. Louis or Indianapolis and at least 45 minutes from any major highway or art store. We have two dogs: a smelly old beagle and an Alaskan something or other. Wonderful dogs, but I wish they were dingoes.

MESSAGE BOARDS

Magic General Forum
magicthegathering.com Forum

RULES

RULES



As for where I am from, this all depends on the time of the day that I'm asked. I've just escaped near-certain doom, so I'll give you the long version. I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and my immediate family moved back and forth from Illinois to Missouri about 13 times. Finally, at the end of high school, my parents moved to Eastern Tennessee.

At this point I started college at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale studying Graphic Design. After making it through the program, amazingly penniless due to collegiate activities, I moved in with my parents in Tennessee and attended a Baptist College (freeloaded some more education - my father was the dean of Math there, so I got a nice cut in tuition, and I wasn't quite happy with Design and wanted to explore more of the visual arts). After a year or two I moved back to Carbondale, got married, and moved up to Seattle, where I finally "officially" graduated with a BA at Cornish College of the Arts. We spent about five years there, moved back to Carbondale for a few, then moved over to New York City, where I received my Masters degree under Marshall Arisman at the school of visual arts: Illustration as visual essay.



MC: I am going to interrupt here for a moment. Art goobs of the world may recognize that name, but most **Magic** peeps probably don't realize that Arisman is an illustration world heavyweight. Give the folks a little bit about who he is.

DT: Marshall Arisman is one of the most important editorial illustrators in the last part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. He was one of the first illustrators in the 70s to break the boundaries of 70s realism into an area where illustration can be more personalized. He blurs the boundary between illustration and fine art. Check out his website, <http://www.marshallarisman.com>, for evidence of his mastery.

MC: The whole thing about illustration vs. fine art is a hot topic. We'll get back to that. For now, continue with the tale of the Tuck.

DT: After getting my MFA, we moved back to Carbondale and then finally Olney, where I am currently illustrating and teaching at the local college (OCC, or fully known as Olney Central College). There is a recurring theme here - I might be *from* Carbondale, but I have always preferred to think of myself as a sort of gypsy, though not as swarthy.

MC: All that moving around - it's no wonder you were able to elude the Moa, you're never in any one place for more than a moment! Speaking of moving around, you were on the **Magic** scene from Alpha through *Mirage*, then moved out, and now you're back again in *Time Spiral*. People might not realize it, but you made one of your quick signature appearances in a cameo in the *Unhinged* art for **Zombie Fanboy**.

What was your reaction when the artist - who was that guy, anyway? Oh yeah, it was me! What was your reaction when I asked you if I could feature some of your art in my own **Magic** illustration?

DT: Oooh I was overjoyed. But yeah It is an honor - I felt honored. I am a bit of a hermit (which doesn't help my career as an illustrator), so, here and there, I think of myself as an outcast - and to have a card be an homage to

me is pretty f'n cool. Makes you feel like you count or made a difference or something silly like that.

MC: Just so all y'all know, the "artist matters" cycle in *Unhinged* asked artists to paint themselves into their art. While all the other artists were worrying about their own complexions, I decided to shine the light on an artist who I always admired - the Tuck. You can see hints of the following Tucker classics in the Fanboy art: [Dark Banishing](#), [Hurr Jackal](#), [Warmth](#), [Decomposition](#), [Harmattan Efreet](#), and [Dream Fighter](#).

I am going to stop brown-nosing the Tuck and get on with the interview. What inspired you to become an artist? And why specifically a fantasy artist?

DT: This is a fairly easy one. For as long as I remember it's all I have ever wanted to do. I'm told that, as a little boy, I would sit for hours trying to render the perfect feet and hands. Ironically, for a couple of years, much later, I would try and hide feet in really tall grass and hands in conveniently placed pockets. Funny to me.

MC: So where are you today on the whole hands and feet thing?

DT: I prefer to make them as blurry as possible - ha! No, I spent an amazingly long time working on hands and feet. I still hate them and their gestures, but I can finally draw them.

MC: And at some point, the feet and hands gave way to swords and demons?

