

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Timmy, Johnny, and Spike Revisited

Mark Rosewater
Making Magic
Monday, December 18, 2006



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

At the end of every year, **magicthegathering.com** goes on vacation for the holidays. This means no new content, (although do check in this Friday for the final episode of *The Great Designer Search* to see who wins the coveted design intern position) but it does give each columnist a chance to look back at the year and pick what they think was their best columns. As New Years falls on a Monday, I get three slots this year for my best-of articles. And you know what, it was difficult picking my favorite three.

I was very happy with a number of my columns this year. Don't get me wrong, I had my clunkers too. But in the end, I figured out what I consider my top three. Runners up included "[It's About Time](#)", "[As Good As It Gets](#)" and "[Between a Grok and a Hard Place](#)." But number three goes to...

"Timmy, Johnny & Spike Revisited"

The original "Timmy, Johnny and Spike" had the distinction of being the column with the most hits of all **magicthegathering.com** for a long time. While I enjoyed my original column I felt I could do better with a new take thanks to everything we've learned since then. This column was my chance to revisit one of my favorite contributions to the game - the player psychographics - and talk a little more deeply about what they mean. There's even a new test to check out what box(es) you belong in.

This article originally appeared on March 20, 2006. To take the test it refers to, click [here](#).

This column will have two distinctively different readers. The first will have read the original article or at least be aware of the three terms. The second will be learning about this R&D classification for the first time. This column will have something for both types of readers. I will be walking through each of the player types (for the benefit of the second group), but going into much greater detail this time, including looking at some of the subsets of each profile (for the benefit of the first group – and I guess the second group as well).

So, let's start with the obvious. What or who are Timmy, Johnny, and Spike? To answer this question, let me begin by flashing back ten years. When I was hired into R&D, I was a bit of an oddity. The way I put it back then was I was the one R&D guy that studied words in college. Everyone else majored in something that involved a lot of numbers, be in mathematics, engineering, or a number of different sciences. I, on the other hand, had majored in communications. I was a writer.

This meant that I approached card design the same way I approached writing a story. After all, to me, they were both forms of creative expression. So this begs the question of how I function as a writer. I write from the heart. I write to create an emotional response in my readers. This is the same way I design **Magic** cards.

Here's where it gets interesting. In order to create an emotional response, I had to understand what emotions I was trying to evoke. In short, I had to ask a number of questions: What does a **Magic** player want when they play **Magic**? What are their reasons for playing? What makes them happy?

This is where my communication background helped me out. You see, when you attend a communications school, they make you sample classes in all the different aspects of communication. Now, I majored in broadcast & film (yes, I managed to pick a major where watching television and movies were actually homework), but I was also forced to dip my toe into the schools two other sections – journalism and advertising/public relations.

In one of my advertising classes, I stumbled onto a neat little tool called a psychographic profile. The idea of a psychographic profile is that by isolating different personality traits and behaviors you can understand what motivates a particular type of person to act in a certain way. In advertising, psychographic profiles are used to understand what motivates people to buy a particular item versus another. But the field of psychographics has advanced over the years and is now used to help in all sorts of fields. Why not game design?

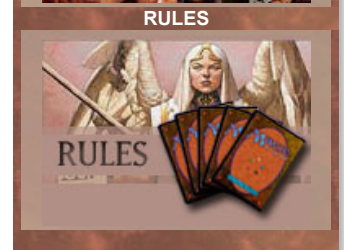
The Play's The Thing

Timmy, Johnny and Spike are psychographic profiles for **Magic** players. That's what the test was all about. It lets you know which profile (including all the various hybrids) you fall into. So what makes the psychographic profile so valuable to a **Magic** designer (or developer)? The simplest answer is that our job is to make you happy. If we know what makes you happy, our job gets a lot easier.

