LANDS & LEGENDS

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COUNTRY SCENE INSIGHT

PREMODERN IN PORTUGAL: FROM STASIS TORTURE TO A THRIVING COMMUNITY

THE CREATOR

A CHAT WITH MARTIN BERLIN



ISSUE 02

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Hello and welcome to the second issue of Lands & Legends, the UK Premodern zine! Following a first issue built on the labour of FGR and especially Baldo, we've expanded our team. While those two reprised their respective roles of Lay of the Land columnist/editor-at-large and all-round ideas guy/zine designer, this issue was also built on invaluable editorial contributions from Thomaz, with some additional support from newlywed Ben HR and newly recruited Carlo, who will be more involved from issue three onward. Much as we have certain ideas in mind for future issues, we are very open to suggestions from the community, and if you have something you'd like to pitch to us, please get in touch. Equally, if you're a store owner, and would like to stock copies of the zine, do drop us a line!

This issue features excellent guest writing in the form of a piece on brewing by Nick Bormann and a report on the Portuguese Premodern scene by Guilherme Morai, huge shoutouts to the both of them. It is our intention to make the country reports a regular feature, and we're also keen to ongoingly platform brewing and innovation in the format. We also have the first installment of Play This, Not That, a series seeking to support onboarding players from other formats into Premodern. We'll probably print one for Legacy and one for Pauper at some point in future zine editions.

Above all, we're delighted to have the honour of publishing an interview with Martin Berlin, the creator and custodian of the Premodern format. We're lucky to have had Martin's time, and are very grateful to him for the considerate, thoughtful, interesting responses he provided to our questions. If you read only one thing in this issue, read that, though if you ask us, everything in these pages is well worth your attention. Till the next time!

The Lands & Legends Editorial Collective



Brewing in Premodern - Four Questions to Ask

According to Scryfall, 5,376 cards are legal in Premodern. Of those, 4,435 are not in Modern, so may be unfamiliar to players who joined Magic recently. 2,294 have never been reprinted.

Most of those are chaff but others have powerful effects that would never appear in current-day game design. And, to a brewer's joy, some look superficially terrible but can become strong in the right shell.

Brewing in Premodern is fun because the card pool is large but closed. If you develop knowledge of the tools, there is the potential to refine existing decks or create new archetypes. And maybe even win games.

For this article I'll stay away from deck-building truisms - mana curves, the metagame clock, having a proactive plan, so on - and instead drill down into what makes brewing strategies in Premodern unique.

Average card quality in Premodern is not high, so how good are the synergies?

Current formats let you build "goodstuff" decks, which hope to play volumes of individually powerful cards, overwhelming an opponent with X-for-1s and efficient threats.

This largely doesn't work in Premodern because the few powerful creatures - your Psychatogs, Deranged Hermits, Phyrexian Dreadnoughts - are in disparate colors or require significant deckbuilding concessions in order to function. The card pool doesn't offer redundancy on standalone threats that can all be jammed together in the same deck.

Most Premodern midrange decks I've attempted, failed. The format lends toward aggressive synergy, combo, or resource denial, aiming to break up opponents' combos and synergy. Midrange alone is not good enough.

What synergies can I see now that WotC couldn't balance around in the past?

To find busted interactions, combine cards that were printed in different eras.

While Premodern is "old cards" by current viewpoint, it actually spans a large number of years in the game's history (1995 to 2003).

Wizards of the Coast was balancing for “Type 2” (Standard’s grandma) at the time through most of those releases - some blocks being more power crept than others - but overall, cards printed into each particular block likely have some synergies when played together but aren’t “broken.”

The very best Premodern decks make use of combos or mechanics that weren’t available together at the times they were printed: Terravore and Armageddon were never legal together in Type 2. The interaction between Phyrexian Dreadnought or Parallax Tide with Stifle didn’t work as the cards were originally printed. Psychatog, a control finisher in its era, didn’t have to contend with Swords to Plowshares.

Looking at old deck lists can be fun to learn the history of the game, but is most often a dead end for finding competitive decks in Premodern; the power level will not hold up.

On the other hand, looking for combinations that WotC’s game design team could not have seen at the time the cards were printed is more likely to find exploits.

Which powerful cards have not found a competitive home?

The “Sol Lands” (Ancient Tomb, City of Traitors) have not made a big splash in Premodern outside of Replenish or some artifact-based strategies. Combined with Mox Diamond, a Sol Land can generate three plus mana on the first turn and should be able to generate a big advantage - but what are you casting for three mana: Call of the Herd? Stone Rain? These do not threaten a win in the same way that, say, a Goblin Rabblemaster would.

Some other potentially powerful synergies that haven’t found success yet: Oath of Ghouls & Pox; Mogg Bombers & Living Death; Mogg Maniac & Earthquake; Spontaneous Generation & Gush; Nantuko Cultivator & Mulch. Although explosive, brewing a shell around them is quite the challenge!

