
The Scroll

The Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

Issue 22

(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 ... Good CU Cards

Card to Watch for ... Thundermare

The Question..Fiery El-Hajjaj?

Deck of the Fortnight ... Bosium Trickery

Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes and Horn Blowing

Trade and Tale Zone ... Gripes from the Front.

Feedback ...

Spotlight on The Good CU Cards by David Norman

It has finally happened--CU is no longer a concept that only suckers try to rely upon. Visions has given most colors a non-crappy card that uses CU. Let's see if any of them are truly viable....

Black has Gallowbraid, a 5/5 Trampler with a CU of 1 life. and Morifen, a 5/4 Flier with a CU of 1 life. Lessee here, it will take 4 turns to kill OP, so that means 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 =10 life. Not great, but you're only going to pay this if it will work; you can even exploit various GY robbing cards to get Gallowbraid back into play if the life cost becomes too steep. Black also gets Wave of Terror--hey, Phyrexian Walker is immune to this card, so it can't be all bad.. This card backfires all too easily--there's no way to snuff OP's pump knights without taking out your own. A good thing to experiment with, maybe.

Blue has Ancestral Knowledge, with a CU of 1. You can only sanely cast this spell when you have a good mana supply (5+). You have to take out at least one of the ten cards just to break even (since not drawing a useless card will make up for drawing Ancestral Knowledge). This is not awesome, although if you are playing cards where you can exploit knowledge of what is coming up, this might work.

Green gets a trio of CU cards. Aboroth gets CU: add a -1/-1 counter. So you can attack when its an 8/8, then a 6/6, then a 3/3, then it dies. Hmm, this isn't so good--you only get two turns where it is likely to do something, and it will be stymied by a regenerator, Icy, or Gossamer Chains. Ok, its a yuck, at least without a Concordant Crossroads effect coming from somewhere else. Arctic Wolves is a 4/5 CU cantrip creature. You'll get at least two turns out of it, and it replaces itself. That is pretty good, although 5 mana puts it out of tournament contendorship. Mwonvuli Ooze is the final CU card; getting +X/+X where X = last CU is nice, but that's alot of mana to invest in something that has all the same weaknesses of Aboroth, and won't be really viable for two more turns, AND ties down much of your mana. Almost yuck.

Red gets Heart of Bogardan, and holy cow is this thing a buttkicker. An Inferno that only targets OP and his creatures? For less casting cost? Sure, Op sees it coming, but he can't do anything about it, other than hold his creatures in hand and let you get one free attack. Twitch, twitch. Op won't play creatures when this is out, which means it will be ok to not cast spells while you are pumping mana into this beast. Any card that turns a Pyric Salamander into a major threat is an obvious winner.

White gets Revered Unicorn, a 2/3 with CU 1 and Volunteer Reserves, a 2/4 Bander with CU 1. The unicorn has a cheap casting cost--somebody somewhere will combine it with Unstable Mutation--when it leaves play, you gain life equal to its last CU. Nice. Not great, but nice. The Reserves are better than they look--big banders are good, and a big bander with low casting cost will likely prevent a good bit of damage before the CU sends it to the GY. These are well worth experimentation, although probably neither will become tournament standards (at least, while Nekrataal is around; what drug exactly was WotC taking when they approved that thing? It's a Feast AND Famine with first strike).

Cards to Watch for... Thundermare by Sjkmagic@aol.com (sorry, Scott, some hard drive troubles made us lose your last name).

Thundermare is a cool card, but the real trick to using Thundermare is to get around the "everybody's tapped" syndrome.

The first card that comes to mind is Relentless Assault. You attack with all of your creatures, dealing some damage. The problem with Relentless Assault is, however, that creature damage is not cleared after the attack, so creatures that attack twice are more likely to be killed. Enter our Flaming Equine Friend. After the initial attack with everybody, play your Thundermare, tapping all creatures on the board. Then play Relentless Assault, untapping all the creatures that previously attacked. Now stomp your opponent with all your creatures that you won't need to block. (or have them attack again unimpeded).

