

RK Post, it's nice to meet you for the Redbull Untapped in Brussels. For those who don't know you, you are an illustrator and you worked for Wizards of the Coast (WOTC), Sony, Microsoft and many other companies. You are mainly known for your artwork in Magic the Gathering (MTG), Morphling : Avatar of Woe, Unmask etc. Can you tell us a bit about your background and how you started as an illustrator?

I went to university and got a bachelor degree in illustration, but it has nothing to do with what I do now. It all came up from one teacher who was working for comics and games. His name is Mark A. Nelson. He is the one who pushed me down that path. He was teaching at the Northern Illinois University and has been a mentor for many other MTG artists like Michael Sutfin, Tom Baxa, Jim Nielson. He also did a couple of cards.

How did you start to work for WOTC?

Actually my first freelance job working in the game industry was for TSR doing Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). So before graduating and getting my degree, Mark introduced me to the art director and I started to make D&D interior art before I was out of school. But you know, having a degree isn't too important in gaming, it's more your portfolio. So my job at TSR helped me get into MTG.

Were you familiar with the game and WOTC prior to working for them?

I was. Before working for TSR, I had been to GenCon back in 94/95 and I gave them my portfolio, but it turned out I wasn't ready yet (laugh), and shortly after I got an offer to be full time illustrator at TSR. One thing I didn't know is that TSR were financially strapped and, since I lived close by, I could drive there. They didn't have to move me or pay me more. So, they basically gave me a salary to learn how to paint, since I was doing more black and white work for them originally. A year after WOTC bought TSR and Todd Lockwood and I got hired, that's when I contacted the art director of MTG saying: "Hey, I want to do some magic cards" (laugh) and the rest is history. My first illustrations for them were *Keeper of the Beast*, *Thrull Surgeon* and *High Ground*, that I had to paint while working at the same time for TSR, since I was still full time there. I was doing work for MTG from time to time.

How long have you been working in the "D&D/MTG world"?

I have worked over 17 years for them, even though I haven't done a thing for them in the last couple of years.

So what are you doing now?

I'm just too busy traveling to events like Redbull Untapped or GP. At the moment WOTC is not asking me anything and I'm not asking them. Also, I would first have to look at my calendar to check if I'm actually home because between travelling and family, I don't want to blow any deadlines. I left Wizards of the Coast in 2000, freelanced for about a year, and then went into the video game industry for 10 years, which brings us to now. It's so funny, I worked for big companies, Sony, Microsoft... and all the titles I worked on eventually got cancelled. Then I worked for a more casual game company which was releasing a title every year with a core audience of 50 year old women and it was a lot of fun. Turns out I didn't do any concept art for them but production art, 3D models, texturing, so not so far from my work at Sony where I was an environment artist.

Could you tell us more about some of the titles?

Yes, *Dungeon Siege* for example and also an MMO by *Microsoft* called *Mythica*. They cancelled it after 5 years of productions, after some changes in the management. I worked one year on it. But MMO development are so long that anything can happen, as you can see. A funny thing is when you work in the video game industry, they ask you what published title do you have to your name, and when you have cancelled projects, it's difficult to show. But after that I worked for *Big Fish Game* where we did one every year, so suddenly, I had 5 (laugh). (Editorial note: Randy worked for *Warcraft Card Game* and his artworks where used for *Hearthstone*).

So if I sum up, black and white ink, oil painting, Photoshop, 3D. Did all those tools influence your style over the time?

It didn't really change my style much, I learned to work digitally while I was at TSR. But the feeling is different, especially the scale/size of the artwork. My first MTG cards were done traditionally, like *Unmask*, the avatar cycle card, but they were much bigger than the average MTG painting. Now I mix different media. Since I don't do freelancing at the moment, I just do stuff for myself. Most of them are a mix of traditional black and white drawings and I take them onto Photoshop for color, mostly to do tokens at the moment.

I want to dig a bit deeper into what MTG is, and especially the controversy around signing events and boycotts. What is your opinion about these events?

You know, I like those events. I followed what happened with Channel Fireball but my attitude toward events is different. I might be the only artist left who doesn't charge anything for signing, you come up and I'll sign anything you have. I know some are charging 3\$ per signature most around a 1\$ or 2\$. (Editor's note: Since this interview, Randy changed his signing price policy). And it doesn't bother me that they arrive on eBay. They are advertising because then people go check my website, or see it on the back of the card if those are tokens. So, for me, it creates a demand that is beneficial. The boom of alterations also created a new demand. Before the token business, I was less busy and could do more of them but now it's a bit harder. I've been told that my alteration card rates are pretty low, around 40\$, so I have to limit them. If you show up at the beginning of the day, there is a queue and I know what I can finish through the course of that day, depending on how busy the event is, and I usually underestimate the work and take too many of them. But If you leave them to me, they should be done first things the next day. So to answer your question for me every signing event is a good promotion of my work. But I'm not part of the current set artists so my experience is different.

