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# Paradigm Shift

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In the proud blue tradition of card drawing creatures such as [Ophidian](#), [Thieving Magpie](#), [Shadowmage Infiltrator](#), I present to you...

[Hystrodon?!?!?](#)

Aaron sent out the five Morph Week preview cards to the writers a few weeks ago. Each writer got a different color creature, and they all seemed fairly interesting. All except for the one I was assigned, which in fact was utterly mind-blowing. Wasn't it the domain of blue to draw cards for attacking with creatures? Why was there this amazing green card-drawing creature staring me right in the face?

[Hystrodon](#) is nuts. I've had the pleasure of previewing a lot of good cards, but this beast of a beast makes everything else look like small potatoes. Look at everything that he has going for him:

1. He has a morph cost of 1GG. This means that in a world with [Llanowar Elves](#) and [Birds of Paradise](#), you can easily play him on turn two every game, and turn him into a 3/4 trampling monster on the third turn—while drawing a card in the process!
2. He tramples. Your opponents can't be content to chump block him with smaller creatures to keep you from drawing cards. [Nightscape Familiar](#) will simply absorb one point of damage as [Hystrodon](#) plows on through. [Spectral Lynx](#)'s protection from green is almost for naught.
3. He's a 3/4 creature. [Thieving Magpie](#) flies and [Shadowmage Infiltrator](#) has fear, but neither of them can kill an opponent quickly. [Hystrodon](#) not only acts as a mad card drawing engine, but he also beats down like a mother.



## Paradigm Shift

I'm not talking about the sorcery from [Weatherlight](#). I'm talking about a whole change in the way you think of each of the colors in **Magic**. Remember when Randy spoke of the [color pie](#)? He wasn't kidding when he said that R&D was looking at the distribution of mechanics between the colors, and thinking of divvying them up a little more fairly. This isn't to say that blue loses all card drawing abilities; instead it looks like it might lose the attacking with creatures to draw cards mechanic, which shifts to green.

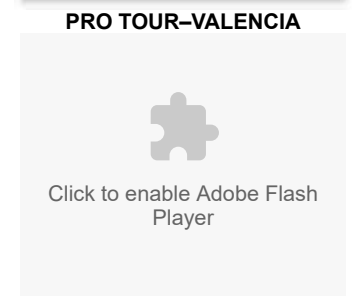
Doesn't this make sense overall? Green is the color of creatures and nature, and green is no stranger to card drawing abilities. Blue is the color of illusion, manipulation and trickery. Why would attacking with a flying bird or a giant snake allow you to gain more knowledge if you're a wizard of the blue robes? Instead, the green nature mages will enjoy being able to attack with creatures to replenish their hands. "It was a creature, and its victory led me to more resources." Sounds green, doesn't it?

## Green Draws Cards?

Researching this article, I came across a surprisingly high number of green card drawing cards in **Magic**. For the sake of discussion I've divided them up into seven categories: Cantrips, "Creaturetrips," Cyclers, Enchantresses, Black Hosers, Library Manipulators, and Uniques. A few cards were left out, such as [Xira Arien](#) (which thematically makes no sense given her colors), [Malignant Growth](#) (which would have fit better as a blue/black card), [Treva's Charm](#) and [Last Stand](#) (both of which share both blue and green in their mana cost, but clearly gain their card drawing components from blue). It should be noted that [Fungal Shambler](#) also fits the above category, drawing trample and size from green, card drawing from blue, and card discard from black.

## In the Beginning

In the beginning, there was [Verduran Enchantress](#), and she was good. A relatively fragile 0/2 creature for three mana, this Druid (formerly an Enchantress and Wizard) allowed the caster to draw a card each time they played an enchantment. Back in the early days of Alpha, there weren't really a whole lot of enchantments to get excited about. Many players put together novelty decks with [Rabid Wombat](#) and [Verduran Enchantress](#) once [Legends](#) came out, but they didn't really amount to much, even with the addition of [Femeref Enchantress](#) in [Visions](#).



Update on Rain Delay





It wasn't until *Urza's Saga* where the Enchantress came into her own. Apparently the forests of Argothia breed a much less vulnerable enchantress, one which both comes out a turn earlier and cannot be targeted by spells or effects. Combined with recurring enchantments such as **Rancor**, the **Argothian Enchantress** made a mark on *Urza's Block* constructed, and emerged as the key to a rogue extended deck featuring **Auratog**.

## And Then...

*Legends* introduced the very powerful **Sylvan Library**. The first of green's library manipulation cards which allowed for card drawing (building on **Natural Selection** from Alpha), this enchantment proved to be extraordinarily powerful combined with card shuffling engines such as **Land Tax** and **Thawing Glaciers**. Not only could you dig three cards deep into your library every turn, but you could also pay life to keep one or both of the extra cards.

Later variations on this theme didn't work as well, such as **Preferred Selection** from *Mirage* and **Rowen** from *Visions*. **Rowen** came in the spirit of **Sylvan Library** (look at extra cards, see if you can keep more), but didn't really allow you to manipulate your library at all. Finally, Wizards changed this mechanic to blue (**Impulse**, **Raven Familiar**) after giving it a

final non-card drawing hurrah with **Mirri's Guile**.

