

Upkeep

Spring 2026

Get Off The Internet.

There is work to do
and the hurricane of your good life is passing by right now just outside the door.

I told myself at the end of last year that I am going to spend less time on the Internet this year.

It's a work in progress. A seemingly endless work in progress.

I do not think I have a problem with being on the Internet—I spend a not embarrassing but not ideal amount of time looking at various screens. It's. . . well. . . do I really need to provide an insufficient description of the state of all things?

There are things that stay, there are things that change.

The problem is that the Internet, and everything, seems to be changing for the worse. There's a clever term for this that is used later in this issue.

This issue isn't about the Internet. It is, if all the folks who were so kind and generous with their time and words will permit me to say, about what we do when we are confronted with the fact that something we enjoy(ed) is seemingly rotting.

Do you treat the blight? Try to contain it? Simply live in the decay?

I don't have the answer(s).

Thank you as every and always for taking the time to read these words that are primarily distributed on the Internet.

As the world is ending / Can I survive this cold dawn / At least I can sit here on the street / Exhaling and strong / Clean up the mess / Get off the internet / We are the ones who are alive right now / So let's start living

MY JOURNEY TO THE PAST

by NateLikeFrogs

Preface

I have been in the MTG Cube Talk Discord (<https://discord.gg/4J84j6CP>) server recently, singing praise of bringing back my local cube scene using the power of Char, Knight of Meadowgrain, and Basking Rootwalla. It has been an arduous journey and one that has been non-linear, as most are. If you read and remember my previous entry to this zine, A Buddhist Rambling of Cube, then you will be familiar with my style of spinning a tale before I give you any valuable cubing insight. I hope at least one person will be able to resonate with it.

I will reference specific cards, like the three above. If you are not a 2010s magic sicko, see a page of cards mentioned at the back of this article or consider having scryfall nearby.

My “Why”

My local cube group popped off in 2024. We ran a monthly cube day at the minimum, sometimes getting up to six drafts in certain months. I led the charge, putting a lot of effort into advertising my Legacy cube, Glory Days (<https://cubecobra.com/cube/list/2n2tj>). While its name may suggest that it is a nostalgia cube, it is actually trying to convey that our perceived “glory days” of the future are the present moments we are currently living through. The “glory days” are any days I can cube with my friends. It is a fairly typical cube in the “Bun Magic” space. Inspired by Legacy with lots of interaction, small games, and a constant flux of newly released cards. With this cube,

I also offered a more casual space for games of magic outside of a local game store. Once friends and acquaintances experienced a cube day in my cozy home—free snacks, plentiful drinks of all varieties, soft cats that meandered between rounds—they were hooked. Players also became very invested. I tracked data and created leaderboards of my drafters. 3-0 winners got to add cards to the cube and would consult draft patterns to find their perfect, championing card. People would bring booster packs and other items to create a prize pool. It was like hosting a mini Pro Tour circuit where everyone lived within five miles. It was a cube curator's dream. At the peak of our festivities, I had a group of twenty people gaming in my house on the Fourth of July.

Everything good is ephemeral, though. Behind the scenes of my cubing escapades, I was struggling with substance abuse.

It started as a coping mechanism for increased responsibility at work and the worldly situations of the times. It did not impact my ability to function in society early on but continually pulled me down. I found myself in a spiral of depression, self doubt, and longing for perfection that could not be attained.

At the time, I did not think I had a problem so I did not try to stop. Adding the stress of being the de facto figure head of my cube group pulled me deeper down this path. The hours of organizing, vying for perfectionism in hosting, spending my money on refreshments, uploading decklists, updating spreadsheets of colors drafted—it all got to me at some point. A casual joint with the fellas on cube day turned into an afternoon of being strung out well after people left my home. If a cube day didn't fire, I would blame myself for failure and consult substances to calm my guilt. Eventually, my own choices bled into the choices of those close to me and I pulled them into the vortex. All of this compounded and eventually killed my drive to participate in much of life, let alone cube.

I ran one last big event in December 2024, the Mid-Michigan Cube Championship. Mentally, it was a "prove it" moment for me. I told myself that if I could run something big without a hitch, I had no problem with my habits. When I could not make it through the event sober, I realized I needed to take a step back on a lot of things in life. This realization, unfortunately, still did not get me to stop my habits. My friends would reach out to me in January & February of 2025 to check on me, as well as cube

days, but I ghosted the entire scene in my melancholy state. My gloom seeped into most of 2025; I feel like I lost 9 months of that year to depression and substances. My brain was fogged and my functionality became limited beyond my career. It took the deep support of my wife and several catastrophic moments to pull me back from the brink.

In September of 2025, I began my journey of sobriety. Much like the one I am taking with my nostalgia cube, that journey has been non-linear and is far from over. However, I am in a place of good spirits and health as of writing this. As I regained control of my life, my brain fog lifted, and my supports were in place, I began trying to get back to a healthy relationship with cube.