Would you see yourself back in regular sets?

At the moment I don't think so, I am contacted for more promotional cards or one off.

Artworks for MTG are totally different now compared to when you started, it is more visually controlled to support the brand. Is it a problem for artists?

If you look at the beginning of magic, it's completely different than the middle, which is completely different from the way it is now. WOTC and now Asbro are trying to focus it a bit, to be more about the story and it's good because you are building an IP. They have 25 years of building this brand and it's solid. So, now they bring some very expensive artists and it's an excellent publicity for those who are selected. Just having your art on a card is really something, plus it's excellent advertising for your portfolio and your fan base. So, no it's not really an issue in my opinion.

Speaking more about art, in recent years the art market for original MTG painting has completely exploded. Does it affect you as an artist?

Not really. The art market has clearly shifted and I have kept none of my artwork. You know, at the time I didn't think about it, I had to sell these right away. I put a price on, and they were reasonable: \$800 to \$1500. Some were more expensive like *Unmask* that I sold for 6k but it was a big painting; I cannot imagine what it's worth now.

When working for WOTC, did all your work get published or did some not make the cut for the final set kind of like for videogames?

Only few of them didn't. For *Unglued 2* (Editorial note: the complete set got cancelled and was never published. This is the only one so far. This set is a special one that is a parody from MTG), one was called the *Moose Rider* (known as *Portal Elf*). But I also did one for *Unglued* that was called the *Grim Elf of Vengeance*, it was the working title. They wanted something dark and I made it so dark that they said "this is not *Unglued*" (laugh). Too muscular... and skulls in the background. It wasn't funny at all for this extension. So, in the end that's two failed attempts to be featured in an Un-set (laugh). I could talk also about the artwork for *Defiling Tears*. That one was originally called *Dead Walk*. It was supposed to be an undead zombie angel. She was holding a lantern, I thought it was kind of cool: blood, tears... And that card did not work through play-testing, so they just cropped the face, removed the arm, but you can just see the lantern floating in front.

How many events are you doing per year, and how do you organize your personal life around them?

Wow! It's a lot because at the moment I'm doing 21 or 22 this year, and it's down from last year when I went to 28, and the year before was even more: like *Starcities*, conventions here and there, or unique events like the *Redbull Untapped*. This one is almost like working in a Pro Tour or *Mythic Championship* since it's a limited pool of people, it's fantastic. I was in Florence yesterday and now I'm going back to the US, but I'm already booked for the weekends coming up and will finish summer in Vegas with the *Mythic Championship*. When possible I come with my family, but this time since I was going to Germany, Italy and Belgium, the trip and the dates were too hard to work out. Sometimes I managed to work with my son for a few events only. For a playmate for example, I asked him if he could do some stuff with it. He also did a couple of regional events with me so we have worked together on a few illustrations. He is much better at background than I am, so we are complementary (laugh). That's the sort of things you can do when you are a freelancer.

With your background as an illustrator and videogame artist, what will be your next goal in the coming years?

I don't know. Eventually I want to build thing online more, to be home more often. Maybe like *Patreon* or *Kickstarter*. But the transition can take some time. *Kickstarter* scares me because I don't want to do one about something I want to produce, but for something that is already done instead. Just to avoid one of those failing campaigns. I could go back to videogame. The smartest thing would be to do some art direction, but directing is not really my thing. I'm bad at explaining (laugh). And there is a ton of eager and capable young people, also cheaper so no... Plus, I haven't been active for about 5 years in the videogame scene. It's a pretty tough market: titles get cancelled, people lose their jobs and they go to the next company. It's all about who you know and where to go next. But often people have to move to another city to work for another studio. As for me, I'm fully independent, it's kind of the new model for illustrators. In the past 20-25 years the illustration rates haven't become any better. We have Eastern Europeans, Russians, Chinese illustrators. They work for

cheap, fast, and they are insanely good. So being up against that, it's a lot tougher. More and more coming from video game schools where they teach you how to do concept art, people get out and find out that there is not much work out there. But they are doing this kind of fantasy work anyway, try to do freelancing and just try to make the best out of it. So I prefer to keep making tokens and prints for now.

Our readers are mainly gamers, could you share with us what kind of games you are playing?

I just play on my phone. I know it's awful but I just play Pokemon GO (laugh). I'm an artist but also a collector, and virtual collecting is so much better than actually collecting stuff all over your house. With time I got a lot of things and I had to get rid of a lot of them so I kind of switch my consumption mode. So Pokemon GO is way easier, especially while traveling. I also have an addictive personality, once I start something I'm all in. But I still keep my eyes on other games for the artistic aspect of it.

RK Post, thank you it has been a pleasure meeting and talking with you.