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The Scroll

A Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

Issue 8

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Published by Books Electric Publishing

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Enough bureaucratic stuff, get to the contents already!

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Spotlight on Guildmages (by David Norman)

There are very few 1 mana casting cost creatures in Magic, meaning anything that fits the description should be looked at. Every color gets a "Guildmage", so lets take a look at them.

Black has the Shadow Guildmage, and this guy is contender for best of the lot. All guildmages have two abilities, and both of the powers here can be awesome. Using one blue mana, the Shadow can tap and put a creature you control back on your library. Wow! What an easy way to protect a creature from getting Incinerated! But, having two creatures in play at the same time (the Guildmage and another creature you control) is a bit much too ask. The second power is even better! Being able to deal one damage to any target is great, even if it costs one mana and deals a point of damage to you. If you are the first person to get Shadow out, OP can't cast his own guildmages! Sure, that cuts both ways, but many people have overlooked these "weenies", and, besides, black and red are excellent colors for creature control, giving you a decent chance of being the only person with a Guildmage in play.

Blue's Shaper Guildmage is nothing to write home about. Not only is it guaranteed to be killed by the Shadow (or Granger), it has no ability which can reliably kill another creature or save one of yours (except, of course, if you use it to target a Skulking Ghost--watched one get Boomeranged to the GY the other day). Giving a creature first strike can be useful, but, at best, this will just delay the game until OP pulls one of the myriad of cards which can kill a Shaper.

The Granger Guildmage of Green is almost as good as the Shadow. It has the great "ping" ability that makes the Shadow so useful--provide you play the colors of Red and Green, and this is how most green decks are seen anyway. First strike might be more useful here than in Blue, since many of Green's creatures become much more devastating when they have first strike (unlike White, whose creatures tend to have first strike but low power, or Blue whose flyers tend not to need first strike).

While it is nice that Red's Armorer Guildmage doesn't add more direct damage, neither of his powers is worthwhile. One might think that the "+0/+1" power would counter the ping ability, but, it ain't so. Suppose you've got the mage, and OP has the pinger. At the end of your turn, OP pings your Armorer. You tap the Armorer, adding one to its toughness. Then, on OP's turn, he pings your Armorer again. Since the Armorer is tapped, he can't use his ability, so he dies. Well, this might force OP to take two points of damage to get rid of one of your cards, but I wouldn't build a deck around this concept.

Finally, there is White's Civic Guildmage, and the "Put target creature you control on top of owner's library" is a nice ability, although usually Blue has something better to do with the mana, Reparations is a better way of "protecting" creatures in a White/Blue deck, and there are scads of better weenies to play in White anyway. This guy and the Armorer should take up checkers, 'cause they sure won't be playing much Magic.

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#### Card to Watch for ... Gravebane Zombie (by Lee Maurici)

Hmm, 4 mana for a 3/2 creature. That's a P/M ratio of .75, which doesn't sound like a threat. It must be the special power.

Before we get to that special power, look how the power of 3 means the Gravebane can block a flanker and kill it (barring extra effects), even though it doesn't have flanking. In the Arena environment of perpetual flanking, this is a good deal.

The latter power, of going to the top of your library whenever it hits the GY, is the important one. While it is meaningless in regular type II, where Swords to Plowshares and Disintegrate reign supreme, in a Mirage-only environment, this is quite cool indeed. Most things that block a Gravebane will die in the process, taking the Gravebane with it. Is this really trading a card for a card? Nope.

Suppose the Gravebane Zombie's deck is 40% mana, and doesn't need more than 4 mana (to summon the zombie) to be dangerous. I.E., once it can summon a Gravebane, this deck is "wasting" cards when it draws a land. So, by putting the Gravebane on top of the library, instead of drawing a new card (which will be "useless" land 40% of the time), the Gravebaner gets his zombie back. He's just gained a 0.4 of a card over you. If you are forced to kill the Zombie 5 times (and believe me, I've seen it happen), you've just given OP a 2 card advantage, even though it "looks" like you've been trading a card for a card. Moreover, this power can't backfire like the Ivory Gargoyle's sometimes does, since OP always has the option of not casting it again.

