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Weather(light) Report

Mark Rosewater
 Making Magic
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Welcome to *Weatherlight* Week! Or is that **Weatherlight** Week? It's all of the above. This week is dedicated to everything Weatherlight, be it the expansion, the ship, the card, or the Saga. For my column today I am going to focus on the latter. You see, I was very involved in the creation of the *Weatherlight* Saga and today I thought I'd give you a designer's behind the scenes of how it all came together. Yes, normally I talk about card design, but today I thought it would be interesting to explore what it takes to make a story.

Howdy Partner

I guess I need to begin by introducing you to Michael Ryan. Many years ago (and by many, I mean fourteen), Michael was just another **Magic** player, one whose day job was technical editing. While I have never done any technical editing, I understand that it involves of lots of reading over long dry material (usually for things like textbooks and instruction manuals) and making sure that all the text is as it should be grammatically, contextually and factually. (Kelly Digges, our illustrious editor, and Brady Dommermuth, creative director, by the way, were also both technical editors before they were employed by Wizards.)



While Michael was good at his job, he wasn't too fond of it. One day he got it into his head to try and get a job editing something he enjoyed—**Magic**. So he wrote a letter to the head editor at the time (a woman named Beverly Marshall Saling—Beverly, by the way, as the head and only editor in the early days, was responsible for finding most of the real world text used as flavor text in *Alpha* and *Arabian Nights*) and pitched himself. Somehow it worked. She hired him. Michael spent many years as a **Magic** editor. (He has long since left Wizards but still works as an editor in the gaming industry.)

I met Michael through my work on *The Duelist*, Wizard's **Magic** magazine (the precursor to magicthegathering.com). I got my start at Wizards by writing freelance articles (and puzzles) for the magazine. As part of his job, Michael did some editing for *The Duelist*. Because writers tend to make the same type of errors in their writing, it proved useful to assign particular writers to particular editors. Michael volunteered to edit me. I later found out it was because I was a decent writer that didn't require too much editing. Nonetheless, I first met Michael because he was my editor.

Shortly thereafter I was asked to turn my *Magic: the Puzzling* column into a book. (It shows up on eBay from time to time for anyone who's interested; note that all the puzzles work under pre-*Sixth Edition* rules.) Michael volunteered to be my editor for the book. While my articles didn't require much editing, the puzzles were a whole other matter. **Magic** puzzles are very hard for two reasons. One, often the solution I planned simply didn't work. Two, simpler solutions always crept into puzzles. This meant that I was constantly changing my puzzles forcing Michael, my editor, to constantly have to reedit, which forced him to constantly have to talk to me.

Once we started talking we found we had a lot in common. He too was a writer. Obviously, he was also into **Magic**. We shared a lot of other interests and had a similar sense of humor. When I moved to Seattle to take a job in R&D, Michael and I quickly became good friends. Good friends that loved to talk, especially about **Magic**. One topic that came up was how it was odd that **Magic** didn't really have a story. Yes, there were individual stories that accompanied most sets, but there was no ongoing, overarching, all-enveloping story. **Magic** seemed worthy of having a cast of characters that players could latch onto that would stick around from set to set. As we were talking about this, I could see Michael's eyes light up. Remember, he was the person who got a job at Wizards because he was bold enough to ask for it (and for all my eager readers who are about to take pen to paper—or at least pixel to screen—it's gotten a little harder than it was fourteen years ago to get employed by Wizards). Of course, **Magic** could have a story, he said. We'd make it.

The Saga Begins

As one of **Magic**'s developers (yes, back then I was a developer) and one of its editors, we had an "in." We decided we would put together a proposal and then pitch it to **Magic**'s then-brand manager, a man named Joel Mick. What did we need to do the proposal? Well, we needed a cast of characters. We needed a premise. And we needed a storyline. We decided a three-year arc made the most sense. (Thinking of each year as a story, we felt that this would act as a trilogy—and story does love its three-act structure.)