Survival of the Fittest is another card that is a bit lost in the wilderness, competitively. There are at least three playable Survival decks: Green-Black “RocSur”, Elves, and Full English Breakfast (FEB, a combo deck built around abusing Volrath’s Shapeshifter). They’re all strong in their own ways but the competitive results are spotty.

The problems for building a Survival deck are (a) it’s very mana hungry, (b) requires a critical mass of creatures and (c) the namesake card will be instantly targeted with removal so ideally the deck can function without it in play. Accomplishing all three is difficult.

I've had recent success brewing with FEB. The "classic" lists have 20-24 creatures, and then use tutors and discard spells to find/protect Survival of the Fittest. Instead, I wanted to be more creature heavy, with 35+ creatures: this gives the deck a robust midrange gameplan so it can still win without the Survival itself. Flexibility and power.

Contrast with previous FEB, by Carl Winter, which is combo-focused (see second list overleaf).

Is this a worse version of an established deck?

A final exercise. Why does Reanimator struggle so badly in Premodern? The best reanimation spells (Reanimate, Animate Dead, Exhume) are all legal, and there are powerful creatures to bring back. Why does the deck show so few results?

The best combo decks in Premodern are Dreadnought and Replenish, and unfortunately, Reanimator carries the weaknesses of both. It's reliant on the graveyard (like Replenish) and has to win in the attack step (like Dreadnought). But, while both of those decks can play interaction and effective cards, Reanimator is often stuck with creatures in hand that are uncastable.

A better reanimator deck wants to exploit some angle of attack that other combo decks can't. That might be playing more at instant speed (Corpse Dance, Shallow Grave) or taking advantage of flexible graveyard tutors (Buried Alive, Intuition). Decks like this - featuring creative names, "Tin Fins" or "Dance Academy" - are keeping some great Magic minds hard at work. Perhaps you'd like to join the brewing challenge, and join them!

Nick Bormann



FEB Rider - WBAC April 2025

Creatures (37)

4	Birds of Paradise
1	Deranged Hermit
1	Elvish Spirit Guide
1	Fyndhorn Elves
1	Genesis
1	Gilded Drake
2	Krosan Tusker
3	Llanowar Elves
1	Man-o'-War
1	Palinchron
1	Phage the Untouchable
1	Phyrexian Devourer
4	Ravenous Baloth
2	Tradewind Rider
1	Triskelion
1	Uktabi Orangutan
4	Volrath's Shapeshifter
4	Wall of Blossoms
2	Wall of Roots
1	Yavimaya Granger

Enchantments (5)

4	Survival of the Fittest
1	Sylvan Library

Lands (18)

3	City of Brass
6	Forest
2	Gaea's Cradle
3	Island
4	Yavimaya Coast

Sideboard (15)

3	Hydroblast
1	Masticore
2	Naturalize
1	Scavenger Folk
2	Tormod's Crypt
1	Tsabo's Web
3	Winter Orb
2	Xantid Swarm

Format: Premodern | Number of Players: 104 | Date: 01/03/2025

Carl Winter playing Full English Breakfast — **Position: 6**

Deck Name: Full English Breakfast — **Sideboard**

Creatures [21]
4 Wall of Roots
4 Birds of Paradise
3 Mesmeric Fiend
2 Squee, Goblin Nabob
2 Volrath's Shapeshifter
1 Auramancer
1 Ghitu Slinger
1 Palinchron
1 Phyrexian Devourer
1 Psychatog
1 Triskelion

Instants [3]
3 Intuition

Sorceries [10]
4 Cabal Therapy
3 Duress
3 Unearth

Enchantments [4]
4 Survival of the Fittest

Land [22]
4 City of Brass
4 Forest
4 Llanowar Wastes
4 Yavimaya Coast
2 Gemstone Mine
2 Reflecting Pool
1 Treva's Ruins
1 Undiscovered Paradise

3 Xantid Swarm
2 Smother
2 Gloom
1 Withered Wretch
1 Uktabi Orangutan
1 Sphere of Law
1 Ray of Revelation
1 Monk Realist
1 Hydroblast
1 Enlightened Tutor
1 Chill

60 Cards — 15 Cards

Premodern in Portugal: From Stasis Torture to a Thriving Community



How It All Started: Blame Victor

Every great story needs a villain-or, in our case, a die-hard Stasis player. Meet Victor Silva, the man we (half-jokingly) call the father of Premodern in Portugal. Victor had been trying to get people into the format since 2018, even creating a Facebook group to spread the word. But there was one tiny problem - nobody took him seriously. Why? Because Victor LOVES Stasis, and we all thought his enthusiasm for Premodern was just an elaborate scheme to lock us out while he had his “fun”. Every time we hung out at his place, he’d hand us Premodern decks to try. But surprise-they all had terrible matchups against Stasis. So yeah, early Premodern in Portugal was less about nostalgia and more about suffering. But here’s the thing: even though Victor was clearly evil, he was also right. The format was awesome.

