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# Seeing the Forest for the Treefolk

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 Making Magic  
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Welcome to Treefolk Week. This week is dedicated to the gnarliest creatures in all of **Magic**. As it turns out, the timing is perfect because this last week I had a chance to play a Treefolk deck in a non-sanctioned tournament. In said tournament, I did something that I have never done (and most likely will never do again). Today's column is about that little feat.

## I've Got the Whole Worlds in my Hand

Before I get into the details, I guess I should begin by setting the scene. As I mentioned during my two-part trivia column (What Do You Know, Parts I & II—click [here](#) and [here](#)), last week was the 14th annual **Magic: The Gathering** World Championships. While I have cut my travel way back since the birth of my twins, I still attend two events every year: the **Magic** Invitational and the **Magic** World Championship. I chose these two for a few simple reasons. One, I happen to be the only person in the world with a perfect attendance to each and I want to keep both streaks going. Two, they are the two events that I have the closest emotional tie to—the Invitational because it's my baby (you can read my lengthy feature article on the origin of the event [here](#) if you wish) and the World Championships because, to me, it represents the pinnacle of tournament play. Also, as a longtime Pro Tour attendee, I have fond memories of the Pro Tour, and going to Worlds is a way to keep some touch with that former life.



So, as normal, I was going to Worlds. While there I was given four responsibilities. One, I was to run Question Mark, the **Magic** trivia game show that I run at every Worlds (I used to run it at every Pro Tour back when I went to every Pro Tour). The event went well. We had thirty-two teams of three. With the sole exceptional of having to rush through the giving out of prizes because the hall was literally closing around us (just imagine lights being turned off and someone yelling, "Mark, we really need to lock the doors."), the event ran very smoothly.

Two, I needed to be available for any press that was interested in talking to me. I did a lot of interviews, so keep your eyes (and ears) peeled as there will be a number of different interviews with me hitting the 'net, the highlight being an audio interview I did with Aaron that I was told was ninety minutes long.

Three, I was to do gunslinging. Here's how it worked. From 11:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. every day (except on Sunday when we went until 1:30 p.m.), at least two members of Wizards R&D or **Magic** Brand (with a few special guests such as [House of Cards](#) author Chris Millar and numerous top Pro Tour players and/or Hall of Famers) played against any and all comers. If you could beat us, you would win a prize. There were two options. You could take a booster pack of *Lorwyn* or you could take a gamble with the Box of Mystery (insert your own sound effect here). In the Box of Mystery was everything from a pen to, well, to a promotional card that had never been given out until this weekend. (I only had three people all four days, by the way, take the *Lorwyn* booster.)

The card in question is this:

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MAGIC ONLINE

MAGIC WORLDS

2007 World Championships Video Coverage

MESSAGE BOARDS

Magic General Forum

magicthegathering.com Forum

RULES



This is the 2007 Holiday gift card. Last year's card was this:



For those unfamiliar with the holiday gift card, it comes out once a year (I'll let you guess when). It's a playful holiday gift we give to employees and the people who have a business relationship with Wizards. As of Worlds, none of the cards had been given out to anyone. The man who won the first one from the Box of Mystery was the first person in the world to own one.

Add on top of this that there seems to be some correlative relationship between how well-known you are in the **Magic** world and how much people want to beat you in a game. (Okay to be fair, a lot of players just wanted to

play me win or lose.) I'm not and have never been a Pro Tour-caliber player. Nonetheless, it turns out the bragging right to "I beat Rosewater" carried more weight than I would have thought. The combination of winning one of the rarer cards in **Magic** coupled with living the apparent dream of obliterating me in a game of **Magic** meant for some long lines. Before moving on, I really want to stress how much fun I had gunslinging. For the same reason I read all my mail, I find it invaluable to get a chance to mingle with players. As my job is to make the game fun for all of you, it helps to occasionally get some feedback about how I'm doing. Also, I got a big kick out of seeing what everyone was playing. One gunslingee even built a deck using only cards I had designed. (It turns out I've made quite a number of cards that can kick my, um, donkey.)

Luckily for me, Aaron Forsythe, Erik Lauer, and Ken Nagle had built a stable of Standard gunslinging decks that allowed me to keep changing what I was playing. This both kept me from getting bored of playing the same deck over and over and it let me check out what decks were available for my fourth responsibility (which I'll get to in a moment).

