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Beginning At the End

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Making Magic
 Monday, August 28, 2006



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Welcome to End of Turn Week! You heard me right. This week is dedicated to the second to last step of the turn (found, of course, in the fifth and final phase, the one and only End Phase). Why do we have a week dedicated to a step, not even an entire phase? I'm very eager to tell you. I even wrote five paragraphs about it, but then something happened - I realized that I couldn't share them with you. Not yet anyway. Why? I can't even tell you why I can't tell you.

But I'm not a heartless man. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm hiding the offending paragraphs for now, and later in the week when I'm allowed to say what I cannot say today, Scott will be kind enough to unlock the link below. (And if you don't want to constantly check back, just show up on Friday.) For now just trust me that End of Turn Week is not as totally random as it may seem.

[Click here](#) to see the verboten paragraphs.

So why is it End of Turn Week? To hear the answer, I'll have to have you all hop into the Wayback Machine and set the dial to Tuesday, January 1st, 2002. A number of important things happened on that day. Okay, yes, the lovely year that was 2002 did make its spectacular debut, but I'm more focused on **Magic**-related milestones. January 1, 2002 was the premiere of **magicthegathering.com**. And as it was a Tuesday, the [first column](#) premiered was by the Tuesday columnist (we only had one back then – the merging of **magicthegathering.com**, **sideboard.com**, and the **Magic Online** site was when we started having two columnists a day) Anthony Alongi with a column dedicated to the casual Timmy called "Serious Fun" (and yes, while aimed at Timmy by design, we know that there were a number of Johnnies and Spikes that also turned in).

Also, that day was the very first feature article written by yours truly called "[In the Beginning...](#)". In it I described what exactly **magicthegathering.com** was up to. Among other things, I introduced the five columnists that would be writing for the site: myself, Anthony, Ben Bleiweiss, Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar, and Randy Buehler. Four of the five columns continue today (Ben's "Uncommon Knowledge" Spike history column has since fallen by the wayside), all but two with different authors. How does this tie into the End of Turn Step? I'm getting there.

In the beginning, there were five columnists. There was some talk about how long before we lost one of them. The first to go was Ben. He was replaced at the time by Brian David-Marshall (who would go through several columns before ending up with "The Week That Was"). Ben would, of course, later return to be a columnist for "Building on a Budget". Next to leave was Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar. He was replaced in his column by Mark Gottlieb. Jay would also come back to be a columnist for another column. Actually more than one – Jay wrote for both "Into the Aether" and "Building on a Budget". Next to go was Randy Buehler. Randy was replaced by Aaron Forsythe who had since gone from being the editor of **magicthegathering.com** to being a member of R&D. (Hmm, according to the trend, Randy should come back one day to write "Building on a Budget".)

Cut to four and a half years later. Only two of the original authors remain writing their original column: myself and Anthony Alongi. Here's one last bit of trivia to help you tie all the pieces together: Anthony selected the theme for this week. Yes, original columnist #4 is stepping down. Anthony - after over two hundred columns - is moving on. He thought that the End of Turn theme would be a nice tip of the hat to his departure. That is why we have End of Turn Week. And for anyone that cares, I plan for my streak as a columnist to be a very long one. I've already begun to think about cool things I could do for my five hundredth column and that's six years away! (Okay five hundred and first – the fifth hundred is already slotted for "Five Hundred and Counting".)

Let me just end this section by saying a heartfelt goodbye to Anthony. History has shown me that this isn't the last we'll see of him. He'll just have to let us know when he wants to start his stint on "Building on a Budget". But seriously (yes, my writing style actually forces me to tell you when I'm not being jovial), it's been an honor to work side by side with Anthony and I feel that he has done wonders to shine a flashlight on a part of the game that before he started writing (and yes, that was long before **magicthegathering.com**) was almost never talked about. We'll miss you, Anthony. Good luck!

