
The Scroll

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(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 Winning the Card War by David Norman

The Card War, or Card Advantage, refers to the concept of getting/using more cards than OP. If you draw 2 cards when OP draws 1, you're winning the card war. If you nuke 2 of OP's creatures (hopefully, before either creature deals damage), that too is winning the card war. Winning the card war is a powerful method of winning the game, but it is not a certain one except in long games. Here's some factors to consider:

The card war is a long term strategy--using a Black Lotus to help Channel a Fireball isn't a card war winning move, but it is a quick game winning one. Hitting OP with a Bolt every turn for seven turns is likewise card war losing, but game winning, move. Slapping down a Jayemdae Tome, and using it, is a card war winning move, but it is really hard to do it before the third turn of the game. So, if you're going for a card war method of victory, be sure to build your deck for a long run. This is a classic mistake people make with Necropotence--its a Black card, Black is fast, so Necro should come out fast, goes the flawed reasoning. The key card in Necropotence is the Nev Disk--once the card count for each player is equalized (and, more importantly, minimalized--having 1 extra card means little when one player has 6 and the other 7. But, when one player has 2 and the other 1, its a big, winning, deal), the Necro goes down to generate a game winning card advantage.

The most critical aspect of the card war is mana. If a card war winning deck mana stalls, it will probably lose--such decks are slow enough without losing a turn or two in addition. But, if a card war deck draws too much mana, this likewise will be a problem--if you draw 9 lands and 2 Forces of Will, you'll still lose because you won't have enough "real" cards to win with. A good card war deck contains "mana sinks" to put the excess mana into so that it can profit from and survive a mana splurge. Jayemdae Tome is the best such "sink", but even a Rod of Ruin (or a pump knight) provide such decks greatly increased chances of winning even when too much land is drawn.

The second important aspect is survival. A card war deck has to have some means of protecting and regaining life. The worst deck for card advantage--mono-Red, direct damage, where each spell has one use, namely dealing damage to OP--will easily deal out more than 20 points of damage in a long game. Again, good cards to help survivability are Shield/Pentagram of the Ages (mana sinks as well as protection!), Fountain of Youth, and, just about anything that will stay in play while it protects from damage.

On the other hand, if you're going up against card advantage decks, attack them fast and hard; in the short run, you have a good advantage, but in the long, you'll get creamed. Play each creature one at a time, and FORCE him to deal with it before summoning another; anything else and you're playing his game (for this reason alone, you should almost never put a creature of power 1 in your deck--it will kill him in 20 turns, which is just too long. Just having a power of 2 cuts the time to death in half, and this is very, very, critical!). Smash anything he puts into play before he can get use out of it, if at all possible. Such decks can easily be beaten quickly, but only rarely beaten in long games. If you are losing the first match slowly, it might be worth your while to concede, since if you win the next, it will be quick (giving you a chance at a third game), and if you play too long in the first, and lose, you won't have enough time to play the third game--and this just sets you up for a match loss or a possible draw, depending on the local rules.

Cards to Watch for ... Teferi's Veil

Phasing used to be something of a drawback, but just put the Veil out, and now your creatures phase out at the end of combat anyway; this means your Sandbar Crocodile can attack turn after turn after turn, effectively doubling its usefulness (i.e., putting it into tournament contendorship), in addition to gaining resistance against Wrath of God. Use it with Revered Unicorn, and gain life every turn. Use it with Jokulhaups, and stamp OP flatflatflat. Use it with Ball Lightning or Viashino Sandstalker, and make OP hurt, real bad, every turn without recasting. These are some great combos for a 2 mana, no activation cost enchantment. Expect to see it around.

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The Question of the Fortnight... Can I Infernal Harvest two swamps, to deal 2 damage to one creature and 0 damage to a Tar Pit Warrior, causing it to bury?

You most certainly can. You can even Infernal Harvest 0 swamps, and target the Warrior; in the latter case, since all targets for the spell are no longer in play at resolution, the Harvest will fizzle, but as you'll accomplish the effect (getting rid of the 3/4 bad boy), this usually isn't a worry.

Deck of the Fortnight...Deck of The Fornight: Manabarbs By Eric Fauss

This deck is made up of a lot of rares, but the rares are not that all hard to get. People don't usually expect it, and it has enough "most counter" stuff to keep counter players on hold, and it is full of surprises.

Lands: 3 ardakar wastes, 2 undiscovered paradises, 4 quicksand, 5 mountain, 6 island

Creatures: 2 air elemental, 1 volcanic dragon

Enchantments: 2 cop: red, 4 manabarbs

Artifacts: 4 felwar stones, 2 fire diamond, 2 jalum tome

Non-Permanents: 4 arcane denial, 4 counterspell, 2 disintigrate, 4 drain power, 2 enlightened tutors, 4 fireball, 2 force of will, 1 recall.