It took me many years to piece these three psychographic profiles together and many years after that to really understand how each worked. (I should point out that this is an ongoing learning experience which is one of the reasons, by the way, that this column is so much more advanced than the one four years ago.) I had a lot of help from the rest of R&D fine-tuning the details, both in how to interpret what each profile liked and then figuring out how to make cards that satisfied that group's desires.

Final Wrap-up

[Top 8 Video Archives](#)



One of the biggest stumbling blocks is that each group had a clear stereotype that pulled focus. That is, when we talked about the psychographic profiles, we had a tendency to err in talking about one particular subset at the expense of the rest of the profile. That, I feel, is what I did in my first article on this topic. I oversimplified to the point where I reduced each profile to a stereotype. This has caused a number of inaccuracies and misunderstandings (one might even call them myths) about each of the profiles. Today, I'd like to set the record straight by doing a better job of clarifying each profile. As with last time, let's begin with Timmy.

Timmy

The first question I always ask of a profile is: what does this profile want when they play **Magic**? *Timmy wants to experience something.* Timmy plays **Magic** because he enjoys the feeling he gets when he plays. What that feeling is will vary from Timmy to Timmy, but what all Timmies have in common is that they enjoy the visceral experience of playing. As you will see, Johnny and Spike have a destination in mind when they play. Timmy is in it for the journey.

One of the great myths about Timmy is that he is young and inexperienced. I think this comes from the fact that a non-Timmy (particularly a Spike) looking at a Timmy play reads his choices as those of inexperience. Why else would he play overcosted fatties or coin flipping cards or cards that, simply put, aren't that good? Because Spike misses the point. Timmy plays with cards that make him happy; cards that create cool moments; cards that make him laugh; cards that allow him to hang with his friends; cards that cause him to have fun. Winning and losing isn't even really the point (although winning is fun – Timmy gets that). For Timmy, the entire reason to play is having a good time.

But fun varies greatly from player to player. This is why for each of the profiles we like to examine many of the subgroups that make up the profile. These subgroups are not an exhaustive list but rather a touch upon a few of the larger subgroups.

Power Gamers

One of the stereotypes of Timmy is that he (or she; for the rest of this column just add "or she" whenever you see "he") loves playing big creatures and big spells as he smashes his way to victory (my last column on Timmy really reinforced this image). This isn't true for all Timmies, but it is true for this group. The Power Gamer equates power with fun. He enjoys the vicarious thrill of dominating the game. For Power Gamer Timmy, **Magic** is about seeing how much he can do. How big a creature can he play? How much damage can he do in a single turn? How much can he win by?

The important thing to understand is that the Power Gamer while a subset of Timmy is not the entirety of Timmy. As you will see in a moment, there are many other ways to enjoy the game of **Magic**.

Social Gamers

These are the Timmies that thrive on the social aspect of the game. To them, it's all about interacting with their friends. They see **Magic** as a means to spend a fun Saturday night (or Sunday afternoon, or lunch time, etc.). This is the group that is much more partial to multi-player variants, as they want to involve the entire playgroup in a single game. (Although I should point out that some social gamers like pairing off and playing traditional two-person **Magic**.)

Social Gamer Timmy makes his card and deck choices to maximize fun interactions. Of all the Timmies, Social Gamer Timmy is the one most likely to issue house rules and self ban cards. Why? Because if the point is to have a good time with one another, why let irksome cards get in the way.

Diversity Gamers

This third subgroup finds its fun in the variety inherent in the game. Due to its modular design and fanatical following, **Magic** has many different deck types and formats. Diversity Gamer Timmy wants to experience it all. Fun for him is this constant exploration. Each time he plays, he wants to try something different than what he did before. Yes, he occasionally returns to things he's done before, but only as a breather before he leaps once again into the great unknown.

This is the group of Timmies most likely to try cards that no one else is paying. Not to prove that they can be like the Johnnies, but because they are honestly interested to see if the card might be fun. The same goes for deck types and formats. Every color, every archetype, every way to play is all fair game.