The End Is Here

Okay, I've managed to waste almost seven hundred words explaining why it's End of Turn Week. Now I actually have to stay on theme and talk about how **Magic** design interacts with the End of Turn Step. After thinking it over, I realized that I don't have any one big thing to say about the End of Turn, but that I did have a bunch of little things to say. So this is going to be one of those "popcorn" columns with a lot of little, bite-size chunks. Maybe popcorn's the wrong analogy, as there are only going to be a few sections. Maybe it's more like a Kit Kat bar. You know, with the multiple pieces that you can break apart? Of course, that would make this a "Kit Kat Kolumn" and only bad things can happen from there. All right, I'll abandon my metaphor for once. Shocking, I know. Anyway, here's some stuff that has to do with both design and the End of Turn.

Harnessing the Power of Death

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Whenever you ask a writer for advice about how to be a writer, nine times out of ten they will say the following: Write. Every day. Really. Every day. Writing is a skill that you simply improve upon the more you do it. If you want to be a writer, you have to just commit to doing it. If you're not up to that, fine - you're not a writer.

Why do I bring this up? One, it's very true. This is why nine out of ten writers will say this. But two, it brings up an interesting point about **Magic** design. How can someone improve their **Magic** design? My answer: Design. Every day. Really. Every day. Designing **Magic** cards is a skill that you simply improve upon the more you do it.

By the way – quick aside – are you interested in **Magic** design as a career? Over 18? Qualified to work in the United States? Willing to move to Seattle for a minimum of six months? Didn't read my column last week? Or if you did, did you not read it all? One of the most exciting things we've ever done is going on right now. (I'll give you the link in a second.) It's called "The Great Designer Search" and it's magicthegathering.com's foray into reality programming. The important part is that the winner wins a SIX MONTH PAID DESIGN INTERNSHIP IN WIZARDS OF THE COAST R&D DEPARTMENT! (I apologize for the caps but I am incapable of writing that in lowercase.) The first test is due by midnight tonight (a.k.a. Monday, August 28th), so if this at all sounds interesting go [check out this link](#). You can read the rest of this column tomorrow.

I'm back. My point from above is that **Magic** design is definitely a skill that improves with experience. How do I know this? Because I've had the chance to watch my own learning curve first hand. The lesson on theme occurred during the design for *Urza's Destiny*. Trivia buffs or "Making Magic" readers with a good memory will remember that *Urza's Destiny* is the set I designed by myself. In it, I put the following card:

Intolerance
BBB
Enchantment
Pay 2 life: Draw a card.

This card would later become **Yawgmoth's Bargain**. And yes, I know this is one of the ten cards I talked about in my first Topical Blend ("[To Err is Human](#)" a.k.a. "Mark's Dating Disasters"), but my issue today is a little more focused, and it actually has to do with the End of Turn step, so give me a break.

Today I want to examine what I was trying to do and talk about the technical lesson I learned. For starters, I was messing with something I perhaps shouldn't have been messing with. I was trying to create a "fixed" **Necropotence**. (One lesson I seem never to learn is to stop fiddling with new versions of broken cards.) At the time, I felt the issue was with how much life was being traded for a card. The card **Greed** never seemed to be a problem. **Intolerance** was trying to merge the two together, taking the "2 life for a card" from **Greed** and the manaless activation cost of **Necropotence**.

I was so confident in the "2 life for a card" idea that I decided to junk the whole "wait until end of turn" part. Unnecessary, I thought. Yeah, I was wrong on that one. I think **Yawgmoth's Bargain** might have been banned before the card actually left the printing press. We were only a day or two away from writing, "This Card Is Banned" on the card. (Yes, *Unglued* would later use that joke.) So what went wrong?

First and foremost, I didn't appreciate a careful balance that the *Ice Age* designers (Skaff Elias, Jim Lin, Dave Petty and Chris Page) created when they made **Necropotence**. Trading life for cards is about as scary as engine cards get. Cards are the most valuable commodity in the game and players have plenty of excess life to spend. The *Ice Age* design team got this. So they added a second value to the exchange: surprise. By keeping the controller of **Necropotence** from seeing the cards they drew until end of turn, they took away the player's ability to properly determine how much life he had to spend. The forced commitment made players have to predict what was the right amount to gamble.