It had that perfect mix of nostalgia and balance, and eventually, we couldn’t ignore it anymore. Fast forward to early 2022, and Victor convinced Clube Topdeck, our local game store in Coimbra at the time, to host weekly tournaments. At first, it was a small group, but week after week, new players joined. Soon, we had 20+ players at monthly events, and just like that-Premodern Portugal was born.

Where Are We Now? Today

Premodern is more than just a Coimbra thing. The scene has spread across Portugal, with hubs in: *Coimbra* - The birthplace of organized play. *Lisbon & Viseu* - Strong and growing scenes. *Covilhã & Santiago do Cacém* - New groups popping up. The WhatsApp group has 140+ people, and our Facebook group has 330+, but if we’re talking actual active players, the number is closer to 80. Unlike other Magic formats, Premodern in Portugal doesn’t have clear regional differences-probably because the community is still small enough that we’re all connected. Everyone plays in the same online leagues, chats in the same groups, and mocks Victor for playing Stasis.

Tournaments: A Mix of Fun & Competition

If you want to play Premodern in Portugal, you've got plenty of options: Weekly tournaments at local stores. A popular webcam league for online play. Big monthly tournaments drawing 20+ players. The first-ever Portuguese Nationals on May 17th, 2025, in Coimbra! We're even setting up "qualifier" tournaments in different cities where the winner gets a first-round bye at Nationals. Because if you're going to be the best, you might as well start with an advantage, right?

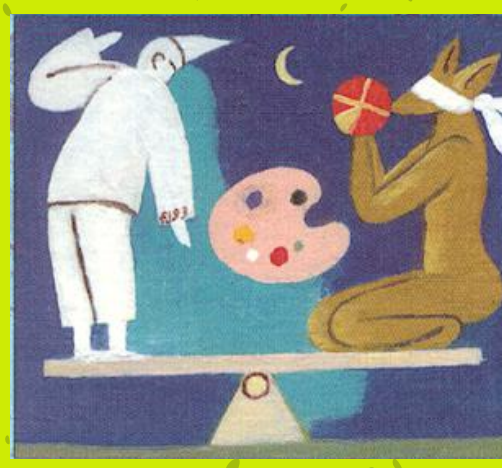
Metagame Madness: What's Winning?

One of the coolest things about the Portuguese Premodern scene is that it's super diverse. Unlike some places where the same decks dominate, here's what happens in our big events: Most of the Top 8 of relevant tournaments have eight different decks. Seriously. It's wild. Mono Red Sligh is the closest thing to a "popular" deck, but it's not oppressive. A surprise standout? Naya Survival Welder. It won a couple of tournaments and nobody saw it coming. The typical player here tends to stick with their pet deck, but the more competitive ones follow international trends. As more people get experience, we're seeing more original brews, which is exciting.

Premodern in Portugal is still young, so who knows where our metagame will go?.

The Future: Where Are We Headed?

Right now, the big focus is growing the community and getting more stores to support the format. Some key plans include: Convincing more LGS to host Premodern events-especially in the north of the country. Organizing a Portuguese group to represent us in international tournaments. Expanding our webcam league to include more players. The biggest challenge? Recruitment. There are tons of potential players out there, but getting them and the local stores to take the leap isn't always easy, but we're working on it.



How to Join the Fun

Want to play Premodern in Portugal? It's super easy:
1. Join our online groups - Everything you need is at www.premodern.pt
2. Visit an LGS: a. Coimbra: Taberna Topdeck b. Lisbon: Gárgula Gaming
3. Ask for help! The community is super friendly-just post in the group, and someone will hook you up with decklists, advice, and bad Stasis jokes.

Final Thoughts

What started as one guy pushing Stasis decks on his friends has turned into a thriving Premodern community. We've got weekly tournaments, big events, and our first Nationals on the horizon. More players are joining, the metagame is evolving, and the scene is as welcoming as it gets

If you are in Portugal and love old-school Magic with a competitive edge, come hang out. Shuffle up a deck, cast some Lightning Bolts, generate absurd amounts of mana with Gaea's Cradle, drop infamous 12/12 shrimps, and experience Magic the way Richard Garfield always envisioned-balanced, powerful, and ridiculously fun. Just… maybe don't let Victor convince you to play Stasis.

Guilherme Morai



PLAY THIS, NOT THAT: A GUIDE FOR MODERN PLAYERS ENTERING PREMODERN

If you're a Modern player curious about Premodern, you're not alone. Many of today's competitive Magic players cut their teeth in Modern but are now discovering the rich complexity of Premodern's curated card pool. What might surprise you is how many decks across these formats share similar play patterns, strategic goals, or game-ending combos.