Adrenalin Gamers

This final subgroup embraces the joy of variance in the game. They enjoy playing cards and decks that don't have a predictable outcome. To them, the fun of the game is to see all the different kinds of things that could happen. This is the group, for example, that loves things like coin flip cards and cards that work differently each time you play them.

Adrenalin Gamer Timmy likes flying by the seat of his pants. He enjoys the rush of adapting to the unpredictable. As a result, Adrenalin Gamer Timmy is drawn to decks and formats that allow every game to be as different from the last as possible.



For Timmy, the entire reason to play is having

Let me end my section on Timmy by stressing that of the three profiles I believe Timmy has gotten the worst rap. Timmy isn't an idiot. Timmy just chooses his cards for his own purposes. It's not the reason Johnny and Spike choose their cards, but then that's the entire point of psychographic profiles - to explain how different players are motivated by different criteria. I hope after this article, a lot of readers will realize that they themselves are Timmies. Don't shy away from this news. Embrace it. Be proud of your Timmy-dom. After all, to quote/paraphrase a semi-popular 80's tune "Timmies Just Want To Have Fun".

Johnny

So why does Johnny play **Magic**? *Because Johnny wants to express something.* To Johnny, **Magic** is an opportunity to show the world something about himself, be it how creative he is or how clever he is or how offbeat he is. As such, Johnny is very focused on the customizability of the game. Deck building isn't an aspect of the game to Johnny; it's *the* aspect.

One of the strengths of **Magic** is the ability for players to imbue much of themselves in their decks. When you play Monopoly you don't get emotionally attached to the board. But with **Magic**, your deck becomes an extension of yourself. When your deck wins, you win. When your deck gets complimented, you get complimented. It is this principle that drives Johnnies.

As with Timmy, Johnny also has numerous subgroups. The difference though has to do with the focus. Timmy's subgroups form around the issue of how to make the game fun. For the Johnny subgroups, it's about how one can express themselves.

Combo Players

Just as the Power Gamer subgroup defines the Timmy stereotype so does the Combo Player subgroup define the Johnny stereotype. The Combo Player is fascinated by the interaction of the cards. His quest is to find combinations that no one else has. He wants to build a deck that will impress all who see it. Because of this desire, the Combo Player is drawn to cards that have a sense of potential. In particular, he likes cards that he can build a deck around.

How the Combo Player varies from the other subgroups is that he is very focused on the modular aspect of the game. He wants to find the connections between the cards. This means that most of his focus is on the individual cards themselves.

Offbeat Designers

The Offbeat Designer also comes up with strange decks, but he starts from a very different vantage point. Instead of being driven by the cards, he is driven by ideas. What if the deck only had lands? What if the deck never played permanents? What if the deck stole every card played by the opponent?

The difference between the Combo Player and the Offbeat Designer is a subtle but important one. The Combo Player is proving that he can master the system by finding gems in the midst of chaos. The Offbeat Designer is proving his ability to find answers for any challenge. The former is an explorer. The latter is an inventor.

Deck Artists

The Deck Artist also builds decks but in a very different vein. The deck artist isn't trying to find anything or demonstrate anything. The Deck Artist is trying to use deck building as a form of self-expressive art. These are decks that do things like embody the elf culture or represent Empire Strikes Back or play in a way that makes the opponent appreciate the uniqueness of the card choices.

The Combo Player and Offbeat Designer are showing off what they are doing. The Deck Artist shows off how they are doing it.

Uber Johnnies

The Uber Johnnies build their decks based on sheer stubbornness. They are out to prove that what conventional wisdom says can't be done, can be done. To them, no card is too bad to find a use for. No deck archetype is too unworkable. Nothing truly is off limits.

The Uber Johnnies thrive on doing the undoable. They live to demonstrate that they were the one to succeed where all the others failed. Yes, this is the group that makes R&D design things like **One with Nothing**. (Which I feel compelled to point out showed up in multiple sideboards at Pro Tour--Honolulu).

