

The Scroll

A Bi-Weekly Magic Newsletter

Issue 7

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Enough bureaucratic stuff, get to the contents already!

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Spotlight on Dragons (by David Norman)

Dragons, Dragons, everywhere, and no end to them in sight.
Let's see which is the best...

Artifacts have the Teeka's Dragon, and darned if I know why its an artifact. Better than the Colossus of Sardia, but not much else--for the same cost, the Crimson Hellkite could probably snuff it. If you're going to pay 9 mana for a creature, you should go for total domination. As one of the few dragons not likely to be killed by Femeref Archers, it is worth something, but not much. Black has the Catacomb Dragon, and the thing may as well say "can't be blocked by non-walls". Any dragon can stop it, of course, so even if Dragons become as popular as they might, this one won't make many decks--Black has too many other cards to use. Blue has the Mist Dragon, and, as is typical for Blue, its a real beast if there's enough mana around. It is almost worth just waiting until you have 11 mana (the point where you can summon it and use its power if needed), since this guarantees you to have a great blocker (with that instant phasing out) that will be impossible to be rid of. Just watch out for trampers. Green has the Canopy Dragon, and while it can come out

of the trees, the real issue is it has a power/toughness of 4/4, and Green already has other comparable creatures (Nettletooth Djinn, Jungle Wurm--and that's just in Mirage!) at less mana, Armor of Thorns can make a big creature long enough for Green to kill something, and Femeref Archers give Green the ability to stop big fliers already, with Tropical Storm as a backup. Don't expect to see the Canopy Dragon in winning decks. Red has two dragons, and both are viable. The Volcanic Dragon gives Red a chance of getting some use out of his creature right away, although, in the Mirage-only environment, this doesn't seem to be as great a concern as in general type II (which has too much cheap creature removal). Of course, the Volcanic Geyser (when cast with 6 mana, the cost of the Dragon) can deal 4 damage anywhere, and this is often a better deal than the reusable (if it lives) Dragon. The Crimson Hellkite is by far the most effective dragon, and this seems as good as time as any to talk about these mana costs. Suppose your deck has 24 (of 60) lands in it. Then you can, on long-term average, expect to cast the Hellkite on turn 14 or so--this uses up about 40% of your deck, so you probably shouldn't put more than 2 Hellkites in your deck under any circumstances (since more than this and you run a considerable risk of multiple Hellkites in your hand with insufficient mana around). If you really want a 4 Hellkite deck, you should go about 55% mana--probably too much for a generally successful deck. If you go to 50% mana, you can expect to have 9 mana around turn 11. If OP is using any sort of land destruction, expect your wait to be longer. Don't even bother if you play with a 33% mana deck--it will be turn 19 until you can expect have enough mana (that's 27 cards, nearly half your deck!) to summon a Hellkite. The whole point of all this is, the Hellkite is great, but you should put it in your deck with the full realization that most games will end LONG before you even get a chance to summon him. White follows up with the Pearl Dragon, a nifty beast that, like the Mist, can be a problem if White has mana. The Pearl Dragon is quite possibly the best (of the 6-mana dragons, and clearly better than Teeka's), since it can beat any other 4/4 dragon in either offense or defense, an ability that is well worth having.

No Dragon discussion would be complete without mention of Zirilan of the Claw and Rashida Scalebane. Most people consider these cards "mirror images" of each other, and value them the same. Rashida is worth less--she's only effective if OP uses dragons, whereas Zirilan only works if he is in a dragon deck (and which of those is easier for you to control?). Don't underestimate Zirilan's "instantly summoned dragon" power. If he lives 3 turns, that could easily mean 3 Hellkites and or Volcanics (or, god forbid, Dragon Whelps) coming at you out of nowhere, and this is a lot of damage (or surprise blocking) for a measly 3 mana. If OP plays Zirilan, take him out fast if you don't have a surplus of flying regenerating blockers. There aren't a lot of creatures that can kill OP if they live three turns--and Zirilan may be the cheapest of those very few.

Card to Watch for ... Subterranean Spirit

Wow, 5 mana is a lot for a creature, and a 3/3 at that. Let's

talk about its two abilities.

Protection from Red is a great ability, especially in a Mirage-only environment, where creatures with "tap" abilities practically have protection from White (assuming Afterlife doesn't become popular). Only Black has two reliable cards to be rid of it (Banishing and Drain Life). Green has direct damage now, thanks to the Unyaro Beesting, but it deals 2 points, and the Spirit has 3 toughness. This makes the Spirit an ideal card for playing against Red/Green decks. The second power is the devastator. Little earthquakes everywhere! My goodness, what a way to snuff elves, "Tims", pump-knights, and almost any other 1-toughness tournament favorite. And no mana cost, either, which means he can be used like this every turn regardless of whatever else you do.

