

# The forgotten deck type that's all about the fatties. The Midrange Archetype

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Greetings! I'm Kenneth Nagle and I've been working in R&D about two months ago after participating in [The Great Designer Search](#). I want to address something that's been bugging me for quite a while now. Magic theorists, deckbuilders, and writers seem to know it, but they can't put it into words. They understand it without really understanding it. They think about it without really thinking about it. Do you know what I'm talking about?

What I'm talking about extends from the aggro, control, and combo trifecta that Magic players have known, talked, and [written about](#) for years. We know that aggro swarms you with fast damage, control reacts and disables opposing threats with answers, and combo seeks to assemble a gigantic game-winning spell or sequence of spells.

One extension is the hybrid archetype aggro-control, which borrows the creature element from aggro and the disruption element from control. This is another well-studied archetype that follows a 'deploy and protect' plan.



But I feel there's another archetype that lots of players are missing. It's an archetype that also borrows some creature elements from aggro and some disruption elements from control, but in a different way. While it's been called many things over the years, the term most in use by the Magic populace is **midrange** – that's what we will call it today and hopefully everyday hereafter.

## On the Origin of Midrange

Ever since **Magic** players first started playing creatures and attacking, their opponents have been, well, playing creatures and blocking. Creatures die, more creatures are summoned, and war wages on. The dust clears and one player wins.

One thing that players learn quickly in our game is that large creatures, which we colloquially call 'fatties', win when they fight with smaller creatures called 'weenies'.



Fatties are significantly better in the aggro vs. aggro matchup than elsewhere. The creatures or 'threats' in both aggro decks normally cancel each other out, and games often come down to a topdecking war. One player draws additional threats while the other player draws lands that he can't use effectively. Many players will sideboard out weenies and sideboard in fatties in this matchup to better utilize their excess lands and outclass the opponent's smaller creatures.



In fact, it's my experience that fatties are at their very best when their mere presence invalidates one or more enemy creatures already on the table. Attacking with [Akroma, Angel of Wrath](#) is awesome, but it's even more awesome when your opponent can't attack back with their [Bogardan Hellkite](#) afterward.

One fateful day, an aggro deck kept its fatties in and dropped the remainder of its small attacking force. It shored up its holes with things like mana acceleration, stalwart defense, and maybe even a reset button or two. It became a midrange deck!

Now is a good time for a decklist. To show that I'm not just making all this up, I'll cite historic precedent from some of the game's most successful deckbuilders.

## William Jensen

Green-White Vegetation



### Main Deck

*60 cards*

7 <a href="#">Forest</a>	4 <a href="#">Akroma's Vengeance</a>
7 <a href="#">Plains</a>	4 <a href="#">Explosive Vegetation</a>
4 <a href="#">Secluded Steppe</a>	_____
4 <a href="#">Tranquil Thicket</a>	8 other spells
4 <a href="#">Windswept Heath</a>	<b>Sideboard</b>
_____	1 <a href="#">Akroma, Angel of Wrath</a>
26 lands	4 <a href="#">Broodhatch Nantuko</a>
2 <a href="#">Akroma, Angel of Wrath</a>	3 <a href="#">Demystify</a>
2 <a href="#">Daru Sanctifier</a>	2 <a href="#">Gigapede</a>
4 <a href="#">Exalted Angel</a>	2 <a href="#">Oblation</a>
4 <a href="#">Ravenous Baloth</a>	3 <a href="#">Pacifism</a>
3 <a href="#">Silvos, Rogue Elemental</a>	_____
4 <a href="#">Wall of Mulch</a>	15 sideboard cards
3 <a href="#">Windborn Muse</a>	
4 <a href="#">Wirewood Elf</a>	
_____	
26 creatures	



William Jensen's *Onslaught* Block Constructed deck is a very straightforward midrange deck. Let's break the deck down into components.

## The Components of Midrange

In essence, Midrange is the strategy of playing fatties and the means to make them most effective. They share many attributes in common.

### *Fatties*

Aw, the reason to play the midrange! These threats are what the archetype is trying to maximize. You can't play a midrange deck without excellent fatties! Green-White Vegetation sports an impressive fatty suite in [Ravenous Baloth](#), [Silvos](#), [Exalted Angel](#), and [Akroma, Angel of Wrath](#).

### *High Curves*

Midrange decks sport relatively high mana curves. They contain spells for the early game that lead into cards included for the midgame. There's also relatively good incentive to play 'scaling' cards like [Fireball](#) that get better and better as the game progresses. Green-White Vegetation sports a staggered mana curve all the way to eight, with the most impressive plays happening on two mana, four mana, six mana, and finally eight mana for Akroma.

### *Lots of Mana*

Because of their high curves, midrange decks must reserve a healthy amount of deck slots to mana to effectively play their spells. You'll often find mana acceleration and mana sinks that somehow make effective use of all the spare mana midrange decks have lying around. Green-White Vegetation sports 4 [Wirewood Elf](#) to jump from two mana to four mana and 4 [Explosive Vegetation](#) to jump from four mana to six or seven or mana, bringing the deck to 34 dedicated mana sources! The eight cycling

lands are great turn-one land drops with almost no drawback, cheaply cycling away in the later turns to dig out of a manaflood to look for more gas.

### Defense

Midrange decks normally find one way or another to defend themselves, especially against aggro decks. Here you'll often find dedicated board control elements not unlike what you'd expect in a control deck. Green-White Vegetation sports [Wall of Mulch](#) and [Windborn Muse](#) in addition to a full reset button in quadruple [Akroma's Vengeance](#). We even see metagame utility man [Daru Sanctifier](#) as a preemptive answer to [Astral Slide](#) and [Lightning Rift](#), the premiere Control deck at the time and presumably a bad matchup for Green-White Vegetation.