Sideboard:
4 hydroblast
4 pyroblast
3 dream tides
4 sirocco

In order to play this deck effectively, you have to be very careful about getting manabarbs out. Use the drain powers effectively. The opponent must counter them, or not be able to counter the next threat. Many players tap out just leaving 2 islands untapped. This is a prime time to use drain power. Watch out for force of wills, though. And when manabarbs is out, use the cop: red to cast things, for due to the new rules, you can tap a land, resolve the damage from the Manabarbs, tap several more lands--generating more damage--then prevent all of that damage during the same damage-prevention step, with one point of mana. (I got an OK from WotC on this) And when manabarbs is out, if you drain power, your opponent takes damage when the lands are tapped, and you have plenty of mana for a fireball also. The quicksands hold back weenie hordes, but if they become too much, throw in a couple of dream tides. Remember, they will be taking two damage to untap a creature. If you are playing a counter deck, the sirococs are almost always a must counter card. And don't worry about mana. There are plenty of mana producers.

Other possibilities for the deck: Æther flashes are a big possibility, as well as pendrell mists and thundermares. Mana chains would also work.

Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes On An "Unbeatable" Sealed Deck.

First, a little editorial. Some people hate sealed deck because of the luck factor, i.e., lack of skill factor. I can appreciate this. I'm less of a fan for constructed deck for the same reason. All too often, when I show up at a constructed deck event, half or more of the players are using a near identical deck, usually the one that won the last major tournament. How much skill is involved with this? When two people with an identical deck meet, the winner is usually whoever draws/doesn't draw too much/too little mana, and this is almost always a matter of luck.

Sealed deck is a hard thing to practice for; I've found the most practical way to prepare for sealed deck is multi-player games. Such games have a wide variety of cards in them, a wide variety of deck ideas, and cards that work well in long games (hence, generally suck in tournaments) do very well. So, if you don't have the resources to play alot of sealed deck, you can improve your sealed deck play by engaging in multi-player melees. You really will see interactions in such games that apply directly to sealed deck.

Ok, enough preaching. Here's the deck I built that was completely undefeated:

Lands: 7 Plains, 5 Mountains, 4 Islands.

Artifacts: Telim'Tor's Darts.

Blue: Cerulean Wyvern, Knight of the Mists, Ovinomancer, Phantom Wings, Sandbar Crocodile,

Red: Dwarven Nomad, Dwarven Thaumaturgist, Fire Whip, Stone Rain, Suq'Ata Lancer, Talruum Champion.

White: Auspicious Ancestor, Benalish Infantry, Benalish Knight, Foriysian Brigade, Gossamer Chains, Ekundu Griffin, Femeref Scouts, Ivory Charm, Longbow Archer, Pacifism, Resistance Fighter, Teremko Griffin.

Note how the card arrangement is different than for constructed decks. When you get your sealed cards, organize them by color--the strongest colors are what counts, hence your deck should organize itself by color. This deck is at 40%

mana, the absolute minimum for sealed deck. Trust me, you cannot expect to win a tournament with less mana than this. If you have less, you will almost certainly lose at least 1 match to a mana stall, and if you lose two matches (and the second can easily come by playing a skilled or luckier OP, both very possible in 10 hours of play), you are out of the tourney.

Now let's talk about the cards that worked, and why.

Telim'Tor's Darts won me one game, but otherwise wasn't much of a factor. I chalk this up to a fluke, as it only came up three times, and I played an inordinate number of OPs who used artifact control (snuffing it as I get 1 use only). I'm not totally satisfied with its performance in sealed, but not dissatisfied either.

Blue: The Wyvern is a nice flyer; he didn't win me anything because he didn't come up much. There was not one occasion where I cast Knight of the Mists and didn't find a Knight to bury; naturally I always held it for the opportunity. A great card for this format. Ovinomancer won me at least 3 games. If OP couldn't kill it (and it only got killed once the whole day), I gained reusable creature control--an absolute game winner. Phantom Wings was a gamewinner, too. Time and again I used it on OP's creatures, especially ones that were too tough (via creature enchantments--I'm very reluctant to use such things even in sealed format, but one must be prepared for OP to do so), and "unsummoned" them at need. Sandbar Crocodile never won me a game directly, but OP almost always had to chuck two creatures in front of it to save himself (and kill it), so I'd use this again.

