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Off and On

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Magic: The Gathering is very malleable as far as games go. Several of its aspects have changed in some way since the initial Alpha release, and just listing all the variances would take up an entire column in and of itself. The most drastic change stems not from the Oracle (rewording cards to fit current templates) or from changing the cards physically (adding colors to indicate card rarity on the expansion symbol, or changing from black to white borders for reprinted cards). It comes from editing the very rules of the game itself. This week I'm going to take a look at one of the changes to the fundamental rules, and see how it affected the way in which **Magic** is played. Today's column deals with tapped artifacts and you.

Under the Alpha rules (and up until the release of *Sixth Edition*), tapped artifacts "turned off." This meant that should you find a way to tap an artifact, it would simply stop working and could not be activated. From the *Revised* rulebook: "If an artifact becomes tapped you may not use it again until it is untapped, even if it does not normally tap. Even continuous effects of the artifact cease until it is untapped."

For example, if you used an *Icy Manipulator* to tap your opponent's *Zuran Orb*, he wouldn't be able to sacrifice lands to gain life until it untapped. Many other strange interactions came from this rule. You couldn't activate a tapped *Chimeric Sphere* to give yourself an extra creature to sacrifice to *Diabolic Edict*. You could, however, save your Swamps from an *Earthquake* by *Twiddling a Kormus Bell*. *Meekstone* could conveniently be turned off by a *Relic Barrier* so that only your fatties would untap.

THE PARADOXES

Of course, just to make things complicated, some cards had text that you were not supposed to ignore when they were tapped. I refer to the rules paradox cards: artifacts which said "in order to use this correctly, you have to ignore one of the rules of **Magic**." *Tawnos's Coffin* states: "You may choose not to untap Coffin during the untap phase." Can you choose to keep a *Tawnos's Coffin* tapped if the game rules prevent artifact text from "working" when the artifact is tapped? The Wizards rules team circumvented this issue by making up a reason why you could chose to keep card like these tapped. Okay, so I'm supposed to ignore all rules text on artifacts while they're tapped, except for text that says I don't need to untap them. Hmmm.

Mana Vault states: "Mana Vault doesn't untap normally during untap phase; to untap it, you must pay 4 mana during your upkeep. If Mana Vault remains tapped during upkeep it does 1 damage to you." Okay... So I can't USE tapped artifacts, but I can be damaged by them. So I guess I'm supposed to ignore the GOOD text and just read the BAD text, like the part about taking a point of damage...

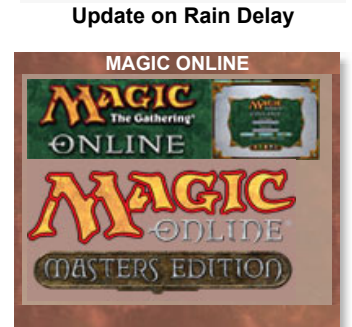
Torture Chamber states: "At the end of your turn, Torture Chamber deals 1 damage to you for each pain counter on it." Anyone who played tournaments during *Tempest* block -- whether draft or constructed -- will verify that you could have a tapped *Torture Chamber* in play with a pain counter on it, and you'd take no damage. Why not? Because it's *tapped*, silly! Everyone knows tapped artifacts *don't work!*

Sigh. Confused yet? So was the rest of the world.

DOES THIS THING WORK?

Some artifacts just didn't work like they were intended to under the old rules. Take *Magnetic Web* as an exhibit in messy card interaction. The card text illustrates how utterly broken (and I mean that in the "doesn't work" sense) this artifact was under the old rules.

Magnetic Web states: "If any creature with any magnet counters on it attacks, all creatures with magnet counters on them that the attacking player controls attack if able.



If any creature with any magnet counters on it attacks, all creatures with magnet counters on them that the defending player controls block that creature if able.

①, ⚡: Put a magnet counter on target creature."

Got that? The intended function of the Web was that you would put magnet counters on creatures, then attacking creatures with magnet counters would all have to attack together, and defending creatures with magnet counters would have to block creatures with magnet counters. The net effect simulated a cross between **Nettling Imp** and **Lure**. The maddening fact of this spell came from the artifacts rule: If you tapped it to put a counter on a creature, the Web shut off. The only way to put a counter on a creature was to tap the Web, but if you tapped the Web it stopped working! While you could delay your plans for a turn or two to wait for this artifact to untap (or find a way to untap it prematurely), the intent by the card designers surely was not to have a wait between activation and the combat effect.