However, I found it hard returning to my Legacy cube after my sabbatical. Many can relate to the overwhelming feeling I had trying to catch up on a year of cards due to the pace of releases. I was met with the stomach churning decision of sorting through and potentially including racecars, space aliens, and Spider-People. As I tried dipping my toes back in, the pool of cards hissed back at me that it was too late. As quickly as my motivation had come back, it seemed to dissipate. I started sorting a large chunk of my collection to be sold. I began making peace with the fact that magic may have outgrown me.

That is. . . until I found a box of cards in the corner of my home office. Lost in my short-term memory was a project I hazily started in early 2025. A box full of dragons, mages, and zombies. Beautiful cards of wizardry and monstrosity that had full borders around all four sides. Scribbled on a sticky note, reminding me to look at CubeCobra, was

GLORY TAG TOURNAMENT XIV

The premise of Glory Tag Tournament (<https://cubecobra.com/cube/list/GTTXIV>) was to be a nostalgia spin-off of my legacy cube circa 2014; only older cards but with my current cube design sensibilities. The name was riffing on Japanese roleplaying games I would find in the bulk bins at GameStop as a kid—long names that often branched off of previous titles and roman numerals. All cards must be printings from before the release of M15, which was a restriction I picked based on my love of the old and 8th Edition borders. It also set a card pool that aligned with my first few years of discovering the game. I found that I really enjoyed setting a restriction while cultivating

the list. It prevents me from getting distracted and helps curate the aesthetic, which is important to me.

So it began. My endorphins fired and the motivation returned. If I could not currently face the future of magic, perhaps it was right that I try to look towards the past. I quickly got my box of old dragons and started crafting it into a 360 card and later a 450 card cube. I enjoy the common aggro-control-combo spectrum, with low curves, that you find in many cubes. After trimming some of the bombs in the top end, I feel that I have ended up with a list that feels like the gameplay of a regular, unpowered cube. While there are cards from the entire first 21 years of the game, it has the texture and play patterns of Innistrad/Return to Ravnica standard.

Getting Things Started

While my excitement was palpable after compiling the first iteration, starting or resuming a group with a nostalgia cube comes with challenges. The biggest is getting buy-in. When so much of magic is now the churn and shininess of new designs, players often are not thrilled by “this is my box of cards that haven’t been relevant in 5+ years.” So, it is important to find players who already want to play with aging cards or create hooks for those that don’t.

I am lucky enough to be blessed with some folks of the first category. My group already has an old pro and other grinders with fond memories of casting Wild Mongrels, Bloodbraid Elves, and Prognostic Sphinx in standard decks of yore. When I brought up a cube list where the main combo deck was sacrificing Yosei to Greater Good, they were all for it. Four grouchy oldheads does not a full-pod make, though. I had to do some work to get others involved. I needed pitches to get other folks excited.

For many, using nostalgia as a coping mechanism was an effective pitch. It is what I use the cube for, afterall. I would tug on the heart strings a bit. Sometimes all it took was connecting to a card or deck someone enjoyed and showing them how it was in the cube. “Remember when you finally built modern Spirits and they power crept it out with Horizons sets? Come draft UW flash in my cube!” or “Yeah, it is crazy that BBE used to be banned and now it's unplayable. I had a really sweet Gruul deck with it in my cube last week though. Want to see?” or “I also really miss playing basement magic like

when I was a kid. I have a cube where we are casting Giant Growths if you're interested." The current path and divisive future of magic can bring up strong emotions, you may as well provide a place for people to cope with that using cards & strategies from their past. Not everyone played magic before the release of M15, though. A handful of folk from my LGS started in 2018 or later. They had heard of, or seen, some of the relics in my cube, but didn't have strong attachments or desire to use them. I found that making connections in less emotional ways was helpful in hooking them in. Aesthetics and novel experiences proved to be one of the best connections. Being able to lay out a pack and show them how all of the cards have the clean old/modern border can be fascinating. People seldom get to see a stack of cards without the silver rare-stamp nowadays. Being able to experience something unique like that is often enough to get someone to try the cube at least once.

Having beautiful looking cards can also be a big pull. I am privileged enough to have been collecting for over a decade, so my cubes tend to have a bounty of foils in them. Fanning out a pack and seeing shimmering M11 titans and special Grand Prix promos can be fun for anyone. This is not the greatest on-ramp if you are just starting to dip your toes into building a nostalgia cube; some old cards and one-off promos can be restrictively expensive. However, there are a good handful of FNM promos and solid (un)commons that are accessible to foil out if that is your jam. Outside of foiling, being selective with the printings you play can cultivate an aesthetically pleasing experience as well. Include cards whose artists are revered. Find the coolest Giant Growth you can that people may not have seen before. If you want to showcase the vibes of 2011, don't pick a printing of a card from 2022.

