

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# Dear Maro

Mark Rosewater  
Making Magic  
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Welcome to Theme Week Week. Okay, okay, that was actually last week. So why am I talking about it today? Because I missed out. Stupid Memorial Day. But as I always write in theme, I couldn't miss out on one of the coolest theme weeks ever, so for once I'm batting clean-up.

My goal was to come up with a theme week that I really wanted to see and then give all of you enough of a taste that you might bother Scott to actually do it. My choice: Parody Week. Yes, the idea is that every column that week would be written in the style of something else. Since I have a design column, I chose a column that would allow me to give design advice.

So welcome to Parody Week! I hope you like it.



## DEAR MARO

Dear Maro,

I've found this awesome new card design. It's fun, sexy, elegant. The problem is that one part of the card wants to be red and the other part wants to be black. This wouldn't be a problem except the current block I'm working on doesn't have multicolor cards. Now, the card could be squeezed into red with just a little bleed or possibly pushed into black with a bit bigger bleed. How do I know what bleeding is acceptable?

-Longing For Gold

Dear Longing,

You're asking the wrong question. Your real issue isn't about how to put this card in the current set. What you should be asking is: is this card right for the current set? And the answer is no. You've fallen in love with a multicolor card. But if you truly love it as a designer, you have to let it be true to what it is. That means you have to learn to let go. (And trust me, multicolor designs are much more demanding than monocolored ones.) When a multicolor set rolls around, the card will return to you. If it doesn't... well, you know what they say. A good designer has to be willing to let cards go where they fit. Every good card doesn't have to see print right now. Good ideas stand the test of time. If you love your card you have to let it be true to itself, and that means right now you have to have the courage to say goodbye.

Dear Maro,

I've been messing around with this uncommon card. It's top down and definitely pushes all my Johnny and Vorthos buttons. The card is clever but subtle. Everything's great. Well, except for one thing. The card uses a new mechanic, meaning it needs reminder text, but the rules text is too long to fit with the reminder text. So my question is: is it so bad to leave reminder text off an uncommon?

-Remind Me Not

Dear Remind,

Oftentimes designers get so caught up in the romance of a card's design that they don't have the perspective to see the big picture. Reminder text serves a very important function. It helps players understand how to use a card. And since the designers have no control over what order players will see the cards in, it's important to have the reminder text on every card with the mechanic. Can't we make an exception? Well, we do, on the occasional rare card. Why rare? Rares exist in a much smaller quantity, which lessens the chance of any one particular card being a player's introduction to the new mechanic. What this means is that your card can have a life, just not at uncommon. If you want to print it as is, you need to make space for the card at rare. And trust me, any card with that much rules text should feel just fine in gold-expansion symbol territory.

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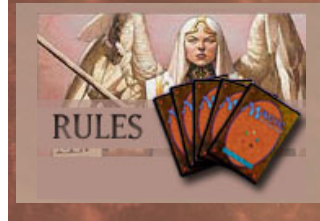
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### RULES



**Dear Maro,**

I have a close friend who I'll call "Donald." Donald designed a set and asked me to playtest it with him. While I think there are some interesting ideas in the set, overall I'm not that impressed with it. Here's my problem. Donald is so excited about his set that I just don't know if I can tell him the things I need to. I don't want to crush his spirit. What do I do?

**-Silent Critic**

**Dear Silent,**

Here's what I would say to Donald. Tell him that he needs to get some playtesters that aren't his friends. You are happy to play with him, but more as a means to help him see how the set plays and less as a way to get criticism. Brutal honesty is important with playtesting, and that won't come from people that have strong emotional attachment to the designer. Not only is it harder to give real criticism but you also are more inclined to want to like it. An invested group can make any game or set fun if they try hard enough. A good playtest group is one who is playing solely because they are interested in trying out a new game and/or set. If it isn't fun, they'll tell you, hopefully in great detail. Once Donald gets a serious playtest group, you can then be there as his friend after he gets their feedback.

