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The first thing I will do this week is briefly go over what I didn't cover in last week's article, then I'll revisit the topic of the Standard bannings at the end to clear up what seem to be a few misconceptions.

Portal in Vintage and Legacy

It has always been a little odd that *Portal* and *Starter* cards were not tournament legal. Many of us here at Wizards wished they were, and we know that players have been asking us to legalize them. So we did. But why now?

It's mostly a "cleanliness issue" related to the timing of when the various starter-level sets were released. Those sets had release dates that were contemporary with blocks currently legal in Extended; for example, *Portal Second Age* came out between the releases of *Exodus* and *Urza's Saga*. Because people tend to remember the sets legal in Extended as "Tempest forward," the **Magic** brand team didn't want any confusion to arise regarding the legality of *Portal* cards in that format. Sure, most of you would have had no trouble keeping what sets were Extended legal straight, but we must cater to the masses, and the decision makes a lot of sense once you realize that Extended is rotating very soon.



With the knowledge that all those blocks would be out of Extended in October of this year, we penciled in the *Portal* legality date as October 20, 2005 over a year ago. Then Rules Manager Paul Barclay undertook the task of creating Oracle wordings for all the cards, and once Organized Play gave their blessing to the decision earlier this year, we finalized it.

We decided to announce the change six months early for two reasons. One, the cards themselves can sometimes be hard to find, and we wanted players to have time to track them down, trade for and/or buy them. Two, we wanted an extra-long window to make sure we banned and restricted the right cards from those sets, as we have no real internal resources dedicated to playing *Portal* cards in large constructed formats. So to all you Vintage and Legacy buffs—if you find anything ridiculous in the next few months, drop me a line using the email link at the end of the article.

A Note on Horsemanship

"Horsemanship" is the main keyword ability from *Portal Three Kingdoms*, and it is for all intents and purposes another version of flying—creatures with horsemanship may only be blocked by other creatures with horsemanship. We had a long discussion regarding this ability and what impact it might have once tournament legal. Would the ability be too good? Should we errata it so that horsemanship creatures can be blocked by fliers? In the end we realized that we were kidding ourselves—the creatures with that ability just aren't aggressive enough to worry about, so we left the ability alone. If you want to play horsemanship in constructed, knock yourself out.



Why Didn't We Change the Banned Lists for Extended and Legacy?

Extended continues to be a crazy exciting format.



The continued Japanese dominance at Grand Prix – Seattle confirms that skill and experience still rule

Ernie Marchesano, GP Seattle '05 Champion

the day, even with several blazingly fast combo decks available. There were some grumblings from players that Aether Vial was too powerful to remain legal, but it hasn't been showing up in enough winning decks to warrant action.

Legacy, still in its early development stages with pocket metagames, doesn't appear to be in need of any changes. There is significant deck diversity, and most of the input we get from people that are playing it is not that any more cards need banned, but the opposite—they'd like some cards removed from the list. (The committee went over most of the cards in question during the latest round of meetings and concluded that we wanted to leave the cards banned for now.)

Discussions on having some higher-level support of the Legacy format are ongoing, so we will continue to watch that format closely. Until we can start getting large amounts of data, I expect we'll manage the banned list conservatively.

Interlude: Answers from "Under the Masque"

Two weeks ago, I presented a series of Multiverse comments from the Masques block and asked you to guess which cards were being discussed. I went so far as to give art clues to help you decipher the puzzle. Here, in order, are the cards in question:

1. Elephant Resurgence
2. Infernal Genesis
3. Groundskeeper
4. Horn of Plenty
5. Thunderclap
6. Chilling Apparition
7. Angelic Favor
8. Reverent Silence
9. Darting Merfolk
10. Silkenfist Order
11. Bribery
12. Ancestral Mask
13. Noxious Field
14. Noble Stand
15. Excavation
16. Defiant Vanguard

Many of you posted on the boards or wrote in to say that you figured out the 16 cards. While that was true—many of you did get all 16 right—no one actually "solved" what I consider the real puzzle. Look at the 16 answers, and read the first letter of each.

Had I said in the column that there was another level to the puzzle, I'm sure it would have been solved within moments of being posted. I find it fascinating that without any hint that there was a second level of information hidden within, no one (that I know of) found the secret message, even though it's pretty darn obvious once you know it's there.

Which brings us to...

More on Standard

I fear that I was a little too subtle last week in explaining why we felt forced to make such a radical move with regards to banning cards. I said "...recently the evidence of the general public's disdain for what the format looks like has gone from anecdotal to measurable." What does that mean exactly?

Many people misconstrued it to mean people were whining and complaining more than we'd like. Trust me, that's no reason to ban cards. People—especially devout gamers—complain incessantly about everything. We're used to it, really. When I said "measurable" I meant measurable.

Standard tournament attendance was down noticeably, an average of almost a player per event (which is a lot when you realize we're talking about every FNM and similar small events at the store level). Many organizers were opting to sanction formats other than Standard (including Champions-only Constructed, of all things), just to get people to come and play. We did our homework, calling store owners and trying to get to the root of the problem, and while there were several factors at play, "Affinity" was always at or near the top of everyone's list of complaints.

Our January sanctioning numbers were off by double-digit percentage points from a year ago. People were actively *not playing*, as opposed to just whining. So we did what we deemed necessary.

The good news is that it all appears to be working. After I teased that there would be sweeping format changes a month ago, sanctioning numbers for February shot up *17% from a year ago*. People are willing to come back—they just needed a reason to.

I hope that makes sense.

I'm at Pro Tour — Atlanta this weekend... stop by and say hello, or give your opinion on your favorite constructed format. I'm all ears.

Last Week's Poll:

What is your opinion on the legalization of <i>Portal</i> and <i>Starter</i> in Vintage and Legacy?		
Good move.	7084	50.6%
Don't care.	5342	38.1%
Don't like it.	1586	11.3%
Total	14012	100.0%

This Week's Poll:

What color do you foresee as the most powerful in post-Affinity Standard?

- White
- Blue
- Black
- Red
- Green

