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The Scroll

A Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

Issue 9

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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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Enough bureaucratic stuff, get to the contents already!

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Spotlight on Artifacts (by David Norman)

Ah, artifacts. Can't play without 'em, and can't play without 'em. Ok, when Zuran Orb was around, this certainly was true, but all too often I see artifact-less decks, which leads me to believe people think artifacts are more trouble than they are worth.

The main reason people avoid artifacts is people think "I don't want to give OP extra life if he Divine Offers it" or "I don't want to take damage if OP has a Builder's Bane", or, my personal favorite, "An artifact creature is doubly vulnerable, so I don't use them."

Let's start with the non-creatures. In this section, we have two types of artifacts, the ones that cost mana to generate an effect (eg, Rod of Ruin), and ones that generate an effect all their own (eg, the horrifying Winter Orb).

As long as the cost to generate the effect is small, such artifacts are often a good deal. Let's take Telim'Tor's Darts (2 to cast, and pay 2 to deal 1 damage to any player). If you get one use out of it, and OP hits it with a Builder's Bane, you've broken even (you've both lost 1 life and lost 1 card). If you get two uses out of it, and OP Divinely Offers it, you again break even (OP gains 2 life, but lost 2 also, and you both lose a card); if OP plays Shatter or Disenchant, you come out ahead!. So, here's the important part that people sometimes forget: *avoid playing artifacts if you don't have the mana to cast and activate it in the same turn.* While you are most likely to generate the effect in OP's discard phase, it still

makes sense to have the mana available. As long as you generate at least one effect from your artifact before it hits the GY, you stand a good chance of coming out ahead. It makes no sense to cast an artifact that you KNOW you won't use for another three turns anyway (two probable exceptions: Vice-type stuff, and an OP without cards in hand). I can't begin to count the number of times I've seen some goon play a second millstone on the third turn of the game, when he has 3 mana and another Millstone in play.

If the artifact has no mana requirement to generate its effect (eg, Black Vice, Zuran Orb, Ivory Tower, Moxes), you should look at it good and hard--note how many of such artifacts find their way to the banned/restricted list. These artifacts win game after game, and often entire decks can be built around them (I've seen an Ivory Tower deck, for god's sake!). Of course, some suck rotten eggs (Lion's Eye Diamond, Vibrating Sphere), but, hey, identifying what doesn't work is what Magic is all about.

Artifact creatures are another story. Sure, if the only artifacts you have in your deck are artifact creatures, then they are doubly vulnerable (the same goes if they are the only creatures in your deck, although not many people see it that way--Rick). Soooo, if you use artifact creatures, you can avoid the double-vulnerability by including other artifacts (or other creatures--Rick), and you avoid the risk of being hosed by Builder's Bane by making sure you've got some return on your artifact creature before you bring out another artifact, generally by successfully attacking OP and dealing damage.

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#### Card to Watch for ... Savage Twister (by Lee Maurici)

Pay 1 Red, 1 Green, and X: deal X damage to all creatures. Pretty good. Most people have overlooked this card, especially in Arena. This is a mistake.

When you first see the card, you think "Hmmm, Pyroclasm deals two to all creatures, for half the cost. I'm only worried about weenies anyway" or "Jokulhaups can get rid of regenerators and artifacts too" or "Inferno for 7 mana deals 6 to all creatures". But, none of these cards are in Mirage, and that is the point.

There are only two mass large creature destruction cards in Mirage (Kaervek's Purge works on smaller ones) that can work reliably, this and Torrent of Lava, and the latter doesn't affect fliers. Waiting in the Weeds, Carrion, and Sacred Mesa (this is roughly their order of usefulness, too) all give OP the ability to summon a horde of creatures which you might not be able to stop, making mass destruction something no Mirage-only deck can be without.

