
The Scroll

A Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

(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 Flanking

Mirage has introduced YET ANOTHER creature ability, namely Flanking, which, if possessed by an attacking creature, will cause any nonflanking blockers to get -1/-1 until end of turn. The key thing to note about flanking is it is an OFFENSIVE power--flankers are poor defenders, as the Flanking gives no bonus or penalty when a flanker is blocking (unless both attacker and blocker has Flanking, in which case they cancel). So, let's put flanking up to the Tor Giant test. Recall that a Tor Giant is a 3/3, costing one red mana and three colorless; Tor's susceptibility to Bolts and Incinerates doesn't make him a tournament favorite, so if he comes off as good as a flanker, then flankers probably won't make it into tournament decks either. Consider the Burning Shield Askari. Like most flankers, he's a 2/2, but if you pump 2 red mana into him, he'll get first strike until end of turn.

Suppose you have the burning shield, and OP (your opponent) has a Tor in play. When you attack, OP will only block if you can't give Askari first strike, since Tor drops to 2/2 as soon as he's declared a blocker, low enough to be snuffed by a first striking Askari. So, you'll not get blocked, and deal two points to your opponent. On the other hand, when OP attacks, Askari will get crushed if he tries to block Tor, so you have to let the giant stomp on you for 3. So Askari costs 25% less, but does 50% less damage, than a Tor Giant, and only dealing that much if you can keep two red mana available at all times. Thus, the damage potential drops more than the lower cost, making the Askari a questionable substitute for a Tor Giant. Go ahead, check the other flankers, you'll see the result is the same--the inability

to defend hurts more than the slightly increased ability to attack--even Erg Raiders come off favorably against a Burning Shield, due to their lower casting cost.

The point here is, flanking isn't so hot all by itself; it really becomes worthwhile, barely, if you exploit cards like Meekstone (which shut down the more powerful creatures) or if your opponent is using toughness 1 regenerators, which won't be able to block anything with flanking. Flanking does NOT combine well with Banding, believe it or not, since, according to page 1 of the Mirage rulebook, a creature can choose to block a particular creature in a band (assuming something else in the band can be legally blocked), usually avoiding the Flanker, of course.

Card to Watch for ... Grinning Totem

The "Jester's Cap" of Mirage, this card is already selling for more than \$12 at auctions. The grinning totem, for 4 mana to cast and 2 to activate, lets you go through your opponent's library and take a card out and put it aside for possible casting, much like the Elkin Bottle, but it just gets buried (in opponent's graveyard, of course) if you don't cast it by next upkeep. Curiously, this card goes well with the "Stinking Dog" of Mirage, the Lion's Eye Diamond (well, as best as anything can combine with the Lion's Eye, anyhow). How so? You use two mana to activate the Grinning Totem. Take the best card you can from OPs deck (hopefully the Zuran Orb, but it could be in play already), and, if you need the mana, activate the Diamond for the appropriate color and discard your (hopefully depleted) hand. Great? Nope, but at least the Diamond will get you the color you need.

Expect the Totem to be hugely popular, moreso than the Cap, since you don't just remove cards from the game (which might not help you immediately), you have a good chance of getting the card you need. Zuran Orb tops the list of gamewinning cards, but sometimes Balance, Swords to Plowshares, or even a Lightning Bolt are all you need to win the game. Solve the mana problem before you start by putting Fellwar Stones in your library, which allow you to get the kind of mana OP is using.

Deck of the Fortnight... Black Weenie

Mana Sources: 18 Swamps, One Lake of the Dead, two Dark Rituals.

2 Thawing Glaciers

Creatures:

- 1 Cadaverous Knight
- 1 Cosmic Horror
- 4 Erg Raiders
- 1 Feral Shadow
- 2 Fetid Horrors
- 4 Hypnotic Spectres
- 2 Insidious Bookworms
- 1 Purraj of Urborg
- 1 Spirit of the Night
- 1 Urborg Panther
- 2 Vampire Bats
- 1 Zombie Mob

Enchantments:

- 2 Bad Moons
- 1 Grave Servitude
- 2 Infernal Darknesses
- 1 Phyrexian Boon

2 Unholy Strengths

Artifacts:

Phyrexian Vault

Non-Permanents:

1 Ashes to Ashes
1 Bone Harvest
2 Choking Sands
2 Drain Life
1 Ebony Charm
1 Hymn to Tourach
1 Painful Memories
1 Stupor
1 Withering Boon

(no sideboard, this deck is for amusement purposes only)

White Weenie is very popular, but nobody goes for Black weenies very much. This is a training deck, packed with Mirage cards, to hopefully get you used to playing with them--with the proper sideboard, however, this deck can be a fearsome competitor. First, some generalities: the theme here is to overwhelm an opponent with creatures, so we have a strong creature mix here; playing creatures one at a time is still the best way to go against a tournament deck, and this deck guarantees you'll often have a creature to play. Enchantments are the killing blow (especially the little-used *Infernal Darkness*), so this deck has many of them, to make it difficult for an opponent to be rid of them all. Creature control is light here, but some of the enchantments can kill small ones, *Drain Life* works on mediums, and *Ashes to Ashes* is good on the ubiquitous *Ivory Gargoyles* or anything that is too big to handle--creature control is a tad less important in a deck with 20 (or more) creatures. Ok, that's the basic structure, let's talk about what Mirage has added to it.

