
The Scroll

The Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

Issue 20

(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 Enchantment Killers by David "Hillbilly" Norman

(In "hick" accent:) Way back when I was knee-high to a grasshopper, there weren't much you could do to stop enchantments. You had yer Disenchant, you had yer Tranquility, and you had yer Nev Disk. Blue folk had them there counterspells, but them didn't do much 'gainst Land Taxis and other quickie stuff.

Those days are gone. Let's take a little peekie poo at what else has cropped up in the back forty:

Black mages hain't had much luck killin' enchancements; Dystopia is an often overlooked card, and Gloom--even tho' it don't reckon to kill nothin'--is the standard. The biggie artifact for killin' is Nev, Never, Nevee, oh, the whatchamacallit Disk thingie. Ya sees it alot in Black decks 'cause they ain't got nothin' else.

Blue has Feedback and Power Leek, and them boys be feeble. Just stock up on counters, with Boomerangies ifn's you really worried, and y'all do alright.

Green be the color of choice for people not wantin' to use White. Creepin Mold (just like between mah toes!) is mite useful; Tranquil Domain and Serene Heart are selective, but each can miss the enchantment you wanna get, so they's not real popular 'round these parts. Weatherlight's got this new thing, Tranquil Grove, which will kill all other enchantments

but isself; I reckon this'n will be poplar as all get-out. Don't forget City of Solitude can clam up some enchantments for half a turn--and this might be all ya need.

Red cain't do nuthin' 'bout enchantments. Anarchy is about it, and that only works 'gainst White. If you goin' mono Red, you need them Disks I told you about earlier, else you liable to be, er, altered (like mah pet pig), by the first Cop: Red you see.

White is the holy mother of enchantment-bashin'. Heck, I bet white mages get together, wear sheets, and go hunt down enchantments to lynch in their spare time. Arenson's Aura never caught on, despite being pretty useful in the right situation. The new boys around here are Aura of Silence (whoooooeeeee! This boy replaces Disenchant in a heartbeat, I tell you!) and Serenity; just keep in mind Serenity buries isself, so don't get too attached to it--despite anything that that smooth-talking city-slicker Rick mighta said last issue.

Cards to Watch for ... Aether Flash

HOLY CRAP. Whatta card! Will Red's domination of tournaments never end? This doublemana enchantment, with a mere 4 casting cost, is mighty, mighty, mighty. Go look at the last creature deck to win a tournament. How many of those creatures had toughness 2 or less? Aether Flash puts a stop to the game even worse than Cop: Red, since the Flash will crush ANYTHING with toughness two or less (that's a good number of creatures, including untouchables) that isn't Protected from Red or regeneratable. If you are using a Red deck, just put this puppy in, and watch as you cruise to an easy victory every time you cast it and OP doesn't take it out.

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The Question of the Fortnight.... Can creatures Band with Deadly Insects?

Short questions merit short answers: yep. Deadlies are only immune to targeting from spells and effects; Banding is neither. Similarly, after an enchantment is in play, any non-targeted effect it generates (eg, Afiya's Grove) can be applied to the Deadlies. Heck, you can cast a Binding Grasp on something, and then use Crown of Command to move the Grasp to the Deadlies--a hard but amusing way to discombobulate your OP.

Deck of the Fortnight....The Bane of Type II Returns!

At the end of the first Ice Age (i.e., the first time Ice Age left Type II), Winter Orb/Icy decks were predominant winners. When another Ice Age's return 7/1, expect to see many decks focusing on this devastating concept; our example has an unusually heavy mix of Weatherlight cards thrown in.

Lands: 4 Adarkar Wastes, 9 Islands, 6 Plains, 1 Thawing Glaciers, 1 Undiscovered Paradise.

Creatures: None

Enchantments: 2 Pendrell Mists

Artifacts: 1 Chimeric Sphere, 1 Feldon's Cane, 4 Icy Manipulators, 4 Mind Stones, 1 Telim Tor's Darts, 3 Winter Orbs.

Non-Permanents: 4 Arcane Denials, 1 Counterspell, 3 Disenchants, 2 Divine Offerings, 1 Enlightened Tutor, 3 Forces of Will, 1 Impulse, 1 Kismet, 3 Mana Chains, 1 Mystical Tutor, 1 Swords to Plowshares, 1 Wand of Denial, 1 Wrath of God.

