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# Clans & Communication Managers



Daniel Myers · Inside Magic Online  
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## Last Week's Crash

As I mentioned in my announcement about last week's crash, we're going to have to make some adjustments to clan policies.

The topic of the number of inactive clans in *Magic Online* has come up with the team several times in the past. The dev team expressed the need to prune the number of "dead" clans in the system occasionally. Unfortunately, our attention has been focused on other issues and we never got around to deciding exactly what we were going to do about it. That lack of decision caught up with us last Thursday.

So, we need to remove the excess of clans—both one big initial sweep and on an ongoing basis. We also, however, want to make sure that those of you who have active clans get to keep them.

What do we consider a dead clan? The definition we came up with last week is any clan with less than two members. Basically, if a clan has one member (or zero, in some cases) it's not an active clan.

So, during the downtime on Thursday, March 4, we'll be cleaning house in the **Clans** room. Every clan with fewer than two members when we take the servers down will be deleted from the system. How many clans will this remove from *Magic Online*? As of last week, approximately 4200 clans had one or zero members.



Like I said, we've been thinking about this issue off-and-on for some time.

After we come back up again, we'll start accepting applications for new clans. However, before you all go nuts realizing that "AllYourBaseAreBelongToUs" is available again, let me tell you about the *regular* pruning of the system.

Each week we'll be running the same script during downtime. That means if your brand-new clan has only one member in it on any given Thursday morning, it'll go away. That goes for *any* clan in the system—even if it was created right before the system comes down. We don't have an automated "clock" on how long a clan has been in existence, so this is how we have to do it. So, if you *really* want your clan to stay around, make sure you've got someone in it with you.

## Communication Policy

The first thing you should know about the new *Magic Online* communication policy is that it's not something I just started working on. Okay, I take that back—it's something I recently started working on, but it's been in development by the *Magic Online* team for a while.

The idea of fleshing out a communication policy dates back to the launch of Version 2.0 last summer. Unfortunately, the problems we had brought the need into crystal-clear focus for that

the **Magic Online** team. While we had the Customer Service team to respond to player issues, our proactive side sorely needed to be fleshed out.

Actually, the team's been working on this since the fall. It was during the development of the communication policy that it became clear one player was missing. We didn't have any one person whose responsibility was to be a gatekeeper for information going out to our players. Probably more than any other issue, not having a single messenger to the community has caused us problems. What **Magic Online** needed was a communication manager.

Evidently, as the team worked to define this role, my name kept coming up. So, it was the communication policy that brought me back to work on **Magic Online**. I now have a few items that it's now my responsibility to fill in. They also happen to be some of the more visible items as far as the players are concerned.

While everything's not written out and signed off yet, there are some items that are pretty much set in stone. Here's what we have so far.

## Gatekeeper

Probably the most important part of the communication policy is that information from the **Magic Online** team to the players has to go through the Communication Manager. (That would be me.) Among other things, I'm responsible for making sure the information that needs to get out does, and what shouldn't go out doesn't. And, because I can't personally keep track of everyone on the team, it requires that I make sure we have a well-defined and enforced communication policy.

Thankfully, the rest of the team made a great start on deciding how things were going to be handled before I came back on board. Most of that has to do with our main source of direct contact with all of you be through Customer Service. That includes both emailing or calling the folks in CS or Tech Support and having the Adepts online to help players. That also means that things outside of direct customer support need some polishing up.

While I'm going to keep the flow as open as possible, understand that there are some things we just won't talk about and not everyone on the team is supposed to be telling players what's going on.

Do we want to keep team members from chatting with players? No, not at all. But we do want to keep players from getting conflicting (and sometimes incorrect) information. I understand that it's cool to talk with the folks inside and I'd like to make sure you continue to have the opportunity to do so.

However, when it comes to what's being worked on, we need to have official channels for you to get that information from. So, unless it comes from me or appears in the Announcements folder or on the website, it's not official. Any other source should be taken with a grain of salt.

## Message Boards

Which leads to probably the biggest change you're going to be seeing—and, to a certain extent, have already seen. You aren't going to find many posts on the Message Boards from the crew here at Wizards. I know some of you will see this as less communication instead of more. Less or not, it's better that we don't have team members addressing threads directly.

We've had to learn some hard lessons about what messages can get out to players if we just let team members talk. We've had occasions when a theoretical discussion about an interesting idea gets turned into a public declaration that a feature is coming soon. Then, if we don't come through with it, the community sees it as yet another broken promise.

Another reason we don't want team members responding directly to threads is that some players might not find answers they're looking for. Just last week we had a crash thread that a team member responded to. While some players who were reading the thread got information about the crash, other players were left in the dark. In general, it's better to keep that information to the

Announcements folder so you all know exactly where you'll find the information you're looking for.

The Message Boards are a nice informational tool, but they're horrible for two-way communication between the **Magic Online** team and the community. We can post information for you to read and you can post comments and questions we can read. But trying to respond in a timely basis this way is too inefficient.

Eventually, you're only going to see postings from team members in the **Announcements** section. The only comments you'll find from team members elsewhere will be fun or personal comments done on their own time—not as “official” statements from the **Magic Online** team. By keeping our messages to that folder and the website, you'll know exactly where to look for important information.