Let me interrupt for a short aside. Ken Nagle? The Ken Nagle from *The Great Designer Search*? He's still at Wizards? Let me explain. At the finale of *The Great Designer Search*, the top three candidates (Alexis Janson, Graeme Hopkins and Ken) were all given internships at Wizards. While I'm not allowed to give all the nitty gritty for legal reasons, let me sum up by saying that a year later all three (plus fellow Great Designer Mark Globus, who managed to use *The Great Designer Search* to impress other people in Wizards enough to skip an internship altogether) now have full-time jobs. Ken is the only one who ended up in R&D (he's an Associate Designer) but the other three all keep their hand in **Magic** design and are all on design teams for upcoming sets.

Four, I was to play in a Multiplayer Free-For-All event. Wizards has been trying to push some more casual formats and it was felt that having Wizards employees play in the event would help stress this message. When I got the email where they asked if I would play, I said of course provided someone would give me a deck. That person turned out to be Ken Nagle.

Anyway, there was going to be a Multiplayer Free-For-All and I agreed to play in it. To sweeten the deal, we came up with the idea of using the event to sneakily preview a few *Morningtide* cards. There were five Wizards employees playing in the event. Each one was given four copies of a *Morningtide* card that we were told to play "when the time felt right" and "make an impression." All I had to do was to figure out which of the gunslinging decks (note that we gunslang versions without the *Morningtide* cards) I wanted to play. After trying them all, my answer became clear. I wanted to play the Treefolk deck. (The fact that I had a column for Treefolk Week, believe it or not, actually didn't play into my decision.)

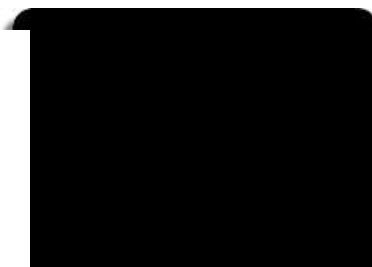
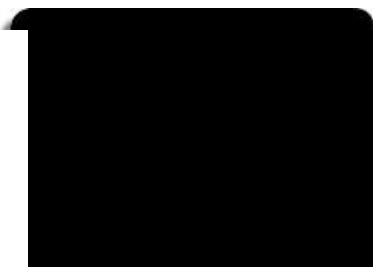
## The Art of Diplomacy

Before I continue, let me explain what exactly "Free-For-All" means. In a Multiplayer Free-For-All game, players sit in a circle and, going clockwise, take their turns. Any player may target or attack any other player. When a player loses (most often by having their life reduced to 0, but as we'll see that's hardly the only way), he or she is out of the game. While on the surface this might sound like most other formats, it's not. Multiplayer Free-For-All is what we refer to in R&D as a political game. Strength of your deck is secondary to your ability to connect with the other players. In fact, this is the one format where having a strong deck (at least one that appears strong on the surface) can work against you.

It was with this understanding of the format that I chose the Treefolk deck. Let's take a look at it:

Multiplayer Treefolk		
Future Standard-Legal		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
2 Highland Weald	4 Battlewand Oak	2 Boom // Bust
2 Scrying Sheets	4 Chameleon Colossus	4 Into the North
20 Snow-Covered Forest	4 Dauntless Dourbark	2 Loxodon Warhammer
24 lands	2 Deadwood Treefolk	2 Rootgrapple
	4 Heartwood Storyteller	10 other spells
	4 Sheltering Ancient	
	4 Timber Protector	
	26 creatures	

The Treefolk deck, I felt, had a few things going for it in the format I was about to play. First it had **Heartwood Storyteller** and **Sheltering Ancient**.





These two cards are very good political cards because they allow you to do something beneficial for the other players. This in turn not only generates good will but also gives your opponents a reason to not want to take you out (well, early anyway). Next up are these two cards:



The Treefolk deck is very resource intensive. Most of my good spells require a lot of mana. To help get there I have these two cards. They are by the way, the reason that all my Forests are snow-covered. The early plan with this deck is to sit and be patient. I need to spend my early turns building up my mana and using the Scrying Sheets to draw cards. Being a non-threat is a very good early game strategy in a political format. The Storyteller and Ancient allow me to have a little defense (not offense because I'd be crazy to attack in the early game) while making me valuable to other players.