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Before any of this, though, we knew we needed to step back and ask a few big questions. What kind of story did **Magic** need? How were we going to be able to tell that story on cards? What requirements of the game did we have to take into account? The answers to these questions, we felt, rested with the game. I often talk about *Mirage* as being the beginning of what I call the "silver age" of **Magic** design as it was the start of the modern block (yes, technically *Ice Age* is the first block, but it didn't really have most of the conventions that have come to define what a block means). The lesson from *Mirage* (and *Ice Age*) was that blocks needed to have their own identity. This meant that the game wanted to change worlds, or at least locales within the same world, every year. Having to change worlds every year is a huge obstacle for an ongoing story. Luckily, there was an archetype to help us.

Quick aside on archetypes. As someone who studied writing, I was well aware that certain storytelling devices were so popular and so effective that they had acquired a



status over the years. The idea was that certain things just resonated better with humans than others. Rather than fight this inertia, storytellers began to embrace these conventions. The analogy I like is that the storytellers understood that these thematic devices were tools. No one faults a carpenter for reusing the same hammer because they understand that it is a tool that helps him get his job done. Archetypes work much in the same way. If I use a structure or a character that my audience is familiar with, I save a lot of time and energy getting them to "get" the character or story. Because we were working to build something that needed to be universal to millions of players, we decided it was prudent to embrace archetypes, be they character, structure or story.

There luckily is an archetype that allows the same cast of characters to keep going to new places—what I call "the band of adventurers." The idea is that you take a traveling group of characters (usually aboard a moving vehicle) and follow them as they go place to place having adventures along the way. Probably the current most famous example is *Star Trek*, where each week they "boldly go where no man [or no one, depending on your *Enterprise*] has gone before." Other famous examples would be Homer's crew from the *Odyssey*, Jason and the Argonauts, and the fellowship from *The Lord of the Rings*. Because this archetype is about exploration (or travel—*Battlestar Galactica* could be argued into this archetype) it allows the constant discovery of new worlds. The crew allows for the continuity of character.

As luck would have it, the seeds for this kind of story had already been planted in the *Mirage* story. **Captain Sisay** and crew from the flying ship *Weatherlight* had played a small role in helping Mangara. Other than Sisay no one else had been mentioned specifically which would allow us to build our own crew.

Here's a Story

We had an archetypal premise to work with, but that isn't the same thing as having a story. If we were going to capture the audience we needed to have a story that would drive the action. As we looked into creating a story, Mike and I started reading Joseph Campbell. For those unaware of who this is, he is a writer who most publicly discussed the ideas of story archetypes. His contention was that there were a small number of stories that resonated so strongly with the public that these stories kept getting told again and again. Once such story he called "The Hero's Journey."

Even if you don't think you know it, you probably do. You've seen it again and again. Luke Skywalker, Harry Potter, King Arthur, Moses. A boy (well, most often a boy, there are examples of it being a girl) discovers that the simple little world he lives in is not where he really is from. No, he has a noble birth and was whisked away for his safety to this other world. But he meets a mentor who teaches him who he really is and what he is capable of. Then our hero is pulled away to a dark place where he must confront some evil force that is in some way (usually by blood) intrinsically linked to him. Blah, blah, blah. As I said, you've seen it many times. This familiarity isn't a bad thing though. In fact, Campbell asserts it is this group awareness of such myths that binds society together.

Anyway, Mike and I decided that we were going to tell "The Hero's Journey." This meant that we had to line up all the pieces. Our protagonist, Gerrard, needed to be of a noble birth yet have been taken away from it as a baby. We needed a villain that was blood-bound to Gerrard. We needed a dark home for our villain. We needed a number of things to be able to tell "A Hero's Journey." At the same time we had other needs. To be integrated into **Magic** we felt as if we had to have a good representation of all five colors and artifacts and of as many of the staple races as we could. Finally, we were determined to make the story an integral part of each set meaning we wanted to make sure that the mechanical identity of the set was woven into the story. If slivers, for example, were an important part of *Tempes's* design, then they had to show up in the story.