The two powers together are the surprise. How many "Protection" creatures have a "tap" ability? This has always been the drawback of Protection. If you hold the creature back as a blocker (thereby making the Protection worth something), you get no other use out of it, and if you use it as an attacker, OP won't block (even if he could, sometimes), which leaves you open to his attackers. But, the Spirit can just sit back and protect you from Talruum Minotaurs (even red dragons if you give it flying somehow) and weenies, and, during OP's discard phase, you get the option of clearing out all the weenies and softening up the 4/4's for an Incinerate. Ouch. At 5 mana, it is still something of a risk to put a creature like this in your deck, but, there are more than a few situations where this guy can lock down a game for you. The biggest example is, of course, against a Red/Green deck, but even a White weenie deck has much to fear from this.

A Question....Do the Mirage "Fetch" Lands Suck?

Most people hate the Mirage equivalent of dual lands with a passion--"Come into play tapped" is something of a slowdown. "Suck" is a strong word; I wouldn't use them if I had the option of using IA lands, and I most certainly wouldn't use them over Thawing Glaciers, but I most certainly wouldn't laugh at an OP who played with them. I would use them over Rampant Growth, and I most definitely would use them if my deck had doublemana spells of more than one color.

There are two values to them. First, they let you pick out the kind of land you need, from a short list of two lands. If you play a deck that often requires multiple mana colors available in the early game, this can be critical. The second value is the more important one, as it allows you to "thin out" your deck. If you play a deck that doesn't need alot of mana, but needs it to be of the right type (say, a deck with cheap casting cost cards, but uses Granger Guildmage and the like), this can be important. My main complaint with the "Sac lands" is their design flaw. To best use them, you should activate them in the upkeep phase right after you untap them--this reduces the chance of you getting a land in the draw--an event which, typically, is undesirable (there are indeed occasions where you'd use the sac after the draw). This forces OP to just stare at you while you reshuffle your deck--he's not going to do anything at this stage. Most people are comfortable with the discard phase being when silly things like this would take place, and making the upkeep phase

another "silly effects" phase is another small drag on a game that can only bear a few more small drags. Bottom line: They don't suck. They are far superior to nothing, and better than many other non-basic lands.

Deck of the Fortnight... A Cheapo Mirage Deck (by Lee Maurici)

Lands: 9 Mountains, 9 Forests, 2 Plains (\$2.00)

Creatures: 2 Burning Shield Aksari (\$1.50), 4 Femeref Archers (\$2.00), 1 Foratog (\$.75), 4 Giant Mantises (\$.60), 4 Granger Guildmages (\$.60), 2 Jungle Wurms (\$.30), 4 Jolrael's Centaur (\$.60), 4 Mtenda Lions (\$.60), 4 Quirion Elves (\$.60)

Enchantments:

4 Armor of Thorns (\$.60)

Artifacts:

2 Mana Prisms (\$1.50), 2 Phyrexian Vaults (\$2.00)

Non-Permanents:

3 Builder's Banes (\$.45), 4 Incinerates (\$.60), 3 Kaervek's Torch (\$.45), 3 Rampant Growth (\$.45), 2 Seedling Charms (\$.30), 2 Tranquil Domains (\$.30), 2 Tropical Storms (\$1.50), 3 Unyaro Bee Stings (\$3.00), 1 Vitalizing Cascade (\$.75)

(Look below for some comments on Sideboard construction)

Some people have commented that decks in The Scroll are "too expensive", even though they all fit the definition of "type II legal" (at least, at the time they were made!). While usually we try to have decks that, when constructed and played, will allow you to make an important realization about how Magic works, today we'll break from that and go with a deck with a market value of around \$22. That's market value as defined by InQuest magazine--realistically, you could construct this deck for less than a \$15 investment in cards (Gods, I remember when I could get an "expensive" game for my Atari 400 for about that). We're sticking with all-Mirage, so the less financially challenged can still use this deck to play with cards that otherwise might not make consideration. The traditional colors for cheapo decks are Red and Green. Both big creatures and damage come cheaply to these colors (compare the price of Nightmare to Crash of Rhinos, say). There's a splash of White in there, on the off chance a Granger Guildmage will last long enough to give a creature first strike. The "fetch lands" are obvious choices here, but we're trying to keep the cost down. There's no rare cards, but there's plenty here that can win games. At first glance, the mana percentage seems a little light, and it is. With any luck, however, an elf or Rampant Growth will allow this deck to get up to the 5 mana it needs to be able to cast everything it has. Most everything can be cast at 3 or less, so this isn't a deck that stalls all that much, even when OP uses land destruction.

