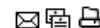


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All-Star Trek

Mark Rosewater
Making Magic
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If you were to believe my teaser [from last week](#), you'd expect me to be sharing stories about the designs of various *Lorwyn* cards. Of course, following that logic, you might have expected me to write about planeswalker design during Planeswalker Week last week. Neither, it appears, is going to happen (well, yet), but I'll take a paragraph or two or six to explain why. When I'm done, you're get to read a column I didn't know I was writing until I sat down at the computer.

Okay, let's start with last week. Once upon a time, I used to travel everywhere Wizards would send me. My first summer here (the summer of 1996 for the trivia junkies) I only spent three weeks in the office. If there was **Magic** being played in a convention or a tournament somewhere around the world, I was there. Then I met Lora (a.k.a. Mrs. Rosewater) and my travel slowly started on the decline. I began by no longer going to random places that I was going to simply to go. Then I cut back on conventions. Then non-Pro Tour tournaments. Finally, when my twins were born, I struck the following deal with Lora: I would go to just two tournaments a year. (I touch upon this in more detail in [Life Lessons, Part II](#) if you care to hear more.)

The first would be [the Magic World Championships](#). Randy Buehler might have passed me to take the record for longest consecutive Pro Tour streak, but I am still the only person on this planet that has attended every **Magic** Worlds. As it is the crème de la crème of **Magic** competition, it seemed like a tournament to keep attending. The second tournament I attend is the **Magic** Invitational. It's my baby. While I've made a lot of **Magic** cards, this is the only tournament I've ever created. I'm a proud papa and if I had to cut back to two trips a year, how could I not watch my baby grow? (If you want more info on how the Invitational came to be I wrote [a feature article about it](#) many moons ago.) It turns eleven this year.



Meanwhile, you might be aware that I write a column every Monday. (If not, welcome to Making Magic—you might want to check out [the archive](#). Scarily, I've written over a million words worth of articles about **Magic**, most of which is available if you click on my name at the top of the page.) Now, when some writers leave town they'll have someone else fill in for them. I'm not so much into that. Making Magic is also my baby and I'm a mite bit protective of my babies. Sure, I'll swap columns every once in a while for fun, but pretty much I want to be the guy writing this column. Add to that that the number one fact I write this column is that I enjoy writing (if that wasn't number one I wouldn't have been writing about **Magic** for thirteen years, let alone a weekly column for six) and I've made a dedication to write every column.

What this means is that if I'm going out of town, I need to write two columns the week before I go. (This was one of the reasons that my kithkin column was below average in length—but hey, if I can't be short on Kithkin Week... Heaven knows I didn't apply that strategy to [Dwarf Week](#)) That meant the two nights before I left for Germany (this year's Invitational was held in Essen, Germany—but more on that soon) I stayed up late and wrote my column for Kithkin Week. It wasn't Kithkin Week, you say. Yeah, I figured that out after I got back from Germany. My best defense is "I thought it was Kithkin Week." I didn't have access to my email that I could have checked the theme weeks on so I used my memory. (Curse you middle age.)

What this means is that I'm playing [Swap Week](#) with myself. Planeswalker Week got my Kithkin column so it will only be fair next week when Kithkin Week gets my planeswalker column. As it turns out, that's much better for me (and hopefully you) because I don't want my planeswalker column to be shorter than average. It's an awesome story and I want to give it the space it needs to do it justice. So no, I'm not skipping out on telling you all the cool info on planeswalker design. I'm just making you wait. (But don't worry, the end is in sight.)

Which leads to the final question for my intro. (Yes, this is just like shows like "Ugly Betty" that surprise you mid-show with the opening credits.) Why aren't I talking about the design of individual *Lorwyn* cards today? I guess the simple answer is something else came up. Part of the great joys of writing a column is I pretty much get to write about whatever strikes my fancy. Sure, I have to touch upon **Magic** design (and even then, I've had numerous columns that pretty much weren't about **Magic** design) but given that and staying in-theme on theme weeks (well, except when I mess up and then leave for a week) my column is pretty much carte blanche. When I sat down today I decided that I wanted to write about something else. Don't worry though, you'll get the *Lorwyn* design stories soon enough. I have a lot of non-theme weeks to fill so I'm not about to toss away perfectly good material.