In some cases it seems that the designers forgot that this rule even existed when they made cards. For example, look at the *Visions* card **Sands of Time**. **Sands of Time** reads: "Each player skips his or her untap phase. At the beginning of each player's turn, untap each tapped artifact, creature, and land he or she controls and tap each untapped artifact, creature, and land he or she controls." Look at this card step-by-step. Once I have this in play, the first thing that happens is all my tapped stuff untaps and all my untapped stuff taps. This happens *before* my normal untap phase that I'm theoretically supposed to skip. So the Sands taps itself. Then what? Do I skip my untap step? No! The Sands is tapped, so it doesn't do anything! Everything of mine untaps normally, including Sands of Time. As for my opponent... good luck to him. I just effectively Stasis-locked him with one card. Granted, **Sands of Time** was errataed immediately as *Visions* became tournament legal. "It will not tap or untap itself." But the errata only goes to

show that even R&D was thrown by the "tapped artifacts" rule.

TALES OF THE CRYPT

One of the most abused cards in **Magic** history owed its popularity in Type 1 to the "tapped artifacts" rule. **Mana Crypt**, a promotional card from days when you could send away for specially made cards using coupons from the **Magic** novels (and for those wondering, **Mana Crypt** was associated with the novel *Final Sacrifice*, released in April 1995), used the coin-flipping mechanism as a deterrent to counteract its absurd ① mana cost. Without this drawback, the Crypt simply outshone many other mana producers, functioning as an improved **Sol Ring**. Because upkeep effects didn't trigger right away like they do now, you could skirt the coin flip. If you could find a way to tap it during your upkeep, the Crypt would "shut off" and the coin flip would never occur, preventing the possibility of you ever taking three damage. Many decks were built specifically around abusing this loophole. They would pack in several copies of **Jayemdae Tome**, **Disrupting Scepter**, **Mishra's Factory**, and other mana sinks (permanents which could use the mana from the Crypts), and then use the **Mana Crypt** mana to power these artifacts as soon as turn two! **Mana Crypt** was immensely popular before the artifact rules change, but faded away once the coin flip became mandatory under *Sixth Edition* rules.

THE BIG SIX

Sixth Edition rules (named after the release of the *Classic Sixth Edition* Base Set) changed the artifact rule. Now all artifacts worked the way they were worded regardless of tapped status. A small handful of cards were "left alone" in order to preserve some of their strategic value. **Winter Orb** was issued errata: "As long as Winter Orb is untapped, players can't untap more than one land during their untap steps." **Howling Mine** and **Static Orb** were also errataed, and then reprinted with the new wording. And **Urza's Destiny's Storage Matrix** was printed with the correct wording already on it.



CASUALTIES OF WAR

Traveling back to the **Zuran Orb** at the beginning of the article, I'll readily admit that having artifacts shut off when tapped led to some very interesting strategies. Bluffing was a little more relevant: "If I don't sacrifice some of my

lands to **Zuran Orb**, does he have enough damage in hand and on the board to kill me? Or is he just tapping the Orb to psyche me out?" In addition, you used to be able to build your deck to minimize the damage of negative artifacts upon yourself (such as **Ankh of Mishra**, **Dingus Egg**, or **Ensnaring Bridge**). But that isn't the case now. Additionally, the **Torture Chamber** "trick" no longer works; you can't store a counter on it and escape unscathed any longer. **Mana Crypt** is neutered. And you can no longer dodge **Black Vise** damage with a **Touchstone**.

So what's the upside to all this? The rules are a tight, more intuitive package. Tapped creatures deal combat damage (they didn't before), the stack resolves one effect at a time (it used to resolve all at once), damage prevention can be used any time, and combat damage goes on the stack. The artifacts rule shares a lot in common with tapped creatures rule; both of them were "in the rulebook" so to speak, but a player just picking up the game had no way of knowing this was the case, unless they dug for a small explanation. Since the goal of the *Sixth Edition* was to make **Magic's** rules less convoluted (while retaining the same level of strategy that had existed previous to changes), artifacts were suddenly allowed to function when tapped.

Strategically, new things happen now. **Tangle Wire** became such a powerhouse because it could tap itself and still affect the opponent. **Tsabo's Web** was a good countermeasure to the Wire because it could absorb one of the taps and also still work. **Phyrexian Furnace** got a lot better because now both abilities can be used in response to a **Disenchant**. **Magnetic Web** and **Sands of Time** (as well as **Diamond Kaleidoscope**) work as intended. **Triassic Egg** can be "hatched" a full turn sooner. And **Mana Vault** and **Tawnos's Coffin** don't brashly contradict the rules any longer.

But most importantly, artifacts as a whole make more sense now, both to new players and veterans alike.

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