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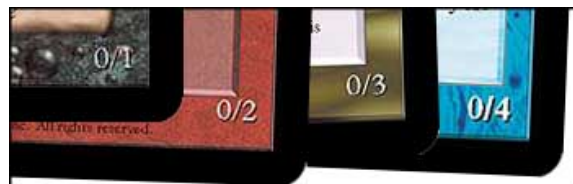


Quietly Dying

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Uncommon Knowledge
Wednesday, July 31, 2002



What's the worst way to die in **Magic**? Surely there's no shame in being killed by a large creature, or a horde of smaller ones. Being decked by a **Millstone** is annoying, but hardly carries a stigma. Losing to **Battle of Wits** might mean you're in the top eight of a Grand Prix these days. Even the best of players have stories of being poisoned to death. This week's article deals with what I consider the worst way to die, the bestiary of zero-power creatures that kill.



Before I delve into the six categories of zero power creatures that are capable of killing an opponent, let me add a couple of stipulations. First, creatures which come into play with +1/+1 counters (or any other type of counters, for those who will cite **Frankenstein's Monster**) are excluded. Spikes might universally be 0/0 creatures, but each and every one of them comes into play with a higher power and

toughness than that. Second, the creature must be able to kill without being enchanted or enhanced through any means other than itself. Accordingly, you won't be seeing **Ornithopter** or the **Kobolds** on this list, since they are harmless without a **Crown of Flames** or **Orcish Oriflamme**.

PUMPERS

Pumpers are creatures which require a mana cost to enhance. The earliest zero-power was **Frozen Shade** in Alpha. It required black mana in order to go large, but could easily be made unblockable by **Dwarven Warriors** and then get pumped to an obscene size. **Legends** introduced the colorless pumping version of the Shade, **Carriion Ants**. A favorite of players for years, any mana source could be used to make the Ants feel like a one-man gang. **Legends** also gave us the flying **Killer Bees**, which could be fed quite a bit of mana thanks to green's **Elves**, **Birds**, and **Wild Growths**. The diminutive **Vampire Bats** completed the trilogy of zero-power **Legends** pumpers, and later was reincarnated as both **Pit Imp** and **Phyrexian Battleflies**. Unlike the previous pumpers however, it merely grew on the power end and not the toughness side.



Ornithopter might not deal damage on its own, but its cousin **Roterohopter** certainly had that capability. An amalgamation of the **Antiquities** card and the aforementioned **Bats**, this artifact could soar through the air and hit for a less-than-astounding two damage a turn, all for the not-quite-low cost of four mana.

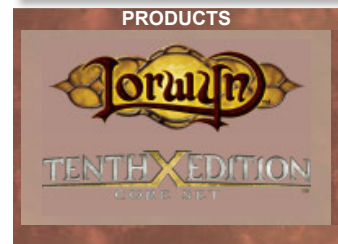
Red got into the act in later years, with the recently reprinted **Storm Shaman** and mountainwalking **Cavern Crawler** both tapping into the power of the mountains in order to upsize from the big zero. Unlike all the other pumpers, **Cavern Crawler** didn't solely grow large, instead trading an increase in power for a decrease in toughness. In this way it owed just as much to **flowstone creatures** as to **firebreathers**.

ACTIVATORS

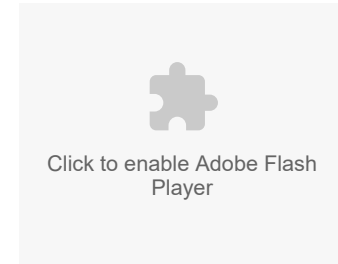


Unlike the pumpers from above which enjoy a one to one ratio between mana invested and change in power, the activators require a different type of cost in order to move past their state of powerlessness. The two simplest examples of this type of creature are **Walking Wall** and its identical twin **Mobile Fort**. Both are 0/6 walls which may be activated a single time each turn. For a mere three mana they transform into 3/5 creatures which may attack their opponent. Likewise, you can hop a bunch of merfolk aboard the **Vodalian War Machine** in order to send this wall into the Red Zone.

