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The Scroll

The Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

Issue 23

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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 Weatherlight Creature Enchantments by David Norman

Creature enchantments are destined to be little-used cards--the risk of investing multiple cards into one thing that can be easily removed, compounded with the risk of drawing only creature enchantments and no creatures, will forever keep them on the sidelines of Magic. Still, let's see if anything in Weatherlight will make the tourney scene:

Black's only enchantment is Coils of the Medusa, and it is pretty feeble. Don't forget that it serves as creature control for creatures with toughness 1; perhaps its best use will be on a creature that OP will feel obligated to block (eg, Bone Dancer), but, for the most part, this is not a strong card.

Blue gets a family of creature enchantments, but only two are semi-viable. Phantom Wings serves triple duty: you can temporarily remove Op's creature, you can give one of your creature's flying, OR you can use it as one-shot creature protection that Op will be aware of in advance. Note how a counterspell can do two of these things just as well if not better (provided you have mana). The other enchantment worth consideration is Abduction--once you get to 6 mana, you can abduct Op's creature and protect it with a counterspell. Not great, and far inferior to Control Magic, but sometimes you don't have good choices. If Abduction was for 1 blue and 2 colorless, it would be good, though. (I have my doubts--what happens when Op plays Jokulhaups?--Rick)

Nature's Kiss is Green's addition to genre, and it serves little purpose, even though it is sometimes superior to Firebreathing. A fun card for trampling creature theme decks, but not much else.

Red's Fire Whip is what creature enchantments should be all about--you don't lose the card investment if the creature gets destroyed, and it adds to the usefulness of the creature. While most tournament decks don't have creatures weak enough that the Fire Whip will be worthwhile, it can be a fine "surprise" card. Just put one in your deck, and see how long it takes for it to win you a game.

White probably gets the best creature enchantment (kinda like saying "the best snippet of parsley"), Empyrial Armor--wow, the casting cost is less than Divine Transformation, and the effect is often greater. This card is turning into a nice sideboard card against Red/Black decks, which often can't deal with an early pump knight, pumped still more up to ungodly levels via this card. This is another one to add to your deck, just to watch its awesome power.

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#### Cards to Watch for ... Desertion by Lee Maurici

Most people looked at Desertion, read the description, said "oh, its like Deflection, but its limited to creatures and artifacts, and costs more", and put it back in the collection. No way, its MUCH better than Deflection.

Yes, it does cost 5 mana, but this is a fair price for what it does. The vast majority of decks use either creatures and/or artifacts, and in either case, such decks tend to be a bit slow. A Desertion against a creature (even against a Force of Nature) can turn the game around--not only do you counter a big creature, you get to attack with it before Op gets access to enough mana to kill the creature. In addition, your control is not through an enchantment, so the usual tactics against Binding Grasp-type cards won't help much.

The real advantage over Deflection is Desertion STILL counts as a counterspell, so you can stop an Inferno if you need.

Its an expensive card, but its also one that can win you many games. If you are playing against it, try to not cast anything big when Op has 5 mana available--its a good sign a card is valuable when the advice for stopping it is so brief and weak!

(There's truth in that--how do you stop Zuran Orb? Kismet, lots of Disenchants, and hope?)

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#### Question of the Bisemaine: Can you Spellblast a Karoo Meerkat?

The Meerkat has Protection from Blue, which might lead a beginning player to believe that it can't be targeted by Blue counterspells. But, yes, you can counter such a card. Let's clarify why:

When a card is in your hand, it is a card. When you try to play it, it is either a land or a spell. There's no way to respond to playing a land. If its a spell, you can respond to it with an interrupt (almost always a counterspell of some sort), instant (although the instant generally can't target the spell) or a mana source, and this response will take place before the spell becomes anything but a spell. Then the effects resolve in the LIFO order.

If a spell happens to be a "Summon Creature", any abilities that the creature has (in this case, Protection from Blue) don't count until the creature is actually in play--spells don't have built-in abilities like protection unless it says so on the card (nothing like this yet, but Kaervek's Torch and Forsaken Wastes are close). Hence, you can counter the Meerkat. You can cast Sleight of Mind (a Blue interrupt) on the Meerkat as it is being cast. You cannot cast a Mind Bend (a Blue instant) or Sleight of Mind on a Meerkat in play, barring some other weird effect (eg, Celestial Dawn).

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#### Deck of the Fortnight.... Green Creature Madness

Creature heavy decks are always the rage--the trick is using creatures that are powerful enough that they can win. Another trick, albeit one that few have tried to exploit, is to use creatures that replace themselves. Here's an example of such a deck:

Lands: 22 Forests, 2 Hearts of Yavimaya

Creatures: 4 Arctic Wolves, 4 Llanowar Sentinels, 4 Striped Bears, 3 Sylvan Heirophants, 2 Uktabi Wildcats, 4 Veteran Explorers, 2 Yavimaya Ants

Enchantments: 2 Barbed Foliage, 1 City of Solitude, 1 Downdraft

Artifacts: 1 Cursed Totem, 1 Null Rod

Non-Permanents: 1 Creeping Mold, 2 Gaea's Blessing, 2 Nature's Resurgence, 2 Tropical Storms.

The first big combo in this deck is simple: mana and a cantrip creature. If Op can't get rid of the creature, you've gained either a free attacker or a free blocker. If he does get rid of it, he's used a card on something that didn't cost you a card. Either way, Arctic Wolves and, yes, even the meager 2/2 Striped Bears, are viable in a deck with sufficient mana. Let's talk about the other creatures.

