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TAKING STANDARD TO ELEVEN

By Patrick Chapin

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By Pro Tour Champ Brian Kibler

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TAKING STANDARD TO ELEVEN

Amazing what a difference a single set can make! M11 is here and in a big way. The hype was pretty massive for this year's core set, but to the surprise of many, it has delivered. Every single major archetype has a new M11 card as a central element, with the exception of the deck everybody loves to hate: Jund. In fact, it is probably because of Jund gaining so little from M11, as well as each other strategy gaining big and the super-hateful Obstinate Baloth that Jund has not only lost its mojo, but may not even be tier 1. Still, if there is one thing we have learned from Faeries, it is to never count out the villain, no matter how much you may think you have his number.

Let's examine the current kings of Standard. While Jace, the Mind Sculptor and Bloodbraid Elf may be the best cards in the format, they have found a wide variety of homes and along with the Fauna Shaman, Primeval Titan and



By Patrick Chapin

Patrick Chapin, "The Innovator," is a three time Pro Tour Top 8 competitor, including a finals appearance in the 2007 Magic World Championships. Patrick is the author of Next Level Magic, and a member of Team RIW. Catch his column, Innovations, every Monday on StarCityGames.com Premium!



Wall of Omens, provide the defining pillars of the format.

Let's start at the top, with Jace, the Mind Sculptor and work our way around clockwise. The space where Jace, the Mind Sculptor really overlaps with Wall of Omens is most commonly represented by U/W Control. It should be noted that Jace, the Mind Sculptor is so powerful, that he is fairly universally adopted in almost every Blue deck, even those connecting Wall of Omens and Fauna Shaman, such as the various Next Level Mythic decks.



The archetypal U/W control deck of today is that of the archetypal control player, Guillaume Wafo-Tapa.

While U/W Tap-out gained favor for a while before

U/W Control

- 2 Sun Titan
- 4 Wall of Omens
- 2 Oblivion Ring
- 1 Cancel
- 2 Condemn
- 2 Deprive
- 2 Essence Scatter
- 2 Jace's Ingenuity
- 4 Mana Leak
- 2 Path to Exile
- 2 Elspeth, Knight-Errant
- 1 Gideon Jura
- 3 Jace Beleren
- 3 Jace, the Mind Sculptor
- 2 Day of Judgment
- 5 Island
- 4 Plains
- 4 Celestial Colonnade
- 4 Glacial Fortress
- 1 Scalding Tarn
- 4 Sejiri Refuge
- 4 Tectonic Edge

Sideboard

- 3 Kor Firewalker
- 1 Oblivion Ring
- 1 Cancel
- 3 Celestial Purge
- 1 Flashfreeze
- 2 Gather Specimens
- 1 Jace's Ingenuity
- 2 Negate
- 1 Day of Judgment

eventually being hybridized with U/W Control, Mana Leak led to a fairly universal return to the Classic U/W Control strategy of Pro Tour San Diego. The age-old combination of white re-

removal and blue counterspells is nothing new, and at this point relying on the incredible blue and white planeswalkers for most of your card advantage has become fairly standard procedure. Wafo-Tapa and company do unveil some sweet new technology in the form of Sun Titan as a finisher.

Sun Titan's vigilance does a passable job of making up for not having Baneslayer Angel's lifelink, but where Sun Titan really shines is that he is a card advantage engine, returning Tectonic Edge, Scalding Tarn, Wall of Omens, Oblivion Ring, and most importantly Jace Beleren. So many matches come down to Jace wars and Sun Titan will often destroy an opponent's Mind Sculptor on his way in by returning Jace Beleren. Then, next turn, he attacks and returns the Jace Beleren to the battlefield once again. Even if you aren't destroying a Mind Sculptor, returning a Beleren lets you draw a card immediately as well as still have a 'walker on the battlefield, making Sun Titan the biggest and baddest Mulldrifter around. A subtle additional benefit is that with a six toughness, Sun Titan lives through new hot cards like Combust and Destructive Force.

U/W Control was already a force to be reckoned with, and now it has gained advantage in just about every area. Sun Titan is an upgraded kill card, and Condemn is a great new tool for defending against aggressive decks like Mono-R, Jund, and those with Vengevine. Mana Leak is obviously a super-versatile counterspell. Even its card draw has improved, with Jace's Ingenuity replacing Mind Spring on account of how much better it works with counterspells. Its greatest strength is its natural advantage against ramp, combo, Red, and Jund. Its Achilles heel is its

inherent weakness to Fauna Shaman (and Vengevine) decks.

Wall of Omens and Fauna Shaman overlap in the various Bant decks that have become so hybridized that there is no longer much difference between Mythic, Next Level, and Conscription decks, often uniting into a single Bant deck such as Federico Ronchi's Italian National Championship winning list.

Next Level Mythic

- 2 Birds of Paradise
- 4 Fauna Shaman
- 4 Knight of the Reliquary
- 4 Noble Hierarch
- 1 Ranger of Eos
- 2 Sovereigns of Lost Alara
- 4 Vengevine
- 4 Wall of Omens
- 1 Oblivion Ring
- 2 Eldrazi Conscription
- 3 Path to Exile
- 2 Elspeth, Knight-Errant
- 2 Jace, the Mind Sculptor
- 4 Forest
- 2 Island
- 1 Plains
- 4 Celestial Colonnade
- 4 Misty Rainforest
- 2 Seaside Citadel
- 1 Sejiri Steppe
- 1 Stirring Wildwood
- 2 Sunpetal Grove
- 1 Tectonic Edge
- 1 Terramorphic Expanse
- 2 Verdant Catacombs

Sideboard

- 4 Lotus Cobra
- 2 Obstinate Baloth
- 1 Qasali Pridemage
- 2 Sovereigns of Lost Alara
- 3 Negate
- 1 Path to Exile
- 2 Jace Beleren

Fauna Shaman is the glue the holds all of the various Bant strategies into a single deck. Like Mythic's Knight of the Reliquary, Fauna Shaman demands an immediate removal spell or its start generating an incredible advantage every turn, which can be especially punishing for control decks that use lots of Counterspells. All it takes is sneaking a single Fauna Shaman down and the game can spiral out of control, most commonly as a result of the retrieval of Next Level Bant's Vengevines with Wall of Omens to help bring them back to life. Additionally Fauna

Shaman increases the ability for a Bant mage to drop the Sovereigns of Lost Alara + Eldrazi Conscription combo that spawned the recent Conscription decks.

Bant is quite good against U/W, but a little soft to Bloodbraid Elf decks, often suffering as a result of not being able to kill others' Fauna Shamans or Cunning Sparkmages reliably. While this list has no permission main, don't be fooled, some Bant players have taken to main-decking Deprive, Negate, Bant Charm, or Mana Leak.



As we continue around the wheel, we come to the overlap of Fauna Shaman and Bloodbraid Elf in an archetype I fully expect to gain widespread popularity, as Fauna Shaman provides an entirely new element to its strategy, while strengthening the existing core by getting more Bloodbraids, Vengevines, Sparkmages, and Stoneforge Mystics.