And that in slightly under a thousand words is why I didn't and am currently not doing what I was supposed to. (I'm a rebel, Dottie, a loner.) With that out of the way, let's get to today's column.

Sweet Sixteen

PRODUCTS

MAGIC ONLINE

MESSAGE BOARDS

RULES

I just spent the last week in Germany at Essen Spiel, what I believe is the largest game convention in the world. (I spent the first day walking around all of the convention only to realize the next day that I missed five halls!) I was there to attend the Eleventh Annual **Magic** Invitational. The event ran smoothly. It was a very close tournament for all fifteen preliminary rounds. The finals went to a third deciding format. The winner was Tiago Chan from Portugal. But all that stuff you can read about [here](#). I'm going to talk about this year's **Magic** Invitational, but not about the tournament itself.

Huh? You see, the Invitational is a very unique event. Why? Because it's as much exhibition as competition. Many of the choices we make concerning the Invitational are more about the public than the players. My plan today is to walk you through several of those choices and explain the issues behind them. In short, I'm going to examine the state of **Magic** through the lens of the **Magic** Invitational.

Let's begin by looking at one of the defining traits of the event—the formats.

Cube Draft

I was going to take time to describe each format to you but then it dawned on me that I already did that work. For the Invitational I recorded five short videos explaining each format. I'm going to start the section on each format by showing you the video to explain the format at hand. Be forewarned that this is about as low tech as it comes. The whole thing was me in a tiny meeting room about twenty feet from Scott Johns's desk. I was told there were going to be some jazzy graphics but I suspect that nothing was able to compete with my wildly gesticulating hands. If you've never heard me do a podcast, this will also be a chance for you to hear my voice for the first time. I've been told by many that it isn't what they expect. The line "I thought it'd be deeper" seems to come up a lot. Anyway, here's the first video.

That's what I sound like. And look like, but you've had the little picture of me to give you a rough idea since the column started. And yes, I've aged since that picture was taken (while I was petting a cheetah at the **Magic** Invitational in Cape Town a little over six years ago).

Why did I choose to do a Cube Draft? Because it's offbeat and fun. Very fun. Very, very fun. (I'll show you two decks I drafted in a moment.) One of the most important roles of the Invitational is to remind everyone that a) **Magic** is a fun game and b) Wizards actually remembers that fact. Much like the *Un*-sets (another one of my babies—so many babies) the Invitational exists to reinforce that **Magic** has more to it than simply competition.

Why invite the top pros then? To better drive this point home. Having a bunch of casual players sitting around enjoying wacky formats doesn't have the punch of watching the top competitive players in the world do so. (This begs the question of what Evan Erwin—a.k.a the Storyteller—was doing there. I'll get to that before this column is done.) By the way, I need to stress that the Invitational is seen very positively by the pros—partly because there is a lot of honor in being invited to the all-star game, but even more so because it's a fun tournament. A very, very fun tournament. It's not often that they get to interact in a tournament setting where the stress is on having a good time rather than staying constantly focused on winning. There are certain pros that I've seen laugh more at a single Invitational than at every Pro Tour I've ever attended.

Which brings us back to the Cube Draft. When I was putting together the formats, I put out a call for suggestions. Later that day, Aaron Forsythe came up to me and said, "We have to do a Cube Draft."

Why did Aaron insist on doing one? Because it's one of his favorite formats to play of all time. He wanted to share it with the players and he wanted to share it with the world. Anyone can make a Cube Draft (okay maybe not of the caliber Aaron and Paul Sottosanti put together for the Invitational—click [here](#) to see the complete list). Just take the most powerful and/or fun cards you own and put them together. The joy of Cube drafting is the thrill of seeing all these powerful and fun cards intermingle. Seeing thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth picks that you might take first in a normal draft is a blast. (In my mono-red deck below, I managed to get **Seal of Fire** to table—that is, to come back around during the draft.)

