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Damage on the Stack

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Uncommon Knowledge
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To say that I underestimated the response I'd get to my column "[Thanksgiving in Dominia](#)" is an understatement. Over 150 emails came pouring in from all corners of the world. Some people had just started playing **Magic** this year. Some had only played **Magic Online**. Others had been with the game since the Alpha set, while still others began with *Revised Edition*, quit, and then came back. But they all had one thing in common:

They love the new rules.

I received a grand total of two emails from people who said, "I don't like the new rules at all. I wish you'd left them the old way." Other than that, a dozen or so people lamented the loss of interrupts, wished trample hadn't changed (this wasn't a *Sixth Edition* change, it occurred with *Urza's Saga* -- don't worry, it'll get its own column someday), and missed banding (which wasn't a rules change per se, but the phasing out of a keyword mechanic).

I also received an email asking questions about *moi*. The person asked me, "How do you know all the rules so well?"

Experience (I've been playing for nearly ten years now, and I've been attending sanctioned tournaments -- the best places to be constantly bombarded by rules -- with certified judges nearly as long) and a willingness to always, always ask a knowledgeable source about a rules issue if I'm unclear about how a card (or the game itself) works.

"But Ben," you might reply, "I have absolutely no desire to attend tournaments. I just want to get together with my friends every week and have a good ol' time in Bubba Zeke's house, whipping up on his Thallid/Thrull deck with my *Ixidor/Camouflage* deck. I have no access to a high-level judge to help me with the rules, so I'm lost. Lost, I tell you!"

Ladies and Gentlemen, I entirely empathize with your situation. We at MagicTheGathering.com realize that there are times when you can't wrap your head around how a certain card works or how a combination of cards interact. That's why Aaron recruited level-4-certified-judge, rules guru, and all-around-nice-guy Rune Horvik all the way from Norway to become the sixth weekly columnist on our site. Rune heads up the "[Saturday School](#)" column each and every, well, Saturday. This puts one of the finest **Magic** judges in the world just an email away and gives you the amazing opportunity to ask him any rules question about **Magic**!

Note: Please, for the love of God, don't ask him what happens if you have *Humility* and two *Opalescences* in play. The answer is that this has never actually happened in a real game of **Magic**. If you claim this happened in one of your games, you're lying. It's been proven that making this occur causes a black hole to momentarily erupt and sweep the offending player away. I see that goatee! You're really evil Spock! Get away from me!

Now, on with the show . . .

SIXTH EDITION RULES, COMBAT STYLE

Two weeks ago we looked at some of the changes between *Fifth Edition* and *Sixth Edition*. If you haven't read that column yet, I suggest you take a look at it *before* continuing with this one. This week we're going to examine how combat changed with *Sixth Edition* rules. This time, we're starting at the beginning and working our way to the end of combat.

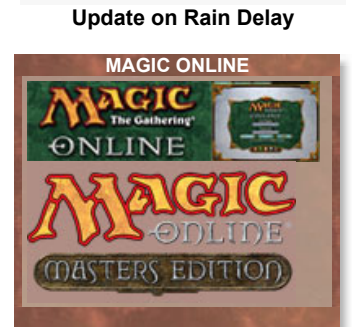
Handy Dandy Crib Sheet to See the Phase Changes Between Fifth Edition and Sixth Edition

Fifth Edition Style:

- C.1 -- The Attack Phase
- C.1.1 -- The attack phase follows a multistep procedure. The steps are:
 0. Declare intention to attack during the Main phase
 1. Beginning of combat
 2. Declare attackers
 3. Effects before blocking
 4. Declare blockers
 5. Effects after blocking
 6. Damage dealing
 7. End of combat

Sixth Edition Style:

- C.1.Ruling.3 -- The combat phase can be mapped in a longer form like this:
 1. Triggers on "beginning of combat," then chance for instants and abilities.
 2. Declare attackers.



3. Triggers on attack declaration, then chance for instants and abilities.
4. Declare blockers.
5. Triggers on block declaration, then chance for instants and abilities.
6. Assign combat damage (but don't deal it yet)
7. Chance for instants and abilities.
8. Deal combat damage.
9. Triggers on damage being dealt, then chance for instants and abilities.
10. Triggers on "end of combat," then chance for instants and abilities.