That's a good enough definition to get us through the rest of our discussion today. Let's continue with something a bit more theoretical. I'm going to describe three different strategies that midrange decks can execute, providing multiple decklists per strategy.

## Midrange Strategies



*Sieve Wurm encapsulates the Acceleration Midrange strategy in a single card package.*

### Acceleration: Midrange-Combo

One midrange strategy is to quickly accelerate mana or otherwise cheat a huge threatening fatty into play. Large creatures need to attack, and if you can get a large creature into play earlier, logic follows that you'll get additional attacks in, which equals more damage, which equals deader opponents.

When taken to an extreme, this strategy can resemble or turn into a combo deck:

### Kenji Tsumura

Heartbeat (KDW) - Pro Tour-Philadelphia 2005





## Main Deck

60 cards

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 7 <a href="#">Forest</a>                    | 1 <a href="#">Cranial Extraction</a>    |  |
| 3 <a href="#">Island</a>                    | 4 <a href="#">Final Judgment</a>        |  |
| 2 <a href="#">Plains</a>                    | 3 <a href="#">Gifts Ungiven</a>         |  |
| 1 <a href="#">Shizo, Death's Storehouse</a> | 3 <a href="#">Heartbeat of Spring</a>   |  |
| 5 <a href="#">Swamp</a>                     | 3 <a href="#">Hideous Laughter</a>      |  |
| 4 <a href="#">Tendo Ice Bridge</a>          | 1 <a href="#">Horobi's Whisper</a>      |  |
| 1 <a href="#">Tranquil Garden</a>           | 4 <a href="#">Kodama's Reach</a>        |  |
| <hr/>                                       |   |  |
| 23 lands                                    | 4 <a href="#">Sensei's Divining Top</a> |  |
|   | 1 <a href="#">Soulless Revival</a>      |  |
| 1 <a href="#">Hana Kami</a>                 | 1 <a href="#">Stir the Grave</a>        |  |
| 1 <a href="#">Meloku the Clouded Mirror</a> | 1 <a href="#">Time of Need</a>          |  |
| 1 <a href="#">Myojin of Night's Reach</a>   | 2 <a href="#">Time Stop</a>             |  |
| 1 <a href="#">Myojin of Seeing Winds</a>    | 1 <a href="#">Wear Away</a>             |  |
| 4 <a href="#">Sakura-Tribe Elder</a>        | <hr/>                                   |  |
|   | 29 other spells                         |  |

8 creatures



## Sideboard

- 2 [Cranial Extraction](#)
- 2 [Hero's Demise](#)
- 1 [Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni](#)
- 3 [Kodama of the North Tree](#)
- 1 [Meloku the Clouded Mirror](#)
- 4 [Nezumi Graverobber](#)
- 2 [Wear Away](#)

15 sideboard cards

Kenji's Tsumura's Pro Tour – Philadelphia deck has fierce acceleration, completely skipping over the usual fatties of Kokusho, Yosei, or Keiga and instead dropping a godlike, game-winning Myojin.

## Kai Budde

2005 Magic Invitational - Standard



### Main Deck

60 cards

2 <a href="#">City of Brass</a>	1 <a href="#">All Suns' Dawn</a>
11 <a href="#">Forest</a>	1 <a href="#">Cranial Extraction</a>
2 <a href="#">Island</a>	1 <a href="#">Crystal Shard</a>
1 <a href="#">Mountain</a>	1 <a href="#">Engineered Explosives</a>
1 <a href="#">Plains</a>	3 <a href="#">Gifts Ungiven</a>
2 <a href="#">Swamp</a>	4 <a href="#">Kodama's Reach</a>
4 <a href="#">Tendo Ice Bridge</a>	1 <a href="#">Persecute</a>
_____	3 <a href="#">Plow Under</a>
23 lands	1 <a href="#">Stir the Grave</a>
	1 <a href="#">Terror</a>

4 [Birds of Paradise](#)  
1 [Bringer of the Black Dawn](#) 17 other spells

1 <a href="#">Duplicant</a>	<b>Sideboard</b>
4 <a href="#">Etched Oracle</a>	4 <a href="#">Boil</a>
4 <a href="#">Eternal Witness</a>	3 <a href="#">Cranial Extraction</a>
1 <a href="#">Meloku the Clouded Mirror</a>	3 <a href="#">Engineered Explosives</a>
4 <a href="#">Sakura-Tribe Elder</a>	1 <a href="#">Plow Under</a>
1 <a href="#">Viridian Shaman</a>	2 <a href="#">Terror</a>
_____	2 <a href="#">Viridian Shaman</a>

20 creatures

15 sideboard cards



Kai Budde's deck begins with 4 [Birds of Paradise](#), 4 Sakura-Tribe Elder, and 4 Kodama's Reach to ramp and hit all the colors just before raining down massive bombs upon his opponent's head, including my personal favorite card from *Mirrodin* block – [Etched Oracle](#). [Bringer of the Black Dawn](#) comes prepackaged with its own mana-cheating clause for a potential turn-three play thanks to all of Kai's rainbow acceleration.

