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Rogue Operative

*Evil Mark Rosewater
Making Magic
Monday, February 25, 2008*



So it's Rogue Week here on [magicthegathering.com](#) and I'm sure you're all here to hear Mark yammer on about how Rogues are the most inventive creature type since blahity blah blah. He'll show you some card that wasn't originally a rogue yet somehow is now a rogue and tell you some story about how he was personally responsible for making it a good card. He had to fight uphill both ways, R&D was all against him and he only had an orphaned puppy on his side. Then he'll have some dialogue between himself and some other part of himself and yammer on some more. Look, he's capable of writing dialogue! Isn't he clever? How is he not still writing for "Roseanne"? If he were still there, the show will still be on. You know how he is. Luckily, I've decided to spare you all from his ramblings for this week.

Who am I? Let me introduce myself. I'm Mark. That's "Evil" Mark. I'm goody two shoes' evil twin. Geezers who remember when **Magic** used to print its PR spin on paper (known as *The Duelist*) might remember Mark's cutesy little stories in his puzzle answer column of which I was a commonly used character. Yes, I exist. Mark doesn't actually have much imagination so most of the crazy stories he tells are true. (Except for that stupid "Coldsnap was found in a file cabinet" crap.) Why am I here? I don't know. I was bored. I just got sick and tired of reading Mark's tripe. It was Rogue Week and I thought it would be appropriate for "Making Magic" to have a rogue column. Mark wrote something; I just took the liberty of turning in my own column in its place. I doubt Mark will even notice what I've done until he reads his email. By the way, if you want to mess with him, send him an email where you take a quote from some article of his and do the following. Quote it completely out of context and then explain how offended you are. Feel free, by the way, to just make stuff up. I'll give an example:

Dear Mr. Rosewater,

In your recent column "Seeing the Forest For The Treefolk" you had the following line: "Before I continue, let me explain what exactly "Free-For-All" means. Are you aware of the loaded language of the term "free-for all"? And no I don't mean the watered down, squeaky clean dictionary.com definition. I would suggest trying one of the more hardcore dictionary sites. Come on, Mr. Rosewater. I thought [magicthegathering.com](#) is a family friendly site. Act like it.

Yours truly,
John Doe (a concerned fan)



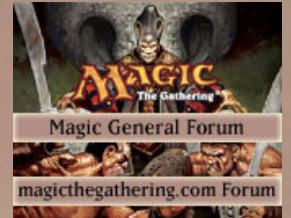
A letter like that will keep Mark busy for an hour and depending on what sites he visits perhaps get him in trouble with HR. Good times. Kind of like when I got Mark arrested for fourteen hours in Rio. And he doesn't speak Portuguese so that was extra fun. But I digress. Let me get to the reason I'm here. My job as an evil twin is basically to make Mark's life a living hell. Well, that and do evil. As such, I thought I would use this column today to tell embarrassing stories about Mark. Anyone have an issue with that? Anyone? Anyone? Buehler? Forsythe? Anyone?

Then embarrassing stories it is.

Stuck Up, Half-Witted, Scruffy-Looking Rogue-Herder

While there are a lot of stories to tell as Mark is a bit of a goofball, I've decided to stick to telling stories within our lovely rogue theme. Evil people still like style points. So what has Mark ever done in his life to be considered a rogue? Quite a bit. More than you would think. You see he's stubborn, headstrong, a little too honest and willing to speak his mind so that often gets him into trouble.

I'm going to keep most of these stories **Magic**-based but I figure one "early year" story would be okay. Heaven knows Mark has no problem with large chunks of the column having nothing to do with **Magic**. Check out his

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[dating column](#). Notice in it, for the record, that Mark seems more than willing to tell his own embarrassing stories. Don't worry though, I promise to tell a few that I don't think Mark ever planned to tell.

The first story takes place during a typing class he took his freshman year in high school. It was a mandatory class. So the teacher, named Miss Manual (I swear), forced them all to learn how to type on manual typewriters. The problem was that Mark has stubby little fingers and couldn't reach all the keys without taking his hands off the home row. In particular he couldn't reach the "p".