Next comes Timber Protector:



*Wrath of God* and *Wrath of God*-like cards are quite popular in multiplayer games as they allow players to answer numerous threats. This means that it's very hard to keep creatures in play. *Timber Protector* is quite useful because with two in play all my creatures are immune to *Wraths*. Yes, it is expensive to get out two *Timber Protectors*, but that's why I spend my early game building up my resources. The *Timber Protectors* also have a second use. They make all my forests indestructible. Which, of course, begs another card in my deck:



This card was my only splash into red. The idea behind it was that I can play "*Armageddon* everyone else" once I have a *Timber Protector* in play. I called this my "Plan B" strategy. I worked hard to never reveal my *Highland Weald* (my snow red-green dual land) or my *Boom // Bust* so that no one could see it coming.

If *Boom // Bust* was Plan B, here's Plan A:



When it's time to attack, this was often the Treefolk to do it. He has the ability to grow very large once my deck starts pouring out Treefolk, and he has trample built-in. With *Timber Protector* giving him back-up he's hard to stop and with a *Loxodon Warhammer* he also helps build up a healthy buffer of life. Of course, he wasn't my MVP. That honor went to my *Morningtide* preview card, a little shapeshifter known as Chameleon Colossus.

Click [here](#) to see it.



Yeah, he doesn't have trample built-in, meaning I was reliant on Warhammering him up, but with a healthy amount of mana, this guy can go large. (Very, very large, as my story will show.)

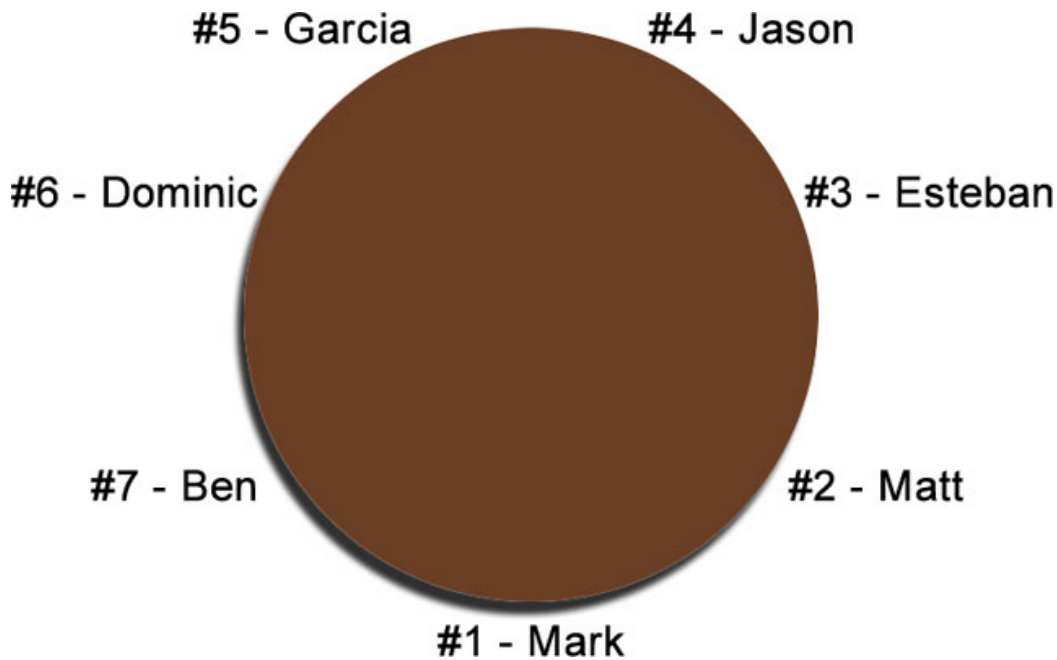
With all that out of the way, let me run down my basic strategy with the Treefolk deck in this format. Early game, I did nothing but play **Into the Norths** and **Heartwood Storytellers** and **Sheltering Ancients**. I never attacked. When I had enough mana, I would play out two **Timber Protectors** in one turn. Then I'd start dumping out my Treefolk until I had a big enough force that I could take out another player in one attack. I would hold back my **Rootgrapples** to deal with any noncreature threat that was causing my Treefolk problems. Well, that was my plan anyway.

## My Life

It may sound like my story is about my performance in the tournament. It isn't. I didn't win. I did make it to the second table (a feat no other Wizards employee accomplished), but I lost there to a **Coalition Victory** deck masquerading as a semi-harmless Sliver deck. No, my story is about a little feat I accomplished during the game that is going down on my **Magic** permanent record as a story I will tell until the day I die. I often talk about how I'm a Johnny. While that is true, I do have a bit of Timmy within me. (Not so much Spike.) I do so love the glorious moment. I love doing something in the game where I can just sit back and say, "Man, that was cool!"