Without the delay built in, there is very little to keep the player from knowing exactly how much life he has to spend and how much he is able to spend. If you can draw the card immediately, you take cards one at a time using the knowledge to determine whether or not you need to spend more life. But with **Necropotence**, players had to take risks because they didn't have the luxury of knowing when to stop or when to push their luck. The end result is that the card forced players to make educated risks. By taking away the control, the designers added skill to the card.

Let me repeat the last sentence, as it is a fascinating piece of design insight. By taking away the player's control, the designers *added* skill to the card. This is quite radical, because it flies in the face of conventional design wisdom. It is normally believed that adding more control is to the advantage of the skilled player. While this can be true, **Necropotence** points out that it isn't always true. Why? Because the ability to gauge expectation and act accordingly happens to require a lot of skill. This is why, for instance, becoming an expert poker player is so hard.



Another example of this phenomenon takes place at the **Magic** Invitational. When I started the "all-star game", I made a habit of throwing numerous unconventional formats at the players. Why would I do this to the best players in the world? Because it was very skill testing. Adapting to the unknown requires a lot of skill. (As an aside – a lot of players were complaining about how skill testing would go down at prereleases without spoilers; because of what I've outlined above I believe the exact opposite to be true – different skills, of course, but ones I believe are

better indicators of a player's raw talent.) This basic premise is what I was missing when I made **Yawgmoth's Bargain**. The end of turn technology is quite ingenious. Forcing the commitment both better balances the card and adds strategic value. A very important lesson in my growth as a designer.

Never Let It End

Next up – Staying Power.



If the card is unfamiliar, please note the silver border. This card is from *Unhinged*. (And yes, that is our pal **Wild Mongrel** in the art – notice that his doghouse says “Mongo” on it.) What does this have to do with black-bordered **Magic**? Quite a bit. You see, this card was almost in a normal set.

All right, perhaps “almost” is a stretch, but the precursors that led to this card were all submitted for normal (read: non *Un*) sets. The earliest version was:

Time Extension

U

Instant

All effects that would end at the end of this turn instead end at the end of next turn.

I don't remember what set I made this for, but it was something pretty old (*Urza's Saga* block, I think.) So what happened? The Rules Manager happened. It's a tale as old as time. The universe has opposing forces. These forces - by their very definition - are designed to continually butt heads with their opposite. In **Magic**, one such set of opposing forces are the Head Designer and the Rules Manager. (And yes, the current Rules Manager is my arch-nemesis Mark Gottlieb.)

You see, the job of the Head Designer is to continually move the game in new directions. To boldly go where no set has gone before. The Rules Manager, on the other hand, is trying to keep the status quo. It is his job to keep the rules working. To continue the *Star Trek* metaphor, he's Scotty. His job is to keep the engines running. That makes me Kirk. (When you invent the metaphors, you get to do cool things like be Kirk.) I just want the ship to do what I need it to do. When Scotty informs me it can't work, I say “Make it work.”

This is where the *Star Trek* metaphor ends. For some reason, Kirk gets to bully Scotty even when it breaks the laws of physics. I don't have that luxury. If the Rules Manager nixes it, it goes. I can push a little bit, but in the end if the rules cannot make something work, I don't get to do it. Time Extension was one such card. I only had one tool left at my disposal – patience.

Here's the other valuable thing to know about the Rules Manager. They change with some regularity. During my time at Wizards, I have had the pleasure to work with, I believe, seven different Rules Managers. Whenever one Rules Manager tells me that something doesn't work, I just wait it out until the next one shows up. And I try again. This technique works much better than you might think.

As soon as there was a Rules Manager switch, I dusted off Time Extension. I put it into the next set. And he rejected it. Next Rules Manager – rejected it. Next one – ditto. The next one – he liked it; said I could do it. He was gone before the set was out of design. I soon figured out that I would have to try and approach this problem with some new tactics. I made a new card.

Status Quo

U

Enchant Creature

Any effect that targets enchanted creature that would last until end of turn instead lasts permanently.