Naya

- 2 Birds of Paradise
- 4 Noble Hierarch
- 4 Fauna Shaman
- 2 Lotus Cobra
- 1 Stoneforge Mystic
- 3 Cunning Sparkmage
- 4 Knight of the Reliquary
- 4 Bloodbraid Elf
- 4 Vengevine
- 1 Obstinate Baloth
- 1 Baneslayer Angel
- 1 Sun Titan
- 1 Realm Razer
- 2 Ajani Vengeant
- 1 Basilisk Collar
- 5 Forest
- 2 Plains
- 2 Mountains
- 4 Arid Mesa
- 3 Misty Rainforest
- 1 Evolving Wild
- 2 Sejiri Steppe
- 2 Raging Ravine
- 1 Stirring Wildwood
- 2 Sunpetal Grove
- 1 Tectonic Edge

Sideboard

- 3 Dauntless Escort
- 3 Celestial Purge
- 3 Manabarbs
- 2 Obstinate Baloth
- 2 Qasali Pridemage
- 1 Cunning Sparkmage
- 1 Linvala, Keeper of Silence



This list is the latest in the evolution of Michael Flores, Tom Ross, and Gerry Thompson's work on the Naya Light-saber/Boss Naya/Vengevine Naya archetype that is sure to regain its position in the tier 1. While Naya has many of the strengths that Bant has, such as Fauna Shaman for Vengevine and support from Knight of the Reliquary, it uses Bloodbraid Elf instead of Jace, the Mind Sculptor to provide the midgame push it needs to take the upper hand. This is especially deadly with Vengevines, since it almost always assures at least two creatures to bring back the Vengevines. Additionally, the Sovereigns + Conscription combo is replaced with the Cunning Sparkmage + Basilisk Collar combo, which Fauna Shaman can search up, with the help of a Stoneforge Mystic.

Obstinate Baloth and Sun Titan are two new weapons M11 has given Naya, which can be searched up at will, when Fauna Shaman lives. Additionally, Baneslayer has returned under the theory that if the Fauna Shaman lives, then the Baneslayer it gets probably will too. Naya is at its best against Bant and U/W, but suffers against Ramp decks, relying on Realm Razer as its primary "plan" to try to steal wins.



Bloodbraid Elf decks converge with Primeval Titan decks in a few ways, and in fact, some of them don't always even stick with the Bloodbraids themselves (though I suspect they would generally be better if they did). The two primary forms of Red Ramp decks are Destructive Force (usually Naya or RUG) which use green ramp, Destructive Force, planeswalkers, and Titans, as well as Valakut decks such as Tamada Ryouichi's Japanese PTQ winning deck.



Valakut Ramp

- 4 Avenger of Zendikar
- 4 Primeval Titan
- 4 Siege-Gang Commander
- 4 Khalni Heart Expedition
- 4 Harrow
- 4 Cultivate
- 4 Explore
- 4 Rampant Growth
- 6 Forest
- 12 Mountain
- 3 Evolving Wilds
- 3 Terramorphic Expanse
- 4 Valakut, the Molten Pinnacle

Sideboard

- 3 Cunning Sparkmage
- 4 Oracle of Mul Daya
- 2 Summoning Trap
- 2 Chandra Nalaar
- 4 Forked Bolt

The wheel breaks down somewhat at this point, though it is very possible that Bloodbraid Elf will return to these decks. Regardless, these Red Ramp decks use green mana ramping to fuel some powerful stage 3, such as Valakut the Molten Pinnacle (super sick with Primeval Titan) or Destructive Force (also super sick with Primeval Titan). What these decks lack in early interaction, they more than make up for in powerful bombs they plan to start playing possibly as early as turns 3 or 4.



R/U/G Titan-Force

- 3 Everflowing Chalice
- 4 Primeval Titan
- 3 Into the Roil
- 1 Lightning Bolt
- 4 Mana Leak
- 2 Garruk Wildspeaker
- 4 Jace, the Mind Sculptor
- 4 Cultivate
- 4 Destructive Force
- 2 Mind Spring
- 4 Rampant Growth
- 5 Forest
- 4 Island
- 3 Mountain
- 1 Halimar Depths
- 2 Khalni Garden
- 4 Misty Rainforest
- 4 Raging Ravine
- 2 Scalding Tarn

Sideboard

- 4 Obstinate Baloth
- 2 Pelakka Wurm
- 3 Terastodon
- 2 Lavaball Trap
- 4 Negate

Primeval Titan is why these decks are even possible, as it is one of the best fatties ever printed and top 5 cards in standard. It is a 6/6 trampler for 6 that does better than drawing 2 cards when it enters the battlefield and every time it attacks. Retrieving Raging Ravine, Khalni Garden, Valakut, Halimar Depths, or Tectonic Edge can put a game away in a hurry. Whereas the Destructive Force decks use the new M11 card as their soft lock, another popular strategy is to rely on Avenger of Zendikar to provide an insurmountable army to take over the game. Red ramp decks are often strong against both Bant and Naya Fauna Shaman decks, but suffer against U/W and combo.



The wheel completes itself with the intersection of Primeval Titan and Jace, the Mind Sculptor in Turbo Land, such as Gabe Walls' list.

Turboland

- 4 Lotus Cobra
- 4 Oracle of Mul Daya
- 4 Primeval Titan
- 2 Kozilek, Butcher of Truth
- 1 Ulamog, the Infinite Gyre
- 4 Jace, the Mind Sculptor
- 4 Explore
- 2 Ponder
- 2 Rampant Growth
- 4 Time Warp
- 5 Forest
- 5 Island
- 3 Eldrazi Temple
- 4 Halimar Depths
- 4 Khalni Garden
- 4 Misty Rainforest
- 3 Tectonic Edge
- 1 Verdant Catacombs

Sideboard

- 4 Obstinate Baloth
- 2 Flashfreeze
- 3 Mana Leak
- 2 Mind Spring
- 2 Rampant Growth
- 2 All Is Dust

These decks use the same green ramp engine, but give up the red brute force endgame in favor of blue's card draw. The Red Ramp decks were sort of 1-card combo decks in the sense that they tried to Destructive Force or Valakut you out before you beat them, rather than take control. Turbo Land goes a bit further, with almost no defense

at all. Instead Walls' deck uses an incredible selection of acceleration combined with Time Warp and Primeval Titan to race into a degenerate stage 3 before most other decks are even fully operational. Turbo Land is sometimes known to start dropping Eldrazi as early as turn 5, often playing Primeval Titan on turn 4 and searching up two Eldrazi Temples. Occasionally, Lotus Cobra and Time Warp will lead to games where Ulamog hits so fast, the opponent may only have 2 land on the battlefield before he destroys 1!

