
The Scroll

A Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

Issue 13

(by all means, if you aren't a Magic player, let us know and we'll happily remove you from the list of recipients)

Published by Books Electric Publishing

Contents copyrighted 1997 by Books Electric Publishing

Permission is granted to distribute the information contained herein, provided no charge is made for such distribution.

Wanna subscribe? Its easy--send an e-mail to BooksE1@aol.com asking to sign up!

Spotlight on ... Vision Charms

Card to Watch for ... Chronatog

Question ... Disenchanted Diamond

Deck of the Fortnight ... A Creatureless Creature Deck

Tidbits of Wisdom ... The Difference Between 4 Mana and 5 Mana

Tradeand Tale Zone ... A tale from the combat zone.

Feedback ... Oops, as usual.

Spotlight on Vision Charms by David Norman

Visions has introduced another batch of charms, dirt cheap instants with three possible "non-game winning" effects. Let's see if any of them are useful.

Funeral Charm in Black is just as mighty as Ebony Charm. The first option is the best, since it all but guarantees making OP lose a card, even if he gets to pick the card. After he sideboards in Sand Golems, you can go for the second option--either killing OP's toughness 1 creature, or allowing yours to deal an extra 2 points of damage (or, rather, add 2 to a creature's power)--TWO damage from a Charm? This is a game winner, since if you never hit OP with a creature, you're not likely to win anyway. The third use, granting Swampwalk, is almost nothing, but, who cares, as that first use is a no-brainer almost every time.

People are ranting about Vision Charm, but this isn't so hot. The first use, cause an artifact to phase out, is a quaint counterspell for protecting your artifacts--but just one more measly mana gives you Counterspell, which is much more useful. The double-millstone effect is nice, but narrower than the guy in Thinner. Just get a friggin' Millstone, or use Foreshadow, which can easily pay for itself, and is just as good as Vision against those Tutors everyone loves. If you already use Millstones, you don't need this card, since a Millstone player is ever in search of cards that deal with stuff in play already. The third use, changing all lands to a different type, can be powerful in combinations (eg, Flashfires).

Again, there are better cards to generate this kind of effect. In short, every use of this Charm needs other cards to be more effective, and if you have those other cards, there's something that combines even better with them.

Emerald Charm is the sleeper, since, finally, Disenchant isn't the only selective way of getting rid of Circles of Protection. The other two uses aren't so great, but can be quite good--remove "flying" can knock Serra out of the air to be blocked by Ernham, or "untap target permanent" can let Ernham block a White Knight or something, or allow you to get quick use out of Serrated Arrows--important when Hippy is flying your way. This isn't much, but when you consider that Tranquility is totally useless against decks without enchantments, this is still a good deal.

Hearth Charm is much like Vision Charm, every use can be done better by something else. Destroy target artifact creature is nice, but Builder's Bane or Primitive Justice is just as good for but one more mana, and much better if more mana is around. All attacking creatures get +1/+0? Nice for fun decks, but this kind of combo is not for tournaments. Target creature with power two or less is unblockable? Yeah, Red has a lot of those. You can't blame WotC for having trouble making a decent Charm for Red--Red is plenty powerful at low mana as it is.

Hope Charm suffers from the same problem as Red--White is already awesome with 1 mana spells. Give a creature first strike? White already has a bunch of first strikers, although this can help against the all too common Mishra vs Mishra deadlock, assuming Disenchant, STP, or Divine Offering isn't around (snort). Gain 2 life? Why could that not have been prevent up to two damage? At least it would have countered the Funeral Charm, and made it just a bit easier to protect a creature. Healing Salve does this, and can be equivalent to granting a creature First Strike as well (if two Mishra's fight, and one gets Salved, it is saved just as though it had First Strike). I'm not saying the Salve is a great card, just better than two of the uses for this charm. Destroy Local Enchantment? Again, this is very limited, since White already has the ability to destroy everything in the game (i.e., everything a local enchantment would go on).

Cards to Watch for ... Chronatog (by Rick Moscatello) and Maro (by Patrick McKenzie)

Chronatog is just too easy, so we also include Maro this issue. Chronatog has more loopholes than an alpha Time Vault. There's five pages of errata on this, or will be soon enough.

First off, this card grants a Stasis lock--skip your turn, which means skip your upkeep, so Stasis stays in play as long as you like. If you put Kismet on OP, and he's tapped out, its over. If he isn't tapped out, you'll probably still get him if you play Force of Will or have a bit of spare mana. All too easy.

