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What's In It For You?

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 Limited Information
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This article is brought to you from a sweat-filled, mosquito-infested Internet cafe in Chiang Mai. I was trying to think of some clever way to bring up this fact whilst writing this article, but I couldn't think of any real way of doing it. Subtle references along the lines of 'first picking a **Disintegrate** is as sweet as a Thai soft drink', but they hardly roll off the tongue well, nor do we learn anything from them. But I've been thinking. I'm here on holiday purely from recent **Magic** winnings. This is an awesome fact. **Magic** has taken me to many places and brought so many new and exciting things into my life. I have so many friends and have met so many great people all because I play this game. The same game that had I used to explain to bemused colleagues, instead now impresses high-rolling employees at dinner parties. In fact, I would never have met my two travel companions if it were not for the game.



This moment of reflection left me wondering what else **Magic** has done for me. I've recently decided to enter the 'real world' and get a job. This has been a monumental decision for me, and the first step I took was to update my CV (that's my resume for you people across the pond). When I had to fill out my job history, at first I felt a little awkward because all I could contribute was 'professional card player' for the last three years. Then I had to think about what skills my future employers might desire from me that gaming had provided. This was a long thought process, foiled at many a turn by clichéd sentences such as 'vastly helped improve my people skills' and other such nauseatingly vague business lingo, but I unearthed a lot and I want to bring that to the table here for discussion, rather than bring you the usual Limited advice.

Despite any joking earlier, I think that people skills have been one of **Magic's** best features. Whether it is your current opponent, local trader, or your team mate of many years, **Magic** brings you into contact with many new people. You have to learn how to interact with them, how to befriend them, and how to beat them. If you travel to any international tournaments, you will have to book flights and hotels, negotiate with irate taxi drivers, and meet artists and players you've heard about and respect. If you want to get anywhere in life, you have to do it through other people, and having a smile on your face and the confidence of having dealt with hundreds of unknown people, is worth its weight in gold. Anyone who's sweated through a job interview that can compare it to having played against Kai or Kenji will recognize that both experiences share a lot in common.

It is not just professional expertise that **Magic** brings us, but also friends. It is a great activity to share with people you already know, and meet new people. If you have a regular job, or feel socially awkward around other people, it provides a great hobby and venue to meet others. I would keep coming to the Pro Tour even if my only reason was to see the great friends that I've made over the years. If it is networking you're after, there is probably a player you know in every aspect of the business world.

I mentioned pressure earlier, but whilst I was looking at some of the job descriptions in my area of interest, many of them included the line 'often contains high levels of stress'. **Magic**, as with any other form of competition, provides stress and pressure by the bucket load. Whether it is your first final at FNM, your first Top8 of a PTQ or the quarterfinals of a Pro Tour, we all know that feeling of discomfort, or having something on the line that is greater than ever before; and whether you won or lost, that feeling of pressure will stay with you. Slowly, and more often with success than not, it will dissipate, and things that once scared the hell out of you will now become routine or even mundane. It is true that the higher the stakes that you play, the more likely you are to feel pressure; but the feeling remains the same.

I've been told that traveling is an excellent addition to any CV, and **Magic** is all about traveling. I think it was only when I had qualified for my first PT in Tokyo as a sixteen year old that my parents started taking the game seriously. If you want it to, **Magic** can take you around the world and back. I've met and experienced more different and diverse cultures because of **Magic** than anything else I have ever endeavored to do. There is a Pro Tour nearly every year in Japan - the country in the world I think is most different to the world of home. Just being given the option of going to Japan is more than most people will ever get, and we get it at least once a year. Not only is there Japan on offer, but each year Wizards are trying to provide a new, great location to go to. This year it was the option to ski in Geneva, last year it was to surf in Hawaii, and who knows what next year will bring - maybe the option to visit this unique area of the world and haggle with the locals.



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In trying to find the skills that **Magic** had brought or improved in my life, I asked myself what skills a successful **Magic** player possesses. Or more relevantly for a Limited column, what skills Limited demands. There are many, be they minor or not, that contribute to success. There's the confidence you need to have in yourself that you can do better and win. The courage it takes to roll with your losses or turn the sting of defeat into a valuable lesson for the future. The poker face when your opponent stares at you trying to work out if you have a **Strength in Numbers** or a **Damnation** in your grip; and the inverse, divining the content of your adversary's hand. Having to stay mentally focused for hours on end and the ability to change it up a gear when the going gets tough. These are a few of the smaller qualities, which although incredibly important, are not the major players.