This guide highlights some of the most striking deck-to-deck comparisons-offering a smooth transition into Premodern for Modern veterans.

Play Boros Aggro? Try Goblins

If you enjoy the synergy and snowball potential of Modern Boros aggro decks, especially those that curve out early with powerful threats and back them up with burn and disruption, Premodern Goblins should be your go-to.

Goblin Lackey can snowball games just like Guide of Souls and Ocelot Pride do in Modern-if left unanswered, it creates a swift avalanche of board presence. The deck rewards sequencing, board control, and racing maths, and it often splashes green for cards like Naturalize.

Play Yawgmoth? Try RecSur aka Survival Rock

Modern Yawgmoth players looking for a similar value-combo hybrid will feel right at home piloting Recurring Survival. Both decks are based around mana dorks, tutoring engines (Yawgmoth vs Survival of the Fittest), and a value engine that can double as a game-winning loop. Wall of Roots is even in both formats!

Whether you're grinding value or assembling a board state your opponent can't untangle, RecSur offers that same long-game inevitability with satisfying decision density.

Play Murktide, Death's Shadow, or Dimir Frog? Try Gro-A-Tog or Dreadnought

If you love cantrips, cheap threats, and efficient disruption, then Gro-A-Tog or Dreadnought are your spiritual successors in Premodern. These decks combine low-to-the-ground threat deployment with powerful card filtering and draw like Gush and Portent, and back it all up with Counterspell, Daze, or Foil.

You're still playing evasive threats, drawing cards in bursts, and keeping opponents off balance with permission and tempo plays-just with a nostalgic old-frame twist.

Play Storm? Try Frantic Storm

Frantic Storm in Premodern is a spell-chaining combo deck that will feel familiar to Modern Storm players. It uses Helm of Awakening and Sapphire Medallion to reduce the cost of spells, much like how Modern Storm uses Ruby Medallion or Ral, Monsoon Mage.

You draw and untap using Frantic Search, Cloud of Faeries, and Meditate, building to a critical mass of mana and cards before closing the game with Brain Freeze. If you enjoy managing storm count and planning combo turns with precision, this deck will scratch the same itch.

Play Goryo's Vengeance? Try Tin Fins

Modern players who love Goryo's Vengeance will immediately connect with Tin Fins. It's a fast, all-in reanimator combo that leverages cards like Shallow Grave, Buried Alive, Lotus Petal, Unmask (just like Grief used to do it for you), Dark Ritual, and Duress to put together a deadly line on turn one or two.

Your reanimation target is Sutured Ghoul, exiling Krosan Cloudscrapers from your graveyard to make it enormous, then give it haste via Shallow Grave or Corpse Dance to go for the kill. This is raw unfairness at its most exhilarating.

Play Belcher? Try Angry Hermit

Fans of glass-cannon combo decks like Belcher will find a kindred spirit in Angry Hermit. The combo is to activate Hermit Druid and flip your entire library into your graveyard. This can be done at the end of the opponent's turn, or during your upkeep after the Druid comes into play-if you have enough mana to complete the combo.

With your library in the graveyard, you can set up a kill with Krosan Reclamation, after which you simply need to reanimate Sutured Ghoul, exiling some number of Phyrexian Dreadnoughts to make it huge, give it haste via Shallow Grave and Dragon Breath, and attack for lethal. It's fast, fragile, and devastating-just like Belcher.

Play Eldrazi Ramp? Try TerraOath, aka Oath Ponza

If you like casting big creatures, ramping hard, and slowing your opponent down, TerraOath may be your next favorite. Think of Sylvan Library as your Kozilek's Command, Sphere of Resistance as your Chalice of the Void, and Pyroclasm as your Kozilek's Return.

It ends the game with massive threats like Terravore, while disrupting the opponent with taxing effects and soft lock elements.

Play Death and Taxes or Orzhov Blink? Try White Weenie or Dead Guy Ale

Premodern White Weenie scratches that same itch for efficiency and control through aggression. It deploys cheap threats that tax the opponent's resources while protecting its own board. Cards like Mother of Runes, Soltari Priest, Winter Orb, and Wasteland echo the disruptive nature of Death and Taxes. This deck commonly splashes black or blue, often for cards like Meddling Mage or targeted disruption. And yes, it runs Swords to Plowshares, one of the best removal spells of all time. Dead Guy Ale in Premodern and Orzhov Blink in Modern occupy a similar niche: they are midrange-control decks that combine resilient creatures, efficient removal, and disruptive effects to control the board and outvalue opponents over time.