Next, try using Glacial Chasm. Hmm, skip my turn, and OP can't damage me. Ever. If OP doesn't have a way to kill lands (and this can happen easily in Type II) or is quite limited (as can happen in Type Idiot and a half), this is another lock. Well, it is if you can keep it alive, which, mercifully, is hard to do. Still, most brutal, especially if you put a Mystic Veil on it to make it untargettable, and have enough counterspells and mana to stop the 4 or so "mass destruction" spells that belong in every deck.

Don't forget Forsaken Wastes, Armageddon Clock, Copper Table, Island Sanctuary, Arborea, anything that has a bad drawback during upkeep or "next turn", as all of these can turn the Chronatog into a screwatog.

In short, this card is a mess, with more "locks" than Alcatraz. Exploit it while you can, and if you don't want to use it, stock up on Nevinyrral's Disks, STPs, and Bolts--not much else will work reliably.

Maro by Patrick McKenzie

Well, since Mirage came out, my local game group has been degrading Maro. 2 green, 2 other for a creature that has power and toughness equal to the amount of cards in your hand. The group decided that "If you're playing green, you're playing speed, and emptying your hand should be a goal!". Well, so Maro isn't for every deck. It wouldn't get a ***** from InQuest, that is for sure (***** is the grade for a mandatory card for a color, like disenchant).

But Maro's uses are not just superficial. First of all, in typical speed decks you have 33-40% land. And you need 3 to be able to cast spells (with elf support). Lets see, Maro gets bigger every twice every 5 turns. Pretty good deal, considering no upkeep. He even beats out Ernham's, because he is usually 4/4 without bringing every creature in the game to your doorsteps.

But Maro's main use is in a deck where he can really get maximum card play. I use a tournament deck whose main purpose is to Storm Cauldron/Ankh of Misra/Land's Edge. It is ALL type 2. Maro happens to be one of the many cards in the deck that unknowingly helps it out. For example, say you have 4 land, 4 cards, a Cauldron, and Maro. Bounce your lands back, cast a spell (Armageddon fits the bill nicely), and bam, you have a 7/7 Maro. Or use howling mines (get 3 out and you can have 11/11 Maro when the Cauldrons have a mana lock or MINIMUM 5/5 when they don't).

Bottom line is, Maro requires preparation, but is probably the best green creature since Ernham.

(I personally have my doubts about this; I'd put Jolrael's Centaur ahead of Maro any day, among a handful of others. I find that if I'm using a creature deck at the tournament level, my hand empties soon enough, as I lay creature after creature to get wiped out by OP. Using Maro is assuming that your deck is 4 or more cards better than OP's deck under any circumstance, an assumption I'm loathe to make. I'd hate to have no cards in hand, and draw this guy--I'd have to do nothing for four turns to be able to use him effectively, and that's a fatally long time. Still it might work if, as he does, you build a deck around it--Rick)

A Question.... A friend taps his Fire Diamond and 9 Forests to cast Fireball. Can I tap his Diamond with my Icy, forcing him to take 9 points of mana burn?

Well, you can tap the Diamond, but it won't do any good, since its tapped already from the declaration of Fireball. There's several factors going on here:

First, there is NO WAY to prevent OP from getting mana (the "mana source" rule--any spell/effect that grants mana cannot be stopped/prevented/countered). In the old rules, it could be done, but it was reallyreally hard--the Ouphe could stop a Mana Battery, and this was about the only way this would reasonably happen (well, someone could counter a Dark Ritual, but this was rather boneheaded. Enough digression, you can't counter Rituals or use the Ouphe on Batteries anymore). Under 5th edition, it cannot be stopped. Period. Stop trying.

Second, destroying the source of an effect DOES NOT cancel the effect. This is the ol' Prodigal Sorcerer vs the Royal Assassin stand off. If Tim (the Prodigal Sorcerer) taps to deal one point of damage to the Royal, the Royal can tap to destroy the Tim. When the effects resolve, Tim dies, and then the Royal takes his point of damage from the buried Tim, killing it. You could prevent the damage to the Royal somehow (Salve?) or untap the Tim (Twiddle?) so the Royal's effect fizzles, but getting rid of the Royal or Tim won't do the trick. Similarly, once a land is tapped for mana (or to generate some other effect), removing the land can't counter/stop the effect--unless the land needs to remain in play to generate the effect, like Ice Floe. Ah, special cases.

Third, when a spell is declared, the mana is already paid for. It's gone, there's no way to drain his mana pool to prevent him from casting a spell that he's already declared. Hence, "Mana Short" (which taps OP's lands and empties his mana pool) is NOT a counterspell, and you can't "Word of Command" in response to a Fireball to make him retarget the Fireball on himself or something.