The biggest skill in Limited is being able to analyze. This skill is applicable in every major aspect of the game and being able to analyze often and accurately is where you will find success. Four new sets come out each year. This is a huge influx of new information. Not only do you have to learn all of the new cards and their inherent strengths, but you have to know how they interact with each other for Limited and Block Constructed; how they interact with the previous year's four sets for Standard, and so on for every format.

The influx of each set does not just bring us new cards, but we lose the ones that rotate out. This void also needs examining; old strategies fall apart, new cards bring both new combinations and possible re-workings of those once thought lost. You continually have to compare cards that compete for the same slots in Constructed. Take **Shock** and **Seal of Fire** for example, but it is limited where the overhaul is biggest. The new cards do not just mean a shift in the format, they create a new one. This requires a massive amount of data to be both researched and then analyzed. In Constructed, I would imagine (as pure speculation) that creating and analyzing a metagame is very akin to the futures market. You have to both build a gauntlet, work out what beats what, what sidebar cards are good, how they affect the match-ups, how many cards will be played or can be changed to affect specific games, and at the end of it all, you hope you have an accurate model of what the make up of a future tournament will be. This projection is purely analytical and one of the hardest things to do in **Magic**.

I'm not entirely certain whether another of **Magic's** biggest skills falls under the umbrella of analysis, but I'm going to lump it in there. I'm talking about the process of elimination you use to work out the contents of your opponent's hand. Using similar skills to those in poker, where the betting actions combined with the community cards steadily provide the needed information to narrow down an opponent's holding, we can work out what we are facing in **Magic**.

In Constructed, this tends to be fairly easy as the range of specific cards being played in Constructed decks is limited at best. However in Limited, they might have any of the cards in the format. Sure, you can restrict the possibility of certain cards based on rarity, but you still have to take them into account. However, every single action a player takes divulges something about their holding. These fall into two broad categories: elimination and suggestion are the two snappiest titles for them that come to mind. Elimination is when an action eliminates potential holdings – it tends to be the case that a player isn't holding a creature protection spell if they let their best bomb die. Suggestion is where a certain play suggests that a player is holding something – the easiest example is of a small creature attacking into a larger one, which suggests a combat trick. These bits of information get stored away until they amount to something credible, like the realization that they are holding a **Fortify** or a **Death Rattle**. This ability to use what I will call shadow information, or reading between the lines, is, I think, one of the most important skills you can possess in life, if only to improve how you understand the opposite sex!

Another very important skill, which will also profit you in any job that requires future speculation, is the fact that you always play **Magic** not for the present but for the future. You should not be thinking so much as the current board position but, ideally, what the board position will ultimately be. This talent is the main reason why I often liken **Magic** to chess. In chess, you have to think many moves into the future, and the trend tends to be that the further you can forecast, the better you are. This translates flawlessly to **Magic**. A good example from last week was deciding not to kill an early game **Ashcoat Bear**, because you know that three turns in the future, you will have bigger guys and the bear will be irrelevant. The moment I realized Kenji was really the master that he is was when I saw him keep an opening hand including a **Magus of the Mirror** and a **Momentary Blink**, and then play the entire game with the intention of winning off the Magus safeguarded by the Blink on turn nine or so. He had a plan from the word go, and it was only going to reach fruition many turns away.

At the end of the day though, life isn't about what a future employer will think; it's about having fun and finding peace with yourself. If you didn't enjoy **Magic**, you wouldn't play it. **Magic** makes you laugh, it challenges you, and it makes you a better person. Learn from the lessons it teaches you. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a motorbike to ride and a world to see,



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*Widely considered one of the world's foremost Limited competitors, Quentin Martin has four Limited Grand Prix Top 8s and a Top 8 at Pro Tour–Prague 2006. Between his **Magic** expertise and a background in philosophy, it's no surprise Quentin is well known for his strategic insight and theories on the game.*



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