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An Unnatural Affinity

Brian David-Marshall
Learning Curve
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So close...

What Isn't There

Almost all of my favorite cards from one of my favorite decks of all time are being reprinted in *Eighth Edition*.



Almost.

Right now you are probably running through a mental checklist of decks and cross-referencing against the *Eighth Edition* spoiler to figure out what deck I am referring to. Don't bother. My favorite deck is a deck that never was. It was a *Mercadian Masques* block constructed deck designed for Pro Tour - New York. At the time, the block only included *Masques* and *Nemesis* and *Lin Sivvi* and *Rishadan Port* had not yet been banned in the format.

The whole format was Rebel-icious. With the ridiculous power of *Lin Sivvi* at its disposal, the Rebel deck seemed to beat everything—just like rock. In fact, all other decks became known as "scissors" because rock beat them. While most players resigned themselves to fine tuning the best possible Rebel deck, there were a handful of deck designers working on something—anything—that would beat it. With two-thirds of the Rock-Paper-Scissors metagame established, they were looking for the middle component—paper.

I was not qualified for that Pro Tour but was playtesting extensively with a group of local players and I quickly grew bored with the format. When I am bored, I try to build decks with overlooked cards and see if I can make them better. The deck I ended up designing became known as Paper in the New York area and a handful of local players almost played it at the big event.

Almost.

The deck looked something like this:

Paper
Masques Block Constructed

Main Deck
60 cards

14 Forest	4 Howling Wolf	4 Brainstorm
7 Island	4 Nesting Wurm	4 Credit Voucher
21 lands	4 Skyshroud Sentinel	4 Ensnare
	4 Vine Trellis	4 Natural Affinity
	16 creatures	3 Revive
		4 Skyshroud Claim
		23 other spells

The idea behind the deck was to explode your mana with a *Vine Trellis* and *Skyshroud Claim*. *Skyshroud Claim* was similar to *Explosive Vegetation* except that it only fetched forests AND they came into play untapped. This would allow you to *Revive* your *Claim* after casting it on turn three. The deck would almost always have eight or nine mana in play by turn four.

From that point the deck went into turbo search mode looking for the combo kill. A few more unusual cards made it in at this point. *Brainstorm* had terrific interaction with the *Howling Wolf* and his cousins. The first wolf would find three copies of itself and then with *Brainstorm* you could draw three cards and put two wolves down. I liked the interaction so much I began looking for similar effects and stumbled across the otherwise unplayable *Credit Voucher*.

Here's how the deck would win. The cards you wanted to find were *Natural Affinity* and *Ensnare*. You could cast *Natural Affinity*—ideally tapping a *Vine Trellis* and two islands—and attack for at least twenty



points of damage. Remember the deck easily had nine mana in play on turn four and with **Howling Wolves** and such would always have enough time to reach critical mass. After you declare attackers and before your opponent has the opportunity to block you could return your two tapped Islands to pay the alternate casting cost on **Ensnare** and tap all creatures. Your opponent cannot block your creatures now and would take lethal damage.

There were all sorts of fun little tricks you could do with the deck. **Ensnare** could serve as a fog effect if you were getting beaten down. You could trade in excess mana with an **Ensnare** and a **Credit Voucher** to look at even more cards by returning two islands to pay the alternate cost. I have even had situations where I used **Natural Affinity** and **Ensnare** as an ersatz two-card **Mana Short** during an opponent's end of turn.

A number of local players had built copies of the deck for the tournament—including Jon Finkel and Dave Price—but in the end it remained on the sidelines while the varsity squad of Rebels got the call. It is still my favorite deck that I have ever built and as I scrolled through the *Eighth Edition* spoiler I grew more and more excited. First I saw **Natural Affinity** and then I was startled to see **Revive**. **Revive** is a card that has always been ignored. Despite the green color restriction, the card is a **Regrowth**. Of course, that was back when green was lousy, right? It might be a different story this time around when you can regrow **Wild Mongrel**.



Vine Trellis had been a known card for awhile and although I didn't expect to find **Skyshroud Claim**, I would be more than happy to play the deck with **Explosive Vegetation**. The trade-off of the untapped forests versus being able to find islands would have been well worth it. I had no illusions about **Brainstorm** or **Credit Voucher** being included—one is way too good and the other is just plain awful—and it seemed unlikely that the **Howling Wolf** cycle would be reprinted as well. I would have found another way to dig for cards. I would have **Concentrated**. I would have undergone **Deep Analysis**—to cure my **Compulsions**, no doubt.

Sadly, the card I needed to have reprinted was **Ensnare**.

What IS There

I can't complain, though. *Eighth Edition* is like a treasure trove for me. **Natural Affinity**, **Revive**, **Intruder Alarm**, **Cowardice**, **Phyrexian Plaguelord**, and so many other of my favorite cards. I guess hoping for **Ensnare** was a tad greedy. Fortunately there was another **Natural Affinity** combo that emerged from that same Pro Tour. Designed by a group of deck doctors that included Adrian Sullivan, Mike Flores, and Bob Maher, Jr., the deck's name also played off of the notion of a Rock-Paper-Scissors (Hey, did you know there is actually a "Pro Tour" for rock-paper-scissors?) environment. It went by the "official" name for the childhood game, "Roshambo."

Roshambo		
Masques Block Constructed		
Main Deck		Sideboard
61 cards		
7 Forest	4 Death Pit Offering	2 Desert Twister
4 Rishadan Port	2 Extortion	1 Extortion
15 Swamp	3 Forced March	1 Forced March
26 lands	3 Horn of Ramos	3 Hunted Wumpus
	4 Massacre	1 Natural Affinity
2 Ascendant Evincar	3 Natural Affinity	2 Predator, Flagship
4 Divining Witch	4 Saproling Burst	3 Reverent Silence
4 Thrashing Wumpus	2 Skull of Ramos	2 Woodripper
10 creatures	25 other spells	15 sideboard cards

The core of this deck is a simple combo. **Death Pit Offering** and **Natural Affinity** allows you to destroy all of your opponent's lands with a **Massacre** while your's remained intact. With so many players opting for Rebel decks, **Massacre** was a free spell most of the time. The deck was a modest success at the Pro Tour and is remembered fondly by rogue deck enthusiasts.

Death Pit Offering is also included in *Eighth Edition*. While there is no **Massacre**, there is **Infest** as well as **Decree of Pain** available for six- or eight-mana combos respectively with **Natural Affinity**. Throw in an **Explosive Vegetation** or four and you should have no problem getting there!



Go Play!

Hopefully you are all attending a [10th Anniversary Global Celebration](#) tournament at a store near you this weekend. (Think of it as an *Eighth Edition* prerelease.) Unlike the larger prereleases for expert level expansion sets, this one is being held in thousands of stores all over the world in an attempt to generate the single largest tournament event ever held. I'll be doing my part and I'll share my experience with you next week.

Brian may be reached at brian@fightlikeapes.com.

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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