

Why hello there! It feels like years since I sat down to write an article, but that's *mostly* due to 2020 being a complete sh\*t show. In reality it's only been \*checks notes\* six months since I left Star City Games. It's funny, because I saw many speculating that I got fired, but in reality I was just very burnt out with writing articles every week. It became difficult to find topics that interested me, and on top of that I was much more intoxicated with my other projects; The Magic Pro League and [Melee.gg](https://Melee.gg).

Do I miss it? Yes, and truth be told I might come knocking on Cedric's door about getting my old gig back again at the beginning of next year. If he'll have me, that is. You know if my goal is to get my old job back again, maybe I should stop making fun of his Mono-colored aggro decks so much? Hmm, NAH! So yeah, I haven't written an article in over six months, and I'm probably not going to get this edited so you're going to have to bear with me on any grammatical errors on this one. Sorry, not sorry!

It was actually Cedric's [Twitter thread](#) from Saturday combined with today's [announcement](#) from WotC that sparked this sudden interest to write again. I don't know, I guess just constantly seeing how miserable people are when playing/covering Standard combined with Wizards blaming high-level competitive play for bad formats really just got the blood pumping and helped me say this; Standard sucks and the players aren't to blame for why it sucks.



Now I'm not asking for any praise for being the one to finally blow the whistle on this. All I humbly ask for in return is that you continue reading this article, retweet it, follow me on [Twitter](#), become a Patron of the [Bash Bros Podcast](#), buy a sweet [MTG Melee Shirt](#), and try out the new [Melee Deck Database](#), that's it!

So where was I? Oh yeah, Standard sucks. It has for some time now, and even though some people find enjoyment out of it at various times does not make me feel it's been healthy, interesting, or engaging. In fact, I've felt like we've been in the "best deck" abyss for far too long, and it's quite honestly driving me insane.

So how did we get here? Well, I guess Wizards wants us to think;

*"The speed at which high-level digital play attacks new formats, particularly when digital play is the only high-level play available, means that metagames advance past the early stages far faster than they used to."*

So what they are saying is that we, the competitive players, play their game so much that we find all the best decks too quickly that the metagame evolves far too quickly for the 3-month set cycle causing the format to stagnant too quickly. While this might have *\*some\** truth to it at the tail end of a format, I'm here to say;



Now it's true that in the past we truly did master a format that once it was close to the end of its play cycle everything felt solved. What's not true is thinking this particular Standard format has already been solved, or that those 'solved' formats weren't still fun to play in. I mean just take a look at all the Four-color Omnath [decklists](#) and you'll clearly see that we haven't even come close to boiling down the best version of this deck.

In reality, all we did was identify that Lotus Cobra, Uro, Omnath, Escape to the Wilds, and Genesis Ultimatum are very good together. Past that, we are all ramping, interacting, gaining card advantage, and killing with different cards. All we did was identify the best cards, that's it. We didn't even have to tune the deck for it to dominate the format!

This is why I think it's ridiculous for Wizards to frame this as "competitive players advancing metagames past the early stages too quickly!" Honestly, it really upsets me, because if that's actually true, then competitive Magic is fundamentally flawed. That no matter how well the sets are designed, competitive players will come in, boil a format down to its essential pieces, and solve things in record time leaving the format uninteresting.

Today's announcement felt more like passing off the blame for clearly flawed card design. Now I'm no expert at card design. In fact, my month consulting on Modern Horizons 2 taught me that the job is damn near impossible. There's clearly more possibilities than time allowed so sometimes things are going to get missed, and the competitive players are going to find things Play Design never thought about. Still though, that doesn't explain what happened this past week.

Wizards printed some messed up cards (again) that broke the format, plain and simple. We didn't 'find' the best deck through the sheer volume of games we got to play. No, we saw Javier Dominguez playing this deck during the early access streamer event. We found it on day one by putting all the best landfall cards with all the ways to put additional lands into play cards. That's it, that's all we did, and it was disgusting.

Now Uro is banned, the Omnath decks might still be good enough, but in reality Adventure decks may finally be in a position to take over the format. If they do, then Lucky Clover or Edgewall Innkeeper may have to get banned next. If that happens, who's fault is that going to be?

Look, let's get to a point. I think the way current cards are designed is flawed in many ways.

### **1. Too many decks build themselves.**

From Energy to Adventures, some decks have felt like they were already built at WotC Headquarters with just enough removal, card advantage, hand smoothing, and payoffs to compete against anything the rest of the format can throw at them.

