

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Myth-Understandings

Mark Rosewater
Making Magic
 Monday, March 19, 2007



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

They say the best way to give bad news is to just come right out and say it. I know that readers have come to expect that magicthegathering.com is the definitive source for information. As such, it pains me to have to admit that I made a grave error in my column last week. Yes, somehow the army of fact-checkers missed a vital detail. My faithful readers, I can only apologize ever so humbly (and I seldom do anything humbly, so this is hard for me) for my gaffe of [last week](#). It turns out that a duck's quack *does*, in fact, echo.



So how did I make this mistake? Well, you see, the duck's quack not echoing is a myth, one perpetuated on cheese-stick-wrapper trivia and Snapple caps. Wizards sneak up on you because they kind of sound like the truth. I mean, have you ever heard a duck's quack echo?

Today, I'm going to tackle a few myths I've seen in some of my threads. Note that these myths are mostly about how **Magic** functions and how Wizards of the Coast and R&D thinks about certain things. If you're eager to check out myths of card design you can check out my column [Rules of the Game](#), one of my personal all-time favorite columns. If you want to hear myths about how flavor interacts with design, check out another of my columns [Bursting with Flavor](#). But if you want to hear about some basic myths of **Magic**, you're in the right place. (Note that the following myths aren't in any order other than the order I remembered them.)

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



Myth #1 – Magic “Burns Through” Players Quickly

For some reason there is this belief among numerous posters that **Magic** players have a short life span (as a player of **Magic**, that is). I'm not quite sure why. My guess is that many players look at how much is involved in playing and assume that although they stick with it most players don't. I'm here, as someone who cares greatly about how long players play, to say that this is simply not true.

Here's what the data shows. If you make it past the first six months (the “do I understand how to play and if I do am I interested in the game” portion of the **Magic** experience), you're going to play **Magic** for many years. The average varies based on a number of factors, but once a player commits to **Magic**, statistically speaking, they stick around for the long haul. Why so long? Because **Magic** is more than just a game to most people. **Magic** is a hobby. **Magic** is a lifestyle. **Magic** is something you do that defines who you are. Even if someone finds they need to stop playing **Magic** due to personal reasons, they rarely stop being a **Magic** player.



Plus, (remember my comment from above about not being so humble) **Magic** is an excellent game. If you like playing games, it does a lot to quench your game-playing thirst. As I often mention, **Magic**'s constant evolution keeps the game fresh. In addition, its extensive metagame (and by metagame I mean all the parts that surround the game, not just what deck beats what other decks in the next PTQ) ensures that there are many different ways to enjoy it.

And even when people do leave **Magic**, a good number of them later return. Why is this? It has to do with the major reasons people leave. Number one reason for quitting – changing of social environment, i.e., the people you used to play with aren't around to play with any more. Number two reason for quitting – change of time responsibilities, i.e., something keeps you from having the free time you used to spend playing **Magic**. Number three reason for quitting – change of fiscal state, i.e., you don't have the money you used to have to spend on the game. What do these three things all have in common? Yes, they all have to do with something about the player's life changing.

To be fair, there are people who leave because they don't like the latest block or they get burned out on the game, but our research shows that the biggest determiner of when you quit is not what we (being R&D) do but what you do. This explains why so many people get back into the game. If you left **Magic** on good terms, it's easy to get back in when the personal situation that changed reverts back. You find new people to play with. Or you find new time available for play. Or you get to a place where you have a more disposable income. Or maybe you just find a new way to play ([Magic Online](#), hint, hint.)



The real point of this myth is that being a **Magic** player is not a short-lifespan activity. The opposite has proven to be true. Players who commit to **Magic** tend to do so for a significant amount of time.

Myth #2 – Wizards of the Coast Doesn't Like the Secondary Market

Okay, here's how the logic on this one works to the best of my knowledge. Wizards of the Coast makes its money selling booster packs of **Magic**. When some secondary market dealer sells a card, Wizards isn't making money. In fact, the money spent is probably being taken out of Wizards' pocket, as that would have been money spent on more boosters. While this sounds plausible, it just doesn't work out that way (kind of like the duck's quack). Note that this is a very complex issue with lots of factors. To save us all some time, I'm going to focus on a few key factors that I think get less attention.

Number one – All Magic product sold, whether sealed or in single form, is good for Wizards. Single cards all came from boosters. So, any Magic product sold is good for Wizards because everything had to originally be purchased from a booster pack. Single card dealers get their stock from one of two places, either they open the booster themselves or they buy a card from someone else who either opened it from a booster or bought it from someone else, and so on.

Number two – The secondary market helps promote deck building. While it is theoretically possible to get every card you need for your deck by opening booster packs, that's not always the most practical solution, especially if you play in environments where your decks need to constantly change. If you need four copies of Card X and you only own two, sometimes buying the other two is the most direct way to do that. Wizards understands this. We want people to be able to build their decks. We don't want acquiring cards to be an obstacle that keeps people from playing.

Number three – It allows older formats to stay in existence. We haven't sold some of the cards relevant to Vintage in many, many years. (And yes, we do want it to exist – see below for that myth.) And by the nature of how we do business, we can't. **Magic** is a collectible, meaning that there will always come a time with any particular set that we stop printing it. But just because we stop printing and selling the cards doesn't mean we want the cards to no longer be available to newer players that want to get into older formats. The secondary market ensures that this access always remains.

What all that means is that Wizards understands the value that the secondary market adds to the game. It's clearly net positive for everyone involved. And because of that, we don't dislike it.



Myth #3 – R&D Doesn't Care About Casual Players

I think this myth comes when players look at how much Wizards does for competitive play. Why can't casual play get that kind of support? The simple answer to this is – how? How exactly does Wizards support casual play?

