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Some Subtler Advantages

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Learning Curve
Wednesday, March 19, 2003



Lucas came roaring out of the gate with mana creatures and a turn three *Gigapede*. Chung enlivened the Neutral Ground cheering section when he cycled *Slice and Dice* to kill Lucas' *Bird*, *Elf*, and *Insect*. Mike Flores was beside himself and patted Chung on the back, "OMG Chung! That was an *Ancestral!*" Then realizing that Chung also drew a card for cycling he amended his comment, "Oh wait...It was an *Opportunity!*"

--from the [Grudge Match Finals](#) on Sideboard.com

It is not unusual to hear more experienced **Magic** players refer to lopsided exchanges of cards like the one showcased above in comparison to card drawing. For his one *Slice and Dice*, David Chung killed three creatures and drew a card. In other words, for his one card he "gained" another four—three of his opponent's dead creatures and the one card he drew—a net of three cards.

That is card advantage.

The most basic form of card advantage is obviously card drawing. *Ancestral Recall* nets you two cards (three cards drawn minus the *Ancestral* itself), *Opportunity* nets you three, *Fact or Fiction* nets you some number between -1 and four—Don't laugh, I have actually seen it be -1! After a split of 5 and 0 on an all-land *Fact or Fiction* the player casting the FoF became wary of *Blood Oath* and took the pile of zero choosing to net -1 card advantage over a potentially suicidal net of +4.

Card drawing is only one component of card advantage. Anything that results in a net gain of cards over your opponent—whether you draw them, play them from your graveyard, kill your opponent's creatures, or nullify their permanents is considered card advantage. Today I am going to look at my five favorite card-advantage cards that do not actually draw you any cards. I'll leave the card-drawers to Ben Bleiweiss. Theme week be damned!

5. Ensnaring Bridge

The Bridge ensures that your opponent cannot attack you with creatures greater than the number of cards in your hand. This card has been most effectively used in mono-red decks in conjunction with *Grafted Skullcap*, which draws you an extra card each turn but forces you to discard your hand at the end of each turn. These decks are traditionally referred to as "Burning Bridge" decks because they consist mostly of burn spells and they shut you down with the *Ensnaring Bridge*. Once the two-card combo is in place and you have negated every creature in your opponent's deck, you can use all of the burn on your helpless opponent.

Ensnaring Bridge completely negates a creature-based strategy that has no answer to the board dominating artifact. This is tremendous card advantage; even though it doesn't destroy your opponent's creatures, it can render them useless, which, for most intents and purposes is the same thing. Yes, card advantage comes in many forms! Of course, the Bridge strategy can be a house of cards if there are any answers waiting in your opponent's deck. I recently had a playtest game against blue-green with this deck where my opponent killed me by casting *Deep Analysis* and flashing back to make me draw four cards while I was tapped out, enabling him to attack me for the win.



Mark Zeigner's Burning Bridge		
Chicago Gateway Tournament		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
4 Barbarian Ring	4 Chain of Plasma	4 Blistering Firecat
4 Forgotten Cave	2 Earthquake	3 Flaring Pain
13 Mountain	4 Ensnaring Bridge	3 Fledgling Dragon
3 Petrified Field	4 Fiery Temper	4 Grim Lavamancer
	4 Firebolt	1 Lava Dart
24 lands	4 Flame Burst	
		15 sideboard cards

0 creatures	3 Grafted Skullcap
	3 Lava Dart
	4 Violent Eruption
	4 Volcanic Hammer
	36 other spells

4. Quiet Speculation


In an environment with flashback, this card may actually be more powerful than **Ancestral Recall**. Ancestral lets you draw three random cards whereas Speculation allows you to *tutor* for three flashback spells. Whether it is simply three **Roar of the Wurms** or a more strategic **Ray of Revelation**, **Krosan Reclamation**, and a 6/6, this is as close as you can come to drawing three cards without actually having the words appear anywhere on the card. Often the card advantage will be compounded by putting a **Deep Analysis** into the graveyard and actually drawing two more cards.

Pete Guevin's Quiet Roar		
YMG Grudge Match Finals		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
56 cards		
2 City of Brass	4 Careful Study	3 Callous Oppressor
9 Forest	4 Circular Logic	1 Deep Analysis
11 Island	1 Deep Analysis	1 Krosan Reclamation
22 lands	3 Quiet Speculation	1 Ravenous Baloth
	1 Ray of Revelation	2 Ray of Revelation
	4 Roar of the Wurm	4 Stupefying Touch
	17 other spells	3 Turbulent Dreams
2 Aquamoeba		15 sideboard cards
4 Arrogant Wurm		
4 Basking Rootwalla		
4 Wild Mongrel		
3 Wonder		
17 creatures		


3. Null Rod and Cursed Totem

I love both of these cards because they completely hose strategies based around artifact or creature abilities respectively. Imagine your opponent goes off on his second turn with **Grim Monolith** and **Voltaic Key** and **Phyrexian Processor**. Next turn he is going to begin making 10/10 token creatures... unless you untap and play Null Rod, that is. Where once stood a menacing factory belching out 10/10's now stands a four-mana vanilla artifact that cost its controller half his or her life to play. In that situation your one card would have not only negated three cards in play but virtually every card in an artifact based deck.