Thus, when you build a deck, make sure you have a way of blocking/stopping/nullifying this creature, and if you are using Black, consider putting one or two of these in your main deck.

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#### A Question....Can you Mind Bend Mangara's Equity? (from Rick Moscatello)

Well, of course you can. The real question is, will it do any good? Here's the text of Mangara's Equity: "When you play Mangara's Equity, choose black or red. During your upkeep, pay (one white and one colorless, or bury the Equity). For each 1 damage a creature **of the chosen color** deals to you or a white creature you control, Mangara's Equity deals 1 damage to that creature." Now, Mind Bend is an Instant, so it can't target the Equity until it comes into play. So, when OP casts Equity, he picks a color (say, "Black"). Now, you can Mind Bend the word "Black" to "Blue", but it won't matter, since the color CHOSEN was "Black". You COULD cast Sleight of Mind on the Equity when it was being cast (taking advantage of the Interrupt speed of the Sleight) to have it affect Blue creatures, but Mind Bend just won't work that way.

So, where did this question come from? I was playing an Arena match, and OP had an Equity out, and he tried to Mind Bend it to Blue (thereby shutting down my Firewalkers). I explain to him that it won't work that way, and he runs to the judge. The judge sides with him. I ask the (Arena Sanctioned) judge to consider reading the card before making his decision and get threatened with disqualification for arguing with the judge. I bet him \$20 to his \$5 he's wrong and get threatened with disqualification for acting unsportsmanlike.

I'll say it again: never assume the judge knows the rules. The other guy was a better player for determining how the judge would rule before the match started (although I did win the match).

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Deck of the Fortnight... White/Blue Mirage

Lands: 4 Flood Plains, 11 Islands, 10 Plains.

Creatures: 3 Femeref Scouts, 4 Hazerider Drakes, 1 Leering Gargoyle, 1 Melesse Spirit, 1 Sandbar Crocodile, 4 Suq'Ata Firewalkers, 1 Wall of Resistance, 1 Zhalfarin Commander

Enchantments: 1 Managara's Equity, 2 Prismatic Circles, 3 Reparations, 2 Thirsts, 1 Ward of Lights

Artifacts: 2 Telim Tor's Darts

Non-Permanents: 1 Dream Cache, 1 Enlightened Tutor, 1 Ivory Charm, 3 Meddles, 3 Rays of Command, 2 Shadowbanes.

Both Blue and White are unpopular colors in Arena, for a few reasons. First, the artifact selection is slim, making White's Disenchants (a staple card for White decks) much less useful than in a "normal" setting. Second, White has lost the Circles, important cards that forced many decks to have a way of dealing with enchantments--yep, there's nice enchantments in Mirage, but nothing is more capable of rendering a deck impotent than a few relevant Circles. Nobody desperately needs enchantment or artifact control in Arena right now. Also, White lost Swords to Plowshares, the main creature control card (I've yet to see someone use Afterlife, which, inexplicably, doesn't even remove the creature from the game). There are a few cards hosing Blue (Sirocco and Roots of Life), but Blue got no hosers, making it a fundamentally unattractive color for all but the most subtle players. Finally, without Millstones, a Blue/White totally defensive deck is not an option. This deck illustrates that Blue/White can be used to win games (it has a 3-0 record, which is at least decent).

Note the fetch lands. One way to tell if a card is good is if you are happy when you get it in the draw (I've never seen anyone frown and go "Darn, I drew 4 STPS" or "Dangit. 4 Hymns!"). The fetch lands pass this test. You WILL like it when you get them in the early game, despite the occasional inconvenience of getting them in the mid-game.

