

The Wizards I Know

June 8, 2020

My name is Zaiem Beg. I was a contributing editor, then editor-in-chief for major Magic: The Gathering retailer and strategy website Channelfireball.com. Before that, I was a regular contributor for TCGPlayer.com. I've covered several Grand Prix events for official Wizards of the Coast coverage, I've played in Pro Tours testing as a member of Team Channelfireball and Team Mythic, and I've been an active member of the Seattle Magic community, where both Wizards of the Coast and I reside. My work has allowed me to foster close relationships with players at all levels of competitive play as well as employees and contractors at Wizards of the Coast.

Last week when [Lawrence Harmon's published his open letter to Wizards about the treatment of black players in the community](#), a friend and former employee of Wizards of the Coast shared it on his Facebook wall saying, "The Wizards I know is a company that wants to do the right thing," a sentiment I saw echoed several times elsewhere. I hold a very different viewpoint of the company.

Here's the Wizards I know:

I know the time a black writer messaged Wizards asking about writing openings for eighteen months and was told they were not accepting new writers, then continued to keep hiring white writers over that time.

Or the time a black person interviewed at Wizards and started off the interview being told "I've never had this many internal recommendations for a candidate before" then three minutes later, "you're not really a culture fit here."

Or the time they put a [7/11 creature](#) in an [India-themed set](#), then joked in a column about [putting the word "convenience" in the flavor text](#) if only there was room on the card for such delightful racisms.

Or all the times people of color heard "you don't have experience for this role," when they had more experience than the white person they ultimately hired.

Or how the only way most people with brown skin can get in the door is as a temporary contractor and the common refrain along the lines of "well, I didn't get hired on full-time as a contractor, got beat out again, maybe next time, I don't get it -- my teammates and manager said I was doing the best work on the team" with baffled sadness over why their dream company treated them that way.

Or all the times a person of color got fired (contractors, natch) for their first offense but saw their white coworkers get second- and third- chances for the same thing.

Or all the times someone of color had to put up with casual workplace bullshit but knowing if they speak up, they have zero chance of ever advancing if they say anything, so they had to go along with it with a smile.

Or or or or or or.

There are so many stories. And most of these stories don't get shared, even privately among friends. Stories that were asked not to be shared even anonymously, lest some vague detail potentially connected back to them. And those who are in a position to speak out for others don't feel empowered to do so.

That's because they operate on fear.

Monowhite Control: not just a deck

There is absolutely zero accountability at Wizards of the Coast.

People don't speak up to change from within because they can't. Passion is welcome as long as it's not the boat-rocking kind. It's really hard to do well at the company if you're a boat-rocker. People hold petty grudges for years and it's very bad for your career if you want to stick your neck out to do the right thing. Dissent is absolutely not what you want to be doing if you want to advance your career prospects at Wizards of the Coast. If you're seen as a troublemaker in any way, they won't hire you if you apply. If you're a contractor, you won't get converted. You get less leeway at work. Maybe your bonus is a little lower. You don't get as good a review. You get passed over for promotion.

This problem is not limited to just inside the company by any stretch. Content creators who rock the boat do not get rewarded. Community leaders can't speak out about things they feel are unjust because they know if they do, their equity plummets. If you're a content creator and get showcased or get a preview card and receive the mammoth signal boost that comes with any official Wizards endorsement of your content, that can make-or-break someone in an increasingly crowded field of streamers, video makers, writers, and podcasters. It is absolutely imperative that nobody bites the hand that feeds them because absolutely anything out of line at all can result in any number of forms of retaliation, mostly insidious, sometimes overt. They'll blacklist them. [They'll ban them if they need to.](#)

Anyone in a position to hold them accountable is invested in being around the game in some capacity, and that would be career suicide. If you ever even *plan* on potentially working at Wizards someday you need to keep in line at all times. And even worse, even if you don't have aspirations of working for Wizards, a Magic website, or creating content independently, they can just shut off your ability to play the game.

