

CZ0507: Commander Bad Habits You Need to Quit

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

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Happy New Year Command Zone listeners! Today we're covering all the bad habits you need to quit in 2023! This is the year you become the best Commander player you can be! BUT BEFORE WE GET INTO THEM:

****CARD KINGDOM** **ULTRAPRO #1** **PATREON: ERIC HANNA****

2) MAIN TOPIC: COMMANDER BAD HABITS YOU NEED TO QUIT

Commander is a difficult format to play. We all make mistakes and they will continue to happen. But there are plenty of bad habits that are more easily improved. In 2023, resolve to kick these bad habits.

RESOLVING PHASES INCORRECTLY

Player Video: Upkeep, draw, untap, main phase 1!

THE HABIT *Players rush through their first few steps and often resolve them out of order.*

- When I was new to Commander, I was very bad about this. Always untapping in my first main phase. But once I moved from a casual meta to an LGS, I had to unlearn that habit
- The correct order: Untap, Upkeep, Draw, Main Phase 1...
- Often confused: Sagas, Attractions, some Shrines go off at the beginning of the first main phase
- Reading the card explains the card (most of the time). If you ever want to see the full Oracle text, you can go to Scryfall or Gatherer

THE PROBLEM

- It can cause confusion about where in the game you are
- Makes it difficult for opponents to interact at the correct time
- It's especially important on SpellTable where the communication has to be extra clear.
- But it also makes it difficult for the player to remember their triggers

THE CURE

- Slow down and be deliberate. Say the steps out loud as you move through them. Check for triggers as you do. It will save you time in the long run.
- Use coins, dice, or Infitokens as trigger reminders. I like to put things on top of my deck, especially for upkeep or draw triggers.
- Try saying "Untap, Upkeep, Draw" a few times right now out loud - once you get that cadence into your memory, you'll never forget it in the future.

POORLY REPRESENTING BOARD STATE

Player Video: This penny is a beast token. These three scraps of paper are +1/+1 counters. What does this gum wrapper represent? It's just a gum wrapper!

THE HABIT

- Not having enough dice, the right tokens, or some kind of life counter
- Using illegible cards, including scraps of paper in sleeves
- Generally means players are unprepared to play their deck
- Using similar dice to represent different things - this D6 is how many of this token there are, this D6 is how many +1/+1 counters, etc.
- This is only getting more complicated with things like keyword counters

THE PROBLEM

- Not just your mental bandwidth, but the entire table's mental bandwidth gets taken up - that energy could be used better - like playing better!
- Your deck becomes harder to pilot
- Your deck makes it harder for opponents to play against
 - Imagine this scenario: an opponent swings out in the most important attack of the game, but makes a big error because they didn't understand what your board state was representing (that card is a 5/5!? What!?)
 - Imagine this scenario: you miss a lethal attack because you've forgotten what your board state represents (oh crap that token had trample!?)
- Overall anything that slows down gameplay is not making the game more fun or exciting for anyone
 - Creating situations where 'take backs' are asked for, or things are beyond solvable is also not a way to make things more fun
 - Takes away from the spirit of what's happening

THE CURE

- Get the actual tokens you need! (CardKingdom)
- Infinitokens
- Cut up pieces of paper and write on them (a temporary solution)
- I keep a box of the common tokens that I bring with me everywhere: Monarch, treasure, clue, zombies, etc.
 - Don't feel like you need to slam the tokens and squeeze them into a deckbox!

APOLOGIZING FOR PLAYING

Player Video: I'm sorry, my deck never does this. I'm sorry I removed your thing. I'm sorry this is taking so long.

THE HABIT

- Build for fun, play to win

- I've seen this a lot lately, especially when decks have a powerful engine online but no means to capitalize / end the game
- Also happens when decks get a lot of fast mana in an opening hand
- Apologizing for removing cards or interacting with combos

THE PROBLEM

- Apologizing for playing the game is unnecessary and sets a tone that interaction or powerful effects are wrong or bad.
- Apologizing can come off as disingenuous if you apologize for repeated behavior
- Even if you've made a mistake in Commander, don't feel the need to apologize - we've all been there. Magic is one of the most complicated and complex games in the world - there will always be mistakes.

THE CURE

- Know what you're bringing to the table - goldfish it a bit if you're unsure of how it will play
- We'd like to hope that people are not *actually* upset if your deck is going off or you're taking a long turn - the main thing is being respectful of their time overall
- Commander is a high variance game. Sometimes you just get there and pop off.
- If you are actually concerned that your decks are too powerful or you are frustrating your playgroup, talk to them. Find out if they feel the same. What decks in particular are the problem? How can you work to solve it?
- Listen to your deck! If it isn't playing how you'd like, make changes to the list to make victory lines more straight forward, reduce triggered effects, etc.

