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Power-Level-Errata-B-Gone

Aaron Forsythe
 Latest Developments
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Scott Johns mentioned in his article [last Saturday](#) that the latest Oracle update was going to reflect some serious changes with regard to retraction of previous power-level errata. He was right. I'll go over what was done, why, and what you might expect from us in the future.

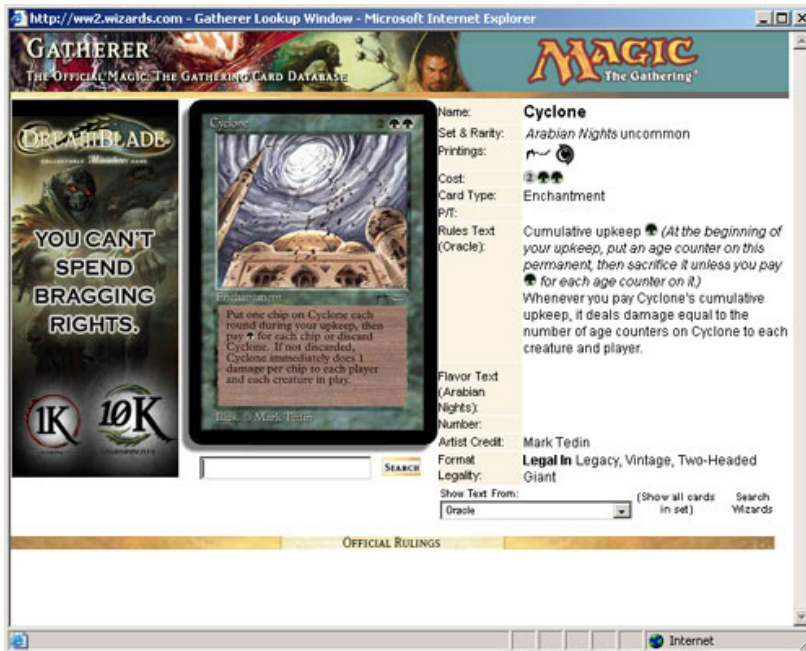
Quick Primer: What is Oracle?

Over time, **Magic's** rules have been overhauled several times, and have become much more precise than they were in the game's early years. As such, many older cards' wordings are too ambiguous for modern game play, or simply do not work correctly. Additionally, some cards have received minor functional changes from printing to printing, and the most recent printing supersedes all previous ones. In a few rare cases, cards have been issued with incorrect wordings.

In order to make sure that two strangers meeting in a tournament or other **Magic** game will be playing all cards using the same wordings, the Oracle Card Reference was created.

From the official Oracle web page: *"The Oracle card reference lists the text of every **Magic: The Gathering** card, including rulings, errata, and all functional changes. The card entry listed in these sets take precedence over any previous rulings and errata."*

The best place to view the information contained in Oracle is through our very own card database—[Gatherer](#). You can access Gatherer via the link at the top right of the [magicthegathering.com](#) home page. Of course, the easiest way to access it is to click on any of the hyperlinked card names or images that appear anywhere on the site, like this one: [Cyclone](#).



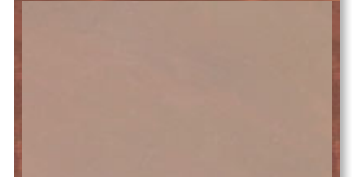
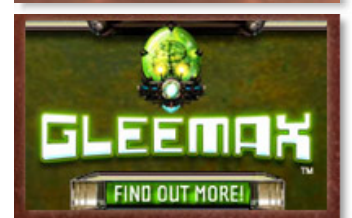
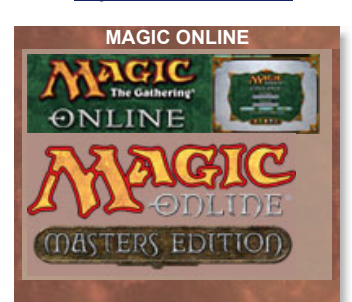
If you clicked on that card link, you would open a window that looks like the one above. On the left is a picture of the card **Cyclone**, complete with its card wording "as written." On the right is the card's "Oracle text," which is the wording as we'd print it today—and the wording you should be using if you ever play this card; in other words, that is Cyclone's "current official wording." (Isn't **Cyclone** a neat example? It was first printed in *Arabian Nights*, long before the *Ice Age* set came out, but its ability exactly mimics cumulative upkeep. The current wording simply gives the card cumulative upkeep, and hence it uses age counters instead of chips.)

You can type any card name into the search box in the Gatherer window to see the Oracle wording of the card.

Why Did We Make This Latest Batch of Changes?