DT: Its odd, and I bet a lot of other illustrators are the same, but many of my early pictures were of vampires, werewolves, cemeteries, and blood. (I had a few elementary teachers concerned.) I had a couple of pics of multi-toothed sharks and a monkey-eating crocodile (happens to be my first attempt at illustrating my own story.) But for the most part, I made a lot of pictures of spooks and such, so I have come full circle. As an "adult," I illustrate my childhood dreams. I'm drawing the same stuff I was working on when I was little.

But I like some of the freedom fantasy art gives. Even so, I like trying to push the envelope there and give a little more than the traditional approach.

MC: How long have you been working as an artist?

DT: My first paid jobs were in fourth grade. During recess some of the older kids would bring me pages of their dads'... um, magazines. For a couple of bucks I would return the next day with some saucy little drawings.

MC: Did you include the hands and feet? Ha! No need to actually reply to that. Anyways...

DT: Around the same time I would make Christmas cards and gift tags and would collect orders and sell them to my neighbors, relatives, and folks from church.

During high school and after my first couple years in college, I did a lot of logo work and brochure design with the occasional illustration. But it wasn't until the early 90s that I got my first real illustration job - from you guys at Wizards!

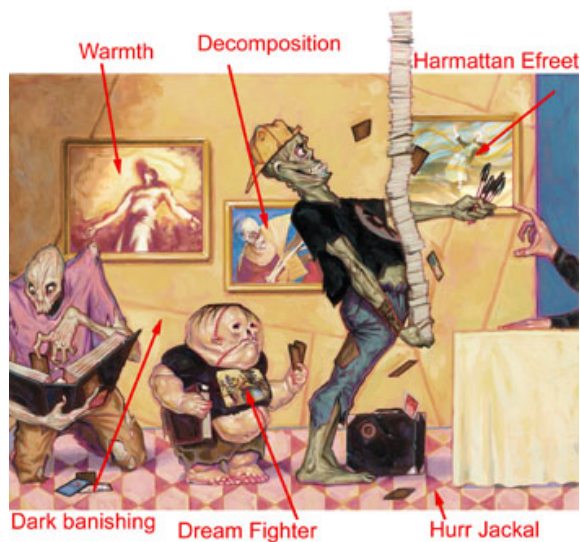
MC: Who are your artistic influences/faves outside of fantasy art?

DT: Here's a list for you, and mind you that it's a fluctuating list. For fine artists, I like Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, Kiki Smith, Kara Walker, Damien Hurst, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and Wayne Theibold (who can paint one mean piece of cake.) And I can't forget Marshall Arisman, who I would put in with both fine art and illustration. That's just a handful. As a little kid I would look at a lot of Edward Gorey and Charles Adams. There was a period when I wanted to be the next Maurice Sendak; I really like his draftsmanship. I'm also partial to Istivan Banyan, Aubrey Beardsly, the Clayton Brothers, and there's more, but I think I'll stop there. The list is huge when I start to think about it.

MC: I think it's interesting that you list so many children's book artists. For many of us fantasy artists, I think, children's story book art is where we got our first glimpses of the "fantastical." It's where reality does not impose its heavy rules on the art. So what about some fantasy art favorites. Any artists that the **Magic** fans might know?

DT: As a kid I loved the early Tarzan covers by Frazetta. But these days I like Heronimus Bosch. I'm a huge fan of Dave McKean, as well as of Matt Mahurin's earlier stuff. I also like me some Brom, Jon J. Muth, and George Pratt.

MC: Just so you fans know, you will not find Bosch on any **Magic** cards. But you will find Brom, Muth, and Pratt on cards. [Gatherer](#) away to see what the Tuck likes.



DT: I like those guys, but I absolutely love Richard Kane Ferguson. This is probably a horrible thing to say, and to Richard this is meant as a compliment, albeit an off one at that - but one in the highest order: I would gladly eat Richard's heart and brain, maybe the hands as well, to obtain his power - if cannibalism was acceptable. I have a lot of admiration for his work. I can remember early on in my career, when I would look at cover art and his stuff always stuck out for me. His use of shape and color is simply incredible.