**Dear Maro,**

I've been involved with a mechanic for well over a year. It plays well and I feel it has a lot of room for design. I've been planning to make it part of my set, but there's a problem. You see, there's another mechanic. This new mechanic is leaner and more to the point. It doesn't have many of the wordiness or templating issues of the first mechanic. The new mechanic is fun, but maybe not quite as fun as the first one. It's more organic to the design but, I worry, a little less showy. I keep going back and forth on which mechanic to include. What is a young designer to do?

**-Torn Between Two Mechanics**

**Dear Torn,**

You've taken an important first step. You're questioning whether or not the first mechanic has what it takes to be in your set. While it might seem petty to dwell on wordiness and templating, let me stress that these are the very qualities that most often lead to a mechanic failing. If the audience doesn't "get it" or, even worse, is scared away before they try, it doesn't matter how sexy a mechanic might be. Second, don't get so caught up on which mechanic is "more fun." The real question isn't how the new mechanic compares to the old one but rather how it measures up all on its own. The players don't get to compare the two, so putting them in competition with one another isn't addressing how the mechanic will actually be measured. Think less in terms of "more fun" or "less fun" and more in terms of "fun" or "not fun." The real decider, though, comes when you talk about the second mechanic being "more organic" but "less showy." You need to figure out what it is you want from the mechanic. Is it part of the architecture of the set or a piece of the window dressing? Is it there to make the set play better or is it to make it look more exciting? Once you've solved the role you want the mechanic to play, that will help you see which mechanic is right for you.

**Dear Maro,**

I like mechanics. A lot. I've been known to mess with two, three, four, even five on a single card. Is this okay? Do I need professional help?

**-The More The Merrier**

**Dear More,**

Akroma (**all three versions**) has seven mechanics, so obviously it's okay to occasionally mix it up. The real question for me is: why the need to put so many mechanics onto a single card? If it's to create something that's greater than the sum of its parts, then thumbs up. But if you're doing it merely to see if you can, you're getting into dangerous designer territory. As I've explained before (See [Design 101](#), [Design 102](#) and [Design 103](#)), a common novice mistake is to cram a single card with too much stuff. Whenever you're adding something to a card, make sure that it makes sense with what's already there.

Multiple parts of a card need to either work together, make some interesting contrast, add interesting play decisions or enhance flavor.

If extra text is there merely to make the card do more, you have to ask yourself if it's needed. A good rule of thumb is to make every card as short as it can be while still accomplishing its goal.



**Dear Maro,**

I designed this cool card. It's a perfect fit for my set and I think players would

like it. My only worry is that it obsoletes an existing **Magic** card. The card in question is far from a tournament staple, but it is the kind of card that shows up every once in a blue moon in a tournament deck. What is your opinion on obsoleting old cards?

**-Strictly Better**

**Dear Strictly,**

It's good times. And I should know, as I've obsoleted quite a few cards in my day. In *Invasion*, I designed a card that obsoleted five cards in one fell swoop. And not an ounce of guilt. Why? Because **Magic** is an ever-evolving game. Part of change is obsoleting the past. That said, it shouldn't be done nilly-willy. Obsoleting cards needs to be done with caution. Ask yourself why your new card has to be strictly better than the old one. Is the old one outdated, costed for a time gone by? Or does the existence of multiple cards make it impossible to make a new card without obsoleting something new? Or are you specifically trying to push the card to help it see tournament play? (Note that this last one is much more a Development issue than a Design one.) The thing you want to be careful about is to not obsolete cards solely for the novelty of obsoleting them. If you can add a little twist that keeps one card from being strictly better than another, that is most often preferable. Still, if you can answer all these questions and still feel that your card is obsoleting for the right reasons, then by all means you have my blessing to go ahead.

**Dear Maro,**

One of the things that's always bugged me is how every set keeps having the same cards dressed up in the latest mechanic. Oh look, it's **Dark Banishing** plus new mechanic and **Shock** plus new mechanic and **Giant Growth** plus new mechanic. I'm so sick of it that I'm designing a set where there just aren't those same tweaks you see every set. What do you think of that?