Cursed Totem was a lot fun for me last Extended season. One of the more popular decks that season was a blue-green madness deck that relied on **Waterfront Bouncers**, **Wild Mongrels**, and **Merfolk Looters** to power out **Arrogant Wurms** and put the potential for 6/6 flying tokens in the graveyard. I was playing a deck that used **Quirion Dryad** and inexpensive black spells to make it very large, very quickly. **Waterfront Bouncer** put a big frown on my face until I remembered the **Cursed Totem**. There were some weeks when blue-green was so prevalent it even found its way into the main deck.

BDM's Black Thumb		
Extended		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
4 Llanowar Wastes	3 Cabal Therapy	3 Choke
14 Swamp	4 Diabolic Edict	1 Cursed Totem
4 Tainted Woods	4 Duress	1 Engineered Plague
1 Wasteland	1 Haunting Echoes	1 Massacre
23 lands	4 Pernicious Deed	2 Naturalize
	1 Skeletal Scrying	1 Perish
	1 Smother	1 Smother
4 Faceless Butcher	4 Tainted Pact	1 Stronghold Taskmaster
4 Quirion Dryad	4 Vampiric Tutor	2 Terror
2 Spiritmonger	26 other spells	2 Vicious Hunger
1 Thrashing Wumpus		15 sideboard cards
11 creatures		

2. Shard Phoenix

The Phoenix was a multi-faceted card advantage tool. Against weenie horde decks the sacrifice ability would wipe the board clean with a **Pyroclasm**-esque effect. Since you could just pay  to return the Phoenix to your hand it was not even at the cost of a card in the long run. The ability to return to your hand from the graveyard made all of your opponent's removal less effective. Shard Phoenix really shined when used in conjunction with discard effects like **Survival of the Fittest** or **Forbid**.

One of the most famous deck to utilize the card was played by MagicTheGathering.com's own Randy Buehler. Tune in on Friday for Randy's take on that little gem.

1. Wrath of God

This one goes all the way back to Alpha and has long been one of my absolute favorite sources of card advantage. If **Ensnaring Bridge** or **Cursed Totem** represents card advantage against creature decks, Wrath does it in spades. There will be no timely **Disenchants** here my friends. No back-breaking **Rushing River** to let you back into the game. I am going to pay four mana and wipe out your army of creatures, and every one to hit the bin after the first will be card advantage for me.

Wrath has traditionally been played in decks with few creatures of their own because each creature of yours that dies will minimize the advantage you are attempting to generate. In fact, the best creatures to play with in a deck with Wrath are ones that are only creatures when you want them to be. **Chimeric Idol**, **Mishra's Factory**, and **Fairie Conclave** all excellent compliments to Wrath. Of course, they are also excellent foils to it as well, with your opponent rarely able to Wrath them away at sorcery speed.

With no such creatures available in the current Standard environment, **Astral Slide** has stepped to the forefront as the compliment of choice to Wrath of God. **Astral Slide** decks are also the most card advantageous decks in today's Standard format as showcased at the top of this article. **Astral Slide** allows you to protect your creatures from your own Wrath effects—in addition to Wrath you also can use **Slice and Dice** or **Starstorm**. **Lightning Rift** gets more and more advantageous with each use and if you are playing a version with Cartographer you can generate an **Inspiration** each time you block.



Dave Chung		
Three-Color Slide		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
4 Forest	4 Astral Slide	1 Auramancer
4 Forgotten Cave	3 Lay Waste	4 Boil
5 Mountain	4 Lightning Rift	1 Cartographer
5 Plains	3 Living Wish	1 Cloudchaser Eagle
4 Secluded Steppe	4 Renewed Faith	1 Genesis
4 Tranquil Thicket	4 Slice and Dice	1 Gigapede
26 lands	1 Starstorm	1 Nantuko Monastery
	2 Wrath of God	1 Pardic Arsonist
	25 other spells	2 Ray of Revelation
2 Cartographer		1 Teroh's Faithful
3 Exalted Angel		1 Wrath of God
4 Krosan Tusker		
9 creatures		15 sideboard cards

I will be in Venice this week doing Pro Tour feature match coverage for the [Sideboard](#). The next learning curve will look at how the decks from the Pro Tour can be adapted to the current Standard format for the upcoming Regionals, JSS, or even just good ol' Friday Night Magic. See you in 168 hours, not counting the time difference.

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Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is [Top8Magic.com](#), the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



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