

That pile of old commons can be so much more... **Mental Magic: The Beginning**

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On your way from the table in the back corner of your local store, where you and your friends are blithely playing the format of your choice, to the front counter, where you are planning to pick up a frozen Snickers bar or perhaps a refreshingly chilled bottle of Orangina, I am sure you have happened right by the Stack. The Stack is sitting there, bereft of rares—the only evidence that an eight-person draft had finished just a few minutes ago. It might even be over there, in the careless remnants of a broken prize box, that all but the most obviously playable cards have been left behind by careless customers. The Stack may even be right in front of you, as you sort away the "keepers" from your failed sealed-deck outing the day of the Prerelease. Let's be honest. It's also probably spread messily across your floor like some bizarro cardboard tile, or perhaps stuffed into your closet so that your mommy won't see it and immediately scold you upon entrance to your bedroom.



As **Magic** players, we come across discarded chaff cards all the time. We all own them. Lord knows that no booster pack is full entirely of keepers. Anyone who plays Limited on a regular basis probably ends up planning to retain for his or her collection only a fraction of the booty: the rares, the known, or the projected staples for some Constructed deck in the future. But what do we do with the rest of the cards?

There are many options. Gary Wise and others have suggested that we donate some to children's hospitals or other charitable organizations. These spells may not appeal to savvy **Magic** players, but they still have the ability to bring enjoyment to some people, and may end up helping to grow the player community. Certainly, unlike the careless players we met above, we can throw them away, so as to avoid heaps of trash and help circumvent later headaches for store employees and event organizers.

Or, before we do so, we can use them again. For Mental **Magic**.



Mental **Magic** is by far my favorite format. It is largely more fun and interactive than traditional **Magic** because neither player ever gets mana-screwed or mana-flooded, the cards played are dictated by happenstance and improvisation rather than the established archetypes of a given format, and no two games ever develop precisely the same way. While I am framing this introduction to Mental **Magic** by suggesting you first try it out with the rejects that wouldn't normally make it into your collection, some players who have grown to love the format actually carry around boxes of Mental **Magic** cards to ensure that they can play, whether or not there is an available pile of chaff cards. Adrian Sullivan, for example, has a box of Mental **Magic** cards balanced by color and diverse of cost, hoping to both make games interesting and encourage the playing of new and different spells.

At this point you may be asking yourself "what is Mental **Magic**?" If you are in this camp, you are very lucky, because beginning with the next section, I am going to explain it to you. Those of you who have played the format already know about it and are probably wondering what you will get out of this mysterious next section. I am aware that Mental **Magic** is akin to the oral traditions of preliterate and barbarian cultures of old and has largely been passed from player to player like the stuff of legend. In this article series, I am going to try to unify disparate regional rules and to share and broaden the elegance of this inherently casual format.

1. A Big Pile of Cards

First of all, take your Stack and shuffle it. The Stack can be made up of any **Magic** spells, from any expansion, in any combination of colors and costs. Players can play either from their own libraries or a shared library (because certain cards, such as [Sylvan Library](#), make a shared library clumsy, we tend to split the Stack when such cards are played, but I'll get into that at some future date . . . you can avoid these issues altogether by playing with individual decks from the get go). Players draw a hand of seven, per usual, and are ready to go.

2. Playing the Cards

One of the neat things about Mental **Magic** is that no one is ever mana-screwed or mana-flooded. Any card can be played face down as a land. The "lands" in Mental **Magic** are far superior to the lands in real **Magic**. Though they can tap for any color of mana, these lands count as basic lands and are their own unique type (they do not count as swamps, for example); I have heard them referred to as Utopia, but I don't know that the name we call them is that relevant. Just like in any other **Magic** format, you can play only one land each turn, and lands stay in play unless something happens to them.

