

Early this morning, Mark Rosewater proposed the following question on Twitter:



Mark Rosewater 
@maro254

Inquiring Minds Want to Know:
While R&D tries to support innovation and balance, the two often fight with each other. Which of the two do you personally believe R&D should prioritize?
[#mtgimwtk](#) [#WotCStaff](#)

☐ Innovation

☐ Balance

[Vote](#) 12,230 votes • 12 hours left

8:24am · 7 May 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

This is a tough one to answer because, as Ben Seck quickly pointed out, they are on different axes. There shouldn't be a tradeoff here. Having formats be balanced doesn't actually do anything to stifle innovation, and if it does, we have a very real problem. Innovation is very important to the game, but when it dives into the design space of completely warping Magic as we know it, it complicates matters.

I understand that everything within is my personal opinion and I speak for nobody but myself. My view is that Companions are arguably the biggest mistake we've seen. This changed the fundamentals of Magic. Suddenly, players get to start with a functional 8 card hand. Not just do you get the extra card, however, but you get to start with a specific card you're already incentivized to build your deck around AND it can't be interacted with while it sits off to the side for whenever you're ready for it.

This is not a small deal. We saw it immediately in Standard where almost every deck was playing with a Companion. Today, I think that has gone to even larger extremes. The Yorion decks, despite being 80 cards, are unbelievably consistent. There is plenty of card drawing, planeswalkers, and removal that all interact incredibly well with Yorion by getting enter the battlefield triggers. Having Fires in the format just exasperates that as players are able to accumulate tremendous value turn after turn starting early in the game.

The ways to combat that are mostly getting aggressive, and now we have to decide between Lurrus aggro and Obosh aggro. Yes, they offer some ability to innovate here, but within incredible constraints. If you're playing an aggressive deck where none of your creatures cost more than 2 mana, then sure you could play a Sacrifice deck or a Cycling deck, but how many other creatures fit into the Lurrus colors to make a deck? Same with Obosh...you could play Black, Red, or Rakdos, but your options are very limited when you're playing only odd casting cost cards within those constraints. I think the Companions severely limit innovation if you want to be competitive.

As the conversation went on, this ended up being the main focal point of discussion:



The short answer to this is no. The creative team absolutely needs to get creative.

I've seen more time than I can count people calling for members of R&D to get fired for design mistakes. Mistakes happen. Having there be penalties attached to making these mistakes is something that would greatly diminish creativity. If it's your job to be creative, but you'll be fired for getting too creative and missing the mark, this doesn't create an optimal environment for making the best game that you can.

That said, Companions should have never existed in the manner that they were printed. So what's the solution?



Mark Rosewater ✓ @maro254 · 3h

My larger question for today is should companions have been made and banned appropriately in the necessary formats or never have been made at all? Should the unhappiness it creates for some mean others should never have gotten happiness from it? It's a very serious question.

143

1

91



eric froehlich ✓
@efropoker

Replying to @maro254 @cryogen_mtg and 4 others

I think this is the easiest slam dunk. Yes, they should NOT be created. These are crazy powerful and easy to put in specific strategies. There isn't a ton of creativity This Standard format has so many players saying it's least fun they've ever had, and other formats are crippled

4:08 PM · May 7, 2020 · TweetDeck

Companions haven't even been released in paper here yet and we're overwhelmingly seeing players say how little fun they're having and how big a mistake this was. And yes, there will be complaints from some number of players every time anything happens. People love to complain. But the absolute lovers of Magic who tend to only speak positively are joining in on the overwhelming complaints. Here's a very small sample:



Bryan Gottlieb @BryanGo

5h

I just want to love constructed Magic again

15 5 122



Sam Black

@SamuelHBlack

Replying to @BryanGo

Emphatic co-sign. Glad I'm finding a genuinely surprising amount of depth in this limited format.

2:21am · 5 May 2020 · Twitter for iPhone



Andrew Cuneo

@AndrewCuneo

Replying to @ffreakmtg

Having a handful of candidates for the best deck is not the same as having a good standard. The quality of the gameplay, especially when Fires is involved is awful. The games snowball way too fast and the companions mean the person in the lead never runs out of stuff to do.

6:02pm · 2 May 2020 · Twitter Web App



Brad Nelson

@ffreakmtg

The Jeskai Lukka Fires mirror is awful. Like it's so bad that the only reason I don't want to play the deck is because then I will have to play mirrors.