### Hattori Hanzo Tron – Werner Cloete

2005 Worlds: 6-0 Standard Day One



### Main Deck

60 cards

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 <a href="#">Forbidden Orchard</a>              | 2 <a href="#">Blaze</a>               |
| 3 <a href="#">Island</a>                         | 4 <a href="#">Compulsive Research</a> |
| 1 <a href="#">Minamo, School at Water's Edge</a> | 2 <a href="#">Confiscate</a>          |
| 4 <a href="#">Shivan Reef</a>                    | 3 <a href="#">Dimir Signet</a>        |
| 2 <a href="#">Tendo Ice Bridge</a>               | 3 <a href="#">Hinder</a>              |
| 4 <a href="#">Urza's Mine</a>                    | 4 <a href="#">Mana Leak</a>           |
| 4 <a href="#">Urza's Power Plant</a>             | 4 <a href="#">Pyroclasm</a>           |
| 4 <a href="#">Urza's Tower</a>                   | 4 <a href="#">Telling Time</a>        |
| 1 <a href="#">Watery Grave</a>                   | 2 <a href="#">Tidings</a>             |

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24 lands

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28 other spells

### Sideboard

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| 4 <a href="#">Keiga, the Tide Star</a> | 1 <a href="#">Confiscate</a> |
|--|------------------------------|

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 4 <a href="#">Meloku the Clouded Mirror</a> | 3 <a href="#">Cranial Extraction</a> |
| <hr/>                                       | 1 <a href="#">Dimir Signet</a>       |
| 8 creatures                                 | 1 <a href="#">Hinder</a>             |
|   | 1 <a href="#">Orochi Hatchery</a>    |
|   | 3 <a href="#">Pithing Needle</a>     |
|   | 4 <a href="#">Ribbons of Night</a>   |
|   | 1 <a href="#">Tidings</a>            |

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15 sideboard cards



Most Urzatron decks are midrange decks full of bombastic cards. Both [Remand](#) and [Repeal](#) are tempo cards that temporarily slow down the opponent, while [Mana Leak](#) and [Spell Snare](#) gain additional tempo in the early game. Once the Urzatron is assembled, the deck goes nuts with gigantic spells that outclass anything the opponent can possibly do.

### **Secret Force**

Jamie Wakefield



### **Main Deck**

*60 cards*

- |                                 |                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 16 <a href="#">Forests</a>      | 4 <a href="#">Creeping Mold</a> |
| 3 <a href="#">Gaea's Cradle</a> | 4 <a href="#">Natural Order</a> |
| 3 <a href="#">Wastelands</a>    | 3 <a href="#">Overrun</a>       |

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22 lands

11 other spells

- 3 [Elvish Lyrist](#)
- 4 [Fyndhorn Elves](#)
- 4 [Llanowar Elves](#)
- 4 [Spike Feeder](#)
- 2 [Spike Weaver](#)
- 3 [Uktabi Orangutan](#)
- 3 [Verdant Force](#)
- 4 [Wall of Roots](#)

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27 creatures



Secret Force is a midrange deck that's notorious for bringing in a turn-three [Verdant Force](#) through Natural Order, an absurdly powerful play against an aggro deck. Even without its namesake in play, all those wimpy Elves and utility creatures look innocent enough until [Overrun](#) does exactly what its name implies.

### **Nagle's Dragons**



### **Main Deck**

*60 cards*

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4 <a href="#">Blasted Landscape</a> | 2 <a href="#">Lightning Greaves</a> |
| 4 <a href="#">Forgotten Cave</a>    | 4 <a href="#">Magma Jet</a>         |
| 4 <a href="#">Great Furnace</a>     | 4 <a href="#">Mind Stone</a>        |
| 7 <a href="#">Mountain</a>          | 2 <a href="#">Serum Tank</a>        |

4 [Smoldering Crater](#)

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23 lands

2 [Covetous Dragon](#)

4 [Dragon Whelp](#)

4 [Imperial Hellkite](#)

4 [Kilnmouth Dragon](#)

1 [Shivan Hellkite](#)

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15 creatures

2 [Starstorm](#)

4 [Thran Dynamo](#)

4 [Urza's Rage](#)

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22 other spells



This is my dragon deck that I love very much, capable of 21/21 hasty [Kilnmouth Dragons](#) as long as you're not already dead by then. Beware: Dragons are the slowest tribe in Magic

## **Attrition**

Midrange-Control



Many creatures in a midrange deck are potent enough to kill an opponent by themselves. One strategy a midrange deck can employ is to play just one large threat, then force the opponent to deal with that threat or die. Usually, the threat is either neutralized or matched in board presence. If the opponent committed lots of resources to the board, this becomes a great opportunity for the Midrange deck to equalize the table with a reset button such as [Pernicious Deed](#) or [Akroma's Vengeance](#). This strategy when executed correctly is one of the very best against aggro decks. The aggro player is constantly wrecked by the dilemma of attacking through a large blocker or being decimated by a reset button. In addition, a large creature can quickly finish off a crippled aggro player and prevent them from topdecking a lucky streak of threats or burn. Oftentimes control decks in tournaments will sideboard into this kind of strategy to have a better matchup against aggro decks.

This is an area where midrange blends into control. However, control is more likely to finish the opponent with what I call a **perpetual threat** – mana-intensive cards such as [Firemane Angel](#), [Eternal Dragon](#), [Genesis](#), [Urza's Factory](#), or Haakon, Stromgald *Scourge*. A midrange deck normally uses a reset for the tempo with the intention of coming out even or ahead.

The reset buttons midrange enjoys most are potentially asymmetrical ones like [Pernicious Deed](#) and [Wildfire](#) that are friendly toward large creatures. These cards can often be played proactively, leaving the opponent crippled and ripe for fatty beatdown. Sometimes, the creatures even have some kind of synergy with resetting the board, such as the Kamigawa Dragons.