Turbo Land is very powerful against midrange decks, such as Red Ramp and Naya, but can suffer at the hands of a dedicated control deck or a superfast aggro deck, such as Mono-R. While U/W was one of Turbo Land's best match-ups before, the return of countermagic can be tough. On the



other side, any aggro deck fast enough can give Turbo Land fits, since it is almost entirely without defense. Still, Obstinate Baloth provides a powerful new tool against these aggro decks, so if they can defeat the counterspells, they may try to make a claim for top dog in the format.

Wait a minute! So where is Jund? Well, as I said, Jund has not been doing particularly well since the addition of M11, though the lists that have won are basically the same lists as last season, with only Grave Titan seeing some new play. Rumors swirl about Monument Jund lists, but thus far they haven't put up the numbers.

Some others try to escape the metagame wheel with unusual combo decks such as Guillaume Matignon's Pyromancer's Ascension deck.

This list tries to race through its deck, find the Ascension, then trigger it, allowing a near unstoppable flow of card draw and eventually turns.



What is the key to cracking the code of

Pyromancer's Ascension

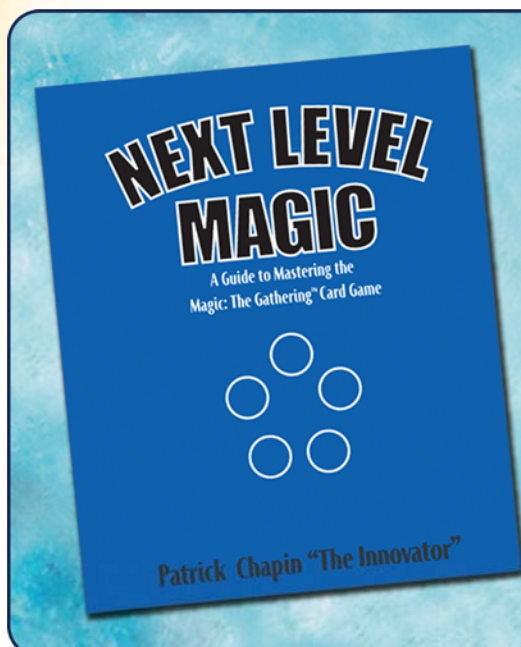
4 Pyromancer Ascension
4 Burst Lightning
4 Lightning Bolt
4 Mana Leak
2 Call to Mind
4 Ponder
4 Preordain
4 See Beyond
4 Time Warp
4 Treasure Hunt
8 Island
7 Mountain
3 Halimar Depths
4 Scalding Tarn

Sideboard

4 Kiln Fiend
4 Spreading Seas
2 Flashfreeze
3 Negate
2 Jace Beleren

the post-M11 metagame? It remains to be seen which of the five major players can overcome its weaknesses to rise to a position of dominance, but I would not be surprised if each of these decks remains a major player. Will anyone be able to escape this wheel, piloting a strategy such as Pyromancer's Ascension? Personally, I think there is great room for rogue decks, though Pyromancer's Ascension in particular may suffer from receiving too much publicity, allowing players to prepare for it.

One thing is for sure, the new Standard is healthy and thriving with many different and interesting strategies possible, as well as tons of room to explore. This entire past year has been full of awesome sets, and I think we have only scratched the surface of all that M11 makes possible!



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The Art of Sideboarding

By Brian Kibler

Brian Kibler has multiple Top 8 finishes at the PT, GP, and Nationals level, including three wins. Recently, he made Top 8 at PT: Honolulu, and he won the latest Extended Pro Tour in Austin, Texas. Read his column, The Dragonmaster's Lair, every Friday only at StarCityGames.com Premium.



When you're testing for a tournament, how many games do you play with your main deck? How many games do you play sideboarded? Most players test very few sideboarded games, which is particularly shocking when you consider that in best of three matches, you're likely to play more games with sideboards than not.

Sideboarding is one of the most important parts of Magic that receives the least attention. Many players build their sideboards largely as an afterthought, but the cards you choose to sit on the bench are as important as those in your starting sixty, and it's crucial to your tournament success to make the most of them.

The best way to think about your sideboard is not as fifteen extra cards against specific decks, but as an extension of your deck as a whole. One method I find is particularly effective is making a list of what I want my deck to look like in each major matchup. This lets me see what sorts of effects I want, how many cards from my main deck that I want to take out in each matchup, and where I might be able to find overlap to gain extra value from my sideboard slots.

In my GP Sendai sideboard, for instance, I played 2 Negates, 2 Deprive, 1 Martial Coup, 3 Celestial Purge, 1 Bant Charm, 1 Oblivion Ring, 2 Oust, 1 Mold Shambler, 1 Journey to Nowhere, and 1 Gideon Jura. While this number and assortment of cards may seem strange at first glance, each of the cards was very carefully chosen for specific reasons, often serving multiple purposes across different matchups. One way I look at sideboard cards is how they fill each of three major categories: capacity, efficiency, and redundancy.

Capacity is providing an effect that you want in a particular matchup that your deck may not otherwise have. Negate gives a deck the capacity to counter non-creature spells, while Bant Charm gives a deck the capacity to de-

stroy artifacts. Adding different capacities to your deck can drastically change the dynamic of a matchup. If you're capable of countering key spells, your opponent has to play very differently or else you may blow them out with a timely Negate.

Adding capacities, even in small numbers, can add a major dimension to your deck. The single Martial Coup in my Sendai sideboard allowed me to sculpt games around my ability to wipe the board on those occasions when I drew it and sometimes let me win games that would have otherwise been impossible. It's very difficult for your opponent to reasonably play around a single mass removal effect in your deck, but it's very easy for you to plan your game around it when you draw it.

The split between 2 Negate and 2 Deprive rather than a full complement of Negates is a matter of capacity. Having two of each let me bring Deprive in against decks like Jund or Mythic, which often rely on resolving a single large threat like Siege-Gang Commander or Sovereigns to win. Additionally, Deprive helped give me the capacity to deal with Baneslayer Angel after sideboarding, even once I have removed all of my Paths.

Efficiency is how well a card fills a particular role in a given matchup. Celestial Purge is the most efficient removal spell available against Jund. It's not necessarily providing the deck with an effect that it doesn't have otherwise, but it provides a better resource exchange than the other removal spells. Efficiency isn't just about mana - it's about resource exchanges as a whole, including card advantage and tempo.

When I played against Jund at GP Sendai, I cut my Oblivion Rings and Paths for Celestial Purges and Bant Charm. Having the mana efficiency of Celestial Purge to deal with early creatures like Putrid Leech let me avoid the card count inefficiency of Path. Bant Charm was an upgrade from Oblivion Ring in terms of tempo exchange because I can play it with

unspent mana on my opponent's turn, as well as providing me with the capacity to counter removal.

Redundancy is simply that - more of a given effect. Neither Oblivion Ring, Journey to Nowhere, nor Bant Charm are necessarily the best ways to deal with creatures, but I brought all of them in against Mythic and Naya because I just wanted more ways to handle Knight of the Reliquary and friends. Many cards can serve as analogues for one another, and sometimes you can gain valuable percentage points overall by finding cards that can give you what you're looking for in a particular matchup while giving you more of an effect you want in another.