The Rules Manager saw right through that. So I tried:

Sneaky Swap

U

Instant
Replace "until end of turn" on target spell or permanent with "until end of next turn".

That didn't fare any better. Every set I would try a new tweaked version. Each time, thumbs down. And then came *Unhinged*. I love *Unhinged* for many reasons, but here's one of my favorites. When I was working on *Unglued*, the Rules Manager at the time didn't want to have anything to do with it, so I pitched allowing me to be the *Un-Set* Rules Manager. And they agreed. This means that when I'm in silver-bordered land, I'm the guy that tells me I can't do something. See where this is going? Yes, I, the *Un-Rules* Manager, just give in to myself, the Head Designer. If he wants to do something, I just let him.

Why do I do that? I'll let you in on a little secret. Just don't tell anyone. The *Un*-sets don't actually work in the rules. Don't get me wrong - they work on the surface. We come up with all the answers necessary to let people play, but if you dig deep under the surface - chaos. A lot of the *Un* cards don't actually work. But we don't let the cards know that. I'm using *Cartoon Physics*. In cartoon worlds, physical forces only apply if the character is aware that they're breaking them. Gravity, for example, doesn't work until you're aware that you've taken five steps over the edge of the cliff. (I still haven't solved the great *Cartoon Physics* dilemma - why does the pan sometimes take the shape of the character's head and sometimes the head takes the shape of the pan? No one knows.)

So, *Staying Power* ended up as an *Un* card because no one else would take it in. Poor Mongo.



Poor Mongo.

Before I end this section, let me point out that I understand I was talking more about "until end of turn" which actually happens during the Cleanup Step. Yes, I know. But I technically think it's End of Turn Week, not End of Turn Step Week! Either way, work with me here. This is not the friendliest topic I've ever worked with.

I Forget

The last little story is an insight into the design process. When I write up a card, I'm not under any obligation to be technically precise. Partly this is because we often venture into areas that aren't figured out yet and partly because it really doesn't matter if our templating is exact. There are people whose job it is to make sure the templates are correct (mainly the editors with help from the templating team for that set). No matter what we do, they're going to pore over the cards and correct the text. My attitude has always been let them do their job.

There's a running joke in R&D. Whenever you see collation or templating, run away. Both are vital to **Magic**, but both get very technical and very tedious. Luckily, some people thrive with that kind of project. Not me. As such, I've made it my job not to learn enough about either collation or templating to ever be called upon to do it. But over the years, I've been forced to learn a few things about both. I have to know enough about templating to at least get across the base idea of what I want. Also, knowing templates helps me understand sometimes what can't be done. Not because of rules, but because of the unwieldiness of the text. (*Time Spiral* has an interesting story on this topic, but we'll have to wait until after the set comes out to dive into that one. Hint: see [last Wednesday's Magic Arcana](#).)

Despite this need to have some basic grasp of templating, I'm still pretty bad at it. (I chalk it up to years of trying so hard to avoid having to do it.) One of the side effects of this is that I often have one of the editors asking me what I meant about a card. Sometimes the issue is complex, but most of the time it's just me forgetting to write some basic thing. You want to know what the most common thing I miss is? "Until end of turn." (If you stopped to think about the theme, I assume you figured that one out.)

Often I'll do things like the following:

```
Get Big
2G
Instant
Target creature gets +5/+5 and gains trample.
```

I then get the following dialogue.

Editor: Mark.

Me: Yes.

Editor: I have a question about one of the commons. Get Big.

Me: Yeah?

Editor: I assume it's not your intention to have the creature get +5/+5 and gain trample permanently.

Me: No.

Editor: "Until end of turn".

Me: Yeah, yeah. Maybe down deep I have a personal grudge against temporary effects.

Editor: It appears so.

Me: I said "gets" the power/toughness bonus and "gains" trample. Do I get any brownie points for that?

Editor: There are no brownie points. It's either correct or it isn't.

Me: I can't get partial credit?

Editor: This isn't a test. And it's not your responsibility to template. Just get the gist of the mechanic across.