PLAYING AT SORCERY SPEED

Player Video:

THE HABIT *Commander players often play as if there is one main phase, no combat step and no instants. They play very flat footed. But just like boxing, Commander is best played on your toes.*

- Overutilizing the first main phase. Even holding your mana up through combat can give you a threatening aura, making blocking scarier.
 - If you tap out and then swing, your options are immediately limited - you no longer have a chance to bluff a trick or make someone unsure of their blocks
- This is a habit formulated in a player's early years that often extends far longer than it should
- Casting all your spells on your turn makes you feel like you got the most out of your turn
- Maybe you are afraid you will forget to do everything you need to before you untap again

THE PROBLEM

- Reacting at the first possible moment ignores the possibility of future problems or surprises.
- Leaves you tapped out and exposed to board wipes, Alpha strikes, or combo wins
- Often leads to overextending
- If you run all your spells out first, you look scarier than you would be if you had cast spells on your opponent's end step
 - Say you cast a signet, a creature and an instant speed draw spell on your turn and passed.

- Now there's three turns of opponents knowing that you are building the board and have the cards to do it again
- Instead, cast the signet and the creature and hold up mana for the draw spell on end step.
- You eliminate those three turns of opponents having tons of information on what you're doing
- You also eliminate three turns of knowing what your OPPONENTS are doing and thus will make a less informed decision in the case of draw and discard spells like Izzet Charm

THE CURE

- Reading the card explains the card! Plan out your turns and know the speed at which you can cast everything (instant speed draw spell? Unless you're trying to not miss a land drop, hold it up until the last possible moment!)
- Put more instants and activated abilities in your deck
- Don't solve a problem until it's *your* problem.
- Every turn can be your turn if you're patient and wait for the right moment!
- Float like a butterfly. Sting like a Hornet Queen.

KEEPING SKETCHY HANDS

Player Video:

THE HABIT

- Keeping a hand because of its explosive potential but not planning for the long term
- Most of the time players know that it's risky but keep it anyway
- Keeping a hand because it has one really attractive or shiny card (one land a sol ring) but not thinking past your next few turns

THE PROBLEM

- This can cost you a game! And not just a loss! You could not participate meaningfully at all!
- You risk your next hour and half of fun, but also your opponents. They don't want to play a non-game either

THE CURE

- Ask yourself if this hand is worth the next hour and a half being a non-game
- Ask yourself - if you drew NO cards for the rest of the game, would this hand get you to some kind of playable game?
- Watch the How to Mulligan episode!

MIDROLL POINT

TOUCHING CARDS WITHOUT ASKING

Player Video: Touching opponents' cards with messy hands.

THE HABIT

- Instead of asking what a card does, reaching over, grabbing it, and touching it yourself

- Even worse, asking what a card does AND still reaching at the same time to grab it
- This may not be a bad habit for every player or every playgroup, but I find it a bit presumptuous
- There are a lot of new cards coming out. Of course you may need to read a card every now and then, but snatching a card off another player's mat is not the way.
- These are other players' things. They are expensive. They are precious.

THE PROBLEM

- I've seen players do this at my LGS while they're eating chips. Gross!
- At best, you interrupt their board or thought process.
- At worst, you damage their card or gunk up their sleeves

THE CURE

- It's polite to ask before touching.
- Players are mostly fine with just telling you what it does
 - If they're not being clear with the text, then you can ask if you can see the actual card
- Or look it up on your phone.
 - Sometimes cards have old text and even the players playing them don't know how it's actually worded - Scryfall and Gatherer are your friends

SCROLLING DURING THE GAME

*Player Video: *scrolling* Wait. What happened?*

THE HABIT

- Scrolling / looking at your phone / not being engaged with the game

THE PROBLEM

- It's rude to be on your phone when you're hanging out with people. It makes you look like you don't want to be there or that whatever's on the phone is more important.
- There can be a lot of downtime in a Commander game - watching the action like a hawk can be mentally draining - instead of trying to re-focus, we reach for distractions instead
- A lot happens in a Commander game, the more you're on your phone, the more you miss.
 - "When did that enchantment come out?"
 - "Wait I wanted to respond to that"
- It is not fun to wind the game back for a player who isn't paying attention.

THE CURE

- Commander Clock App
- Offer your phone as a life counter
- Engage with the game: Ask questions. React to cards.
- Play more instants / have instant speed effects
- Opponent taking a long turn? Engage with your other opponents. Commander is a social format!