The fourth reason involves Interrupts and Instants/Fast Effects, but, the Mana Source rule makes this irrelevant also.

Bottom line: just take the Fireball.

Deck of the Fortnight....A Creatureless Creature Deck (by Lee Maurici, commentary by Rick Moscatello)

Lands: 23 Mountains, 4 Mishra's Factories (a deck consists of 56 cards and 4 Mishra's nowadays, even in Winter Orb decks)

Creatures: 4 Ball Lightnings, 4 Viashino Sandstalkers

(Ball Lightning hard to come by? Take away 10 Mts, add 8 forests and 2 Thawing Glaciers, and add 4 Yavimaya Ants instead).

Enchantments: 2 Lightning Clouds

(yeah, its rare. Buy some Visions and trade for it. Heck, its probably better to just add a couple Fireballs)

Artifacts: 3 Nevinyrral's Disks

(yah, Disks are tough to get also. Try adding a Builder's Bane, 2 Pyroclasms, and an Earthquake instead)

Non-Permanents: 1 Builder's Bane, 1 Disintegrate, 4 Incinerates (as in every Red deck), 3 Earthquake, 1 Fireball, 4 Fireblasts, 2 Hammers of Bogardan, 4 Lightning Bolts (as in every Red deck).

Creatureless decks are more rare in the tournament scene than they used to be, but creature decks that are highly resistant to spells are common (eg, "Can't Touch Me" creatures). Unfortunately, such beasts are still vulnerable to Wrath of God, Earthquake, and a host of other maladies. This deck features creatures that are not concerned with such atrocities, and, in fact, encourages them.

It simple really--mass destroyers are almost all Sorceries (i.e., "slow effects"). This deck has creatures, but none of them are vulnerable to such crude attempts at controlling the game. The Ball Lightning is just pure misery--6 damage from 3 mana, and OP often can do little about it. The Sandstalker is the same way--if OP is untapped, this is a free 4 points of damage for 3 mana. Not bad at all.

Every once in a while, OP will get away from you with this deck, especially if he's playing artifacts like Icy Manipulator or Amber Prison. With luck, a Nev disk will tilt things back in your favor; they also help against those untouchable creatures, and are supported with some Earthquakes as well. The Disk may not be reliable, but, OP needs to have two things 1) something that you need to Disk away, and 2) something that can kill the Disk. As you only need to draw the Disk, the odds aren't that bad.

Let's talk about the new cards. Lightning Cloud can be a killer--now your Bolts deal out 4 points instead of 3. Not bad, and useful if OP is heavy on Serra Angels. But, this is still pretty clumsy. The real issue is now, every time you cast the Sandstalker you get to deal a point of direct damage, too. But, keep in mind that the Cloud doesn't have to target the same thing as your red spell; if you need to Bolt a Brass Man, use the Cloud to deal a point to OP. Fireblast is the surprise card. People include Drain Life in their decks with Dark Ritual, so that they'll always have a use for excess mana. The Ritual lets the Drain deal 2 more points of damage. Fireblast is more horrifying. After you do a 7 point Fireball, chuck two Mountains to the Blast for an additional 4 points of damage. This is a gamewinning move, by any measure.

What can I say, this is a direct damage deck, there's not alot of high level strategy here. Well, there is one consideration: how long will it take to kill someone. Its a good idea to look at this sometimes, to get an idea of how well you'll fare against certain decks, in this case, a deck with 4 COP: Red. Such a deck can be expected (mathematically) to put a COP into play on turn 8, when 15 cards have been drawn. The question then is, can this deck kill OP before he can expect to draw/play a COP? So a direct damage deck must be able to deal 20 points of damage, in 7 turns, using $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 5 = 23$ mana; where did that sum come from? That's how much mana you'll have in the game, assuming an average/weak mana draw. Let's assume you get 13 cards in the game. 5 are land, so we have 8 damaging cards in this example. This deck gets a Bolt on the draw around 40% of the time, so it expects to deal 1.2 points of damage on the first turn. There's around a 45% chance that it'll get an Incinerate by turn 2, so that's another 1.4 damage. On turn three, I'll have a 75% chance of getting at least one Ball Lightning or Sandstalker--that's another 3.75 points. After this, things get ugly. Let's just assume it deals out a measly 3 points of damage on the next 4 turns (pretty safe bet, especially with Sandstalkers around). So, at the end of turn 7, I'll have used 12 cards and dealt an expected 18.35 points of damage. If my last card is a Fireblast, I can cast it "for free" to deal out another 4 points. As most of the assumptions here (especially the one about only dealing 3 points a turn after turn three) are "worst case", its safe to say that this deck can expect to kill a CoP deck before it even gets a circle out, provided all it does is deal damage to OP--note how drawing a Nev disk can be a setback! Nasty. The only way a creature using OP can deal damage faster than this deck (short of luck) is to put multiple creatures into play, quickly, and Earthquake can solve that problem more often than not. Victory is all too easy.