The game I am about to talk about had one such moment. The coolest part about it was that my biggest task at the event was to show off a new *Morningtide* card. Well, that and have fun. And show it off I did. Enough of my teasing. (And yes, I know if you read Worlds coverage you probably have already heard this story – but it's good enough to hear twice; plus this time you get it from my perspective.) Let me tell you what happened.

Okay, I sit down for the first round of the tournament. As we had twenty-eight participants (we lost a bunch of potential players to the Worlds Finals which were going on at the same time), we had four-seven person pods. At my table, I was the #1 position. For some reason the judge seated us in order counterclockwise so that is how we played the game.



#2 was Matt. He was playing a five-color deck complete with all five *Planar Chaos* dragons, multiple *Legacy Weapons* (with different artwork for style points) and a bunch of *Platinum Angels*. #3 was Esteban. His deck was a white-blue-black control deck with a strong dredge component. #4 was Jason. Jason was playing a blue-green deck with permission and a milling win condition complete with *Howling Mines*, *Rites of Flourishing*, and *Forced Fruitions*. #5 was Garcia. He was playing a mono-green deck with *Rites of Flourishing*, *Gauntlet of Power*, and *Coat of Arms*. I'm not quite sure how his deck killed, but it involved *Jolrael, Empress of Beasts* and *Primal Forcemage*. #6 was Dominic. He seemed to be playing some sort of Kithkin deck. #7 was Ben. Ben was playing a blue-black deck with creatures and a few control elements.

Very early, Garcia plays a *Rites of Flourishing*. This allows me to play a *Heartwood Storyteller* quickly. Multiple *Rites of Flourishing* get played (by both Garcia and Jason). Garcia also plays two *Gauntlets of Power* set to green. Suffice to say I'm drawing lots of cards and getting lots of mana quickly. At some point around turn five or six I draw a *Chameleon Colossus*. Along with it in my hand are a *Timber Protector*, two *Dauntless Dourbarks*, a *Deadwood Treefolk*, a *Heartwood Storyteller*, and an *Into the North*. In play I have twelve *Snow-Covered Forests*, each of which taps for three mana.

Seeing my opportunity to make my *Morningtide* card's preview, I do the following. I say, "Okay guys, I guess it's time to dump my hand. I play *Into the North* getting another *Forest*. Then I play *Timber Protector*, two *Dauntless Dourbarks*, a *Deadwood Treefolk*, a *Chameleon Colossus*, and a *Heartwood Storyteller*."

I then start plunking down my cards. At some point, Matt chimes in, "What's that fourth one?"

"Take a look," I say.

Of course, at this point, things get a little crazy as everyone has figured out that I've just played something that no one has ever seen. After a few minutes of passing the card around, someone says, "Hey, I thought these decks had to be Standard." To which I reply, "We didn't mean current Standard."

Sensing the Colossus might be dangerous, one of the players (Matt or Esteban, I forget which) plays *Wrath of God*. This, of course, manages to simply kill my *Timber Protector*, leaving the rest of my team untouched. No one else does anything to destroy my Colossus and my turn comes back to me. When the turn passes to me, I'm getting quite excited. The few players who would be most likely to be able to mess with my Colossus are tapped out. I might actually be allowed to do the cool thing I'd been imagining while everyone else was playing.

I draw my four cards, two of which are forests. I play them. This means I will have access to forty-five green mana. I know I need to put on a least one *Loxodon Warhammer* on my Colossus as it will give it trample allowing me to take out another player and the lifelink will keep me from being able to lose to damage. The question is this. Do I want to attach both Warhammers or use the extra mana to activate my Colossus one extra time?

Added to this is the fact that there are two *Gauntlet of Power* in play set to green and two *Coat of Arms*. With twenty-one other creatures and Colossus having changeling this means that my Colossus gets +2/+2 for each other creature in play for a power of 48 ( $4+1+1+21+21=48$ ). And this is before I added in the +3/+0 of the Warhammers.

As I start in on the math I realize that if I attach one Warhammer I can activate my Colossus ten times. If I attach both, I will only have enough mana to activate it nine times. The first scenario seems like it will produce more damage but the second is going to net me more life. Since the numbers in question were crazy large, I decided that my decision isn't one of tactical play. No, I had to decide which would make the better story. In the end, I chose to take the action that would produce the largest number. That number turned out to be the life gain I would get from the double

Warhammer scenario so that is what I did. This meant that before my first activation began my Colossus had a power of 54.

