

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



One Squid, Blue Squid

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Here's a little secret: Aaron Forsythe, MagicTheGathering.com's esteemed editor, loves cephalids. It's true. I don't know why exactly, but he admits to an "unhealthy fascination" with the things. Cephalid theme week? His idea. The **Cephalid Broker** deck below? Also his idea. The guy likes cephalids.

My reaction to cephalids is slightly more mixed. Actually, it's fairly negative. First, they're kind of gross looking. And not in a cool Cthulhu kind of way, just in a squishy squid kind of way. Second, in terms of game mechanics they don't hang together all that well. Cephalids aren't universally small or big, cheap to cast or expensive. I guess as a species they are supposed to be political and tricky, thus their individual abilities are just plain weird. I mean, **Cephalid Snitch**? What the heck is THAT?

Still, because they are weird, they present some interesting deckbuilding possibilities. Below are, from my perspective, three of the more interesting cephalids. Keep in mind that I'm not trying for a cephalid theme deck in this article, especially since [Anthony already pretty much built one](#) on Tuesday. Instead, consider this a foray into the Very Strange, and an exploration into why Aaron's eyes dilate when looking at **Aboshan, Cephalid Emperor**.

Squid #1: Cephalid Broker

I have always liked **Merfolk Looter**. He always seems relatively harmless on the table, and so opponents are loath to kill him. But left untouched too long, the Looter can rapidly sift through your deck, allowing you to find cards when you need them. In a pinch he can attack or block too.

Cephalid Broker is in many ways two Merfolk Looters rolled into one card. It is exactly twice the cost at 3. It is twice the power/toughness at 2/2. It sifts two cards deep into a deck instead of one. It can target twice the number of players: either you or an opponent. And yes, I like it twice as much as Merfolk Looter.

When Aaron pitched Cephalid Week to me, he said something like "Make some neat cephalid decks, you know like a Cephalid Broker-Plagiarize deck." At first I thought he was just being cute, since Plagiarize's art clearly has two ugly cephalids on it. Then I blinked.

Cephalid Broker? Plagiarize? Man, that's a cool Type 2 deck idea.

Imagine it: **Cephalid Looter** on Turn 3, Cephalid Broker on Turn 4. On Turn 5 you play Plagiarize during your opponent's upkeep...

Their draw step, you draw a card. Tap your critters, you draw three cards, your opponent discards three cards.

Once your opponent is out of cards, of course, the Looters and Broker become **Millstone** machines if needed.

Neat.



But what *e*lse to do? Madness cards are great. Counterspells are good, especially with massive card-advantage. **Recoil** is good, and becomes über-removal when an opponent has no cards. After that, the deck has pretty much made itself. The only decision concerns a win condition: Is the goal to mill or beat an opponent to death? As Anthony pointed out to me, a milling strategy is dangerous these days because of threshold and flashback. Besides, dedicating the Looters to milling means no deck-sifting for yourself. But if the idea is to win via damage then the Looter/Broker crew is fairly anemic. The deck needs one, solid, finisher.

I showed the deck to Bennie Smith and he suggested **Psychatog**, which is getting a lot of current Type 2 attention. The deck will be filling up its graveyard mightily and drawing lots of cards, so little Psychatog can get awfully big. Sounds good to me...

Looter		
4 Salt Marsh	4 Cephalid Looter	4 Obsessive Search
4 Underground River	4 Psychatog	4 Counterspell
3 Cephalid Coliseum	4 Cephalid Broker	4 Circular Logic
14 Island		4 Plagiarize
		4 Recoil
		3 Compulsion

Squid #2: Llawan, Cephalid Empress

Llawan, Cephalid Empress is the perfect example of a weird cephalid card. If your friend plays a wicked mono-blue deck, then she's great. Otherwise, she's not.

Here is my train of thought when considering Llawan as a feature card:

Me: You know, if you could somehow turn all of your opponent's creatures blue, Llawan would be really annoying.

Myself: I guess you could do that using **Shifting Sky**.

I: Ha! And then you could use **Circle of Protection: Blue**!

Me and Shut up, I.