Sure, Twister nails your own creatures as well, but you can get around this by using only bigger creatures, such as the awesome Wall of Roots. Even better, use Amber Prisons to tie down one of OP's creatures. When OP summons another creature, use the Twister to wipe out everything--not only have you killed 2 of OP's creatures (at the cost of one card), OP will need to summon TWO creatures to attack you, since the first will just get tied down by the Prison again. This might not be as easy to accomplish as Icy/Wrath of God, but the theory is the same.

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#### A Question....Can you Mind Bend a DeathGrip, to make it so you can counter a blue spell by playing 2 black mana?

You certainly can. You can even Sleight it. The timing rules, however, mean you have to be a bit careful how you do this.

A clever player would wait until a blue spell (say, Air Elemental) was cast, then cast Mind Bend/Sleight on the DeathGrip, then activate its power to counter the spell. This is a no-no.

When a spell is cast, both players get a chance to respond to it with fast effects and interrupts. Then players get to respond to any responses. Then players respond to the responses to the responses, and so on, until neither player wants to do anything more. Then everything in the batch resolves (except mana sources and possibly interrupts, but we'll get to that in a sec), last in first out (for the most part, and we'll get to that in a bit too), and NO EFFECTS CAN BE GENERATED UNTIL EVERY EFFECT IN THE BATCH RESOLVES (except for damage prevention--aren't the exceptions in Magic swell?).

This means there is no way to cast Mind Bend on a Death Grip in response to a spell, and then using the Bent Death Grip to counter the spell. Once the Mind Bend is cast, and no players respond, no more effects can be generated until the effects resolve. So, Mind Bend resolves, changing what Death Grip affects, then the spell resolves. Now the Death Grip could counter the spell, except its already resolved.

It used to be that Sleight of Mind, an Interrupt (as opposed to Bend's Instant speed) would work this way, but WoTC closed this little loophole in the Mirage rulebook, page 4. Interrupts that target a non-spell/effect are treated as instants. No great loss, as this is a tough combo to succeed with anyway.

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Deck of the Fortnight... Green/Blue Type II

Lands: 11 Forests, 11 Islands

Creatures: 1 Llanowar Elf, 2 Quirion Elves, 4 Walls of Wood

Enchantments: 2 Control Magic, 3 Malignant Growth

Artifacts: 3 Howling Mines, 3 Miser's Cages

Non-Permanents: 4 Arcane Denials, 4 Counterspells, 2 Mystical Tutor, 4 Memory Lapse, 4 Stormbind, 2 Tropical Storms.

Blue and Green are ugly colors to put together--artifact and creature control are problems for both these colors. Nonetheless, they can be combined, much like Turbo-Stasis, into a hyperinefficient deck that bewilders and obliterates OP.

Our first lesson for today is an examination of the difference in usefulness between the Llanowar and the Quirion Elf. Watch how much more quickly the deck develops when you get the Llanowar in the draw as opposed to the Quirion. Sure, the ability to produce the extra color can be a lifesaver, but, usually, if you have three mana (you'll get at least one from the elf) you have the colors you need already, and the 50% boost that Llanowar gives you on turn 2 is better than the 33% boost the Quirion gives you on turn 3.

The only other creature this deck sports is the Wall of Roots. Awesome, a truly useful wall--low cost, able to block creatures that cost twice as much (those 4-mana walls are a joke! Its almost stupid to use creatures that cost that much, after all.), and a NON-TAPPING source of mana.

Note the counterspells--all of them stop OP for two measly mana. This deck gets a defense up quick! While Control Magic on a particularly large beast can sometimes win the game, this deck will most often win by making OP choke on a handful of cards. Don't forget the proper use of Stormbind. At the end of OP's draw phase, i.e., after he's drawn his card, cast Stormbind on him. You can easily deal 5-8 points to him this way. You'll find that the Mystical Tutor will almost always be used to get another Stormbind to the top of your deck.