Social media activity is closely monitored. If this note gets shared on Facebook, no Wizards of the Coast employee or content creator, no CFB writer, no Arena streamer, no podcaster is likely to engage with it in any way. Not a like on a tweet. Not a Facebook react. Doing that carries too high a risk of the silent death penalty.

Former director of Global Organized Play and eSports Helene Bergeot:

Helene Bergeot Zaiem Beg I have been reprimanded for expressing personal opinions on Facebook. To provide more context, someone was expressing their frustration about a decision in Europe and I commented something like "not my call; this is a local decision"

Screenshot of my answer was sent to my boss; I got scolded for not playing team

Wow · Reply · 8h



This is formally codified in the language when players sign when they agree to the Magic Pro League, a league of 32 contracted players for MTG: Arena, one of their two digital offerings.

a. Your personal conduct reflects on the public perception of the MPL. To that end, you understand and agree that your conduct, both during public events and when not engaged in public events that nonetheless may reflect negatively on MPL, its parent company, WOTC, and its/their parents or sponsors is of great importance and material to your continued participation in the League;

b. You shall abide by all laws that you are subject to;

c. You shall not take any action adverse to MPL Content (defined below) and any and all other intellectual property owned by MPL, WOTC or Hasbro, Inc.;

d. You shall at all times observe the highest standards of personal integrity and sportsmanship, and not take any actions that brings your integrity into question or that is detrimental to the MPL, the Games, the League, WOTC, or Hasbro, Inc.;

e. You shall compete to the best of your ability. Any form of cheating will not be tolerated and may result in the immediate termination of this Agreement, and the forfeiture of any applicable Appearance Fee(s) (defined below) and/or prize winnings. Additionally, you must not attempt to influence or manipulate the result of any match or tournament including, but not limited to, prize splitting, wagering, conceding, or bribery; and

f. You shall not make any statement, oral or written, that ridicules, libels, slanders, makes fun of, is injurious to, or places in a negative light the MPL, the Games, the League, WOTC, and Hasbro (including for each its employees or other competitors).

Further, you agree that the MPL is the proper organization to make decisions regarding violations of this Section 3. Violations of Section 3 may result, at our sole discretion, in the immediate suspension from the League, the revocation of outstanding invitations to Competitions, or termination of this Agreement, the forfeiture of any remaining Appearance Fees, and fines or other penalties as proscribed in the then current League Rules. Such suspension, revocation or termination shall be without liability to you.

You shall not make any statement, oral or written, that ridicules, libels, slanders, makes fun of, is injurious to, or places in a negative light the MPL, the Games, the League, WOTC, and Hasbro (including for each its employees or other competitors).

Clean it up a little and that could be the company mission statement!

The Jason Chan situation: where basic human decency is kind of a big ask

The degree to which Wizards operates knowing it won't face public accountability sometimes reaches absurd levels. Take, for example, the situation last week with Jason Chan, [better known as Amaz](#).

Amaz is a Chinese-Canadian streamer on Twitch with 924k followers. He is primarily a Hearthstone streamer, but in recent years has played more Magic, much to the delight of Wizards. Bringing in that crossover audience is very valuable, so they are happy to promote him. He's received two special Pro Tour invites and had previously been sponsored by Channelfireball. Last August, he was disqualified from Grand Prix Vegas [for aggressive behavior](#). Pushing or bumping into a judge, depending on whose account you believe.

Getting disqualified from a Grand Prix for aggressive behavior toward a judge typically carries a suspension from playing in live Magic tournaments. However, Wizards can't continue to use Amaz for advertising their new digital platform if they announced he's not and didn't want to deal with the PR and outrage, so they just quietly banned him behind the scenes and gave him a shadowban so they could keep him out of their Magic tournaments, but still reap the rewards of the audience he brings to their game. This is one of the open secrets that are whispered in private messages, and these shadowbans have been effective in managing the PR strategy. They're watching your social media likes. They're definitely watching what you say about who is and who isn't banned. Nobody gets out of line.

Jason Chan, better known as Amaz, has been banned from playing in live Magic: The Gathering tournaments since the fall of 2019.