Play Living End? Try Fluctuator Combo or R/B Goblins with Living Death

Miss cycling into a massive payoff spell? Living Death is the Living End of Premodern. Decks like Fluctuator Combo and red-black Goblins with Living Death and/or Patriarch's Bidding give you the same rush, either sweeping your opponent's board and filling yours in one brutal turn, or going off with Songs of the Damned.

Whether it's through fast cycling or goblin recursion, the gameplay is unmistakably similar.

Play Merfolk? Try Madness or Mono-Blue Tempo

If tribal synergy and reactive disruption are your game, then Madness is your jam in Premodern. You can also tinker with classic Merfolk shells using Lord of Atlantis, Winter Orb, Sea's Claim, Gush, Foil, and Daze. It's tempo-based, tricksy, and fun, bringing the islandwalk beatdown with a lot of the same pieces that make Modern Merfolk tick.

While we didn't cover every archetype in Premodern, this guide should help you find a familiar foothold if you're coming from Modern. The formats may differ in pace and card pool, but the joy of finding "your deck" transcends both. Premodern isn't just a nostalgia trip, it's a thriving format with competitive depth and some seriously satisfying gameplay. So take a look at your Modern favorite… and try its Premodern cousin.

Baldo Sciacca





THE CREATOR

A CHAT WITH MARTIN BERLIN

Hey Martin!

First of all, thanks for taking the time to chat. We all know you as the creator of Premodern. At the same time, players don't know much beyond that. Who is Martin Berlin outside of Magic?

I'm a father of two sons, family life and work taking up most of my time. I live in Stockholm, Sweden, where I work with modelling and statistics within public health. I got a PhD in economics and my thesis was about happiness and life satisfaction. Also a passionate trail-runner, but due to back problems I haven't been able to get out much during the past couple of years. So I started baking sourdough bread instead.

How often do you get to play Premodern?

It varies a lot, but in general not as much as I'd like to due to time constraints. I'm more active in specific periods, for example if I plan to attend a tournament. I prefer IRL play but I've been playing some more webcam games lately when preparing for the European Premodern Invitational Challenge (EPIC).

Moving onto the format. We have seen some black builds such as Broccoli Soup and Pitless Rack perform in tournaments. RecSur also has a competitive win rate recently. In Phil Nguyen's end-of-year newsletter, you mentioned "black is significantly weaker and less played than the other colors...I intend to make a change to push black in 2025". What is your current view on black? What cards are on your radar?

Black is played and has its merits and unique effects like discard, but it's clearly the weakest colour in Premodern at the moment. As I stated in Phil's newsletter, a big problem for black is red. Black actually has some very efficient aggressive creatures like Carnophage, Phyrexian Negator and Skittering Skirge, but they all line up poorly against burn spells. Likewise, black has decent card-advantage cards like Phyrexian Arena, Skeletal Scrying and Graveborn Muse, but they all involve trading away life, which is not the greatest idea versus red, on top of life-gain spells available not being the best. The fact that Stifle-Nought is a top deck currently is probably beneficial to black, both because it keeps Sligh in check, and because black's mana efficient discard and removal spells line up well against Stifle-Nought.

The Pitless Rack deck is really cool, and I think there's room to brew with black within the current meta. As for cards on the radar for potentially unbanning, it's hard, because the banned black cards are obviously there for a reason. I try to have an open mind about whether anything could come off without being too oppressive.

What is your methodology for bans and unbans?

There is no protocol for this, to be honest, but more so it's a combination of observing, listening, testing, thinking and gut feeling. I'm primarily concerned about the format being fun, interesting and playable as a whole, rather than following some abstract logical principles for the ban list. I do try to listen to the community as a whole, and some insightful players in particular. I'd say I'm rather conservative with changes in general.

Looking back, the ban list hasn't changed that much over time, and the changes have also been quite different from each other. For example,very early when Black Vise came off the list it was mostly based on having a better idea of the power level of the format, rather than testing the card. In contrast, I tested the potential of Frantic Search in storm decks, and found it to have an acceptable power level.

Several years later, you could perhaps argue that it contributed to pushing the Replenish archetype a bit too far though? In any case one should be humble about the fact that the collective hive-mind will be more intelligent than any one person or small playtesting group.

How do you determine the line between a Land Tax and other cards people have complained about over the years? Is prison-style gameplay (e.g. Parallax Tide, Oath of Druids, both of which have found success over the last year or so) a significant consideration?

Prison cards were really pushed in the Premodern era, similar to how creatures are now in later Magic design. Structurally, this is hard to undo, and I don't think it needs undoing. I think that the above cards need to be judged individually and in context. For example, Land Tax costing only one mana makes it hard to meaningfully compare it to Parallax Tide, even though they both slot broadly into the prison category of cards.

How do you think local communities can grow?