## The Great Ice Age

*Ice Age* gave green no less than three branches on its card drawing tree: Cantrips, "Creaturetrips," and color hosers involving card drawing. Technically Creaturetrips are an extension of Cantrips since essentially you get to play a creature plus draw a card. They are distinct enough from cantrips because until **Phyrexian Rager** and **Phyrexian Gargantua** in *Apocalypse*, no other color had received this sort of card.

Cantrips are cards which have a minor effect combined with the phrase "draw a card." Green's first few cantrips weren't particularly exciting. **Foxfire**, **Renewal**, **Touch of Vitae**, and **Feral Instinct** didn't exactly get anyone's creative deck building juices flowing. **Weatherlight** changed all this with perhaps the most played cantrip (give or take **Arcane Denial**) of all time, **Gaea's Blessing**. **Gaea's Blessing** formed the backbone of many recursion oriented decks such as Turbo Oath (**Oath of Druids** + the Blessing to reshuffle the library after the oath resolves), Turbo Land (**Time Warp** + **Gaea's Blessing** to recur the Warp for infinite turns) and Prison (**Icy Manipulator** + **Winter Orb**, with the Blessing used to deck the opponent). Recent sets have seen cantrip versions made of **Tranquility** (**Tranquil Path**), **Animate Land** (**Vivify**) and **Giant Growth** (**Sudden Strength**).

"Creaturetrips," on the other hand, are probably the most beloved of the green card drawers. Although the original Creaturetrip, **Pyknite**, was a "slowtrip" (a cantrip for which the card wasn't drawn until the following turn's upkeep), the following creatures drew the card immediately. They included **Arctic Wolves**, **Striped Bears**, **Multani's Acolyte**, **Kavu Climber**, **Jungle Barrier**, **Nantuko Cultivator**, and of course, **Wall of Blossoms**. The wall became the most used of these creatures, making several notable appearances in **Tradewind Rider**, **Living Death**, and **Survival of the Fittest/Recurring Nightmare** decks.

As for the color hosers, they targeted black for the most part. **Freyalise's Charm**, **Compost**, and **Pygmy Kavu** acted as counterbalances to black's discard (as did **Reap**, which does not technically draw cards). **Multani's Presence**, the one oddball, attempted to gain card advantage against (mainly) blue's counterspells.



Green card drawing

## Cycling All Over the Place

Cycling cards and cantrips have a lot in common. Their main difference comes in flavor: cantrips usually are minor effects which, with the addition of a couple of mana, add a card drawing mechanic. Cycling cards, both the actual keyword "cycling" and cards that simulate it, actively require effort to be made for the card drawing (paying a cost/sacrificing a permanent) and might entirely separate the card drawing from the card's ability. For instance, take the original cycler for green, **Bequeathal**. On its own it does nothing. On an opponent's creature, it gives you card parity combined with your creature removal (your removal + your **Bequeathal** = 2 cards for 2 cards). On your own creature, it gives you card parity should the creature be killed (your creature + your **Bequeathal** = 2 cards for 2 cards). The same goes for many cards from *Urza's Saga*, along with creatures like **Wild Dogs**, **Bloated Toad**, and **Darkwatch Elves**.


**Greater Good** fits into the cycling motif as you give up a creature in order to dig further down into your deck. Likewise, three creatures from *Urza's Destiny* share cycling: **Yavimaya Elder**, **Marker Beetles**, and **Heart Warden**. During design of the set, R&D wanted to put a new twist on cycling. So instead of making cards cycle from the hand as they had in the previous two sets in the block, they made permanents which cycled from the board!

## And Now for Something Completely Different

While the above all might seem like standard fare, green also houses some of the most innovative and strange card drawing engines in all of **Magic**. **Fecundity** and **Nature's Resurgence** both make use of the graveyard as a card drawing resource: one for creatures going, and the other for creatures gone. **Fugitive Druid** worked nicely as a cheaply priced **Jayemdae Tome** with the return-to-your-hand enchantments in *Tempest* such as **Crown of Flames**. **Collective Unconscious** might have been a bit pricy at six mana, but it at least fit the flavor for green—card drawing for creatures in play. Likewise, **Kavu Lair** was the “coming-in” to **Collective Unconscious**'s “already-there.”

Two cards stand out as particularly risky. They are **Recycle** and **Symbiotic Deployment**. Both completely remove your regular draw for the turn, leaving the rest of the game totally at the mercy of your hand and your board, respectively. People tried getting **Recycle** decks to work, going as far as to running the much maligned **Ghost Town** to counteract otherwise game-ending **Stupors**. The more fragile **Symbiotic Deployment** never really caught on, though thematically it fit green more than **Recycle**, due to its theme revolving around creatures.

## Hystrodon, Anyone?

While green has a long and very varied history of card drawing, **Hystrodon** finally gives green a mechanic it was due for a long time coming. One comparison could be made to **Scragnoth**, another  casting cost creature which saw a lot of play in its day: Would you rather play with a card which beats blue, or would you rather play with the monster which beats blue at its own game?

Next week: A Revised look at *Onslaught*. A Revised look at *Onslaught*.

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*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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