He explained to the teacher that he couldn't reach the "p" and asked if he could use an electric typewriter which didn't require you to push the keys down so far but the teacher wouldn't let him. So when the test came, Mark, trying to make a statement, just replaced every word on the typing test with a "p" in it with a synonym that didn't have a "p". Miss Manual flunked him. He actually ended up getting a D in the class. To this day he types with two fingers.

He got two other Ds, for anyone who wants to know. One in Home Ec where he made a stuffed bunny pillow so ugly his mom told him "he could keep it" when he gave it to her as a gift and the other in industrial arts where he started a small electrical fire.

What's the point of this story? Mark is stubborn and has been known to butt heads with authority. This trend continues into his time with Wizards of the Coast. And after all, aren't those the stories you really want to hear about?

All Your Rogue Are Belong To Us

Where to start? Okay, how about when Mark got put on probation by the **Magic** brand team. Yes, Mr. "Face of **Magic**" was once benched for two months, prevented from talking to the public. It was a long time ago, but juicy nonetheless.

Our story starts at the Pro Tour. Back in the day, Mark used to go to every Pro Tour. (He whines on and on about it in this two part article, [here](#) and [here](#), if you enjoy wallowing in minutiae.) At every Pro Tour, Mark used to always run a trivia show. Wait, wait, wait. Let me channel Mark to give you all a flavor of what these things were like. I'm not going to bother coming up with a dated trivia question, so just assume that this is like ten years ago.

Mark: All right everyone. Who can name a Kithkin?

Audience: *Burrenton Shield-Bearers*.

Mark: Not from *Morningtide*.

Audience: *Goldmeadow Harrier*.

Mark: I mean, not from the *Lorwyn* block.

Audience: *Amrou Scout*.

Mark: Something printed before *Time Spiral* block.

Audience: *Mistform Ultimus*.

Mark: That's in *Time Spiral* block.

Audience: You said something printed before *Time Spiral* block. It was. It was printed in *Legions*.

Mark: Something that actually says Kithkin on it.

Audience: *Amrou Kithkin*.

Mark: Who said that? You're right.



Mark seemed to enjoy playing this little game where people could come and see if they could guess what he was thinking about. For some strange reason, a lot of people would always turn out. So Mark is doing his trivia thing and for some reason he decides that it might be fun to answer questions from the audience. While this is many, many years ago, Mark was in R&D at the time (I'm guessing he'd only been there a year or so at that point) and *Fifth Edition* was coming out in a few months so that was all the audience would ask about.

Is this card in? Is that card out? Is such and such true? Mark was bombarded with reporter-like inquisitions. So does Mark shut up and say "no comment"? Not my boy. Oh no, Mark decides it would be fun to play a little game with the crowd. He says, "Here's what I'll do. You all decide on four cards and I'll tell you how many of those cards are in *Fifth Edition*."

To understand how blindly idiotic Mark was being let me explain a few things. Mark wasn't supposed to do this. He just did it on a whim. Why? No one knows. I don't know, I assume he was seeking attention. In addition, he set it up in such a way that he had no control over the information given out. If the audience, for example named four cards that were either all in or all out of the set, Mark would just be giving away concrete information.

As it turns out, he got lucky. Two of the cards were in and two were out. (While I don't remember all four cards, one was *Armageddon* and one was *Wrath of God*; the first one was going out and the second one was staying in.) The luck only lasted until he returned to Seattle. Within the hour of arriving at work, Mark was pulled into a conference room by the **Magic** Brand Manager at the time and chewed out. Mark then had the joy of going to his boss' office where he was chewed out again. This was the point where he got banned for two months.

But wait, the story gets better, because Mark came a hair's breadth away from far, far worse. So the two month period ends and Mark is allowed to communicate with the outside world again. Later that day, he gets a call from the PR department. Some web site wanted to do an interview with him and it had been set up through PR. Mark wasn't told the name of the site, just that they'd interview him through email. The next morning the email with the interview shows up in his mailbox and Mark, like the attention hog he is, quickly sends it back.

