

## And a look into the mailbag

# Mental Magic: Card Advantage

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This is Part 3 of the Mental **Magic** series. – [PART 1](#) – [PART 2](#)

Last time, I promised you that before I went into our next exploration of the intricacies of Mental**Magic**, I would address some questions and concerns from both email and the message boards. Many of the questions are similar, so I thought that this forum would be a good place to answer them.




*"My friends and I were playing Mental **Magic**, and we got into a fight about the landwalk ability. Do all lands count as every land or can you just tap them for any color mana? It would be great if you could clarify this for us.*

Lands can tap for any color of mana, and they count as basic lands, but they don't have any of the basic land types (like plains and forest).

There is one notable exception to this. If, for some reason, one of your lands is specifically changed to have a land type, then it is that type of land for the term specified by the card in question. For example, as long as one of your opponent's lands is enchanted with [Sea's Claim](#), it is an island. Your opponent could destroy that land with [Boil](#) or [Tsunami](#) or be subject to the islandwalk of your [River Boa](#).

To answer the inevitable related question, neither [Corrupt](#) nor [Allied Strategies](#) is particularly worthwhile in this format.

*"Say you did play a  card as [Turf Wound](#), and later during your upkeep, you named that card as [Squee, Goblin Nabob](#) and returned it to your hand. Can anyone now announce the spell [Squee, Goblin Nabob](#)? Or by using its ability, have you rendered the spell off-limits for the rest of the game? The reason I ask is because the rules state that only one spell with a specific name per game can be*

played, and you never actually played Squee. So if you could return it every turn, that would clearly be broken card advantage because you could reuse the card as [Solfatara](#), [Stone Rain](#), [Urza's Rage](#), and so on and so on."



I am sorry if I was not clear on this issue. I agree that being able to reuse [Squee, Goblin Nabob](#) every turn would indeed be broken card advantage and that is not something we want to see. You are allowed to declare the name of any card only once, so this should not be an issue.

In a game some years ago, it was obvious that I was setting up [Stone Rain](#) and [Squee, Goblin Nabob](#). My opponent, the great Patrick Chapin, probably the finest Mental **Magic** player in the world, saw this and played Squee himself so I couldn't reuse my 2 card! He even beat me down for 1 several times and eventually took the game.

"How exactly does morph fit in? Do you need a card that costs three mana in your hand?"

Morph is an interesting issue for Mental **Magic**. I don't see any reason why you wouldn't be able to play morph creatures. In order to differentiate them from your lands, you should probably put a counter on your face-down morph creatures, though. Also, you should not be able to play just any old card as a face-down creature . . . when your creature leaves play or the game ends, you should declare what creature was face down ([Phantasmal Terrain](#) can be [Voidmage Prodigy](#), or [Akroma's Vengeance](#) can be [Exalted Angel](#), for example).

That being said, you might not see a reason to play morph creatures. [Gray Ogres](#) are extremely low power in this format . . . the hungry-for-hats Eric Taylor was overheard saying that no one would ever play a morph creature in Mental **Magic**; that doesn't mean they shouldn't be allowed to, though.

"How does a card like [Astral Slide](#) or the phasing mechanic fit into Mental **Magic**? Do I have to declare a different card when my creature returns to play?"

Nope. You are stuck with whatever creature you had prior to its being targeted by [Astral Slide](#) or its being phased out. In fact, because of their resilience with mana open, [Teferi's Honor Guard](#) and [Rainbow Efrete](#) are two popular finishers in Mental **Magic**.

"How do you play creatures with amplify?"

Amplify works the same way as [Duress](#), [Death Spark](#), and so on. Say you were to play a [Striped Bears](#) card as a [Canopy Crawler](#). If you wanted to increase this creature's size, you would have to reveal actual Beast cards from your hand. . . [Chromeshell Crab](#) can boost the [Canopy Crawler](#), but oddly enough, its similarly costed, similarly crabby cousin, [Giant Crab](#), would not.

*"How do Incarnations work?"*

Incarnations, for the most part, don't work in Mental **Magic**. The simple reason is that you will rarely, if ever, have a mountain for [Anger](#) or an island for [Wonder](#). There are, of course, some exceptions to this (such as our case with [Sea's Claim](#), above). Otherwise, remember that we name cards when on the stack or in play. You will not typically have an opportunity to name the passive Incarnations, even if you were to have a basic land in play.

As for the other Incarnations -- [Glory](#) and [Genesis](#) -- they work like any other cards in Mental **Magic**. If you have an [Aven Soulgrazer](#) in your graveyard, you can activate [Glory](#) exactly once; similarly, if you have a [Spike Colony](#) in the bin, you get one shot with [Genesis](#). After these cards are named, no one can use the respective Incarnation again or play them normally as creatures.

*"Can I cast [Living Wish](#)?"*

You sure can. You will find that in many games everything from [Cremate](#) to [Withered Wretch](#) can remove graveyard cards from the game. You can use *Judgment Wishes* to access cards that have been removed from the game. Of course, the target will have to be an actual creature or land card in the case of [Living Wish](#); you can't call a removed [Dark Ritual](#) a [Pit Imp](#) in order to create a legal target. Keep reading.

The last major thing to go over is how to deal with effects like [Anarchist](#), [Duress](#), or [Replenish](#). Some players seem to think this is complicated. It is no more complicated than it is in regular **Magic**.



