
The Scroll

A Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

Issue 14

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

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Spotlight on Creature Enchantments by David Norman

When a new player puts together a deck, he (or she--saw 1 female player at the Pro Qualifier) often puts a bit of everything in it--assuming a mixture of cards is the best idea. Creature Enchantments (CE's) are something that should only rarely be used.

The first problem with CE's is they get put on creatures, so it becomes an easy matter for OP to remove both the enchantment and the creature (two cards) by using only one of his. This means that one thing you should consider, before using an enchantment, is making sure you get SOMETHING out of the enchantment as quickly as possible. Unstable Mutation is thus popular, since it can easily allow you to deal 3 more points of damage (as much as a Bolt, after all) on the turn you cast it--especially if you make sure OP is "tapped out" so he has little choice but to get hit. Swords to Plowshares, Lightning Bolt, and Dark Ritual/Dark Banishing mean that even an OP with 1 mana available is probably too dangerous to risk Mutating something.

Of course, the fragility of creatures makes some people consider using defensive enchantments, such as Ward of Lights or (my personal fave) Vanishing. Either way, you're not getting any game-winning return on your card investment. In the former case, OP might well have two different colors for creature removal (if not artifact sources or

Wrath of God), and in the latter, you become forced to keep two blue untapped to preserve your creature, which can be a lot to ask in a counterspell deck (which needs that blue for other purposes).

Let's see here, if you use an enchantment aggressively, you risk getting your creature killed. If you use the enchantment defensively, you slightly reduce the chance of getting your creature killed, or tie down what could be a critical amount of mana. This brings us to the real reason CE's should generally be avoided: the card that you are using to be a CE could just as easily have been another creature! An extra creature can deal out extra damage, just like an aggressive enchantment, and an extra creature just as easily "protects" another creature (since the "extra" creature might get removed instead). In short, most CE's are for fun decks and little else.

Cards to Watch for ... City of Solitude (by Rick Moscatello)

At the risk of abusing alliteration, City of Solitude is Vision's sleeper. At first glance--even the second or third glance--this card doesn't look like it does more than shut down "Counterspell" decks completely. This is a nice start, but there's more to "Players may only play spells/abilities during their turn".

Mishra's become practically unkillable. The only way to stop Mishra is with a fast effect (like Icy or Bolt), but, OP won't be able to do this with the City in play. Sure, you can't use them for defenders, but just load up on creature control so you don't need defenders.

The Icy Manipulator becomes useless. I saw a semifinals game determined by this--one guy was having his lands tapped down so he couldn't get his second green mana to cast his Centaur. He ended up discarding the City, and casting an Elf (Howling Mine in play) which was trivially blasted into a pile of green ash. If he'd cast the City, the Icy couldn't tap his lands (at least, not during his upkeep), couldn't tap his creatures to prevent them attacking, and in short, would lose most of its value.

The new built-in phasing creatures likewise lose most of their punch--OP will need to phase them out every turn to protect them. Pumpables are no longer mighty defenders, creature enchantments become just a little more useful, Millstone players have to use their mana more quickly than they like, the list goes on and on.

While stopping Counterspell decks might be narrow, enhancing Mishra's and nailing Icys is something that most decks can profit from every time. Watch out for this little nightmare.

A Question.... A 2/3 Erg Raider has an Unholy Strength on it, making it a 4/4. I use my Sorceress Queen on it, making it into a 0/2. My friend says that the Strength makes it a 2/3. Who's right?

Your friend is. Errata/clarification on the Queen says that her ability makes those little numbers on the bottom right of card into "0/2". Thus, modifications from enchantments (even Bad Moon), counters, spells (like Giant Growth) or fast effects (like Dragon Mask) still affect it.