Final Wrap-up Top 8 Video Archives



Over the years, the sheer number of rules revisions and changes of rules managers the game has undergone—as well as unintended consequences that arise when new mechanics and card abilities are unleashed each set—has led to cards slipping through the cracks. As the evil genius currently in charge of maintaining Oracle, **Magic** rules manager and former cult-leading columnist Mark Gottlieb is a strong, strong believer that cards should have functionality that matches their *printed intent* as often as possible.

To that end, Mark rather famously changed the functionality of **Time Vault** right out from under the then-popular **Time Vault-Flame Fusillade** combo, as detailed in [this Ask Wizards](#).

Making changes in Oracle is, unfortunately, not terribly scientific. The bulk of Gottlieb's job duties are tied to making sure the rules and wordings associated with the hundreds of new cards we make each year are working properly, which leaves precious little time for the combing of thousands of older cards looking for anomalies. What usually happens is an editor, developer, judge, tournament organizer, or rules guru brings an issue regarding inconsistencies on older cards up to Gottlieb, who then adds it to a list of "Oracle issues." Prior to each new set's release, a bunch of us meet to discuss all of Gottlieb's collected issues and weigh in on how he proposes to solve them. After all that, cards get updated in Oracle and the cycle begins anew.

With the big change to **Time Vault**, many of us in R&D started to hear from judges and players—not necessarily bemoaning that particular change, but asking why we weren't being consistent with regard to other cards that no longer matched printed intent. (Kudos to Internet columnist and Vintage players extraordinaire [Stephen Menendian](#) and [Rich Shay](#) for being the loudest and most rational voices in the crowd.) After talking to Gottlieb and a few of my other coworkers, I came to realize that the answer was simply that no one had ever brought it up before. With that, a whole swath of previously-errata'd cards were added to Gottlieb's "to-do list." Monday's update contained the fruits of our subsequent labors.

I fully believe that the original power-level errata changes were made by our predecessors with the best intentions. But times change, and with them new policies are implemented. This is not an easy task, and we anticipate some resistance from within the community, but I believe this is the correct strategy for the long-term health of the game.

What Were the Changes?

Goblin Snowman – The most important card of all. Actually, his errata is very minor—his blocking ability was changed from a static ability (starting with "if") to a triggered ability (starting with "when"). He's pretty darned inconsequential, as was included on the list in Scott's article more for laughs than anything else.

Current text:

Whenever **Goblin Snowman** blocks, prevent all combat damage that would be dealt to and dealt by it this turn.

☞: **Goblin Snowman** deals 1 damage to target creature it's blocking.

Balance – For some reason the order in which things were "balanced" changed in Oracle compared to how the printed versions read. The order has been restored to "lands, cards, creatures." Unfortunately, that means the text on the limited issue premium promo **Balance** cards is wrong.

Current text:

Except the player who controls the fewest lands, each player sacrifices lands until all players control the same number of lands as the player who controls the fewest. Players discard cards the same way, then sacrifice creatures the same way.

Basalt Monolith – This card had textbook power-level errata previously; it basically said "you can't use **Basalt Monolith** to untap itself." I'm not sure if this clause was invented to stop combos with **Power Artifact** or the old wording of **Relic Bind**, but either way it was bad news. It is removed, and **Power Artifact** fans across the globe can rejoice!

Current text:

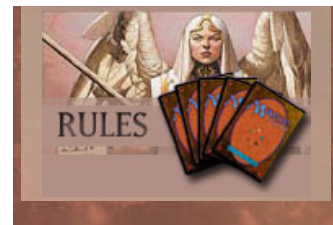
Basalt Monolith doesn't untap during your untap step.

☞: Untap **Basalt Monolith**.

☞: Add ☞ to your mana pool.

Celestial Dawn – Somewhere down the line, **Celestial Dawn** received errata such that if you played **Dark Ritual** while it was in play, you'd get ☞☞☞. Or if you tapped a **Sky Diamond** while it was in play, you'd get ☞. That isn't how the printed card worked, and that isn't how the card works any longer.

Current text:



Lands you control are Plains.

Nonland cards you own that aren't in play, spells you control, and nonland permanents you control are white.

You may spend white mana as though it were mana of any color. You may spend other mana only as though it were colorless mana.

Cloud of Faeries / Great Whale / Palinchron / Peregrine Drake / Treachery – More classic power-level errata. These cards “broke” shortly after they were printed in both Standard and Extended when combined with cards that put them into play “at a discount,” like **Aluren** and **Recurring Nightmare**. Instead of banning the cards, the rules team at the time issued errata on all of them that said “if you played it from your hand.” That has now been removed. If they “break” again in Vintage or Legacy, we'll do the proper thing and ban or restrict them.

