Richard Garfield leaves Valve, puts Artifact's future in question



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- At the most zoomed-out level, every *Artifact* match begins like this: with three lanes of combat, across which you will arrange five heroes in a mission to destroy towers. Sure sounds a lot like how *Dota 2* works, doesn't it? (Not shown here: the "flop" of your creeps that are randomly added and arranged between every round.)
- Now we're zoomed in on a lane. Based on the attack, armor, and health stats on the board, the game will show you how the round will end should no other cards be played or mana/gold be spent. The bottom player has one

unblocked hero, who will directly attack the top player's defense tower. Both players still have all three points of mana for this lane, which they can spend on any three-or-less card in their hand that matches the color of any hero(es) in the same lane. The top player is out of luck if they don't have any black cards in that value. Tap the "pass gong" in the bottom-right corner if you would rather not play any of your cards.

- This flashy animation is a result of Luna's incredible hero-specific ability "Eclipse."
- Sometimes, due to sacrifices in previous rounds, you may wind up with zero creeps or heroes in a lane, at which point your opponent can wail on your tower. (Much like when things go bad in a *Dota 2* match.) But again, like that game, sometimes letting one tower go is worth it in terms of swinging your momentum to the two other lanes, as you only need to drop two towers to win. (When you destroy a tower, by the way, it comes back with 80 HP instead of the standard 40 HP. Your foe can just hang around and re-destroy that boosted "ancient tower" to count as a second downed tower and win a match.)
- The top row represents equippable items that you can add to your heroes through the course of the game, and this zoom shows that the equipped sword and ring boost this character's attack and health stats.

Richard Garfield, the legendary game designer behind *Magic: The Gathering*, says he has been laid off from Valve as part of a recent modest downsizing effort at the company. The move comes as *Artifact*, Valve's *Dota 2*-based card game which Garfield worked on closely, struggles to find a continuing audience.

"We weren't surprised by the layoff considering how rocky the launch was," Garfield told *Artifact*-focused site Artibuff. "The team was enthusiastic about the game and were confident that they had a good product, but it became clear it wasn't

going to be easy to get the game to where we wanted it."

Garfield goes on to suggest that a smaller *Artifact* team makes some sense now that the game has been launched and that Valve has probably already maximized the value to be gleaned from Garfield's contract company, 3 Donkeys.

"The expertise that 3 Donkeys brought is less critical after listening to us for 4+ years," he wrote. "Both [3 Donkeys co-founder] Skaff [Elias] and I remain optimistic about the quality of the game and have offered our feedback and advice in an ongoing gratis capacity simply because we would like to see the game do as well as we think it can. We enjoyed working with Valve, and I was impressed with their relentless focus on the quality of the game and experience being offered to the player."

Garfield was a big part of *Artifact*'s pre-release promotion, as the veteran game designer's stamp of approval was put on Valve's first new game in over five years. A year ago, Valve co-founder Gabe Newell touted Garfield's four years of work on the project to that point and made the lofty promise that *Artifact* would be "to trading card games what *Half-Life 2* was to single-player action."

After launching with tens of thousands of simultaneous players in November, though, *Artifact* quickly declined in popularity, to the point that only about 500 players have been online at any time in the last week, according to stats collected by SteamDB. The game has faced widespread criticism for its monetization system, which requires paying real money for every card past a few starter decks and has led to a messy second-hand economy for digital card resellers. *Artifact* has also faced complaints that certain rare cards are overpowered, leading Valve to backtrack on a promise that cards would not be changed after their release.

As Artibuff points out, *Artifact* has not received an update

since January 28, and Valve has not updated the community on its plans for the game since that update promised the company was “still in it for the long haul.” Garfield’s departure certainly doesn’t inspire confidence for the future of a game that, as of now, looks like one of Valve’s more spectacular failures.

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