Before I wrap up with Johnny, I feel obliged to point out that Johnnies aren't restricted to deck building. Be it choice of format, choice of play style or even choice of tokens, Johnny can use many different means to



Johnny wants to express something



express himself. The common bond to all the Johnnies is that they are on a mission to show the world something about themselves. What they're showing varies tremendously, but at the core of each Johnny is a similar motivation: "Look at me world! Look at me!"

Spike

So why does Spike play? *Spikes plays to prove something*, primarily to prove how good he is. You see, Spike sees the game as a mental challenge by which he can define and demonstrate his abilities. Spike gets his greatest joy from winning because his motivation is using the game to show what he is capable of. Anything less than success is a failure because that is the yardstick he is judging himself against.

Like Timmy and Johnny, Spike has his own subgroups. What separates these subgroups is how Spike has chosen to try and dominate. Different Spikes focus on different aspects of the game.

Innovators

This group is the closest thing Spike has to Johnny sensibilities. (Although I should point out the Innovator Spike wants to win first and foremost; he doesn't feel any need to be novel or unnecessarily different.) Innovator Spike prides himself on his ability to judge new cards. His goal is to find the next broken thing. Innovator Spike's dream is to spawn the next dominant deck. He wants to break the game. And like Johnny, he wants credit.

Because Innovator Spike is so focused on breaking new cards, he spends a great deal of time understanding the nuances of the mechanics. If something broke once, odds are greater that R&D will misjudge the same thing in the future. Because this group wants to understand how the game ticks, they are the ones most likely to be interested in **Magic** game theory. They want to understand things like card advantage and card utility because it is this intimate knowledge that's going to reward them later on.

Tuners

This subgroup of Spike doesn't try to innovate. They leave that up to the Innovators. This subgroup is the next in line. Once decks are produced and played, this group tries to dominate by fine-tuning the known decks. Known as min/maxers in the role-playing side of gaming, this is the group that tries to squeeze every ounce of advantage they can out of the resources at hand.

Tuner Spike uses his expertise to understand the things that help optimize decks such as mana ratios, card numbers and sideboard technology. Innovator Spike has surprise on his side. Tuner Spike has to win his games by being more efficient than those he plays against.

Analysts

The next subgroup also sits and collects information, but aiming for a different type of advantage. Analyst Spike's focus on the metagame. He plans on winning not by having the best deck in a vacuum, but by having the deck best suited for any particular environment. Analyst Spike understands that all decks have a weakness. If you can understand what will be played, you can figure out how to beat it.

Analyst Spike also tinkers with his decks, but more so to prime it for the field he expects. In addition, Analyst Spike (at least the tournament version; and yes, there are Spikes outside of the tournament environment) is very focused on the sideboard. With only fifteen slots, proper sideboarding relies heavily on understanding the threats one should expect to face.

Nuts & Bolts

The last subgroup has moved beyond decklists and metagames. Nuts & Bolts Spike focuses his energies in perfecting his own gameplay. He believes that the ultimate key to victory is flawless play. As such, Nuts & Bolts Spike spends his energy looking within. He tries to understand his own internal flaws and works to improve them.

Because of this focus, Nuts & Bolts Spike tends to spend more of his time on Limited formats, as it allows the most opportunities to improve his general skills. (This by the way, is mostly due to the fact that Limited has more variety and a wider level of power variance.) Some Nuts & Bolts Spikes do focus on constructed but it is the minority of this subgroup.

The most important thing to understand about Spikes is this. To them **Magic** is a means to test themselves. As such, their enjoyment comes from marking their own progress. While that often means winning, there are Spikes who measure their success in other ways. For example, some Spikes measure themselves not against winning or losing but by how perfect their play was.

The last thing I want to stress before I move on is that Spikes are neither limited to organized play nor are necessarily good. There are Spikes who play casually. There are Spikes who are downright horrible. Being a Spike is measured against why you play not where or how well you play. (And the inverse is true for Timmy.)