### Death Cloud

Japanese Regionals – Former Standard



### Main Deck

61 cards

13	<a href="#">Forest</a>	4	<a href="#">Befoul</a>
1	<a href="#">Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers</a>	3	<a href="#">Death Cloud</a>
1	<a href="#">Shizo, Death's Storehouse</a>	3	<a href="#">Kodama's Reach</a>
7	<a href="#">Swamp</a>	4	<a href="#">Plow Under</a>
		3	<a href="#">Rampant Growth</a>

---

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 22 lands                                    | 1 <a href="#">Rude Awakening</a>           |
|   | 2 <a href="#">Sword of Fire and Ice</a>    |
| 4 <a href="#">Eternal Witness</a>           | _____                                      |
| 4 <a href="#">Kokusho, the Evening Star</a> | 20 other spells                            |
| 4 <a href="#">Sakura-Tribe Elder</a>        |  |
| 4 <a href="#">Solemn Simulacrum</a>         | <b>Sideboard</b>                           |
| 3 <a href="#">Viridian Shaman</a>           | 4 <a href="#">Cranial Extraction</a>       |
| _____                                       | 3 <a href="#">Horobi's Whisper</a>         |
| 19 creatures                                | 3 <a href="#">Nezumi Shortfang</a>         |
|   | 2 <a href="#">Night of Souls' Betrayal</a> |
|   | 2 <a href="#">Reap and Sow</a>             |
|   | 1 <a href="#">Viridian Shaman</a>          |
|   | _____                                      |
|   | 15 sideboard cards                         |



[Death Cloud](#) is a reset button that favors committing just one sizable threat to the table, in particular [Kokusho, the Evening Star](#). [Eternal Witness](#) plays cleanup as a perpetual threat and all around Best Green Creature Ever Printed.

### **Nagle's Reset Buttons**



### **Main Deck** 60 cards

- |                          |                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 6 <a href="#">Forest</a> | 3 <a href="#">Armageddon</a> |
| 1 <a href="#">Island</a> | 2 <a href="#">Serenity</a>   |

- 4 [Plains](#)
  - 2 [Selesnya Sanctuary](#)
  - 4 [Temple Garden](#)
  - 1 [Treva's Ruins](#)
  - 2 [Undiscovered Paradise](#)
- 
- 4 [Wave of Reckoning](#)
- 
- 9 other spells

20 lands

- 4 [Anurid Brushhopper](#)
- 4 [Birds of Paradise](#)
- 4 [Erhnam Djinn](#)
- 2 [Exalted Angel](#)
- 1 [Forgotten Ancient](#)
- 1 [Genesis](#)
- 1 [Glory](#)
- 3 [Lhurgoyf](#)
- 1 [Pristine Angel](#)
- 2 [Tradewind Rider](#)
- 4 [Vine Trellis](#)
- 4 [Yavimaya Elder](#)

31 creatures



This is a midrange deck that plays 3 different reset buttons in [Wave of Reckoning](#), [Armageddon](#), and [Serenity](#), and usually comes out way ahead on each of them. Many decks are seriously crippled by at least one of those three board-wrecking cards.

**Curving: Midrange-Aggro**



This is an obscure Midrange strategy but let's explore it for the sake of completeness. Notice how Midrange decks tend to have high mana curves? Well, one can build a deck that concentrates solely on curving out one creature spell each turn for as long as possible. Creature spells that fit well in this kind of strategy include [Kavu Titan](#) and [Wurmcalling](#), because they can fall into multiple places on the mana curve. Let's take a look at an ideal mana curve using the awesome green flashback cards from *Odyssey*:

Turn 1: [Forest](#), [Chatter of the Squirrel](#)

Turn 2: [Forest](#), [Flashback](#) [Chatter of the Squirrel](#)

Turn 3: [Forest](#), [Call of the Herd](#)

Turn 4: [Forest](#), [Flashback](#) [Call of the Herd](#)

Turn 5: [Forest](#), [Beast Attack](#)

Turn 6: [Forest](#), [Flashback](#) [Beast Attack](#)

Turn 7: [Forest](#), [Roar of the Wurm](#)

Turn 8: [Forest](#), [Flashback](#) [Roar of the Wurm](#)

Turn 9: [Forest](#), [Crush of Wurms](#) (we're feeling ambitious!)

This sequence is interesting in that it plays a land and a threat every turn all the way to turn 9 while 'drawing' four additional cards, which is very impressive. An aggro deck that tries to attack through these green tokens is going to be in serious trouble. Likewise, a control deck that tries to contain creatures on a one-for-one basis using cards like *Swords to Plowshares*, [Terror](#), [Cancel](#), or burn is going to get mauled by relentless token green creatures. It takes three reset buttons to survive and barely break even on card advantage!

There are a couple reasons why this curving strategy typically doesn't work well, especially in tournament play:

- Drawing the correct sequence of cards to curve out this high is very inconsistent.
- 'Curve-friendly' creatures are usually not the most potent threats a deck could play for those mana costs. [Troll Ascetic](#) and [Spectral Force](#) are more potent than [Call of the Herd](#) and [Beast Attack](#), but the token makers are more robust.

This curving strategy did exist at one time in an extremely powerful form when it was introduced in *Mercadian Masques*, known as the Rebel mechanic. Subpar two-drop creatures like [Defiant Falcon](#) and [Amrou Scout](#) give you the option of playing a three mana Rebel from your library as long as you're willing to pay four mana for the privilege. The Rebel lord [Lin Sivvi](#) lets you search for any Rebel

and doesn't even charge a premium *and* has a recursion ability to boot. She was ultimately banned in Mercadian Masques Block Constructed!



## Why Is Midrange Misunderstood?

I've often wondered why I should need to write an article like this in the first place. Why haven't we already embraced the midrange archetype for years now? Am I just wrong about this? I don't believe I'm entirely correct, but I'm pretty sure I'm not entirely incorrect, either.

In my experience, it's actually quite rare for professional Magic players to naturally adopt a hybrid archetype like aggro-control or midrange unless it's grossly overpowered and obvious to begin with. By contrast, I build midrange decks all the time. I have a couple theories about this, and they are just theories at that. I feel it's important to lay aside all our prejudices and look at *why* we see things the way we do.

### Theory #1

**Midrange decks throughout Magic's history are seldom competitive and 'look bad.'**

Here's a list of some premier midrange cards that see lots of tournament and casual Constructed play:

- [Loxodon Hierarch](#)
- [Exalted Angel](#)
- [Flametonque Kavu](#)
- [Spiritmonger](#)
- [Wildfire](#)
- [Pernicious Deed](#)

These powerful cards that are some of the very best cards in the game at trumping decks that attack with small creatures. [Flametonque Kavu](#) is a supremely powerful red creature... as long as your opponent is playing creatures that die to 4 damage! [Loxodon Hierarch](#) is a reverse analogue, and there are only a handful of creatures in Magic that can outrace a naturally unmorphed [Exalted Angel](#).