Most of all, you have to make sure a nostalgia cube looks fun to play at a glance. As a cube designer, you may reminisce about highly taxing cards, mass land destruction, and lock-out control decks. If someone sees that heavily in your list, are they going to be interested in playing it? I originally included Armageddon in my rough-draft list and got remarks from even my spikiest players along the lines of, "Oh boy, can't wait to get my lands nuked after casting my four-mana 1/2 synergy piece." That very quickly made me realize that the overall fun of gameplay was more important than having the powerful cards from yesteryears. Many players reminisce of slamming big splashy monsters into

play, casting little weenie idiots, or burning an opponent's creature for the first time. Less so do they think of the busted power outliers that we all learn months, or years, after starting. So, I leaned into that axis and implore others to do as well.

Keeping Things Going

Once I had established a group that wanted to draft my nostalgia cube consistently, I still found much work to be done and things to consider to keep the experience going. I think one aspect that makes cube interesting in the modern day is the churn of new releases, despite my personal contempt for it. It can keep a cube fresh and gives people a place to try new 3-drops & such that won't see play in commander or competitive formats. So, how do you keep a cube fresh when there are not newly printed things to change up an environment?

Well, you can simply refresh your list. I have heard some people talk about liking nostalgia cubes because you can build a list and never touch it again. However, I believe that to be unsustainable, especially if you plan on having a nostalgia cube as your main list that gets drafted often, over many years. The first 20-something years of magic are just as rich, deep, and explorable as new releases. If you are not caught up in cubing only the most powerful cards, it is easy to cut and add cards often to change up dynamics. For example, my cube started with the blue section being focused on the classic axis of counterspells and flash creatures. As my group has gotten a few drafts in, we found ourselves wanting something different to give the colors options. I've swapped in a higher creature density to support ninja decks and blue devotion. In the future, I could see myself switching some of those cards out to more heavily support madness, flicker, or faeries-typal. Cubes can only be so large; it is worth considering cycling through different packages to keep things fresh. Change the removal density. Make like-for-like swaps of similar cards. There is so much you can do to refresh your environment.

I also have found that nostalgia cubes can bring the designer into traps. I believe that people should build these cubes with their current sensibilities and knowledge. For some entrenched designers, this could mean lower mana-curves, creatures with potent enters-the-battelfield abilities, and cards that recoup their cost. That is all well and

good. What this doesn't mean, though, is attempting to find parallels in the past for the modern cards we use today.

For example, I found myself wanting to emulate a classic in cube's 3-drop slot, Goblin Rabblemaster. Rabblemaster is just outside the cardpool I set for myself and I omit it on principle. So, I went to scryfall to find something similar. I thought having a knock-off would be good. I found Goblin Assault, an enchantment that makes a goblin token on your upkeep and gives your goblins haste. It seemed perfect on paper, but in reality it was too slow since it didn't have an impact on the turn it entered. It fit the era, but players have the knowledge of today and just wouldn't play it when they had a bounty of creatures & Searing Spears available to fill their decks. Instead of staying attached to my perceived perfect find, I cut my losses and the card. Don't go chasing today in the past.

Another pitfall I believe should be avoided is trying to completely recreate a moment in time. Nostalgia is all about the rose-tinted glasses after all. When possible, we have the power as curators to sand away the rough edges of the past. I play Kessig Wolfrun in my nostalgia cube, it brings back fun stories and is powerful reach for creature decks. A card that saw a lot of play alongside it in 2011-12 was the infecting menace of Inkmoth Nexus. I could try to emulate the past by including Nexus, giving players the opportunity to poison-kill out of nowhere. It's not very fun to lose that way, though, so I omit it. Just because it got played, does not mean it is going to be fun now. Use what you know now to craft a cube from the past, don't let the past craft your cube.

In a similar vein, my group has come to the conclusion that we don't like a lot of cards that have protection from colors or that hose specific colors. Lifebane Zombie holds a lot of nostalgia for many people. It became maindeckable to fight off the dominating Thragtusk in mid-2010's standard. That does not mean I am going to put it in my cube. The feast or famine of such cards have not been enjoyable for my group, even on cards we look back on fondly.

Some will find disagreement with my thoughts on building lists from our different nostalgic lenses, which I encourage. I would love to grow more discussion and theory on these kinds of cubes. If no other point stands strong, I hope the point of connections has shined through. Always be willing to try something because someone

has a connection to it. Try a random pinger or multi-color six-drop because someone's 11-year-old self played it. Don't be afraid to try weird things just because it doesn't align with our modern dogma, despite the paradox this creates with my encouragement to build from your current sensibilities. Give things a try that will make people reminisce. The worst possible outcome is no one drafts it or you cut it later.

To the Future with Our Pasts

This is the part where I begin wrapping up an article with the cliché of how it is all about the gathering, people, and the relationships we build. For this topic, it does need to be reiterated. What is the point of building a nostalgia cube without the human connections that go with it? Surely you could untether yourself from arbitrary era-restrictions and have a subjectively better cube. I could potentially add in a smidge of cards from 2015 & beyond to create more supported archetypes, find better performing two-drops, and cut the fat of cards that ride sideboards. The joy of sitting around a table with my friends, opening a pack of cards, and immediately hearing random anecdotes about a card that has not seen the light of day in a decade or longer is much more valuable to me.