The defense is pretty heavy for a creature heavy deck. Builder's Banes and Tranquil Domains stop much of what OP might try to pull, and Tropical Storms help to get rid of fliers that just hang around and block or the very dangerous Suq Firewalkers. The Femeref Archers and Mantises give even more protection against the all-flier decks that are common in a tournament setting (and 2/4 is a great set of stats, especially in a Mirage environment), and share the multi-use of all the direct damage spells, since they make fine attackers even when OP has no creatures in play. The Armor of Thorns is likewise multifaceted--it allows one of your creatures to survive a Bolt (at least, when you cast it in response) and can even let a Mantis kill a dragon and survive. I don't recommend not using it as an instant, but if you do, make sure you use it AFTER you've successfully attacked OP with a creature when he has mana available--almost nobody deliberately takes damage, so if he "lets" you hit him when he has mana, then he probably doesn't have any "creature control" spells, making it an ideal time to put an enchantment on your creature. Unfortunately, you'll have to do it next turn, which gives him a chance to draw a card, but, hey, I didn't say it was a good idea, but now you have some rule to go by for when to play it as an enchantment. Of course, if you're using the Armor as an enchantment, that means you're on the offense, and I have to admit there's nothing like a 4/6 Mantis for attacking someone. You've got lots of little creatures, and don't be afraid to attack with them, even when you might lose one--OP might not block if he knows you've got Armor of Thorns, and once you've worn him down, you just need to draw some direct damage to finish him off. The Granger Guildmage is the "new" creature around, and you'll find his most useful ability is the one that deals damage. Once you get a mage and white mana in play, though, OP will have to worry about your creatures (and some are pretty big) becoming "first strike"--although a Seedling Charm regeneration will make him think twice about "exchanging" creatures (i.e., losing one of his creatures by blocking and killing one of yours), even if they don't have first strike. Rampant Growth lets you rip out a plains that might otherwise be hard to find, and Mana Prisms serve as both giving you the mana you might need, and, hopefully, giving OP something to nail besides your Vaults. Another as yet overlooked card is Vitalizing Cascade. Ok, it isn't awesome, but a huge burst of life can let you survive long enough to get a big direct damage card (yeah, another direct damage card might be better, but-- finally!--there is a healing card that heals more than what a damaging card damages), or allow you to get a few more uses out of the Guildmages.

Tidbits of Wisdom ... Some Notes on Sideboards (excerpted from Advanced Magic, by Rick Moscatello, Chapter 7)

Many of the cards in your sideboard should be for when you are up against the worst possible situation you can get. As you are trying to build a deck that wins more than 50% of its games, ideally (when you have a nigh unbeatable deck) this means you need to have sideboard cards that will allow you to defeat a deck very similar to your own. This latter use of the sideboard is one most

overlooked by players, but it is important--if you do build a deck so superior that it wins consistently, you must expect it to be copied, and your sideboard will be your best hope of defeating any imitator you come across. There are four schools of thought on sideboard building:

Color hosers: A color-hosing player builds his sideboard based on cards that obliterate a certain color or land. For example, Karma is so devastating that many White players put it in their sideboard, even if they already have 8 Protection from Black creatures in their deck. It is generally not a good idea (and somewhat difficult) to build a deck that is particularly vulnerable/strong against a certain color, any more than it is a good idea to build a deck that assumes an opponent doesn't play that color. While color hosing will allow a deck to trash a certain color, the deck, even after sideboarding, may still be vulnerable to certain strategies that need not rely on a particular color to win. Counterspell decks are invariably Blue so a colorhoser can do fine here, but Weenie decks could conceivably be Green, White or Black, making Anarchy (a card which buries all white permanents) an unreliable choice to stop this strategy. This brings up the next sideboard building technique:

Strategy hosers: A strategy-hosing player choose sideboard cards that will interfere with an opponent's strategies. As a strategy, not a color, is what will beat you, this is a more reliable choice; Pyroclasm (dealing 2 damage to all creatures), for instance, is effective against Weenies regardless of their color. To continue this example, a player that was only concerned with Protection From Red Weenies (since he has several Pyroclasms in his main deck) would seek some some alternate damage source (eg, Time Bomb) to rid himself of this one weakness in his deck. While color hosing and strategy hosing may sometimes be indistinguishable (eg, it is difficult to say if a Hydroblast prevents a Red spell more than it prevents the Direct Damage strategy), the latter is what a player should really focus on when building a sideboard.