The basic idea of an Icy/Orb deck is simple: deny OP mana. There are two "meta-strategies" in Magic: deny mana and deny cards. Both are awesome, and when assisted by artifacts (The Rack, Black Vice) and lands (Strip Mine), become dominant in tournament formats. The two critical artifacts (Icy and Orb) can be put in most decks to increase their power dramatically. This issue's deck has the classic "control" colors, White and Blue, but viable Red/Black Icy/Orb decks exist as well (just as 4 Strip Mines and a Black Vice could win many a game, in many a deck, in days past). Just to remind people that the concept is still possible, this deck is creatureless--this usually generates a significant card advantage, which is important in counterspell decks, and in decks where many of the cards (Icy, Orb, Kismet) don't directly remove OP's cards.

Let's talk about the new cards for the deck, starting with Undiscovered Paradise. This card combines well with Winter Orb, since you'll neglect to untap the Paradise before putting it back into your hand--guaranteeing you 2 mana a turn even when you don't have an Icy in play. The Thawing Glaciers does poorly in this deck, but, as it is the only means to survive an initial mana stall, we keep one in for strictly defensive purposes.

Pendrell Mists is a great way to thin out creatures or slow down OP when he gets the drop on you.. Once you have 2 in play, and an Orb, no creatures can survive upkeep. At 4 mana, it is too expensive for the effect (see Aether Flash), but, experiment for yourself and you be the judge.

Chimeric Sphere is one of the two ways this deck has of dealing damage (so, if OP is playing Jester's Cap, save your counters for it!), and it isn't much worse than Mishra's Factory. You'll be surprised how well it works--although this deck probably would do better with Miser's Cage.

Feldon's Cane isn't new, but you need some insurance against running out of cards, especially when your damaging cards come late.

Mind Stones will replace Felwar Stones--they provide as much defense against Armageddon, and additional defense against Jokulhaups. Always include a bit of artifact mana in every deck, especially if you think you'll face a Winter Orb deck.

Telim Tor's Darts is the other damaging card in the deck. Don't play it until you are ready to win (that's goes for the Sphere as well, which is why there aren't duplicates of them in the deck--they are almost worthless on defense).

There's only one new card in the non-Permanents: Mana Chains. This deck doesn't need very long to get into "lock" position, and Mana Chains is a great way to slow down a creature assault, especially with all the Protection from White creatures in the tournament scene nowadays. I know the card doesn't look good, just try it out already. One trick some people miss is using the Mystical Tutor to get an Enlightened Tutor--that's alot of cards to throw away, but getting the Icy/Orb combo is worth it every time.

Have fun putting together the sideboard!

Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes on Weatherlight Artifacts and Lands

I'll just stick to the cards that aren't jokes. To save space, I'm not going into detail what the cards do; go get a spoiler list if you aren't familiar with these cards yet.

Bosium Strip is the first card (alphabetically) in the set, and it's something of a doozie; just remember, you need 5 mana to really be able to get use out of it, but, when you can, you get a hefty, hefty, card advantage over OP, at least, as long as you use alot of the so-called "reactive" (i.e., defensive) cards. This could be a real menace in Type 1.5 (and maybe even Classic/Restricted)--double the power of all your Bolts, double your STPs? Owowowow. There's a critical difference between 4 and 5 (or more) mana, so use this card only in deck with lots of very cheap instants and lots of mana. Anyplace else just won't work well.

Bubble Matrix is an interesting card--could it make Prodigal Sorcerer decks really powerful? Definitely worth a bit of experimentation.

Chimeric Sphere has all sorts of potential--Jade Statues and Mishras were really powerful in their day, and I'm not convinced this watered down guy is any less useful in the current format.

Dingus Staff is a fine collectible, but won't be very playable--it's tough to build a deck that can really exploit its usefulness.

Jabari's Banner is far more powerful than it looks. It is almost a reusable Ashnod's Transmogrator, and that doesn't suck a bit. Try it in a group game to really see its power. Don't forget, double flanking means double effect against non-flankers!

Mana Web is a narrow use artifact, especially when you figure out and keep in mind that it won't inflict mana burn on a player. It's a good way to sorta hurt a counterspell player, an interesting supplement to a Winter Orb deck, combines with a few obscure cards (psychic venom), and hurts an OP playing Gemstone Mines and Cities of Brass. Not bad, but not great either.

Mind Stone will be my personal favorite (I have an extensive collection of Felwar Stones), but I doubt others will see it that way. The idea here is, use these guys to put your deck ABOVE 40% mana, then "burn" through them when you don't need mana anymore.

Null Rod, and others of its ilk, aren't popular for a reason; you can only include such a card when you know that OP will be vulnerable to it. That puts it in the sideboard; there are already too many cards that can go into a good sideboard, and narrow, narrow, cards just don't make the cut.

The Phyrexian Furnace is the right kind of narrow card, since you can sacrifice it to draw another card (so if its useless against OP's deck, you can "burn" through it fast enough that it won't slow you down when you draw it). We need more good, narrow cards like this.