Meanwhile, the **Magic** brand team had gotten into a big fight with some other web site. It wasn't a rumor site, just some site that did something it wasn't supposed to and upset the brand team. This will become important in a moment.



The day following the interview, Mark gets a second email interview. He's confused so he forwards the email to PR. That's the interview they'd set up. But what about the interview the day before? PR didn't know what he was talking about. Yes, another website had wanted an interview with Mark so they blindly sent one in not understanding the process they were supposed to go through. Normally, Mark replies to all unsolicited interviews sending them to PR to get approved. But this time because he was expecting an interview (and remember he didn't know the name of the site interviewing him) he answered the one that showed up in his mail box. PR says not to worry about it.

It gets even better. The site that runs the interview is the very same site that Brand is furious with. Imagine the **Magic** Brand Manager's surprise when while surfing the **Magic** sites one night he sees a link to an interview with Mark Rosewater—on that site. He absolutely loses it. What makes matters even more perfect is that PR never bothered to tell the **Magic** Brand team about the mix-up so it looks like Mark went maverick yet again and interviewed on a verboten site. Even better, the woman in PR that Mark talked to is out of town on a business trip and can't be reached.

The next day, Mark gets called to the Brand Manager's office and is ripped to shreds. He tries defending himself but there is literally no proof he can produce because the only person that knows about it isn't available. Just before he leaves the office, the Brand Manager says, "Mark, I don't know if I'm comfortable with you working on **Magic**."

I wish I could say there was a happy ending, but Mark managed to dig his way out of that one.

We're Going to Need a Bigger Rogue

Another close call with brand involved the time that Mark started a column on another web site. Be aware that at this point Mark had already been writing for Wizards both in print and online (although this is years before magicthegathering.com would become a reality) for years. He was an employee and had just finished a multi-year stint as editor-in-chief of *The Duelist*. So what exactly caused him to start a column on another website?

My theme today is that Mark is a bit of a rebel—I'm sorry, a rogue. He's quite passionate. So much so that he often acts without thinking things through. Case in point, Mark was a big fan of TheMagicDojo, what is considered to be the first major web site really dedicated to **Magic** (and yes, I'm counting wizards.com). He liked what it was doing for the **Magic** community at large. In addition, the editor-in-chief at the time was Dave Price, a pro player (he won Pro Tour—LA '98) and friend of Mark's.

Mark decided (once again without consulting anybody at Wizards) that it would be a good PR move to start a column on the Dojo so he came up with the idea of doing a trivia contest column he called "Question Mark" (for those that recognize the name, yes it started on TheMagicDojo). The idea was that he would ask a trivia question that anyone could answer. Then the next day's question was only for the people that had gotten it right the day before. The field kept getting narrowed down until only one person remained. That person would win a prize and get the glory of winning.

The idea was better than average for one of Mark's, and it was quickly popular, which drew attention to it—at Wizards. Once again, Mark was called down to the Brand Manager's office. This was years later and there was now a new Brand Manager. He asked Mark why he had a column on another web site. Mark replied because they'd let him do it. The brand manager said how about we move it to Wizards' site (then sideboard.com). Mark asked if he had a choice. No he was told. Okay, said Mark, let's move it.

Once again, he somehow weaseled his way out of trouble. I don't get it. He was an employee of Wizards and he wrote a column on another site! Aren't people supposed to get fired for doing things like that?

This Rogue Goes to Eleven

It's true that Mark's most rogue-ish activities took place many years ago, but that doesn't mean his rebel spirit has gone away. He just uses it now in design.

Mark loves talking about all the wonderful things he's done for design, but in his desire to do things "his way" he's had his hand in many of **Magic**'s biggest design blunders. For instance, have you ever wondered why *Odyssey* is missing all the iconic creature types? Why there are no Goblins or Elves or Merfolk? Mark's idea. He was trying to give some time to the lesser known tribes—you know like the aven, cephalids, and nantuko. People around him told him it was a bad idea but he didn't listen (he was in charge of creative for *Odyssey*).

