

Magic couples, famous and otherwise

Love Is in the Cards

Josh Bennett, One Man Crowd

Thursday, February 14, 2002



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Ah, Valentine's Day. Not a holiday I celebrate, I must confess. I treat it like Arbor Day. I mean, I'll cheer for Love and Trees, but I'm not about to go planting one way or the other. A steady diet of bitterness has left me without much insight into the romance end of things.

Were this a 1980's romantic comedy, it would be simple: a series of charmingly wacky exploits that look suspiciously like stalking to win the heart of my love. These modern teen movies are no help at all. The same goes for TV. Apparently, chocolate and roses figure into it somehow.

The actual mixing of **Magic** into this already treacherous alchemy has to be a bad idea. If you must give cards, know your audience. Card art is key. If you're unsure, hedge your bets with cute things like faeries (though [Earthbind](#) is probably right out). I can attest that [Dragon Whelp](#) has met with some measure of success. Those beady eyes have the "Awwww"-inducing power of a thousand kittens.

I have a story to illustrate the extreme end of things, not that you'll believe it. My good friend (we'll call him Doctor Love to protect him from jealous boyfriends) once seemingly squandered his first pick during a rare-redraft on, of all things, [Traumatize](#). When asked if he was willing to trade it, he responded simply "No, I know a hot Swedish girl who wants it." I've been told not to expect similar opportunities.

Hopefully this illustrates just how thin the threads joining **Magic** to little candy hearts shouting "Be Mine!" are. There are ways to improvise. The printing of storyline legends does give you the chance to direct your own soap opera. Will [Karn](#) help [Gerrard](#) and [Hanna](#) keep their affair secret, or does his cold, metallic heart harbor desires of his own? Can the murderous, backstabbing squid-monsters [Llawan](#) and [Aboshan](#) keep it together, for the children? When will [Riven Turnbull](#) and [Princess Lucrezia](#) realize that they're made for one another?

That sort of thing can only go so far. To keep with the spirit of the day, I'm going to take a look at some well-known "couples" in **Magic**. A lot of card combos, but also some of the oblique connections that make up this game we love so dearly.

LOVE AT FIRST TURN

Trust me, I feel terrible for writing that. Still, too late to do anything about it now.

Like the cringe-inducing header suggests, these pairs of cards combine to make your first turn a happy one. Not that they wouldn't do the same on subsequent turns, it's just that they've come to

stand for particularly potent openings. That's the way these things work. Ideas get put together for whatever reason and end up sticking. People jump to put Romeo and Juliet beside True Love, but refuse to link them up with death-faking and double-suicides.

Moving right along.

Kird Ape and Taiga

More "classic" than catastrophic, the favorable interaction between these two is apparent. [Kird Ape's](#) text doesn't seem to mention [Taiga](#), but I'm sure it's in the fine print somewhere. The best part about busting this duo wasn't the 2/3 you got, but rather the feeling that everything was going your way. It was practically requisite to enjoy a cigar and tell your opponent how you love it when a plan comes together.

Dark Ritual and Hypnotic Specter

Now we're getting somewhere. Back when these were legal, a first-turn [Ritual](#) usually had your opponent crossing his fingers and hoping against hope for [Scathe Zombies](#). Granted, [Lightning Bolt](#) and [Swords to Plowshares](#) were still around, so it wasn't all pie-in-the-face, but the poor, poor control players. "Maybe he won't get the [Wrath](#)... he sure did." With the retiring of the [Specter](#), players were "forced" to move on to [Necropotence](#).

Channel and Fireball

From the mere unfair, we move to the downright ridiculous. The mighty [Black Lotus](#) and humble [Mountain](#) play matchmaker here, giving you four mana on your first turn. Two of those become nineteen more thanks to [Channel](#), and suddenly your opponent is foamed into game two before they've played a land. Poor [Disintegrate](#) was never welcome at the party, despite its much cooler picture. Say what you will about [Fireball](#)'s technical superiority, the art is a little uninspired. It's a BALL, and it's made out of FIRE! Stop the presses!

LIMITED DYNAMITE

Pretending that I've already made the necessary allusions to whirlwind romances on the streets of Paris or clandestine midnight rendezvous with metal briefcases, we come to these twosomes that really only shine in Draft and Sealed.

Auramancer and Shade's Form

This duo is the bouncer that escorts a stalemate to the door. [Shade's Form](#) is always bad news given enough swamps, but here your beatstick can bounce back from any difficulty. You don't even have to keep mana around to protect it. [Faceless Butcher](#) can stop your fun, but he stops everyone's fun. (With a name like that, I doubt he'll be seen running a Day Care Center.)

Animal Boneyard and Chamber of Manipulation

Enchant Lands have sure come a long way since the days of [Evil Presence](#). Still, this is no joke. That part where you effectively draw [Terminate](#) every turn? That's game winning made easy. The life-gain isn't too shabby either. Plus, there's nothing better than an egregious overuse of the term "Boneyard."

Demoralize and Rites of Initiation

This "two-card kill" has been the abrupt end of a number of my drafts. Here I am, thinking I'm doing fine holding off a red-green assault. My opponent [Demoralizes](#) and responds with the [Rites](#), pitching

his hand and reaching threshold. Suddenly his bunch of dudes has become a team of unblockable killing machines. The last time this happened, I may or may not have flipped the table into his unbearable smugness and been out the door before the cards hit the ground.

