

Mark Gottlieb

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**W**hat's the latest fad sweeping the nation? Full-contact Christmas shopping? No. Taking a broom and *actually* sweeping the nation? No. Being nice to people? NO!!! It's writing me mail! All the suave and debonair kids are doing it. And today I'm going to share some Do's and Don'ts on how to participate in the second-most exciting thing you can do on your computer. (The first-most exciting thing being skysurfing while websurfing on a wi-fi laptop.) Rosewater's not the only one who can do a mailbag column. I figure what's good for the Mark is good for the suave and debonair Mark.

### DO: Send in cool decks!

Stan McKim sent in a brutally fun, mostly *Mirrodin* deck with a number of different synergies in it. It had 28 artifacts (including artifact lands), which supported Atog, Shrapnel Blast, and the ubiquitous common affinity creatures, Frogmite and Myr Enforcer. (As a side note: If you like playing in the Casual Constructed room on **Magic Online**, you better be prepared to deal with a pair of turn 4 Myr Enforcers. My math may be a little off, but it seems like 239% of the people in that room are running affinity. It makes sense—the deck is new, cheap (as in mostly commons), fast, and harsh.) Anyway, Stan's Atog and Blast, along with Pyrite Spellbomb, supported his Disciples of the Vault. Not to knock Stan, it seems pretty typical so far. But his "Chuckwallatog" deck included a combo that caught my eye: the new Channel-Fireball, the new Hatred... Wall of Blood & Grab the Reins! Get a Wall out on turn 3, then on turn 4 pump it up to 19/21 and fling it at your opponent's head. (Not that you have to do this on turn 4. It works later than that too.) Hopefully a Disciple or a Spellbomb would have taken care of that other point of damage.

Stan's deck was great, but the Wall-Reins win has so much more panache (no, that's not what happens when you hit someone with a frying pan) than the affinity plan that I wanted to play it up. And what a coincidence that black has Diabolic Tutor to help search for either half of the two-card combo! In my version, I swapped out the Frogmites and Enforcers for Steel Walls (hey, they only cost 1 so they're almost as cheap) and Myr Retrievers. It's necessary early stalling—if your life total isn't higher than your opponent's, Wall of Blood won't do you much good. The Retrievers also reinforce the "sac an artifact" theme played up with the Atog, Disciple, Spellbomb, and Shrapnel Blast. I'm not sure about the Bonesplitters, but early beatdown goes a long way in this deck, and when attached to the Wall of Blood, each one saves you 2 life. You'll have to watch out for counterspells and instant burn that will finish you after funneling your life into the Wall of Blood, but barring that, this deck is very hard to stop. Why play the whole game when you can bypass it and just make each player lose 19 life?



## Main Deck

60 cards

4 Great Furnace  
7 Mountain  
7 Swamp  
4 Vault of Whispers  
22 lands

3 Atog  
3 Disciple of the Vault  
3 Myr Retriever  
4 Steel Wall  
4 Wall of Blood

17 creatures

2 Bonesplitter  
4 Diabolic Tutor  
4 Grab the Reins  
4 Pyrite Spellbomb  
4 Shrapnel Blast  
3 Talisman of Indulgence

21 other spells

### DON'T: Tempt me to crib off Bennie Smith



Bennie Smith has a monthly-ish column on our site called Single Card Strategy. He'll take an oddball card and explore a range of possible uses for it. The last one he did was on the quirky little combo enabler Dross Scorpion. Which is why the raft of Dross Scorpion decks that I've received pain me so. Yes, it's a great casual card that's fun to build a deck around: That's why we did it already! One email suggested Dross Scorpion-Soul Foundry-Ornithopter-Carrion Feeder. Another put forth Dross Scorpion-Soul Foundry-Cathodion-Carrion Feeder-Grab the Reins. This deck was so convolutedly cool that I was tempted to post it... but it's nearly identical to the core of a deck Bennie already wrote about. (He had Atog instead of Feeder.)

Why is this a problem? Can't I just ignore the decks people send me? Sure, but what if I slip? Do you *want* Bennie Smith mad at me? Is that was this is all about?

### DO: Send in deck ideas even if you don't have a whole deck to go with it

Bryce from Hochstedler loves March of the Machines, and he loves Thought Prison, so his great inspiration was to combine those two cards with Astral Slide. While Thought Prison is a creature, you can repeatedly Slide it out and in to remove cards from your opponent's hand. In Bryce's exact words, "WHEEE!" (Aaron Diers also wrote in with the March-Slide combo—and since it wasn't already insane enough, he suggested Opalescence as well!)

