

January 15, 1999

Dear **Magic** Player Community:

In recent weeks there's been a lot of discussion of the pending *Magic: The Gathering*®--*Classic*™ (Sixth Edition) rules changes, which will take effect in tournament play on June 1, 1999. Some of you fear these changes will be the death of **Magic**® play, others want to wait and see the complete *Sixth Edition* rules, and still others have praised the changes. Let me start by telling you that the *Sixth Edition* rules changes posted on the **Magic** Dojo news are accurate. For those of you who haven't seen them, I have attached the *Sixth Edition* rules changes at the end of my letter.

Some of you believe that the **Magic** rules are being "dumbed down," that Wizards of the Coast believes starter-level products like *Magic: The Gathering--Portal*™ sets are the game's future, and that the removal of trample from *Sixth Edition* is the beginning of the end. This simply isn't true. The continued success of **Magic** lies primarily in one type of product: expert expansions. **Magic** R&D's number-one goal is to create interesting expansions that stimulate the Standard tournament environment and challenge current players.

Even though expert expansions are our most important **Magic** releases, starter-level products and the basic set play significant, though sometimes misunderstood, roles in the **Magic** product line. Starter-level products aren't intended for the experienced **Magic** player. I believe that the **Magic** community has accepted this and therefore understands what *Portal* is; experienced players don't purchase or play with *Portal* cards.

What *Sixth Edition* means for the experienced player is less black and white. Let me shock you: The experienced player with lots of cards has no need to purchase *Sixth Edition*. There's nothing new in *Sixth Edition*. *Sixth Edition* is just a combination of *Fifth Edition*™ cards and the *Mirage*™ cycle, with a few older cards thrown in.

The most significant impact *Sixth Edition* will have on the tournament player is the tournament-level cards found within it. Let me share some truths about *Sixth Edition* with you:

1. *Sixth Edition* has some tournament-level cards that were in Fifth. Armageddon is still around.
2. Some tournament-level cards that were in Fifth are not in Sixth. Adios, Dark Ritual.
3. Some tournament-level *Mirage*-cycle cards are in Sixth. Welcome back, Uktabi Orangutan.
4. And some tournament-level *Mirage*-cycle cards didn't make the cut. Sorry, Gemstone Mine.

Sixth Edition can't contain all the tournament-level cards we've ever produced. There are only so many top cards a set can support before some top cards are no longer top cards. As the pool of cards available for Sixth, Seventh, and future basic editions continues to grow, **Magic** R&D will need to choose which good cards stay, which good cards leave, and which good cards return.

For Sixth, we tried to select some tournament-level cards that would support existing deck types while removing cards that hurt existing deck types. For example, Necro's going. Losing Necro isn't the end of the world. It wasn't removed because it was too powerful, and it wasn't removed because of the *Sixth Edition* rules. It was removed to change the tournament environment and to challenge our top tournament players. Finally, we added some *Mirage*-cycle cards we thought were good for the tournament environment.

Before I explain my reasoning behind the rules changes, I want you all to be aware I wasn't working in a box with my head stuck up my butt, refusing to talk to anyone. The rules team included Wizards people like BethMo, Tom Wylie, Richard Garfield, and many other members of Wizards R&D. I also worked with many top rules experts outside of Wizards, like Collin "Gammavirus" Jackson, Dan Gray, Dave DeLaney, David Sachs, DonaldX, Jeff Jordan, Michael "Meowse" Phoenix, Stephen D'Angelo, and Paul Barclay. We didn't always agree on all the answers (just ask DonaldX about triggered abilities), but we always discussed all the issues and the vast majority of us are extremely pleased with the final product.

Our main motivation behind the *Sixth Edition* rules changes was that the rules were needlessly complicated and growing more so each month. I realize that this is a judgment call, but I ask you: How many rules experts are there, really? Twenty-five, maybe. And I have questions that will stump all of them because there are *Fifth Edition* rules questions with no answer. Having overly complex rules is detrimental for **Magic** play. The skill of play and of deckbuilding should be the challenge of **Magic**, the thing that separates good players from great players. Memorizing a complex rules system should not.

