

Erratic Portal reborn SCS: Crystal Shard

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While it's common for Wizards to reprint toned-down versions of broken cards from **Magic's** past, it's always a pleasure to see an upgrade to an old favorite. For today's *Mirrodin* preview, I get the pleasure of giving the [Single Card Strategy](#) treatment to the prodigal son of the *Exodus* set's [Erratic Portal](#), Crystal Shard!



For one mana less to cast, your activation cost is now a blue mana, which is an acceptable tradeoff. In return, your Shard comes on line a full turn earlier, which can make a big difference especially in new Standard where large, expensive creatures are sure to make an impact.

So what if you don't have blue mana available? No worries, the Shard gives you the option of activating with three generic mana instead.



MESSING UP THE MANA MATH

Right away you can see how an active Crystal Shard can affect your opponent's creature plans. No longer can he really afford to use up all his mana without you returning his biggest and baddest creature to his hand. Even if he leaves one mana available, you can activate your Shards at the end of his turn, making him tap out, then you untap and use it again, bouncing the offending creature.

So what if he just makes sure he has two mana available at all times? That's okay too--you're in effect tying up two of his mana by leaving only one blue untapped until the end of his turn. And maybe then you just play [Unsummon](#) on the end of his turn just for spite!

Leeching an extra mana from your opponent to keep his threat creature on the board can be useful even if he can pay the cost. It can make [Propaganda](#), [Windborn Muse](#), [Collective Restraint](#) and [Whipgrass Entangler](#) much more effective. [Mana Breach](#) and [Storm Cauldron](#) are even more disruptive. [Psychic Venom](#) and [Manabarbs](#) can get downright prickly. It can become nearly impossible to keep a creature on the board with a Shard backing up a [Winter Orb](#) or [Rising Waters](#). The pirates from *Mercadian Masques* get nasty in conjunction with the Shard; tap down too low and not only might your creature be bounced but you might also lose a permanent to a [Rishadan Cutpurse](#) or [Rishadan Footpad](#). And then your opponent could return his pirate to his hand with the Shard and do it again!



COME INTO PLAY, AGAIN AND AGAIN...

Speaking of reusing the pirates, a more effective way of using the Shard may be in reusing your creatures that have comes-into-play abilities. The possibilities here are endless, but here's a few ideas to get your juices flowing: [Uktabi Orangutan](#), [Nekrataal](#), [Man-o'-War](#), [Wall of Blossoms](#), [Triskelion](#), [Mystic Snake](#), [Gravedigger](#), [Hunting Moa](#), [Flametongue Kavu](#), [Solemn Simulacrum](#), and the [Battlemages](#) from *Planeshift*. [Deranged Hermit](#) and [Siege-Gang Commander](#) can churn out endless token creatures. Reset your [Volvers](#) and other kicker creatures to maximum throttle when you've got the mana together. *Torment's* Nightmare creatures like [Mesmeric Fiend](#) and [Faceless Butcher](#) can do their thing permanently if you activate your Shard and bounce them in response to their comes-into-play effects. Bounce back [Peacekeeper](#) at the end of your opponent's turn to give you an attack, and then recast him afterwards to keep your opponent's creatures impotent. Reset your [Meddling Mage](#), or fading and cumulative upkeep creatures like [Woodripper](#), [Ancient Hydra](#), [Jolting Merfolk](#), [Morinfen](#), [Musician](#), and [Revered Unicorn](#).

CLEARING THE WAY FOR THE ATTACK

So your opponent is having a tough time keeping creatures in play; how do you take advantage of that? Obviously, attacking with damaging creatures will eventually win the game, but some creatures are most effective unblocked. The mighty [Ophidian](#) immediately leaps to mind, along with creatures enchanted with [Curiosity](#) or benefiting from [Coastal Piracy](#). [Hypnotic Specter](#) and [Headhunter](#) can end up knocking the bounced blocker out of their hand. [Phyrexian Negator](#) and [Flesh Reaver](#) obviously prefer to deal their full damage to your opponent. Clearing the skies is often fairly easy so your [Blinding Angel](#) can do her work taking away your opponent's attack phase.

LEND A HELPING HAND

Crystal Shard can also be an insurance policy for your own creatures, protecting them from an early demise. Save your best creature from an untimely [Wrath of God](#) or [Akroma's Vengeance](#). You can pretty much negate any pinpoint removal like [Terror](#) or [Shock](#). And in creature combat, get familiar with the phrase "damage on the stack" and remember that your creature doesn't have to still be in play for that damage to resolve. This method of saving your creatures is particularly effective in conjunction with equipment, since your equipment stays around if the equipping creature leaves play, ready to be picked up when he returns.

REDUNDANCY IS THE BEST POLICY

Crystal Shard is a permanent way to constantly bounce creatures, albeit situationally if your opponent has extra mana lying around. The Shard probably works best in conjunction with more bounce effects, and blue has plenty of them to choose from. [Boomerang](#) is probably the best overall, but you can also choose from [Aether Burst](#), [Chain of Vapor](#), [Man-o'-War](#), [Hoodwink](#), [Cowardice](#), [Temporal Adept](#), and even the venerable [Time Elemental](#).

A SAMPLE DECK... AND A WARNING

Since Crystal Shard works most efficiently with blue mana, I've built a monoblue "bounce" deck around it. A word of caution however: you may want to have a backup "fun" deck with you when play

someone with this, because this deck can rapidly annoy even the most laid back and patient players. Have fun with your bounce, but then put it away and play nice!

Shard Bounce



Main Deck

60 cards

24 Island	4 Boomerang
_____	4 Counterspell
24 lands	4 Crystal Shard
	4 Hoodwink
2 Air Elemental	4 Unsummon
3 Jolting Merfolk	_____
3 Man-o'-War	20 other spells
4 Ophidian	
4 Rishadan Footpad	

16 creatures	



If you have [Rishadan Ports](#) they'd work perfectly in this deck, as would a splash of white for [Meddling Mage](#) if you had them.

I have to say I'm extremely excited about the abundance of artifacts in *Mirrodin*! Artifacts have always been some of the most interesting cards since most of them can fit into decks of any color, really

opening up the possibilities for casual and serious gamers alike. I can't wait to start busting *Mirrodin* packs to see what bounty turns up!

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