GOLD OVER LOVE

Like it or not, there's an unscrupulous element at work out there, those who let dreams of cash overwhelm their honesty. Genuinely bad guys, and not in the president-saving, "Bad Dudes" sense of "Bad." There are even some so addicted to the rush of winning that they'll cheat when there's nothing on the line. I don't know about you, but I've yet to win a match of **Magic** and be overcome by The Quickening.

Some cards, in particular, lend themselves to misuse. Not that the cards themselves are bad, just that they've been running with the wrong crowd. If you find yourself seated across from a man in a sinister black coat, twirling his moustache, then these are some of the tricks you can expect him to pull.

Brainstorm and "Sticky Fingers"

With just a little sloppiness, "draw four" can look startlingly similar to "draw three." [Impulse](#) also tends to be overdrawn. In fact, it's probably dangerous to let them anywhere near the top of their deck. Logistical difficulties aside, it would be best to simply have them trussed up like Hannibal Lechter and force them to dictate their plays to the judge.

City of Brass and "Selective Amnesia"

If ever there was a reason to track both life totals with pen and paper, it's this card. Otherwise Snidely Whiplash can just say, "I take one" every time and forget turn his die. For the truly adept, that fog can spread over most of their game, allowing them to take liberties with spell payments, creature stats, and the playing of lands.

Land Tax and "Keeping It To Yourself"

Sure, sure, it says "basic land," but [Disenchant](#) would be ever so helpful. If you skip the part where your opponent gets to verify, [Land Tax](#) is like three tutors in one! In that way, anything that lets you search your library can be a Tutor, including [Tithing Tutor](#), [Yavimaya Tutor](#), and the less-recognized and ultra-ambitious [Thawing Tutor](#).

'TIL DEATH DO US PART

For the more honorably malicious, there's nothing like a good combo. Prolonged ones are best, like the legitamite use of [Land Tax](#) and [Scroll Rack](#) to get on the Red Phone to [Ancestral Recall](#), but in a pinch, a little whirlwind cruelty like [Plagiarize](#) and [Cephalid Coliseum](#) will do. Here are some classic card pairs that put your opponent on the lockdown train to Loserville. In some of these cases, the road is a lot shorter than they would like.

Kismet and Stasis

[Stasis](#) is the baseline for this sort of thing: drawn out games with your opponent forced to sit

there and twiddle his thumbs. But there is always the chance that he could play out a bunch of lands and deep-six your lock. With [Kismet](#) in the picture, the best your opponent can do is have an impressive array of tapped permanents in play by the time you consent to kill him.

Humility and Orim's Prayer

The precursor to [Grafted Skullcap](#) and [Ensnaring Bridge](#), these two conspire to make creatures as useless as possible. With those meddling kids out of the way, you're free to focus on protecting your combo. Oh, and the killing. Musn't forget that.

Static Orb and Opposition

With enough dudes in play, this makes a mockery of your opponent's ability to interact with the game. When you get all of your mana whenever you want it, and he gets two during his draw step and maybe one more during his main phase, well, it's pretty much over. [Squirrel Nest](#) is an appropriately humiliating path to victory.

WOTC LOVE AFFAIRS

The people who bring us this fine game are an experimental lot. They slave hours on end in their underground lairs, dreaming up new and exciting twists. Some, like the oft-forgotten "bands with other" ability, barely made it off the ground. Others, like foil cards, have endured. The printing of the card [Foil](#) was definitely a sign that they were here to stay. If you look at a foil [Foil](#), you can practically hear the design team giggling behind you, saying, "Get it? Get it?" over and over again. Here are a few more for your sampling.

***The Dark* and Cards with Three Mana of One Color in Their Casting Costs**

At the other end of the spectrum that runs to *Invasion* Block's polychromatic paradise is *The Dark*. Taking "mono-colored" to its logical extreme, it was jam-packed with three-of-a-color gems like [Amnesia](#), [Cleansing](#), [Niall Silvain](#), [Worms of the Earth](#) and [Uncle "Steve" Istvan](#). Unfortunately most of them, like [Erosion](#), didn't pack enough punch to warrant such a big wind up.

The Dark also has a bit of a reputation for being a storehouse of terrible cards. The good news is that their frontman, [Squire](#), eventually grew up to be [Devoted Caretaker](#). That still doesn't excuse cards like [Fire and Brimstone](#). Try to focus on the good times, like [Ball Lightning](#).

***Torment* and the Color Black**

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention this one. Black's got its hand in all the pies this time, what with the [Possessed creatures](#), the [Collaborators](#), the [Nightmare Horrors](#), even [Papa Sengir](#) himself. [Mutilate](#) seems downright unfair, and [Nantuko Shade](#) puts even the venerable pump-knights to shame. It is as-yet unclear if the other colors will be phased out entirely.

MagicTheGathering.com and Beards

Just look at their writers! Alongi, Bleiweiss, JMS? Bearded like they're in the Witness Relocation Program. Sure, sure, Rosewater and Buehler haven't so much as a beer-buying moustache, but I'm sure it's hourly trips to the barber shop that keep them from auditioning for the part of Evil Spock. As if that weren't enough, the call for this article came during a period of relaxation that had left me as unshaven as a hobo. Make of that what you will.

I'm afraid that's all I've got. My parting thought would probably be something like "Push out the jive, bring in the love," but that might be too much to expect. If nothing else, do try to smash with a smile.

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