Along similar lines, Final Fortune works well also. It can be used as a substitute Relentless Assault (attack with everybody, play the 'mare, take another turn to untap only your creatures, and attack), or it can be even nastier (and more likely in a tournament game) if the Thundermare is your only creature.

Play the mare, attack for 5 unblocked, then Final Fortune and attack for 5 more the 10 damage should be enough to kill your opponent at the stage in the game where you can cast him (yeah, but where's the 7 mana gonna come from?--Rick).

Another ruthless combo is the Thundermare + Smoke/Meekstone combo. With a Smoke out, you'll want to play Thundermare, then all your other creatures, leaving all yours untapped and OP's tapped for quite a while. With the Meekstone, you'll need a deck of weenies, outposts (to make even

MORE weenies), and of course, Thundermares. While his creatures will get locked under the stone, yours are free to pound away easily. Your 'mare only gets to smack him once, thanks to your meekstone, but a well placed Icy Manipulator should be more than sufficient to get your Little Pony ready for more charges at your opponent.

Basically, the idea of a Thundermare deck is to make sure that your opponent's creatures end up getting the short end of the stick. Even when you can't get around the Thundermare's "tap all creatures" effect, Op almost certainly can't either, so the Mare can often be a killing card.

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The Question of the Fortnight.... Do I gain life if I put Fire Whip on El-Hajjaj?

Well, if after you put the Whip on El, and you tap him to deal damage, yes. The card says the creature deals the damage, so this will work fine. Alas, there's "errata" that says the Whip grants "T:", so you can't activate the effect on a creature that has summoning sickness.

***** E R R O R *****

Last issue, we asserted that you could Infernal Harvest 0 swamps, and target a creature for 0 damage. Alack and alas, the judges who asserted this were mistaken; we've been corrected numerous times (by other judges, who quoted from Duelist), you can't target for less than 1 point of damage. Our apologies.

***** E R R O R *****

Deck of the Fortnight... Bosium Strip Insanity

No, this is not a tournament deck--not without a little more non-white, creature removal cards. Still, some cute tricks are here.

Lands: 12 Plains, 10 Forests, 2 Thawing Glaciers

Creatures: 2 Blinking Spirits, 2 Ivory Gargoyles, 4 Jolrael's Centaur, 4 Walls of Roots

Enchantments:

Artifacts: 1 Chimeric Sphere, 2 Touchstone Amulets, 3 Thran Forge, 3 Bosium Strips

Non-Permanents: 3 Disenchant, 4 Divine Offering, 1 Dust to Dust, 2 Elven Caches, 2 Gaea's Blessings, 4 Swords to Plowshares, 2 Tithe.

The goofy combo for today involves the Thran Forge. With it, you can turn any creature into an artifact, and grant it +1 in power. The Touchstone will let you turn Op's new artifact creatures into harmless tapped things, and this decks' flurry of anti-artifact spells will hopefully let you rid yourself of any offending creature or artifact in record time.

But wait, there's more! The creatures, except for the Wall of Roots, are chosen for their hardiness; OP will have a hard, hard time getting rid of them, so, in the long run, you'll have creatures whilst his go to the GY.

But wait, there's more! The Bosium Strip is an AWESOME card for this deck, which is so, so heavy in the non-permanents that the Strip lets you recycle. When you eventually run to a permanent in your GY, you can cast Gaea's Blessings to get it (and any others) out of your way and back into your library. Then you can cast Gaea's Blessing AGAIN to get even more stuff out of the GY. And, you get a card for doing so. Elven Cache goes one better, by letting you put the permanent in your hand--get 7 mana and you can use the Strip to cast Cache again! Whoooooee! Its the same deal with Tithe--the Bosium Strip is an awesome card when using cantrips, netting massive card advantage.

All this activation requires mana, and this deck sits at a semi-low 35%, but that's not counting Wall of Roots or Tithe, and the Thawing Glaciers will put you up to speed in no time at all. This deck is a touch lethargic, but can be quite a powerhouse in melee games, where it eventually accumulates enough mana to burn through three or more cards a turn after activating a Bosium Strip.

Just try it, you'll be impressed how tough it is.

Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes On The Last Type II Tournament

Well, you are talking to the winner of the Louisiana State Championships Type II format. Its good to be a medium fish in a small pond. My white/blue Icy/Orb deck (a crude version of which was here a few issues ago) stopped all comers, losing only one hand (of seventeen) in the entire tournament to end the day with an ugly victory (we both made horrible, game-costing mistakes in the last game). The weird thing was, I only cast the Winter Orb twice the whole day (bait for the ridiculously important Icy Manipulators). The REALLY weird thing was, I only played mono-color decks

the whole way. Every player made some "classic" mistakes with their deck. Let's talk about the decks, and the mistakes (from weakest deck to strongest):

Mono-Green. The poor guy had 4 Forces of Nature. An awesome creature (especially with no Cop: Greens in my sideboard), it did little good when Icy was around. He had no real tricks, just creature after creature after creature. Unfortunately, he had little in the 1-2 mana range, making this his deck far too slow for this strategy to work at the tournament level.

Mono-White. We get to the dangerous decks quickly. White weenies all over the place (excellent mix of 2-mana first strikers--Longbow Archers, Pump Knights, White Knights), supplemented by Crusades and even bigger first strikers. He had good artifact protection, and that "instant Knight" caused me some difficulty. Luckily, he didn't get rid of the Crusades even after he saw I had Kjeldoran Outpost (and he had no Kjeldoran Outposts!); first strike is useless against a creature advantage, and the Outposts were only too happy to provide it to me. Even more fortunately, he disregarded the card advantage that Wrath of God gave me. Even with Mistmoon Griffin (interesting card....), he had no way to come back from two Wraths.

Mono-Black (version 1). The first version of mono-black for the day was a brutal pounder, featuring the obligatory Pump Knights, supplemented by Skulking Ghost and Tar Pit Warrior--both excellent targets for an Icy. My deck keeps two Greater Realms of Preservation standard, so the first game was a breeze. His later reliance upon Nev Disks was his undoing; he did get a Gloom off in the second hand, but a handy Mind Bend made this more than a little irrelevant.

Mono-Black (version 2). In the hands of a master, this deck style would have crushed me like a shiny blue/white beetle. Luckily OP had no idea what to do with all his power. Necropotence and Infernal Tribute (what a combo--use Necro to get the Tribute, then sac the Necro, and every useless card you get, to the Tribute) combine well with the Nev Disk (please don't forget, as Op did with 12 swamps in play, that you can sack swamps to the Infernal Tribute). Almost every game he enjoyed a 3:1 card drawing advantage over me. He followed it up with full complements of Stupor and Coercion. This left him with insufficient ways to deal damage (and Wrath of God and Quicksand were both instrumental in keeping the Knight and Abyssal Spectre count down), and few, few, ways of dealing with the Greater Realms. He compounded his error by casting 4 creatures in a single turn. I Wrath them away. He does it again next turn. I Wrath again. He does it again (man, this guy was an awful slow learner to have such a great deck), and I Recall to get another Wrath (and, at this time, I can do both in the same turn). The second game he gleefully mana stalled himself by chucking swamp after swamp after swamp after swamp to his Lake of the Dead for an "early" advantage (that's not the point of Necropotence, and sacrificing swamps in this manner is so often a mistake I'm reluctant to use Lake of the Dead myself). He shouldn't have made it so far in the tourney; if I had enough room in my sideboard, I would have put in 4 Sand Golems and thereby flattened him--but there's no room for Golems, AND the other cards I need. Worse, nobody else had the sideboard to stop him and I had to play him again in the finals. The first hand was an easy win despite his massive card advantage--Greater Realms, man, are AWESOME. The second hand he self-destructed in a black flame of glory. He nailed himself for 10 points of damage with an Infernal Darkness, while exploiting my inability to defend by hitting me for 6 with an Abyssal Spectre. Here's a really important tip: you don't have to activate a Nev Disk when its about to be destroyed. He's got two creatures (Spectre and Knight) and a disk in play, and I've got 2 tokens and Fountain of Youth. I desperately try to nuke the disk, and he falls for it! Of course, I've made the same mistake myself a few times in the past; note how not only do I learn from a mistake by not repeating it (hah!), I also learn that its a mistake someone else can make. Eventually he recovers, but he then nails himself for 6 damage with another Darkness. Then he lays down Necropotence. As he's gasping for breath, I bungle things by using a Force of Will (discarding a Force of Will) to counter a Drain Life; I don't know why I didn't want to use the Greater Realm for that. He's so disgusted with my horrible play that he concedes. Well, he's disgusted at getting countered, anyway; he's got a Necro in play, 4 cards in hand, and 1 life, and, evidently, no way to get rid of the Greater Realm. I can't believe after all this time I STILL don't have complete understanding of how Circles of Protection work.