BACKING OUT OF YOUR ATTACK

Change: Tapping a creature before combat no longer backs you out of your attack.

Why: Oy, this one caused rules headaches. Back in *Fifth Edition*, the attack phase was incorporated as part of the main phase. In order to attack, you had to declare that you were ready to enter your attack phase. Once you entered your attack, you declared your attacking creatures and your opponent no longer had the opportunity to tap down your attackers with cards like *Icy Manipulator*. This led to some really awful timing issues because tapping a creature would knock the attacking player back to the main phase and allow him or her to play more spells/creatures/whatever before redeclaring his or her intention to attack! Under the new rules, there's an opportunity to tap down creatures in combat at the "beginning of combat" when triggers are going on the stack.

How it used to work:

- I declare my intention to enter my attack phase, with only *Squire* on the board.
- You say, "Wait a moment, chief! I'll use this here *Icy Manipulator* to tap your *Squire*, so it can't attack this turn!" (Because this is your last opportunity to use the *Icy* to tap my *Squire* before I attack.)
- By doing so, you've actually brought me back to my main phase! I now play *Ball Lightning* and redeclare my attack.
- You say, "Hold on, bubba! I'll play *Twiddle* and tap your *Ball Lightning*!"
- By doing so, you've once again brought me back to my main phase. This time, I play *Intruder Alarm*, then play *Lightning Elemental* (untapping my *Ball Lightning* and *Squire*) and attack you for eleven.
- No, that made no sense. But that's the way things used to work.

How it works now:

- I declare I'm going to my combat phase. I don't declare my attackers yet. You say, "Groovy! Go right ahead."
- The combat phase begins. The game checks to see if there are any triggers (which would be worded as "At the beginning of combat, do X").
- This gives you the opportunity, within the attack phase itself, to tap down my *Squire*. You do so.
- Combat continues as normal. I can't attack, and I would have had to play my *Ball Lightning* and *Lightning Elemental* before the attack in order to swing with them.

TAPPED CREATURES DEAL NO DAMAGE

Change: Under *Fifth Edition* rules, tapped blocking creatures dealt no damage in combat. Under *Sixth Edition* rules, they do.

Why: Much like the old "tapped artifacts shut off" rule, the rule about tapped creatures dealing no damage wasn't something a player would intuitively know just by looking at a card. It also made for less interesting games because combat often didn't become about who could outmaneuver who, it became a battle of who had the most *Icy Manipulators*.

How it used to work:

- I attack with *Master of Arms*.
- You block with *Elvish Archers*.
- I activate *Master of Arms*, tapping your *Elvish Archers*.
- We go to combat damage. Your tapped Archers deals no damage to my *Master of Arms*. My *Master of Arms* deals 2 damage to your Archers. Mine lives, and yours dies.

How it works now:

- I attack with *Master of Arms*.
- You block with *Elvish Archers*.
- I activate *Master of Arms*, tapping your *Elvish Archers*.
- We put first strike damage on the stack. Your tapped Archers deals 2 damage to my *Master of Arms*. My *Master of Arms* deals 2 damage to your Archers. They both die.

How it used to work:

- I attack with *Grizzly Bears*.
- You block with *Angelic Page*.
- You tap *Angelic Page* to make itself 2/2 after the block.
- We go to combat damage. My Bears deals 2 damage to your Page. Your tapped Page deals no damage to my Bears. Mine lives, yours dies.

How it works now:

- I attack with **Grizzly Bears**
- You block with **Angelic Page**
- You tap **Angelic Page** to make itself 2/2 after the block.
- We put damage on the stack. My Bears deals 2 damage to your Page. Your Page deals 2 damage to my Bears. They both die.

DAMAGE ON THE STACK

Change: Under the old rules, creatures simply dealt damage to each other, and the only spells and abilities you could play at that point were damage prevention and regeneration. Under the new rules, damage goes on the stack, and then both players have the opportunity to play spells and abilities.

Why: This addition to the combat phase opened up a huge realm of possibilities for strategic play. Before *Sixth Edition*, creatures pretty much whaled at each other and then went dancing merrily into the night. After *Sixth Edition*, the phrase "combat tricks" entered the vocabulary of **Magic** players overnight. Creatures that were once woefully under-equipped for the field of battle suddenly became juggernauts.