Deck of the Fortnight.... The Pro Qualifier Deck

The Pro Qualifier finally came to the great unshaven and rarely washed armpit of the Magic world, New Orleans (well, to be technical about it, it came to the Holiday Inn for the New Orleans Airport. Of course, Airport is in Kenner, which is next to Metairie, which is next to New Orleans, so it isn't really in New Orleans; talking about how backward Louisiana is isn't the point of The Scroll, so we'll stop with these little details...). The format was sealed deck, and you had to construct a 40 card deck using only a Mirage starter deck and a Visions booster. Here's the cards I took:

Artifacts: Horrible Hordes ("decided" not to use Phyrexian Dreadnaught.).

Black: Breathstealer, Crypt Rats, Dirtwater Wraith, Enfeeblement, Funeral Charm, Gravebane Zombie, Necromancy, Restless Dead, Skulking Ghost.

Green: Armor of Thorns, Canopy Dragon, Gibbering Hyenas, Mortal Wound, Panther Warriors, Spider Climb, Stalking Tiger, Uktabi Faerie, Unyaro Bee Sting, Warthog, Wild Elephant.

Red: Chaos Charm, Spitting Earth, Talruum Champion, Tremor

Gold: Shauku's Minion.

Land: 5 Forests, 3 Mountains, 6 Swamps, 1 Mountain Valley.

The point of sealed deck formats is to do the best you can with limited resources. Looking through my cards, I saw few fliers, no direct damage, and almost no creature control (Mortal Wound is my only reliable method of "killing" a creature with toughness above 2), and almost no way to achieve any 2 for 1 card deals. In other words, in a format dominated by Hammer of Bogardan and Dragons (the Green one is clearly the worst, friends), the only card I have of any significance is Gravebane Zombie, with Crypt Rats giving me a slight chance if I'm lucky. Hellfire, I'm screwed and have no real chance, but I've blown my \$30, so I'll see how long I can hang in there. I literally can't even sideboard my deck-- Withering Boon, Divine Retribution, and Emerald Charm are the only cards capable of killing a creature which I haven't used in the main deck (and all my green, black, and red creatures are in the main deck as well); every color- and land-specific card is in the main deck also (I also have Forbidden Ritual, but this a fairly unreliable creature control card).

Using these resources, I see little choice but to just pile on the creatures, and go with the strategy that works real well when it works: pray OP doesn't get enough mana. I throw caution to the wind by going a little mana low--I'm going to need to put more creatures in play to make up for how crummy they are. By a cosmic fluke, I make it through the first three matches with a record of 6-2. Everyone is using black, giving my 2 swampwalkers a little boost in usefulness. That gets rid of the chaff, but from here on out, things go grim. It turns out Dragon Mask is awesome in this format. I manage to kill it the first time OP plays it with my Uktabi Faerie (had to waste my Spider Climb to keep it from getting Incinerated, though--god, I wish I'd gotten some decent creature control), but, amazingly enough, OP plays it again on turn three of the second game. Now I'm 6-4. In match five, OP starts my beating off with Mind Harness. He takes my Minotaur, Thirsts my Elephant, Terrors my Tiger, and crushes me. The next game, he again draws Mind Harness, takes my Dragon, Thirsts my Elephant again, Terrors my Tiger effing AGAIN, and finishes me off (god, I wish I had a bit of creature control--having to let OP keep his creatures until he decides he wants them dead is a tough situation to be in all the time). 6-6 (3-2 as far as Match play), with no chance of making it into the finals, and, tired after 11 hours of Magic, I admit defeat, taking some comfort in doing far better than my friends (I was the only one in "my group" in contention after the 4th round, although I never ranked higher than 13th out of 110). I was very lucky to do this well, as my deck only stalled once (instead of an expected 3 times).

For the first time ever (for a big event), I can say the judging was good. There was only one incident that left a player upset, and, not to get into details, it was a situation that only King Solomon could have found a solution which didn't have one player whining (and his solution would be something like "cut both players in half").