MC: I am not surprised that you, too, are a Ferguson fan. My art-nerd's eye tells me that you are both watercolor wizards and fans of abstract work. Before we gab about realism versus abstraction, can you talk about the media you use in your art?

DT: I started out using purely watercolor, but somewhere in there I started mixing it up using different printing inks, occasionally starting out with a monoprint, sometimes collage, gouaches, tempera, and then came the acrylic media. I could get some almost oil-like glazes, still all with a water color base. All still in a watercolor fashion - not as traditional, but I seem to like the effect. I often think I should switch to oil. I do a lot of these on my own time, but probably not for illustration work.

MC: So let's talk about how you approach your illustrations. We've talked about Arisman's envelope-pushing influence, and the peeps have seen the art sprinkled throughout this article so far. It's apparent that your work is a lot more free and loose than most **Magic** art. There's a level of abstraction that only comes out every once in a while. Tell us what that's all about.

DT: When I approach an illustration I'm trying to show a few things: first, the assignment's description, and then I often try to instill an emotional element for myself and the viewer. My hopes are that the viewer will be able to bring themselves into the illustration - fill in some of the visual cues and then walk away with more than just the straight read.

MC: Engaging the viewer is a "fine art" goal. It is not always the aim of illustration. Some guys are great at showing us every speck of detail we could ever want to see, but there is not art/viewer interplay. I think it's admirable that you try to bring the "fine" into **Magic** art.

DT: So, okay, fine art and illustration. Today there is a problem with the definition - fine art is so broad and encompasses everything. My favorite definition for it is that art is any expression outside the basic needs. Lets take going to the bathroom for instance; you have the basic animal poo, but the moment you start expressing yourself, you have taken it to a higher level - it could be defined as art. Really though, to me, I think primarily it is in the intent of the creator. For traditional illustration, the illustrator is trying to please a client and communicate their idea, and, in opposition, the fine artist is trying to please himself. With this in mind, could we not consider the Sistine chapel a piece of illustration? Were DaVinci, Michelangelo, Donatello mere illustrators or were they fine artists? But I think the two can blend - it is the intent of the artist that counts. When I take an assignment I try to internalize it. There is research involved, but mostly I try to feel something for the assignment. I try to make a personal connection that I can draw from. I am still trying to please the art director, but in the forefront I am trying to please myself and the art that is being created. My thought is: if I can relate to the piece, I can send that sort of thought or energy to the viewer. I want them to become engaged with the art work.

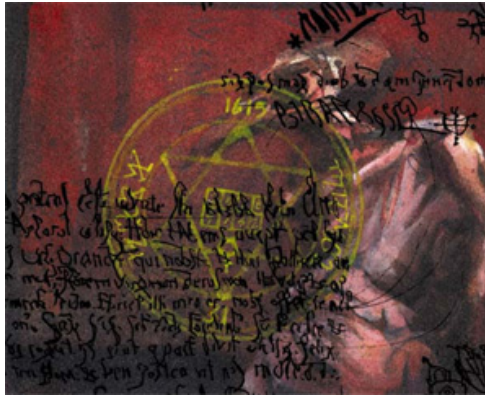
A good art director takes you on for your personal voice - how you create and problem-solve. They are looking for *you*, not a knock-off of someone they would like you to be.

Okay, here's more, and it's great for illustrators. A year or two ago, I think it was two, the MoMA started to show Norman Rockwell. Here we have a museum, a gallery, showing an illustrator. And Norman Rockwell is an artist, and a "fine artist" at that. He was not showing America as it was, but his own dreams of America, an idealized version - personal content in illustration. Practically everyone loves Rockwell. I don't think anyone would challenge the idea of him as a fine artist, but it took years for him to get into a museum. Maybe it's because of his narrative, but it is a step for illustrators and fine artists that use a more narrative voice.

