

EPISODE 440: RULE 0 - HOW TO PLAY WITH HOUSE RULES

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1) INTRO JIMMY & JOSH

@jfwong - @JoshLeeKwai - @CommandCast

We hope that playgroups are getting back to normal soon, and new ones as well! Hopefully some of you out there will get to play with people who got into Magic over the holidays, or are open to trying a new hobby in 2022! One of the more talked about aspects about the game is the balance and unevenness that is inherent to a format with such a huge audience.

Today we're getting into

- *How the Rules of Magic the Gathering work across all its many formats,*
- *The concept of "Rule 0" for Commander*
- *Hearing from our office mates here at the Command Zone about HOUSE RULES!*

BUT FIRST:

****CHANNEL FIREBALL** **ULTRAPRO #1** **PATREON: *JUSTIN BRUNSON***

2) MAIN TOPIC: **RULE 0 - HOW TO PLAY WITH HOUSE RULES**

THE RULES OF COMMANDER RULES

Commander rules, and having a good set of rules helps. Here's HOW the rules break down, and where House Rules and Rule 0 fit into it all. Let's start with the Pyramid of Rules!

- **THE CORE RULES OF MAGIC**

These are the fundamentals of Magic. At the top of the pyramid are its core rules. You know - untap, upkeep, pass priority, mulligans, resolving spells, etc. In order to play Magic the Gathering right, your playgroup has to follow these rules, or else there's no foundation to actually play the game with.

- The best way to teach someone the mega-basics is through MTG Arena.
- Past that, ways to strengthen your fundamentals:
 - Playing more with friends
 - Watching streamers and pros play
 - Going to events like Prereleases

- **THE FORMAT RULES OF MAGIC**

On the second tier of the pyramid, the game rules are split into different categories, depending on the Format you are playing. Commander is the most popular of them all, but it didn't always used to be this way. Limited, Modern, Standard, Legacy, and Vintage were around beforehand, and since Commander we now have rulesets for Pioneer, Historic, and now Alchemy. Whew.

- These rules are typically focused on the LEGAL CARDS playable (incl. what is banned)
- Almost all of the listed are minimum 60-card decks, 4 copies of a card allowed, 20 life.
- Commander is the most different:
 - Only one copy of each spell, excluding basic lands
 - 40 Life
 - 99 cards in the main deck
 - One "Commander" with Commander identity
 - You die to 10 infect... oh wait, that's still the same :D

- **THE HOUSE RULES OF MAGIC / COMMANDER**

On the final tier of the pyramid, the format rules are modified by specific rulesets and nuances to each. Commander is by far the most different and complex (Vintage has restricted cards, Alchemy is digital only, etc.)

- Commander has their own separate rules committee!
- Because Commander is a multiplayer game, there is an official "Philosophy of Commander" page - *Commander is for fun, focuses on a resonant experience, relying on a social contract in which each player is considerate of the experiences of everyone involved.*
- Rule 0 applies to Commander!

Now that we have an understanding of how the overall rules works, let's talk about the meat of the episode - RULE 0, how to play and create House Rules, and how the Rules Committee is being updated for 2022 and beyond.

RULE 0

Rule 0 for Commander is derived from the original meaning of the term, which originally applied to tabletop RPGS that "The game master is always right". Since then it's evolved a bit, and now can be known to be a number of different, but similar, things: "do what's fun" or "don't be a jerk". In Commander there are two "main" parts to understanding Rule 0

1. Rules can be bent.
"Rules are not set in stone - they can, and should, be modified by playgroups and organizers to increase the overall fun of the group they want to cultivate." - Toby Elliott
2. The Pre-Game Discussion.
"Power level. Agreeing how long you expect the game to go, what levels/types of interaction are enjoyable, etc." - Gavin Duggan

The first part of Rule 0 is establishing the "House Rules" for Commander. We'll get more into that in a bit.

The second part of Rule 0 is very unique to the Commander format, and it's something that makes a really big difference when it comes to Commander and how a game pans out. Let's get into it.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GET ON THE SAME LEVEL?

- In typical board game settings, each player brings their experience and gamesmanship to the table within the boundaries of the game.
- In Commander, each player builds their own unique deck with their own collection of cards - the amount of variance can create natural imbalances and a higher level of variance.
- This pre-game discussion is a formalized idea to maximize enjoyment of the game - and getting everyone on the same page - it's not "do whatever".