I want table talk with random stories of someone's 2015 PPTQ top-8 with Voice of Resurgence. I want players to throw god-awful cards at me because they thought about it late at night and think it can finally hang with our box of oldies. I want newer players to jaw about their reluctance to believe the cards were ever good and call me Unc. I want to hold on to things we've enjoyed and use them as an escape from the never ending march of time. None of this exists without the people and their stories.

In the first three months since I started firing drafts for Glory Tag Tournament XIV, I have gotten seven full-pods to fire. Given my past experience with hosting cube events, I do plan on tampering this down soon. Once a month is more than enough to get my fill of old cards and warm my heart with the companionship of my friends. But it shows the demand to experience the past! There is so much Magic outside of cowboy hats and new IPs coming in the future. Be it the premodern format, my cube, or other's nostalgia cubes, it is evident that players yearn to experience the entire stretch of Magic's history.

My foundation has been set to keep this going for as long as my friends see fit. Building connections to people's past and learning how to pull it into our future has been a great journey so far. If you find yourself or others burnt out on the magic of today, maybe you can create your own journey to the past, too.

Cards Mentioned:



Bloodbraid Elf 2 ♣



Creature — Elf Berserker

Haste
 Cascade: When you cast this spell, exile cards from the top of your library until you exile a land card that costs less. You may cast it without paying its mana cost. Put the exiled cards on the bottom in a random order.

—Steve Apple

3/2

Prognostic Sphinx 3 ♣ ♣



Creature — Sphinx

Flying
 Discard a card: Prognostic Sphinx gains hexproof until end of turn. Tap it.
 Whenever Prognostic Sphinx attacks, scry 3. (Look at the top three cards of your library, then put any number of them on the bottom of your library and the rest on top in any order.)

—Steve Prescott

3/5

Yosei, the Morning Star 4 ♣ ♣



Legendary Creature — Dragon Spirit

Flying
 When Yosei, the Morning Star dies, target player skips his or her next untap step. Tap up to five target permanents that player controls.

—Weta Loew

5/5

Greater Good 2 ♣ ♣



Enchantment

Sacrifice a creature: Draw cards equal to the sacrificed creature's power, then choose and discard three cards.
 "We have more sprouts than they have hands."
 —Gamelen, Citanul elder

—Ilus, Pete Ventors

Giant Growth ♣



Instant

Target creature gets +3/+3 until end of turn.

—Ilus, Sandra Everingham

Annihilation 3 ♣



Instant

Destroy all lands. (This includes your lands.)

—Ilus, Puzos/Verbeke

Goblin Rabblemaster 2 ♣



Creature — Goblin Warrior

Other Goblin creatures you control attack each turn if able.
 At the beginning of combat on your turn, put a 1/1 red Goblin creature token with haste onto the battlefield.
 Whenever Goblin Rabblemaster attacks, it gets +1/+0 until end of turn for each other attacking Goblin.

—Ilus, James Johnson

2/2

Goblin Assault 2 ♣



Enchantment

At the beginning of your upkeep, put a 1/1 red Goblin creature token with haste into play.
 Goblin creatures attack each turn if able.
 A goblin raid is a delicate gambit—a blend of stealth, precision, and screaming death.

—Ilus, James Johnson

Searing Spear 1 ♣



Instant

Searing Spear deals 3 damage to target creature or player.
 Sometimes you die a glorious death with your sword held high. Sometimes you're just target practice.

—Ilus, Christopher Moyle

Kessig Wolf Run

Land

☾: Add 1 to your mana pool.
 × ☾, ☾: Target creature gets +X/+0 and gains trample until end of turn.
When a werewolf changes for the first time, that first howl is said to echo through the woods till moonset.

—Jung Park
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Voice of Resurgence

Creature — Elemental

Whenever an opponent casts a spell during your turn, Voice of Resurgence enters the battlefield as a 1/1 green and white Elemental creature token. Its power and toughness are each equal to the number of creatures you control.

2/2

—Wimond Neleman
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Thragtusk

Creature — Beast

When Thragtusk enters the battlefield, you gain 5 life.
 When Thragtusk leaves the battlefield, put a 3/3 green Beast creature token onto the battlefield.
*"Always carry two spears."
 —Mokgar, Kalonian hunter*

5/3

—Nils Hamm
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Inkmoth Nexus

Land

☾: Add 1 to your mana pool.
 1: Inkmoth Nexus becomes a 1/1 Blinkmoth artifact creature with flying and infect until end of turn. It's still a land. (It deals damage to creatures in the form of -1/-1 counters and to players in the form of poison counters.)

—Jung Park
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Lifebane Zombie

Creature — Zombie Warrior

Intimidate (This creature can't be blocked except by artifact creatures and/or creatures that share a color with it.)
 When Lifebane Zombie enters the battlefield, target opponent reveals his or her hand. You choose a green or white creature card from it and exile that card.