A Pauper's Cage on the third turn of the game is not a bad idea--OP need have but 4 cards in hand to take 2 points from it, and the Cage will be a lasting threat. The Howling Mine is a matter of taste, some will prefer the Winter Orb, despite the Orb's working against the cumulative upkeep cost of Malignant Growth. Either way, this shoves enough cards into your hand (and OP's too) that you're sure to have a defense against Fliers, the only thing that can threaten this deck, despite the Tropical Storms (which are mostly in to stop Hypnotic Spectres).

Finally, we come to the really scary card, Malignant Growth. Yeah, it costs 5 mana, but that just means when you cast it, you'll have enough mana to pay the upkeep to deal 15 points of damage to OP--a turn 5 Growth, plus one Stormbringer, pretty much guarantees the end of the game in 5 turns, less if any Pauper's Cages are around. Let's see here, OP will have to summon a 4/4 flier, immediately, in order to have a chance of killing you before you kill him. That's good--how many enchantments kill so quickly and surely?

At first glance, this looks like a stupid deck, since Howling Mines, Arcane Denials, and Malignant Growth all fill OP up with cards, which is usually a mistake. But, Stormbind and the Miser's Cage make him pay dearly for those cards. Build it, play it, be impressed by it. God only knows what all the new stuff from Visions will do to this new deck type.

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Tidbits of Wisdom ... The Top Ten Cards of 1996 by Rick Moscatello

Is it too late for a top ten list? The following are the top ten cards to kick my butt in tournaments last year. Were they as heinous for you?

1. Zuran Orb. So much life, so little cost. Having a Zuran Orb when OP doesn't is like playing chess with an extra queen--something of great value that nonetheless you can afford to sacrifice for any purpose. No other card comes close.
2. Balance. You have to beat a Balance player twice to win. This is the fundamental idea behind reset buttons (like Jokulhaups and Nevinyrral's Disk): if you have resets, and OP doesn't, then you only have to beat him once, whereas he has to beat you once for every reset you get. Balance is the king of resets. Thank goodness its gone.
3. Strip Mine. Can easily force your opponent into a mana stall he won't recover from, at no cost to yourself. Finally banned, less skilled players are stumped at what to use the extra "slot" for. Strip Mines were like turnovers in football--you can reliably tell who's going to win just by looking at who drew the most Strip Mines in the first ten cards.
4. Land Tax. Give your opponent the choice of conceding, or letting you control the mana. Much like Strip Mine, and early Land Tax was a great start to an easy win.
5. Mishra's Factory. Very difficult to remove (compared to other creatures), very cheap to cast, provides mana, pumpable, immune to most enemy enchantments and sorceries. Wow. Anyone wanna bet what is next to be restricted? I must have lost over 1,000 life last year to rampaging pieces of geography named after a wizard.
6. Armageddon. Tap all your mana, kill all the lands, spend all your mana, kill your helpless opponent. This is not complicated. Automatically win any game where you have a creature advantage.
7. Necropotence. Extra cards, for little cost. I dunno, I still think this card is a bit overrated. The number of times I stopped a Necro player by Force of Will on his Ivory Tower or Zuran Orb, or finished him off with a Balance, or Powersunk his Drain Life, or watched as he drained his life away drawing land leads me to believe that it really was other cards (Zorb) that made it so powerful. Nonetheless, it was in alot of decks I played against, so it must be good, right?
8. Hymn to Tourach. Two cards for the price of one card and a little mana. I wish this card had lasted long enough to be played against the discard hosers (notably Sand Golem--the joy of discarding two Golems on the second turn is one I wouldn't deny to my worst enemy), but, much like the Zorb, there was no thought to putting it in the deck, so I don't grieve its loss.
9. Wrath of God. Decide when you want your creatures to come into play. More importantly, OP has no choice in the matter. This would have rated higher if I didn't tend to use creatureless decks.
10. Icy Manipulator. Control whatever part of the game you need to control. Such a frustrating card to play against, and such a joy to have in play.

I'm sure there's going to be some people to argue with me on this; feel free.