MC: Just recently, I explained to the readers that the worlds and storylines created for **Magic** build a rich setting, but leave a lot of dots unconnected - so players have room to connect them on their own. It seems to me that your art may be doing the same thing. It reminds me of the way Hitchcock made his movies. What inspired you to use this approach in your art? Was it Hitchcock? ;)

DT: Holy crap, it was Hitchcock! I have always found his storytelling and visuals, angles, etc. compelling. It reminds me of the first *Halloween* movie, Hitchcock-inspired I'm sure. It's not a bloodbath or a gore movie. It was, for the most part, all insinuated - not a drop of blood. But when I think about it, it was a splatterfest - one of the most suspenseful, horrific modern horror movies at the time - and it's all built in the head. I have always thought that the mind is a far more terrifying, sensual image builder. If the viewer is given just enough info, they will fill the dots in. Our brains' compulsion to make connections to create order is a funny little thing. A little Gestalt theory there.

MC: So let's talk about how that applies to your **Magic** art. **Magic** art fans invoke your name quite often when trying to assess each others' taste in art. How do you feel about being the "litmus test" when it comes to representational vs. abstract art?

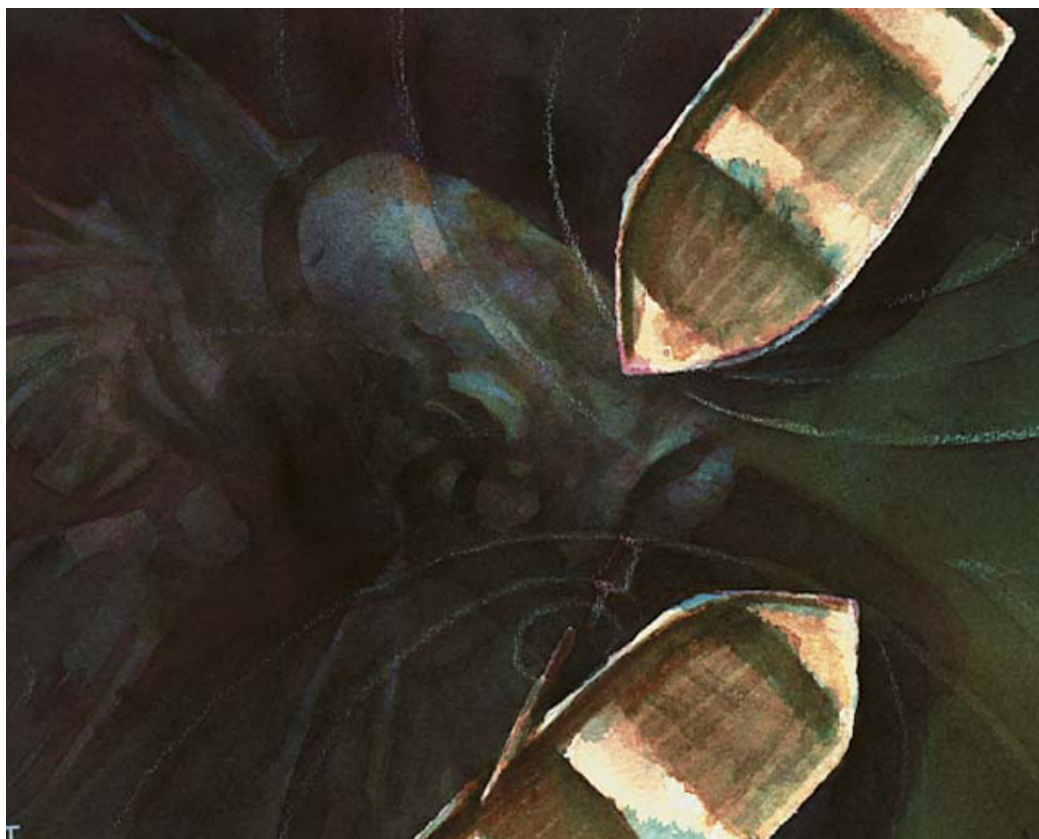


DT: I have always been the sort of person that either you love or hate. So I am kind of used to it. As for the litmus test, I'm pretty happy with it and hope I can always be that pivotal. Its kind of nice, because on either side you get a fairly strong opinion. And any time you can move someone in that fashion to either extreme, I feel, is a success. Both sides seem to know exactly why they feel that way and I have read some pretty good debates, etc. Of course, I like the pro-Drew folks the best and would like to say they are very articulate and well read. I also have a theory that their knuckles do not drag nearly as much as the other folks.