Good question. First, I'd think about what your local playgroup enjoys the most: are you more on the competitive side? It might be a monthly tournament or league. Or if you're more on the casual side perhaps a bi-weekly pub meetup is preferred? The second point is consistency, such as trying to keep that meetup or league going, even if only a few people attend. It's probably better to moderate expectations a bit and go for a bi-weekly or monthly meetup e.g. not to dilute attendance. It can also be worth reaching out to the neighbouring communities to coordinate on larger meetups or some regional event. Lastly, be the change and organize the event you'd like to attend yourself! (laughs).

How important is growing Premodern to you? Is there such a thing as too much growth for this format?

Now that the format is established and has reached critical mass, further growth for growth's sake is not important from my perspective. But I believe there is still a big potential playerbase, such as people who played back in the day but who're not really in tune or can keep up with the current design philosophy. If they can reignite their interest in Magic that is of course great.

How important is nostalgia to keep current players and to acquire new players?

It obviously matters a lot for some. But I think we may overstate the importance of nostalgia too. I've met several Premodern players who started playing Magic after 2003 actually. The format has other selling points, such as being a closed format. In the end, I think what matters most is that the format is fun and interesting to play.

How do you feel about new printings of premodern cards and what kind of input have you gotten from the community on the topic? Any particular attention to Universes Beyond?

I don't pay much attention to new printings, since I don't play newer formats myself, and I personally prefer the printings from the Premodern era. I haven't really received any particular reactions on Universes Beyond, other than the occasional humorous take. Whatever version you prefer it will mostly affect yourself in the end, as you're the one who sees your own deck the most.

What have you seen bring in younger players that have no previous contact with these cards and combos to the format?

Younger is relative (laughs), but there are some different factors. I guess it's mostly a matter of community dynamics. If you prefer a bit more of a casual play style, you may want to join the Premodern playgroup. The non-rotating aspect is one selling point, and perhaps the appeal of a "golden age" of Magic with its distinct artwork is appealing too?

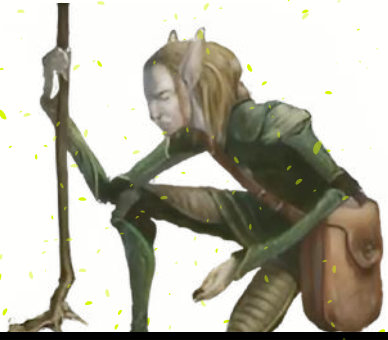
We've had a number of local communities become quite healthy after tabletop events came back. How do you think these local communities can connect across borders?

International community organized events like the European Championships are excellent occasions - this year it's in Finland on the 6th of September! And overseas there are events such as the Latin American Champs and LobsterCon. And if you want to reach out, the Premodern Facebook group and the Discord server are good options.

How does it feel to 'parent' the format now that it's grown so much? What does that routine look like?

Great! If we go with the parenting analogy (laughs), the children have really grown up and can take care of themselves. Initially I was involved in the organization of many events and content creation, but now there are lots of awesome events all over the world, as well as quality content in different forms.

All the best,
Martin



LAY OF THE LAND

A deep dive into the Southeast UK Metagame

Since the first installment of this column, the South-East UK Premodern scene has continued to grow and strengthen. In the past three months, we have had three large (for the UK) events. In February, Brighton hosted its first ever Premodern tournament, called Premodern by the Sea, with twenty-two players in attendance. The vibes were impeccable, and the venue (Dice Saloon) was excellent. I believe the Brighton community intends to keep these up as a quarterly occurrence, which is fantastic news. In March, we had the eighth installment of the London Premodern Quarterly, aka Rogue's Quarterly, hosted as always at Rogue's Quarter Café in London. Twenty-eight Premodern magicians came, its largest ever turnout, and it saw the first cut to top eight at a Rogue's Quarterly. Finally, in April, Big Smoke ran its second league event of 2025 in a new venue, Mythic Goblin store in South London, with an impressive forty players present.

As well as these larger events, Labyrinthe store in Chislehurst has started running monthly Premodern events, with seven present at the April edition and thirteen in May, the latter being won by Lands & Legends' Thomaz Coelho on Replenish. Cardmarket stalwarts Webuyanycard, based in Maidenhead, ran their first Premodern event in April, with thirteen players there as well, and Nick Bormann (check out his article on brewing in Premodern elsewhere in this issue) took it down with his UG Tradewind FEB build. Additionally, the April Big Smoke included a side event, which was won by Ben HR (also of the Lands & Legends editorial collective), who was playing GB Survival Rock. Finally, the Premodern weeklies at Dark Sphere in West London have continued to fire on Monday nights, with an average attendance of around 8-10, while a second weekly series has started at Mythic Goblin on Wednesday nights, with similar numbers showing. I've been keeping track of the weeklies metagames to run some fun analysis once we accumulate a sample size that justifies it.

