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Thursday, March 27, 2003

Hi readers! First, I'd like to thank you all for your avalanche of email. I asked you to write in, and you certainly did. It's going to take me a while to get through it, but I've already seen some really creative ideas and I've been inspired with ideas of my own. So before I get to this week's column, I want to address the two most common questions that have come up in your mail to me so far.

Question 1: Why do I stick to the Standard card pool?

There have been rumblings and grumbings on the message boards and in my inbox about this. Lots of readers have noticed that I'm only using Standard-legal cards in my decks, and don't know why I'd restrict myself like that. The decks I talk about aren't meant for tournaments, so there's no need to adhere to a tournament-regulated card pool. Furthermore, casual players are, naturally, casual about what cards can be used around the living room. These are good points, and I encourage anyone with a deeper card pool to dive in and find lost gems and cards that make new combos with *Onslaught* and *Legions* cards. But there are a number of reasons I won't be doing that here:

- Aaron asked me to only use Standard-legal cards. (For all you youngsters out there, this is called "passing the buck.")
- I totally agree with him. (OK, this is called taking responsibility. But why? Read on.)
- I want to be relevant to my audience. Pay attention, because this is the biggest reason. A lot of my mail starts "I've only been playing **Magic** for [one year, two months, three weeks, etc.] and . . ." These new players don't have extensive collections. Let's divvy you readers up into veterans and rookies. Veterans have Standard-legal cards. Rookies have Standard-legal cards. Veterans have pre-Standard cards. Rookies *don't* have pre-Standard cards. By sticking to Standard, I bring the whole audience along for the ride.
- I want to keep current. Those of you who have Winter's Night in your collection have had it for years, so there's no point telling you about the turn-two win I just found. Spectral Sliver is new, and all the possibilities haven't been explored yet.
- I love testing decks on **Magic Online**. It's fast and easy, I don't need proxies or reluctant testing partners, and it helps me make my decks better faster. Of course, **Magic Online** doesn't have any pre-*Invasion* cards available.
- I have to draw the line somewhere. For each person that wants me to include *Invasion* block, another would rather see decks using the Extended card pool, and another would prefer Type 1 goodies. I'm happy with the decision I made.

If you have a thick binder of cards, by all means use it. You can come up with ideas tailored to the unique components of your collection better than I could. But just to be wishy-washy, I reserve the right to ignore all of my own arguments and dip into the past at any time. Like April 13th.

Question 2: Can I help you with your deck?

Well, no. Sorry about that, but this isn't a deck clinic. My strength is coming up with new decks from scratch, not tuning decks to perfection.

Chopped Sliver

Speaking of new decks, how about I make some? This week's theme is Slivers, the cool new creature type introduced in *Legions*. OK, that was mean; I just did that to irk the old-timers who are already miffed at me. (Yeah, you.) Slivers premiered back in 1998 in the *Stronghold* set . . . wait, wait, kidding again! *Tempest*, Slivers first popped up in the *Tempest* set in 1997.

But just to prove once again that I'm catering to the new players and love them the mostest of all, let's pretend that we have no *Tempest* or *Stronghold* Slivers. Not to worry, all the rare *Legions* Slivers are strong, and worthy of building decks around. But continuing the vow of poverty, let's say we have no rare Slivers either! Heavens to Betsy! What do we do? Give up on Slivers altogether until some rare ones come along? No way! As always, we make the most with what we've got. Sometimes the cards make the decks, but sometimes the decks make the cards. (I know, that seems to make no sense. Take it as a Zen koan. Meditate on it under a tree at sunset. The meaning will become clear to you.)



Common and uncommon Sliver color combos:

Green & the box of cards sitting under your bed.

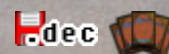
Sorry, green fans. You're out of luck this week. While Brood Sliver is a house (and can quickly fill up a house with all that Sliver-lovin' reproduction), Quick Sliver and Root Sliver by themselves don't make the cut. They're reactive cards, not proactive cards. Quick Sliver is a way around sorcery-speed destruction and paves the way for surprise blockers, while Root Sliver thwarts counterspells. But they don't help you win as much as they help you not lose. Against a non-counterspell deck (which describes most casual decks), Root Sliver is a very overcosted 2/2.

White & Red

White's defensive Slivers match up best with red's offensive counterparts. Blade Sliver's +1/+0 and Hunter Sliver's provoke are backed up by Plated Sliver's +0/+1 and Ward Sliver's color protection. There is a glitch in the system: provoke doesn't really interact with protection because if your Slivers have protection from green, provoking a green creature is useless (a green creature can't block your pro-green Slivers). But at that point, you have some degree of unblockability and a mighty defense, so why quibble?