There's nothing really powerful in the creature mix. The Femeref Scouts and Leering Gargoyles make fine defenders, although one has to miss the Yotian Soldier. The Zhalfarin Commander is the new "pump knight"--just play him and see how HARD it is to have 3 mana laying (as opposed to 2) around for pumping. This deck boasts 8 "protection from red" (or nearly so) creatures, giving it some chance of keeping a creature alive from the onslaught of direct damage that one can expect. Have fun trying to keep the Wall of Resistance alive--not only will it not survive an Incinerate, it can't even block a Flanker and live. At least the Firewalkers might be able to ping it up to a decent toughness. The Melesse Spirit is mostly an Incinerate-rod, but flying is a useful enough ability in Mirage to pay extra for. The Sandbar Croc is more of a delaying tactic--OP is unlikely to attack on the turn you summon it, and, hopefully, next turn you'll hold your mana back for all the nifty spells this deck has.

This is an enchantment heavy deck. The Reparations are the gamewinner, and hopefully will allow this deck (which has relatively few creatures--15) to gain card superiority. Thirst gives this deck some hope against Wildfire Emissaries, just in case nothing else is working. Managara's Equity combines beautifully with all the low power/high toughness creatures--sure, it hurts if OP isn't playing Black or Red, but, from what I've seen, that is a RARE occurrence. Ward of Lights, when put on one of your Protection creatures, will give you a menacing creature that OP might not be able to deal with. The Circles are not bad at all--a cumulative upkeep of 1 means you can get a half dozen turns out of them if you play wisely.

Only 2 artifacts? It is amazing how Rod of Ruin doesn't work, but the Darts are quite useful. Just try them out and see how often you can deal 3 or more points to OP with them--obviously the Darts make little sense if your deck has Incinerates, but this deck can have a hard time finishing off a wounded OP, and the Darts, with their low, low, activation cost, suprisingly often serve the fatal blow. Well, just try them out.

The non-permanents are what will give OP fits. Try playing the Wall when you have 4 mana. Watch as OP gloatfully Incinerates it. Smile as you Meddle the Incinerate to his regenerator. Or, take the damage and then use the Ivory Charm to prevent one point. The main secret here is not to play a creature until you have enough mana to protect it with a Meddle. While you are waiting for this to happen, use Ray of Command to take out two of OP's creatures in a single turn.

Dream Cache is a fun card. Just cast it a few times and watch it let you organize your deck quite nicely. Finally, we have the Enlightened Tutor. We don't really have 4 of anything in this deck, so when you get the Tutor, hold it as long as possible until you figure out what card you need and haven't drawn. Sometimes it will be the Ward of Lights, sometimes a Circle, sometimes the Equity, and every once in a while, yes, you'll want the Darts. For this deck, its practically a Demonic Tutor. Shadowbane will give OP fits--a great way to protect your creatures, and a better way to protect yourself from massive Torches and the like than Powersink.

If I were going to give a sideboard for this deck, Mind Harness would top the list (heck, I'd put them in the main deck and use Thirst for the sideboard except I'd be accused of pre-sideboarding and scouting)--one more way to stop Emissaries. Sand Golems would be for show--much like Sleight of Mind was often put in the sideboard to threaten a Gloom player, I've found that the threat of Sand Golems typically makes OP take the Stupors out of his deck. Past that, I might experiment with Jabari's Influence--expensive and limited, but sometimes you're up against an OP who isn't playing black or red (hasn't happened to me yet in Arena), and the Influence will help out then.

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#### Tidbits of Wisdom ... Mirage Decks in New Orleans by Rick Moscatello

My record so far this season is 17 and 4, which is nice although not as glorious as last years' undefeated triumph. I've found that how Magic played, and what tactics and styles are emphasized, varies dramatically from one geographic location to the next, so, perhaps, the esteemed readership of The Scroll might have some interest in what the Mirage-only decks look like in the New Orleans area.

I'll start with the decks that beat me. My first loss came to a Red/Black deck. There was nothing surprising in it--4 Stupors, 4 Incinerates, 4 Torches, 4 Cadaverous Knights, 2 Gravebane Zombies, 4 Shadow Guildmages, 4 Skulking Ghosts, and few related cards. The tuned version of my Red/Blue deck (listed in The Scroll a few issues back) just didn't have enough life to survive the onslaught. I stalled the first game, and, in the second, I stupidly Torched his red flanking knight. This gave me nothing to Meddle his Dark Banishing of my Emissary to, subsequently causing me to die with a handful of Powersinks and Meddles. My Firewalker went the bulk of the game untouched. I think that under better circumstances I could have won a majority of games, but not on that day.