Wizards of the Coast runs a feature called Cube Spotlight. A cube is a great way to fine-tune a Magic experience and is something people feel deeply passionate about. It's a form of expression and the philosophy of what makes good or fun or interesting gameplay. Curating a cube is very personal. For Cube Spotlight, they take someone's cube, they put up a beautiful writeup about the cube and the decisions that went into it, and run it on queues on Magic Online all week. Having different cube lists each week keeps formats fresh so people will continue to play Magic Online and not burn out.

Amaz did not get the treatment to his writeup that everyone else got. They had him submit one. Magic writing for things of this nature takes a long time to write even if you're used to the cadence of putting out a column every week. For people who write seldom or not at all, these can take as many as 20 hours to write.

Instead, they had him submit a time-consuming writeup about a passion project under the guise of showcasing his cube to the world, then didn't run the article. They just put his cube list up and they

didn't even give him credit for it until he asked them to. The reason? "Scheduling issues." They didn't afford him the basic decency of an explanation that isn't transparently bullshit. Every other cube spotlight has the search feature enabled on the webpage, allowing you to search for specific cards in the long list. His does not.

But I'll tell you what they didn't have any problem with: they took the part they can monetize and were happy to run with that. Scheduling issues did not extend to the Magic Online queues, which were fresh and popping off with his intellectual property. Hey, as long as they can profit off his work!

Asking someone to spend considerable time writing and perfecting an explanation of their passion project, then not running it saying "oops, scheduling issues" is cruel. It reads like a mean-spirited prank. They couldn't even afford him the decency to put *his own fucking name* on his work until he asked. They asked a content creator to provide content, then ran it without attribution. Of all the possible permutations available to them, THAT is what they ultimately settled on.

Adam Styborski's writeup

THE ARCHETYPES

Every archetype should feel familiar if you've played Magic long enough—after all, a cube built from commons is built using those bread-and-butter Limited staples you've used dozens of times drafting each set! But taking an eye to ensure there's synergy between their chosen colors and strategies is something any cube designer should do.

White-Blue Tempo



White-Blue decks can play out in a number of ways but will always be best focused on enters-the-battlefield creatures providing value, then backing them up with bounce spells, protection tricks, and counterspells. Kor Skyfisher is a meme within the community and led to "flicker" effects like Ghostly Flicker being added, so have fun drawing cards as many times as possible off Mulldrifter!

Blue-Black Control



One of the decisions that went into the cube years ago was a move away from "best in your sideboard" cards. While having a Disenchant effect for when your opponent gets Pestilence going, or a Shatter option to side in against a Bonesplitter, seems great because the power level across commons is somewhat flat, the choice was made to focus on every card in the cube being a card that can reasonably be put into your main deck. You'll find you draft a "playable" deck easier and earlier than other Draft formats, letting you instead focus on choosing cards that best synergize or improve what you want to do with your deck already.

As VP of R&D Aaron Forsythe once said, "This is just all the cards we *shouldn't* have printed at common." You'll find powerful choices deep into every pack, and it's really up to reading the table to see how you want to handle things.

GET READY TO PLAY

There is plenty to explore and try with the cube, and I'm excited to see how far it will be pushed by the biggest audience it has ever had. I look forward to seeing the ups and downs of your all-common experience, and I'll be sure to take trips through the queues and try a hand at playing my cube in a way I had never dreamed possible!

CLICK FOR SEARCHABLE CUBE LIST



John Terrill's writeup

For many people, Cube is fundamentally about doing broken things, and *Cultic Cube* is delighted to help you scratch that itch. Lots of unfair cards exist, from [Sylvan Library](#) to [Through the Breach](#) to [Liliana of the Veil](#). The fastest, least interactive game-enders are absent, however; [Balance, Show and Tell](#), [Channel](#), and so on. Still, creature cheat is present in spades. Reanimator has access to a wealth of discard effects and reanimation spells, such that a careful drafter can almost certainly assemble the deck. Our guiding rules, however, are that reanimation spells cost four or more mana, or they are creature-based and thus slow and fragile.