3/1

—Min Yum
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CUBE WILL OUTLIVE MAGIC

by Vivian

“Cube will outlive Magic,” the skeletons tell me.

Magic, a beast of industrial printing and market research, of game system patents and quarterly returns, will sell pieces of itself until there is no profit left to make, and then it will die.

“Let it die,” the skeletons whisper.

The things we value in Magic—the community, the shared creativity, the intricate system of emergent properties and possibilities—these things don't need to depend on the product any more. The secret formula is out; the punks stole fire from the gods. The rest is in our hands.

I love cube. It is a sandbox of game design with a shared language and a community that delights in creating things for each other. If you, like me, resonated with the Lucky Paper playmat (“Cube Will Outlive Magic”), you may also be in a position of wanting to distance your love of cube from the product or the capitalist system behind it. This is not an essay about what Wizards of the Coast has done with the game you love that might make you feel that way. This is an essay about what comes next.

Cube communities rely on Wizards of the Coast in a variety of ways. When new spoilers pop up on a Discord, new cards come in the mail, or new players walk through the doors of the local game store, we can generally give Wizards some credit. On the January 26, 2026 episode of Lucky Paper Radio, “The Death of Magic”, the hosts speculated on what would happen to cube if those things were to vanish, and how the death of Magic is more likely to be a slow enshittification than a clear moment of collapse. In either case, Wizards has taken on certain roles that are attached to genuine needs, and if those needs stop being met, cube will fade away. It’s time to consider how these needs could be met without them.

Prefiguration is the practice of imagining and living out the values and structures we wish to see in the world. I don’t just want to preserve the Magic of decades past, despite my nostalgia. That game was equally intertwined with the ills of capitalism, including rampant sexism and use of prison labor, and it invented the business model of gamified gambling that is ubiquitous today. The desire to see cube thrive in spite of Wizards is an opportunity to flex our prefigurative skills; to build something new in the shell of the old. The more I envision how a community of players free from profit motive might take on the roles of maintaining the hobby, the more I see by comparison how often Wizards fails to meet the needs it has captured. I think we could do better—so much better that I don’t see any reason to wait for them to die.

I want to look at three needs that cubers currently rely on Wizards to fulfill, dig into how the way they meet those needs fails us, and imagine how we could create culture and infrastructure that meets the needs better. And the solutions I imagine aren’t new—they are all already being done, at some scale, by passionate people just in it for the love of the game.

1. Wizards of the Coast provides us with physical game pieces via printing and selling cards. This fails us when the price of cards becomes a barrier that limits who gets to build what kinds of cubes. I imagine share-boxes full of cool cards anyone can browse and build a cube out of. I imagine pooling resources for the

equipment to print and cut proxies at scale. I imagine beautiful hand-drawn cards given as gifts.

2. Wizards of the Coast provides a flow of new potential cubers. Magic percolates through schools and summer camps and Twitch streams and local game stores until people find their way to us. This fails us when people who would love cube are discouraged by mainstream Magic and never find our communities. I know I wouldn't have gotten into Magic if all I saw was four-player commander and Marvel-branded copaganda. I imagine donating cards and rulebooks to schools and libraries and prisons. I imagine local events for new players that reflect our values and the spaces we want to create.

3. Wizards of the Coast determines the pool of card designs we all curate from, and continually adds cards to that pool. Fresh designs open up new options for selective curation, and card overlap makes discussion and jumping into new cubes much easier. This fails us when the cards are so off-putting that we don't read them, let alone learn them well enough to build a shared language. We instinctively push back against Wizards of the Coasts's claim of legitimacy, saying "I'm not considering this card and I'm less interested in any cube that does". This also fails us when there are types of cards or rates of effects that Wizards of the Coasts does not add to the card pool. I imagine a collaborative project taking on that mantle of legitimacy to make cards that are more usable (eg. cutting multiplayer-only text), more appealing (eg. universes within), and even custom designs, with infrastructure like searchable databases and spoiler seasons to maintain a shared language. I imagine working together to solve the questions of trust, accessibility, and hierarchy that would come with such a project.

