Why cards are banned

Before we get into details, it's important to take a step back and share our perspective on the role the ban list serves. Historically speaking for the MLPCCG, bans have been used incredibly sparingly, and usually to address a specific fundamental issue.

- Severe Negative Play Experiences (NPEs)
  - Mane Six, Fluttershy, Tantabus, Bulk Biceps
- Decks that hold an unusually dominant position ("tier 0") in the meta
  - All of the stuff that powered combo decks, Applejack, Pinny Lane
- Decks that disrupt the normal progression of a tournament
  - Globe Trotter

While these reasons are sufficient justification for banning a card, they don't represent the full extent to which bans can be utilized; indeed, other successful CCGs show us that careful application of bans can improve the diversity and health of the meta.

- In extreme circumstances, cards which make the meta stale and reduce deck diversity
  - Eff Stop. Applejack is arguably also in this category.

Things that aren't grounds for banning a card

- Somebody is mad about it and/or it wrecking their local meta
  - If this were the case, we'd all be running 45 two cost two power vanilla Friends because everything else would be banned. Variance and skewed metas happen, and a small number of data points is not sufficient grounds for banning.
- It helps or powers a deck that holds a top, but not dominant, position in the global meta
  - Thunderlane has certainly carried more than his fair share of games but the decks he was featured prominently in were not untouchable. Being a good, solid card isn't grounds for banning.

Straight from the horse's mouth

Here are two articles written by Mark Rosewater, who some of you may recognize as the lead designer for Magic: The Gathering. Suffice to say that he knows a few things about running a CCG and what he has to say is still 100% relevant despite being 15 years old.

https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/making-magic/banned-run-2003-02-17
https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/making-magic/fun-fun-fun-2005-04-18

Why is CiM taking up the banhammer?

We're in one of the better positions to do so: we're involved in most events above the locals level; we're playtesters with experience making speculative changes to the game; and we're heavily involved in the rules committee including informing past ban decisions.

In some sense, we're obligated to do so. Commentary is Magic is responsible for running the Organized Play program for MLPCCG; part of that responsibility is to curate the tournament floor rules (including the ban list) used in Organized Play.

Besides, we're the scum of the earth that helped some of those cards get banned in the first place. Who better to make sure new offenders get justice?

Why not errata?

It is more difficult for players to be informed of and remember changes to the printed text of cards than it is for them to know that a card is illegal.

Why not use restricted lists like Magic's Vintage format?

To give some background, Vintage is a format where nearly all cards are legal for play, but a small set of the most powerful cards are restricted, meaning they are only allowed as one-ofs.

One-ofs are obviously going to be less consistent than full playsets, which causes the matches to be swingy depending on whether or not the card shows up. Variance sucks. Nobody likes losing due to bad luck on their part - or good luck on the opponent's part, which is effectively the same thing from a psychological perspective.

Why not ban combinations of cards?

This is difficult to validate, both during play and when inspecting deck list submissions. Say the combination of Tantabus and Gilda was banned but the individual cards weren't.

Your opponent uncovers a Tantabus which is fine on its own, but they're running Blue - is their deck legal? Do you play it out? What happens if you lose and find out it was illegal afterwards?

When you look over deck lists as a tournament organizer or judge, do you remember that they had Gildas when you see the Tantabus or vice versa? Did you look at them soon enough to catch the above issue during Swiss rounds?

Change process for tournament floor rules document

Every 2-4 months, Commentary is Magic will review the meta - tournament results, trends in deck construction, etc...

Between reviews, we'll maintain a watch list for meta trends, deck archetypes, specific cards and other items that we believe need to have an eye kept on them on an ongoing basis, as they may turn into problems that need to be addressed in the future.

During the review, all items on the watch list will be discussed to determine if there is an issue that needs addressed, and if there is, what changes to make to address it. Changes can include but are not limited to banning cards, unbanning cards, adjusting formats, etc...

If we determine that a change is necessary and unanimously agree on the change to be made, it will be applied to the tournament floor rules.

Following the review, we'll post an announcement with the changes (if any) to the tournament floor rules document. If there are any changes to the floor rules document, the announcement will also include a justification or explanation for each change and an updated version of the document, with an effective date at least four weeks into the future from the date of the announcement.

What's changing?

Normally this would be posted in a separate announcement, however for this first one, the policy document and change announcement are being combined for your convenience!

The updated floor rules, version 3.3, may be found here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/14Mw6wTk2gsGHmTqLmFCUA1R5xG7suEvFHPG25Uy_uuA/edit?usp=sharing

1. Minor formatting changes to the Tournament Rules Document to improve readability.
2. Changed several references from Enterplay to Commentary is Magic
3. Removed prohibition on members of the Tournament Authority from playing in Tier 2 and Tier 3 events; this does not change the existing prohibition of the Tournament Organizer, and judge team from participating.
4. Changed Tier 3 Elimination round time limit to two (2) hours.
5. Ban list changes as follows:

Banned in
Harmony
Odyssey Block
Core

Banned in
Harmony
Core (existing)

Banned in
Harmony
Odyssey Block
Core

Ban **Exact Duplicate, My Little Clony** in Core, Harmony, and Odyssey Block

Combo decks that rely on making infinite token copies of action token-generating Friends with Exact Duplicate have been approaching problematic levels of viability in both the Core and Harmony formats. These decks require relatively few cards and a minimal amount of action tokens to assemble the loop in question, leaving them free to include additional cards to make the combo more consistent and less vulnerable to disruption.

However, all of these decks rely on Exact Duplicate in order to function, and Exact Duplicate does not see competitive play outside of combo decks attempting this sort of interaction. To prevent this style of decks from reaching a dominant position within the meta, Exact Duplicate, My Little Clony is banned in Harmony, Odyssey Block, and Core formats.

Ban **Applejack, Ambassador of Honesty** in Harmony

Applejack, Ambassador of Honesty continues to hold a dominant position within the Harmony format, despite the greater availability of cards which can meaningfully interact with her "farming" playstyle. This is primarily due to additional power granted by cards that are only Harmony-legal, which affect the speed and reliability at which these decks are capable of performing.

So long as these decks are allowed to exist, the Harmony metagame will be unreasonably warped, forcing competitive players to build a strategy around disrupting Applejack farm decks, thus reducing deck and color diversity. In order to encourage this diversity and to address a deck that has and continues to sit at a dominant position, Applejack, Ambassador of Honesty is banned in the Harmony format (as well as her existing ban in the Core format.)

Ban **Berry Punch & Orange Swirl, Drinking Buddies** in Core, Harmony, and Odyssey Block

The card combination of Berry Punch & Orange Swirl, Drinking Buddies and Belly Flop has been an issue for many players, as it is a source of incredibly efficient removal. The interaction between these two cards usually result in two of a player's most relevant and powerful Friends being turned against them and subsequently removed for minimal investment by the opponent.

Between these two cards, Belly Flop is the least problematic of the two - there are many other ways in Pink to retire or otherwise remove a "stolen" Friend. Taking control is also one of the best ways to address an opponent's Friend if there are powerful protective abilities in play and while there are other effects that take control of Friends, none are as efficient or as repeatable as Berry Punch & Orange Swirl. To remove one of the more severe negative play experiences, Berry Punch & Orange Swirl, Drinking Buddies is banned in the Harmony, Core and Odyssey block formats.