Baxter was in attendance, as well as his not-so-little entourage. I played one of them (the #2 seed at the time, Mr. Dragon Mask), he made a few mistakes, but between the Mask, the Sandbar Crocodile, the Crimson Hellkite, the River Boa, and the Panther Warriors, and my deck having almost no method of killing creatures with toughness greater than 1, much less regenerators, the end was never in doubt. The usual tactic with such limited creature control is to save it until you see a creature which is bigger than anything you can summon, then kill it. But, I just didn't have that option this time around.

My biggest mistake was including Red. I included Red so I'd be able to exploit every Red card I won in ante (since nigh every sealed deck uses red, getting a Red ante card is likely). Unfortunately, they weren't using ante at all. The double whammy of not knowing the rules (my own fault), and not having any hope of improving my deck through play (lord knows, it couldn't get worse) was a crushing blow to my morale.

This is a fun format, but essentially a lottery. Let's suppose that there's a 128 people playing. Let's suppose that someone builds a deck that is FOUR times as good as anyone else (i.e., wins the hand 80% of the time). You gotta admit, this would be pretty awesome in sealed deck. Such a deck would win a match around 89.6% of the time. This means that even an "awesome deck" has less than a 50% chance (46.36%, to be more exact) of winning every round in the tournament--queer how more players increases the luck factor, no?

Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes On Identifying Bad Cards by Rick Moscatello

Building a deck is easy--just slap together around 60 cards. Building a good deck is hard; it requires tuning, and tuning is alot easier when you can identify bad cards. Here's some tips:

1) You lose, and the card is in your hand. This is a real good sign that this card shouldn't be in your deck.

2) You win, and the card is in your hand. Look, if you're not casting the card, why do you have it around? Now, obviously, some cards will consistently be in your hand at the end of a winning game (eg, Counterspell), but, if time and time again you find yourself just holding the card, say Time Elemental, "waiting for the right moment", and you win the game without that moment arriving, that's a sign, friend.

3) You get two in the draw, and you aren't happy about it. Pairs are good in poker, but sometimes not so in Magic. A pair of Serra Angels in the draw can easily mean you'll die before you get enough mana to defend yourself.

4) You have 4 in the graveyard, and you lose. Its a rare, rare, game that OP hits me with 4 Bolts and I manage to win. If I get 4 STPs, cast them, and still manage to lose, its a fluke. But, if I look in my GY and learn that I've cast 4 Updrafts, I really can't tell you how well the game is going.

5) You're losing, you cast this card, and you are still losing just as bad. Welcome to the wonderful world of Fog, a good card for delaying the inevitable, or for combining with mediocre combos. Before you put a card in your deck, see if you can answer the following question: "How will this card keep me from losing?" If you can't answer that, the card better be a real good answer to "How is this deck going to win the game?" Ideally, you want cards that answer both quite well.

(Incidentally, the only card in my sealed deck that found its way into my losing hands reliably was Enfeeblement. Methinks it is too high costed for effect, even in sealed deck.)

Obviously, these tips don't apply every time, but, they should help to get you started on understanding what goes into a winning deck.

Trade and Tale Zone.....Fifth edition is out, and to judge by the hellish chorus of whining, people just don't get it. The idea in Magic isn't to play the same deck over and over and over again, you're supposed to change every once in a while. Yes, STP is gone. Creatures now can expect to live 0.87 turns instead of 0.82 turns. Yes, Bolt is gone. That moves creature survival rate up to 0.98. Then again, maybe Fifth edition does suck. It is still a bit early for me--I've only bought two boosters, but I'm singularly unimpressed. My rares were Sengir Autocrat (he reeked in Homelands, he's no better now) and , sniff, sniff, Ivory Guardians (YUUUUUUUCCCCCKKKK!). Well, this is no doubt payback for never drawing Telim Tor's Edict or Teferi's Isle. Still, I sure hope all the rares I get aren't as crummy as these.

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.

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Until next time!

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