We used to joke that our family motto was, "if you're not for me, you're against me," and I think that says it all. I want those opinions, the positives and the negatives, because they keep me in check and give me something to shoot for. I think I will always put in an emotional element - for me it's very important to try to connect with the assignment. I will also retain some of the more atmospheric elements, but I am also trying to give a couple of extra sharp edges in there as well try to "define" a few things for the farsighted.

MC: Let's chat about some particular pieces you've done for **Magic**.

Dandan



DT:**Dandan** I remember when I made this one, I thought I was so smart (I still do, mind you). This is probably one of my own favorites - as far as a painting, the handling is pretty good, but I like how it reads - that you have to take a second to pull it all in. It seems that most viewers take a quick look at art - they want a very quick read - but here we are not selling shoes. I like that the viewer has to offer something to the image part of the story; it must be filled in by them.

MC: This is a great example of storytelling. While it might not jump out at you immediately as "Look at this awesome giant fish!", it does stand out as a "Hey, what's with this one?" It invites you in to figure out A: "Where's the creature?" and B: "Why are those boats empty?" In my mind, this is not the *Jaws* scene with **Dandan** rising to feed, it's the after scene, where **Dandan** is hovering just beneath the surface, digesting some fishermen and waiting for potential curious boaters.

Decomposition

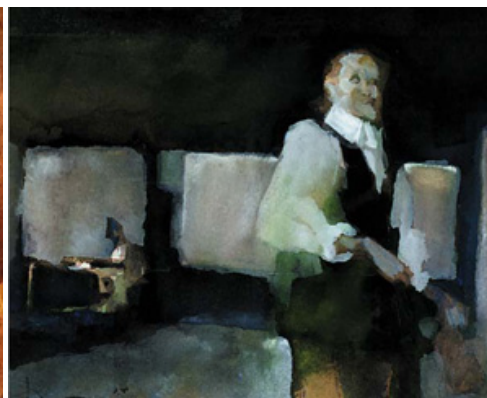


DT: This is actually not one of my favorite pieces - it's not bad, but I was reading a lot of blogs at the moment and taking all the "blurry blurry" comments to heart and thought I'd crisp it up a bit. A little too much for my taste. There were some neat things going on here though. I was trying to use primary colors in a more aggressive way, but my favorite part is the thing's arm. It's a painting of a raccoon's arm that I found on the railroad tracks. I kept it in a magic trick box for a couple of years and finely gave it away as a sort of thank you present.

MC: I, on the other hand, like this one. I like how the bold primary colors look on a green card, and I think the abstraction (though not blurry) is still rather extreme. But, extreme as it is, it still *feels* like a *Mirage* card - the tribal, jungle, aboriginal feel is still there. That little triangle of red in the bottom right corner is why I love Tucker art. What is that, and what is it for? Well, it's probably nothing, but it ties the whole piece together and gives the color palette zing. It's like the Dude's rug in *The Big Lebowski* - it ties everything together.

Repentant Blacksmith

Icatian Moneychanger



MC: I don't know which of these two doozies I want you to talk about more. I love them both. So let's do a little bit on each one...

DT: I lived in a building on Republican Street up in Seattle when I painted *Icatian Moneychanger*, and one of the tenants was a bank teller. I always thought he was a mortician. I think it was his aftershave. Anyhow, I was going for a sort of the feeling of distrust. You rarely get to know your banker and, well, all that money passing through their hands, all that time spent in lightless buildings (yes, I know banks are well lit), it might get to them, and possibly they would snap and end up with just a little more of a deposit.

MC: For me, this is one of the definitive images of *The Dark*. It has an ominous, shady patrician feel. Like you said, it looks like a respected official gone over the edge. The angular shadow in the room along with the shaded windows give it a secretive, sinister feel. And the fact that you cannot make out the moneychanger's face is

perfect! Wait a minute, Moneychanger isn't from *The Dark* at all. I guess I have carried that misconception around for years because the art is so, well, dark. Behold, people, the stupefying power of art!