Many players know what The Rock means in Magic lingo – some green and black concoction with accelerators like [Birds of Paradise](#) and Sakura-Tribe Elder, monsters like [Ravenous Baloth](#) and [Spiritmonger](#), disruption like [Duress](#) and [Putrefy](#), and a board sweeper like [Pernicious Deed](#) or [Death Cloud](#).

What you might not know unless you're a seasoned tournament player is that The Rock is a notoriously bad deck. It's a deck full of great cards that somehow can't win games.

Most midrange decks in Magic history look like 'utter piles' of 'bad cards.' Let's take a look again at the Hattori Hanzo Tron deck mentioned earlier:

## Hattori Hanzo Tron – Werner Cloete

2005 Worlds: 6-0 Standard Day One



### Main Deck

*60 cards*

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 <a href="#">Forbidden Orchard</a>              | 2 <a href="#">Blaze</a>               |
| 3 <a href="#">Island</a>                         | 4 <a href="#">Compulsive Research</a> |
| 1 <a href="#">Minamo, School at Water's Edge</a> | 2 <a href="#">Confiscate</a>          |
| 4 <a href="#">Shivan Reef</a>                    | 3 <a href="#">Dimir Signet</a>        |
| 2 <a href="#">Tendo Ice Bridge</a>               | 3 <a href="#">Hinder</a>              |
| 4 <a href="#">Urza's Mine</a>                    | 4 <a href="#">Mana Leak</a>           |
| 4 <a href="#">Urza's Power Plant</a>             | 4 <a href="#">Pyroclasm</a>           |
| 4 <a href="#">Urza's Tower</a>                   | 4 <a href="#">Telling Time</a>        |
| 1 <a href="#">Watery Grave</a>                   | 2 <a href="#">Tidings</a>             |

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24 lands  
28 other spells

#### **Sideboard**

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 4 <a href="#">Keiga, the Tide Star</a>      | 1 <a href="#">Confiscate</a>         |
| 4 <a href="#">Meloku the Clouded Mirror</a> | 3 <a href="#">Cranial Extraction</a> |
|   | 1 <a href="#">Dimir Signet</a>       |
|   | 1 <a href="#">Hinder</a>             |
|   | 1 <a href="#">Orochi Hatchery</a>    |
|   | 3 <a href="#">Pithing Needle</a>     |
|   | 4 <a href="#">Ribbons of Night</a>   |
|   | 1 <a href="#">Tidings</a>            |

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15 sideboard cards



Werner Cloete piloted this deck to 6-0 on Day 1 of Worlds 2005, when *Ravnica* was legal but *before Guildpact* brought forth the blue-red staples of [Steam Vents](#) and [Izzet Signet](#). This deck looked to the vast majority of tournament players like an utter pile of garbage. Who plays main-phase blue spells? Isn't tapping out every turn suicide for a blue deck? Is that a red splash for [Pyroclasm](#) and [Blaze](#)? Using [Forbidden Orchard](#)?!

It turns out that you can do these things when the best sorcery speed drops in the format are [Compulsive Research](#) and legendary blue creatures. It's not suicide, it's powerful! Other decks have to struggle to find better plays than this deck can make.

There's some kind of phenomenon that causes professional Magic players to puke at seeing the mainphase high curve of decks like Hattori Hanzo Tron, to not test them, and most importantly, to not build them in the first place.

Of course, we all now recognize this as the pre-[Steam Vents](#) skeleton of the powerhouse Izzetron deck. Osy Lebedowicz piloted such a deck to a Top 8 at Pro Tour – Honolulu. The deck evolved further to sport maindeck [Wildfires](#), like the version Ben Lundquist and Tim Aten played at Southeast Regionals in 2006:

### **Izzetron – Benjamin Lundquist**

2006 U.S. Nationals Top 8



### **Main Deck** *60 cards*

2 <a href="#">Island</a>	4 <a href="#">Compulsive Research</a>	<b>Sideboard</b>
1 <a href="#">Minamo, School at Water's Edge</a>	2 <a href="#">Confiscate</a>	4 <a href="#">Annex</a>
	2 <a href="#">Demonfire</a>	2 <a href="#">Copy Enchantment</a>
		2 <a href="#">Hinder</a>

4 <a href="#">Shivan Reef</a>	4 <a href="#">Izzet Signet</a>	2 <a href="#">Meloku the Clouded Mirror</a>
4 <a href="#">Steam Vents</a>	4 <a href="#">Mana Leak</a>	2 <a href="#">Pithing Needle</a>
4 <a href="#">Urza's Mine</a>	4 <a href="#">Remand</a>	3 <a href="#">Volcanic Hammer</a>
4 <a href="#">Urza's Power Plant</a>	3 <a href="#">Repeal</a>	_____
4 <a href="#">Urza's Tower</a>	2 <a href="#">Simic Signet</a>	15 sideboard cards
_____	3 <a href="#">Spell Snare</a>	
23 lands	2 <a href="#">Tidings</a>	
	3 <a href="#">Wildfire</a>	
4 <a href="#">Keiga, the Tide Star</a>	_____	
_____	33 other spells	
4 creatures		