Red: Note I have no direct damage spells. Dwarven Nomad allowed me to deal damage repeatedly, and is a gamewinning card (just like it is in multiplayer). The Thaumaturgist, another card that rocks in multiplayer, is another gamewinner--many a sheep token got "offed" this way; these two combine well with my 1/4--make him unblockable, then "pump" his power for no mana. Fire Whip is another card that didn't do as well as it should. It didn't come up much, but when it did, it worked beautifully. Always put it on the crappiest creature you have (like a wall--see any walls in this deck? That's a hint.). Stone Rain was a mistake, there was not one occasion where it mattered. If OP stalled, I had him anyway, and if he didn't, the Rain didn't matter. There aren't enough dangerous lands in this format. The Lancer was dubious; always cast him when OP can't block, so you can get some small return immediately. Creatures are gamewinners generally, but the Lancer will win less than most. The Champion was awesome. He never won a game, but he set up wins, much like the Crocodile.

White: Auspicious Ancestor won me two games, in conjunction with Gossamer Chains--every time I cast him, I would end up gaining a half dozen life. Note how cards that keep you from losing (Ovinomancer--kills creatures, Phantom Wings--removes creature temporarily, Ancestor--gains life) "win" games more reliably than other cards. OP never, ever, killed him, a certain mistake. The Infantry was so-so, banding is good, and sometimes they allowed me to hang in there until I got a better creature out. The power is just a bit low, is all. The Knight might be tournament quality; time and again I'd cast him when attacked, allowing me to create an unexpected first striking blocker--card advantage, folks. No flanking is a bit of weakness for him, though. I never used the Brigade's ability --only a fool puts many creatures of power less than two in his deck, making use of the Brigade's double-block ability a suicidal gesture. Gossamer Chains won me 3 games, at least. Time and again, I stopped OP from dealing as much damage as he could, and that let me live until good creatures came out. Use this card always. (Look, another game-winning card that merely makes it hard for you to lose!) The Griffins were both nice; banding and first strike are excellent abilities for this format, and are too good to pass up in conjunction with flying. The femeref scouts likewise just let me survive--they can block flankers and live!--until something better came along, but the Dwaven Nomad/Thaumaturgist/Scouts combo came up twice and dealt out much damage. Ivory Charm is a game winner--when direct damage is scarce, damage prevention is mighty. I used it to save myself from an otherwise fatal Torch, and gained an extra life with the Ancestor. Poor OP nigh excreted sufficient construction materials to build a motel. The Longbow Archer won me nothing, although he added to my preponderance of first strikers. Amazingly enough, Pacifism never helped--I had such a nice collection of creatures that often I wasn't greatly worried, and OP invariably drew enchantment control or used his pacified creature for convenient sacrifice. Still, I'd use it again, especially in a deck such as this with so little creature control. Resistance Fighter was useless. He should be good, but even when he came up, he did little for me. I don't think I'll use him next time.

To give you an idea how everyone else was playing, the judges ran out of swamps to hand out. Black was a major player--I have my reservations about this, as Swampwalk is such a common ability in this format that this seems a set-up for self-destruction. I only met one other player using White.

Trade and Whine Zone..... I've spent the last year trying to get a publisher to consider my book on Magic. The publishers that have done Magic books aren't interested: "Our books are popular and well-loved, there's no way you could add anything" says one. Funny that they say that, as myself and everyone I've spoken with says the Magic books out now are dated and useless practically at the time of publication, and their information is so trivial (if not outright wrong) that only a beginner can get anything from reading them. The one publisher (who had done a Magic book before mine) read a sample chapter of my book but didn't like it. Her criticism: "I was overwhelmed with information". I'm not kidding. Heck, I guess I could remove all discussion of "creatures"-maybe that simplify things enough that it would be publishable. Leaving out creatures would put it on a par with the other books, though. Several merely returned everything I sent them, including my SASE (unused), with a letter saying essentially "We don't have a clue what you are talking about". I'm still not kidding. The most amusing response? "We're sorry, but we don't do books on card tricks". I'm still yet not kidding. Another publisher will do my book, provided I send them a check for \$17,000; this covers their cost of printing, and "professionl marketing". Their marketing campaign, after allegedly researching the market for my book at their expense, involves sending free copies to the editors of Modern Maturity and a half dozen other "biggies". I'm still not quite yet kidding. Oh well, I guess people will have to shell out bucks for another Wordware book packed with stuff you can download off the internet for free. And I'm STILL not kidding--Wordware puts out a complete list of Visions and has the cajones to charge \$12.95 for it. If I don't find a publisher soon, I'm gonna need a therapist. There, now I'm kidding--the real issue isn't the inadequacy of my book; it is that I don't "know" someone.

No trades at all? I guess this is one of those happy planetary times where all are satisfied.

Feedback

Well the jury is in, and Strip Mine and Zuran Orb belong in every Type I deck. Whew, glad to hear I haven't lost my mind.

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Until next time!

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