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An Interesting Gate

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

When Bennie Smith, of "Single Card Strategy" fame, and I started discussing the *Legions* set, we inevitably compared our lists of favorite cards. One of the cards on my list was *Celestial Gatekeeper*. My list, not Bennie's. This isn't a humongous shock, as two deckbuilders are bound to be attracted to a different sample of cards when a new set comes out. In fact, I think the whole of our conversation about *Celestial Gatekeeper* went something along these lines . . .

Jay: I like *Celestial Gatekeeper*. Cards that bring creatures directly into play are spiffy.

Bennie: Eh. Too expensive. Too narrow.

Jay: Yeah. I still like him, though.

As you might expect, I have these sorts of conversations a lot.

I think anyone who looks at *Celestial Gatekeeper* sees this:

- You are paying 3*** for a 2/2 flier.
- You get to put two creatures into play when it dies, but not *any* two creatures. They need to be either Clerics or Birds. A quick mental checklist of *Magic* spoilers brings no killer Clerics or Birds to mind.
- *Celestial Gatekeeper* has to die first. It can't sacrifice itself, so you need to find another way to kill it.
- It removes itself from the game, so you can't reuse the ability.
- Wait a minute, doesn't *Glory* cost 3***?



Conclusion: NEXT!

What I see, however, is something slightly different:

- Hey, neat, creature reanimation in white. I love creature reanimation in white.
- It's only good on Birds and Clerics? Wow, that's interesting. What kind of Birds and Clerics are out there that could make *Celestial Gatekeeper* really annoying?
- It sure is cool in a deck with *Wrath of God*.

Conclusion: LET'S GET STARTED!

Now, I should emphasize that what I see does not trump what a more sane *Magic* player sees. *Celestial Gatekeeper* is awfully expensive for what it does. No spectacular Birds or Clerics really exist. If picking between *Celestial Gatekeeper* and *Glory*, you should pick *Glory* nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand. I am not by any means saying that *Celestial Gatekeeper* is a powerhouse card.

Instead, I'm saying that *Celestial Gatekeeper* is an *interesting* card, and interesting cards get my mind whirring.

Below is an outline of a number of possible ways that I see how a deck built around *Celestial Gatekeeper* might take shape. As is my usual tactic after a new set, I'll focus on Standard. Also, I'll spend most of my time talking about the options in white because, well, it's White Week.

THE GREAT WHITE GATE

First, the basics. Here are some cards that I find showing up again and again in my own Gatekeeper deck creations:

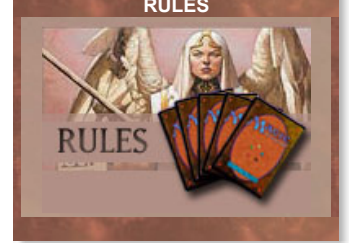
- *Starlit Sanctum*

Laugh all you want, but white doesn't have very reliable ways to sacrifice its own creatures. *Starlit Sanctum* lets you ensure that *Celestial Gatekeeper* will bring creatures from your graveyard to play on your terms rather than your opponent's.

Animal Boneyard plays a similar role if you need extra insurance. If your deck is swimming in mana, I suppose *Doom Cannon* can work too.

- *Breath of Life*

If you like your Birds and Clerics enough to bring them back into play, you might as well maximize your chances of doing so. *Breath of Life* is always fun to use (somehow more than *Zombify*, I think, simply because it's white)



and duplicates the Gatekeeper's ability nicely.

- **Disenchant**

All decks need to worry about opposing enchantments and/or artifacts. I'm putting **Disenchant** here as a friendly reminder.

- **Marble Diamond**

To be honest, it doesn't bother me too much that **Celestial Gatekeeper** costs five mana to cast. The reason I'm okay with is that if it were too fast, I would need to find ways (**Tireless Tribe**, **Patrol Hound**, **Millikin**, **Hypochondria**) to quickly get creatures into my graveyard. On the other hand, I can cast my Birds and Clerics early, wait for them to die then cast **Celestial Gatekeeper** to clean up the mess. In these cases I find waiting for the Gatekeeper on turn 5 or later to be perfectly acceptable.

If, however, you want to mess around with a rapidly filling graveyard and a quick Gatekeeper—or a deck with a lot of high-end creatures—then you need mana acceleration. In white, that means **Marble Diamond** (and a hefty dose of prayer).

- **Pariah**

Another sneaky way to get your **Celestial Gatekeeper** killed. **Pariah** doesn't give you as much control as something like **Animal Boneyard**, but it can be a lot more frustrating for your opponent. As an added bonus, **Pariah** acts as pretty decent white creature removal.