The Thran Forge is interesting--imagine putting it in a deck with 4 Divine Offerings, and a bunch of other artifact-killers. Good enough for tournaments? Probably not, but I bet it will be a heck of alot of fun when it works.

The Thran Tome is an interesting, interesting, card. I think the activation cost is just a bit too high to make it reliable, but you will be drawing land up the wazoo with it, so maybe if you put it in a deck where everything else costs mebbe 2 mana, it will be powerful enough.

A kinder, gentler Relic Barrier has returned with a new name, Touchstone. A good counter for Winter Orb decks, and will be useful for the next few weeks as people experiment with the new batch of artifact creatures.

Well of Knowledge is a nice card, but, much like Howling Mine, you could easily be giving OP card superiority when you don't want to. As such, it pretty much belongs in decks where you don't mind OP getting extra cards (Stasis), or you can control the mana, somehow (cough).

A good land will be in every deck, so let's look at them all.

Gemstone Mine is interesting, and, properly exploited (Political Trickery or Sheltered Valley fr instance) it might be useful.

Lotus Vale goes well with Gemstone Mine, doesn't it? Unfortunately, the Vale is a risky card--more than 7 out of 8 times (except for screwy decks, like the "5-color monogreen" decks people are experimenting with), you won't need the Vale's ability, so I don't have much faith in this card. Of course, it might be good if Orb decks do return to complete domination. Probably not.

Scorched Ruins, on the other hand, is possibly good--you get a mana boost immediately out of it. Look, this one card can activate Jayemdae Tome every turn. Eventual ouch for OP.

Winding Canyons is much like Thran Tome--a very special deck can use it, but you are effectively adding 3 mana to the casting cost of any creature cast this way--selectively hitting yourself with Gloom can be a bad idea. This card will only help you bring out weenies, and only at that stage in the game where weenies aren't so good. Yuck, IMO.

Trade and Tale Zone..... Well, luckily the Louisiana State Championships was sealed deck--one of my strongest formats. Unfortunately, I drew crap cards. Luckily, all my opponents were a bit weak on creature control (cept for one guy who had Heart of Bogardan), so I finished undefeated--spending the last 4 rounds as the top player! Unfortunately, the top 8 players, after 7 rounds, have to start over with a whole new set of cards. Luckily, I got an awesome draw, a Hammer of Bogardan, a Wand of Denial, and a Kaervek's Torch among the better things. Unfortunately, I got mana screwed on the third hand of the first match, falling to a guy with 3 mass creature removal cards at his disposal. This makes the 4th consecutive tournament where I've been taken out in the third hand due to a mana screw. As long as 1/3 of the games are decided purely by mana draws, Magic cannot become a sport to take seriously (yeah, this is just temporary bitterness--I won 5 hands due to OP mana screws earlier in the day. Paybacks are just hell, is all; I did make a game-costing mistake in the second game, but it wouldn't have been so bad if OP didn't have a Bone Harvest in his hand). I'll show you guys the "unbeatable" deck I won with--people were surprised that a deck with no direct damage, and no Black whatsoever, could do so well (no Dragon Mask either, although the Darts won me a game).

Miller6785@aol.com has quite a bunch of semi-old cards for sale. E-mail him for a price list.

Feedback (by Rick instead of Dave this issue).

A respectable majority (60%) said that Dark Ritual is a necessary, gamewinning card. That looks bad for me, but in the latest Sideboard I saw major tournament winning decks with Drain Life but no Dark Ritual in them, so this subject shall remain open.

We're often written by people asking for advice. As often as not, its from people wanting tips on how to build a Type I deck, without using Moxes and the like. I hate giving advice for this format--you're a sucker if you're not using the broken cards, since that is what Type I is all about (fleecing suckers who pay to play at a disadvantage? Well, I guess not, but it is about playing with all the super powerful cards.) If you don't have the OOPs, don't play in the format. Anyway, this guy shows me his deck; the highlights: Winter Orbs, Balance, Ernham's, Armageddon, 4 Black Vices. He wants my advice. I tell him to add 4 Strip Mines and Zuran Orb (among other things).

He pretty much says I'm clueless. He says his deck can't profit from these cards. I readily admit Type I is my weakest (and, possibly not coincidentally least favorite) format, but am I really out of touch here? Does anybody else think Strip Mines and Zuran Orb don't belong in decks that have Balance, Armageddons, and Black Vices? By all means, let me know, my grasp of Magic could only be improved by achieving an understanding of how these cards don't fit in this deck (heck, I'd like to see a deck that can legitimately not use these cards under any circumstance!).

(Upon reflection, a deck that's guaranteed to get Land Equilibrium and appropriate mana on the draw would never need Strip Mine or Zuran Orb. Any others?)

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Until next time!

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