8:42pm · 4 May 2020 · Twitter Web App

9 Replies 52 Likes



Reply to @ffreakmtg



Brad Nelson @ffreakmtg

6h

I'll admit I was wrong, eat crow, whatever. Just don't make me do that ever again pls.

9



Paul Rietzl

@paulrietzl

What if instead of getting to start with it, you had to shuffle your companion into your deck but you could play 4 and wouldn't have to follow the restriction?

8:07pm · 2 May 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

9 Replies 14 Retweets 539 Likes

 **Nick Prince, Arboreal Grazer Fanatic ...** 1d
Ban companions, ban Fires. The jokes just aren't funny any more.

💬 20 ↻ 3 ❤️ 209 ⋮

 **Chris Kvartek**
@Kavartech

Replying to @nicknprince

I've decided to put down standard for a little bit too, Nick. Yorion + teferi decks are all that I face, and the gameplay is just too monotonous. I've also yet to find anything that can counteract it. Fortunately I've been loving Ichoria draft so everyone should just do that!

8:35am · 4 May 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

 **Jacob Wilson**
@JacobWilson95

Just timed out a Hasbro employee in game 1. They played very well, but slowly. Maybe this will trickle down to R&D that average folks can't handle Yorion mirrors and each player spending 15+ mana every turn, 5 thru 15.



1:55pm · 4 May 2020 · Twitter Web App

2 Replies · 1 Retweet · 95 Likes

💬 ↻ ❤️ ⋮

Reply to @JacobWilson95

 **Jess** ✨ @bloodymessjess 13h
Replying to @JacobWilson95

I played one Yorion mirror on arena and the first game lasted 30mins and that was the last time I played a Yorion deck.

💬 ↻ ❤️ 6 ⋮

 **Emsizz** @Emsizz 12h
Replying to @JacobWilson95

I have conceded ranked Yorion mirrors on Arena just because I was sick of playing by game 3.

💬 ↻ ❤️ 2 ⋮

 **Sam Black** @SamuelHBlack Apr 28
Failing to find any motivation to play games of constructed with companions, but becoming a limited-only player has really put a damper on my brews. Also hurts that I don't have tournaments to force me to play constructed. (Online tournaments aren't for me)

💬 14 ↻ 1 ❤️ 114 ⋮

 **Zvi Mowshowitz**
@TheZvi

Replying to @SamuelHBlack

I tried, faced companion after companion, motivation destroyed. Maybe try again later.

You don't only need a companion. You need a companion *that destroys people* or what are you even doing. So terrible.



Bob Huang @Griselpuff · Apr 20

Instead of banning Companions in all formats, [@wizards_magic](#) should consider getting rid of the ability altogether. Treat all the cards as regular cards.

Admit they were a mistake, and move on.

17

22

257



Matt Sperling

@sickofit

I'm now on ban the companions but make constructed 80 card min across the board rather than 60.

8:49am · 26 Apr 2020 · Twitter Web App

39 Replies 10 Retweets 390 Likes



Seth Manfield(Envy)

@SethManfield

They were holding me in a basement, my bad. Let's stop playing Yorion mirrors now 😞

Seth Manfield(Envy) @SethManfield

Been seeing some negative posts regarding this Standard format, but I love it. Good job [@wizards_magic](#). Sure there are some super powerful cards in the format, and we may need some bans, but that doesn't take away from it being very enjoyable to play.

11:13pm · 6 May 2020 · Twitter Web App

There's little doubt that Companions are a very major issue, and I didn't even get into all the Lurrus complaints from Vintage players around the world. We have ultra powerful cards that were printed without strong enough drawbacks. The advantage of starting with an extra card that also (in most cases) makes your deck much stronger in a zone that can't be interacted with by the opponent was just too much.

If Companions had been powered down dramatically, we could have a really cool design space potential. Take Pikula's tweet, for example:



Metaling Mage

@meddlingmage

Replying to @maro254 @efropoker and 5 others

To me it feels like Companions would be much cooler if they were hard to use. "Oh wow somebody broke that weird Companion" is sweet. Companion in every deck less sweet.