While we call these changes "*Sixth Edition* rules changes," the changes have nothing to do with *Sixth Edition* other than that they are being released at the same time as the *Sixth Edition* card set. *Sixth Edition* uses only a subsection of the rules. The absence of trample or flanking from *Sixth Edition* doesn't mean the removal of these abilities from **Magic** play. The **Magic** rules have been and always will be designed and developed for the expert-level player. Please don't confuse a less complicated *Sixth Edition* card set with the **Magic** rules being "dumbed down." I have a 20,000-word rulebook currently being edited as proof that expert-level **Magic** and starter-level products like *Portal* are worlds away from each other.

Before I tackle the new rules issues one by one, I want to note that the *Sixth Edition* rules changes attached to the end of this letter are the vast majority of the rules changes. There are no more surprises. While there are some other changes, the other changes are to obscure rules. The complete *Sixth Edition* rules document will be released in a few weeks, after it's been edited.

On to the good stuff:

First, no more interrupts. Can you think of the last time you played Counterspell and it mattered that it was an interrupt instead of an instant? When do you respond to a Counterspell? Usually to counter the Counterspell or to play another copy of the spell that was countered. Maintaining the interrupt spell type did very little other than lengthen the rules. This change makes Power Sink worse, changes the Armageddon - Zuran Orb combo, and adds the "Tutoring for a Counterspell" trick. This won't make **Magic** play worse and it won't make it better; it just makes it different.

Next comes the stack. The stack was created so that activated abilities, instants, damage prevention, and triggered abilities could all work the same way. The rules team referred to this as the Grand Unified Timing System. The stack will allow players to respond to anything played.

Triggered abilities were changed for the casual player. Lots--and I mean lots--of players don't understand why you can respond to a Terror by Unsummoning the creature, but you can't respond to a Nekrataal by Unsummoning the creature. The new triggered abilities system treats "when comes into play" creatures in a more intuitive way. These creatures truly become a creature and a sorcery rolled into one, and as with all sorceries, you can respond to the sorcery part. We also cleaned up the messy rules about when a triggered ability resolves during a spell and when the triggered ability waits until the spell finishes resolving.

Damage prevention under *Fifth Edition* rules had the problem that "deal" really meant "assign." Lightning Bolt didn't deal damage. Lightning Bolt assigned 3 damage to a target creature or player. The damage wasn't dealt when Lightning Bolt resolved; it was held in Never-Never Land until a damage-prevention step was completed. The new rules fix this. In *Sixth Edition*, when Lightning Bolt resolves, it deals its damage immediately.

So, under *Fifth Edition* rules you waited for the Bolt to resolve and then played your Healing Salve during a damage-prevention step. Under *Sixth Edition* rules, you respond to the Bolt being played with your Healing Salve. First the Healing Salve resolves, stopping 3 damage, and then the Bolt resolves, dealing 3 less damage, or 0 damage. As with the removal of interrupts, there will be changes to some cards and combos. Damage prevention gets a little stronger. But in reality this change will have very little impact on **Magic** play.

We reorganized phases and steps. Upkeep is now a step and combat is now a phase. They're just title changes with no impact on game play.

The rule about losing immediately when you have 0 life is just intuitive. It matches what happens to creatures that have 0 toughness or take lethal damage. I only need to make one apology, to the one person harmed by this rules change: I'm sorry, Mark Rosewater. I've made it harder for you to create your puzzles.

Having artifacts no longer "turn off" when they're tapped was a tough decision. I chose short-term pain for long-term gain. My strategy was to remove the rule from the rulebook so noncreature artifacts would work like all other permanents. But to keep the strategic element of artifacts turning off, we're going to add the turn-off ability to the card text. *Sixth Edition's* Howling Mine will say, "At the beginning of each player's draw step, if Howling Mine is untapped, that player draws an additional card." The short-term pain is that players using the new rules with older versions of some cards will need to know some errata. So what else is new? One goal of these rules changes is to reduce the amount of errata issued on future cards.

Phase abilities have been eliminated. They've been replaced by triggered abilities that trigger on the beginning of the phase. This change makes the rules a lot simpler and doesn't reduce any strategy of play. (For each of the few strategies lost, there's a new strategy gained.)

"End of turn" posed some of the most interesting rules questions. What does it really mean to do something at the end of your turn? Let's say that at the end of my turn I discard down to seven cards. If when I do so a triggered event occurs, it's no longer the end of my turn. What the new rules do (using lots of legal-type talk) is make sure that the last things you do at the end of your turn are clear all nonlethal damage and discard down to seven cards. Tournament players will learn the new rules and use them to their advantage in the one game in a hundred in which they apply. Casual players will go on playing the way they always have. It's just that now the casual player will be playing the game correctly.