These three categories clearly aren't mutually exclusive - a card can be in your sideboard for a multitude of reasons. I played Bant Charm both for the capacity to kill artifacts against Naya as well as for the redundancy of additional creature removal against Mythic. But when you sketch out the sixty cards you want for each major matchup, it can be useful to identify what it is that you want out of the cards you've chosen because it can give you an idea where you can make better use of your sideboard slots and find overlap.

Consider this when you're building your next Standard deck. If you're playing U/W, what do you want your deck to look like against Jund? Against Valakut? Against Fauna Shaman decks? Sketching out what sixty cards you'd play to beat each particular deck can show you where the similarities lie, especially when you're paying attention to the reasons behind those similarities.

Your anti-Jund U/W list may have 4 Celestial Purge, but does that mean you need to play them in your sideboard? Obviously it's one of the best cards for the matchup, but if what you're looking for is an efficient creature removal spell, you can find a great degree of overlap with your anti-Fauna Shaman list if you make the swap to Journey to Nowhere. What matchups do you want more counter-magic in, and what kinds?

It's easy to put together a list of fifteen cards you think might be good against the decks you expect to face - it's much harder to build a sideboard.

Legacy Then and Now

By Stephen Menendian

As one of the foremost voices in the Eternal formats, Steve has been influential in shaping Vintage and Legacy metagames. Not only did he win the 2007 Vintage World Championship, he also participated in the 2007 Magic Invitational. Look for his column, So Many Insane Plays, every Tuesday on StarCityGames.com Premium



The Legacy metagame before Grand Prix: Columbus was a well defined mix of Zoo, Merfolk (either mono-blue, U/g or U/w), and CounterTop with Natural Order and Progenitus. Zoo is the format's premiere aggressive deck, running the most efficient beaters, curving out with Steppe Lynx/ Wild Nacatl, Tarmogoyf, and Knight of the Reliquary (sometimes), the most efficient removal (Path to Exile), and plenty of burn (Lightning Bolt, Chain Lightning, Fireblast, and Price of Progress) to clear a path for beaters or to finish the job.

Zoo was not only enemy number 1 at Grand Prix: Columbus, it was the most populous deck on Day 2. Many people were mauled by 4/5 Steppe Lynx and burned out by Fireblast. But the much maligned archetype with the most impressive performance was Merfolk, in the hands of the Tomoharu Saito.

Saito's Merfolk list is simple genius. He employed fundamental principles of

metagaming and deck selection. A finalist at GP Madrid, the Legacy Grand Prix in Europe, Saito recognized that Merfolk was a massive favorite against presumably everything top opponents, sporting blue decks, would throw at him. He would also be a huge favorite against Counterbalance decks, which are trumped by Aether Vial and out-tempoed with Wastelands and Daze/Curse-catcher. But most importantly, he splashed an unusual and unexpected color to shore up his two weakest, and prevalent, matchups: Zoo and Goblins. Engineered Plague is practically a silver bullet against Goblins, and hugely effective against the predominant Wizards/Cat that compose most Zoo decklists. Perish, and the Portal duplicate, Nature's Ruin, bat clean up, finishing off Nacatl's and Goyfs that survive the Plague. Making it into the top brackets, Saito feasted on round after round of blue-based opponents (or combo players), Islandwalking his way to victory.

Saito's U/b Merfolk list is the model for all other Merfolk pilots going forward, and will probably constitute the great bulk of Merfolk lists that can afford three to four Underground Seas. It may be wise, however, to squeeze in another basic Island, just as extra resistance to Lands decks and opposing Wastelands, either by cutting an Underground Sea or adding another land to the deck. I have great faith that Merfolk will persist in this new metagame.

Even though Merfolk is a number one target, plenty of players will find Tom Martell's runner-up CounterTop list attractive enough. Martell and a host of pros, including LSV, Matt Sperling, Craig Wescoe and PV played a very similar list.

Counterbalance

4 Sensei's Divining Top
4 Tarmogoyf
4 Counterbalance
1 Oblivion Ring
4 Brainstorm
3 Counterspell
4 Force of Will
2 Spell Snare
4 Swords to Plowshares
2 Vendilion Clique
3 Jace, the Mind Sculptor
3 Firespout
2 Island
1 Mountain
1 Plains
4 Flooded Strand
1 Misty Rainforest
4 Scalding Tarn
3 Tropical Island
3 Tundra
2 Volcanic Island
1 Karakas

Sideboard

2 Relic of Progenitus
1 Grim Lavamancer
1 Meddling Mage
1 Blue Elemental Blast
1 Hydroblast
3 Krosan Grip
1 Pyroblast
1 Red Elemental Blast
2 Spell Pierce
1 Llawan, Cephalid Empress
1 Firespout



U/b Merfolk

2 Flooded Strand
2 Island
2 Misty Rainforest
4 Mutavault
1 Polluted Delta
2 Scalding Tarn
4 Underground Sea
4 Wasteland
4 Force of Will
4 Daze
4 Aether Vial
4 Standstill
3 Spell Pierce
4 Lord of Atlantis
4 Cursecatcher
4 Merrow Reejerey
4 Coralhelm Commander
4 Silvergil Adept

Sideboard

4 Engineered Plague
2 Nature's Ruin
1 Perish
3 Submerge
3 Tormod's Crypt
2 Umezawa's Jitte

Borrowing long-time Legacy tech, these players employed Firespout to address both the Merfolk and the Zoo matchup. They paid a price for this inclusion, on a greedy four-color mana base.

But they supported this mana base with an unusually high land count, and no Ponder. What's distinctive about these lists is the presence of three Jace, the Mind Sculptor, and a testament to the planeswalker's power. What's traditional about these lists is the core reliance on Goyfs to win the game, here supported by a pair of Vendilion Cliques. Jace clears the way for Goyfs, or Goyfs can provide defense while Jace digs up Firespout or wins the game with his ultimate ability. Craig Wescoe, and his team, were running a pair of Predicts to generate additional card advantage more



efficiently than other spells. Expect this kind of Counterbalance list, or something close to it, to very popular going forward, at least in the near future. Karakas was a concession to the power and presence of Emrakul and Iona. If you can afford one, it's a great investment. Karakas will be great for a long time in Legacy.

Speaking of Emrakul, Show and Tell is back. Show and Tell has been tried before, but now we know what works. Show and Tell in a Doomsday deck is a synergistic fit that enhances both combos. One of the Doomsday piles involves Shelldock Isle and Emrakul. Show and Tell can be played on its own, and broken things happen. The other Show and Tell deck that has performed well recently is a hybrid Sneak Attack deck. I developed a CounterTop-Emrakul deck using Burning Wish to find Show and Tell, along with select answers such as Firespout and Hull Breach. Burning Wish gives the deck consistency and flexibility. This approach to Show and Tell preserves all of the advantages of blue, including Force of Will, Jace, and superior card selection, but with an even more explosive combo finish, and the 'oops, I win' factor.