The end result of all this was that we had a massive puzzle on our hands. After weeks of working through all our objectives, Mike and I decided that we needed to start with our characters. As with everything else, we were attracted to character archetypes. We wanted to use characters that our audience would intuitively "get". Here's what we came up with:



Gerrard

The one mistake that people make when they hear about archetypes is that they assume their use means that the story will not seem new. Obviously the success of something like Star Wars shows that not to be true. Archetypes are tools. What you do with them is left up to the storyteller. Why do I bring that up with Gerrard? Because Mike and I made a very quirky choice for our protagonist. We chose to make him the rogue. Let me explain. "The Rogue" is a character archetype. He is the person who is out for his own means and who does what is best for himself. Yet the rogue has an underpinning of nobility. Despite their gruff exterior, they want to do right. Han Solo is probably the most famous example of a rogue in modern pop culture. Here's the quirky thing about rogues: They tend to be supporting characters.



We, on the other hand, loved the idea of making the protagonist a rogue. What if he was a hero that knew his destiny but consciously avoided it? Most heroes, when they learn of their true nature, embrace it. Not Gerrard. He fights it kicking and screaming. In fact, when the story begins, he's abandoned the *Weatherlight* because he doesn't want any part of his destiny. As far as he's concerned his destiny has done nothing but killed those he's loved.

In the backstory, Gerrard learns that the *Weatherlight* is part of his destiny (he is supposed to use a collection of artifacts known as the Legacy) to defeat some great evil. He tries to embrace it but when one of his best friends is killed aboard the *Weatherlight* by evil forces, Gerrard says he has had enough and walks away. But as Gerrard is a rogue, down deep he wants to do good. When his back is pushed against a wall, Gerrard does what he is supposed to do. Which is how we get the story rolling.

Sisay

Sisay is the captain of the *Weatherlight*. She is entrusted with helping Gerrard embrace his destiny. Here's the catch. Sisay chooses to do it without telling Gerrard what she's up to. When she recruits Gerrard to join her crew, he has no idea that she tracked him down or that the ship itself is part of the Legacy and thus belongs to him. Sisay was crucial to the mix of characters because Sisay is the force pulling Gerrard towards his destiny. She is unwavering in her belief in Gerrard, which is important because Gerrard himself is constantly wavering. If Volrath (we'll get to him in a bit) is the devil on Gerrard's one shoulder, Sisay is the angel (although not literally; the story does have an angel though).



Sisay and Gerrard's relationship is crucial because it is the kidnapping of Sisay by Volrath that sets the entire story in motion. In order for Gerrard to be pulled back to the very thing he's been running from his entire life, something of real importance had to be on the line. Gerrard could come kicking and screaming back to the ship but with Sisay's life on the line he had to come.

Volrath

As I stated above, the myth requires a connection between the hero and the villain. We chose to go the blood brother route. Gerrard is sent away by his parents as a baby (with Karn serving as the floating basket) to be taken care of by a close family friend named Kondo. (I talked about trying to make Kondo into a card in *Time Spiral* in [this column](#).) It was *Mirage* block so we chose to send Gerrard to Jamuraa. Kondo, it turns out, has a son named Vuel. He and Gerrard become brothers. Vuel is jealous of all the attention that Gerrard receives and a rift grows between the two. Vuel will later venture to Rath and become Vuel of Rath, or Volrath.



As is normally the case, the spurned one seeks out power as a means to right what they see as a wrong. This is what draws Volrath to Rath and gets him his shapeshifting powers. The kidnapping of Sisay is a carefully orchestrated plan to finally defeat Gerrard. Gerrard, and the audience at the time, would not learn of Volrath's true identity for some time but we built in all the relationships to add resonance when it later comes out.

Greven il-Vec

While we planned for some other villains as the story progressed, we liked the idea of starting our villain in the color that people would most expect the villain, black. Also, following archetypal convention, we had two bad guys for the first part of the story (one could argue Starke is a third, but I'll get to him in a moment) one the brains and the other the brawn. Volrath was the brains. Greven *il-Vec* was the brawn.