**-Tweaked Off**

**Dear Tweaked,**

I think that you're looking at those cards in the wrong light. The reason we keep making **Dark Banishing** tweaks isn't that we can't come up with anything else it's that every set needs a **Dark Banishing**. I feel like you're asking why every house has to be built with a kitchen. Technically it doesn't, but I don't know who wants to live in a house without one. The same is true for simple, straightforward creature removal. The real trick to design is not how to avoid having a **Dark Banishing** but rather how to get a **Dark Banishing** into your set that feels organic. From a creative standpoint, I'm eager to see you build a house without any recognizable rooms, but from a craftsman standpoint, I think you're tilting at windmills (a.k.a., aiming to do the impossible).

**Dear Maro,**

I've been designing cards for several years, yet I still feel as if the vast majority of what I produce is udder garbage. Yes, I have my gems, but should I be worried that such a high percentage of my work isn't worthy of seeing print?

**-Junkmaker**

**Dear Junkmaker,**

I've been a professional **Magic** designer for over a decade, and you want to know my hit percentage (a.k.a., what percentage of my cards see print)? Under one percent. On a good year, I design several hundred cards that get made. How many do I design? Thousands! Be aware that I'm not saying that I design thousands of cards that make it into card files. No, a small percentage of what I design even gets that far. Many of my designs don't even make it to the point where other people see them. **Magic** design has a lot of what I call design churn. A lot of ideas are merely stepping stones to get you closer to what you need. Some are just a way to get certain ideas out of your system. Yet other ideas are shots into the dark. I find this process similar to how writing works. Much of writing is rewriting. That is taking what you've done and redoing it, oftentimes leading to completely different work. There's nothing wrong with that. It's just part of the creative process. I would dwell less on what it takes you to get your gems than on how you feel about the gems themselves.

*Send questions via email to the button below that says "Respond via email." That's all I got for today. I hope you enjoyed my theme (and if you did send my letters that I can forward to Scott). Join me next week when I kick it up a notch.*

*Until then, may you heed the advice when you receive it.*

*-Mark Rosewater*

## The Invitational Goes to 11

May has come and gone, and there was no **Magic** Invitational. What happened? Well, to start the Invitational's second decade of existence, we decided to shake things up a little. For starters, the event isn't going to be held at E3 (and thus in May) this year. It's not even being held in North

America. The 11th Annual **Magic** Invitational is going to be held October 18-21 at Spiel 2007, casually known as the Essen Game Fair, in Essen, Germany. For those who might have never heard of Essen, it's the biggest game convention (for traditional games such as TCGs, boardgames, etc.) in the world, and the **Magic** All-Star Game is going to be there.

For those unfamiliar with the **Magic** Invitational, it is a sixteen-person, invite-only round robin tournament where the best of the best play against each other in five different formats. The winner earns the right to make a **Magic** card complete with their lovely mug in the art. Some famous past Invitational cards include **Meddling Mage**, **Dark Confidant**, **Avalanche Riders**, and **Shadowmage Infiltrator**.

So how are we shaking the Invitational up? Besides moving it across the ocean, we're also doing something we haven't done in five years: we're not holding the event on **Magic Online**. This is due to logistics and is not a sign that it won't return to **Magic Online** in the future. We just felt the opportunity to be at Essen was worth the cost of not being online. The most positive aspect of this change is that it will allow us to return to some of the more offbeat formats that the **Magic** Invitational has historically been known for. (The biggest limitation of **Magic Online** for the Invitational has always been its restriction of available formats.) The announcements of this year's formats will come later this summer.



We are also making some changes in the voting. I don't want to ruin the surprises, but suffice to say that you will get to vote on more categories and on some criteria you've never voted on before. Voting will start on Friday, June 8 here on [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com).

Finally, let me comment on the status of Antoine Ruel's card. (Antoine was last year's winner and he, along with World Champion Makihito Mihara and Pro Player of the Year Shouta Yasooka, are the only three currently with slots for this year's Invitational.) Antoine turned in a flip card (named Bibi // Sleur) that was later rejected by R&D. Working with Antoine to create a new card he was happy with and finding a place in a current set in design that's appropriate has taken longer than expected. That said, I believe you will see Antoine's card in a set within the next year (and no, it's not in *Lorwyn*.)

Please check out Brian David-Marshall's The Week That Was column on June 8 for the first ballot and the full schedule and check back on October 18 for full coverage of the 11th Annual **Magic** Invitational.

*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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