TALKING TO PEOPLE IS HARD

- Seriously! This discussion and the success of it depends on our actual ability as humans to have it. Every playgroup and setting can be very different, and having this convo with strangers can be difficult too
 - The best way to get better at this exercise is to simply do it more, make sure there's good communication between you and the group, and be patient!
- Focus on the end goal - everyone wants to have a good time together. That doesn't mean games end in a draw! The PUSH and PULL of Commander, the HIGHS and LOWS, contribute a fun night of gaming with friends and family
- Everyone's perspective and definition of fun is unique to them, but for humans to truly play *together*, the spirit of collaboration on many levels is what makes Commander unique
 - Politics are collaborative (manipulation is not)
 - Archenemy is collaborative (unfairly ganging up is not)
 - Compliments are collaborative (insults are not)
- Just keep practicing and be open to making mistakes and also challenging what doesn't feel right. Playgroups don't have to just be Magic related either - I play lots of games with my friends outside of Magic that we continue to foster a camaraderie in, together.

Alright now that we've gotten the nitty gritty out of the way, we're going to be sitting down with our office mates to talk about the very fun concept of HOUSE RULES and how our individual playgroups have evolved.

MIDROLL BREAK

HOUSE RULES RULE. Just recently saw a Twitter thread about some custom House Rules and I was shocked at how many they had, and how many were pretty fun too:
https://twitter.com/jester_game/status/1477491668211634177

They have special mulligan rules, silly inside jokes, and it's a mix of game show antics and real changes to established rules. While I don't agree with all of them, I think it's still great to see - this playgroup must really have an awesome relationship. One thing we want to establish here though is that even though House Rules can be super fun, it's important to not let them get out of hand.

Just like the discussion we just had about "talking to people", House Rules are a similar concept to broach with a playgroup. *House rules are a set of rules that deviate from, alter, or are outside of the established rules by the Rules Committee.*

House rules, as a result, can be wildly different and creative. The new "rules" typically evolve from a group decision that has slowly become agreed upon until it is "set in stone". It can be triggered by different kinds of events, attitudes, and circumstances. What can House Rules effect?

- Card power level (new players? Inexperienced vs highly experienced playgroup?)
- Altered/Different banlist
- Mulligan rules
- Infinite / Combo restrictions
- "MLD" "Counters Only" restrictions
- Arbitrary things (special rewards for a challenge, punishments for silly things)

One thing is important:

- EVERYONE MUST AGREE UPON THE RULES FOR THEM TO WORK

Which is what makes house rules tricky - having a set of rules that is different every time you go play somewhere else will affect you in a variety of different ways. It's hard to keep up with the decks we already have, so if you're dipping a toe into the world of House Rules, might we suggest:

Keep it simple and keep it fun!

Now let's hear from our friends here at the office about some of their fun 'house rules'! We're hearing from 6 people today, including myself... so I rolled a D6 to determine the order and first up...

TRUC THAI

You've played some wild and whacky games, and we've played some League together - it was pretty entertaining. Lots of yelling. What are some things you've done in your playgroups?

- Planeswalkers as Commanders (playgroup started playing before Lorwyn, loved Planeswalkers, started doing this long before some of the smaller "alt" formats tried)
 - Which Planeswalkers have you seen that make for interesting decks?
 - Do they have "substitute" Commanders if they ever take the deck elsewhere?
- Free mulligan
- Super Weird Commanders (Blue Eyes White Dragon, anything else?)
 - Was a "one-night" only thing for the joke
 - But willing to get to that level = a playgroup really comfortable with each other!

You've played lots of games across your life - tons of League - any bigger words of wisdom for a gamer that's been through hell?

Next up, we have...

JAKE BOSS

Your playstyle is one of the most fun at the office! You have an iconic oversized deck - can you tell us about it? Your Arixmethes was awesome on Extra Turns too. What are some of your favorite ways to augment gameplay?

- "Hidden Commanders" (Play first couple of turns with Commander facedown, reveal it when it becomes relevant)
 - Fun to guess, a mini-game within each beginning
- Does your playgroup have an expectation around power-levels?
- Any card types / playstyles that you think are less common in your playgroup than an LGS or Magic Fest?