Mono-Red. The only hand I lost was to this monstrosity. How'd it go? Keeper of Kookus. Orcish Veterans. Ball Lightning. Ball Lightning. Viashino Sandstalker. Fireblast. In 5 turns, the game is over, god forbid I get to cast a spell. Let me reiterate again how 5 mana is just too much for a reliable tournament card--you can easily die two turns before you get that much into play. Always, when you play a direct damage deck, victory will be most determined by luck. I'm sure if I didn't take him out (again) in the semi-finals, I would have seen him in the finals. I won another victory through demoralization; I'm at one life, and carrying pocket munge in my hand (4 lands). I've got the whole toybox out (i.e., Icy and assorted gewgaws like Mindstones and a Lotus Vale), and a Cop: Red. He's at six life, but concedes. One Anarchy (his sole method of Cop: Red removal) and I would have been well cooked. Would you believe I even tapped out with 1 life and a Cop: Red in play? I'm beginning to think I should take Circles Of Protection out of my sideboard, since I'm just

too stupid to play them properly. If he had a Fireblast, I would have died. In the third hand of the first match, I again bring out Cops faster than he can stop them, and he loses in a flurry of tokens--he mana stalled himself "casting" a Fireblast, and I happily went down to 5 life, keeping my counterspells in hand (don't ever panic, as Op did, when you are up against a Cop: Red player--"dealing the damage now" isn't important. All that counts is getting the guy down to zero life. Yes, you can sac mountains to kill a player, but think long and hard before doing it just to wound him). Remember, direct damage decks are vulnerable to card superiority--the key is surviving play against them until you have such a card advantage that they can't possibly hurt you. When I play him again in the semis, he goes down to the Greater Realm in the first game. The second game, I get the Cop. He nukes it with Anarchy. I play a Greater Realm. He nukes that too. I play another Cop, and a Wand of Denial. I "deny" an Anarchy--his third in 4 draws, and he calls ME lucky. At least I'm using Enlightened Tutor to supplement my Cops and Realms. Anyway, he sees his fate carved on the butt of my Wand, and concedes. Again, I allowed him to Detonate my Fountains of Youth, saving my counterspells for what is important (the Wand of Denial--I gained life from the Fountains before they went, so I still got an advantage).

In short, Icy/Orb is such a devastating combo that even with the stupid mistakes that I consistently make, few decks can survive it.

Trade and Tale Zone..... Well, my latest attempt to avoid the Red/Black or Icy/Orb decks that proliferate in Type II (state championships notwithstanding) was a bust--the good-looking Teferi's Veil/Jokulhaups/unblockable creature combo is just a bit too impractical. Blue fliers are way too vulnerable to Red (not to mention Nekrataal), and Phantom Warrior, being a creature with no protection and low toughness, has no survivability. Of the 14 people at the local tournament, 6 were playing Icy/Orb, and 9 were playing Red/Black (yes, there's overlap). My deck started out Energy Fluxes in it--a good plan, but my first two Ops were Red/Black players not using Icy/Orb. Fireblast finished me off, after Coercion got rid of my defenses. I was 2/4 after two rounds, and every single game had us both down to 5 life or less (and three of those were decided by drawing direct damage on Op's last draw). I chalk my two wins up more to bad luck by Op than to the strength of this otherwise amusing combo. The most annoying thing? I'm holding Deflection in my hand, Op is at 4 life, and I have a 4/4 flier ready to attack when its my turn. Op plays Nekrataal. Dang, any other counterspell and I woulda had him. How did this card ever have a market value of \$15?

Feedback

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Until next time!

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