Llanowar Sentinels are another good card when you have mana--it isn't that difficult to bring in more than one on the same turn, and don't overlook Gaea's Blessing as a way to put them back in your library, to facilitate doing it again. The Sylvan Heirophant is yet another creature that replaces itself. It combines poorly with Nature's Resurgence (the latter is probably over-priced in the market), but otherwise is pretty good. The Uktabi Wildcats are as standard for mono-green decks as Heart of Yavimaya--they might not replace themselves, but they are hard to be rid of. The Veteran Explorer is an interesting card, and provides a non-Thawing Glaciers method of getting the large amounts of mana this deck requires to be fully operational; is it as good as Glaciers? Not in my opinion, but see for yourself; try to get them killed in such a way that you'll get to exploit the extra mana before Op. The Yavimaya Ants, believe it or not, are in the same category as the cantrip creatures--instead of providing an instant return on your mana investment by giving you a card, they deal 5 damage to Op. Think about it: the Ants almost certainly provide damage, the cantrip creatures provide cards; these are the two paradigms for victory in Magic. Can a deck subscribe to both and still be powerful?

Barbed Foliage provides some defense against pump knights, although not much else; use of these depends mostly on your local environment. Similarly, the City of Solitude is a good card to have one of in your main deck, and the remainder in your sideboard--combined with the Foliage, and the pump knights can neither attack nor defend well. A strange combo that can work against other deck strategies, such as the strange massive squirrel token decks I've heard about. Downdraft is probably a crummy card--use it yourself and see how pointless it is.

The artifacts go with the theme of "Op can't use fast effects". Yes, there are too few of them to be reliable, but you can't profit from having multiple Null Rods or Cursed Totems in play. Just hold it in your hand, and play it only when you need to (admittedly, not often). If Op doesn't see them initially, he might sideboard out his artifact control for the second game.

The Creeping Mold is one of the few defensive cards--it comes up surprisingly often because of all the cantrips--having a bit of land destruction is important in these days of Kjeldoran Outposts and Lotus Vales. Gaea's Blessing is as grossly underrated as Mind Stone (don't get me started on that...)--it combines great with the Sentinels (ah, the joy of saying "Hi. I'm Larry. This is my brother Darryl, and this is my other brother Darryl. And that's Squishy." on those rare occasions where 4 come out on the same turn.), is a cheap cantrip, lets you put "good cards" back in your library, and is just plain cool. Use it and see how rarely you regret having it. Nature's Resurgence is questionable--it looks good, but you get no guarantees that you'll have more creatures in the GY than OP; maybe it belongs in a weenie deck moreso than this. Tropical Storm is not that good--when playing this deck, keep track of how often you'd prefer a Hurricane. Experience is the best teacher.

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#### Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes On Vanguard

The latest Arena season has a new twist--decks are Type II constructed (funny how "Standard"--the official name for "Type II"--just hasn't made it into the lexicon), and players get to use one of eight Vanguard cards.

Each Vanguard card grants a special ability, along with a penalty/bonus to cards drawn initially and maximum hand size, and a penalty/bonus to life.

Most of the cards grant an ability identical or at least similar to other Magic cards (eg, your creatures get +1/+0, or your creatures don't have summoning sickness or your creatures can't be the target of spells or effects). In these cases, you should weigh the ability against any card penalty with the Vanguard card--why start with a 3 card penalty just to begin the game with some low cost card in play?

Back on the subject of card penalty, keep in mind that reducing the cards you start the game with causes your chance of mana stalling to SKYROCKET! This is best evidenced in the Vanguard card that lets you draw 2 cards a turn, but your starting hand is a measly 3 cards (and you have to discard if you go above three cards at the end of turn). It is almost impossible to build a deck that can work reliably in these conditions. Even a 50% mana deck will stall on the third turn (i.e., not have 3 mana) 21% of the time (its even more likely if you go first!). It will be 4 turns before you break even with this deck. Be very, very, wary of the Vanguard "heroes" that start you off with such a penalty.

The modifier to life is least relevant--yes, games can be decided by 5 life or so, but, more often in untimed games, what determines the outcome is cards, not life.

My favorite card? Squee, big time. His ability of making OP play with his hand face up is nifty, but he also lets you start with three extra cards (this is just devastating in a permission/lock deck). Yeah, you start at 16 life, but, remember that Necro gives you 4 cards for 4 life, and the cost just gets worse after one turn (when you start to lose the "free" card you get when you draw). Squee gives you 3 cards for 4 life, but there's no additional cost.

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Trade and Tale Zone..... It never ceases to amaze me the number of people that claim their deck has "never been beaten", or has a "95% win ratio" or some such rubbish. Invariably, these are people that don't play tournaments, and regularly seek out small children and newbies to bash with their Type I all-power-OOPs quadruple Mind Twist deck. Just once, I'd like to get all these people together and have them play each other in a single elimination tournament. Funny thing is, I bet that after the "Tournament of Champions in Their Own Mind", most of them would still claim their deck has never been beaten.

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Feedback

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

Everybody I know has a "take" on WotC's takeover of TSR. Let's hear some opinions from Scroll readers, the intellectuals of the Magic world--which makes them the braniacs of the gaming world!

As a special bonus, Rick has included his "Worst Thing I've Endured In Gaming" as an attachment; it isn't Magic related, so if you aren't into Necromunda, skipping it will be a breeze. Someone somewhere will have something to say about it, though.

Until next time!

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