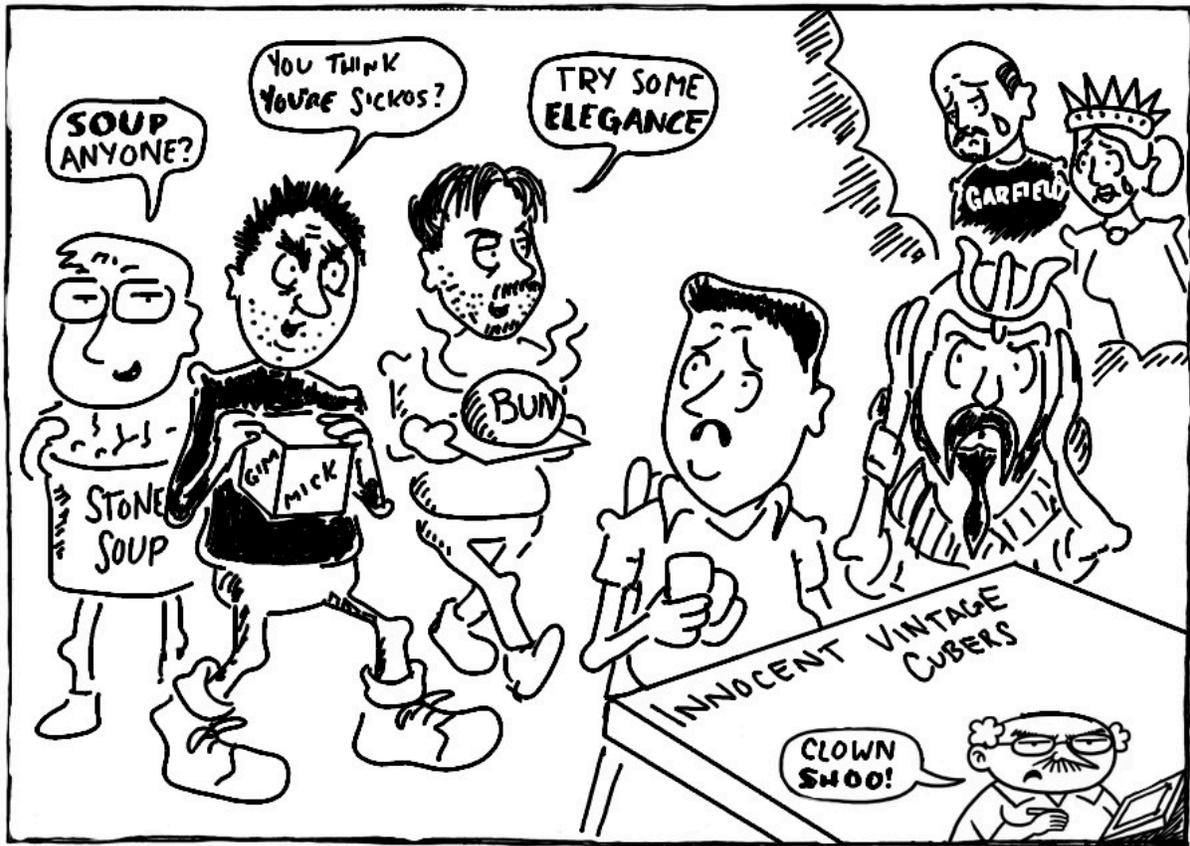
To some of you, trying to do things better than Wizards of the Coasts might sound like a whole lot of work for not much benefit. To others, it might sound like an extremely fun way to spend your card game hobby time. I'm not going to pretend there is any moral obligation here—the end goal of this is to have a good time playing cards with friends. It

is entirely optional. But I do hope that people in the first category are at least open to trying the things that the people in the second category create.

If anyone can do this, it will be the cubers. We already envision how gameplay could be better than in officially sanctioned formats, and we already engage in decentralized experimentation, with constant iteration and exchange of ideas. We already discuss the culture of cube, and how to organize local events that are inclusive, fun, skill-building, and sustainable. I'm only one person, and my analysis of captured needs and possible solutions is surely imperfect. But I hope that by gathering perspectives and sparking conversations, where these initial ideas can be challenged and deconstructed and iterated on, we can create better systems surrounding cube and Magic than the ones that have been sold to us.

And yes, there are institutions far more powerful than Wizards/Hasbro with the same patterns of capturing genuine needs to make themselves indispensable while constantly failing the people who rely on them. There are other, higher-stakes spaces for refiguration, for building a liberated culture and infrastructure. But I don't think playing with these ideas in our nerd friend recreation time detracts from our participation in those struggles—if anything, it makes us stronger for it.

Pack One Sick Ones



LAPDOG

by Jane McKinney

I met a woman at the chip shop on the corner, the night my dog died, and she told me to get off the internet.

The kind that serves—the chip shop, not the woman—fried fish, and fried fries, and fried something called a “buttie” (notably lacking, despite the shop’s name, in chips of any variety known to Lays), soaked in lemon and vinegar and butter and only pretending to be contained by the coy facsimile of a damp paper bag until it’s all hovering with sinister intent over the faux-leather upholstery of your passenger seat.

She was the kind to lick your fingers—my dog, which had just died, not the woman in the chip shop (to my knowledge, at least, though to be honest I didn’t ask, nor would it have felt appropriate for me to do so, not only because of the decency (or lack thereof) of such a query, but also because my dog had just died, and to be frank I wasn’t exactly in the mood). The kind of dog to help you make friends with strangers. To get you out of the house, and to curl up under your bed, and to remind you of younger days.

The kind of dog to have died a slow, expected death, not exactly painful, but not exactly painless, either. The kind of dog whose story was worth telling to the woman at the chip shop on the corner—your bag growing wetter and wetter with each turn of the tale, because damn it, she was a good dog, and even a poor storyteller ought to take her best shot at a eulogy.