### **2. Mana, as a resource, is being tampered with at an alarming rate.**

I honestly don't even know where to begin with this one as there's so many ways things have been disturbed. Cards that accelerate mana development have become more abundant as well as those that smooth draws, draw cards, and utilize mana in later turns. Now one or two of these effects in the format is typically fine, but lately it seems like they are all constantly prevalent. Now add the London Mulligan rule to the mix, and you are left with high-efficiency games over, and over, and over again.

I get it, Magic is a much better game when both players get to play, but I don't think the juice is worth the squeeze on this one. Not for highly-competitive players, at least. Trying to fix the 'mana issue' has steered the game down this rabbit hole where both players, when an aggressive deck is not in play, **must** make every land drop so that they can continue to gather resources while saving some room to interact with their opponent. If one player stumbles that's usually game over. That's because the other can continue to snowball card advantage until they are 40 cards into their deck and have an answer for everything in their hand.

Wait, I just described Magic in a nutshell, didn't I? Like that's been the case for two decades now, why is this something I'm upset about? Well, that's because I haven't talked about the third reason yet!

### 3. THE PREMIUM CARDS ARE SO FLIPPING RIDICULOUS NOW!

If you fall behind in a game, you're not just setting yourself up for a couple bad exchanges in the following turns, you're losing the game. Any slight advantage in the early turns allows the opposition to find a clear opening for game-winning cards like Teferi, Time Raveler, Nissa, Who Shakes the World, Nightpack Ambusher, Embercleave, Fires of Invention, Wilderness Reclamation, Bolas' Citadel, Genesis Ultimatum, Aetherworks Marvel, or Muxus, the Goblin.. Goblin. You know, the cards that kind of just single handedly win the games when they resolve.



Cards just have too much bang for their... mana investment these days. Playable creatures, for example, are also interactive spells, draw extra cards, make extra mana or creatures, or have built-in protection from interaction. Most importantly, the bulk of them force you to do little to nothing to get a return on your original investment.

All of this has almost killed blocking as a tactical strategy in Standard which is something Reid Duke brought up earlier last week in a [tweet of his](#). I mean, it's really foolish to try to make attacking your Plan A when you can so easily generate card/tempo advantage with the plethora of non-aggressive elements available these days. Sure aggressive decks exist, mainly thanks to other degenerate cards like Embercleave and Winota, but rarely can they stand up on their own when being targeted by the format. That's why they tend to be smart choices when the rest of the format is busy cannibalizing itself by maindecking 6-8 copies of Negate and Mystical Dispute.

EDIT: Holy sh\*t, I forgot about Oko. I actually forgot to add Oko to that list above.

So why is this happening? Well, my \*theory\* is that Wizards is VERY focused on the acquisitions of new players. I mean, it makes sense. Now this might be survivorship bias, but we still all play this game, and it's known to have a long retention rate so why not focus on acquiring new players?

Well, one way to do that is to make the cards a little less complex and more stimulating to cast. Try to reduce the amount of games lost due to mana screw, and increase the amount of cards that help smooth out draws. Give the cards big effects so players understand why they are winning and losing games so they understand the game on a deeper level more quickly. Eliminate the most complex phase in Magic; Blocking.

OBVIOUSLY this is all speculation, and in no way am I trying to speak ill of Wizards employees or their intentions. I actually really like everyone I've met there, and the reality is I want what they want. The two things I'm most tied to right now is The Magic Pro League and MTG Melee; two things that want Magic to have healthy formats and a robust organized play.

That's probably why I, and many others have been so frustrated lately. The game's formats have not been fun. They've been riddled with problematic cards, one-deck formats, and confusing/daunting OP structures. When it's time to ban cards, the decisions often feel safe leading to more problems down the line. When this happens it feels like the next big tournament I play in was, once again, solved on day one leading to another tournament where 50+% of the field is playing the same deck, and the rest of the format is trying to attack it.

I want to be excited about the Grand Finals, but I'm just not. I'm sick of playing games where I feel I need to hope they don't have their best two drop on turn two, or that I draw my best card by turn five. I don't know, I just want games to develop at a pace that allows us to interact with each other and not just need interaction for each other's whammies.

Well I'm going to end my rant, and I guess get started on testing Standard for the Grand Finals. While I do that, let me know what you think, but please keep your comments civil and non-disparaging.

**Update:** 1st game... sigh >\_<