Note how none of these (except for the Mishra's, which "technically" is a land) are creatures, note how many of these are artifacts, note how many of these generate multiple effects or destroy multiple cards, and note how **none of these are expensive to cast** (I define expensive as 5 or more--5 mana is a VERY critical amount of mana). As these cards leave the Type II tournament scene, let's see if we can make a few predictions:

Zuran Orb: Direct Damage decks might again be reliable, instead of "only good if he doesn't draw that &\*\*\*\$ Orb!". Finally, White might no longer be dominant, as Land Tax, Balance, and Armageddon will no longer have this artifact to combine with.

Balance: The effects of this sorcery are so widespread that it is hard to say what events, other than a universal cry of joy (and disappointment from the unimaginative), removal of this card from Type II will eventually bring. Perhaps decks won't need to be so artifact (the only card safe from Balancing) intensive anymore.

Perhaps putting more than one creature in play at a time will make sense. Probably not, but getting rid of this is a start.

Strip Mine: Removal of this card opened up numerous strategies (don't let anyone tell you banning cards cuts into the strategies of the game!), from beneficial land enchantments and storage lands to the new Alliances landkillers. Expect Permission decks to go on the rise. In addition, this means that non-basic lands may come to dominate the Type II scene (as they dominated the Type I scene), although a change in the official rules (or a prevalence of Blood Moons and Primal Orders) may prevent this.

Land Tax: Without this card, Land Destruction may become an even more common strategy, although without the Strip Mines, it may be less reliable. The alternate use of this card, preventing damage from The Rack, may become unnecessary, as there are now other cards which harm hand destruction tactics.

Mishra's Factory: Decks will no longer be forced to "load up" on Instants that can remove this nightmare, and expect Blue players (who had little way of removing this thing beyond Ray of Command with another creature) to rejoice. Games might go a bit slower without these guys.

Armageddon: When White finally loses its ability to commit mass destruction, it will be a joyous day. Expect decks that use mana to be happy. Larger creatures MIGHT be more viable, and Felwar Stones will drop out of sight, since Balance will be gone as well.

Wrath of God: Another White mass destroyer, players will actually have the option of putting two creatures into play at the same time, even when an opponent has mana. This might warp the tournament scene beyond recognition. Seriously, expect creature decks to go way up in popularity when this "unbalancer" drops out of sight.

Necropotence: Hardly an unbalancing card (we're getting towards the bottom of the list), this dangerous enchantment is much weaker without its buddies, Hymn and Zorb. As the most popular means of stopping Necropotence (White Knights, Whirling Dervish) were popular anyways, expect Black to drop significantly in tournament popularity, the current Arena format notwithstanding.

Hymn to Tourach: A nasty card which everyone fears, no way to really stop it means its disappearance won't have much effect on the game, other than to make standard Discard Decks an historical oddity. I think every "typical" component of a Discard Deck is under consideration for removal except The Rack and Disrupting Sceptre. What does that tell you about what future Discard Decks will look like?

Icy Manipulator: Gigantic utility, low cost. Will Amber Prison truly replace it? I think so.

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#### Trade Zone and Marketplace

Yippee! Visions is out. Of course, that means you can't trade a dual land for pocket fluff right now. If you have the old stuff, its a good idea to wait until a month or two after a new set is released before trying to trade it. Also, don't go for the prices in magazines on new sets--when Homelands first came out, a certain magazine (cough) had prices on the Homelands lands at around \$4.00 a pop.

FPhoenix94@aol.com has an Ice Age set up for sale or trade for out of prints.

Corak1@aol.com is looking for: Aolepile, Hand of Justice, 5 Storage Lands, Thrull Champion, Breeding Pit, Ication Town and any other Fallen Empire rares (isn't it funny that many people say Aelopile stinks, but more people use Unyaro Bee Sting?)

Nelad@aol.com is looking for duel lands.

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We've had almost a half-dozen people request that The Scroll be sent as an attached message, for easy downloading, instead of the current "just barely not too long" format. While this represents about 0.2% of the readership, we'll change if nobody has anything nice to say about the current format.

Until next time!

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