I selected Cube Draft to simply reinforce the message that **Magic** can be fun. I'll leave this section by showing you two Cube decks that I drafted. We got the Cube put together about a month before the Invitational. R&D took advantage of this to hold numerous Cube drafts. What follows are the two decks I built from the ones I did. Doing these two drafts was some of the most fun I've had in **Magic** in years. It turns out, by the way, that the mono-black deck I drafted was very powerful and completely above my skill level. The deck never lost—when other people played it. The mono-red deck, on the other hand, was just my speed. There's not much in **Magic** more thrilling than the first turn play of "Mountain, Lightning Bolt you" knowing that you're doing what you're supposed to. Anyway, I don't get much chance to show off deck lists so here you go:

Mono-Black Cube Draft Deck		
Main Deck 40 cards		
17 Swamp	1 Avatar of Woe	1 Animate Dead
17 lands	1 Doomed Necromancer	1 Consume Spirit
	1 Faceless Butcher	1 Corrupt
	1 Graveborn Muse	1 Damnation
	1 Nantuko Husk	1 Dark Ritual
	1 Nantuko Shade	1 Drain Life
	1 Shriekmaw	1 Funeral Charm
	1 Skittering Skirge	1 Hatred
	1 Stromgald Crusader	1 Necropotence
9 creatures		1 Sinkhole
		1 Unmask
		1 Vampiric Tutor
		1 Yawgmoth's Agenda
		1 Yawgmoth's Bargain
		14 other spells

Mono-Red Cube Draft Deck		
Main Deck 42 cards		
16 Mountain	1 Avalanche Riders	1 Browbeat
1 Wasteland	1 Blistering Firecat	1 Chain Lightning
17 lands	1 Bogardan Hellkite	1 Char
	1 Fireslinger	1 Fire // Ice
	1 Fledgling Dragon	1 Hammer of Bogardan
	1 Jackal Pup	1 Lightning Bolt
	1 Keldon Marauders	1 Mirari
	1 Kris Mage	1 Mox Ruby
	1 Zo-Zu the Punisher	1 Pulse of the Forge
9 creatures		1 Seal of Fire
		1 Shock
		1 Starstorm
		1 Tarfire
		1 Threaten
		1 Urza's Rage
		1 Wheel of Fortune
		16 other spells

Note that some cards were swapped out based on our early Cube drafts, so you might notice cards in these decks that didn't make the final Cube.

Auction of the People

First, a little word from me:

Was it obvious that we didn't bother practicing?

No format has been played at more Invitationals than Auction of the _____. While we occasionally take a breather and let professional deck builders take a turn, the vast majority of the auctions have been Auction of the People. Why do I keep including this format every year? Three reasons:

#1 – The Invitational is supposed to be a tournament for the people. As such, I really wanted to find a way to let the audience participate in the tournament. We do this in two ways. First, we've made voting a big part of how players get selected. And second, we frequently do Auction of the People to allow the audience to build something that the pros will play. And trust me, it's a hoot to see the pros play with cards that they have not only never touched, but simply have no idea what they are. During the Auction we had to pull up [Gatherer](#) so that we could read off cards to the players. In addition, it's great to see the pros have to figure out how the decks work when the motivations are more about pulling off a cool trick than optimizing resources.

#2 – Deck building is a fundamental part of the game. As such, I try hard to always make sure there are two formats that require creative deck building skills. One format is left in the hands of the invitees (we'll get to this year's format for this soon) while the other is left up to all of you. The important difference is that the pros are going to build a very specific type of deck, one based on being as efficient as possible. The decks for Auction of the People are judged on a completely different scale. One deck was selected because its builder found a way to get another A to Z reference on his same 26 cards (in the first name of the artist). Obviously the deck suffered for such a sacrifice—but only in terms of power, not in terms of coolness, which was how the auction was judged.

#3 – This is a practical concern. Preparing for a tournament with five formats is quite hard (and even I know that the Invitational does not receive the kind of preparation a Pro Tour would). As such, we've tried to build in some ways to make things easier. One way is to have two Limited formats. Another is to make a Constructed format that doesn't require the players to build decks. Sure, the players have to spend a little time judging the decks but that is far easier than taking the time to make them.

If you haven't yet seen this year's decks, check them out [here](#) and then you can see how the decks did [here](#). The message of this format is that deck building (and by deck building I mean crazy, quirky, do-you-own-thing kind of deck building) is a fundamental part of the game. Decks like these should be embraced just as much as lean, mean, efficient tournament decks.