The idea behind Greven was that we wanted a bad guy that was able to beat up our good guy. You see, my writing had taught me the importance of strong villains. In order for a hero to seem heroic he has to be up against people and situations that he shouldn't normally be able to beat. It's winning against the odds that make a hero. This means that the villains have to make a good show early to demonstrate that they are going to be a challenge. This is what the attack on the *Weatherlight* in *Tempest* was all about. We needed the *Predator* to come in and kick the *Weatherlight's* you know what. Plus Greven's the flunky. The flunky is never as strong as his boss.



Hanna

Every



protagonist needs a villain. You know what else they need? Yes, a love interest. But just as a hero is tested by his villain so too is he tested by the love interest. The audience has to see the chemistry but also has to understand the obstacle. And the obstacle needs to be a big one. Your romantic leads cannot just get together. Oh no. There has to be drama. So what drama did we create? Well, we needed Gerrard to run away from his destiny many years earlier. What if in his desire to flee he left behind the person he cared most about?

Here's how the backstory worked. Gerrard and Hanna fell in love while working on the *Weatherlight* (more on her role here in a paragraph or two). When everything went bad (in short, Gerrard's best friend, the elf Rofellos, is killed aboard the *Weatherlight*, which leads to Gerrard to learn that Sisay has been tricking him into following his destiny all this time), Gerrard realized he had to go. He begged Hanna to come with him but she said he needed to stay. Like Sisay she knew of Gerrard's destiny and believed he had to follow it. To try and keep him aboard the ship she made an ultimatum: She was staying. If he walked away from the ship, he walked away from her. Which he did.

It's a number of years later and Gerrard is back, much against his will. Hanna's still aboard. Let's just say there's tension. Of course, underneath it all, they both still love one another, yet each has a reason not to trust the other. That, my friends, is drama.

Besides being the love interest, Hanna had two other important functions. One we needed an "engineer", someone who understood how everything worked. And two, we wanted a tie into **Magic's** backstory. We felt it was important to make use of some of what had gone on before. As such, we made Hanna, Barrin's daughter. Barrin was Urza's right hand man at the **Tolarian Academy**.

Ertai

Which brings us to the blue member of our crew. Ertai was on the crew because we felt it was important in a game called **Magic** to actually have one of our main characters be a wizard. We bring him aboard by making the *Weatherlight* go to Tolaria. Hanna sucks it up (she and her father have a long and tumultuous history) and asks her father for help. Barrin, being too busy, sends Ertai in his place.



Ertai is a young, stuck up wizard who believes he is god's gift to magic. Besides what elements he represented, we added Ertai because we thought it was important to have a few characters that create conflict among our crew. Also, it's good for storytelling to have some characters driven by less noble motives. The audience really took to Ertai I believe because it's fun enjoying how obnoxious he is. As Michael explains in one of the articles in [today's feature](#), to capture the voices in the flavor text, each character was assigned to one writer. I asked for Ertai. I just knew he'd be a blast to write. And he was.

Tahngarth

Which brings us to another strong character. Archotypically this is the "proud warrior." I guess Worf would probably be the most famous example. The "proud warrior" comes from a race that prides itself on its ability to fight. While the warrior is a great fighter and very noble, he has trouble controlling his anger. Along with Sisay, Tahngarth wasn't created by Michael and me. What Michael and I did do was push this particular archetype. We loved the idea of a character that acts before he thinks. My favorite moment for Tahngarth is in *Tempest* when the

Predator is getting away with the Legacy (including Karn) and Tahngarth leaps onto the outside of their ship. What is going through his mind? Probably nothing but blind rage. And as he ends up getting captured, not the best strategic move either.

Tahngarth was important because he added needed flavor to the crew. We liked that he was a minotaur and he made a good first mate to Gerrard's captain because the two work very differently and each is completely willing to get into the other's face. Also, in the beginning, it was our intent that Tahngarth was going to be the person that Volrath impersonates at the end of the first arc, aka *Tempest* block. (Volrath ended up impersonating Takara, Starke's daughter.)



