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Magic has a long history with Elementals. When the game was born, it came with Earth, Air, Fire, and Water Elementals. That was enough for a while (hey, there *are* only four elements, after all), until *Legends* bent the laws of physics enough to introduce Time Elemental (cosmic) and Wood Elemental (less so). *Legends* also gave us Chromium—it may be an element, but it's not an Elemental.

Elementals trickled in over time until *Mirage* came up with the innovation of an Elemental without "elemental" in its name: Maro! Not to mention (and I wish I didn't need to) the very confused non-Spirit creature Subterranean Spirit.

Elementals continue to be a kicky, popular creature type to this day.



- No expansion has more than four of them! The ones that seemingly max out are Alpha, *Mirage*, *Scourge*, and now *Mirrodin*.
- They appear across varied colors! They're spread through red, green, and blue, though black has Bog Elemental, white finally got one with Dawn Elemental, and there's now a colorless one in Rust Elemental.
- They don't do anything in particular! What I mean by that is Elementals don't have any specific template to follow. You have an automatic expectation for the general parameters of an Angel, Goblin, or Myr. Elementals don't fit into a box. (Usually because they're too ornery to let you stuff them into one.)
- The first card you made was an Elemental! Take a bow, Forgotten Ancient.

And that brings us up to date. As stated, *Mirrodin* is full of Elementals. Chemists, I'm going to have to ask you to avert your eyes. Titanium Golem! Platinum Angel! Bosh, Iron Golem! Silver Myr! Gold Myr! Lead(en) Myr! They're all made from elements, yet none of them are Elementals! Instead, we get Quicksilver Elemental (that's another term for the element mercury, so that's OK), Rust Elemental (well, that's corroded iron, so it's close, but it's no longer a pure element), War Elemental (not on my periodic table), and Living Hive (???)



I Want To Give Target Elf Forestwalk Too!

I'm giving Rust Elemental a pass this week. Don't get me wrong: I like the card a lot, and I've compared it to a half-size Lord of the Pit. I happen to know that it will come up in a future column, so it can sit on the bench this time out.

Quicksilver Elemental, though, can step front and center. What a bizarre card. Blue seems to have an affinity—whoops, can't use that word casually anymore. Blue seems to have a penchant for 5-mana 3/4 creatures that do odd stuff. This one splices activated abilities onto itself. You can't rely on your opponent having good stuff to swipe, so you've got to supply the activated abilities yourself. Putting the Elemental to best use is tricky business, though. There are lots of activated abilities that make no sense to copy. Boneknitter? Arc-Slogger? As long as you have one creature with an ability like theirs in play, you don't need another. The stolen ability should require a tap to use, so Quicky lets you do it twice a turn instead of just once, or it has to specifically affect the creature that has it, so Quicky can improve its lot in life.



What fits into the first category? Arcanis the Omnipotent came to mind first. "☁: Draw 3 cards" is right at the top of the ability curve. Elvish Aberration says to tap for 🌳🌳🌳. Spikeshot Goblin, the bane of Limited players everywhere, taps for damage—and Quicky comes with a 2-power advantage over Spikey.

How about the second category? Clockwork Dragon has the spicy ability "⚙: Put a +1/+1 counter on YOUR NAME HERE." It's a combo with the Spikeshot Goblin ability! With a Riptide Mangler in play, Quicksilver Elemental has "🔥🔥🔥: Change Quicksilver Elemental's power to target creature's power." It's a combo with a Clockwork Dragon out! Silvus, an Elemental pal, provides regeneration for 🌳🌳 and a nice Mangler target, and Triskelion offers a nice outlet for those +1/+1 counters.

The deck is rounded out by Forgotten Ancient, a third Elemental that likes to share its counters; Puppeteer, since the deck enjoys tap effects; and mana-generating spells.

Ability Capability



Main Deck

60 cards

11 Forest	2 Arcanis the Omnipotent	4 Explosive Vegetation
10 Island	2 Clockwork Dragon	4 Rampant Growth
2 Mountain	4 Elvish Aberration	8 other spells
1 Wooded Foothills	2 Forgotten Ancient	
24 lands	4 Puppeteer	
	4 Quicksilver Elemental	
	2 Riptide Mangler	
	2 Silvos, Rogue Elemental	
	4 Spikeshot Goblin	
	2 Triskelion	
	28 creatures	

It's at this point that I'd like to remind you that my decks are built to maximize fun, not tournament-level effectiveness and that there are no refunds for the time you spent reading this.