No small wonder that WotC is taking Bolt out of Fifth edition. There IS way too much direct damage.

Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes On The Difference Between 4 Mana and 5 Mana by Rick Moscatello

Its been mentioned several times in past issues that spells costing 4 mana are far superior to those costing 5, and several inquisitive (the first step to being wise) readers have asked for a justification of this "obvious" concept.

In Magic, you want to play your cards. It usually is a good idea to play them quickly. If your deck is 40% mana, you'll be able to play your 4 mana card on turn 4 (in a 60 card deck) some 73% of the time. You'll have 5 mana on turn 5 some 43% of the time--this is WAY too unreliable for a tournament deck, especially when you consider that at this stage of the game you might need your mana to activate an artifact or something.

So, how much mana will you need, in order to get the same chance of getting 5 mana on turn 5 as a 40% mana deck has of getting 4 mana on turn 4? Well, 27 mana out of 60 cards gives a 72% chance.

This doesn't seem like much, and it isn't. After all, this is only 3 more land to make a 45% mana deck. Unfortunately, if you stall, you'll have to wait a bit more than 2 extra turns for every mana over 4 that you need. This is a long, long, time when you can do nothing.

The biggest issue is, most of the stuff that costs 5 mana (creatures, and to some extent artifacts) can be cheaply and simply removed. Serra Angel is a great creature for five mana, but STP removes it for 1, Dark Banishing removes it for 3, any first strike creature and a Lightning Bolt can remove it for 1, a Fireball can take it out for 5 (and has other uses), and Hurricane can take it down for 5 and deal damage to you as well. Artifacts are just as vulnerable, although, most gratefully, most artifact destroyers have limited other uses, making Artifacts a better investment.

In summation, as you go from four to five mana, you increase your chance of mana stalling, you increase OP's efficiency with his removal cards, and you, at best, marginally increase your power. Not a good deal at all. Spells at this expense should be used sparingly, and cast when OP has no cards in hand (optimally), to minimize his ability to deal with them.

Trade and Tale Zone Little kids are great, especially the obnoxious ones. This is good, since there are so many of them. Not much trading lately, so here's a tale: I'm playing in the semi-finals of a 30 player local tourney. There's a crowd watching. It's type 1.5, so I'm just screwing around with a very defensive deck, it even has 1 Millstone (19/6, and have yet to "deck" anyone). I cast a Dancing Scimitar. This 10 year old comes up--blasted out of the tournament a few rounds back--and tells me, in a grave but imperious tone of voice: "Since you're going for life, you should play Wall of Swords instead of Dancing Scimitar." I respond gustily with a "Why, THANK YOU!". Everyone laughed at that. Since the poor kid didn't even know I just told him to, uh, "zog off", was I mean to him? What can I say, my sleep at night is more often interrupted by chuckles than by pangs of guilt. Kids are great.

Bomb85@aol.com has a mint/near mint condition set of Homelands for sale.

ISOTPE770@aol.com is choking on power OOPs to trade/sell. Moxen, Time stuff, etc.

ElledgeJ@juno.com has lots o' Magic cards for sale at "reasonable prices", and can find any card you are looking for.

cwil99 is selling two good conditioned revised Royal Assassins, two almost mint conditioned (fourth edition) Royal Assassins, a good conditioned Wheel of Fortune, two revised almost mint Sorceress Queens, revised Demonic Hordes, and an unlimited Demonic Tutor. Always keep in mind that the condition of a card is subjective, especially through the mail--Rick

Feedback.

Any submissions or replies become the sole property of Books Electric Publishing.

Doh. Last issue both David and myself got a bit confused about "Taste of Paradise", believing it to be "Vitalizing Cascade". No biggie, since Taste is an even worse deal than the Cascade, as least as long as you spend 10 mana or less on it.

Hey, we almost met a Scroll reader face to face. He was in the city of sin on the mighty Mississip', said he'd call back in a half hour, then got sucked into a void or something. Well, at least there weren't any (unusual) murders in the paper, so I guess he's ok.

Until next time!

Our sincere thanks to AOL, Compuserve, InQuest Magazine, Tulane University, and the New Orleans Magic club for their help in preparing this.