

## Size for life... a good deal? SCS: Unspeakable Symbol

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Friday, June 06, 2003

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**T**he symbols are spread throughout Aphetto, marking sites where minions of the Raven Guild and the Cabal can seek refuge."

"So, where can I find one of these symbols?"

"Sorry, I can't speak of it."

"But--"

"Zip it!"



### This Is Not Your Father's Souldrinker

When you first saw [Unspeakable Symbol](#) it may have seemed familiar to some of you. If you made the connection of "3 Life = +1/+1 counter" to a little ol' uncommon from *Tempest* named [Souldrinker](#) you may have groaned and tossed [Unspeakable Symbol](#) into the depths of your closet. Not so fast, mister! While the mechanic was grafted to a rather unimpressive creature before, the fact that it's now attached to an enchantment that lets you target *any* creature opens up a whole realm of possibilities.

### The Game of Life

Paying life for effects is a time-honored tradition for black. From... well, the lowly [Souldrinker](#) all the way up to Mighty Mighty [Necropotence](#), swamp lovers have been giving up their life for all sorts of things. The limiting factor is that you've got a life total of 20 to



start with, minus whatever damage your opponent is willing and able to take out of your hide. Luckily for black mages you've lots of options for regaining lost life, and if you dip into other colors (especially white) you've got even more.

Once a Symbol hits the board, you've basically got 6 activations in the bank at 20 life. [Nantuko Shade](#) would be right scary as a 7/6 to start with before pumping with black mana. And we have [Corrupt](#), [Drain Life](#), [Soul Burn](#), and [Death Grasp](#) at our disposal--all aggressive black spells that give you back your life resource. White adds a ton of options, from [Spirit Link](#) and [Armadillo Cloak](#) to [Congregate](#) and [Renewed Faith](#). If black-white Clerics are your bag, [Doubtless One](#) could certainly benefit from the size increase while paying you back with life. Other recent creatures with built-in [Spirit Link](#) abilities include [Necrovolver](#) and [Rakavolver](#).

## Tokens of Affection

Magic has a plethora of creatures with uses for +1/+1 counters. Lately the [Phantom creatures](#) have used them to stay alive a lot longer than they have a right to, but unfortunately the best of the bunch--[Phantom Centaur](#)--has protection from black. If you somehow get a [Phantom Nishoba](#) into play (through some evil reanimation strategy, no doubt!), a Symbol on the board can start up a nice symbiotic relationship: give that Nishoba +6/+6 to attack for 13 trampling damage, and he gives you 13 life back, putting you at 15. Next attack give it +4/+4 for possibly 17 trampling points of damage, putting you back up to 20 life. If your opponent is somehow still alive, the next swing of the Nish could potentially deal 23 damage!



*Tempest*-era [Spikes](#) provide other promising targets if you can get the mana to work. Paying 3 life to have a [Spike Weaver](#) "fog" every turn could certainly be a better option than the massive attack your opponent wants to do. Pump your [Spike Feeder](#) to an 8/8 size comfortable in the knowledge that you can get back 16 of the 18 life you spent. [Spike Soldier](#) can have your Symbol act as a [Hatred](#), turning your 18 life into an 18/18 creature that dies at the end of the turn.

Turning back the clock even further you can turn your life into 1/1 flying Tetravite tokens with [Tetravus](#), or turn it into direct damage with [Triskelion](#). The more recent [Thopter Squadron](#) and [Spitting Hydra](#) do practically the same thing. Other notable creatures that use +1/+1

tokens include [Mindwarper](#), [Workhorse](#), [Savage Firecat](#), [Molten Hydra](#) and [Rock Hydra](#), and [Mindless Automaton](#).

Right here in *Scourge* is a very likely target for the Symbol--[Forgotten Ancient](#). If you've got no other good targets out there, he's a good one to boost since you can always redistribute the tokens later if you subsequently draw a creature.

## **The Power of the Threat**

Keep in mind that in aggressive decks you might not need to use [Unspeakable Symbol](#) half the time. If your opponent is worried that he's going to lose a creature if he blocks yours because you can pump it with the Symbol he may just let it through; in that case don't use the Symbol unless pumping an attacker will win you the game. Sometimes the best weapons need not be used if their threat is enough.

## **Bigger than They Have a Right To Be**

If you thought a 3/3 [Morphling](#) was bad, how about a 9/9? How ugly can your [Volrath's Shapeshifter](#) or [Vesuvan Doppelganger](#) get when every creature it copies is a +6/+6 version? What about a [Psychatog](#) getting even more vicious than normal?\*

Just to get crazy, pump up your [Flailing Soldier](#) and basically pay 3 life to counter your opponent's futile attempts to shrink it while you keep pumping your mana into it. And if you want to get really crazy, in a play that only Mark Rosewater could love, [Donate](#) your [Phantasmal Sphere](#) to an opponent and then pump it up a bunch of times. Then [Reality Ripple](#) it.

*Bonus Mark Rosewater-esque Play!*

[Donate](#) your [Primordial Ooze](#) to your opponent and pump it with the Symbol so that it is at least equal in size as they have mana available. During their upkeep they'll have to add yet another +1/+1 counter to it, tap it and have it deal damage to them equal to the +1/+1 counters. Dropping 1 mana a turn they should never be able to pay the upkeep cost! Ahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!

Ahem. Sorry about that. Hey, it's MagicTheGathering.com, sometimes you can't help but channel MaRo. At least I wasn't suggesting any [Giant Fan](#) combos... Back to the topic at hand...

### Aku Djinn for the Desperate

Sometimes it's worth the life to pump up your opponent's creatures, [Aku Djinn](#) style. Maybe your friend's [Killer Bees](#) are a nightmare for your [Ensnaring Bridge](#) deck. Maybe you'd like to keep your opponent's [Wild Mongrel](#) tapped down by your Meekstone. What if you've got a [Delirium](#) or [Backlash](#) and your opponent's creatures are just not burly enough for the spell to kill him? Symbol to the rescue!



*Cards like [Meekstone](#), [Intrepid Hero](#), and [Ensnaring Bridge](#) reward you for using the Symbol on your opponents' creatures.*

### Liter Fare

Here's an *Onslaught*-block legal Cleric deck that makes pretty good use of [Unspeakable Symbol](#), especially with the aforementioned [Doubtless One](#). I've kept this build rare-free but if you own some of the really good rare Clerics in this block (notably [Rotlung Reanimator](#)) then feel free to work them in!

### Undoubtable Clerics *Lite!*



### Main Deck 60 cards

- |                                   |                                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 8 <a href="#">Plains</a>          | 3 <a href="#">Profane Prayers</a>    |
| 4 <a href="#">Starlit Sanctum</a> | 4 <a href="#">Smother</a>            |
| 12 <a href="#">Swamp</a>          | 4 <a href="#">Unspeakable Symbol</a> |

24 lands

11 other spells

- 4 [Boneknitter](#)
- 4 [Cabal Archon](#)
- 3 [Daru Spiritualist](#)
- 4 [Doubtless One](#)
- 2 [Vile Deacon](#)
- 4 [Whipgrass Entangler](#)

#### 4 [Withered Wretch](#)

25 creatures



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\*: The first version of the article contained an inaccuracy regarding [Humility](#) and [Unspeakable Symbol](#). They are not a combo. Counters are applied before other size-changing effects, so creatures with counters on them will always be 1/1 under [Humility](#).

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