Current text (**Cloud of Faeries**):

Flying

When **Cloud of Faeries** comes into play, untap up to two lands.

Cycling **2** (2, *Discard this card: Draw a card.*)

Drop of Honey – When **Legends** was released in 1994, **Drop of Honey** received errata to become targeted, matching **The Abyss**. The reasons for this change are suspect. The card has been targeted in Oracle for over a decade, but under current policy we felt the need to revert it to closer to its printed text. Now the card is good *against* creatures like **Troll Ascetic** and **Voice of Duty** as opposed to being good *with* them.

Current text:

At the beginning of your upkeep, destroy the creature with the least power. It can't be regenerated.

If two or more creatures are tied for least power, you choose one. When there are no creatures in play, sacrifice **Drop of Honey**.

Enduring Renewal – The printed wording on **Enduring Renewal** has a triggered ability that returns creature cards that go to your graveyard from play back to your hand. Inexplicably, the Oracle text had been changed long ago to make that ability a replacement effect instead, meaning anti-graveyard cards like **Phyrexian Furnace** and **Leyline of the Void** would be useless against **Enduring Renewal**. With this update, we reverted it back to a triggered ability.

Current text:

Play with your hand revealed.

If you would draw a card, reveal the top card of your library instead. If it's a creature card, put it into your graveyard. Otherwise, draw a card.

Whenever a creature is put into your graveyard from play, return it to your hand.

Ertai's Familiar – **Ertai's Familiar** falls into a very touchy subset of cards—those that had their functionality altered by rules changes. If a card gets significantly altered unintentionally by a rules change, we are going to attempt to preserve “intended functionality” by tweaking the wording on the card (this is where “substance” came from). **Ertai's Familiar**, for example, stopped triggering when it phased out when we changed the phasing rules. Because that stripped away the entire purpose of the card, we altered the template to accommodate the initial intent.

Current text:

Phasing

When **Ertai's Familiar** phases out or leaves play, put the top three cards of your library into your graveyard.

☠: Until your next upkeep, **Ertai's Familiar** can't phase out.

Intuition – The printed **Intuition** targets an opponent, just as **Gifts Ungiven** does. Like **Enduring Renewal**, an inexplicable change was made to the card long ago in Oracle—the targeting was removed in favor of simply choosing. We reverted the card back to the original printed functionality. Of course, like **Balance**, that means the premium promo versions of the card now have outdated wording.

Current text:

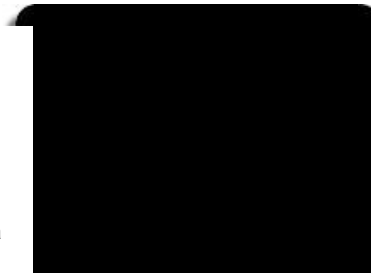
Search your library for any three cards and reveal them. Target opponent chooses one. Put that card into your hand and the rest into your graveyard. Then shuffle your library.

Iridescent Drake – When this card was first legal in Standard, an infinite combo deck sprung up involving it, **Abduction**, and **Altar of Dementia**. Instead of banning one of the cards, power-level errata was issued for the Drake making its comes-into-play ability trigger only when played from your hand. We are removing that restriction.

Current text:

Flying

When **Iridescent Drake** comes into play, put target Aura card from a graveyard into play attached to **Iridescent Drake**. (*You control that*



Aura.)


Karmic Guide – See **Iridescent Drake**, although the combo this time was simply **Altar of Dementia** and two **Karmic Guides**.

Current text:

Flying; protection from black; echo (*At the beginning of your next upkeep after this permanent comes under your control, sacrifice it unless you pay its mana cost.*)
When **Karmic Guide** comes into play, return target creature card from your graveyard to play.

Priest of Gix – Another guy that had the “played from hand” errata, **Priest of Gix** originally did crazy things when combined with **Jet Medallion** and graveyard recursion in addition to being more or less “free” in beatdown decks. Like the two cards above him, the Priest has had the “from hand” clause removed.


Current text:

When **Priest of Gix** comes into play, add  to your mana pool.

Time Vault – The big one. Our current wording makes some assumptions about printed intent, that’s for sure. The printed text is slightly ambiguous about how untapping **Time Vault** is supposed to work. The key question we asked ourselves was, “When this card was made, was the intent that it be incredibly easy to skirt the drawback?” We went with “No.” Does that make the card feel weak? Yes, but we feel that initial intent is captured, regardless of how people have been playing the card for the past several years. Does that mean it is impossible to abuse? No. While **Flame Fusillade** is no longer a combo with the Vault, there is another little-used **Ravnica** block rare that does crazy things with it. I’m sure you’ll hear more about it in the future...