Once I decided what I wanted to do I had my next problem. Figuring out what exactly was going to happen. Like I've said many times in this column I'm a "word guy" not a "numbers guy." So I did what any player would do in this situation (well, one playing in a tournament anyway) – I called "Judge!"

I think the event had three or four judges working it. I believe a few others were spectating. Anyway, if you're interested in how to get ten plus judges to your table in under a minute, just try saying, "So how much life do I gain if I activate Chameleon Colossus nine times when my base power is 54 and I have double lifelink?"

The answer took a few minutes. When the dust settles here's what happened. At the end of my nine activations, my Colossus was a 27,648/27,648 with trample and double lifelink. Upon dealing damage to my opponent (upon attacking, I announced the size of my creature and said, "Do you want to block?"; my opponent declined) I gained 55,296 life. Added to my previous life total of 17 I had a life total of 55,313.

Now, I've gained infinite life before and dealt infinite damage but that's not the same as doing damage of an actual number. A really, really big actual number. It felt good. My inner Timmy was doing his happy dance. I remember walking over to Aaron and Elaine (Chase—**Magic's** brand manager who was also playing in the event) and saying, "My preview card just dealt 27,648 damage and gained me 55,296 life. Is that a good enough impression?"

The question everyone seemed to love asking me after they hear that story is did I win that game? I made it to the final two at which point we stopped as we both had advanced. But barely. I stupidly didn't take Jason out with my mega-attack (I chose instead to take out Dominic, the only person to have attacked me—in political games, it's good to make statements like this to help control behaviors in the future). His deck with a mill strategy was the only one capable of taking me out as damage was meaningless with a life total as high as I had. Luckily, Matt (with a little help from me) took out Jason before he could take me out. Matt and I advanced to the final table.

I remember being asked what I thought my chances were at the final table to which I said, "Probably not good, but it doesn't matter. I already won."

## Up a Treefolk

Why did I choose to tell this story during Treefolk Week? One, it's a cool story and I was playing a Treefolk deck. (Okay, okay Chameleon Colossus, the MVP of the story, is only a Treefolk in the most technical sense.) Two, I think it fits into what I see as the spirit of Treefolk. Some people play to win and others play to play. While R&D has definitely thrown the Treefolk a few Constructed-level bones, Treefolk are definitely a tribe that more often fits the latter. Most people don't play Treefolk to win (although yes, I do realize the [World Champ](#) won with a Treefolk). They play them to play Treefolk. The tribe has a fan favorite following not because they're the best deck (and they're not – although they're far from the worst tribe) but because they capture a certain sense of fun in the game.

I feel like my story is a Treefolk story in that it captures that sense of fun. This story isn't really about how I won but about how I did something that was just cool. And **Magic** has to have those moments. Those moments are for many players what defines the game. I know it defined my trip to Worlds. In twenty years I won't be able to tell you much about what transpired in New York, but I guarantee I'll remember that I gained over 55,000 life.

That's all for today. In fact, that's all for this year. The next two weeks will be our annual "We're off so here's the best of the year" columns. I'll be back in January (on the 7th) to start telling you cool things about what *Morningtide* has to offer (well, beyond a guy that can deal five digits worth of damage).

Until then, may you savor your "Treefolk" moments.

Mark Rosewater

## But Wait, There's More

Before I leave for today, two quick things. First, I wanted to plug a cool contest we're doing. It involves tribal themes and cookies. We mentioned the contest once in an Arcana but I wanted to make sure all of my readers had a chance to see it. [Check it out.](#)

Second, I wanted to start a new holiday tradition for Making Magic. I talk a lot about my family so I thought it would be nice in my last column each year to share with you the holiday card that my family sends out. If columns like [To Err Is Human](#) and [Life Lessons](#) haven't spelled this out, I'm a writer who intertwines my private and public



life. Sharing my holiday card with all of you is my way of letting you know that I take this column very personally and that it means a lot to me to have all of you as my readers.

Happy holidays everyone!

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What has ten legs, an almost inexhaustible amount of energy, a very stubborn streak, an inability to sit still and a desire to spread holiday cheer?

A mutant spider-mule hopped up on caffeinated eggnog. You know, if you were curious. We really try to use our holiday card to educate and enlighten our closest friends and relatives.

Happy holidays from  
Mark, Lora, Rachel, Adam & Sarah

*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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