4:07pm · 7 May 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Now that could be something interesting. When you saw someone with some Companion played in a deck and in a way you didn't think of, it could be a cool takeaway and help breed more innovation. Instead, you just see 80 card decks with a ton of value cards to make Yorion do absurd things. Or you see Lotus, LED, Baubles or cheap creatures to make Lurrus go off, etc.



Mark Rosewater ✓ @maro254

3h

Replying to @efropoker @sickofit and 4 others

I don't have a crystal ball about what will happen to the mechanics I turn over. Power level is decided completely downstream. I'm questioning whether I should push less hard in unknown areas early on so potential problems don't happen later.

💬 15 ↺ ↻ ❤️ 14 ⋮



eric froehlich ✓

@efropoker

Replying to @maro254 @sickofit and 4 others

Ok, this feels like a very different question to me. My answer will always be that you should push, but that you need a team in place that can fix/prevent the things that pushed too far. I would never want someone in creative to hold back, but things can't be released like this.

So in this followup tweet, Mark is saying he doesn't have control over the power level of these things. This opens up a whole bunch of questions for myself and I'm sure many other Magic players. The thing is, if you agree with me about never wanting to restrict creativity, this would mean that Mark and everyone in a similar position to him holds absolutely zero blame for these sort of mistakes. Coming up with a creative mechanic is exactly what his job is and exactly what Magic needs to continue to be a great game.

I was under the impression that Play Design was put together entirely for this reason. This allows Creative to remain creative while making sure that things aren't powered too far as to potentially greatly damage Magic. Whether that is true and whether the Companion power level is attributed to Play Design is something I have absolutely no clue about and I'm not here to speculate.

This brings up the most important question...if someone like Mark Rosewater has an idea that he loves and passes it on down the line to the point that Companions get printed in their current state, how do we fix that? My personal belief is that telling Mark to stop sharing those ideas or

pushing for innovation would mean the end of Magic as we know it. Not pushing the boundaries of creativity is likely to lead to a very boring game that never has the super cool new designs we've come to know. But if someone(s) down the line is not able to stop and say "Oko is too powerful" or "Companions completely break the fundamentals of Magic as we know them by creating a huge power incentive and a repetitive play experience that a ton of players will actively despise", then what's to be done?

I don't know what the options are beyond that, but it makes me very sad. It's hard to feel confident about the future of Magic when the creative people have to question whether they can continue to be creative at the risk of "breaking" Magic. It's clear something needs to be done, and I thought that was Play Design, but here we are.

Maybe that means Play Design needs another new process. Maybe that means Play Design needs more members or other changes. Maybe there needs to be more people in place before things get ready to print to make sure nothing has been pushed to that level...Oko was missed by many top players even when it was spoiled. I don't think an absurdly high number of players knew how powerful this card was, but that wasn't really the case with Companions. Everyone kinda knew that these things were broken and immediately knew Lurrus was one of the most powerful cards ever printed. Now that people have had some opportunity to play them online, it feels like they're even more powerful than the initial extremely high speculation. This is a very real concern.

In an optimal world for the competitive players, things could quickly become fixed when problems arise. If we could just ban the Companion mechanic a week after release, it would make competitive play a much better experience for a large number of players. That said, it's not realistic. Wizards of the Coast is a large company and will always be at odds with itself. Even if OP badly wants a card to be banned, something like Oko when there's about to be an MC that a ton of people will be watching, it's not a slam dunk to get banned. A card like Oko is going to be the face of a set being the premier mythic and banning something like that when a new set has just come out is going to have a real impact on sales and the players who have already spent large amounts of money on cards.

I'm also well aware that the competitive players of the world are a very small slice of the Magic playing community. There's a reason things like best of 1 exist and fire much faster on Arena...the vast majority of players just have no interest in competitive play. Something like Companion could be extremely beloved by less competitive players, so just asking for a ban isn't always going to be realistic.

This creates a major issue that goes back to the original question -- do we want innovation or balance? And my answer is that balance will always be the most important, but I refuse to

believe that non-competitive players can't enjoy cards/mechanics that also work for the game's balance.

I'm not saying it's not a very challenging job. It certainly is. But we need high balance and we need high innovation. We need to find the cards that casual players can continue to enjoy while having the game function for those of us who want to take it seriously. I think it's possible and it was there for so many years in Magic's past. I hope we can start to get back to it.