The best advantages white offers red lie in some of white's other strengths. Both provoke and a power boost are greatly enhanced with first strike, so Knighthood and Guided Strike have a home here. Another ability that combos with provoke is white's "ranged attack," the kind of combat-specific damage dealing seen on Crossbow Infantry and Heavy Ballista. Force a defender to block, then pick it off before it ever engages your Sliver.

Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Slivers **Lite!**



Main Deck

60 cards

3 Forgotten Cave
8 Mountain

4 Blade Sliver
2 Crossbow Infantry

1 Arcane Teachings
2 Disenchant

8 Plains
4 Secluded Steppe

23 lands

1 Flamewave Invoker
3 Heavy Ballista
4 Hunter Sliver
4 Plated Sliver
4 Ward Sliver

22 creatures

2 Guided Strike
1 Improvised Armor
2 Knighthood
2 Pacifism
2 Shelter
3 Shock

15 other spells

The white Slivers don't pair up in a very interesting way with the blue ones because Ward Sliver's ability and Shifting Sliver's ability are mostly redundant. And while white and black work out decently, their abilities aren't especially complementary. As we'll see, black has more intriguing options.

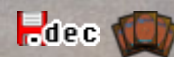
Red & Black

This is where Slivers start to get nasty. Red provides extra power and the ability to hunt down specific blockers. Crypt Sliver accentuates the aggression by letting the overzealous Slivers regenerate: as long as another Sliver has their back, the attacking forces can charge in as recklessly as they like. Spectral Sliver, perhaps the best non-rare *Legions* Sliver, provides a further power and toughness boost to make provoke even more dangerous . . . and unblocked Slivers more deadly still. These critters can get very big very fast, mow down blockers, and be annoyingly difficult to kill.

The deck I came up with for this color combo is very aggressive. Since what it needs more than anything else is multiple Slivers (a lonely little Sliver just isn't that impressive), Book Burnings and Gravediggers provide more cards and/or more damage. Gracing one of your Slivers with a Crown of Fury is almost playing dirty, since first strike, pumped-up power, and provoke turn Slivers into combat assassins—and the Crowns are very nice team players. Some efficient removal clears out anything the Slivers can't take care of themselves. Since this is a black-red deck, opposing enchantments are a huge obstacle; the best way to deal with them is to end the game very quickly.



AggroSlivers *Lite!*



Main Deck

60 cards

1 Barren Moor
3 Forgotten Cave
7 Mountain
11 Swamp
2 Tainted Peak

24 lands

4 Blade Sliver
4 Crypt Sliver
2 Faceless Butcher
2 Gravedigger
4 Hunter Sliver
4 Spectral Sliver

20 creatures

4 Book Burning
2 Chainer's Edict
3 Crown of Fury
2 Duress
3 Shock
2 Slice and Dice

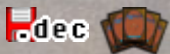
16 other spells

I didn't make a red-blue deck because Shifting Sliver's unblockable nature pretty much cancels out the provoke ability, and that's just no fun. That only leaves one color combination left . . .

Blue & Black

Shifting Sliver, which makes Slivers unblockable except by other Slivers, goes nicely with Spectral Sliver's pumpitude. And Mistform Sliver's type-adding ability opens up worlds of fun. Blue's greatest asset in Sliver decks is the addition of as many proto-Slivers (otherwise known as Mistform creatures) as you want. Turn a Mistform Wall into a Sliver for the turn and it gets all the Sliver benefits that are on the table.

With Mistform Sliver in play, that becomes a two-way street. Attack with an unstoppable Sliver (thanks, Shifting Sliver), turn it into a Goblin during the declare blockers step (thanks, Mistform Sliver), and make your opponent discard a card (thanks, Cabal Slaver)! Just about any tribal ability will work; I chose Deathmark Prelate and Cabal Archon, along with the Slaver, so I could get rid of my opponent's cards, creatures, and life.

Shapeshifting Slivers *Lite!* 

Main Deck
60 cards

4 Barren Moor	1 Cabal Archon	2 Deep Analysis
8 Island	1 Cabal Slaver	3 Duress
4 Lonely Sandbar	4 Crypt Sliver	2 Mage's Guile
9 Swamp	1 Deathmark Prelate	3 Smother
-----	3 Mistform Seaswift	-----
25 lands	4 Mistform Sliver	10 other spells
	3 Mistform Wall	
	4 Shifting Sliver	
	4 Spectral Sliver	

	25 creatures	

If you have any of the appropriate rare Slivers, tossing them in can only help these decks. But you don't need rares to build interesting, interactive decks with cool cards that do cool stuff. Until next week, have fun with Slivers.

--Mark

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