

# The Tale of Two Formats

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"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times..."

## Chapter 1: Extended

Most of the recent talk in the tournament **Magic** arena lately has been about the Extended format, and with good reason. The format currently is, in many ways, perfect.

Powerful cards from every legal block are showing up in Top 8 decks all over the world. The mix of archetypes couldn't be a better cross-section of the game if I drew it up myself. There are decks that draw their inspiration from within specific blocks (Affinity, Blue-Green Madness), from the previous iteration of Extended (Aluren, the Rock), and even loosely from Vintage (Welder Reanimator, Blue-Red Fish). And, of course, there are many decks that never existed before, that take full advantage of the very large pool of cards available. For example, here is GP Boston finalist Lucas Glavin's deck:

Lucas Glavin		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
1 Adarkar Wastes	4 Aether Vial	1 Battlefield Scrounger
1 Brushland	4 Brainstorm	1 Bone Shredder
1 Caves of Koilos	3 Cabal Therapy	1 Cephalid Illusionist
4 City of Brass	2 Chrome Mox	1 Daru Spiritualist
4 Forbidden Orchard	1 Dragon Breath	1 Dragon Shadow
2 Llanowar Wastes	1 Exhume	1 Energy Field
2 Starlit Sanctum	1 Krosan Reclamation	1 Forsaken City
2 Tarnished Citadel	3 Living Wish	2 Gilded Drake
1 Underground River	1 Reanimate	2 Kami of Ancient Law
1 Yavimaya Coast	4 Vampiric Tutor	1 Nomads En-Kor
	4 Worldly Tutor	1 Rootwater Thief
19 lands	1 Worthy Cause	1 Starlit Sanctum
		1 Uktabi Orangantun
	29 other spells	15 sideboard cards
3 Cephalid Illusionist		
3 Daru Spiritualist		
1 Krosan Cloudscraper		
3 Nomads En-Kor		
1 Shaman En-Kor		
1 Sutured Ghoul		
12 creatures		

Glavin's deck uses cards from a whopping 17 different sets spanning each of the eight blocks allowable (with several Core Set cards thrown in for good measure). Seeing a deck like this do well reminds me of what awesome potential for innovation a large format like Extended offers, and how exciting it is to play in a format where such innovation is rewarded.

As a player, this Extended environment is everything I always wanted a format to be (even if it is a little speedy thanks to Chrome Mox). And as a representative of the people who make the game, I'm proud that we managed to get the format to this point via careful management of the Banned List. If you haven't tried playing it yet, check out our compilation of Pro Tour Qualifier decklists here, then head out to your nearest Pro Tour Qualifier (the schedule is here). Better yet, make the trip to the upcoming Grand Prix Seattle and play against the big guns. I'll be there with many of my illustrious coworkers to bask in the wacky grandeur of the format.

## Chapter 2: Standard

One format that is a little lacking in the "wacky grandeur" department right now is Standard. In my eyes, Standard is currently everything that Extended is not. Standard is stale. Standard is not fun. Standard does not contain a representative cross-section of all the blocks and sets that are currently legal. Standard does not currently reward innovation, and Standard is not really anyone's format of choice at the moment.

Ravager Affinity continues to exert its chokehold on the rest of the format. It has gotten absolutely out of control despite the efforts of determined players and worried R&D and DCI officials. Banning Skullclamp didn't stop it, nor did printing subtle hosers in *Champions of Kamigawa* like Samurai of the Pale Curtain, Night of Souls' Betrayal, Horobi, and Imi Statue. As many of you now realize, the "answer" to Affinity was not in *Betrayers of Kamigawa* either.

I just got out of the quarterly Events Team meeting that handles the management of the Banned and Restricted Lists, and we've finally decided to put our collective feet down. On March 1st, we will be announcing major changes to the Banned List that should finally correct what has been an egregious problem with Standard over the past year.

I'm not going to go into detail here (nor on the message boards, nor in any e-mail, nor personal phone calls, nor ambushes in dark alleys), simply because we have a process in place for announcing these changes and I'm not about to pull rank. Like I said before, tune in on March 1st. The only reason I'm even bothering to hint at it now is because I want you to know that we are paying attention, we do care, we're not blind to our own mistakes, and we are willing to do whatever it takes to make **Magic** the most enjoyable, fair, and thought-provoking game there is. The upcoming Standard season of Regionals, Nationals, and Worlds could very well have turned out to be abysmal, and no one wins when that happens.

If we're willing to make a change now, why didn't we do it three months ago? In hindsight maybe we should have. In our defense, we have more data now that points us toward making these decisions, and we wanted to give *Kamigawa* a reasonable amount of time to impact the metagame before jumping to any conclusions.

I'm sure this news is shocking, but I hope most of you walk away from this article smiling. Better times are ahead.

## Last Week's Poll:

**Do you like the new Invitational voting process better or worse than the old way?**

Aside on Nomads en-Kor: One thing that strikes me as particularly funny about some of the combo decks that have been doing well recently is how they exploit cards that were printed before the current set of rules were in place. When *Stronghold* debuted the en-Kor creatures many years ago, the rules regarding damage prevention were very different than what we have now. Under the old rules, you couldn't prevent damage to something unless that thing was actually taking damage. So if I played Unsummon on your Samite Healer, you couldn't use the Healer in response to set up a "prevention shield" on yourself or one of your creatures, since nothing was taking damage at that time.

So under these old rules, the en-Kor ability could not be randomly activated three million times in the middle of your own main phase; you had to wait to use it until the en-Kor creature was actually being damaged. While the switch to the current rules set fixed lots of problems with the game, it did open little loopholes like this one that players will naturally exploit. These weird cases are why R&D doesn't tend to make targeted activated abilities with a cost of 0 any more.

Don't care	3155	57.1%
Better	1787	32.3%
Worse	585	10.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5527</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**This Week's Poll:**

**How did this article make you feel?**

- I'm smiling!
- Cautiously optimistic.
- Wary and/or confused.
- Somewhat annoyed.
- Angry!

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