

CZ435: COMBO CONVOS W/ JIM LAPAGE (THE SPIKE FEEDERS)

- 1) UPKEEP STEP
 - 2) MAIN TOPIC
 - 3) TO THE LISTENERS
 - 4) THE END STEP
 - 5) CLEAN-UP PHASE
-

- 1) INTRO JLK and Jim LaPage

@JoshLeeKwai - @JimTSF - @commandcast

We've got a special guest today, my fellow CAG member and one of "The Spike Feeders" on YouTube: Jim LaPage.

Now, there's a Commander scenario we're all familiar with. The game is progressing, players are doing things but your life total is still pretty high and you don't feel in any imminent danger. And then BOOM! Seemingly out of nowhere, one of your opponents plays a card or two that you didn't see coming and this COMBO instantly wins them the game.

Now, Jim's channel "The Spike Feeders" is known for leaning towards the competitive side of the EDH spectrum. And if there's one thing that cEDH players are experts on, it's COMBOS! Whether you wanna be the combo player or the one trying to stop them. On this episode we'll be breaking down the ins-and-outs of how combo works, how to build and identify them. And then how to prepare. How to see combos coming during the game, how to have proper threat assessment and how to STOP them. -OR- how to possibly sneak the combo by your opponents and grab victory when they're not ready for it. BUT FIRST:

****CHANNEL FIREBALL** **ULTRAPRO #1** **PATREON: ZAK MARCUS****

- 2) MAIN TOPIC: **COMBO TALK**

We know a lot of players do not like combos. But, they're a thing you can do in Commander (and basically any format of Magic) and something you should expect to see at the table at least occasionally no matter how you like to play. Even at the most casual of tables, occasionally people will accidentally assemble a combo. Be sure to have the rule zero/power level discussion with your pod/playgroup before you begin the game.

There's no need to yell at us for talking about combos. It's not some kind of intellectual contagion.

ANATOMY OF A COMBO: (Note for Editors: Let's put this text in the BLACK banner)

Let us begin by talking about what combos are and how they work.

- **“ALL ACTIONS ARE TRANSACTIONS”** (Note for Editors: this goes in the orange banner)

You pay a cost, and you get an effect. Examples:

- Rampant Growth
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Just tapping a land for mana
- Attacking (does blocking have a cost?)

- **EFFECT PAYS THE COST OF THE ACTION** (Note for Editors: Also in orange banner)

Combos involve a specific type of action. One where the effect generates enough resource to pay for the cost, allowing the action to be taken repeatedly (infinitely). Usually these don't come up on the same card (sometimes they do) so to create this type of transaction, you have to combine multiple actions or play cards that alter or modify the cost or effect, until it does what you need it to do.

- Example: Basalt Monolith

The card can pay for its own untapping. You can do this as many times as you like. Of course, alone it does not accomplish much.

-Kinnan, Bonder Prodigy; Zirda, the Dawnwaker; Rings of Brighthearth

- Example #2: Savage Ventmaw + Aggravated Assault

Attacking with Savage Ventmaw gives the mana to get another attack. Simple.

-Same theory as Godo, Bandit Warlord + Helm of the Host

- **OPPONENT LOCK-OUTS:** (orange banner)

These are less common but still can be considered combos. This is a combination of effects that effectively makes your opponents unable to take any further game actions:

- Lavinia, Azorius Renegade/Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir + Knowledge Pool/Omen Machine
- Eruth, Tormented Prophet + Possessed Portal
- Archon of Emeria + Possibility Storm
- Stasis Locks (maybe we wouldn't still call these "combos"?)

- **WHY IS THIS USEFUL TO KNOW?** (orange banner)

- Helps with building around a card or cards you like. Roadmaps to what you need to do to make a combo.

- Example: JLK and The Tim Deck

- Helps with threat assessment in-game. Certain cards can look innocuous in a vacuum but are notorious combo pieces.
 - Examples: Dross Scorpion, Intruder Alarm, Peregrine Drake, etc.
- Helps with new card evaluation during preview season.
 - Examples: King Kenrith is a good exercise for this. With each ability what would you look for to try to make a combo?
 - Examples in recent years: Heliod Sun-Crowned, Port Razer, Jeska's Will
- **COMBO FRIENDLY EFFECTS** (orange banner)

There are a lot of effects that come up often in combos:

 - Examples: EtBs, +1/+1 counters, Card Draw

You'll notice a lot of the same cards come up over and over:

 - Ashnod's, Food Chain, Helm of the Host, Sage of Hours, Freed from the Real
- **WORK BACKWARDS** (orange banner)

Combo is about resetting game states. If you know what things will look like before and after you take an action, the trick is getting the after to look like the before.

