



Games

Books

Community

Events

Help

Articles

Search



HYBRID WEEK

MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM

ARCHIVES

TOURNAMENT CENTER

MAGIC ONLINE

GATHERER

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Having a Blast with Artifacts

Brian David-Marshall
Learning Curve
Wednesday, September 17, 2003



I get a lot of email from readers asking me questions about the thought process that goes into card design. Sometimes readers inquire as to the thinking behind certain policy decisions. Sometimes I make something up but mostly I just send back a virtual shrug and explain that I am a lowly freelance writer without a window into the inner workings of Wizards.

That is not to say that I don't wonder about said thought processes myself. I have been particularly intrigued with the machinations of designing an artifact set like *Mirrodin*. I imagine there are three basic components that you need to consider. The first component is obviously the artifacts themselves. We have already seen two twists on traditional artifacts with the previews of the [artifact lands](#) and [equipment](#).



The second component is creating a reward for playing with artifacts. After all you don't want to go through all that effort and have your artifacts sit on the bench while the previous block claims the Standard sandbox as it's own. We have already seen [affinity](#) and the staggering potential of the [imprint mechanic](#).

The third component is in building some risk into playing with those artifacts—keeping some kind of checks in balances in place so that there is some consideration that needs to go into playing with them. So that the risks and rewards have to be weighed and a decision can be made about whether or not to use artifacts. If everyone is running *Naturalize* you will give your opponent a dead draw by not playing with any targets for it. Of course, that means at some point people will stop playing with *Naturalize*...

I love the risk/reward built into the artifact lands. They fuel a number of exciting possibilities—*Tinker* in the Extended format leaps to mind—but the possibility of having your land destroyed by artifact removal can temper that excitement. An even more sobering possibility is having a board of artifacts and artifact lands sent to the graveyard by a timely *Akroma's Vengeance*.

One of my favorite cards in the set is one that rewards you for playing artifacts—it is plain old useless otherwise—and also provides you with a response to the risks of artifact removal that are sure to abound after the introduction of this set.



WHAT IS MAGIC?
CLICK HERE!

PRODUCTS
SHADOWMOOR
MORNINCIDE

MAGIC ONLINE
MAGIC ONLINE
Download MOL III Now!

Top 8 Decklists
2008 City Champs Finals Standard

GLEEMAX
FIND OUT MORE!

MESSAGE BOARDS
MAGIC The Gathering
Magic General Forum
magicthegathering.com Forum

RULES
RULES

Five damage for two mana? An instant? At first glance it seems to good to be true and of course, it is. The additional cost of sacrificing an artifact means you can't just toss this spell into any old red deck. In fact, you can't even just toss it into a deck with a few artifacts since you will not be able to pay for the card without one in play.

Does the combination of this card and the artifact lands make anyone else think of the *Visions* powerhouse **Fireblast**? Even **Fireblast** didn't deal this much damage. **Shrapnel Blast** is strong enough to knock an **Exalted Angel** out of the sky. I would gladly trade a land to mount that head in my trophy room.

Thankfully this card is uncommon or it would completely unbalance the Limited format. As it is five will be a dangerous life total to hover around with a red mana showing. With artifact creatures trading in battle this will be a nasty trick during combat. I particularly like the idea of throwing a **Solemn Simulacrum** after trading it for another creature during the attack step. **Rampant Growth** a land, take down a creature, draw a card and take either a fourth of your opponent's starting life total or another creature. All for only two cards.

Most of the situations that you will find yourself using **Shrapnel Blast** will not be so card advantageous but the amount of damage the card deals and the fact that is instant speed will offset the card disadvantage of it costing you two cards. Of course if your opponent is aiming a **Naturalize** at your Great Furnace why not toss it at them instead?

There is not currently a Standard deck that makes good use of this card. It is not a good fit in the current Goblin decks, which want to have plenty of Goblins and does not really have room for much in the way of artifacts except for Great Furnace. The idea of two sets of four cards seeking each other out in a sixty card deck for either one to be good is not an exciting possibility. The Goblin party would much rather have seen the reprint of **Goblin Grenade** and are currently looking for a new lobbyist.

There are some possibilities in Extended. Burning Bridge is a burn deck that sits behind **Ensnaring Bridge** while ripping through it's library with Grafted Skullcap to find burn spells to kill an opponent. The deck lurked on the fringes of the *Seventh Edition* Standard environment but only the Bridge half of the combo was reprinted in Core Set. One of the problems I always found with the deck was the cheap burn. You always got what you paid for and I often found the deck wanted to deal more damage. Five seems like a good number.

It also seems like a fun card to play with **Cursed Scroll**. As you peck away at your opponent with the Scroll they will know that a five point finisher is awaiting them if they fall below the Mendoza line or try to **Disenchant** the Scroll. I remember the sense of dread that my **Cursed Scroll**-wielding opponent naming **Fireblast** used to instill and I can imagine experiencing that sense of doom once **Mirrodin** is tournament legal. It also gives you a proper way to dispose of a **Tangle Wire** that has nearly faded away.

Looking at what we know from **Mirrodin**, **Isochron Scepter** is an interesting possibility. While you don't need to pay the mana cost you will still need to sacrifice an artifact to create a copy of **Shrapnel Blast**. Both cards cost you a card when you play them but they fit together nicely. Even if you only sacrifice the Scepter itself it is the same as if you had just played the **Shrapnel Blast** from your hand with only an extra investment of two mana.

I already mentioned **Solemn Simulacrum** but what about imprinting him on **Soul Foundry**? A never ending supply of **Shrapnel Blast** ammunition. I know I am getting silly but I am somewhat constrained in what artifacts I am allowed to discuss here. There will certainly be a great number of them that see play and I am confident that **Shrapnel Blast** will find it's way into a variety of decks.



Don't forget to go to the [prerelease tournaments](#) this weekend and try to stay above five life!

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.



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Brian David-Marshall](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#)

© 1995-2008 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