- **Wrath of God**

Speaking of creature removal . . . play **Wrath of God** while you have **Celestial Gatekeeper** out and you are suddenly up two creatures to zero. Trust me, that's a nice situation in which to find yourself, measly Birds and Clerics or not. Of course you can always use things like **Kirtar's Wrath** and **Akroma's Vengeance**, too.

Once the basics are out of the way, it's time to really make an important decision: Clerics or Birds? Which kind of creature do you want the Gatekeeper to fetch out of your graveyard?



THE HOLY GATE

I think probably the most obvious answer is Clerics. **Master Apothecary** is a creature that is a real pain in the tuchus to kill. Once he's dead, very few opponents want to see him come back into play with a second Cleric sidekick (especially if the sidekick happens to be **Akroma's Devoted**). In addition, some Clerics, like **Nova Cleric** and **Benevolent Bodyguard**, sacrifice themselves for good effect, while others, like **Ancestor's Prophet**, **Nomad Mythmaker**, **True Believer**, and **Stern Judge**, often have big targets on their backs. So you're bound to have at least two worthy Clerics in your graveyard, ready for the **Celestial Gatekeeper** to set them free.

An interesting feature in white Clerics is their absolute love of gaining life. Since **Test of Endurance** remains in Standard, it's kind of fun to try a deck like the following:

| Iron Gate | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------------|
| Standard-legal Celestial Gatekeeper deck | | |
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 22 Plains | 1 Ancestor's Prophet | 2 Animal Boneyard |
| 3 Starlit Sanctum | 3 Celestial Gatekeeper | 2 Disenchant |
| 25 lands | 3 Doubtless One | 4 Marble Diamond |
| | 4 Master Apothecary | 3 Test of Endurance |
| | 4 Planar Guide | 11 other spells |
| | 4 Teroh's Faithful | |
| | 2 Venerable Monk | |
| | 3 Whipgrass Entangler | |
| | 24 creatures | |

Oh, and these are just the white Clerics. Throw **Celestial Gatekeeper** into a white-black deck and you can reap the rewards of **Rotlung Reanimator**, **Cabal Archon**, **Doomed Necromancer**, and **Dark Supplicant**.

THE AVIARY

Birds are a bit trickier, but certainly no less interesting. The very presence of **Soulcatchers' Aerie** and **Battle Screech** mean that monowhite Bird decks can flex some feathery muscles. Although most of the Aven compete with **Celestial Gatekeeper** for the most expensive card in your deck, there are more than enough reasonably costed ones to make a deck.

| Feathers | | |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Standard-legal Celestial Gatekeeper deck | | |
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 23 Plains | 4 Celestial Gatekeeper | 4 Battle Screech |
| 23 lands | 1 Commander Eesha | 3 Disenchant |
| | 3 Lieutenant Kirtar | 2 Pariah |
| | 4 Mystic Familiar | 4 Soulcatchers' Aerie |
| | 4 Soulcatcher | 4 Wrath of God |
| | 4 Suntail Hawk | |
| | 20 creatures | 17 other spells |

In blue, Bird decks get the great boon of **Keeper of the Nine Gales**, along with other bonuses like **Possessed Aven**, **Aven Fisher**, **Skywing Aven**, **Aven Fogbringer**, and **Thieving Magpie**, to name a few.

THE HOLY AVIARY OF THE IVORY NIMBUS

Of course you may be staring at **Celestial Gatekeeper** and wondering why you have to choose between a dedicated-Cleric deck and a dedicated-Bird deck. Other than a thematic appreciation of "tribal" decks and the use of nifty cards like **Master Apothecary** and **Soulcatchers' Aerie**, you don't. Feel free to mix and match beaks and robes and wings and incense . . . after all, the Gatekeeper itself can't decide between the two.

I've really only begun to scratch the surface of possibilities here. Fetch **Celestial Gatekeeper** back from its own death with **Living Wish** while rescuing your **Birds of Paradise**. Make a black-white Birds deck with **Screeching Buzzard**. Or cycle Clerics and Birds into your graveyard before reanimating them. Just to show you how crazy "crazy" can get . . .

| Off-White Gates | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------------|
| Standard-legal Celestial Gatekeeper deck | | |
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 2 City of Brass | 4 Celestial Gatekeeper | 2 Disenchant |
| 10 Plains | 4 Disciple of Grace | 4 Oversold Cemetery |
| 10 Swamp | 4 Disciple of Malice | 4 Wrath of God |
| 2 Tainted Field | 4 Doomed Necromancer | |
| 24 lands | 4 Keeneye Aven | 10 other spells |
| | 4 Primoc Escapee | |
| | 2 Rotlung Reanimator | |
| | 26 creatures | |

So, **Celestial Gatekeeper** . . . Expensive? Yep. Too narrow? When compared to **Glory**, yes indeedly do. But as I hope I've shown today, sometimes the interesting cards are the most fun to build decks around.

Enjoy yourself,

—j

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