The second deck that beat me crushed me with no confusion whatsoever. Mono-Black. Knights and Zombies and Skulking Ghosts, and a few Catacomb Dragons as well. Creature after creature after creature hit the table, and, with no mass destruction cards in my deck, I could do nothing but curl up and die. He even had an Ashen Powder, allowing him to Dark Banish what minimal defense I could summon, and then use it against me. Yeah, I stalled the first game, but I have no illusions about playing against this deck. I would lose 4 out of 5 times even if I was drawing 2 cards a turn.

I've played 3 other Red/Black decks, all pretty much looking like the one that beat me. The lack of Circles of Protection, combined with such questionable hosers as Mangara's Equity and Roots of Life, make little reason not to play these colors. The four mana that lets you summon a Hazerider Drake (a white/blue, prot-red, flyer, 2/3) lets a red-using OP summon a Firewalker (red, pumpable, prot-white, 2/4), and there's no question which is the better creature, by extremely far.

I've heard rumors that there's a completely unbeatable near mono-Green deck. It has just enough Red for the obligatory Incinerates and Torches, and then a honking pile of forests, which sets the game up for a Waiting in the Woods; followed up with Superior Numbers, and the deck supposedly can't be stopped.

Red/Green was the style for the second week of Mirage. I tried a Black/Red/Blue deck with Unfulfilled Desires (enchantment, pay 1 colorless and 1 life to draw one card and discard one card). My two other losses were both to R/G decks. Nettletooth Djins and the 5/5 Wurm brought me down against the first deck (2 Mind Harnesses in my hand, 7 Swamps and 2 Mountains--i.e., no Islands--on the table, left me no choice but to die). The other deck was far more deadly. Stocking up on 28 Mana (20 lands and 8 Diamonds), it very quickly got the 7 mana needed to make a Torch a gamewinning card, although it also had 2 Hammers as well. A nigh creatureless Mirage deck. Well, it looks like it can be done after all. Time after time, the Torch came along and hit me for a half dozen or more points.

One deck that gave me more trouble than one would think was a White/Green "deck of life", packed with Telim Tor's Darts, Elixirs, Vitalizing Cascades, Auspicious Ancestors, and weenies. While it didn't beat me, the time it took for me to kill him was almost enough for the Darts to finish me off (thank goodness for Builder's Baner). The only other artifact I've seen played in competitive decks (I've seen Diamonds and Teeka's Dragons in Arena, but not often in threatening

decks) is Amber Prison. Nobody has enough life to have any illusions having enough mana to use, say, Amulet of Unmaking, before getting blasted by a flurry of Direct Damage or an Emissary that very quickly is capable of dealing 5 damage a turn. Even the white/blue deck given above has no great chance against a mono-Red deck (hmmm, maybe the Zuran Orb wasn't so bad after all...).

Other than these decks, I've faced a Red/White deck, a White/Blue/Black deck, and a slew of Red/Green variants. Only the Red/Greens were dangerous. Every game against such decks was a countdown to see if I could deal 20 points of damage with creatures before I took 20 points of Direct Damage. Apparently, I'm nearly the only person in the city who thinks it possible to use Blue in the Mirage environment. I'm thinking now that that is my mistake, and not everyone else's loss.

In conclusion, I don't know how Mirage-only decks are being built elsewhere, but Red is easily the most popular color here, Black is a close second, Green is not too distant third, and White and Blue are duking it out for last place. Anyone seeing anything different?

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#### Trade Zone and Marketplace

It looks like everyone is holding their breath for Visions. Lord knows, I can't even trade with people around here, they're all saving their cards for when Visions comes out.

#### Alliances Set FOR SALE

E-Mail me for details. make an offer.

DarkMist X

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No Feedback this time, although I did see a very nice "all common" red/black deck.

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.