I've saved the most significant changes for last: the changes to combat. There are two changes to combat, other than that we're no longer just pretending combat is a phase. First, tapped blockers now deal combat damage. We wrestled with this issue for a long time. In the end, we decided that there was no strategic gain to maintaining this rule. The strategy lost (I can't Twiddle your blocking creature to stop its damage) is replaced by the strategy of using creatures to block and then tap for effects. Offense loses a little, defense gains a little.

We made a bigger change to the way creatures deal their combat damage. This change was made so that combat damage fit into the Grand Unified Timing System. We wanted to allow players to prevent damage after they saw how creature damage was being divided (which is what happens under *Fifth Edition* rules). We also wanted for spells played during combat to work the same way they do outside of combat. In the end we created a system that has simpler rules but much more complex play strategies.

These changes to the **Magic** rules will have some impact on the game. Casual players will feel only a little change. Tournament players will need to adjust their decks and play styles slightly to account for the new rules. The impact these rules will have on the tournament environment will be far less extreme than the impact of a new set. Tolarian Academy changed the tournament environment far more than *Sixth Edition* rules ever will. The **Magic** environment is designed to accommodate change--in fact, **Magic** would become stale without change.

I believe the *Sixth Edition* rules are best for the long-term health of **Magic** play. The rules changes shift the **Magic** strategy back to the cards, where it belongs. As with all change, there will be some short-term costs. All I ask is that you learn and play with the *Sixth Edition* rules changes before you judge them. In the end I believe most of you will agree that these changes are best for the game. And that's all any of us wants: what is best for **Magic** play.

Bill Rose
Magic Lead Designer

Sixth Edition Rules Changes

(These rules changes become effective in tournament play on June 1, 1999.)

The Stack

Forget batches and series--whenever you play a spell or ability, it goes on **the stack**. You can then play another spell or ability or pass. If you pass, your opponent gets priority to play spells

and abilities. When you both pass in succession, the spell or ability on top of the stack resolves. Then the player whose turn it is (the active player) gets priority again. **You don't have to wait for everything on the stack to resolve before playing another spell.**

Example: I play Hammer of Bogardan on your Fallen Angel. You respond by playing The Hive's ability to create a Wasp token. After The Hive's ability resolves and your Wasp comes into play, you sacrifice it to your Fallen Angel. The Angel, now 5/4, takes 3 damage from the Hammer and survives.

Abilities that add mana to your pool don't go on the stack. (These are now called **mana abilities**.) You simply get the mana immediately. **Spells** that produce mana, however, such as Dark Ritual, go on the stack like other spells. Mana abilities can be played only when you have priority or are asked to pay mana. Mana sources no longer exist.

Countering Spells

Classic rules do away with interrupts. All interrupts are now instants, which means you can counter a spell any time before it resolves. (Abilities that trigger on a spell being "successfully cast" now trigger on a spell being "played.")

Example: I play Terror on a creature you control. You respond by playing Inspiration, which lets you draw two cards. One of the cards you draw is Counterspell. You can now play it to counter my Terror.

Damage Prevention and Regeneration

Classic eliminates the damage-prevention step. Damage is no longer dealt ("assigned") and then successfully dealt--it's simply dealt. Damage prevention, regeneration, and other spells and abilities that generate replacement effects are now played just like other instants.

When such a spell or ability resolves, its effect creates a kind of **shield**. Damage-prevention effects create shields that prevent the next damage the target would take. Regeneration's effect creates a shield that replaces a permanent's next destruction with regeneration. These shields last until used up or until the next cleanup step, whichever comes first.

If an effect prevents a specific amount of damage, it creates a shield that hangs around until that amount of damage is prevented.

Example: I tap my Prodigious Sorcerer to deal 1 damage to your Tundra Wolves. You respond by playing Healing Salve on the Wolves. The Salve resolves first, setting up a shield that can prevent 3 damage. When the Sorcerer's ability resolves, the shield prevents the 1 damage and waits around for the rest of the turn to prevent up to 2 more.

If two different effects could each prevent the same damage, the "shielded" player or controller of the "shielded" creature chooses which effect gets applied.