As you can see, the format is flourishing in this part of the UK: every event has had great vibes and atmosphere, new players are showing up and taking an interest, and stores like Mythic Goblin, Webuyanycard and Labyrinthe are getting involved with platforming the format. The one thing I will say is that I would love to know more of what's going on in other parts of the country. From what I know, there are occasional meetups and small events in Scotland, as well as Yorkshire and Tyneside, and Bristol saw its first Premodern tournament at the start of June with a turnout of eleven.

We do have people coming quite far to attend London events, but places like Glasgow or Newcastle are a bit out of reach. If you are involved in any of those (or other!) Premodern scenes in the UK, do feel free to reach out, as it'd be wonderful to hear more.

A Quick Note

Before I get into things properly, a brief note on deck name conventions in this column. As you may have noticed, I favour calling the red deck Burn over Sligh. While I recognise that Sligh is the more evocative and/or nostalgic name for many of you, I find it hard to call the deck a Sligh deck when it's only playing twelve creatures that stick around for more than a turn - hopefully that doesn't annoy anyone unduly! Secondly, when it comes to colour identities and archetype names, I am trying to balance flavour with accessibility. For this issue, I am trialling calling shard mana identities after their associated Primeval Dragon (Crosis, Darigaaz, Dromar, Rith, Treva), and otherwise am using letters to indicate colour identities, with the exception of WBG, which I'm calling Junk.

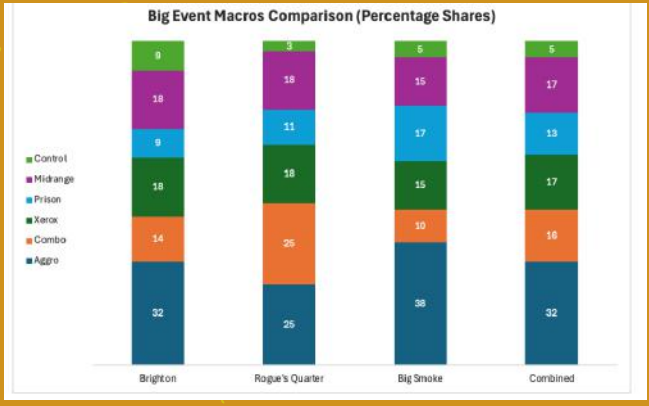
Metagame Breakdown

For the time being, I've decided not to incorporate data from what I'm categorising as smaller events (i.e., under twenty players) which is partly why I mentioned some winners in the column introduction. We'll start with the full metagame from the three big events (see overleaf). As the sharp-eyed among you may spot, decks are sorted by macro-archetype.

I'll get into the top placing decks, but I would note that the overall metagame composition for these events, while plentifully diverse, does skew fairly consistent in terms of macro-archetypes. If we zoom in a bit on specifics, one thing that stands out is that the Rogue's Quarter meta slants heavier toward blue and combo than the other two, which conversely have a higher proportion of aggro in the room, particularly Goblins. My feeling about why this is relates to the playerbase for these events: while there is a lot of overlap in terms of who attends which event, Rogue's Quarter is a favourite of current and former Legacy players, while the Brighton and Big Smoke events see more players coming from Modern and/or Pauper. In that context, it makes sense that Legacy players would favour decks leveraging the power of blue cards like Dreadnought or Frantic Storm, while the explosive-but-grindy Goblins shell, as well as other aggro and midrange decks, would appeal to pilots coming from formats where playing to the board is a bigger part of the puzzle.

Metagame Breakdown

Brighton, February	Rogue's Quarter, March	Big Smoke, April
Goblins x4	Goblins x2	Goblins x7
Burn x1	Burn x1	Burn x2
Elves x1	Elves x1	Elves x1
Swampwalk Brew x1	GW Wurms Brew x1	Mono B Zombies x2
FEB x1	BG Pitless Rack x1	4c Weenie x1
Replenish x1	Mono B Clerics x1	5c Negators x1
Frantic Storm x1	Replenish x1	Merfolk x1
Mono U Dreadnought x2	Frantic Storm x2	Replenish x1
UWR Dreadnought x1	BUG Aluren x1	UG Tradewind FEB x1
Gro-a-Tog x1	Crosis Dragonator x1	Iggy Pop Storm x1
Stasis x1	4c Battle of Wits x1	4c Balancing Act x1
Pit Rack x1	Angry Hermit x1	Mono U Dreadnought x2
Junk TerraGeddon x1	Mono U Dreadnought x3	UW Dreadnought x1
Rith TerraGeddon x1	U W Dreadnought x1	Gro-a-Tog x2
WB Control x1	Gro-a-Tog x1	Gro-a-Mystic-Enforcer x1
Mono B Control x1	Stasis x1	Pit Rack x2
UW Tide Control x1	Pit Rack x1	UR Welder Stax x1
Mono U Tide Control x1	UR Welder Stax x1	GR TerraOath x2
	Junk TerraGeddon x1	Treva Words Enchantress x1
	GB Survival Rock x1	GW TerraGeddon x1
	Dromar Finkula x2	WB Control x1
	Dromar Negators x1	Dromar Finkula x2
	UW Parallax Control x1	RW Slide x1
		GW Slide x1
		UW Tide Control x1
		UW Landstill x1



As mentioned, I think the combined column is fairly representative of what to expect at a larger South-East UK event, but there are some differences between the individual events.