Me: Such as if I want the effect to be temporary or permanent.

Editor: That would be nice.

Me: Maybe we should just assume that all effects I do are temporary. At least that way I'll be right a lot higher percentage of the time.

Editor: I already do that.

Me: Then why do you always ask me what I mean?

Editor: I have to have some fun.

There's not much more to the story than that. I just thought it might be interesting (and in theme) to take a peek at one of the minutia that comes up day in and day out.

End Of Column

Before I leave you today I have a few extras for you this week. And as it's End of Turn Week, I felt it only right to do it End of Column.

Design Up Ahead – I'll mention this one last time. The first test for "The Great Designer Search" is due midnight tonight (Monday, August 28th). If you'd like a chance to win a SIX MONTH PAID DESIGN INTERNSHIP IN R&D, [check it out](#). Soon.

More Than One Way To Skin a Cat (a.k.a. Would You Like To Work At Wizards Without Writing Ten Essays)

– Ever since my call for a Creative Writer led to the largest job application the company has ever seen, I've made it my business to mention any **Magic**-related job that comes along. Today that job is for a Junior Web Developer. Here's how the job was described by Jo Hyde from our HR department:

Based in our Renton office, the Junior Web Developer will support various teams and the brand website producers in properly preparing the information and media for publication. The position will support the many folks that produce web content to achieve their schedules while learning to produce properly formed web content for the Wizards web sites.

If you have a Computer Science degree and a strong working knowledge of HTML, CSS, Photoshop and RGB Colors for web.... what are you waiting for? For more info and to apply click [here](#).

In short, we're looking for someone with the proper technical skills that might also know **Magic**. And if "[80,000 Words](#)" (my photo tour from a few weeks back) wasn't enough to show what a cool company Wizards is, you'll just have to take my word for it. If this sounds up your alley at all and you have the slightest interest, please check the link.

Labor Pains - Next Monday is a lovely American holiday called Labor Day where we celebrate work by not working. (Strangely, it's far from our oddest holiday.) This means the office is closed and as is our policy, there is no new content on days the office is closed. But I have good news. Next week is the beginning of *Time Spiral* previews, and as such all preview related material will be posted next Monday. That means you'll get a new feature article and a new column by yours truly. "Building on a Budget" will not have a new column next week.

Just Teasing – Finally, I'm happy to announce that I've decided to start up an old tradition. Back in "Insider Trading" one of my old *Duelist* columns, I used to give a hint of the upcoming set by teasing you with a few pieces of information. These little nuggets were almost always incomplete and heavy on the teasing, but readers used to love them. I've had numerous people ask for me to start doing them again (including Scott), so I've decided to play along. Here, my faithful readers, are a few things that you'll find in *Time Spiral*:

- an angel that costs two mana (yes, *that* angel, and no she's not some wimpy 2/2)
- a female legend that players have been begging us to do for a *long* time
- a new hermit with a love of tokens and an old keyword (but not the same one)
- a direct damage spell that can do 5 damage for a single red mana
- a new Lotus (oh wait, you've already seen that one)
- a Power Nine card with buyback
- a card with the word "squirrel" in its rules text
- a legend who uttered one of the most popular lines of flavor text of all time
- and a cycle of artifact mana sources that turn into creatures from the Reserved List

And finally, a few juicy card names for you to chew on:

- Liege of the Pit
- Magus of the Candelabra
- Stuffy Doll
- Vesuvan Shapeshifter
- Wheel of Fate

That's all I have for you today. Join me next week when *Time Spiral* previews begin. I'll outline the block plan and start dishing about what *Time Spiral* is all about. Trust me you won't want to miss it.

Until then, may you learn the difference between "until end of turn" and "at end of turn".

Mark Rosewater

*Mark Rosewater is Head **Magic** Designer. What this fancy title means is that he's in charge of **Magic** design. This gets him a lot of mail (which he actually reads). When not alternatively destroying and saving **Magic**, he likes to spend time with his family, do stereotypically geeky things (play games, read comics, watch a lot of science fiction, etc.) and write about himself in third person.*



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