Aluren is the real deal, with or without Imperial Recruiter. Aluren is an ancient green enchantment that has seen new life in Legacy. With Imperial Recruiter and an Aluren in play, you Recruit for another Imperial Recruiter, and then find Dreamstalker to bounce Recruiter. Next, you replay Recruiter to find Cavern Harpy. Cavern Harpy allows you to return

Dream Stalker. You replay Dreamstalker to bounce Recruiter, this time finding Parasitic Stryx. Finally, you repeatedly bounce Cavern Harpy to replay Stryx until you win the game. Stryx gives Aluren the most compact win.



Emrakul gives those pilots an even better target. With Emrakul's graveyard trigger on the stack, you can respond with Loyal Retainer to put Emrakul into play. Patrick "The Innovator" Chapin rocked a Survival/Fauna Shaman deck to Top 16 at GP Columbus. But the key piece of technology is Vengevine. The Survival pilot can survival away Vengevines, and then survival away Basking Rootwallas to trigger a bunch of rampaging Vengevines.

Counterpoised to these aggressive strategies is perhaps one of the most unusual strategies of all: a Lands deck. There are 425 unique land cards in 17 years of printings. In that time, Wizards has printed many lands cards that work like spells. Rishadan Port is a land drop Icy Manipulator on your opponent's mana base. There's a reason it was Port that was banned in block. Wasteland is a free

Stone Rain. And Tabernacle ties up your opponent's mana for every creature they want to play, a great way to prevent the tribal swarms prevalent in the format, and a natural foil to Aether Vial. Academy Ruins recurs Oblivion Stone and Engineered Explosives indefinitely, and will allow you to play Ensnaring Bridge and other silver bullets that have been dredged into your graveyard. Holding it all together is the recursive power of Life From the Loam, which not only tutors up more lands, but then puts them into your hand. Exploration and Manabond play the role of Fastbond, allowing you to play more than one land per turn. Mishra's Factory plays cleanup, once you've locked up the game. This deck is as much fun for the pilot as it is painful for the opponent.

Ultimately, Legacy is a healthy, diverse format where anything goes. There are plenty of options to select from, and plenty of uncharted territory for innovative thinkers. While strong options exist, players who go rogue or develop new technology have the advantage of pushing their opponent's out of their comfort zone, making it far more likely they'll make a mistake on account of the information asymmetry.

Zoo, Merfolk, Goblins, and CounterTop variants remain the top of the metagame, but there are a ton of decks sitting just below and around them. What's emerged most recently are a number of powerful combo options to counter these aggressive strategies, or overwhelm them. But the diversity of the field, while an opportunity to explore the history of Magic, is also a constraint on anyone who metagames too hard. These features give Legacy a sense of continuity in spite of its breadth, making it one of the most exciting and fun formats to play.

Looking for More Legacy Events?

You Found Them!



OPEN SERIES

World's Most Popular Format

By Sheldon Menery

Sheldon Menery is one of the most influential judges in the history of Magic. He's one of the world's four Level 5 Judges, and helps lead the DCI Judge Program. He's Head Judged countless Pro Tours, Grands Prix, and World Championships. He's also one of the creators of and the primary advocate for the EDH format.



Elder Dragon Highlander (also known as EDH) is the most popular casual format in Magic. It has legions of fans all over the globe, and leagues and tournaments springing up everywhere, and here's why: it's really cool. It's really cool because you'll see in EDH games the types of things you'll never see in other formats—big, splashy things. It's become so popular that it even has its own section in the Comprehensive Rules.

EDH is a multiplayer format intentionally designed as a casual, interactive format. It was developed with an eye toward creating memories of crazy things that can happen with such a wide open deck-building space. It's this philosophy of fun that's been instrumental in making the format so wildly popular.

There are a number of rules that specifically define the format. Some are deck construction rules, others are play rules.

Deck Construction

First and foremost in deck construction is choosing your general, who must be a legendary creature (such as Kresh, the Bloodbraided). Your general's mana cost determines what colors can be in your deck. In fact, a mana symbol outside your general's mana cost can't even be in your deck. That means in your Kresh deck, you can't have any white or blue mana symbols anywhere, even if the card's mana cost is within your colors. For example, Anavolver is illegal in Kresh because it has a blue kicker cost. As another example, Altar of Shadows is only legal in decks with black generals.



Including your general, your deck must contain exactly 100 cards, and may only contain a single copy of any card. Otherwise, outside of the banned list, cards that are Vintage legal are also legal in EDH, with the exception that Shahrazad is legal. The banned list contains some cards that are format-warping because of some of the play rules or the necessities of the multiplayer nature of the game. Here's the list:

Banned List

Ancestral Recall
Balance
Biorhythm
Black Lotus
Channel
Coalition Victory
Fastbond
Gifts Ungiven
Kokusho, the Evening Star
Karakas
Library of Alexandria
Limited Resources
Lion's Eye Diamond
Metalworker
Five Original Moxen (Sapphire, Ruby, Pearl, Emerald and Jet)
Painter's Servant
Panoptic Mirror
Protean Hulk
Recurring Nightmare
Riftsweeper
Staff of Domination
Sway of the Stars
Time Vault
Time Walk
Tinker
Tolarian Academy
Upheaval
Worldgorger Dragon
Yawgmoth's Bargain

There are also two legendary creatures that are not banned but may not be used as generals: Rofellos, Llanowar Emissary and Braids, Cabal Minion.

There's a Rules Committee for EDH comprised of high-level judges and tournament officials who keep an eye on the banned list, updating it quarterly. Each new Magic expansion is evaluated once folks start playing with the cards to make sure that none of them become problematic. For example, Channel wasn't historically a problem until the Eldrazi came along. Turn 2 Emrakul, the Aeons Torn, can quickly turn a game into a sour experience for everyone.

Playing the Game

While deck construction is the first hallmark of the format, it's the additional play rules that truly separate EDH from other formats.

You start the game with 40 life instead of 20. The extra life comes with a catch: if you take 21 damage over the course of the game from any single general, you lose the game, regardless of your life total.

A unique feature of EDH is that you can't ever generate mana outside your general's colors. Ever. If you were to use a mana ability that produces mana outside your colors, it produces colorless instead. In our Kresh deck, if we were to somehow acquire an Island, it would tap for colorless.

Your general starts the game not in your deck, but in the command zone. You can cast your general directly from there. He's not in your hand, so you can't discard to pay the cost of anything, but that also means an opponent can't make you discard him. If, during play, your general would go to either the graveyard or exile, you can choose to instead put him back in the command zone. This is a replacement effect, so it won't trigger any goes-to-the-graveyard abilities. For example, Child of Alara's ability won't trigger if you decide to put him in the command zone. You can, however, choose to let Child go to the graveyard in order to make use of the



board-clearing ability.

As an additional cost to cast a general from the command zone, its owner must pay {2} for each time it was previously cast from there. The second time you cast Kresh, it will cost 4BRG; the third time, it will cost 6BRG, and so on.

