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Vedalken on the Wind

Brian David-Marshall
Learning Curve
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Have you ever gotten an idea for a deck stuck inside your head? I don't mean a simple moment of inspiration that leads you to build a deck. I'm talking about a weed on your otherwise manicured mental landscape that won't go away. It doesn't matter that the window for a format may have closed and will not be relevantly opened again for months-the idea for the deck is just sitting there waiting for you to nurture it.

The current blight on my lawn is **Words of Wind**. Sometime last year-probably around the same point after the release of *Onslaught* as we are at for *Mirrodin* - I was returning from a PTQ with my friend Zev Gurwitz. It was a three or four hour car ride back to New York City and we were talking about the different cards in the new set.

We began musing about whether or not **Words of Wind** was abusable. Because the card is symmetrical - meaning both players are affected by its ability - the card was dismissed as unplayable. Now anyone who has been around **Magic** for any length of time will tell you that symmetry is in the eyes of the beholder. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a **Stasis**, **Wrath of God**, or **Armageddon** you should understand what I mean.

Our goal was to create a deck that could afford to give up card drawing in order to lock an opponent out of having more than one permanent on the board at one time. Our deck would have to contain inexpensive permanents that we could replay at a cut rate while our opponent was paying full retail.



The Idea

The deck that took form over the remainder of our trip turned out to be a green-blue number with **Howling Mines**, **Deep Analysis**, **Concentrate**, and **Compulsion** to find **Basking Rootwallas** and **Elvish Pioneers** with **Words of Wind** in play. With a **Compulsion** in play you could turn a pair of **Basking Rootwallas** into **Capsize** with buyback for 2. With one of the **Basking Rootwallas** in play you could activate **Compulsion** paying 1 and discarding a **Basking Rootwalla** from your hand and removing it to the madness zone. In response you would pay 1 to activate **Words of Wind** - you don't even need to respond you could pay enough mana for each iteration you want to go through beforehand - and when the **Compulsion** resolved you and your opponent would have to return a permanent instead of the card draw and you would pick up the **Basking Rootwalla** that was already in play. Somewhere along the way your madness trigger would resolve and the discarded **Basking Rootwalla** would come into play ready for you to repeat the process.

The **Elvish Pioneers** were in the deck for the same reason as the **Rootwallas**. They would let you play an additional land that would help you to circumvent the **Words of Wind** drawback. In the end, the deck was way too fragile and it required you to have the pair of **Basking Rootwallas** for your deck to 'go off'. I found the deck was just winning with **Wild Mongrel** and **Basking Rootwalla** more often than not and the combo was just getting in the way of an otherwise good beatdown deck.

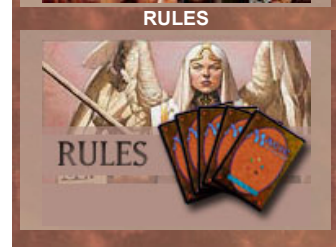
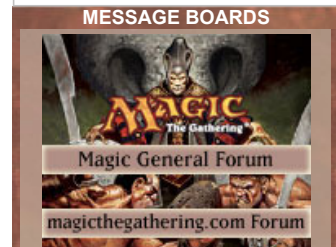
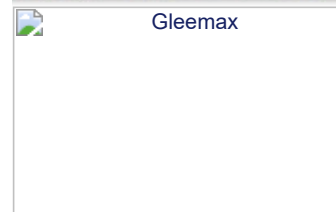
I eventually moved on to other deck building endeavors but **Words of Wind** would inevitably pop up to spoil my lawn. Whenever I participated in a draft, I would nab a copy of the card if it were available with a late pick. I was beginning to think that I was wasting my time - and draft picks - until the Masters Series at Pro Tour Yokohama when Gabriel Nassif finished in second place with his Enchantress deck that exploited the blue enchantment.

I was enthralled watching the deck in action...

I was vindicated that **Words of Wind** was actually a viable card...

I was jealous.