It is generally stupid to put only one artifact in a deck (unless the artifact can't be stopped, like *Zuran Orb* or *Jester's Cap* and the like), but you'll come to appreciate the POWER of the Vault in this deck if OP doesn't smash it right off the bat, as every time OP tries to kill a creature, you can sacrifice it to get another card--late in the game, sacrifice your weenies in a bid to one of the bigger creatures; look for this card to become a tournament staple, with *Reparations* replacing it in Blue/White decks. Supplementing the low creature control is *Withering Boon*, which can stop a creature from being a threat in the first place. You'll find the Boon is a little severe in cost, and not as good as other sideboard cards (eg, *Terror* if you fear big creatures, and the usual hosers for "Protection from Black" creatures), but it still is a fun surprise for an OP who isn't used to the new counterspells. The *Ebony Charm* is a hoot--all three uses it offers can be gamewinners, though note how "remove from graveyard" power gives you an extra way to stop *Ivory Gargoyles*, or stop, at least once, a threat from a graveyard rummaging OP. The Pump Knights like *Order of Ebon Hand* leave type II come January, so give yourself an edge in experience by playing without them now (at least when not in a tournament!). Nothing matches *Hypnotic Spectres*--guaranteed to get creature-killing cards out of OPs hand; *Insidious Bookworms* accomplish the same, so feel free to "tap out" to motivate OP to nail the Worms. Once your OP looks like he can't stop your creatures, whip out those Mirage creatures and enchantments, and compare *Phyrexian Boon* to *Grave Servitude*--Mirage is the winner in this contest. *Purraj of Urbog* is a bit weak for her casting cost--I don't think she belongs in any but a mono-Black deck, but maybe you'll disagree. You'll find the other Mirage creatures forgettable except for the *Zombie Mob*, who can be brutal, but is just a touch unreliable. For the non-permanents, you'll love *Choking Sands*--land destruction is mandatory even in "fun" decks nowadays, and this beauty is a great way to rid yourself of *Mishra's Outposts*, or anything besides swamps. You'll also find *Bone Harvest* to be useful, since, once you have the mana, this card both guarantees a steady stream of creatures AND replaces itself--far superior to *Alliances' Reinforcements*. *Painful Memories* is surprisingly effective, allowing you to stop the game for a turn while your opponent repeats his draw; when using creatures to win, it is imperative to have a SLOW game, and that's what *Painful Memories* helps to give you. Finally, there's *Stupor*--you'll note the look of anguish on OPs face when you cast this is nothing like it is for *Hymn*. All the "slap OP silly if he makes you discard this" cards, like *Guerrilla Tactics* and *Sand Golem*, may cause *Stupor* players to look stupid, at least once in a while, but see if you can get some enjoyment out of *Stupor* before EVERYONE has 4 *Sand Golems*..

Enjoy!

Questions ...

I read in Inquest that if you cast Lord of Tresserhorn and you don't have two creatures to sacrifice, you get to keep the Lord anyway. Is this right?

InQuest was sorta right on this one. Yep, you can cast the Lord without having creatures to sacrifice, but, as soon as he comes into play, you have to pay all those effects, and hey, the Lord is a creature! So, you cast the Lord, and then bury him in an attempt to pay the cost. Or, don't pay the cost, and bury him. Either way, life will be lost and OP will draw a few cards. Ridiculously overpriced, isn't he? An OP with brain cells will let you have two creatures, and then nuke one via a fast effect (eg, Swords to Plowshares) in response to you casting Lord, causing you considerable woe.

Got Questions? Reply to this e-mail address, and we'll see what we can do.

Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes on Sealed Deck (excerpted from Advanced Magic, by Rick Moscatello, Appendix III)

It is an unfortunate aspect of Magic that the player who spends the most money on it has a better chance of winning (well, unfortunate for the players, but a honking good time for WOTC stockholders!). Some elitists may argue that anybody could get any card if he or she just works hard enough at trading, but the guy with the fat wallet can spend that trading time learning how to play the game better, so this argument is fundamentally invalid--no way too much cash can be a penalty in Magic.

In any event, the current Type II scene is something of an aberration from what Richard Garfield originally intended with the game. Magic was not designed for decks containing 30 or more "rare" cards, or endless multiples of the same card, or, in short, the level of degeneracy that is exhibited in the average (even weak) Type II tournament deck. Garfield originally thought that a player who somehow put together a deck comprised of awesome cards would have a greater chance of losing those cards to ante. The reality of the ante as an equalizer vaporized along with the guts of a typical moxeteer, who just couldn't bear to risk losing his most prized possessions any more than he could bear to play a "fair" game with an 8 year old by removing such cards.