Your general can be bounced to your hand or put into your library if a spell or ability (like Oblation) tells you to. This has become a somewhat common strategy to try to help counteract the power of being able to continually recast one's general. If you cast your general from your hand, you'll pay its normal mana cost, no matter how many times you've cast it from the command zone.

Although generals are subject to the normal legend rule, "generalness" is an attribute of the card itself, and can't ever be copied or erased, and won't go away even if someone takes control of your general. I have seen players killed by their own traitorous generals; it's one of those things that will net you great style points from your EDH-playing friends, and style is often way more important in EDH games than outcomes. No one will remember who won last week, but they'll sure remember the time you killed a player with a random Sparkmage Apprentice or did 600,000 damage with someone else's Sliver Queen.

Iconic Cards

EDH has been called "the dollar rare format." Certainly, no other formats have featured the likes of Storm Herd, Serra Avatar, Confusion in the Ranks, Plagiarize, Cemetery Puca, or Read the Runes the way EDH has. Otherwise-disregarded cards like Big Game Hunter and Intrepid

Hero get lots of mileage. Sure, you'll see your share of commonly-acknowledged 'good' cards like Cryptic Command and Survival of the Fittest, but EDH is the format where Spelljack is almost always the right counterspell to play (or maybe Overwhelming Intellect), and Reliquary Tower slips neatly into every deck. With EDH, you'll have spots for old favorites like Spike Weaver, Mana Flare, Skel-ton Ship, Storm Cauldron, or Beacon of Immortality.



Infinite Gyre have found their way into decks of all colors. Other players have added cards in response, such as Tajuru Preserver. I've even seen a few Ensnaring Bridges recently to combat the power of the giant Eldrazi.

Since EDH games tend to last turns longer than other formats, and you can get to 10-12 mana in a normal game without necessarily focusing on ramping out a bunch of lands, cards like Avenger of Zendikar (and his distant ancestor, Dakkon Blackblade), are quite popular. No mana cost seems untouchable. I've seen

Emrakul, It That Betrays, Darksteel Colossus, and even Autochthon Wurm hardcast.

Of course, cards that help you get the mana you want, like the Zendikar fetchlands (Arid Mesa, etc.) and their Onslaught block forebears are heavily played.

Speaking of fetches, owing to the casual nature of the format, there's an unwritten gentleman's agreement

which many groups use when it comes to fetches (or searches) in EDH. The rule is that you don't wait until the end of turn of the player to your right to look through your deck. Generally, you'll do it on the turn of the player right after you, in order to save time. That way, no one is waiting for you. The agreement comes with an out clause. If something in the game happens what would make you change your search, then you can go back and make the change, just like if you had the full information you would at EOT of the player to your right. This generally doesn't matter with fetchlands (although there might be situations where it does), but it might matter with Demonic Tutor or Beseech the Queen. Getting people to activate their Sensei's Divining Tops in a timely fashion has helped keep the pace of games moving briskly.

Magic 2011 is another set that seemed to have an eye on EDH. The most talked-about card has been Serra Ascendant. People wondered if it would get banned before it ever saw play. Clearly, it's an excellent first turn play since you start at 40 life, but the multiplayer nature of the game provides any number of cheap and



available answers. Other great M11 cards include Mitotic Slime, Overwhelming Stampede, and Crystal Ball. The biggest splash, however, will be made by the Titans, especially Sun Titan and Primeval Titan. They're on everyone's 'to-play' list, for good reasons.

EDH is the format made for Timmies. If you like big, splashy, wild, and wacky, it's the format for you. You can find out more about it on the official EDH forums at <http://forum.dragonhighlander.net>.

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Mythics Make Magic Cheaper

By Ben Bleiweiss

Ben is one of the foremost Magic: The Gathering financial experts in the world. His accomplishments over his 15+ year involvement with Magic include two tenures as a weekly columnist for Wizards of the Coast, global travel as both a Pro Tour player and reporter, and his position as the General Manager for StarCityGames.com.



Wizards of the Coast introduced the Mythic Rarity starting with Shards of Alara, and since that time we've seen the price of individual cards in Standard rise to levels previously unseen in Magic's history. Baneslayer Angel and Primeval Titan hit the \$50-\$60 range, Elspeth and Gideon Jura both hover at \$30-\$40, and big daddy Jace, the Mind Sculptor is \$80 pushing towards \$100. Players have been complaining about the high cost of Mythic staples, and it's not without reason - \$320 for a playset of Jace is more than just pocket change! But have Mythic Rares made Magic more expensive than in the time before Mythics? The answer to this is both yes and no; individual cards (such as Jace) spike at a higher price, but the overall cost of Magic is down.

Previous to Mythics, the poster child for expensive Standard-legal rares was Tarmogoyf, which peaked at \$50 in early-to-mid 2008 (a year after the release of Future Sight). The majority of top-flight Rares in Standard peaked around \$20-\$25 - examples of this include the original run of Planeswalkers when printed in Lorwyn, Cryptic Command, and Bitterblossom. These days, top-flight Mythics are generally hitting the \$35-\$40 range (Grave Titan, Elspeth, Gideon, Vengevine), with the most-desired of Mythics doubling that number (once again, Jace and Baneslayer, before it was reprinted in M11). It's undeniable that the top-end of the price range for Standard singles is much, much higher than it was before Mythics existed.

It's very human to react to a shocking figure, and in this case the \$50 on Baneslayer or the \$80 on Jace is that shocking

figure. However, many people have not looked beyond the sticker shock of the high-end of Mythics to see how the existence of Mythics has affected the price of other Magic singles. It was put forward, when Mythics were first introduced, that the existence of Mythics would drive the price of Rares down, to a more affordable price tier. Has this happened? In order to answer this question, we need to understand the math behind Mythics and Rares.

For sake of comparison for this article, I'm going to use Future Sight and Worldwake. I chose both of these sets for two reasons. First and most importantly, each of them contains the highest-dollar Standard-legal single (of their time), if you draw a line pre-Shards and post-Shards. Second, Future Sight has a reputation of being a set that is overabundant with good cards, and was a fantastic value to open when it was Standard legal, whereas Worldwake is generally considered a weak singles set, so less of it is opened just to get Jace, the Mind Sculptor.

The math behind Future Sight is pretty straight forward - there are 60 rares in Future Sight, so your chance of opening any one particular rare is 1 in 60. The minimum number of packs you'd need to open to get one of each rare (non-foil) is 60, and if you opened a large number of boxes (trust me, we do!), you'd get about an even number of each rare in the long-term. In order to figure out the average value of a Future Sight rare, I added up the values of each of the rares in Future Sight circa October of 2007 (6 months after the release of Future Sight), counted

each bulk rare at \$0.25, and divided the total by 60. The average value of a rare in Future Sight was \$3.15, and if you multiply this by 36 (the number of booster packs in a box), you'll see that the average box value of Future Sight (not counting commons, uncommon, or foils!) was \$113.40.

