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Goodbye To The Lizards

Daniel Myers & The *Magic Online Team*
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May 16, 2003 marks the end of an era. Leaping Lizard Software, developers of *Magic: The Gathering® Online*, will be leaving the ongoing work on the game in the hands of the Wizards of the Coast development team. While we'll miss our East Coast partners, we all knew the day would come that everything would be brought in-house, and the team's been preparing for the handoff since the beginning of the year.

So, with that in mind, let's take a look at where we've been, where we are, and where we're going.

The Past

In the summer of 1999, Chris Green, CEO of Leaping Lizard Software, Inc., proposed the idea of creating an online version of the *Magic®* game to Wizards of the Coast. As fate would have it, Wizards was already thinking along these lines, so decided to take a look at Chris's development crew.

By the end of the summer, Bill Dugan, then head of Electronic Media for Wizards, was given a viewing of the demo of what would eventually become *Magic Online*. After a weekend of furious programming, Leaping Lizard had a server and single client ready. While the game only included basic lands, *Pestilence*, *Pouncing Jaguar*, *Rancor*, and *Drudge Skeletons*, it proved that Leaping Lizard might be able to do what others thought nearly impossible -- translate the intricacies of the *Magic* game into an online format.

After some negotiations and many *Magic* games, Leaping Lizard Software was brought on to develop the game with Wizards of the Coast. Anyone with the moxy (or is that moxen?) to actually beat Bill Rose, then Director of R&D, and tell him they could make the online version happen deserved a chance.

And what a result!

I first saw the alpha version in April 2001, when I was an editor working on the *Magic* and *Magic Online* games. I was stunned -- and not just because my first game was a draft that paired me against Randy Buehler. By that time, Wizards was getting ready to let the first testers on board, with Leagues and Tournaments already available.

The official beta testing began that summer and continued for a full year. During that time the game was refined, sets were added, and we all became addicted to playing *Magic* games twenty-four hours a day. Ah, for the days I was able to enter the draft queues.

The Present

Then came the nerve-wracking day of June 24, 2002, when the Wizard and Lizard team released *Magic Online* to the world. After three years, seven sets, and several million lines of code, all we could do was hope the game was well received. While the whole team loved the game, we all realized that it had taken huge leaps in thought and programming to achieve our goal.

It took both Wizards of the Coast and Leaping Lizard Software to accomplish everything. For, while the Wizards concentrated on making the idea fly, the Lizards were busy making code go places people thought it would never go.

The scope of *Magic Online* was of mammoth proportions. Even given the difficulty of creating an interface that allowed people to play *Magic* games versus players all over the world, it had to be a robust enough system to allow the addition of hundreds of new cards every year. Leaping Lizard's groundbreaking work showed that we had the right crew working with us.

Magic Online is the first program to consistently and accurately translate the interactions between individual *Magic* cards and the game rules. Many people thought this task alone was insurmountable, but the Lizards proved them wrong. Not only was it possible, but possible to do well.

In a world of online strategy and roleplaying games, *Magic Online* is the first truly successful eTCG. And we're not willing to rest on our laurels now.

The Future

From the beginning, this has been a cooperative effort between the Wizards and the Lizards. And, for the past few months, the Wizards development team has been working with Leaping Lizard to prepare for the handoff.

The Wizards team is hitting the ground running with the advent of *Magic Online 2.0*. While we continue to refine the code, we're also implementing new play and tournament formats, changing the trading interface, and



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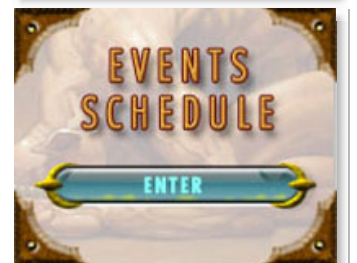
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improving the newbie experience.

As if that wasn't enough, the *Eighth Edition*TM set will be the first set produced entirely in-house at Wizards. Which, of course, also includes a change in the **Magic** cardface. There's certainly a lot of work to be done, but that's no different from all our past experience with **Magic Online**. Fortunately, the foundation has already been laid for everything to come.

As with the **Magic** game itself, **Magic Online** continues to grow and develop. And, like a well-loved block, it's now time for the Leaping Lizard crew to rotate out. As we all know, this brings changes to the game while leaving us with fond memories of the past.

If you come across one of the folks with a lizard icon as you wander to your next game, take a moment to thank them for the work they've done and for helping Wizards of the Coast bring **Magic Online** into being. Their innovation, dedication, and sheer persistence are at the heart of one of the coolest additions to the **Magic** family.

On behalf of the **Magic Online** Team, I'd like to thank Chris "chrisg" Green, Elaine "elaine" Albers, Jon "EIDiablo" Darby, Sergey "dsm" Datskovskiy, David "djens" Jens, Tom "tom" Kemp, Gary "evil" Skinner, and Jon "Outlaw" Young for the work they've done over the years. My, what a long, strange trip it's been. Glad you were with us for the ride.

Sincerely,
The **Magic Online** Team



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