Winston Draft

Explaining this draft is what led to the idea of doing the videos as Winston is so much easier to explain if you can just show people. By the way, the other person in this video is **Magic** creative manager Jake Theis.

Some formats were chosen to point up certain aspects of the game. Others, like Winston Draft, were chosen for no other reason than we wanted the public to see it. Booster draft is a lot of fun, but it requires eight people. Often times it's hard to get eight people. But **Magic** has two-person drafting formats. One of them, Solomon Draft, was a staple at the Invitational for years. So why didn't we use Solomon Draft this year? Because the format has proven to have a few problems. One, it takes forever.

Quick humorous aside: At the Fifth **Magic** Invitational in Sydney Australia, I discovered one day that our tournament organizer had given away our room at 8:00 pm. When I confronted her, she said that she had checked our schedule. We were starting at 10:00 a.m. and only had four rounds scheduled. We would obviously be done by 8:00 p.m., so she gave up our room to another group. "You don't understand," I explained. "Three of the rounds are Solomon Draft!" (She got us a new room to play in.)

Two, it's a little too skill-intensive for casual players. It requires too many decisions, all of which are public for scrutiny and all of which need to be remembered when you played. We wanted to showcase a two-person draft so we surveyed the ones we had and it was clear that Winston was the winner. It was much quicker than Solomon, many of the decisions were hidden, and the decisions, while plentiful, were fewer.

For those curious how Winston came to be, it was invented over ten years ago by none other than Richard Garfield (I might have said that in the video, I don't remember). It was originally called "Let's Make a Deal" Draft as it had much of the flavor of "Choose Door 1, 2 or 3" from the game show. The name was later changed because "Let's Make a Deal" Draft was an unwieldy name. Urban legend has it that Richard got enough complaints about the name that he then picked a name at random, choosing the name on a deck of cards he often carried with him. The cards were Winston cigarette cards (don't ask me why Richard had them—and no, he doesn't smoke).

Of the five formats we showcased in the Invitational, none has received more immediate favor than Winston Draft. So many people have told me how excited they were to learn that you could draft with just two people. If you've never done one, I heartily urge you to save the next six booster packs you run across until you find a friend to draft with you. As is a theme to the Invitational formats, it's a lot of fun.

Choose Your Own Standard

Once again I'll send you over to Video Mark:

How many of you caught what my pointer was? Yes, you can go back and look. It's a lightsaber. I needed a pointer and that was all we could find in the cubicles near the meeting room we shot the video in. Why am I holding a red lightsaber? Hmm.

Choose Your Own Standard was chosen for a very different reason than the other four. I picked it because I wanted to try it out. Yes, unlike every other format at the Invitational, no one has ever played this format before. Why? Because I made it up to solve a problem that I feel exists (or more accurately will exist).

Here's the problem. If we want to let you use a card that is twelve years old, the only way we have to do that is to allow you to play in a format where twelve years' worth of cards are allowed. This makes the power level shoot up through the roof and means that the vast majority of cards in the format are unplayable. Also, it makes it very hard for someone who hasn't been playing for twelve years, and thus doesn't have those twelve years worth of cards, to join. While I believe this problem is bearable in the present day, I feel it's just going to get worse and worse over time.

My solution was to try and find a format that allowed access to *some* of the old cards without allowing access to *all* of the old cards. While the format would be more powerful than Standard, it would be far less powerful than Legacy, and even less powerful (I believe) than Extended. In addition, the format creates interesting choices that have a lot of nostalgia to them. For example, at the event Craig Jones decided to play a red burn deck. He knew instantly that he wanted *Tempest* Block as one of his two blocks. The second block, though, took him days of pondering. He spent a lot of time thinking back to what burn spells each block had to offer before ultimately choosing *Mirage* block with its *Hammer of Bogardan* and Fireblast.

Why was it so important to try out? Because R&D was unsure whether the format would work. How much diversity would there be? Would the decks be fun to play? Would players like the format? The answers, by the way, turned out to be a lot, yes and yes. (On the first count, every block save *Mirrodin* and the unfinished *Lorwyn* Block saw play, including every core set allowed in the format.) I'm not sure of the future of Choose Your Own Standard as a format, but the Invitational definitely put it into people's minds.

