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A New Age of Age Counters

Magic Arcana
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Cumulative upkeep, last seen in the *Weatherlight* set, has spent nine long years on the bench. Its return in *Coldsnap* heralds a new age of cumulative upkeep trickiness not seen before in **Magic**: what if cumulative upkeep were not just a necessary cost, but also a way of keeping track of unique new effects? To see these new *Coldsnap* twists in action, we must first investigate the concept of the age counter.

From the [Comprehensive Rules](#):

502.13. Cumulative Upkeep

502.13a Cumulative upkeep is a triggered ability that imposes an increasing cost on a permanent. "Cumulative upkeep [cost]" means "At the beginning of your upkeep, put an age counter on this permanent, then sacrifice this permanent unless you pay [cost] for each age counter on it."

Cumulative upkeep has been worded like this for years now, and the Oracle text of cards like *Cyclone* and *Heart of Bogardan* have taken advantage of the usefulness of age counters to template their abilities.

Coldsnap takes this to the extreme.

- How'd you like a creature that grows huger every time you pay the upkeep? What about giving that ability to any of your creatures?
- How'd you like to gain a bunch of life or recruit a bunch of owls if you lose your fatty? (One of the most powerful examples of this was *Vexing Sphinx*, [previewed over at Star City](#) last week.)
- How'd you like to fetch a creature from your library or draw cards every turn you pay the upkeep?



It's not just *Coldsnap*'s attention to age counters that hold the new twists to cumulative upkeep. There are also some pretty oddball "costs"—again turning the notion of cumulative upkeep as a cost on its head.

- How'd you like to steal lands as a way to pay for a dark lord?
- How'd you like a way to use cumulative upkeep to hose your opponent's graveyard-recursion strategies?
- How'd you like an undercosted trampling fatty (three of the most joyous words in **Magic**) who eventually stacks up too many +1/+1 counters to stick around?
- How'd you like to throw caution to the wind, and play with fire?

That's one way to make cost/benefit analysis easier—when costs are benefits.



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