Winning Decks

Below are the top 8s from those three events - note that these are the final standings from the end of the tournament, not Swiss standings. Also, the Rogue's Quarter finalists wound up splitting, so the top 2 ranking there is notional. As you can see, Rogue's Quarter in March finally broke the run of Goblins winning UK events, an outcome matched the next month at Big Smoke, despite it being by far the most popular deck in the room. I've decided not to include any charts based on these results as I just don't think the data is deep enough here to tell us much (maybe at the end of the year I'll do it for the whole year), but broadly speaking macro-archetype conversion to top 8 finishes is commensurate with overall representation.

The Rogue's Quarter results skew very blue, with Dreadnought converting well to top 8, though the deck generally continues to not perform as well in the UK as in some more high profile Premodern scenes.

From my perspective, the Frantic Storm and UW Control results reflect high quality individual pilots for those decks (Nick Bormann and GK Neill for Storm, Michael Pike and Armand Postma for Control), and in the case of Control I think it's noteworthy that those players have incorporated proactive angles in the form of Parallax enchantments. Playing too reactively in this format is a recipe for unintended draws. Otherwise, I think my other main observation would be that the decks that crop up more frequently at the top tables are largely tier 1-1.5 strategies (Dreadnought, TerraGeddon, Goblins), though Gro-a-Tog has also been doing well for itself, perhaps because it plays well into all the Xerox and Combo decks around.

Analysis & Recommendations.

Two of the things I called for in the previous edition of this column were for more variation of mono black decks and for people to diversify which Xerox shells

Finish	Brighton	Rogue's Quarter	Big Smoke
1	Goblins	Dromar Finkula	GW TerraGeddon
2	Gro-a-Tog	UW Parallax Control	Goblins
3	UW Tide Control	Mono U Dreadnought	GR TerraOath
4	WB Control	Frantic Storm	Goblins
5	Mono U Dreadnought	Elves	UW Tide Control
6	Junk TerraGeddon	UW Dreadnought	Gro-a-Tog
7	Frantic Storm	Goblins	Gro-a-Tog
8	Burn	Mono U Dreadnought	Goblins

they played, with Gro-a-Tog specifically highlighted as an alternative to Dreadnought. I think it's fair to say that both of these happened, with people rocking Clerics and Zombies at events, and Gro-a-Tog making some strong showings at Big Smoke in particular. With that said, the only results I can remember seeing mono black decks get at decent-sized UK events were Contamination placing second at the January Big Smoke, and Pit Rack winning a Rogue's Quarterly back in late 2023. It's possible that Martin Berlin is right and the colour could use a boost, though I do think that black as a colour should be well positioned particularly into the more blue-heavy Rogue's Quarter meta. As for Xerox, while Dreadnought did well at Rogue's Quarter, I think we're starting to see people come prepared for 12/12s, making branching out a worthwhile endeavour.

The other note I sounded last time was that people need to try more tier 1-1.5 decks that aren't Dreadnought or Goblins - and, as part of this, stop playing so much Dreadnought or Goblins, as you're making it too easy for people to prime their deck selection and sideboard slots. Almost all the UK events are proxy-friendly, so the expense of building Replenish or a Terravore deck doesn't have to be an obstacle. I think we've started to see some shift in this as I've seen more players picking up Terravore decks in particular, which seems sensible to me if people are going to keep playing so much aggro (TerraOath) and durdley midrange/control decks (TerraGeddon). Replenish is still fairly underplayed - and as mentioned in the introduction, it won a smaller event at Labyrinthe in May - as is Burn, and there's also not much in the way of tier 1.5ish decks like Mono U Tide, GB Survival Rock, Enchantress, and Elves. Burn seems to be picking up a bit in some of the weeklies, and between the drop-off in Dreadnought and the fact that it's becoming clear that one of the ways to address that matchup is to tilt more towards a Sligh strategy (at least from the sideboard) with creatures like Goblin Patrol and Goblin Cadets, it may be an alternative for recovering Goblin Ringleader addicts.

I think the final thing I want to say is that, while I am advocating in part for respecting high tier decks that see play globally, the format is also full of underexplored decks and synergies. Between a top finish from an innovative Finkula build at Rogue's Quarter and UG Tradewind FEB taking down the Webuyanycard event, there's scope to tinker your way to a colossal result.

Francis Gene-Rowe,
Bow, June 2025

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