Now for the fun part. Besides being played face down as a land, any spell can be played as any real **Magic** spell of the same mana cost. For example, if you were to have a [Cloudskate](#) in your hand, you could tap a permanent and draw a card with an Ice (half of [Fire/Ice](#)), defend yourself with an [Aether Burst](#), or play a beater on your own turn, say as [Cloudskate](#) itself. Once a card name is invoked (such as "I play a [Cloudskate](#)"), no one can play that same Mental **Magic** card during the same game. Therefore, barring effects like that of [Clone](#), you will not see two [Cloudskates](#) in the same game of Mental **Magic**.

Cards only have a name in one of two situations: Either they are in play (I have a [Cloudskate](#) in play) or there is an effect on the stack (I am returning this [Cloudskate](#) to my hand with [Aether Burst](#)). Once the [Cloudskate](#) returns to my hand or the [Aether Burst](#) hits my graveyard the game ceases to remember their roles as a 2/2 fading flier or an [Odyssey](#) bounce spell. This may seem a bit counterintuitive, but think about it from the perspective of the rules so far . . . If the [Cloudskate](#) were to return to your hand and still have the identity of [Cloudskate](#), what could you do with it other than play it face down as a land? You certainly could not name [Cloudskate](#) a second time. What if, alternately, you were to draw a second [Cloudskate](#)? How would you prove to your opponent, upon trying to play the second as [Memory Lapse](#), that an additional, unique [Cloudskate](#) had been drawn? The loss of identity is even more important for the [Aether Burst](#) in our above example. Among other things, it can now be an [Alter Reality](#) in your graveyard that you can play for that card's flashback cost!




If you draw a [Daru Sanctifier](#), you can play it face-down as a land, or play it as any 3 spell, including [Carrier Pigeons](#), [Armageddon](#), or [Benalish Herald](#).*


When I first started playing Mental **Magic** five or six years ago, we played that you could not play a card as itself (that is, from our example above, you could not name a [Cloudskate](#) as [Cloudskate](#)). Over the years, we have generally found that this is a silly and arbitrary rule. It both hurts new Mental **Magic** players who are just getting the hang of the format and detracts from how creatively established players can approach any given pile of cards.

3. Card Name and Card Type

As I implied in the previous section, cards are "fixed" on declaration as something with the same mana cost. Their names are branded on at that point and may not be used again in a single game. Card type is therefore for the most part irrelevant, going hand in hand with the specific card named. A [Cephalid Sage](#) can be played equally as an [Inspiration](#) (instant), [Sift](#) (sorcery), [Illusions of Grandeur](#)(enchantment), itself (creature), or played face down (land).

There are a few times, however, when a card type does matter. For example, say you have a [Duress](#) in your hand and you want to use it to play [Raise Dead](#). In your graveyard, you have [Haunting Echoes](#) and [Chainer, Dementia Master](#). Though these cards are both black spells with mana cost , you can only target the latter with your [Raise Dead](#). Keep in mind that this is a special case, though. Most of the time [Haunting Echoes](#) and Chainer are equivalent cards for the purposes of the game. Of course, once Chainer has been returned to your hand, you are free to play it as [Extortion, Fugue](#), a face-down land, or whatever else you feel is appropriate.

What if instead you were to play the [Duress](#) as a [Duress](#)?

The opponent might reveal to you a three-card hand of [Sunscape Battlemage](#), [Spike Feeder](#), and [Sonic Burst](#). Of these three, only [Sonic Burst](#) would be a legal target, as the opponent cannot be made to discard a creature card by [Duress](#). Once again, keep in mind that not one of the three cards actually has the name [Sunscape Battlemage](#), [Spike Feeder](#), or [Sonic Burst](#) unless your opponent gives it that name, and in fact, when you force him to discard [Sonic Burst](#) via [Duress](#), a wise opponent would recognize that you have just given him the opportunity to give that  card the name [Guerrilla Tactics](#).

4. lands, Lands, LANDS

As we said before, any spell, regardless of color or mana cost, can be played face down as an overperforming basic land. But what of lands themselves? What do you do with land cards?

The easiest solution, and the one that I and my play group follow, is to ignore land. Either they are eliminated from the available card pool before the session begins, or they are cycled away should they be drawn during the game. An alternate rule is to allow lands to be played as a nonbasic land of the player's choice (for example [Nantuko Monastery](#) or [Wasteland](#)), but because most **Magic** nonbasic lands tend to be on the low end of the power scale when compared to Utopia, especially when you can dictate and optimize every draw, a spell—any spell usually—seems preferable.