Garfield (and WOTC) hoped that sealed deck tournaments would allow Magic to return to its roots, shallow though they may be (the game is hardly 3 years old, after all). The original idea was that players would all start with the same amount of cards, be given some time to trade and organize a deck, and then the tournament would begin. Again, the frailty of the human spirit revealed itself as, before the tournament, some players would form cartels, whereby one player would receive the best cards among all in a group (or each player would take cards from a common pool), and thereby get a nice advantage over all the "suckers" who weren't part of a cartel. Thus, the trading aspect of sealed deck was removed.

Which brings us to the current most common sealed deck rules, namely, each player gets (typically) a starter deck and two boosters, and has to make the best deck he can out of it. Additional changes to the tournament rules include no restricted/banned cards (since such cards are unlikely to appear in degenerate amounts), ante is enforced, deck minimum is reduced to 40, and no sideboard restrictions at all (whatever cards are not in your deck are part of your sideboard).

Of course, decks constructed from such a limited pool generally lack subtlety (understatement). The following tips should be kept in mind when building a deck under sealed conditions:

1) Multicard removal is awesome. When you've sorted your cards by color, look at the cards which are capable of removing multiples of an opponent's cards. Prodigal Sorcerer, Brothers of Fire, Grapeshot Catapult, Pyrokinesis, Splintering Wind, and Balduvian Dead are all examples of cards which are strong in a sealed deck environment, but less so elsewhere. Note how these cards can remove multiple CREATURES; removing multiple artifacts and enchantments is generally unnecessary, as it is difficult to put together a sealed deck with great multiples of such cards. It is cards with the ability to remove multiple creatures that determine what colors you will use in a deck.

2) Creatures rule. Sort out all your cards by color, and rank them by how many creatures you have in each color; almost every artifact creature is a good idea. Creatures which fly are very important--such creatures are difficult to block, and good blockers themselves. Regeneration is nearly as important, as creature removal is scarce in most sealed

decks, and the slower games one sees in such tournaments allows one to keep the spare mana around for regeneration. Landwalkers are somewhat important--landwalkers are NOT sideboard cards at all in sealed deck, as many sealed decks contain 3 or more basic land types. Typically a sealed deck match comes down to who gets the unblockable creature out first, as it is difficult to include many creature removal cards. Failing this, the player who can simply draw more creatures and put them in play will tend to win.

3) Creature removal is critical. Red is almost absolutely necessary in a strong sealed deck. A good deck needs to be able to remove a creature with some reliability, and most such cards are in Red. A deck that has no creature control cards will likely lose to any landwalker or 4/4 flier put out by an opponent--with no way to block, death is inevitable. Artifact and enchantment removal should be used sparingly (if at all)--there's little reason to suppose an opponent will be using these in a devastating fashion, and certainly not as degenerately in "constructed deck" settings, where a Zuran Orb and multiple Icys/Winter Orbs/Necropotences/etc are typical.

4) Land Removal is important. Multicolor decks are very vulnerable to land destruction, and the ability to destroy a particular land of an opponent can be crucial (especially if he has lands that MUST be dealt with quickly, like Kjeldoran Outpost). Many a sealed deck match is determined by a player not getting the appropriate mana colors, so any card that can help you do this to your opponent is worthwhile, although not at the sacrifice of creature removal.

5) Don't exceed three colors if you can help it at all. Two would be nice, but the smaller deck size makes three colors a more viable possibility--with less cards in the deck, it is a little bit harder for the mana you need to "hide" in the bottom of the deck, if you will. Naturally, try to use Barbed Sextant-type artifacts and the like to make it just a bit easier to get the mana in the color you need. Just as naturally, you should avoid doublemana spells if you can help it, and especially avoid using two different color of doublemana spells; this isn't to say that if you have a Serra Angel and a Brothers of Fire you shouldn't consider using them both, just that you shouldn't expect to get either out, quickly, every time you get one in your hand (and, you should also avoid cumulative upkeep cards--they are barely useful in a degenerate deck, if at all).

6) When you finally make your deck, consider setting up an additional COLOR for your sideboard. For instance, if you are using Black, and you suspect your opponent will play a Black-hoser of some sort, this preparation will make it easy for you to remove the 14 (say) Black-related cards in your deck and substitute in 14 Green cards between hands. By very significantly changing the structure of your deck, you'll often gain a surprise advantage over an opponent that is greater than what you'd get by using your first (and strongest) choice of color, in addition to nullifying any color-hosing your opponent had in mind.

Got a Tidbit of Wisdom? Let us know!

Trade/Combat Zone and Marketplace

Got a fistful of Lion's Eye Diamonds, and you wanna trade them for a Sol Grail or two? Let us know about it, and be sure to include a VERIFIABLE address and phone number, and we'll post it here. Just looking for someone to crush with your brand new Griffin deck? Ok, you can guess what to do. Books Electric makes NO guarantee of the legitimacy of any trade offers, although we'll weed out the scammers when we find them.

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Feedback

Ok, this is just a first issue, and if there's something missing, or its too long, or you have something to say about it, hit that ol' reply button (or whatever your software demands) and have your say already.

Until next time!

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