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What should I write my column about this week?" Mark wondered bizarrely.

I sit next to Mark Rosewater and was brainstorming *Mirage* deck ideas the day his Tom Swiftie post went up last week. He suggested Bazaar of Wonders twice, but I can't see building a deck around it. It's a nice blue graveyard hoser that will quiet your *Odyssey*-obsessed friends, but not much more. Emptying graveyards is an odd ability for blue, though, and there's a lot of ability bleeding in *Mirage*. Green direct damage! Black counterspell! White Dragon! Blue diamonds! Purple horseshoes! No decks come out of this, it's just an interesting observation.

Tribal decks, however, seem like a great way to go, especially because they can link up some cool old cards with some cool new ones. There are a couple of unusual tribal themes that run through *Mirage*. One is Griffins: *Mirage* has four regular Griffins and a Griffin Legend that acts as the Griffin lord (and *Visions* gives us a Griffin land). But a tribal deck where just about all of the creatures cost 3W isn't terribly exciting. The other tribe played up in *Mirage* has a weensy bit more pizzazz: Dragons. Featured in the set are a cycle of 4CC Dragons, two additional Dragons, and three Dragon-oriented Legends. I considered a Hivis of the Scale/Imagecrafter tag team, but decided that Callous Oppressor/Imagecrafter was probably better anyway. So I turned to Hivis's best pal Zirilan for help.

## Claws for Alarm

Zirilan of the Claw has been a staple of casual decks since it was printed. The ability to fish a giant firebreathing monster out of your deck and hurl it across the table on a suicide mission *every turn* . . . how could it get much better than that? With better Dragon selection, of course. Zirilan's new favorite pet is Kilnmouth Dragon. The problem with the Zirilan plan has always been pesky chump blockers in the air (as featured in today's second deck). A puny pigeon shouldn't halt the screaming onrush of a mighty 8-ton flame-spewing behemoth, but it does. Poor, dumb, easily distracted Dragons. But if you fetch Kilnmouth Dragon, you can amplify it and tap it to send its damage straight to your opponent's head. Then, before it's removed from the game at the end of the turn, you might as well Fling it at your opponent to add injury to injury. Ow ow ow ow **OW!** Just in case you don't have the Dragons in hand needed to amplify Kilny, Zirilan can whistle for other options, like the trampling, rampaging Teeka's Dragon or the pingy Shivan Hellkite. Just in case you don't have Zirilan or Sneak Attack, some mana acceleration (Fire Diamond, Urza's Incubator, Ancient Tomb) makes it easier to actually play your Dragons the hard way. Fire in the hole!

Zirilan's Kiln

## Type 1-legal Dragon deck

Make your own Dragon mix! If you have cards from the *Starter* game, try the rarely seen Thunder Dragon, which comes into play with a ground-shaking 3 damage to all non-flyers. Did I forget to mention "ow"?

## Mesa Like Dis Card, Ani

That's right, a Jar Jar Binks pun. For the three of you still reading this column after that atrocity, allow me to draw your attention to another *Mirage* card that caught my eye: Sacred Mesa. It's very similar to Mobilization (they're both rare 2W enchantments that pump out 1/1 white creature tokens with

special abilities); so what would make it a better choice for your deck than the newer card? Flying can be better than not tapping to attack, so that's something. But the key is to turn the Mesa's drawback (you must sacrifice a Pegasus every turn or lose the enchantment) into a positive attribute. It's not a bug, it's a feature! The knowledge that you want to sacrifice a creature every turn can steer your deckbuilding efforts in very specific directions. Another *Mirage* card that goes hand in hoof with the Mesa is Asmira, Holy Avenger. Asmira is guaranteed to grow every turn with the Mesa out. What new cards are hip enough to kick it old school? Soulcatcher also grows every turn thanks to the crash-landing Pegasusses, Shared Triumph pumps up the Pegases, and Mirari's Wake lets you produce twice as many Pegasi that are each twice as big as before. Throw in some more ways to take advantage of your fly-into-the-mountainside critters (I went with Bequeathal, Fecundity, and Foster; Pattern of Rebirth is also a nice option) and some mana production so you can churn out a flock at a time, and you have yourself a deck.