Does that mean we won't be reading the boards? Heck, no. The Message Boards are the best place to get an overall picture for what's going on with the community. It's where I get most of my ideas for what my column should be about and what items need to go in front of the Steering Committee.

The boards are an integral part of the **Magic Online** community. You can find a lot of valuable firsthand information from other players who've been through what you have. I encourage you all to use them or at least read them. But, if you need help with a problem, contact [Customer Service](#). And, if you want the skinny on what's going on, check my column or the [Announcements folder](#).

## Downtime Reporting

Given the stability issues we have with **Magic Online**, we're not going to make announcements about every downtime that occurs. The game is designed to “right itself” if there's a crash. So, if **Magic Online** goes down and comes back up without anyone here having to do anything, there's nothing to report.

There are two times I want to make sure we get information out to you: repeated bounces and extended downtimes.

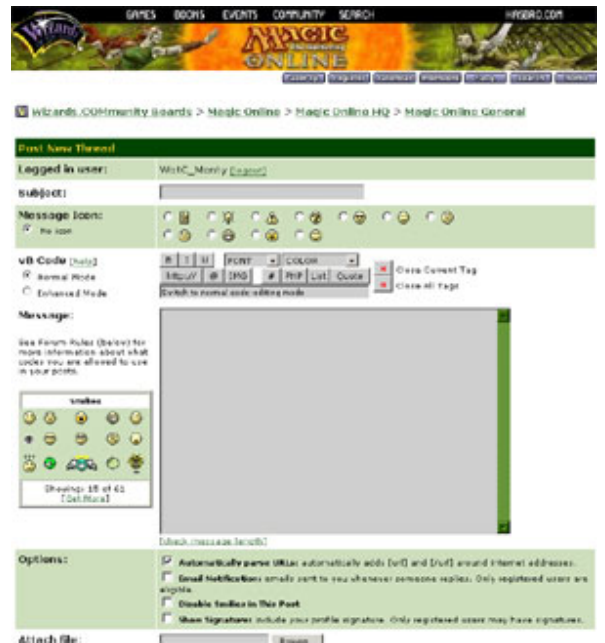
Repeated bounces are when the server goes down, tries to come up, but goes down again after players can log on to **Magic Online**. Granted, when this happens several times in succession, it usually ends in an extended downtime anyway. However, we'll also be getting information out to you if it does this over a period of time, as well. For example, if the game is going down once an hour for several hours running.

An extended downtime is when the server crashes and doesn't allow players to log in for a half hour or more. While the time period is somewhat arbitrary, it's long enough that we'd expect the team to have brought the system back up already.

This doesn't necessarily mean you'll get anything *during* the downtime. I'd like to get to a point that when one of these situations occurs, someone is at least available to post a note to the Announcements folder on the Message Boards. We're still ironing that process out, but we're getting there.

That's not everything that's going on with the communication policy, but it's the meat of what I'm trying to iron out. And, as time goes on, we'll continue to adjust what we do to try and make things better for you.

## The Nominees Are: Zur's Weirding, Mindslaver, And...



...you guessed it: **Vedalken Engineer**. In honor of the *Darksteel* release and the Academy Awards, I present the "Toughest Card To Program So Far" award.

Yes, this innocuous little creature created some headaches for Alan. He still hasn't decided whether **Zur's Weirding** was worse or not. (**Zur's Weirding** caused about 30 late changes to other cards in *Magic Online*.) His first attempt to compile the Engineer code resulted in 184 bugs.

The issue is that, until now, *Magic Online* hasn't had a card that generated mana with restrictions on its use. So, **Vedalken Engineer** required its own personal mana pool. Making the mana pool into a two-dimensional array caused all kinds of fun during programming.

Once Alan finally got the code to compile correctly, the resulting bugs were, to say the least, pretty interesting. At one point or another during testing:

- White mana was no longer required to play spells or abilities. Alan told R&D that he'd single-handedly improved how white performed against the other four **Magic** colors. (As it turned out, he'd commented out a section of code and missed one line. Commenting that line out fixed the issue.)
- Any time **Vedalken Engineer's** ability was used in a game with more than one player, it would crash the game. (It worked just fine in solitaire, however.)
- When the Engineer's ability was used to pay to put an artifact into play, the cost to play it reduced by half the remaining cost each time you added mana.
- If you had mana from the Engineer sitting in your pool and attempted to cast a non-artifact spell, you immediately lost the Engineer's mana.
- *Magic Online* would let you click on any color mana in your pool when paying for a spell—even if it didn't match the colors required. In fact, you could even select a color from your mana pool even if there wasn't any mana of that color in it. (Then again, it rejected the attempt if you *didn't* select the right colors. It just waited until you were done to tell you.)



Now it's time to peruse the *Fifth Dawn* cardlist to see what else is coming down the pike for our programmers.

## In The Meantime

I'm not sure if I'll have information on what's going through testing for my next installment, but I'll get it to you as soon as I can. If I can't, I already know there are a few other issues you'd like me to get to. I'll see what I can do.

I hope you enjoy the [Darksteel release events](#).



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