Spike gets his greatest joy from proving something by winning

Timmy/Johnny & Johnny/Timmy

Now it's time to talk about the hybrids. Timmy wants to experience something. Johnny wants to express something. Put them together and you get someone who wants to show others how much fun he can have. Timmy/Johnny wants to enjoy himself, but likes to be innovative in how he has his fun. Timmy/Johnny enjoys making up new formats or deck constraints. He likes to build decks specifically for offbeat and fun formats (which often includes multi-player).

Timmy/Spike & Spike/Timmy

Timmy/Spike is torn. He wants to win, yet he also wants to have fun. To solve this dilemma, he searches among the viable decks for the one that seems like it will be the most fun to play. Timmy/Spike is the guy who goes out of his way to play a dragon in his deck. Not one that shouldn't be played, mind you. But if there's a dragon that makes sense, Timmy/Spike is all over it.

Johnny/Spike & Spike/Johnny

Johnny/Spike wants to win. He just wants to win with style. Johnny/Spike is the rogue deck builder. He's the guy that comes up with the crazy decks that just might work. But Johnny/Spike takes the next step; he actually plays it. Johnny/Spike is out to prove that he can win while having the limitation of also being innovative while he does so.

Timmy/Johnny/Spike & Timmy/Spike/Johnny & Johnny/Timmy/Spike & Johnny/Spike/Timmy & Spike/Timmy/Johnny & Spike/Johnny/Timmy

Timmy/Johnny/Spike wants it all. He wants to prove that he can win while being innovative and having a rousing good time. This is a rare breed because it's hard to stay centered between all three desires. Most players that have a leaning towards all three profiles tend to lean more towards one or two than the other. But the triple-hybrid does exist and is the AB Negative of player profiles.

Vorthos

The last thing I feel obliged to touch upon is the "fourth" player type introduced by Matt Cavotta in his column on the creative side of **Magic** ("[Taste the Magic](#)"). In his column, Matt explained that he felt there was a missing fourth player type who he named Vorthos. Rather than paraphrasing, why don't I just quote Matt:

Vorthos (His name is actually John, but since there's already a "Johnny" in the mix, he opted to go with the name of his 16th level half-elven ranger/warmage.) is the guy who never puts more than one of any legend card in his deck because "it just wouldn't be right." He's the guy who will only play with the *Icy Manipulator* from *Ice Age* because it's the one they call the "Bone Crank." He won't play with the *Fallen Empires* cards with the stinky alternate art. Vorthos is the guy who started collecting cards because he liked the art, then read some **Magic** novels, then saw his favorite characters appear on some cards and decided to learn to play. There are a lot of Vorthoses out there. Some collect cards, but might not even play. Some have a hoot getting artists to sign their cards. Some don't read flavor text 'til after they finish the novel in case it might spoil the ending. Vorthos understands that **Magic can be fun even when you're not playing the game.**



So where does Vorthos fit into all of this? The answer is that he doesn't. Not because Vorthos isn't important, but because he's not actually a psychographic profile. Vorthos is defined by what he cares about, not why he plays (a subtle distinction, I know). In short, Vorthos is examining the players from a different axis. An interesting one, but not the topic of the day.

What this means is that there are Timmy Vorthos, Johnny Vorthos and Spike Vorthos. The first loves to recite the flavor text to *Fodder Cannon* whenever given the chance, the second has his Weatherlight Crew deck, and the third has read and remembers the characters from every **Magic** novel ever printed. Perhaps one day I'll explore Vorthos' companion profiles (Wait until you meet Melvin).

Playing to Type

And that (in a little over four thousand words) is what I have to say about Timmy, Johnny, and Spike. Check back in three or four years when I update the test yet again and write "Timmy, Johnny, and Spike Revisited Revisited" As always, I'm happy to hear any thoughts all of you have on the player profiles.

Join me next week when I'll finally talk about a topic that's clearly black and white.

Until then, may you embrace what **Magic** means to you.

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.



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Mark Rosewater](#) 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](#)