Starke

Starke is the archetype that I call "the weasel." He is the character that only looks out for himself and thus plays both sides of the conflict.



He's not quite a good guy but not quite a bad guy. The importance for the story is that Volrath needed help kidnapping Sisay. He is able to force Starke's hand by kidnapping his daughter, the only person Starke cares about other than himself. But Starke is smart. He doesn't trust that Volrath will ever release his daughter. So he figures he can help Gerrard rescue her.

Starke was planned from the beginning to be killed in the second act by Volrath aboard the ship. He was the means to get the ball rolling and provided tension in Rath. His death was the first clue that there was something wrong aboard the *Weatherlight*.

Crovax

Starke isn't the only crew member you needed to keep your eye on. We knew we wanted all five colors and artifacts represented in the crew. Crovax was our representative for black. We loved the idea of the crew having a vampire. There was just one problem: Why would they let a vampire aboard their ship? The answer was they wouldn't. So we needed to set up the story such that he would become a vampire in the course of him helping them. Then it would be hard to kick him out because his vampire state was a result of their actions.



This storyline also let us do one other thing we wanted—to get an angel into the story. Crovax's story in a nutshell is this. To defend his home against evil forces (Morifen and Gallowbraid—the same guys who killed Rofellos, by the way) Crovax is forced to use a cursed magical item. That item produces an angel, named Selenia, of course, that vanquishes his foes. The curse is that he falls madly in love with the angel who because she is bound by magic cannot have any free will. When Crovax frees her such that she can choose to be with him, she is instantly whisked away by a new master (Volrath, no less). Crovax assumes that she wanted nothing to do with him and is now heart broken.

When the *Weatherlight* shows up at his door (Crovax had spent time in his youth as part of the crew) seeking help, Crovax agrees to help if they will bring him along. For in his heart, Crovax knows that his true love Selenia resides in Rath (through their bond Selenia occasionally calls out to Crovax—check out the illustration of *Whispers of the Muse*) and he comes along on the journey to find her.



Which he eventually does as the crew invades Volrath's Stronghold to find Sisay. And Takara. And Karn. And Tahngarth. Selenia attacks the crew and Crovax is forced to kill her to save Mirri, thus completing the curse and damning him to vampirism.

Mirri

Volrath is Gerrard's enemy, Hanna his love interest. Mirri is his best friend. We added her partly because we wanted a green character and partly because we thought it was important for Gerrard to have one person that was just on his side. Mirri's relationship was also going to be important because her injury had ramifications in the second arc. (Yes, in our original version, Mirri is not killed by Crovax at the end of the first arc. In fact, in our original version, Crovax doesn't become a villain.) Mirri was also important because she shares a past with Gerrard.



Multani

Which brings us to Gerrard's mentor—his Obi Wan, his Merlin. If there is no other proof that I was involved in this story, Multani is a maro. At the time of Gerrard's training Multani was very old (as mentor's seem to be required to be). Multani didn't train Gerrard alone. No, he trained him along with Mirri and Rofellos. That is where the three met and established their strong bond. While Gerrard had some understanding of his destiny, it was Multani who really spelled it out for him.



Karn

Speaking of the Legacy, we get to Karn, the artifact contingent of the crew. Karn is an archetype known as the "gentle giant." The idea is that it is a creature that is on the outside big and powerful but on the inside is gentle and kind. We liked the idea of having an artifact creature, and once we decided that the Legacy was all artifacts it seemed like a perfect fit for Karn to be part of the Legacy. As the story unfolds you find out that Karn is supposed to be the keeper of the Legacy as well as Gerrard's guardian.