Though your opponent might ruin your day with [Upheaval](#), target a land with [Stone Rain](#), or choose to send one back with [Boomerang](#), consider played lands stapled to the table. Under no circumstances should a player be allowed to peek at an opponent's face-down cards (feel free to look at your own, though), and persistent land-returning cards (like [Hallowed Ground](#) and [Trade Routes](#)) are generally banned. Over the long haul, cards like these remove the inherent investment made by playing such superb lands as Mental **Magic** affords when one's options are so many, and eventually create a serious imbalance of power.

Type 1.5

The 2002 - 2003 **Magic: The Gathering** [Floor Rules](#) define the deck construction guidelines for all **Magic** tournament formats. Here's what it has to say about Type 1.5.

128. Type 1.5 Format Deck Construction

Type 1.5 tournament decks

may consist of cards from all **Magic** card sets, any extension of the basic set, and all promotional cards released by Wizards of the Coast. New card sets are allowed in Type 1.5 tournaments once they qualify for DCI-sanctioned tournaments as outlined in section 104. The Banned List for Type 1.5 tournaments consists of all cards from Banned List and Restricted List for the Type 1 format.

The following cards are banned in Type 1.5 tournaments:

- [Ancestral Recall](#)
- [Any ante card](#)
- [Balance](#)
- [Berserk](#)
- [Black Lotus](#)
- [Black Vise](#)
- [Braingeyser](#)
- [Channel](#)
- [Chaos Orb](#)
- [Crop Rotation](#)
- [Demonic Consultation](#)
- [Demonic Tutor](#)
- [Doomsday](#)
- [Dream Halls](#)
- [Enlightened Tutor](#)
- [Fact or Fiction](#)
- [Falling Star](#)
- [Fastbond](#)
- [Fork](#)
- [Frantic Search](#)
- [Grim Monolith](#)
- [Hurkyl's Recall](#)
- [Library of Alexandria](#)
- [Lotus Petal](#)
- [Mana Crypt](#)
- [Mana Vault](#)
- [Memory Jar](#)
- [Mind Over Matter](#)
- [Mind Twist](#)
- [Mox Diamond](#)
- [Mox Emerald](#)
- [Mox Jet](#)

5. Draw, but Don't Search

Mental **Magic** offers players the deepest possible well of available cards. Players can do everything they've ever wanted to do in more conventional formats . . . they can set up intricate combinations, beatdown with [Savannah Lions](#), [Flesh Reaver](#), and [Ball Lightning](#) all in the same deck without a care in the world for mana consistency, and draw as many extra cards as their blue cards will allow.

Obviously, given the ability to dictate every spell, the opportunity to draw extra cards by way of everything from [Greed](#) to [Stroke of Genius](#) is going to be there. Feel free to play all the card drawing you want. Pick up two with [Inspiration](#), three with [Concentrate](#), and four with [Infernal Contract](#) . . . but do not search. Cards like [Krosan Tusker](#), which allow a player to search his or her library for a basic land before drawing a card from cycling lose that first ability. Just say no to [Eladamri's Call](#).

The reason for this rule should be obvious when you think about how abusable a card like [Survival of the Fittest](#) or the Rebel engine would be in this format. That is not to say that you could not cycle [Krosan Tusker](#) or play with [Ramosian Sergeant](#) or [Defiant Vanguard](#) . . . just that you cannot use their search abilities.

The notable exception to this rule is any card like [Library of Lat-Nam](#), where if you are going to search your library for a card, it was your opponent who put you on that path.