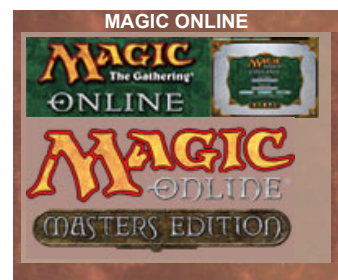
Walls aren't the only activated zero power creatures. **Keldon Battlewagon** combines the **War Machine** from above with **Sword of the Ages** to pack a mighty one-time punch from out of nowhere. **Balduvian Conjurer** transforms your snow-covered lands into 2/2 bears which can join the battle. And **Pulsating Illusion** goes from being the worst flyer on this side of **Hawkeater Moth** into a very respectable 4/5 air attacker.



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA



Update on Rain Delay





TIMS

"Tims" are creatures which tap to deal damage to other creatures, named after a specific enchanter from a memorable Monty Python movie. Although the initial variants on this theme involved 1/1 and 4/3 creatures, it took until *The Dark* for a zero power damage tapper to come along: **Banshee**. This undead spirit was dangerous indeed, capable of reducing both you *and* your opponent to zero life at the same time. In fact, the next variant from *Homelands* (**Reveka, Wizard Savant**) also came with a drawback (only untapping every other turn). Mirage finally introduced a Tim with benefits, the **Suq'Ata Firewalker**. Untargetable by red spells or effects, this wizard could hold down the entire board against low-toughness red creatures, holding off entire Sligh decks pinging off **Ball Lightnings**, **Jackal Pups** and **Mogg Fanatics** in no danger of dying himself (aside from the stray **Cursed Scroll**). Later on, in *Maques Block* Constructed, **Stinging Barrier** would be used in *Rising Waters* decks as a solution to those pesky one-toughness rebels.

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
18 Island	4 Eye of Ramos	2 Bribery
4 Rishadan Port	3 Seal of Removal	1 Counterspell
22 lands	4 Gush	1 Hoodwink
	4 Rising Waters	2 Island
4 Drake Hatchling	1 Brainstorm	3 Misdirection
4 Stinging Barrier	3 Counterspell	1 Rath's Edge
4 Waterfront Bouncer	4 Thwart	1 Seal of Removal
	3 Daze	4 Stronghold Zeppelin
12 creatures	26 other spells	15 sideboard cards

TRANSFORMERS

More than meets the eye, these creatures change from one form to another. They shed their Clark Kent alter egos in favor of Superman-like strength. **Rukh Egg** seems like a very overcosted **Phyrexian Walker** until it heads to the graveyard, at which point you net a very respectable 4/4 flyer. **Roc Hatchling** takes four turns to mature, but eventually grows into a **Roc of Kher Ridges**. **Rabid Wombat** just needs one enchanted evening to go completely berserk, while **Phantasmal Sphere** waits for the moment its bubble bursts, barring an extensive collection of mana. **Dwarven Armorer** theoretically could make himself a really large creature (although he seems weaker than many of the others on this list). And **Kavu Scout** simply wants to feel a basic love of land in order to obtain that rush that comes from attacking for five.

But of all the transformers, none were as deadly as a certain shapeshifter out of the *Stronghold* set. Judge Paul Barclay showed the world the power of timing with his "Full English Breakfast" deck, centered around getting a **Volrath's Shapeshifter** into play, and then stretching the timing rules of **Magic** to the point of abuse. Typical games would go as follows: **Survival of the Fittest** for a Shapeshifter, put it into play, **Survival** for a **Flowstone Hellion** and discard it, put eleven activations on the stack, **Survival** for a **Phyrexian Dreadnought** and discard it, and attack with a 23/1 trampler. Not bad for a 0/2 knockoff of **Vesuvan Doppelganger** and **Clone**, and definitely better than its close relative, the aptly named **Unstable Shapeshifter**.



Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Forest	4 Survival of the Fittest	1 Pygmy Hippo
6 Island	4 Force of Will	1 Phelddagrif
4 Tropical Island	3 Counterspell	1 Recurring Nightmare
1 Taiga	11 other spells	1 Seal of Cleansing
1 Savannah		1 Gilded Drake
2 Undiscovered Paradise		1 Spiketail Drake
3 City of Brass		1 Oath of Ghouls

21 lands	1 Circle of Protection: Red
4 Birds of Paradise	1 Carrion Beetle
4 Wall of Roots	1 Bottle Gnomes
2 Quirion Ranger	1 Masticore
4 Volrath's Shapeshifter	1 Academy Rector
3 Tradewind Rider	3 Pyroblast
2 Phyrexian Dreadnought	15 sideboard cards
1 Elvish Lyrist	
1 Uktabi Orangutan	
1 Bottle Gnomes	
1 Gilded Drake	
1 Sliver Queen	
1 Morphling	
1 Reya Dawnbringer	
1 Flowstone Hellion	
1 Squee, Goblin Nabob	
28 creatures	

JUDO CREATURES

When one practices Judo, one learns early on that you can use an opponent's strength to your advantage. Blue often identifies with this principle, borrowing, trading, or outright stealing its opponent's spells, creatures, and permanents for its own use. In order to battle in the waves, many blue decks used to sideboard **Seasingers** in the mirror match. This merfolk was capable of outright stealing any creature as long as that creature's controller brought even a single island into play.

In *Stronghold* there was a cycle of walls, of which three practiced the judo principal. Blue's wall bounced creatures, and white's gained you life, but it was the **Wall of Souls** in black which held the capability of killing through attrition. As long as there were attacking creatures, the wall could "jump" in front of the battle and force an exchange of damage to both players. Attacking with two 3/3's? No problem, let's both take three. Attacking with a **Skyshrout Behemoth**? I'll block, and you can take ten. Although many shadow creatures of Rath slipped by this wall undetected, it proved to be a very frustrating impediment to winning a damage race against an opponent.

UNBLOCKED CREATURES

Lastly we come to the creatures which only become killing machines when they go unchecked in combat. **Swamp Mosquito** thrives in the air, where it hopes to deliver ten attack phases of zero damage, instead adding to the poison count of an adversary. Remember, ten poison counters and the game is over, so of all the poison creatures, this one truly embraces the full alternate win mechanic.

Also in *Alliances* was a strange 0/3 known as **Lim-Dul's Paladin**. Lim-Dul was one evil guy, and his Paladin reflected his nature. While it was required that a card be pitched every turn to upkeep this unholy warrior, it posed a threat on two levels. If unblocked, it caused your opponent to lose four life, circumventing Circles of Protection and damage prevention effects. On the other hand, he grew to a very respectable 6/6 trampler when blocked, making it a losing proposition to defend against him on any level.

To close this article, let's pay tribute to the newest member of the zero power club, the **Guiltfeeder**. Combining the life loss of **Lim-Dul's Paladin** with near unblockability, the **Guiltfeeder** poses a decent sized body for defensive purposes, but can turn sideways to inflict a potentially huge blow dependant on the size of your his graveyard. While it might not look to be much at first, imagine this creature having a power equal to the number of cards in your opponent's graveyard. Suddenly, it appears as an unblockable 5/4 or 6/4 or 20/4 creature who causes a loss of life (and therefore cannot be prevented, just like the Paladin).

Stay tuned next week when I shift focus to the first expansion set ever printed for **Magic: The Gathering**. Until then, keep on swinging away with the littlest guys who could.

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Ensnaing Bridge? Bring it on!

*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by StarCityGames.com, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



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