So why did **Time Vault** get this errata when its Alpha brother **Mana Vault** did not, despite their similar printed wordings? The truth is that **Mana Vault** was printed more recently with different wording. Now that the majority of **Mana Vaults** in existence have printed wording that works—regardless of what the initial Alpha intent was—we are beholden to that functionality, and **Mana Vault**’s Oracle wording is the modern equivalent of that.

Time Vault current text:

Time Vault comes into play tapped.
If **Time Vault** would become untapped, instead choose one -- untap **Time Vault** and you skip your next turn; or **Time Vault** remains tapped.
: Take an extra turn after this one.

Should any of these cards prove degenerate in the older formats (Vintage and/or Legacy), we’ll do what should have been done in the first place—ban or restrict them. Do I anticipate having to do this? Honestly, I have no idea. That’s on you, the players.

Other changes occurred in this latest Oracle update; most of them deal with converting **Ice Age** block cards to match the current “snow” supertype templating, and updating the wording and creature types of cards that appear in the **Coldsnap** theme decks. Minor changes were also made to the cards **Flash Foliage** and **Ice Cauldron**.

What Didn’t Change...

Other cards were talked about and left alone. Granted, this doesn’t mean these cards will be left alone forever, but in most cases we have passed judgment on them and are comfortable with our decisions.

Waylay / Thawing Glaciers – These cards had their intended functionality disrupted by a rules change. If we’re willing to “leave intent intact” by making cards better (the aforementioned **Ertai’s Familiar** and **Armor of Thorns** with substance), then we have to be willing to “leave intent intact” by making them worse as well. The end-of-turn phase didn’t exist as we know it when these cards were printed.

Lotus Vale / Mox Diamond / Phyrexian Dreadnought – More cards that had their functionality disrupted by a rules change. The intent of these cards was always that the costs had to be paid before the cards could be used, and we want to maintain that.

Lion’s Eye Diamond – Another rules change casualty. You used to have to have all the necessary mana in your pool before announcing a spell or ability, meaning the Diamond could never be used to play a spell. Once the rules changed allowing spells to be announced before costs were paid, we felt it important to maintain the Diamond’s initial functionality.



Interdict – Because this card switched from an interrupt to an instant, no reasonable errata would ever capture its printed intent. That said, we should probably revert back to the printed wording in the next update.

Zodiac Dragon / Rukh Egg – Printed intent was that these cards only worked from play. “From play” is merely clarification. If it didn't say that, they would still only work from play since that's the default. The text was added because the cards are (obviously) a bit confusing without it, and this is the modern template for this clause.

Parallax Wave / Parallax Tide – Currently these cards will not return themselves to play if removed by their own effect thanks to weird interactions with **Opalescence**. This is intentional. Whenever a broad consensus of players interpret a card to work in a certain way, it should work in that way. The Parallax cards, as printed, had a loophole that was quite counter-intuitive so we issued “stealth errata” to make them work the way everyone believed they worked. Granted, the Oracle wording is very ugly and it is unclear exactly how a decision like this fits into our current philosophy (certainly not cleanly). I expect these cards to be discussed at length again in the future; maybe they'll change, maybe they won't.



Relic Bind – Relic Bind was given power-level errata at one point after it released in *Legends* preventing it from enchanting your own artifacts. Normally we would repeal this, but the card was reprinted with this “fixed” wording in *Fourth Edition*. Now that the majority of printed Relic Binds have the new text, we are beholden to that text as the current “printed intent” of the card.

That's That

I hope this (a) makes sense, and (b) sits well with all of you. Oracle is a living, breathing document that will change over and over again as we continue adding to and refining **Magic's** rules. Hopefully now we have a clear vision guiding our hands.

In closing, if you haven't voted in [this week's Selecting Tenth Edition promo](#), do so now... and click on the “Lightning Island” art from *Urza's Saga*. That is my favorite land of all time, and I'd love to see it come back in Tenth.

Last Week's Poll

Were you playing Magic when the <i>Ice Age</i> set was released?		
No.	6064	34.1%
Yes, on-and-off since then.	5990	33.6%
No, but I have since acquired a decent number of <i>Ice Age</i> and <i>Alliances</i> cards.	3006	16.9%
Yes, I've been playing continually since then.	2247	12.6%
Yes, but I don't play any more.	496	2.8%
Total	17803	100.0%

Two good pieces of news here. One, over half of you are at least familiar with the material that *Coldsnap* was based on. Two, we received some customer data a while back that said our average player had been in the game for seven years, and these numbers support that, with just under half of you having played in the time of *Ice Age*, which was out over seven years ago. You are quite the bunch of veterans!

This Week's Poll

Do you agree with our removal of power-level errata?

Yes, great job.

In theory but not in execution.

No, quit changing things.

I don't care.

Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.



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