6. Format

Though Mental **Magic** can support any **Magic** format (Seth Burn, in particular, likes to play Type I and see if he can win on the first turn every game), I have found that at the time of this writing at least, Type 1.5 offers the best balance of card diversity and power level (see sidebar, right). In the Type 1.5 format, you can play with any cards that aren't on the DCI Type 1 Banned and Restricted Lists. At one point, Extended was the format of choice, but changes in that format over the years have eliminated many of the most fun and most basic Mental **Magic** strategies. As an example, in Brian Kibler's *Onslaught* [preview](#) of [Complicate](#), he referenced Mental **Magic** standout [Force Void](#)—in the current Extended, that classic cantrip is no longer legal to play. At the same time, Type 1.5, unlike the ostensibly smaller Extended, has no [Fact or Fiction](#); as we talk more about the basic and advanced strategies of the game, you will see why this is a very good thing.

7. Too Broken for Words

As much as I like to tout the freedom of the format, for the purposes of fun and continued fun in playing it, there are certain cards that should be generally banned from Mental **Magic** play. Back when we played Extended Mental **Magic**, we had a rule of thumb that if a card is just too good, no one can play it; the poster boy at that point was [Yawgmoth's Will](#) (thankfully banned in Type 1.5). For now, here is a partial list of cards that, though they are technically legal in Type 1.5, should not be allowed in Mental **Magic**:


- Persistent land-returning effects (for example, [Hallowed Ground](#) and [Trade Routes](#))
 - We've gone over these already.

- [Mox Pearl](#)
- [Mox Ruby](#)
- [Mox Sapphire](#)
- [Mystical Tutor](#)
- [Necropotence](#)
- [Recall](#)
- [Regrowth](#)
- [Sol Ring](#)
- [Strip Mine](#)
- [Stroke of Genius](#)
- [Time Spiral](#)
- [Time Walk](#)
- [Timetwister](#)
- [Tinker](#)
- [Tolarian Academy](#)
- [Vampiric Tutor](#)
- [Voltaic Key](#)
- [Wheel of Fortune](#)
- [Windfall](#)
- [Yawgmoth's Bargain](#)
- [Yawgmoth's Will](#)

- Search Cards (for example, [Worldly Tutor](#))
- [Argothian Enchantress](#)
 - Its ability is absurd. Even sweeping answers to enchantments will, at best, break even with the card advantage this creature generates. Unlike its sisters, [Argothian Enchantress](#) is also extremely difficult to remove from play.
- [Exploration](#)
 - If you have this in your opening hand and you go first, I don't know that it is possible to lose the game.

This list will undoubtedly be added to as we proceed.

8. Costs to Start You Off

Though I foresee this series as having a long and winding life, Aaron suggests that you wouldn't want to wait four weeks to find out that anything that costs  is a good card. I am going to list some basic excellent Mental **Magic** cards at some common mana costs to get you started:

Cost	Spells	Cost	Spells
	Coffin Purge Ostracize		Hush Striped Bears
	Hypnotic Cloud Soul Rend		Arctic Wolves Kavu Climber
	Recover Stupor		Pyroblast Red Elemental Blast
	Gravedigger Unnerve		Burnout Guerrilla Tactics
	Fugue Guiltfeeder		Squee, Goblin Nabob Turf Wound
	Hydroblast Whispers of the Muse		Avalanche Riders Sudden Impact
	Alter Reality Arcane Denial		Anarchist Shard Phoenix
	Force Void Probe		Bandage Orim's Chant
	Deep Analysis Sift		Abeyance Ray of Revelation
	Desertion Force of Will		Mangara's Blessing Teferi's Honor Guard
	Birds of Paradise Llanowar Elves		Benalish Heralds Glimmering Angel
	Feral Instinct Krosan Reclamation		Balancing Act Wrath of God
	Call of the Herd Uktabi Orangutan		

Obviously, remembering the buyback, kicker, flashback, and ability costs for many of the cards on this list is going to be the key to using them efficiently. Over the next couple of weeks, we will go over basic and in-depth strategy, highlight some of these cards, and focus on the mana costs that will help you win the most games . . . with the most style.

Next Time: Basic Strategy

--mike flores

P.S. More than in any other article series, I think this one will evolve organically. Contact me **atmadmanpoet at yahoo dot com** to contribute your thoughts on the format, comment on the series, or ask questions about the rules.

Mike may be reached at the address above.