The four-CMC limitation still permits you to run out an [Emrakul, the Promised End](#) far earlier than you have any right to. However, it is just slow enough that opposing interaction has a chance to come online. And black does not have a monopoly on creature cheat. Every color has a means of sneaking game-enders into play, from [Resurrection](#), [Arcane Artisan](#), and [Sneak Attack](#) to [Elvish Piper](#) and [Quicksilver Amulet](#).

IN DEFENSE OF THE CONTENTIOUS

A few words about some of the features of this cube that sometimes surprise people: Firstly, this cube dramatically limits the number of multicolor cards. Gold cards tend to put one at a disadvantage when picked early, as the odds that one will ultimately be able to play a two-color card are much lower than a monocolored card. Moreover, if no one is interested in a color pair, its gold cards are wasted. This environment minimizes such potentially unwanted cards by trimming down its gold section to a handful of unique essentials. If you are interested in a more in-depth exploration of [multicolor section design](#), I have a video on the topic!



More broadly, this entails balancing the format in such a way that no strategy, archetype, or color is an odds-on favorite to win. Moreover, recall that the power level of the environment, while quite high, is relatively flat. This has ramifications for choice because it means that there are few cards that are so high above the power curve that they are slam-dunk first picks. When you open a pack, you will have an embarrassment of legitimate choices at your disposal. And when it comes time to build your deck, you'll have the happy challenge of sculpting an elegant and focused deck from a mountain of awesome *Magic* cards.

Cube is the perfect format for showcasing the agency, control, and creativity that *Magic* affords us. And such choice encourages exciting, dynamic gameplay. Rosewater observes that high choice means "more surprise" and more upsets, which results in "games that are more fun to watch." Decision points and real options reward careful thinking, innovative strategy, and playing the percentages. Games do not come down to which oppressive artifact your [Tinker](#) finds on turns two.



What Jason Chan gets



Super disappointed I wasn't credited anywhere with my cube list in the @MagicOnline announcement.

They already told me my article couldn't be published due to scheduling issues, and now this just feels like a gut punch =(

Reached out to them, hoping for the best.

CUBE SPOTLIGHT: PEASANT CUBE JUNE 3-10

Magic Online's Cube Spotlight Series returns with yet another Cube offering. Our last Cube addition to MTGO's *Ikorra* alternative play season, *Peasant Cube*, starting June 3 and ending June 10, features powerful commons and uncommons for a multitude of play options. Drafting is dynamic, and gameplay is crisp and interactive, with mechanics that prioritize the new-player experience while providing enough flexibility for seasoned veterans. Check out the full card list [here](#) to see what's in store.

For more information about the alternative play season, click [here](#).



Amaz (@Amaz) · Jun 2
Replying to @Amaz

A nice update to the original article to include my name at least :)

CUBE SPOTLIGHT SERIES – AMAZ'S PEASANT CUBE

Posted in **Magic Digital** on June 1, 2020

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By Wizards of the Coast
[Archive](#)

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FULL CUBE LIST

CARD NAME	COLOR
Master Splicer	White
Rhox Veteran	White
Miraculous Recovery	White
Glimmerpoint Stag	White
Daxos, Blessed by the Sun	White
Abzan Falconer	White

<https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/magic-digital/cube-spotlight-series-john-terrills-cultic-cube-2020-05-18>

<https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/magic-digital/cube-spotlight-series-pauper-cube-2020-03-10>

<https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/magic-digital/cube-spotlight-series-amazs-peasant-cube-2020-06-01>

<https://twitter.com/Amaz/status/1267886969108996099>

<https://twitter.com/Amaz/status/1267920724997611522>

Imagine thinking treating anyone like this could ever somehow be okay, as if a shadowban justifies this. Of course *he* can't say anything to advocate for himself, because gaming is his livelihood and can't bite the hand that feeds him even when that hand is exploiting him. And since Wizards shadowbanned him because lol transparency, he can't even defend himself along that axis or provide any context. He just has to smile while they shit on him. But they were very nice to credit him for his own work after he asked nicely, as a treat.

