The State of Tron

By sicsmoo, Sept 2022
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Tron. The perennial boogeyman of the Modern format and first choice of gigachads everywhere. It's been a tough few years for the archetype, as it has suffered a seemingly constant stream of new hate cards, and with the power level of the format gradually rising around it while receiving few new tools of its own. There are signs of this trend changing though, as we have been thrown a few bones in Dominaria United, and have The Brothers' War to look forward to in November, which is expected to contain some powerful colorless cards.

In any case, Tron is still viable and there are several flavors to choose from. In this article I'm going to give a quick high-level overview of each.

Green Tron

The original build of the archetype that has hovered between Tier 1 and 2 throughout the entire existence of the Modern format, a distinction that ostensibly only Burn can boast otherwise. All the more impressive when you consider the factors I outlined previously. Given all this, I put the deck firmly in Tier 2 currently, which is to say still quite competitive! Statistically, it's sitting at about 3-4% of the metagame.

Green Tron has the most raw power of the Tron subarchetypes, and also the most linear game plan. The goal is having Tron on turn 3, playing your bombs and outmuscling the opponent. This is achieved through aggressive mulligans and going down to 5 or lower is a regular occurrence. Notably, while your plan is quite straightforward and any noob can potentially pick up the deck and have success, there is still a significant amount of intricacy in sequencing your engine cards (chromatics, maps, scryings, stirrings), playing the few interactive cards you do have, playing around hate, etc.

There are some downsides to this all-in type of strategy. Inevitably, sometimes you will not find a hand that is likely to assemble your "combo" despite shipping a few back and are stuck praying to the Karnfather for good topdecks. If you can stomach these swings, you can live the dream of restarting the game with big daddy Karn or resolving Ugin's ultimate.

Prison Tron

Prison Tron is the newest addition to the Tron roster and currently second most popular. It came into existence with the printing of Urza's Saga in MH2. Some might call it a spiritual successor to the Whir Prison deck which existed until Mox Opal was banned in early 2020. It has a good plan

against many of the top decks and is sufficiently under the radar such that opponents may not know how to play against it. Its meta share is roughly 0.5%.

The goal of the deck is pretty simple - soft or hard lock your opponent out of the game with prison pieces and suck them into Possessed Portal. Ensnaring Bridge and Chalice of the Void are at the core of this plan, with Sorcerous Spyglass and Pithing Needle filling in holes, Spellskite and Welding Jar for protection, and of course Karn, the Great Creator and his wishboard. The deck can generate crazy amounts of card advantage and game objects with Mystic Forge which is super fun and satisfying.

While the goal of the deck is simple, achieving it is not. Knowing which lock piece to prioritize in a given scenario, what number to put your chalice on, how to play around interaction, etc, are all things which require careful consideration and knowledge of your opponent's deck. Modern is now a highly interactive format and opponents will usually have some answer to your lock pieces in game 1, not to mention counterspells. You can feel like you're in a safe position but if one thing slips through the cracks it can be over fast. It's very much a hard mode deck, better suited for experienced players or those who want a challenge.

Eldrazi Tron

Technically a deck since Oath of the Gatewatch in early 2016, it wasn't until Aether Revolt and the printing of Walking Ballista in early 2017 that it rose to prominence. It was one of the best decks in Modern for a few years but has since fallen into relative obscurity due to power creep. That being said, it is still a strong deck which has a good plan against a lot of the format. Similar to Prison Tron, its meta share is also around 0.5%.

It's more of a midrange deck than the others, with plenty of interaction and discounted threats via Eldrazi Temple. Having Tron early is ideal but not necessary to compete. E-Tron is relatively flexible and allows you to take on different roles in different matchups. You can keep a wider range of openers than the others can. It's a deck with a lot of dedicated pilots and for good reason - it's a ton of fun and rewarding to those who learn the ins and outs.

Historically, the deck has been the best way to utilize the super powerful Chalice of the Void, a distinction I would now bestow on Prison Tron. E-Tron is still a great shell for it, but lists without the card have emerged that will be better in some situations. The printing of the consistency piece Inscribed Tablet in the 1-drop slot further plays into this.

Blue Tron

Arguably as long-standing as Green Tron in the format but without ever having put up consistent results outside of the hands of dedicated pilots. It is looking to interact early with counters, bounce spells and removal, eventually assemble Tron and finish the game with anything that works - traditionally the Mindslaver lock. I don't have much experience piloting it and won't be

covering it further, but its continued existence does warrant a mention. It sits at 0.2% of the field currently.