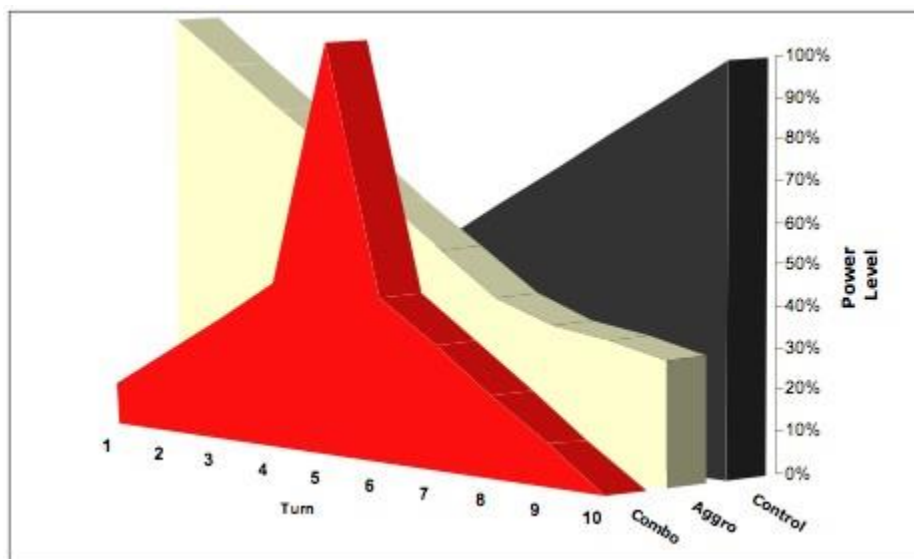
[Wildfire](#) is, in my opinion, the best example of an archetypical midrange card. It's very nice to large creatures with 5 or more toughness but kills most of the weenies you'll find in an aggro deck. [Wildfire](#) comes online during the middle turns of the game, leaving both players crippled on resources, but the player with a fatty surges far ahead in board position. While both players are crippled, the fatty finishes off the opponent. However, against a control deck that draws cards and doesn't play weenies that die to [Wildfire](#), all [Wildfire](#) does is force both players to sacrifice four lands, and leaves no player at any real advantage. Most control decks only care about the 4 Keiga and 2 [Demonfire](#) in this Izzetron deck, which can be beaten with a Cranial [Extraction](#) and an [Eradicate](#). Magic Pros love to play with good cards, but for the longest time midrange cards were simply not very good. From my experience, the viability of 6+ mana sorcery-speed cards depends on the quality and saturation of countermagic you expect to face. [Counterspells](#) are the bane of midrange decks. While [Spiritmonger](#) is an unprecedentedly powerful monster for  $3\text{U}$ , it's not nearly as powerful when the format is saturated with cards like [Absorb](#), [Undermine](#), [Exclude](#), [Dromar's Charm](#), [Counterspell](#), and [Repulse](#) that answer it more than effectively. Thorough history, aggro-control and midrange has to be obviously overpowered for Constructed players to latch onto it – witness such decks as U/G Madness. Decks like Maximillian Bracht's Erayo Ninjas and Jamie Wakefield's Secret Force look like 'utter piles' of 'bad cards' to the tuned eyes of

competitive players despite the fact that they were competitive decklists in their respective metagames.

## Theory #2

**Midrange follows an unfamiliar game plan that isn't particularly powerful.**

Now, this theory is going to be very difficult to explain. To help this theory along, I've drawn a grossly simplified graph to illustrate my point:



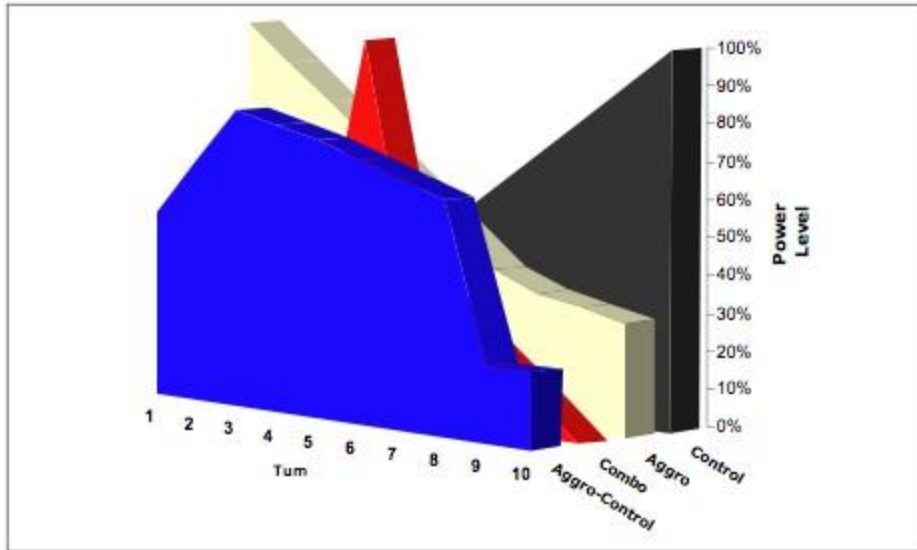
This colorful graph shows the three major deck archetypes: combo, aggro, and control. The bottom axis represents time, which in Magic is measured by how many turns have passed. The side axis represents an archetype's power level – how strong it is or how equipped it is to be "winning the game" on that turn (comparatively speaking). I admit, it's crude, but I hope you get my point.

Looking at the aggro archetype, we see that it begins the strongest and dramatically decreases with each passing turn before tapering off. The strongest turn one in Standard is [Stomping Grounds](#) + [Kird Ape](#) from a Zoo deck, representing the 100% spike that aggro often aims for. The downward taper shows Zoo's chance to topdeck one too many threats or a burn spell to win when the game lasts past turn five or so.

