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GOBLINS WITH GUNS

Posted in **Latest Developments** on December 27, 2002



By Randy Buehler

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*I chose this piece for "Best Of" Week because the Gatling Gunner remains just plain fun to think about. Plus I got yelled at by Dave Williams, Bob Maher, and Neil Reeves when I ran into them at Pro Tour - Houston for giving away how good this guy is. Williams said they used to get passed [Goblin Sharpshooters](#) all the time on **Magic** Online, but the gig was up once I wrote my article. All I could do was smile and be glad I haven't completely lost my ability to recognize the good cards.*

—Randy

This article originally appeared on October 11, 2002.

So there we were, playing five-player, free-for-all **Magic** with tribal-themed *Onslaught* decks. Mike Donais and I had gradually formed an alliance over the course of the game and things had pretty much boiled down to three against two. The two of us had each gotten solid draws, me with my Cleric deck and him with his Goblins, so it was ok that we were on the smaller "team." It didn't hurt that Donais is a master politician and he'd been setting them up the whole time.

You see, he'd snuck a seemingly innocuous Goblin onto the table pretty early in the game and it just sat there, looking innocent (well, as innocent as a goblin can look) and doing nothing. Heck, that thing doesn't even untap, how much trouble could it really cause?

The goblin in question was [Goblin Sharpshooter](#), though in my heart I will always lovingly refer to it by the name Richard Garfield gave it when he created it: "Goblin Gatling Gunner." When he was a member of the *Odyssey* design team, Richard came up with the card almost exactly as it was eventually printed (the only difference was that he priced it at , a price we eventually concluded was too cheap). Richard loved the mental image of a Goblin with some clunky, steam-and-crank-driven gun that he couldn't really control. He could kill stuff, but it was hard, and every once in a

while he actually got it running good for a few minutes and sprayed everyone in sight with jagged rocks.

Of course, there aren't any Goblins in *Odyssey*, because there aren't any Goblins on the northern half of the continent of Otaria, so Richard's card was going to wind up being a Dwarf. That didn't seem like quite as much fun somehow, but it was still a mechanically cool card so the plan was to do it in *Odyssey*.

Richard's vision never got properly communicated to the artist, however. Here's what the artist was actually told: "This is a red card and should show a dwarf using electric magic (to damage others). Maybe come up with a unique way of delivering it." When the art came back it completely failed to capture the fun mental image we all had when we thought about the Gatling Gunner so we decided to make up a new card for that art ([Spark Mage](#)) and we decided to push the Gatling Gunner off to a set where we could get the right art for it.

Before long we realized we'd be bringing goblins back in *Onslaught*, so that seemed like the perfect place to find home for him. This time, we communicated much better, giving Greg Staples the following directions: "Exhausted Goblin turning the crank on a very primitive looking chain gun. The chain gun should fire gravel or slivers of wood."

And here's how he turned out:

Everybody involved was much happier that he got to be a Goblin instead of a Dwarf, and the art turned out pretty well too. We couldn't really call it a "Gatling" gun, because that's named after a guy from 19th-century Earth and the name would thus be hopelessly anachronistic, but the image and the fun that Richard imagined are all still there.

And OH MY GOD is this thing fun!

That multiplayer game was a perfect example. Donais sneaked this thing onto the table and I just sat there. Henry Stern had some 1-toughness Elf in play, but Donais didn't see any reason to kill it right away. After all, since the Sharpshooter untaps as soon as it kills a 1-toughness guy, it's not like you need to use it right before you untap or anything. Even if somebody tries to kill it, you can just respond by shooting something, having it die, untapping the Sharpshooter, shooting something else, etc. Basically, as soon as you've had it for a turn, every 1-toughness creature on the table is a dead man walking.

But it's even better than that. As soon as any creature goes to the graveyard for any reason while the Sharpshooter is untapped, suddenly the Sharpshooter can take down a 2-toughness creature and still wind up untapped, ready to be used again. (Ping, then untap because the other thing died, then ping the 2-toughness monster

again, then untap because *it* died.) You really can't appreciate this card until you've gotten it into play on your side often table and just looked at all the things it can do.

So Donais saw all this and he even managed to keep a perfect poker face as Brian Schneider committed Soldier after Soldier after Soldier to the board. We were in the typical early stalemate that happens during many multiplayer games so there were a bunch of creatures staring across, waiting for a chance to attack. (Even the mana-screwed Worth Wollpert had a few small Zombies). Eventually, Schneider decided to go for it and attacked. Mayhem ensued. Donais was forced to defend himself so he started gunning down everything in sight. Donais set up his blocks knowing that each creature that not only was each 1-toughness creature doomed, but each creature who died in combat would also provide him with a "free ping." Not only was it time for all of Schenider's Soldiers to die, but he started going after Stern's Elves too. Stern kept trying to save them (and keep the Sharpshooter trapped in a tapped position) with [Wirewood Pride](#) and other similar effects, but I had [Cabal Archon](#) in play and whenever it looked like the carnage might get stopped, I just sent one of my Clerics to the graveyard and stole two life from Worth. All in all, 20-some creatures died all on that one turn.

Henry actually managed to win the game eventually, but the real winner was Donais's [Goblin Sharpshooter](#). The mental image of the "Goblin Gatling Gunner" actually getting his weapon to work, along with the glee on everyone's face as they watched in surprise/astonishment/horror, has made the Sharpshooter one of my favorite cards in all of *Onslaught*.

Since this column is a repeat, I already know what your answer was to the poll question. So here's a super secret extra special bonus poll question for you, which actually came up in conversation and was hotly debated inside R&D:

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