This is what happens when there's never any public accountability. People can't even safely like a social media post without fear of retaliation. How can anyone feel safe to do the unpopular thing and

stand up and tell people what they're doing is wrong? How can that possibly happen in the environment of paranoia and fear Wizards of the Coast has deliberately created?

We're very inclusive, that just doesn't include you

The very next day after the Amaz cube went up, they tweeted out [a black square](#) and look, we have [Cedric](#)! And [Rashad](#)! And...an hour later we found a [third one](#) and yes I know he's [called us out over our racist behavior](#) but...he's black! We have *three* black friends, you guys! I'll let you guess if they talked to any of these people before exploiting them for tokenism. Wizards of the Coast is so proud of their diversity and [inclusiveness](#). And they're so, so proud of themselves for their LGBTQ characters and their black characters and how they have a black guy on coverage, so how could they possibly be racist??

And it's so insulting to see them do things like go to Kaladesh and pat themselves on the back about how so [goshdarn diverse they are](#) all the navel-gazing and look [we made Saheeli Rai](#), then you look at the company photo and realize the only people benefitting from this financially don't look like the people in these inclusive planes. They don't look like that at all. (But still gotta work in that 7-11 joke, Indian people own convenience stores you see, that's the joke isn't that very funny, really wish we could have worked something into the flavor text though, hey maybe we can do a tech support joke if we return there that'd be pretty fun wouldn't it?)

Eric Froehlich earnestly looking to support black Magic artists, only to learn the reality of how few there are would be funny if it wasn't so sad:



"Sorry, you're not a culture fit, now please excuse me while I promote our next set with Teferi as the flagship character wow sales look strong this quarter #unity #blacklivesmatter"

And maybe you can explain some of these transgressions with innocent explanations. But I liken it to cheating. Everyone forgets to put their creature into the graveyard after combat sometimes, but

when it happens over and over and over and over and over again, it becomes a pattern. And then the big things like "telling the black writer we aren't accepting writers while hiring white ones" is just clear, naked cheating like stacking the deck (an apt metaphor if I say so myself) and we've arrived at Alex Bertoini. (This analogy gets less clean when you incorporate subconscious bias, but analogies involving complex ideas are rarely perfect; this should still suffice.)

And since nobody feels like they can speak up about all the racist experiences that they've had or noticed from other coworkers, there can be no allyship. The people wronged have no option but to sit there and hope it gets better, often gaslighted and wondering if the very racist thing they endured wasn't racist at all because nobody else is talking about these things, so maybe they're just imagining it.

WotC has some wonderful, kind, empathetic people working there who are willing to do the right thing, but the culture makes it impossible for those people to have any meaningful influence. There's no culture of accountability, just deep obliviousness while simultaneously maintaining the performance of awareness. And they think because they're not all MAGA Trump 2020 alt-right nationalist **#NotCStaff**, they're absolved of racism.

"This game is inclusive to everyone, but if you're brown, we'll keep you at arm's length and maybe you can be a token if you're lucky. But regardless we are always happy to profit off your work, and most of the time we'll even credit you for it!"

Wizards of the Coast is a rotten company with a long unbroken pattern of insidious racist behavior wrapped in self-congratulatory praise. You can print all the Teferis and Saheelis and Chandras you want, but it doesn't make you racially inclusive when the people profiting off it all are almost exclusively white. And people of color can't get in on it even when they try.

That's not inclusive; it's exploitive.

That's the Wizards I know.

[-Zaiem](#)

P.S. this is a real Magic card. Now, this card was from a long time ago and would be unfair to criticize the current management for something printed over 25 years ago. But you know what was not from 25 years ago? The URL that points to this card in the Gatherer database. That can be changed easily and at any point, but nevertheless, [it remains where it is](#). Isn't that an interesting choice?

<https://gatherer.wizards.com/pages/card/details.aspx?multiverseid=1488>

Invoke Prejudice



Enchantment

If opponent casts a Summon spell that does not match the color of one of the creatures under your control, that spell is countered unless the caster pays an additional \times where X is the casting cost of the Summon spell.

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