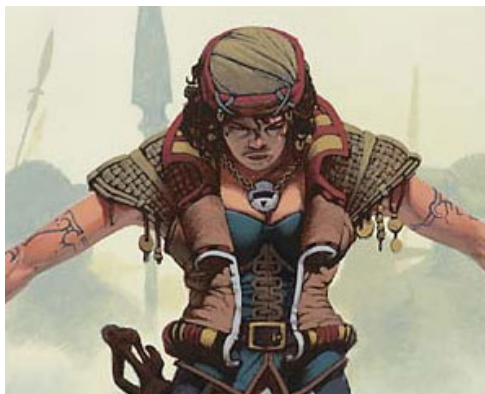
But things go awry when Vuel is able to steal the Legacy, Karn included. He sells off all of it hoping he can scatter it to the four winds, thus keeping Gerrard from every fulfilling his destiny. When Gerrard rejoins the *Weatherlight* he is surprised to find Karn in the hold. Sisay, in her quest to recover the Legacy, reacquired Karn (although he is turned off).



Karn was an important addition both because he represented the Legacy, a key component to the story, but also because he added element we wanted to the crew—sympathy. So many of our characters were so self-absorbed that we liked the idea of having one character that the audience could simply like. Karn's motives were pure. I loved that one of Karn's greatest victories, recovering the Legacy from the *Sliver Queen*, was accomplished through compassion. Yes, it's hard to have an entire crew like this but one person helps soften the crew. This, by the way, is why the "gentle giant" archetype exists in the first place.

Orim

Every crew needs its doctor. Orim, originally, wasn't planned to be a big character, but somehow she kept making us give her more to do. Orim's character at heart was one born out of spirituality. She was someone who did what she did because it was what she felt she was destined to do. Think of her as the anti-Gerrard. While Gerrard runs, she embraces. Also, like Karn, she added some softness to what was a pretty hard crew.



Squee

And finally, what's a crew without the comic relief? We knew we wanted a goblin and based on how we'd set up the race, comic relief seemed like the best choice. It's interesting to note that from the data we collected, I believe Squee was the most popular crew member. He seemed to hit all the buttons we'd wanted. So much so that when we finally made his legendary creature card in *Mercadian Masques* we took extra steps to make sure it was a good and interesting card.





Perfect Pitch

Michael and I spent many weeks figuring out all the characters and blocking out the story. Eventually we knew we had what we needed so we set up the meeting. As I mentioned once or twice in this column, before I worked as a game developer/designer, I used to write television for a living. A big part of that job was pitching yourself and your ideas. As such, I got very good at pitching. Michael likewise had no fear of public speaking. The end result? We nailed our pitch. Within a week, Joel got back to us and said, "Let's do it."

And that is how the *Weatherlight* Saga began. But wait, I kept talking about how things changed. What happened to Mirri? Why wasn't Volrath disguised as Tahngarth? And wasn't the hourglass pendant supposed to be important? (Okay, I didn't talk about that one in this article, but it is a talking point among people who like to discuss story.) That, my faithful readers, is a topic for another column. (Hey, I have to do this every week. I have to save something for the future.)

My question of the week is what did you all think of the *Weatherlight* Saga? What did you like about it? What didn't you like? What did you wish had happened differently? I'm curious to hear.

Join me next week when I finish my trivia column (and for those starved for actual talk of **Magic** design in the **Magic** design column, I promise I'll throw in a few stories for you).

Until then, may you find your own hero to journey.

Mark Rosewater

Extra Helpings #3 Revisited

[Many years ago](#) I set out on a project to find all twenty-six letters of the English alphabet in **Magic** card art. So have I finally finished the project after so much time? No. Luckily, I have a faithful reader who did. His name is Jeremy Albert, and not only did he complete the project but he set it to music. I, of course, am obligated to show it to all of you. Before I do I just want to publicly thank Jeremy for getting done what I apparently was incapable of doing. I think you're all going to really enjoy this. Without further ado, here we go.

Pretty cool, huh? If anyone else, by the way, has any cool **Magic**-related videos (or photos), please send them my way. Who knows, maybe I could start making a habit out of showing this kind of stuff off.

*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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