Horsefeathers

## **Type 1-legal Pegasus deck**

Deck Deconstruction

Another *Mirage* card that lured me in with promises of candy and toys is Malignant Growth. It's right up my alley because it's so counterintuitive. Enemy colors are hard to work with. Cumulative upkeep is best avoided. Giving my opponent cards is certainly not a good idea! Yet this card is a compelling victory condition. Hmmm . . . .

A few weeks ago, I trotted out a deck that wins by shoveling more and more cards into your opponent's hand, and Malignant Growth supports a similar strategy. It deals damage as well, but that means its focus is divided. The Growth wants to win by damage and it wants to win by decking. They're both fine ideas, but one of them is going to be wasted — unless there's a converter of some sort. Crumbling Sanctuary turns the damage part into a decking strategy. Iron Maiden turns the decking part into a damage strategy. Dreamborn Muse turns the decking strategy into an even-more-decking strategy. Clear the Land is fun because it accelerates your mana so you can keep up with the cumulative upkeep while slicing off a chunk of your opponent's deck. Add in some bounce for control, and Malignant Growth is ready to party.

Much Maligned

## **Type 1-legal Malignant Growth deck**

Wow, every card in that deck except the basic lands is a rare. We need to invent a "Heavy!" label!

### **Skeleton Keyword**

I admit that even though I'm quite the Johnny, I've got a good bit of Spike in me too. I want to build oddball rogue decks that pull off strange combos and make use of cards everyone else has written off . . . and *win* with them. Isn't the point, after all, to win **Magic** games? Well, no, not always. Sometimes the point is to annoy your friends as much as humanly possible — and that's the beauty of phasing.

Phasing had to have been created for the express purpose of annoying people, right? Any other application is a waste of precious frustrons, the subatomic particle that causes people's faces to scrunch up in bafflement and exasperation. You can tell the ability was designed with annoyance in mind because it's not defined anywhere on any card. That can't have been accidental. The lack of reminder text is perfect for letting you awkwardly explain phasing to your buddy who's never seen it before. After you slap a Teferi's Curse on your friend's creature and are faced with the question "Ummm . . . what's phasing?" you're all set up for the following reply:

"Well, at the start of your next turn, before you untap, even though nothing is supposed to be able to happen before you untap, that creature leaves the game. It can't attack, you can't target it, it's gone. But then your turn after that, it comes back. And it doesn't have summoning sickness. But then your next turn it leaves again. And so on. And even though it's removed from the game, it doesn't go to the removed-from-game zone, so the enchantment doesn't fall off and you can't fetch it back with a Wish. And when it leaves, it triggers leaves-play abilities, but when it comes back, it doesn't trigger comes-into-play abilities. That's phasing."

The best part is that after you rattle this off, *your friends won't believe you!* And why should they? Even I think you're making that hogwash up. This next deck has nothing but phasing cards and cards that enable phasing. It uses no rare cards, so even if you own none of these, you should be able to affordably grab the pieces of the deck at your local card shop. Then play creatures with phasing, creatures that might have phasing, and cards that give your opponent's stuff phasing. Cards pop in, cards blink out. Toggle the whole board with Time and Tide. I dare you to keep track of what's where when. You might never win a single game with this deck, but that's hardly the point. The look on your friends' faces and the constant stream of groans will be reward enough.

Set Phasers to Stun

### Mirage block phasing deck

Until next week, have fun with *Mirage*.

--Mark

Mark may be reached at [houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com](mailto:houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com). Please send any **Magic** rules questions to [ask@wizards.com](mailto:ask@wizards.com).

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