March into War

On to Elemental #2, War Elemental. I have to admit that I like the fanciful notion of naming Elementals out of intangible qualities. And the mechanic of the card captures the flavor very well. But it also makes it hard to use effectively. First you have to zotz your opponent, then bring out Warren (better nickname than Warry, no?), then zotz your opponent some more to prevent your War Elemental from being an easily picked-on 1/1 weakling. You want a World War II Elemental, not a Grenada Elemental. (See, Grenada is a small Caribbean island nation that was allied with Cuba when the US invaded it in late 1983 as one of the skirmishes of the Cold War . . . wait, what am I, a history lesson? Look it up yourself.)

War Elemental has a neat little loophole. Play it without having done anything else that turn and its "sacrifice me!" ability triggers. While that's on the stack, do some instant-speed damage to your opponent. The damage will satisfy the first ability so it sticks around, and it will trigger the second ability so it gets some +1/+1 counters. It's even better if that damage costs no mana that turn, so you can get Warren out—and beef it up—on turn 3. That's why War Elemental's best friend in the whole world is Seal of Fire. Mogg Fanatic is good too.



In the current Standard environment, we don't have anything like the Seal that costs less than 3 mana. But we have something else that interacts just as well: crazy red mana acceleration! Turn 1,

Mountain, Chrome Mox or Skirk Prospector. Turn 2, Mountain, get a red mana out of the Mox or Goblin, play Seething Song, use 🍀🍀 to drop War Elemental, let its ability trigger, then use the remaining 🍀 to toss Chain of Plasma at your opponent's head. It's turn 2, you've dealt 3 damage to your opponent, and you have a 4/4 creature in play. Thanks to timing intricacies, Chain of Plasma can't ricochet over to the Elemental before it gets its three +1/+1 counters from the initial Chain blast. If War Elemental hits your opponent the following turn, it doubles in size to an 8/8 creature on turn 3. Look out, because War escalates quickly.

How often will you get an insane draw like that? How often will your opponent not have a Terror at the ready? Does the deck roll over without an early War Elemental? Yes, five, and the Toronto Blue Jays. This deck is about potential. Potential for pain. Sulfuric Vortex—hey, sulfur! an element!—stings even more than normal with a War Elemental out. Slith Firewalker pumps both itself and Warren when it hits. Seismic Assault provides a nice outlet for Mountains #4, 5, and 6. War is hell.

War—What Is It Good For?

Main Deck
60 cards

21 Mountain <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 21 lands	4 Skirk Prospector 4 Slith Firewalker 4 War Elemental <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 12 creatures	2 Blaze 4 Chain of Plasma 2 Chrome Mox 4 Pyrite Spellbomb 4 Seething Song 2 Seismic Assault 4 Shock 3 Sulfuric Vortex 2 Volcanic Hammer <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 27 other spells
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Remember when I said that my decks are built for fun, not brutal efficiency? Burning your opponent out by turn 4 is fun, right?

Deep Ponderings on Elements

If antimony ever comes into contact with mony, is there an explosion?

Did Donny or Marie discover osmium?

Can you find germaniums in your flower garden?

Did neodymium phase out original dymium?

Was the scientist who discovered nobelium the biggest kiss-up of all time or what?

Can you meet Plutonium at Disney's Californium Adventure?

Does it take three spore counters to synthesize thallium?



Is fermium surprisingly squishy?

Is francium just a sub-element of europium?

Hives of the Scale

Today's last Elemental is Living Hive. Some inside dirt on this card: A year and a half ago, the clever folks who come up with card concepts decided that a gigantic swarm of insects that itself was in the shape of an insect would be really cool. They



were right. They assigned the concept to a card in the *Onslaught* file, commissioned art, approved the sketch, and waited. Then the final art came in. Though the pencil sketch illustrated the concept of an insect-shaped insect swarm very well, the painted version did not. It just looked like a big insect, and the name changed from Living Hive (or some close approximation) to Stag Beetle.