Offensive/Transforming sideboard: 15 cards is nearly half of the non-mana in a 60 card deck. Some players have twisted the notion of using a sideboard for defense into using it to completely change the deck strategy. A nice example of this occurred with Millstone (or Counterspell decks in general) decks before Black Vise was restricted; such decks suffered horribly to this artifact, and there was very little in the list of available cards that could stop it. By comprising a sideboard of Black Visers, Strip Mines, and other supporting cards, the Millstone deck, between hands, could turn into a second-rate Land Destruction deck. It was still very viable, as it gained a considerable amount of surprise against an opponent--who often took out most of his defensive cards, thinking that he would not be attacked by an ultra-defensive Millstone deck. While this is fairly radical, it is more common for a player to build an offensive sideboard which allows his deck to become creatureless between hands; the reverse of this is even more threatening, as an opponent may remove his creature-removers just as a deck is loading up with creatures. If this notion of a transforming sideboard becomes more popular, color hosing may become the wiser

of the traditional methods of sideboard building, as it is far easier to change a strategy with 15 cards than it is to change the mana the deck requires, making color hosers more reliable.

Deck Hosing: When you build your deck, you can often identify what strategy to which you will be most vulnerable. Or, you might know that many tournament players are going with a certain deck type (Necropotence being the prime example). By devoting almost your entire sideboard to stopping just this one deck type, you crush, at least in theory, the predominant strategy to which you are vulnerable. If you still can't win after sideboarding in 10+ cards, you need to either change your sideboard, or change your deck. Thus, the deck-hosing sideboard is usually found in decks that haven't been tuned properly--often in these cases the deck-hosing cards end up going into the "main" deck, with other cards (for one of the previous schools of thought) going into the sideboard.

Trade Zone and Marketplace

It never fails to amaze me when I find yet another 10 year old kid trying to, and too often succeeding, rip me off. He comes up to me wanting to trade. I whip through his folder, I see he's got more Moxie than the 1920s, with a fistful of the other OOP stuff as well. Getting to the back, I find a Charcoal Diamond. I offer to swap a Sky Diamond for it. No way. It seems he won't take less than a rare (do I have any Dopplegangers, he asks!). I give up. He wants my Helm, and I see he's got a Cerulean Wyvern. "Its a rare" he says. "Whatever" I reply, reaching for more stuff. "Yeah, Volcanic Geyser is rare too". I only have 1 Wyvern and 1 Geyser, so I take his word. At least Kukemsaa Pirates were rare. So, I trade my Helm for all three cards. I find out two seconds later what the rarities are. Not even an apology from the kid, who would neither say he was wrong or he was lying--which of course gives me my answer. Caveat Emptor, friends.

Cheers4145 is selling: 2x canopy dragon, 1x catacomb dragon, 1xbalduvian horde, 1x grinning totem 1x asmira, holy avenger, 1x kaysa, 1x Shivan dragon, and 1x ernham djinn

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LoxDude@aol.com seeks Serendib Effreeti from Arabian Nights.

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Feedback

I dispute your argument in your newsletter about there being "so much less direct damage" in the Mirage environment. If you're willing to go with more than just a mono-R deck, then you can assemble a deck with 24 DD spells (28 with Flares), not counting creature-only spells, Drain Life, Telim-Tor's Darts, or DD creatures. You have available: Incinerates, Hammers (they make great cheap damage spells even if you can't recycle them! Most people seem to forget that), Volcanic Geysers, Torches, Energy Bolts, and Bee Stings. With Quiron Elves and Mana Prisms, a 3-color deck of this nature can, I feel, be feasible. Or you could drop the Energy Bolts, go for black instead, and use Kaervak's Purges and/or Deleriums. . .

- The "Big T"

I stand corrected. After playing a dozen rounds of Arena, and scarcely getting a creature into play before it gets Incinerated, and getting nailed with a ten point Torch game after game, I have no choice but to agree that there's plenty of direct damage. I'm seeing about 90% of Mirage-only decks having Red, so I think it's a mistake to not either go with Red as well, or put in lots of Protection from Red creatures (check out next issue's deck). I don't recommend Deliriums or the Purge--the former doesn't kill the creature (mighty important, especially in the weenie intensive environment of high quality decks), and the latter isn't direct damage (albeit fun to use if you have lots of life--Hah!). Even in Mirage-only, keeping creatures alive in the face of a direct damage assault is a full-time endeavor.

Until next time!

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