The math behind Worldwake is a little more complex. Rares are printed at a two-to-one ratio to Mythic Rares. There are 35 Rares and 10 Mythic Rares in Worldwake, so you'd need to open 80 packs of Worldwake (mathematically) to equal the 60 packs of Future Sight - and that would leave you with two of every Rare, and one of each Mythic Rare. I also added up the values of each of the Rares and Mythic Rares as of August of 2010 (6 months after the release of Worldwake), multiplied the value of the Rares times two (since you'd end up with two of each), and divided by 80 (the number of packs you'd open to get these cards). The average value of a Worldwake Rare/



Future Sight

Rares of Note, Circa Oct. 2007

Akroma's Memorial:	\$4.50
Bitter Ordeal:	\$2.50
Bridge from Below:	\$6
Cloud Key:	\$1.50
Coalition Relic:	\$7.50
Epochrasite:	\$5
Glittering Wish:	\$4
Graven Cairns:	\$6
Grove of the Burnwillows:	\$6
Heartwood Storyteller:	\$2
Horizon Canopy:	\$12.50
Jhoira of the Ghitu:	\$2
Korlash, Heir to Blackblade:	\$12.50
Magus of the Moon:	\$4
Magus of the Vineyard:	\$2
Molten Disaster:	\$2.50
Nimbus Maze:	\$6
Pact of Negation:	\$6
Quagnoth:	\$2
Rites of Flourishing:	\$1.50
River of Tears:	\$5
Seht's Tiger:	\$2
Shimian Specter:	\$2.50
Slaughter Pact:	\$6
Sliver Legion:	\$5
Summoner's Pact:	\$3
Take Possession:	\$2
Tarmogoyf:	\$40
Tarox Bladewing:	\$2.50
Tombstalker:	\$8
Venser, Shaper Savant:	\$10
Bulk Rares:	\$7.25

Average Rare Price: \$3.15

Average Box Value= \$113.40

Mythic was \$2.44 each, for a box price of \$87.84.

For Future Sight, 31 out of the 60 rares were selling for a premium (52%). 13 out of 35 Worldwake Rares sell for a premium (37%), but 100% of the Mythics (10 out of 10) sell above bulk prices – so around 45% if you factor in rares twice and Mythics once.

Imagine a world where there were no Mythic Rares, and Worldwake was released. There would be 45 Rares in Worldwake, with 33% fewer of each Rare, and 33% more of each Mythic. If we adjusted the numbers on Worldwake to account for this standardization (which is very simplified – I'll touch on this for a second, but I need this number as a baseline!), Rares would rise to \$50.05, Mythics would drop to \$75, and the average Rare price would go all the way up to \$2.78 (from \$2.44), or a box price of \$100.08 (from \$87.84!)

I realize I'm throwing out a lot of numbers, so let's tie this all together. There is no quick and easy way to say that "equalizing the number of Rares and Mythics appearing in Worldwake would make the

prices drop a neat 33% in each direction" – they wouldn't. For one, you'd need to open a lot fewer Worldwake to get the same number of each card that you get now – 45 packs as opposed to 80 packs. This would mean that there would be half of many of each of the Rares that are currently Rare than there are now (cards like Raging Ravine and Kalastria Highborn), but around 56% more of each Mythic (2 every 90 packs, instead of 1 every 80). This is a much bigger swing than just a 33% price difference, and I think it can be summed up using the dual lands from each of the sets

Dual Lands

Prices 6 Months After Release

Celestial Colonnade: \$3.50. vs. Nimbus Maze: \$6
 Creeping Tar Pit: \$2.50 vs. River of Tears: \$5
 Lavaclaw Reaches: \$2.50 vs. Graven Cairns: \$6
 Raging Ravine: \$4 vs. Grove of the Burnwillows: \$6
 Stirring Wildwood: \$2.50 vs. Horizon Canopy: \$12.50

Worldwake Total: \$15.00

Future Sight Total: \$35.50

Worldwake Dual Lands are selling at 42% of the price of Future Sight Dual Lands. Worldwake Dual Lands appear one out of every 8 packs in Worldwake (10 per 80 packs), whereas Future Sight Dual Lands appear one out of every 12 packs (5 per 60), making the Worldwake Dual Lands 33% more common than Future Sight Dual Lands – which shows a price discrepancy higher than just a rarity-to-price ratio – and I would feel comfortable enough in saying that the Future Sight and Worldwake Dual Lands have seen comparable amount of play to one-another relative to being six months out from the set release.

There are dozens of other factors that play into these card prices: the popularity of Magic at the time of release, the amount of sets redeemed from Magic Online and put into circulation, the amount of each block drafted (and window for drafting), the fact that Worldwake likely would have had 50-60 rares instead of 45, were it an "older" expansion set, and the imperfect guessing about card values, if cards were at different distribution ratios than other-

wise printed, just to name a few.

In the end though, it's indisputable that the overall price of most Rares and Mythics in Worldwake are, on average, far below the average price of good rares in Future Sight – Worldwake has 7% fewer good rares, but 23% lower average value per-rare – an extreme difference comparatively. Moreover, Future Sight has a lot of marginally good rares (the Jhoira/Cloud Keys of the world) that hovered in the \$1.50-\$2 range. These sorts of rares are all \$1 or less in Worldwake (Amulet of Vigor, Chain Reaction, and Terastodon, for example), because they are available in such abundance compared to the Mythic Rares in the set – leading to those cards falling to near-bulk pricing because of oversupply.



In the end, I don't personally like that Mythic Rares are starting to regularly hit the \$30-\$50 range, much less Jace, the Mind Sculptor topping the \$75-\$80 range (and I predict it'll hit \$100 before it rotates out of Standard, because there are few copies entering circulation at this point). These prices, in my opinion, should only be showing up once-a-block, not one-to-two times a set, on average. However, it's very easy to get distracted by Jace, and not realize that virtually every other card in Worldwake is far below the equivalent value that those cards would have had without the invention of the Mythic Rarity. The Worldwake Dual lands are at an unheard-of low price (overall) as a playable Rare dual land cycle, and the ratio of good Rares-to-chaff is pretty decent – but because there are so many packs opened (by both players and dealers) to look for Mythic Rares, and because there are so many fewer regular Rares per set, we're seeing record low prices for the average tournament-playable and casual-popular Rare – and in this regard, Mythic Rares have been a success for how they've affected the values of non-Mythic Rare cards.



Worldwake

Rares & Mythics of Note

Abyssal Persecutor: \$12
 Admonition Angel: \$2
 Avenger of Zendikar: \$10
 Basilisk Collar: \$4
 Celestial Colonnade: \$3.50
 Comet Storm: \$1.50
 Creeping Tar Pit: \$2.50
 Dragonmaster Outcast: \$2.50
 Eye of Ugin: \$4
 Harabaz Druid: \$1.50
 Jace, the Mind Sculptor: \$80
 Joraga Warcaller: \$1.50
 Joraga Shapeshifter: \$1.50
 Kalastria Highborn: \$2
 Lavaclaw Reaches: \$2.50
 Lodestone Golem: \$1.50
 Novablast Wurm: \$1.50
 Omnath, Locus of Mana: \$2
 Raging Ravine: \$4
 Stirring Wildwood: \$2.50
 Stoneforge Mystic: \$5
 Talus Paladin: \$1.50
 Wrexial, the Risen Deep: \$1.50
 Bulk Rares: \$5.50

2x Rares + Mythics = \$195

Average Rare Price: \$2.44

Average Box Value= \$87.84

Adjustments for Rare/Mythic Distribution Changes

Average Rare Price: \$2.78

Average Box Value= \$100.08



This is Madness!