All damage-prevention spells and abilities are now targeted. This means, for example, that you can't play Healing Salve on a creature with protection from white.

Triggered Abilities

In the *Classic* set, any ability that begins with "when," "whenever," or "at" (as in "At the beginning of your upkeep") is a triggered ability.

When a triggered ability's condition is met, the ability automatically goes on the stack. Its controller chooses all targets for it, and when it resolves, makes all other choices for it. If two or more triggered abilities go on the stack at the same time, those controlled by the active player go first. If one player controls two or more, that player chooses their order. Triggered abilities can no longer resolve while another spell or ability is resolving.

Phase abilities have all been changed to triggered abilities that trigger when the specified phase or step begins.

Under *Fifth Edition* rules, you couldn't play a permanent's abilities until you dealt with its phase costs and "comes-into-play" costs. This rule no longer exists. Abilities that read, "do A or do B" should now be read as "You may do A. If you don't, do B."

Phases and Steps

Each turn now has five phases: **beginning**, **main**, **combat**, **second main**, and **end**.

The beginning phase has three steps: **untap**, **upkeep**, and **draw**. No spells or abilities can be played during the untap step, and abilities that trigger during untap wait until the beginning of the upkeep step to go on the stack. If an effect instructs you to do something at the beginning of the turn, you do it at the beginning of upkeep.

Upkeep abilities ("During your upkeep, do A") are now triggered abilities: "At the beginning of your upkeep, do A." Likewise, abilities that read "During your upkeep, do A or do B" should now be read as "At the beginning of your upkeep, you may do A. If you don't, do B."

There are now two main phases in every turn. They're separated by combat, which is now its own phase. You may still play only one land per turn. Phase abilities played at the beginning of or during your main phase are now triggered abilities that trigger at the beginning of your first main phase.

The end phase has two steps: **end of turn** and **cleanup**. The end-of-turn step works just like the upkeep step. When it begins, all triggered abilities that start with "At end of turn" go on the stack. When the cleanup step begins, the active player discards down to the maximum hand size (usually seven cards). Then all damage on creatures is removed and effects that last "until end of turn" end. If any abilities trigger during the cleanup step, they go on the stack, and then the active player gets priority to play spells and abilities. If no abilities trigger, no one gets priority. If any spells or abilities resolve during cleanup, the whole step is repeated. Otherwise, the turn ends.

Combat

Combat is now its own phase with five steps: **beginning of combat**, **declare attackers**, **declare blockers**, **combat damage**, and **end of combat**. Spells and abilities may be played during each of these steps, but only after the step's mandatory parts have been completed. For example, you can play a spell during declare attackers only after attackers have been declared.

The declare attackers and declare blockers steps are unchanged, but dealing combat damage works differently. The active player announces how he or she wants attacking creatures' combat damage to be dealt, then the defending player does the same for blocking creatures. **Tapped blockers now deal combat damage just like untapped ones.** Because there's no damage-prevention step in *Classic*, the combat damage isn't dealt immediately--instead, it goes on the stack. Players may then play spells and abilities as usual. Nothing that happens to the attacking and blocking creatures can affect damage that's on the stack waiting to be dealt. When the stack reaches the combat damage, it's dealt according to the earlier damage announcements, even if one or more of the creatures in combat are no longer in play.

Example: I block your Fire Elemental (5/4) with my Air Elemental (4/4). The creatures' combat damage goes to the stack. Afterward, I play Unsummon on my Air Elemental. The Unsummon resolves, returning the Air Elemental to my hand, and then the combat damage is dealt. The Air Elemental deals 4 damage to the Fire Elemental--even though it's no longer in play.

The end-of-combat step works like the upkeep and end-of-turn steps. When the step begins, all abilities that trigger on the end of combat go on the stack.

Miscellaneous

You now lose the game as soon as you reach 0 life, not at the end of the phase.

Artifacts' continuous abilities now work the same way as other permanents' abilities. They no longer "shut off" while the artifact is tapped.

Under *Classic* rules, you choose modes and targets for a spell or ability (and pay costs) when you play it, but you make all other choices when the spell or ability resolves, not when it's played. You can identify modal spells and abilities by the "Choose one--" phrase.

Questions and Feedback

If you have any questions, [ask Bill](#). Mr. Rose will compile a list of the most frequently asked questions and make a weekly update to this website.