[Editor's Note: Here's Gabriel's deck for reference]



Gabriel Nassif Yokohama Masters 2003	
Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard

10 Forest	4 Enchantress's Presence	1 Bind
6 Island	3 Exploration	3 Deep Analysis
2 Serra's Sanctum	4 Fertile Ground	3 Gainsay
4 Yavimaya Coast	4 Frantic Search	2 Masticore
	4 Seal of Removal	3 Ray of Revelation
22 lands	1 Trade Routes	1 Worship
	4 Wild Growth	2 Yavimaya Enchantress
4 Argothian Enchantress	3 Words of Wind	
2 Cloud of Faeries		15 sideboard cards
4 Wall of Blossoms	27 other spells	
1 Yavimaya Enchantress		
11 creatures		

The Deck

Flash forward to my preparations for this year's State Championships. I was whiling away an afternoon with my friend Pat Donovan and we were speculating about which decks would be prevalent at States. We started throwing around the different builds of Affinity that we thought might show up. As we discussed the free creatures - **Frogmite** and **Myr Enforcer** - and made the inevitable comparisons to the madness creatures from the previous block I was reminded of the old **Words of Wind** deck with **Basking Rootwalla**.

We talked back and forth about how to exploit the Affinity creatures with **Words of Wind** but we didn't give it too much thought because our attention was drawn to **Molder Slug** as a foil to the Affinity deck and the initial design for the Moldy Hermit deck took form.

I didn't think too much more about the deck until I was checking my e-mail before leaving for a trip to [Grand Prix Shizuoka](#). Pat sent me a quick note to let me know that he had been thinking more about the Affinity/**Words of Wind** concept. How had we missed **Vedalken Archmage**, he wanted to know?

Hmmmm...

I didn't know but I proxied up a quick decklist.

Ill Wind		
Standard deck		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
4 Ancient Den	2 Aether Spellbomb	4 Mana Leak
4 Glimmervoid	4 Chrome Mox	3 Override
2 Island	4 Howling Mine	4 Second Sunrise
4 Seat of the Synod	2 Lightning Greaves	4 Terror
4 Vault of Whispers	2 Talisman of Dominance	
	4 Talisman of Progress	15 sideboard cards
18 lands	4 Thirst for Knowledge	
	4 Thoughtcast	
4 Frogmite	4 Words of Wind	
4 Myr Enforcer		
4 Vedalken Archmage	30 other spells	
12 creatures		

The Proxy Surprise

I love proxying a deck to kick off a build because it easier than actually having to dig the cards out or buy them if the deck is not going to work. The downside is that you don't always have an accurate idea of what the cards do. The deck was initially much better than it would turn out to be because I did not realize at first that the **Vedalken Archmage** triggered when you played the spell and not when it came into play.

If it was the latter than I would only need one free spell to be able to lock my opponent. Playing by the rules of the game - on the other hand - I need to have two. The way it works is pretty straightforward and I will walk you through and ideal draw.

On turn two you play a **Chrome Mox** and cast **Words of Wind**. The following turn you play another land and cast an Archmage. On the fourth turn of the game you play a **Frogmite** for free and draw a card. You can now play another **Frogmite**, **Myr Enforcer**, or **Chrome Mox** and pay one mana to activate the **Words of Wind**. When the Archmage triggers you return the original **Frogmite** instead of drawing a card. You can repeat this process as many times as you have mana - as many as five times on turn

four in this scenario - without losing any board position. Your opponent on the other hand will have returned five separate permanents and be close to being locked out of the game.

I have yet to play the deck in a tournament environment or even test it out against another deck. I am hoping that I can hone the deck into something at least vaguely competitive. One of the problems right now would seem to be the deck's reliance on getting an Archmage into play and protecting it.

I am eager to hear what your thoughts are on my fledgling creation. As always, it needs a good name. I am looking forward to hearing from you and finally getting a chance to dig those *Words of Wind* out of a box in my den when I get home.

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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