Vintage

Not much of a video for this one but how can you not finish the cycle:

The Invitational can show off cool formats and even test out new ones, but it does have one other use. The Invitational is a good place to pay homage to formats that are hard to use elsewhere. R&D is a fan of Vintage as a format, but the limitations in the availability of the card pool, especially outside the U.S., make it a format that we can't really push in high-level play. The Invitational, though, is the one high-profile event that we do which is able to handle formats like Vintage. And so we've made a conscious choice to use the Invitational as a means to show off formats we like but have trouble supporting on a grander scale.

The second bone we threw the Vintage community was to invite one of their premier spokespeople and current world champ, Steve Menendian, as R&D's pick for the event. Which leads us into our next topic: the invitees.

Invite Club

The formats aren't the only ways for Wizards to make a statement about the game. The other important decision is deciding who to invite. By who, I'm not referring to the specific person as we've been leaving a lot of the specifics to all of you. What I am referring to is what slots are represented. Certain accomplishments are a gimme (last year's Invitational winner, World Champ, and Pro Tour Player of the Year, for starters) but beyond that invitations are granted based on roles that we feel are important to encourage.

We want to stress international diversity, so we invite players from each region. We like to encourage players scurrying the globe to play in every [Grand Prix](#) they can, so we have a Road Warrior category. We want to highlight the importance of deck innovation, so we make the Resident Genius category. Each category reinforces some aspect we want to encourage. Which brings us to the controversial category of the year—the Storyteller category.

The **Magic** Invitational is the all-star game of **Magic**. Many of the candidates on the [Storyteller ballot](#) have never been to a Pro Tour. And most of those who have fall well short of the top tier status that has traditionally been invited to the Invitational. How are they all-stars? My response to that is that the Invitational is not nor has ever been the place to decide who is the best of the best. (Although historically speaking the best of the game have done well at the Invitational.) If that were the case we wouldn't be making the players duke it out with alphabet decks, the players might do as much preparation as a Pro Tour, and there would be something on the line more than the honor of becoming part of the game. Note that I'm not saying that the event isn't competitive or that there isn't a lot of skill required to do well. My point is that the event was conceived from day one as an exhibition to show off many facets of what the game of **Magic** is and can be.



I do want the "best of the best" represented at the tournament. That said, I don't think it hurts the integrity of the tournament to have a slot or two dedicated to stressing the importance of other aspects of the game. No one expected Evan to win (including Evan). The point of the invitation (and the slot) was to send a strong message that building community is a huge part of the game. The people who take the time week in and week out to grow and strengthen that community are important—so much so that we feel they deserve the honor of a slot. Be aware that this slot is not limited to non-pros. If a pro player is able to take on the role of storyteller to the point where the public wants to see him at the Invitational, he (or hopefully someday she) will get to go.

Probably the reason I was most excited to have Evan attend the Invitational is that I'm dying to see his take on the event. I know from talking to him how much of an honor the invite was for him. I assume this thread might pick up what has been called the "pros vs. joes" debate. My two cents for the debate is this. The Invitational, like **Magic**, is different things to different people. If one invite can make so many people happy without disrupting the tournament (and I can definitively say from my point of view having watched the entire event that I do not feel Evan's presence in any way disrupted it), what's wrong with it? To use an analogy, when designing cards I have to focus on the audience for that particular card. I cannot let the opinions of others who the card isn't meant for

sway me from my design. To me, the Storyteller slot is much the same. If the slot really upsets you, it wasn't designed for you.

Rockin' Round Robin

Let me end today's column by throwing a few questions out for the thread and email:

- Do you like the Magic Invitational?
- If so, why?
- If not, why?
- Is there anything the Invitational is not doing that it should?
- Is there something it is doing that it shouldn't?
- How did you feel about this year's coverage of the Invitational?
- Is there anything that should be added to the coverage?
- Subtracted from the coverage?
- Finally, what are your thoughts on the five formats from this year's Invitational:
 - Cube Draft
 - Auction of the People (Alphabet Decks)
 - Winston Draft
 - Choose Your Own Standard
 - Vintage

I am very interested in your feedback. The Invitational is always in flux and feedback like this will help guide where it goes.

That's all I got for today. Join me next week for Kithkin Week.

Until then, may you enjoy watching your babies grow up.

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.*



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