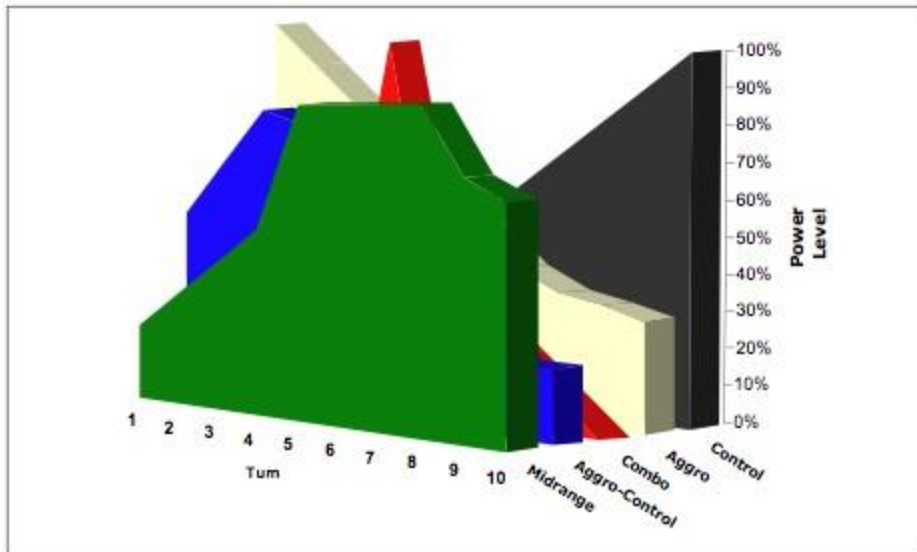
The Control archetype begins very low in power level but gradually increases with each passing turn. After some sufficient number of turns has passed, say ten, control has likely assembled enough resources and answers to contain all the opponent's threats to emerge victorious. The kill is inevitable even if the opponent still hasn't officially lost yet on turn ten. An example here is a blue-white deck that is holding more [Counterspells](#) than the opponent has threats left in his deck and is cranking out 2/2 Assembly-Workers with [Urza's Factory](#).

The Combo archetype begins weak and ends weak, but it has a gigantic one-turn spike of game-winning power that normally determines right then and there if it wins or loses. There's certainly a chance for a combo deck like [Dragonstorm](#) to reassemble a foiled combo attempt, but for simplicity, we'll represent it as an all-or-nothing thing.

Next, here is the same graph with aggro-control's power curve inserted in blue:



The aggro-control archetype has a power curve that's different from the rest – it begins the game somewhere in the middle and gets stronger, but after some number of turns it normally tapers off again. Aggro-control decks like U/G Madness or a Simic Ohran Viper + [Mystic Snake](#) deck first deploy a clock, then try to disrupt or protect that clock long enough to go the distance. Finally, let's complete the graph with the power curve for midrange in green:



Most midrange decks begin the game building up then firing off a short series of potent threats, represented by a rising curve into a plateau. It's similar to the aggro-control curve, just completely backwards.

For example, here's a typical sequence for a monogreen Scrub & Force deck:

Turn

1. [Llanowar Elves](#)
2. [Call of the Herd](#)
3. [Flashback](#) [Call of the Herd](#)
4. [Spectral Force](#)

Notice that this series of plays is relevant against an aggro deck that is attacking you but not very relevant against a combo deck that is, for example, storming up a lethal [Dragonstorm](#). Likely, the fatty plan can be stopped by a simple sequence of [Mana Leak](#), [Cancel](#), [Rewind](#) from a control deck, and it's possible those will be the only threats the midrange deck can present before the control deck gains inevitability.

I have a theory that many Magic players, especially professional Magic players, don't feel 'empowered' by an aggro-control or midrange strategy. From the graph, we see that aggro, control, and combo each hit a 100% spike in power level at some point in the game. I believe the feeling of guaranteed victory, years of Magic theory, and the relative ease of building and playing toward that singular 100% goal are more appealing to Constructed Magic players.

From my experience, aggro-control is a difficult archetype to build and play because of its hybrid nature. It needs threats, disruption, and mana all in the correct ratios from turn one forward to work correctly. Aggro-control decks benefit hugely from cheap card selection like [Brainstorm](#) rather than raw card drawing like [Concentrate](#).

### **Theory #3**

#### **Many players, due to lack of experience, misbuild their Midrange decks.**

Because the theory, practice, and execution of midrange is less explored and understood than other archetypes, it's my belief that midrange decks aren't built optimally to begin with by most players. They put in cards that don't belong, which hurts the deck's performance, which causes it to lose games, which finally causes it to be abandoned as a poor deck.

From my experience, only master deckbuilders like Zvi Mowshowitz, Katsuhiko Mori, and Mike Flores correctly build midrange decks. Most less experienced deckbuilders would never arrive at such a tuned decklist because they've never had to look past a particular card choice.

I searched high and low for an example to illustrate this point, and I found three separate midrange decks by these master deckbuilders that all made the same choice.

#### **My Fires – Zvi Mowshowitz**

Pro Tour - Chicago 2000



**Main Deck**  
*60 cards*

- |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 <a href="#">Dust Bowl</a>        | 4 <a href="#">Assault // Battery</a> |
| 10 <a href="#">Forest</a>          | 4 <a href="#">Chimeric Idol</a>      |
| 4 <a href="#">Karplusan Forest</a> | 1 <a href="#">Earthquake</a>         |
| 5 <a href="#">Mountain</a>         | 4 <a href="#">Fires of Yavimaya</a>  |
| 4 <a href="#">Rishadan Port</a>    | 4 <a href="#">Saproling Burst</a>    |

---

25 lands

---

17 other spells

- |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| 4 <a href="#">Birds of Paradise</a> |
| 4 <a href="#">Blastoderm</a>        |
| 3 <a href="#">Jade Leech</a>        |
| 4 <a href="#">Llanowar Elves</a>    |
| 3 <a href="#">Two-Headed Dragon</a> |