 - New Olivia + Port Razer + Ashnod's Altar/Goblin Bombardment/etc

****MIDROLL BREAK****

IDENTIFYING COMBO (black banner)

How can you tell if your opponent might be trying to combo? How do you recognize which cards might be a key part of that combo?

- **"JUST ADD MANA" EFFECTS** (orange banner)

I'm always worried if my opponent has something out that says "Just add mana". Because infinite mana is not that tough to pull off.

 - Thrasios, Staff of Domination, Aggravated Assault, Walking Ballista, Kenrith, Deadeye/-Eldrazi Displacer
- **REPEATABLE ZERO COST EFFECTS** (orange banner)

If they can get something for nothing on repeat, it's gonna go badly for you later.

 - The Altars; Goblin Bombardment; Intruder Alarm; Aetherflux Reservoir; Grinding Station;

- **ACCESS TO A LOT OF MANA** (orange banner)

With enough mana available, players can often have no visible pieces on the board and deploy the entirety of the combo in one turn. Makes it difficult to predict.

- Watch out for players who have somewhere in the 8+ mana range.

- **PRE-GAME DISCUSSIONS** (orange banner)

You can straight up ask before the game if they have certain combos in their deck.

- *You can also ask during game. Especially if you know the person well.*
- *You can also ask the other players. If you don't know, they might.*

THREAT ASSESSMENT (black banner)

Later in the game EVERYONE has a lot of mana. Or, very often, multiple opponents have scary possible-combo-pieces on the board at the same time. How do you properly threat assess in these situations?

- **How many cards have they drawn?** (orange banner)
- **Have they tutored?** (orange banner)
 - How much? Did they have to reveal?
- **Did they self-mill a lot?** (orange banner)
- **Is their Commander part of a known combo?** (orange banner)
 - Or is there a combo that is typically included in that deck, even if the Commander isn't part of it?
- **What type of player are they?** (orange banner)

STOPPING COMBO (black banner)

Ok, you've identified that it's coming. Now what?

- **Find an answer** (orange banner)
 - Tutor or dig through your deck.
- **Have Cheap Answers**
 - The lower mana value your interaction is, the easier it is to hold up.
- **Recruit Help** (orange banner)
 - Point out the danger to the other players.
- **Bluff Em** (orange banner)
 - Hold up mana. Posture as if you aren't worried.
- **"Interaction Deadlines"** (orange banner)
 - Of course, the best way is to actually have the answer in hand. Part of having the answer available now is not wasting it earlier.

- **Countering Tutors** (orange banner)
 - Common knowledge is “counter what they tutored for, not the tutor itself” but is that actually the case all of the time?
- **Maximize the Disadvantage** (orange banner)
 - When you do have the answer, having a general concept of how combos work will allow you to not only stop it, but also leave your opponent in the worst possible position when you do.
 - Example#1: Kiki + Zealous Conscripts - when/how do you cast your Path to Exile?
 - Example#2: Sanguine Bond + Exquisite Blood - when/how do you Chaos Warp?
 - You can always ask your opponent’s for help/advice here.

EXECUTING YOUR OWN COMBO (black banner)

On the other hand, let’s say YOU are the combo player. How do you play it correctly so that you don’t get stopped?

- **PICK YOUR SPOT** (orange banner)
 - Are your opponent’s tapped out? Is there attention elsewhere? Have they used a lot of interaction already?
- **PROPER SEQUENCING** (orange banner)
 - Deploy your pieces carefully and in the proper order so as not to show your hand or spook your opponents.
- **EMPLOY DECOYS** (orange banner)
 - A good strategy can be to present a threat that is not part your combo but is something the opponents will feel the need to answer. Gets that interaction out of their hands.
- **ASSESS THE ASSESSMENT** (orange banner)
 - Are they (or have they been) actively worried about you? This can be overt or covert (i.e. have they been eyeing your board, etc)

3) TO THE LISTENERS:

What are your favorite combos in Commander?

****CHANNEL FIREBALL-OUT #2** **ULTRA PRO #1****

4) THE END STEP:

Something cool outside the world of Magic. JIM THIS IS YOU.

5) CLEAN-UP STEP

Big thanks to our amazing team here at The Command Zone! **Arthur Meadowcroft, Ladee Danger, Manson Leung, Craig Blanchette, Ashlen Rose, Josh Murphy, Jake Boss, Patrick Nan, Jordan Pridgen, Sam Waldow, Gaurav Gulati, Truc Thai, Jamie Block, Damen Lenz, Shauna Gilles and Evan Limberger.**

-Special thanks to **Geoffrey Palmer** for the living card animations (**@LivingCardsMTG**)