Next up, we have...

ASHLEN ROSE

You've gotten to play in playgroups here in Los Angeles and the Bay area (SF), so what were a couple of the house rules you encountered?

- Played at AnimeImports (one of the best stores in the area! Shoutout to Mike. Their store got broken into *again* 3 weeks ago, so please check it out if you're ever in the area) (<https://www.instagram.com/animeimports/>)
- Played with a home playgroup
- Personal Ban List - Cyclonic Rift, Expropriate (why? Were there any specific games that caused a ... rift?)
- Planechase Nights!

Playing to have fun! Does your playgroup play other board games? Like what?

Next up, we have...

SHAUNA GILLES

You're going to be famous as our resident cEDH player, joining Craig as our resident Infect player. You're in good company! Talk about some of your House Rules!

- Played at an LGS with a silly house rule (where was the LGS?)
- Havoc Festival entering play as an un-interactable enchantment
 - Cards like Platinum Angel and Platinum Emperion are still allowed
- Did not do this for cEDH games
- Havoc Festival definitely favors life-gain strategies: Players with 100 life have 7 turns to live while players at 10 life only have 4. But, this is still exponentially longer than the typical tournament rule of going to turns
- cEDH (spelled cEDH, haha) players eventually decided to remove timers/Havoc Festival due to the fact that we preferred conclusive games over shorter tournaments. Thanks to the format being significantly faster than EDH, we have the luxury of not needing to artificially end games. Reference Finch & Sparrow's tournament rules (turns, with every player receiving 1 point in the event of a draw) if time permits.

Also please let the world know what the correct way is to spell cEDH. It's kinda like esports. eSports? Or is it Esports? Nevermind...

Next up, we have...

ARTHUR MEADOWCROFT

These rules are unique because you're actually engaging with an entire part of Commander Culture that not many people in the office know about! Tell us about the PlayEDH server.

- How does the server work? Can anyone just go and play?
- How often do you play?
- Mods create guidelines that are put in place for healthiness of community + patrons
 - Ban access to certain problematic cards at power levels (examples?)
 - Decklists are checked and assigned a power level based on "combo-y" or "value-y" or "stax-y" your deck comes across
- How has the game quality been overall?

Thanks for sharing! Spelltable seems like its growing in popularity and we're happy to see it, but Rule 0 discussions seem to be pretty important.

Next up, we have...

JIMMY WONG / CRAIG BLANCHETTE

Craig couldn't be make it in today but he sent along some house rules that I have actually employed myself. Spoiler alert, just like there are coaching trees in famous sports, I partially come from the Craig Blanchette coaching tree, so we have similar play styles (and Red runs deep for both of us).

- Last Player Becomes Monarch / Game Starts with Monarch on first Combat Damage
 - Encourages early interaction, also helps out creature based strategies with card draw (or colors like RW that need it)
- "Eh, why the hell not" - this is a very typical reaction from both Craig and myself
 - Fact or Fiction - give em all five
 - New player? Mulligan until you have a good hand, even partial if you have to, just make sure you can *play the game*
 - Weird Politics - as long as they don't disproportionately affect the other players
- If a player wins 2x in a row, they cannot be Player 1 in the next game (but can still be P2 or 3 or 4 depending on seat order)
 - Do you think this is a result of unbalanced decks? Players that are just "better"?
- Sideboards ALLOWED? (friend that really wanted to use Spawnsire of Ulamog)

Thank you for listening! Thanks to everyone for stopping in and telling us about themselves.

3) TO THE LISTENERS

Are you a House Rules Enthusiast? Any special things that your group has done that were tremendous successes? What about huge failures? Let us know in the comments and by messaging us.

****CHANNEL FIREBALL-OUT #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! **Arthur Meadowcroft, Shauna Gilles, Damen Lenz, Ladee Danger, Manson Leung, Craig Blanchette, Ashlen Rose, Josh Murphy, Jake Boss, Patrick Nan, Jordan Pridgen, Sam Waldow, Gaurav Gulati, Truc Thai, Jamie Block, and Evan Limberger. (and Josh Lee Kwai)**

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