DT: I like the **Repentant Blacksmith** a lot. The handling of the watercolors gives off a sort of warmth. I like smithies - the heat of the coals. Foundries in general are pretty cool. Metal, when it is liquid, is amazing, and the idea of blacksmiths that need no real outer protection for their hands and arms is cool too. There are usually leather aprons and gloves involved in the smithing process, but to show the toughest (pro-red) smiths, I thought these should be removed.

MC: I agree. The watercolor itself does some great tricks in this one. The organic shapes it makes in the right side of the piece almost read like heat ripples. The transparent glow is great too, like the forge itself is the main light source. I also like the silhouetted forge grates on the left. While that is what I call them, I like them because they function like decorative shapes. Also, the white-clothed dude in the center is like the fulcrum of the whole thing, balancing the hot orange right side with the dark left side. All in all, I think this is one of your strongest pieces.

Basal Sliver



MC: It would be wrong of us to leave out any talk of your new goodies. What about this one?

DT: If I remember correctly, I'm trying to work a little crisper and give more detail while still retaining an atmospheric element. **Basal Sliver** is dealing with the sacrifice, so I'm showing the moment before the priest-like elder in the background slaughters him (it's really about the moment before the expectation of slaughter).

MC: Thank you Drew - for having the guts to do a Sliver illustration that does not just contain the bugged itself. I agree, this one is about the sacrifice, and the creature's relationship to the controller, not the hive. You've captured this mood nicely.

Eternity Snare



DT: This was a funny one. There are two versions - the first was a little greener than it needed to be. It looked a little too "alive" in the background. The main challenge with this was to stop a minotaur in full motion. I tried a couple of things, including cobwebs, but it wasn't looking right. So that's when I pulled out my fall-back plan and put a crow on his horns. I think it did the trick. The art is a lot crisper than my earlier stuff but I hope it still retains the emotions and suggested possibilities as the old.

MC: While some folks might not get the whole "crow on the horns" trick, I latched on to it immediately. This may be a case of "great minds think alike." (Check me out patting us both on the back. Smooth.) I pulled a similar stunt a while back in an illustration that was meant to show a long period of time in which I did absolutely nothing. I drew myself sitting in a chair with a leprechaun on my knee! Ha! Get it? (If you don't get it, here's a hint: Crows don't perch on charging cow-people, and leprechauns shun all human contact.) Nice.

Vertigo

MC: I thought I'd throw this one in, with all the Hitchcock talk and all. ;)

DT: I don't want to like this piece, but it was pretty successful. The composition gives it an uncontrollable spin, and it was exactly what I was shooting for.

MC: I can see why you might not *want* to like this one. It does not necessarily have the Tucker signature abstraction. But, like you said, it has a "spin" that just works. I actually think the hard lines (that you probably don't like) work to create the severe perspective and expanded depth of field in the piece. If you had softened background elements, it wouldn't be as successful.

MC: Now that a lot of the newer players have gotten a taste of what the Tuck is cooking, can you give us a website address where they can take a look at your entire bill of fare?

DT:<http://www.drewtucker-illustration.com>

MC: Here's a [Gatherer link](#) to all of Drew's **Magic** work.

DT: You know, Matt, This has taken longer than I thought it would. I don't normally stay in one place this long.

MC: Do you need to go?

DT: Yeah.

MC: Let me help you out.

And with that, Matt began muttering something under his breath and folding his hands in bizarre, complex positions. Then, between one artist and the other, a blue dot of light appeared. The light traced outward in a circular arc, then swirled and widened into a yawning, silent portal. It opened into a dark and crooked wood. Drew



regarded Matt quickly, then dashed into the forest. No sooner had he passed the rippling threshold when a crazed, bearded old man started after him with a large, bloody axe.



*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own **D&D** characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; **D&D** and **Magic**. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Matt Cavotta](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