How it used to work:

- I attack with my **Hill Giant**.
- You block with your two **Gray Ogres**.
- I assign 3 damage to one of your Ogres. Your Ogres assign 4 damage to my **Hill Giant**.
- You have no damage-prevention effects. The Ogre dies, and my Giant dies.

How it works now:

- I attack with my **Hill Giant**
- You block with your two **Gray Ogres**.
- We put damage on the stack. I assign 3 damage to one of your Ogres. You assign 4 damage to my **Hill Giant**.
- We now have an additional opportunity to play instants and abilities. You play **Unsummon**, returning to your hand the Ogre I assigned damage to.
- The Ogre on the board lives. The other Ogre is in your hand. My Giant is dealt 4 damage and dies.

How it used to work:

- I attack with **Looming Shade**.
- You block with **Psychatog**.
- I pump my **Shade** six times, so it's a 7/7.
- You discard four cards and remove four cards in your graveyard from the game to make your **Psychatog** 7/8.
- Barring damage-prevention effects, my Shade deals 7 damage to your **Psychatog**. Your **Psychatog** deals 7 damage to my Shade, destroying the Shade.

How it works now:

- I attack with **Looming Shade**. You block with **Psychatog**.
- I pump my Shade once to make it a 2/2.
- You pitch a card to your Tog to make it 2/3.
- With no further spells or abilities, we put damage on the stack.
- I pump my shade again to make it 3/3.
- Damage is dealt. My Shade and your Tog each take 2 damage, so they both live.

In the last example, you can see that I'm baiting you with the Shade to get cards out of your hand and/or graveyard. Under *Fifth Edition* rules, I couldn't pump a little, then pump after damage to save my creature. Under *Sixth Edition* rules, this exchange becomes more "cat and mouse" and less "let's play chicken."

DAMAGE PREVENTION AND REGENERATION

Change: Damage prevention and regeneration used to be a subphase in combat, after damage was dealt. Because both the effects can be played at any time these days, this part of combat no longer exists.

Why: Back in the day, you couldn't regenerate a creature unless it needed to be regenerated then and there (through damage or a destroy effect). Once damage-prevention shields and regeneration shields became a part of **Magic**, this rule went away.

How it used to work:

- I attack with **Su-Chi** and **Soldevi Steam Beast**.
- You play **Shatter**, destroying my **Su-Chi**. I get four mana in my mana pool.
- My Steam Beast deals 4 damage to you. Because it hasn't been marked to go to the graveyard, I can't use the four mana from the **Su-Chi** to set up two regeneration shields.
- I lose 4 life to mana burn.

How it works now:

- I attack with **Su-Chi** and **Soldevi Steam Beast**.
- You play **Shatter**, destroying my **Su-Chi**. I get four mana in my mana pool.

- I put two regeneration shields on my Steam Beast, using this four mana. Damage on the stack, you take four.

Note: Unless the Steam Beast actually takes damage and/or gets destroyed, the regeneration shields sit there until end of turn. Putting a regeneration shield on a creature doesn't automatically regenerate it; it just makes it so the creature will regenerate if it needs to.

A LITTLE STORY

A few people emailed me asking how they could visualize "damage on the stack" working when it involves two wizards and their minions fighting it out. So included below is a little story about damage on the stack.

Mighty Wizard A: Ha ha! I have summoned my **Giant Octopus** to battle you!

Mighty Wizard B: Ho ho! It will have to contend with my defender, **Minotaur Explorer!**

Mighty Wizard A: He he! See how I send my Octopus across the mountains to attack you!

Mighty Wizard B: Ah ha! See how I send my **Minotaur Explorer** boldly where no Minotaur has gone before, in order to intercept yon attacking land-bound Octopus!

Mighty Wizard A: Avast ye land lubber! Your Minotaur has inflicted grievous wounds upon my Octopus. I will **Unsummon** him to a foreign land before he dies so that he can receive the finest in medical coverage from a team of licensed trained technicians.

Mighty Wizard B: And I believe it's not Mr. Binky the Minotaur's time to go. I will use this **Healing Salve** to heal his wounds, saving him from otherwise tentacle-inflicted death.

In other words, imagine that the two creatures wound each other (damage on the stack) but don't actually keel over dead from their wounds immediately (damage resolves).

Next week:

"I'll break my staff,

Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,

And deeper than did ever plummet sound

I'll drown my book."

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*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by StarCityGames.com, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



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