R&D does its job. We go out of our way to design cards that cater to casual players. We make lots and lots of Timmy and Johnny cards. We make cards with an eye toward multiplayer play. We make coin-flipping cards and many other cards that actively upset our tournament players.

Back to the first question. What can we do to encourage casual play? For competitive Constructed play there's an easy answer. We've created an entire organized play structure to make sure that there are tournaments and events constantly to allow competitive players to have a place to play. And we try to make casual-friendly tournaments. We run [prereleases](#) and [release](#) tournaments. We run [Friday Night Magic](#). We've been encouraging events like [Two-Headed Giant](#) that take some of the pressure off of the individual player.

But here's the Catch-22. The casual players are defined by their lack of desire to want to play in structured events. It's hard to make events for the true casual player because the mere act of making a formal event makes it by its nature less casual. We'd love to find ways to support the games played around the kitchen table more, but other than making cards for that style of play, we are caught in a paradox. If you have any ideas how to break out of it, please let me know.

R&D cares a great deal about casual players. We know that they make up a significant portion of the audience and we want to make them happy. The hard part is that this group is very tricky to track. Because the true casual gamer is playing with friends around the kitchen table and isn't necessarily all that involved with Magic Internet sites, they're a hard group to involve in other programs. We do our best, though. And we do care. But, by their very nature, casual gamers interact with the game through the cards, not events or promotions. Like I said, that makes casual players a pretty tricky group to cater to, so any feedback on this topic is appreciated.



Myth #4 – R&D Doesn't Care About Older Formats

Several weeks ago in my column [Breaking Rules](#) I talked about how R&D designs with a duration perspective more than a conglomerate one. (Quick vocabulary recap for those who might not have read that column: Duration players are ones who focus on formats where cards leave the format – like Standard and Extended – while Conglomerate players focus on formats where things never leave save for banning and restriction – like Vintage and Legacy.) A lot of people read this as me saying that R&D simply doesn't care about the conglomerate formats.

This comes from a simple misunderstanding. Conglomerate needs can be addressed by duration-focused design. Vintage, for example, doesn't need to have a lot of cards in each set that are relevant. The last few years of Vintage have been very healthy, and no one set (since *Mirrodin* I believe – I'm sure I'll get letters if I'm wrong – just be kind, I'm not one of the R&D members who follows the metagame of Vintage) has added more than a handful of cards that have had an impact in Vintage.

The point of my column wasn't that R&D doesn't care about the older formats, it's just that there is far less that we can do in design and development to have an impact on them. We can have a huge impact on Limited. We can shape Block Constructed and have a big influence on Standard. To a lesser extent, we can shake up Extended. We spend most of our time and energy on these formats because they're the ones in which we can make the most difference.

The reason we don't spend as much time on Vintage and Legacy is not because we don't like them but because we simply have less control over them. With 10,000+ cards and an overall higher power level (from the early days), it's hard to make a dent. Luckily for everyone involved, innovation tends to solve the problem. As we keep making cards that venture into virgin game areas, we make cards that find niches in Vintage and Legacy.



Myth #5 – R&D Doesn't Care What the Players Think

I'm not sure where this myth comes from. Perhaps because we make decisions that go against what the majority of a particular board thread feels. Or possibly because we sometimes ask for input and then don't follow the majority opinion. I honestly don't know.

I find this myth particularly funny because it couldn't be further from the truth. We go to such lengths to try and understand our players that the idea we just ignore you all is pretty ludicrous. For example, I read every letter sent to me. That's thousands and thousands of letters a year. I'm constantly reading other **Magic** web sites. I read various boards. I make an effort to talk to people at events. I do everything in my power to hear and read as much as I can about what our customer thinks.

Why do I do this? Because my job is to make all of you happy. In order to do that I have to know what you all want. (And you all very stubbornly never agree on anything, so it makes this task especially difficult.) And I'm not alone. All of R&D is as information-hungry as me. When one of us sees something that we think is particularly relevant we'll post the link in the **Magic** R&D folder. I often forward letters that I receive to relevant people in the company.

R&D very much cares what the players think. In the end, when push comes to shove, we're judged by how well a set sells. Did the players like it? Enough to buy lots of it? If we don't give you all what you want, guess what, you buy less. When we do give you what you want, you buy more. R&D has every motivation, both personally as creative artists and professionally as card sellers, to care what the players think.

So why do we occasionally do things that seem to contradict the public's desire? Several reasons. First, different players want different things. Sometimes the majority might dislike a decision but the minority are the people we're trying to make happy with that particular choice. A good example of this would be the "uber-bad" cards like *One With Nothing*. We know a majority of players don't like "really bad" cards but a small segment greatly enjoys them so we've decided to occasionally make cards for this subset. The same could be said for coin flipping cards or giant overcosted monsters.



Second, the public only sees a small portion of the details of any one issue. Things that might seem simple on the outside can be made much more complex when factors that you all aren't aware of cloud the issue. For example, I'm often asked why certain legends don't have a creature type that's clearly reflected in the creative and the answer is "it didn't fit on the type line".

Basically, it's impossible to please all of the people all of the time. (For some reason, I'm reminded of a quote by Abraham Lincoln – just replace the word "fool" with the word "please".) Sometimes we don't even please the majority. But as readers of this column (and [magicthegathering.com](#) in general), I hope you realize that we take great care in each and every decision, and what the public wants is always high on the list of things we care about.

Another Fine Myth

That's all the time I got for today. I hope my foray into myth has been an interesting one. As always, I'd love to hear any feedback on any of the issues I raised today.

Join me next week when the fatties come out to play.

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](#)