PASSING ON PRIORITY

Player Video: Does anyone have anything? I guess I'll respond. Or cutting off active player—IN RESPONSE

THE HABIT

- Priority moves around the table in turn order, starting with the active player (it's their turn)
- In casual games, it is often shortcutted for convenience
- Jumping priority is cutting in the priority line to react to something that's been put on the stack.
- Waiting to see if anyone has any responses before begrudgingly responding is abusing the casual priority system, and frankly cheating. Priority Fraud. Priority Scamming

THE PROBLEM

- You may be giving up more interaction spells than is necessary if you're always the first to respond
- Steps on other players' opportunities to react
- Makes games confusing and out of order
- It's not playing by the rules!

THE CURE

- Slow down. Offer priority to the players ahead of you before responding
- You don't necessarily need to go around the circle in response to every action, but it can be good practice
- If something big is happening, definitely don't feel like you shouldn't react - but make it a habit to go "priority goes around the table"

SHORTCUTTING COMBOS

Player Video: I cast this. I cast this. I go infinite. GG.

THE HABIT

- Skipping over the explanation of the combo
- Assuming everyone knows how it works

THE PROBLEM

- Can leave opponents confused about how to interact or unsatisfied with the ending of the game
- Often assumes there isn't interaction or other players won't have a response to it, especially if your combo is happening at sorcery speed
- Leads to mistakes by the combo player
 - I've played in plenty of games where the combo player missed on-board interaction, was missing a piece of the combo, or misunderstood the loop.
 - Magic is complicated and we're playing with 30+ years of cards - sometimes a player will have a new answer or response you've never seen before (from new cards and old)

THE CURE

- Demonstrate the loop at least once.
 - You should know how to clearly demonstrate the loops in your deck
- Even if you're fairly certain your opponents are familiar with the combo, ask them if they'd like to see it demonstrated
- Answer any questions about interacting.
 - Even if it leads a player to figure out how they can stop your combo or do something in response, that's better than tricking / deceiving them to think they have no shot

ROLLING DICE FOR ATTACKS

Player Video: I don't want to make people think I'm targeting them, I'll let the dice decide who to attack.

THE HABIT

- Not wanting to create enemies or bad blood around the table
- Rolling dice to decide who to attack or using some other randomized method

THE PROBLEM

- You're missing an opportunity to act decisively in a way that benefits you
- It does not give you the threat neutrality you think it does
- Sometimes not attacking a player is a mistake in the game that will cost you later

THE CURE

- Ask yourself which player you're most worried about? Who has the most resources? The most powerful commander? A strategy who counters yours? Who is the most difficult to interact with?
- Commander is a game of decisions. Make it!
- Commander is also just a game - learn to be ok with creatures going into combat and potentially coming at you - this is one of the most fundamental interactions in the game!

NOT TAPPING CORRECTLY

Player Video: Oh woops, I didn't have the right mana for this, can we rewind?

THE HABIT

- Not knowing what mana you have available / tapping the wrong lands
- Needing take-backs or realizing you've done something illegal too late

THE PROBLEM

- You might be rushing through the resolution of a spell and focused more on what the spell does rather than if you can even cast it
- You tap your lands in a way that doesn't leave Blue Blue open, or give you the right mana to do the other thing you were trying to do
- Lands are complicated, especially in 5-color decks - knowing the priority order to tap lands is not something that gets taught usually

THE CURE

- Know your lands! Learn how to tap lands in a way that is optimal - if you have an activated ability of 2UU, then ideally you are tapping a mana rock for the 2 colorless and 2 islands for the UU. You don't want to be tapping your tri-lands if you don't have to.
- Watch how other people play if they're more experienced or better, or watch streamers and see how they go about casting spells when they do things like cube
- Stop playing with auto-tapper on MTG Arena for a bit

3) **TO THE LISTENERS**

What Commander player habits drive you crazy? What are your worst Commander habits? How are you trying to get better at them?

****CARD KINGDOM #2** **ULTRA PRO #2****

4) **THE END STEP**

Something cool outside the world of Magic:

5) CLEAN-UP STEP

Big thanks to our amazing team here at The Command Zone! **Damen Lenz; Arthur Meadowcroft; Ladee Danger; Manson Leung; Craig Blanchette; Josh Murphy; Jake Boss; Patrick Nan; Jordan Pridgen; Sam Waldow; Gaurav Gulati; Jamie Block; Mitch Trafford; and Evan Limberger; Gabriel Pozos; Megan Yip; Eric Lem and Josh Lee Kwai.**

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