Say I play an [Anarchist](#) in a regular game and there are two cards in my graveyard: a forest and a [Firebolt](#). I don't have to know [Firebolt](#)'s name to know that it is the only sorcery in my graveyard and therefore the only legal target for [Anarchist](#)'s ability. Similarly, in Mental **Magic**, when you play a creature like [Anarchist](#), you can go only for cards that literally say "Sorcery" on them. If a [Fugue](#) and a [Guiltfeeder](#) are both in your graveyard (ostensibly the same for Mental **Magic** purposes), [Anarchist](#) can get you the [Fugue](#), but not the [Guiltfeeder](#).

[Duress](#) works the same way. I [Duress](#) you. I look at your hand. You have only creatures in your hand. I whiff. This is not to say that you can have a hand of three [Firebolts](#) and then declare them a [Mons's Goblin Raiders](#), a [Mogg Fanatic](#), and a [Grim Lavamancer](#) so that I miss. You have no opportunity to name a card at this point, and in any case, by the rules, you are gripping three sorceries. Whew.

Out with the old stuff, in with the importance of card advantage.

## Card Advantage in Mental Magic

You may have heard that this "card advantage" thing is pretty important. Card advantage pretty much rules the roost, competitive **Magic: The Gathering** - wise, from the utter dominance of [Necropotence](#)-powered Trix decks to the robust performances of [Psychatog](#) decks packing [Fact or Fiction](#) and [Deep Analysis](#). Having more cards than your opponent is vitally important if you want to do well in this game.

This is truer in Mental **Magic** than in any other format. Remember, in Mental **Magic**, we can pretty much script what we draw. If you are scripting your  card as [Concentrate](#) while I cast my  as [Waterspout Djinn](#), I am going to have a problem (especially with producing an untapped island). There are several ways to generate card advantage in Mental **Magic**, some easier than others, some more important than others as your play becomes more competitive. For this article, I am going to focus on some of the basics:



## The 187

Straightforward as they are strong, the 187 suite is one of the staples of sources for Mental **Magic** card advantage. 187 is lingo for a creature with a comes-into-play ability from when Southern California was the center of limited **Magic** and the aggressive quartet of Truc Bui, Brian Hacker, John Yoo, and Jason "Super-Z" Zila taught the rest of the world how to beat down. Why does it make sense? 187 is the police code for a homicide . . . which is what happens to an unsuspecting creature when a [Nekrataal](#) hits the table.

Destroying your opponent's permanents using creatures with 187 effects (or even going the opposite route and recouping your own resources with cards like [Treasure Hunter](#)) are strong plays not just because they generate card advantage, but because they help develop your board and get your offense going without the investment of additional cards.

Examples: [Gravedigger](#), [Monk Realist](#), [Uktabi Orangutan](#)



## Cantrips

Cantrips are the single most common source of card advantage in Mental **Magic**. Regardless of whether they are the old school *Ice Age* sort that gives you the bonus a turn later or the simplified, immediate sort, these are cards that do a little something and give you an extra card to boot. Examples of cantrips include [Pyknite](#) and [Bandage](#). While the effect that an individual cantrip generates in and of itself often seems trivial (a 1/1 for three?), in the right context, they can be very useful.

The classic cantrip haymaker punch is [Force Void](#). Normally, we would want something more than a [Force Spike](#) for 3 mana, so no one plays [Force Void](#) in Constructed decks. But in Mental **Magic**, it is common to sit on an unnamed  $2\text{G}$  spell to ruin your tapped-out opponent's day by simultaneously countering his or her play and replacing the card you used to do it.

Though cantrips are never wasted because they, by definition, replace themselves, their best applications come when you establish a concrete trade with one of your opponent's spells.

Probably the most elegant play with a cantrip is in using [Arcane Denial](#). [Arcane Denial](#) is basically the best cantrip in all of Mental **Magic**. The reason? You don't cast it on one of your opponent's spells. Consider this . . . You play an end of turn [Impulse](#). Your opponent decides that [Burnout](#) is a good card to play at this point (your opponent read the section on cantrips, after all). You decide to counter not [Burnout](#), but your own [Impulse](#). Now you get to draw three cards on your next upkeep! At the same time, you have effectively countered [Burnout](#) and cost your opponent the extra cantrip card that was he or she going to pick up . . . that is essentially the same card advantage as a six mana [Opportunity](#). . . but with more style points built in.

Examples: [Blessed Wine](#), [Disrupt](#), [Feral Instinct](#)



## Buyback

A closely related cousin to the cantrip, buyback goes for essentially the same goal: getting a little more out of each individual card. Did your opponent just tap out to kill you with a [Crested Craghorn](#)? Why take it out with a [Shock](#) when you can use a [Searing Touch](#) with buyback? Though you will not be able to name [Searing Touch](#) again, you still have the option to cast that [Shock](#) that you held in reserve.

This mechanic gives you some great opportunities for total dominance cloaked in pure **Magic** beauty when you combine buyback with one of the other mechanics. Getting beat down by two huge green creatures? See how your opponent likes it when you [Slaughter](#) one with buyback and then use the same card to play [Nekrataal](#).

Examples: [Ally](#), [Capsize](#), [Shattering Pulse](#)

As you might have guessed, many of these simple tricks we use to generate card advantage work best under specific conditions. For some, creature combat is a great place to put lethal damage on the stack, but then follow up with an [Anoint](#), a [Bandage](#), or both.

For some, the end of turn is a great place to set up card advantage (just like in regular **Magic**). Remember the sit-there strategy from last time? It is often the case that just sitting back and letting your opponent walk into your [Complicates](#) is the best solution. You can start a war at the end of your opponent's turn with a [Whispers of the Muse](#), and then, when his or her mana is tapped down, give yourself both a lightning-quick attacker and a bit of an advantage with [Avalanche Riders](#). In the world of Mental **Magic**, you can decide where, when, and what you will play.

Up next: Card advantage gets serious with proactive flashback.

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