And by my dead dog, I guess I really mean my love for the thing you call Magic: the Gathering™.

The vet said it was a toss-up. My dog's cause of death, I mean. That it could have been anything, really, from malnutrition to the Rapture. The vet said I had a lot to do, now, for my dead dog. And by the vet I mean the woman at the chip shop.

She said that my mistake had lain in treating my dog like a dog, because it wasn't actually a dog, if you've been reading any of this, and that it was actually my love for the game folks called Magic: the Gathering™.

She said that I had developed feelings (of anxiety, primarily, and of nostalgia, secondarily) for an inanimate object which, by nature of it never having been alive, I had mistakenly come to the conclusion had suffered a lamentable death. She said that I had crammed into the small fluffy body of my imaginary dog two vast and disparate frameworks—one for idealized patterns of social interaction, and one for idealized mediums of fictional escapism—and that the poor thing had gone POP when force-fed the cumulative weight of my manifold fears over how Capitalism kept seeping its oily way into the vulnerable corners of the only life I had to live.

She said (the woman at the chip shop, not Capitalism), in a soft voice, that I needed to get off the internet.

It sounded like a diagnosis, which was weird, because it was my dog which had just died, not myself. But she clarified that it WAS indeed a diagnosis—because, again, my dog was

not actually dead, because it did not actually exist. She said that my love for the thing I called Magic: the Gathering™ was not dead so much as it was only mostly dead, and I chose to ignore the tackiness of her quotation in favor of absorbing the meaning of her words, like my corduroys were absorbing fish butter, because I feared she was right.

I needed to get off the internet.

Thankfully, at that exact moment, I was already off the internet. I was, in fact, standing by the long windows of the chip shop on the corner, which is a real place, somewhere, I would imagine. Because of course she didn't really mean that I should never use the internet. I love the internet! When it works, at least, and free of ads, and full of art installations of tattooed Roman statues, and connecting me through all the world with so many dear people I so dearly love.

But the internet was not designed for dogs, the woman told me—which, honestly? sounded kind of condescending. But it was also true. The woman said that the thing I kept so confusingly referring to as “my dog” was, factually, a card game, if admittedly one steeped with the heavy verve of life's more memorable friendships, and that such a game have been expected to thrive when poached from its natural habitat—

—that being, of course, the tacky folding table(s) set up on the carpet of Brad's living room, with very little regard paid to the goings-on of the world's other unseen cardboard collectors, and with one incessantly wobbly leg (Brad's, not the table(s)'s)—

—and that of course, she said, my dog would die when I kept pouring buckets of shitty-ass corporate superhero slop all over its favorite food bowl. Because for the LAST TIME, Jane, it wasn't a DOG at ALL. It wasn't some purebred pet, being poisoned by invisible shareholders snuck over my fence with devilish intent and a testudines' rat's poison. Yeah, sure, I might have told myself that The Man had killed her, to console myself, holding the limp body of the game I used to so dearly adore, but that was a coping mechanism, god damn it, not something meant for the press. Because what else could I

do, I asked the woman, beyond impotently shaking my head at the sad new irrelevance of the familiar dog park down the street?

She told me to go home and make piles of cards to enjoy.

I told her that, being a cube curator, going home and making piles of cards to enjoy was obviously what I already did. She told me back— (annoyingly, and rationally—) that I also tended to go look at the day’s spoilers between my “getting home” and my “making piles,” and that, let’s be real, I sometimes forgot to include the “to enjoy” bit entirely, which kind of defeated the whole purpose of the affair, didn’t it? And she added, kindly, back in veterinarian mode, that to fix this disease—this condition of MY soul, not of some scapegoated canine’s—that I needed to woman-up and buckle-down. That I needed to get off the internet.

The woman at the chip shop told me I needed to learn the electric bass. And by the woman at the chip shop, I guess I really mean myself, staring back from the dark mirror of a window at dinnertime. She said that I was preemptively mourning my beloved game’s death because, at the end of the day, which it was, being dinnertime, I was mostly just scared of having to watch it limp along another fucking day. That I was scared of my friends growing so tired of how the thing coughed and wheezed by the fire that they wouldn’t want to come over anymore. That I was scared of very reasonable and very human things, because no one wants to watch the slow death of a thing they’ve let into the soft parts of their life. That I needed to learn the electric base, by which she really did mean the electric bass, because not everything in life had to be a metaphor.

I needed to get off the internet—

I said, to both the women in the chip shop,

—because the internet was the dark window of the closed morgue across the street, which I would stare at trepidatiously while waiting for the bus, as I chewed the dregs of

my coffee and the thought of my own mortality. I needed to get off the internet, I said, not because I needed to stop poking around in humanity's most interesting corners, but because what the fuck was I saying? Card games only die when their last player shuffles off. Walking hadn't died when the car was invented. The frequency with which one saw it undertaken by those around them sure had, and you know what? That sucks! People should walk more. You should walk more. Because you, the other woman in the chip shop said, don't need to give up your favorite path through town until either your will or your legs do, first.