By Riki Hayashi

Riki Hayashi is no stranger to the Sunday stage, just not as a competitor. A Level 3 judge from Roanoke, Virginia, he has judged 8 Pro Tours and 12 Grand Prix. He's also a full-time member of the StarCityGames.com Events team, bringing law and order to the StarCityGames.com Open Series.



Madness? This is Legacy! After GP Columbus, Wild Mongrel and friends are back with a Vengevine. With that in mind, I thought it might be educational to go back over the madness mechanic since it's been a while since such cards have seen widespread play. The first part of the madness ability is a replacement effect that puts the card into the exile zone instead of your graveyard when the madness card is discarded. Since the card never actually hits your graveyard, your opponent can't disrupt you with Relic of Progenitus or Ferie Macabre.

Exiling the card triggers the second part of madness: the ability that allows you to cast the spell for its alternate madness cost. Like any other triggered ability, either player can respond to this. For example, your opponent may want to Stifle the trigger. If this happens, the card stays exiled and you never get a chance to cast the spell and trigger your Vengevines. Given how ineffective normal counterspells are against Vengevine, this is probably the best way to stop them short of exiling them from play (Swords to Plowshares), or from the graveyard (Tormod's Crypt).

If the triggered ability does resolve, you can pay the madness cost and cast the spell. If you can't or don't want to cast the spell, the card goes to its owner's graveyard. As always, casting the spell is an important distinction for cards like Vengevine, and the reason the engine works at all. One particularly sick play that GP Columbus Top 8 competitor Caleb Durward told me about:

opponent tanked briefly about whether to counter it, but let it resolve. Who plays Wild Mongrel in 2010? Caleb proceeded to bin two Vengevines and madness out a Rootwalla to return the plants and swing for eight with lethal on the board on the next turn.

Should have countered the Mongrel.

With Survival of the Fittest, the deck gains another useful discard outlet and an amazing way to chain creatures. With one creature in hand and enough mana, you can potentially search up all of your Vengevines and finish it off with two Rootwallas. There is one tricky part of a potential chain that doesn't quite work as well as you would like. If you discard a Basking Rootwalla to Survival and intend to go search for a Vengevine to throw in your bin, the hasty plant (that makes no sense) will not make it onto the battlefield, because the madness trigger goes on the stack on top of the Survival's search ability. You will cast the Rootwalla before you search for the Vine.

It's also important not to get too greedy with your Survival if you suspect your opponent of holding the Stifle. As I noted, having the madness trigger Stifled means that you will end up not casting the Rootwalla, bad news if you used all of your mana to search up Vengevines and can't cast another creature spell. There is one sneaky way to still have your cake if you have a free discard outlet like a Wild Mongrel: search up another Rootwalla when the Survival ability resolves and pitch it.

Another fun interaction with Survival of the Fittest involves Emrakul, the Aeons

Torn and Loyal Retainers in Patrick Chapin's combo Survival engine. Loyal Retainers has the somewhat obscure "on your turn before attackers are declared" Portal clause on its ability. Many players shortcut this in their minds as "anytime you could cast a sorcery," which is a common clause for many discard abilities. However, Loyal Retainers can be activated any time you have priority, and the difference in the two restrictions allows you to discard an Emrakul to Survival and activate Loyal Retainers to return the Eldrazi overlord to your battlefield. Note that this doesn't work with Progenitus because Mr. Protection has a replacement effect that shuffles it into the library as opposed to a trigger. The latter can't be responded to.



Using Loyal Retainers to get an Emrakul doesn't get you the extra turn any more than if you Polymorph into it, since you're not casting it, but remember that we discarded Emrakul via Survival. How about if you search up an Anger and discard that as well to give Emrakul haste? Just remember to pitch your Anger after you've resolved Emrakul's graveyard shuffling ability.



Emrakul, the Aeons Torn makes the rounds in Standard as well. Here the main confusion is how Oblivion Ring and Journey to Nowhere can hit it. "But it has protection!" True, but the protection is a surprisingly narrow subset of "colored spells." O-Ring is in fact colored (white), and when you cast it, it is certainly a spell. However, it doesn't target the creature until it enters the battlefield. By definition, this is after the spell resolves; while it is still white, O-Ring is now a permanent at this point, and Emrakul gets sad and goes bye-bye.

Caleb cast a Wild Mongrel on turn two. His

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Elsewhere in Standard, a far less rules-intensive format, Pyromancer Ascension is a pet deck of mine with some fun stuff going on. Not that I've actually played it in a tournament, or at all for that matter, but if I were going to play in a Standard tournament, this is the deck I would choose. When cards like Pyromancer Ascension pop out of the woodwork, there are always a few pressing questions, so let's examine this thing piece by piece.

The first trigger is simple enough. It triggers when you cast an instant or sorcery with the same name as a card in your graveyard. When you cast a spell, it goes to the graveyard as the last part of its resolution, so by definition a spell can't trigger off of itself. This may seem obvious to most of you, but enough players put a spell in their graveyard immediately upon casting it that this interaction could cause confusion.



There is also no way to get a flashback spell to trigger on itself because the first step of casting a spell is to announce it. This doesn't just mean putting on your wizard hat and declaring "I cast my spell!" The important part of announcement is that you take the spell out of whatever zone it was in and place it physically on the stack. It's important to know for triggers like Pyromancer Ascension's that a spell isn't considered cast until you complete all of the steps, including announcement, choosing targets, paying costs, and such.

Unless you're rocking an older format, flashback won't come up, but rebound is a great mechanic for the Standard version of the deck. When you rebound a Staggershock, you are still casting it the second time around, so you can potentially ascend directly with one Staggershock if you have another in your graveyard.



Another useful interaction in the deck is the Call to Mind loop. If you cast a Call to Mind targeting another one in the graveyard, you will get your quest counter. You can then repeat the process and get your second quest counter.

Once you've achieved ascension, you're ready to go nuts. Be mindful that the spell that places the second counter on your enchantment does not in turn trigger the second (copy) ability. Also, while rebounding a Staggershock will net you an additional copy, since you are just copying the spell and not casting it, the copy itself does not rebound for infinite shenanigans.

Looking through a list like Jacob Van Lunen's PTQ Top 8 list from Edison, New Jersey, the deck's only primary victory condition is Lightning Bolt. This is a little surprising, but thinking about copies of Call to Mind will quickly lead you to a Malkovichian situation and ultimate victory.



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