Myself:

Myself: Seriously, though, **Alter Reality** is something we talk about all of the time. If you cast it on Llawan, you can prevent any color creature you want from being played after you've bounced them.

Me: Brilliant! That's a soft lock! And those cards are all legal in Type 2! It just might work...

I: Circle of Protection! Circle of Protection!

Me and Shut up, I.

Myself:

Sorry you had to see that. I should keep Me thoughts to Myself. Or something.

Anyway, if Aaron has an unhealthy fascination with cephalids, then I definitely have one with color-changing cards. **Shifting Sky** has always elicited my wistful sighs, and **Alter Reality** is obviously great fun. Llawan can take great advantage of both cards.

In my original design, I splashed green for **Sterling Grove**, both as a way to protect **Shifting Sky** and find it. I also used a single copy of **Sabertooth Nishoba**. Anthony suggested that I use **Mystic Enforcer** instead of the Nishoba since black decks are likely to rise after **Torment**. Bennie suggested killing the green idea altogether and instead focusing on card-drawing and counters as a way of finding and protecting **Shifting Sky**. Since I abjectly hated the deck's mana base, I took Bennie's path.

Oh, and both fellows strongly advised that I lose the **Circle of Protection: Blue**. But I snuck it into the deck when they weren't looking.

Get it? "I" snuck it in?



True Blue		
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Meddling Mage	4 Peek
4 Coastal Tower	3 Llawan, Cephalid Empress	4 Sleight of Hand
1 Skycloud Expanse	1 Iridescent Angel	4 Alter Reality
		4 Memory Lapse

9 Island
2 Plains

4 Counterspell
4 Shifting Sky
3 Circle of Protection: Blue
3 Repulse
2 Dismantling Blow

Squid #3: Cephalid Vandal

I actually find **Cephalid Vandal** one of the most intriguing cards in *Torment*, cephalid or not. The thing just *eats* through a library and feels like one of those borderline out-of-control cards that can severely backfire if not used properly. In Odyssey Block or Type 2, my best guess as to how the Vandal might work is:

1. a deck that REALLY wants to achieve threshold,
2. a graveyard-recursion deck, or
3. in combination with **Pedantic Learning**.

Those are all interesting ideas, and I encourage you to explore them. My first thought when looking at Cephalid Vandal, though, was to **Donate** it.

When **Oath of Druids** first appeared, I made a deck using it, **Counterspells** and huge, ridiculous fatties. Tim Wu, a friend and play-partner at the time, thought the deck was great fun and took it to Nationals, where he won some side events. Very quickly, sophisticated Oath decks emerged -- those that used creatures like **Spike Feeder** -- and my big fattie deck couldn't compete. I still love the card, though, and I drool over its fun interaction with **Gaea's Blessing**.

Cephalid Vandal not only works great with Gaea's Blessing too, but it seems a perfect fit with the Oath as long as I'm using Donate. In fact, the Extended deck I made uses a lot of tricks from those more sophisticated Oath decks (including... grumble... Spike Feeder). But the deck doesn't worry about winning with damage at all. Instead, it happily mills itself -- constantly recycling its own graveyard -- until the Vandal has enough shred counters to Donate it.

The result is one of those decks whose losses are well worth the few times it succeeds:

Shred-Head

Extended

4 Tropical Island
4 Yavimaya Coast
13 Island
3 Forest

4 Cephalid Vandal
3 Spike Feeder

4 Accumulated Knowledge
4 Memory Lapse
4 Oath of Druids
4 Donate
4 Force of Will
3 Daze
3 Gaea's Blessing
2 Pedantic Learning
1 Capsize



Cephalids. Interesting little critters. Maybe Aaron is on to something by liking cephalids after all. Each has its own funky, mind-altering mechanics that just beg to be used creatively. And, overall, they seem to be relatively cost-efficient for all of the strangeness they offer. Yes, maybe I misjudged cephalids and their blue, big-headed, beady-eyed... tentacled... squirmy...

Nah. They're still gross.

Next week: The decks from the *Torment*-only [House of Cards Deck Building Challenge #1!](#) Wheeeee!

-j

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