The woman in the chip shop said—and by the chip shop, I guess I really mean this sticky old vinyl-covered eatery we call a planet—that I should make art to pass the time until my death. That I should keep making cubes, and by the excuse of their luster to keep sitting down across from things that lived and breathed and viewed art very differently than I did. That I should write increasingly deranged “pieces” of literature with only the barest hint of relevance to my hobby. That I should keep talking about that weird little gross dog of mine, because even she, who had just met herself in the window for the first time, could tell that we both still loved the damn thing, dead or alive.

Because why, I said to her, and by her I guess I really mean you, do you honestly like playing games in the first place? Come on, girl. Stop deluding yourself with phrases like “curatorial responsibility.” What are you, my grandmother? Jesus, I hope not. The racist one's long dead. So's the one who could have flawlessly impersonated Bilbo Baggins from the 1977 animated screen adaptation of *The Hobbit*, but at least she was less racist, and had a sick Boston accent.

But unlike them, the woman at the chip shop said, you're still alive. So give it a shot. Sneak out of your retirement home for an afternoon. Take a hike, literally. Go boil your head, in the cold rush of a stream you don't recognize. And when you're done with that, maybe go home, and make piles of cards to enjoy.

I'll be waiting, she said, as a piece of fried cod the size of my fist escaped its sodden paper prison to make first contact with the pristine cotton ridges of my pants, for you to make that next pile. And since I'm nice, she added, laughing at life's tendency to shit on the things we hold dear, I'll even wash my hands before helping you count out the packs.

ONE MORE PAIR OF GLOVES WILL FIX ME

by Joe Kiefer

A very modern problem that I sometimes deal with is that I have access to a version of what I need in a given situation, but that I don't have the specific version of that thing that feels "right" for the moment.

This winter, the snow was unrelenting in Juneau. I did a lot of snow shoveling. When I needed to go out and shovel, I had the choice of four different archetypes pairs of gloves:



Big goretex mittens that I use for backcountry skiing.



Insulated "guide" gloves for resort skiing.



Thin gloves with a foldover mitten for outdoor running.



A pair of liner gloves that I usually wear underneath other gloves if it's really cold, but that don't do much on their own.

They all have great application and fulfill a purpose, but none of them really works well for hours of shoveling. I found myself thinking about walking downtown to buy another pair of gloves that would fit the specific niche that I need filled. Warm, but functional. Maybe a leather outer layer for all the shovel gripping?

“Just one more pair of gloves” I think, “and I’ll be able to tackle every situation that comes up for me.”

This is a common trap, a problem of capitalism and the need for constant optimization. We are often told that life will be better if we have this new product, this easier-to-use version of the things we already have, this more specific tool. Buy this product, avoid some kind of suffering.

This trap is baked into the heart of Magic: The Gathering.

The game is a limitless juicy puzzle with millions of things to try and solve for. Yes, your deck can deal with a bunch of small creatures, but how do you deal with enchantments? What if the opponent has a Chalice of the Void? What utility land do you need to prevent flooding out? What density of white one drops is correct to help support your archetypes?? Each set introduces more problems and more answers to try and solve for. Even as cube enthusiasts, we aren’t immune to it.

There is an unyielding hamster wheel here. You optimize, optimize again, smooth out all of the edges, and all of a sudden there is nothing interesting left. It will never be enough until you decide it is enough.

So . . . uhh. . . what was all of that stuff about gloves?

It turns out that there is another solution beyond just buying a pair of gloves to further optimize my glove stable. I vaguely remembered a pair of work gloves I had from a field camp contract that I had used all of the time for...digging snow. I was fairly sure I “forgot” to give them back when my contract ended. I dug around a bit in our apartment and eventually tracked them down in a box of camping gear. They were pretty busted up from a few long seasons of work and had some major holes, which is probably why I abandoned them to this box. As an aside, they also had a vexing series of numbers written on them which was the count of frozen bagels we had in a food cache that I was

inventorying—I didn't have paper, but needed to track the number, so I wrote it straight on the glove.



Bagel numbers at the Allan Hills food cache circa January 2023. No idea if anyone has returned, so these may still be accurate for the number of bagels out there.

I got out a needle, thread, and a pair of pliers to work the thread through the tough leather and patch up the holes. An hour later, I had the gloves I had envisioned for the job of snow shoveling, a pair perfectly positioned to fill my missing archetype. I didn't have to buy them either.

I did some shoveling and they work great, but honestly, the fun part was finding them and fixing them. It's a good reminder not to worry too much about finding the perfect thing. It's a trap anyways. You may already have what you need.

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—Crap Hound No. 6: Death, Telephones & Scissors by Sean Tejaratchi*

*(lightly modified)

CONTRIBUTORS

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Quoted in the introduction/preamble are words from Phil Elverum.