---

18 creatures

**Sideboard**

- |                                    |
|------------------------------------|
| 3 <a href="#">Earthquake</a>       |
| 3 <a href="#">Flashfires</a>       |
| 4 <a href="#">Kavu Chameleon</a>   |
| 1 <a href="#">Obliterate</a>       |
| 2 <a href="#">Reverent Silence</a> |
| 2 <a href="#">Tangle</a>           |

---

15 sideboard cards



**Ghazi-Glare – Katsuhiko Mori**

2005 Worlds Top 8 - Standard



**Main Deck**

60 cards

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 4 <a href="#">Brushland</a>                         | 2 <a href="#">Congregation at Dawn</a> |
| 5 <a href="#">Forest</a>                            | 3 <a href="#">Glare of Subdual</a>     |
| 1 <a href="#">Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers</a> | 3 <a href="#">Pithing Needle</a>       |
| 1 <a href="#">Plains</a>                            | 2 <a href="#">Seed Spark</a>           |
| 4 <a href="#">Selesnya Sanctuary</a>                | 3 <a href="#">Umezawa's Jitte</a>      |
| 4 <a href="#">Temple Garden</a>                     |  |
| 4 <a href="#">Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree</a>         |  |

---

**Sideboard**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 23 lands                                   | 2 <a href="#">Carven Caryatid</a>          |
|  | 2 <a href="#">Greater Good</a>             |
| 3 <a href="#">Arashi, the Sky Asunder</a>  | 3 <a href="#">Hokori, Dust Drinker</a>     |
| 1 <a href="#">Birds of Paradise</a>        | 1 <a href="#">Kodama of the North Tree</a> |
| 3 <a href="#">Kodama of the North Tree</a> | 1 <a href="#">Kodama's Reach</a>           |
| 3 <a href="#">Llanowar Elves</a>           | 2 <a href="#">Naturalize</a>               |
| 4 <a href="#">Loxodon Hierarch</a>         | 1 <a href="#">Seedborn Muse</a>            |
| 4 <a href="#">Selesnya Guildmage</a>       | 1 <a href="#">Wrath of God</a>             |
| 4 <a href="#">Wood Elves</a>               | 2 <a href="#">Yosei, the Morning Star</a>  |
| 2 <a href="#">Yosei, the Morning Star</a>  |  |

---

15 sideboard cards

---

24 creatures



Katsuhiko Mori won Worlds 2005 with Ghazi-Glare, a green-white midrange deck in the most maligned two-color combination in tournament Magic history – a color combination that's often midrange by nature. Along with Yosei's Time Walk, Mori's deck gains a huge midgame burst of power

through [Congregation at Dawn](#), which ensures its next three turns will be the best creature drops it could cast.

## Kuroda-style Big Red

Mike Flores



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 <a href="#">Blinkmoth Nexus</a>	3 <a href="#">Beacon of Destruction</a>
20 <a href="#">Mountain</a>	4 <a href="#">Magma Jet</a>
<hr/>	
24 lands	4 <a href="#">Molten Rain</a>
	4 <a href="#">Pulse of the Forge</a>
	4 <a href="#">Sensei's Divining Top</a>
4 <a href="#">Arc-Slogger</a>	4 <a href="#">Shrapnel Blast</a>
4 <a href="#">Solemn Simulacrum</a>	1 <a href="#">Sowing Salt</a>
<hr/>	
8 creatures	4 <a href="#">Wayfarer's Bauble</a>
	<hr/>
	28 other spells



Kuroda-Style Big Red has a fat curve that begins with [Sensei's Divining Top](#) and [Wayfarer's Bauble](#) to set up Arc-slogger and big burn spells as its fatty threats. This is a deck where X-spells like [Fireball](#) and [Demonfire](#) shine. While many players think of this as a control deck, I see it as just how red does midrange. You can equate [Beacon of Destruction](#) to activating a [Weatherseed Totem](#) and attacking in a roundabout way. A better example of a red control deck would be centered around [Lightning Rift](#) alongside cycling cards.

Now, let's make a side-by-side comparison of these Midrange decks:

- My Fires
- Ghazi-Glare
- Kuroda-style Big Red

We have

- High curve
- Fatties!
- Setup for the Fatties

Now, what do the cards...

- [River Boa](#)
- [Watchwolf](#)
- [Slith Firewalker](#)

... have to do with these decks?

Nothing! That's what!

[River Boa](#) is the most powerful two-drop creature My Fires could play, but Zvi chose not to run it. The same is true for [Watchwolf](#) in Mori's Ghazi-Glare and [Slith Firewalker](#) in Flores's Kuroda-style Big Red. I have an axiom I follow: "Play good decks, not good cards." All these decks have fully embraced the midrange strategy – the signature of master deckbuilders who know what their deck is trying to do.



Running good cards like [River Boa](#), [Watchwolf](#), and [Slith Firewalker](#) indicates that your deck is playing toward a power spike on turn two, but the reality is the rest of these decks aren't set up to maximize that same power spike. Instead of catering to the best two-drops in the format, these decks build toward maximizing [Blastoderm](#), [Arc-Slogger](#), and Yosei, the Morning Star, and have successfully done

so in tournament play. These decks are set up to hit a power spike from turns three to six (give or take).

While there's an argument for simply playing all the most powerful cards, the simple truth is that [Watchwolf](#), [River Boa](#), and [Slith Firewalker](#) would be all alone in these decks. You will find pro players who chose to play these incredibly powerful two-drops, such as Jon Finkel's [River Boas](#) in My Fires or Antonino De Rosa's [Watchwolves](#) in Ghazi-Glare, and it's hard to find fault in that choice. But to me, those choices separate the professional players from the master deckbuilders.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell, the midrange archetype is the art of playing fatties. There's been a few tricks invented in Constructed tournament play over the years for the lucky fatty, but by and large fatties get most of their love in casual games, Limited, and from the great stories that are told about them.



Just remember the immortal words of one of midrange's biggest fans:

"It's the last fatty that kills you." – Jamie Wakefield