Not ones to be daunted by reality, the eternally optimistic and clever folks who come up with card concepts decided to give it another go. They took the same concept and gave it to the same artist. When the final art came in, still refusing to be daunted by reality, they said, "We're not doing it again. This is a Living Hive, dangit! See, the flavor text (scribbling frantically) proves it!"


Now that I've made some enemies within the company, I'll turn to my real job: Figuring out how to make this thing work. There are two aspects to the task. 1) How do we get the best use out of the Insect tokens it spits out once it's in play? 2) How do we get it into play? It's an 8-mana creature, so hard-casting it is tough, even with mana acceleration. It can be reanimated. It can be Piped out via *Elvish Piper*. But I think I'd prefer to hard-cast it.

Normal mana acceleration doesn't help too much. *Rampant Growth* would get us from 2 lands to 3. *Explosive Vegetation* would get us from 4 lands to 6. We need 8 to play Liv! That's when I remembered a bad little rare that I like to trot out every once in a while: *Vernal Bloom*. It's liable to backfire if your opponent is playing with *Forests*. Unlike the permanent boosts generated by land-fetchers, *Vernal Bloom* provides fragile acceleration that depends on keeping it in play. But it will jump you from 4 mana to 8 mana immediately, and that's just what this deck wants. The other mana accelerator I included in this deck is *Journey of Discovery*. There are a lot of choices out there: the aforementioned *Growth* and *Vegetation*, *Krosan Tusker*, *Sprouting Vines*, *forestcyclers*, *Vine Trellis*, *Wirewood Channeler*, and more. Why go on the *Journey*? Partially because it's new. But I really like how it interacts with *Vernal Bloom*. On turn 3, it can fetch two *Forests* to set you up to play the *Bloom* on turn 4. Later in the game, with a *Bloom* in play, you can tap three *Forests* to play *Journey* with *entwine*, fetch two *Forests* from your library, and put them both into play *untapped*. You've spent only two mana to increase your total mana supply by four!

How do we take advantage of our Insects? It's unclear that we need to. If we're smashing in with a 6/6 trampler that is shedding free creatures into play, we're winning the game, right? But as long as we've got potential for lots of 1/1 critters that share a creature type, let's go tribal! *Broodhatch Nantuko* is an early defender that will create more Insects if your opponent is foolish enough to attack into it. *One Dozen Eyes* is an instant infestation. *Nantuko Vigilante* is an Insect that can dispatch

Platinum Angel. (This should become a question you ask yourself every time you build a casual deck from now on: *Can I get rid of Platinum Angel?* All of today's decks can.) Gigapede keeps coming back. Symbiotic Wurm is a dare to your opponent, though you unfortunately have no way to sacrifice it yourself. All of this sets up a giant Stag Beetle or a way to create giant attacking swarms via Coat of Arms or Tribal Forcemage. My favorite idea is to slap an Alpha Status on a Xantid Swarm (who says green creatures can't fly?) and swing in.

Breaking Out in Hives



Main Deck
60 cards

20 Forest 4 Tranquil Thicket <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 24 lands	4 Broodhatch Nantuko 1 Gigapede 4 Living Hive 2 Nantuko Vigilante 1 Stag Beetle 2 Symbiotic Wurm 2 Tribal Forcemage 2 Xantid Swarm <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 18 creatures	4 Alpha Status 2 Coat of Arms 4 Journey of Discovery 4 One Dozen Eyes 4 Vernal Bloom <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 18 other spells
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Until next week, have fun with Elementals. And be on the lookout for new **Magic** Elementals such as Selenium, Dark Angel and Western Palladium!

Mark

Deck Dare Update

I am very impressed so far with the response I've gotten to last week's Acrostic Deck Dare. (Wait, was my tactic to compliment you folks or taunt you? Huh.) I received over a hundred brilliant, bizarre submissions in the first day alone. You're all too clever for your own good, and I'm loving it. There's still plenty of time to take the Dare; I'm accepting decks until Halloween. See last week's column for details.



One reminder: If you want to include *nonbasic* lands, they must fit into the acrostic *and* the theme of your deck. You don't get to haphazardly build a five-color deck and then straighten things out by sticking some Tropical Islands, Taigas, and Cities of Brass on the end. *Basic* lands don't have to fit the acrostic; you can include as many of those as you want. Good luck, and happy construction!

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