Making all the rare creatures in *Champions of Kamigawa* legendary? Mark's idea. He was told that the block was supposed to be about legends, so he said, "if that's the case why not just make all the rare creatures legends?"

Coldsnap's lost set idea? Mark's as well. He was inspired by the "lost episode" phenomenon that happens on television where they unearth a long unseen episode. The idea to have it found in Richard Garfield's old file cabinet—also Mark's.

Alternate reality set messing with the color pie—Mark's idea. Cards from the future—Mark's idea.

Mudhole. Hint of Insanity. Carnival of Souls. Duplicity. Tahngarth's Glare. Sword of the Chosen. Odyssey's Shrines. More bad cards than you can shake a stick at—Mark's.

Tinker. Skullclamp. Entomb. Dream Halls. Yawgmoth's Will. Lotus Petal. Memory Jar. Yawgmoth's Bargain. Rishadan Port. Wasteland. Metalworker. Chrome Mox. Earthcraft. Mind over Matter. Masticore. The entire "free spell" mechanic. The affinity mechanic. Putting Necropotence into *Fifth Edition*. Mark has his hand in all these things.

And this is just stuff that's made it all the way through. Mark also has a long history off adding themes to sets that never make it through development. *Tempest* was turned in with a poison theme. *Odyssey* had a milling theme. *Mirrodin* had an entire mechanic (the so called [E-mechanic](#)) yanked out.

One of his biggest recent failures was a mechanic in *Lorwyn* that he called showoff. The idea behind showoff was that if it was revealed (from your hand or your library) it could be played for its showoff cost, which was often cheaper than its normal mana cost. The mechanic had a lot of rules issues, but Mark worked it out with Gottlieb (one of my favorite people in R&D by the way—few people are able to irritate Mark like Gottlieb can). The mechanic had a lot of synergy with the block because there were numerous ways to reveal things (the common creature cycle and rare land cycle are remnants of this theme). Mark pushed it hard but in the end the problem was that the cards weren't worth the hoops they made the players jump through to use them.

Mark also had a miss in *Morningtide* when he tried to create über-classes that collected together different classes. Cards that affected "fighters" affected Soldiers and Warriors (and possibly Knights). "Mages" were Shaman and Wizards (and possibly Druids). "Scoundrel" meant Assassins and Rogues. This was another idea that Mark pushed hard on, but he wasn't able to get enough supporters.

If it was left up to Mark, the flash mechanic would have been "instant creature" instead. Evoke would have been instant and sorceries that "kicked" into creatures. And splice onto arcane would have been splice onto instant. (Okay, maybe that last one would have been better.) On top of all that, Mark's hit ratio of "cards made" to "cards that see print" is much lower than most people would imagine. He designs thousands upon thousands of cards each year, and at best a hundred to two hundred see print. Mark likes to focus on the cards that make it into the sets, most of which are the successes (they got to print after all). But behind the scenes, there are many more failures.

There Is No Rogue

I'd better wrap this up. I'm getting as yammery as Mark. I apologize for the three thousand plus words but when I start making fun of Mark it's hard to stop. Kind of like eating potato chips. But hey, making Mark's life harder is what I do. I'm a dedicated evil twin. I hope my stories have helped you think less of him (because heavens knows he won't). Perhaps one day I'll pop back in to twist the knife a little more.

I'm not going to tell you what Mark is writing about next week both because I don't know and because I wouldn't tell you if I did.

Until then, may you fall down a well, get trapped and possibly die.

"Evil" Mark Rosewater

*Evil Mark Rosewater is not **Magic** Head Designer, thank goodness (or more properly thank evilness). When not alternately torturing and slandering his good twin, he likes to spend time advancing the cause of evil and watching reality television (kind of the same thing really). Although he never pays his dues or attends any meetings, he is a member of the Brotherhood of Evil, Evil Twins (BEET). He asks whenever you take Mark Rosewater's name in vain that you do so with a smile.*



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