Though Bryce hadn't constructed the deck, he suggested a blue-white Slide build that was altered to include Solemn Simulacrum, Duplicant, and some other artifacts. He went on to suggest Clockwork creatures, countermagic, and comes-into-play draw creatures like Merchant of Secrets, but since I wanted to stay under 85 cards, I couldn't include everything.

I liked this idea (even though it used the evil Astral Slide), so I put a version together. It was a tough build: A good chunk of the deck is occupied by the Slide components, more real estate is eaten by

March of the Machines and high-mana-cost artifacts, and the deck really needs some normal creatures to Slide out and in because you can't count on having March in play. Astral Slide plus Triskelion is good times, as is Pentavus (the card that does EVERYTHING! I'll probably get to that in a future column.) I only have two March of the Machines in here since they only have 4½ things to animate: 2 Mind's Eyes, 2 Thought Prisons, and maybe a Sculpting Steel (depending on what it's copying.) March has another important role, though: It's an amazing defensive card in the current environment. That affinity player has a landscape full of Seat of the Synods? Nope, they're all 0/0 creatures. That white weenie player has a Loxodon Warhammer? Nope, it's a Trained Armodon now. And hoo boy is it fun to use Astral Slide on a live Sculpting Steel. It's a different artifact every turn!



Astral March 		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
4 Coastal Tower	2 Duplicant	4 Akroma's Blessing
4 Island	3 Eternal Dragon	4 Astral Slide
4 Lonely Sandbar	1 Pentavus	2 Complicate
7 Plains	4 Solemn Simulacrum	1 Fabricate
4 Secluded Steppe	2 Triskelion	2 March of the Machines
3 Temple of the False God		2 Mind's Eye
	12 creatures	4 Renewed Faith
26 lands		1 Sculpting Steel
		2 Thought Prison
		22 other spells

## DON'T: Be rude

The day before Thanksgiving, Brian David-Marshall wrote about a Words of Wind-Vedalken Archmage deck. In that article, he mentioned both Tangleroot and Ornithopter as possibilities he considered but dismissed. On Thanksgiving, I wrote about a Words of Wind-Tangleroot deck. In that article, I specifically avoided Vedalken Archmage because Brian just wrote about it in a similar deck. Between us, we managed to tiptoe around—and completely miss—the four-card game-ending combo of Words of Wind, Tangleroot, Vedalken Archmage, and Ornithopter.

A number of readers wrote in calling me on that. Some of the letters were great. Logan Billig asked, "Have you tried playing with Ornithopter in the deck? You should then be able to totally shut down an opponent forever." Patrick Patterson's email said "I appreciate you bringing Words of Wind and Tangleroot together. They work really well, but I think you could do better by adding Vedalken Archmage and Ornithopter. It would give you the ability to bounce all of your opponent's permanents,

and would allow you to win by either decking your opponent or by lethal damage from a Frogmite or Myr Enforcer." I appreciated those letters. They were polite, helpful, and expressed a good idea in a good way. However, there were other letters...

One began: "At this point I am surprised that no one has slapped you or Brian" for missing the (obvious?) four-card combo. Chill yourself out, dude! If this is the kind of thing that inspires you to violence, I suggest you try some herbal tea, one of those squishy stress balls, a straightjacket, and a padded room. Another email asked the question "Why didn't you include Vedalken Archmage and Ornithopter in your deck?" By phrasing it this way, it's clear the correspondent cares less about the deck and more about how I could commit the horrible crime of withholding the vital information. But it's a valid point, no? Let's explore the reasons I didn't write about it:

1. I don't want you to know about its existence! This is the 4-card combo made up of two 0/2 creatures and two symmetric permanents that will ultimately destroy **Magic** as we know it!
2. I'm dumber than you. (Is it true? No. Is it what the letter-writer wants to hear? Yes.)
3. It was too close to Brian's column for me to explore. (Uh-oh, we're getting close to *logic* here.)
4. I don't like the combo. All the creatures I included in my much weirder deck (Wood Elves, Merchant of Secrets, etc.) at least do something on their own. Ornithopter is useless by itself. That's why Brian dismissed it.
5. I didn't think of it. Guess what—this happens a lot! I create three decks from scratch most weeks. That's a lot of decks, and I can't put too much time behind any particular one. My goal is not to create the best combo of all time. My goal is to present some interesting, goofy decks that will zap the creative center of your brain and inspire you to come up with even better decks. It looks like that happened. Perfect!

## DO: Feel free to be bizarre



Two different people sent me Serra Avatar-based Turn 1 kills this week. "The artist formerly known as Kevin" suggests Swamp, Dark Ritual, Dark Ritual, Dark Ritual, Dark Ritual, Belbe's Portal (choose "Avatar"), activate Belbe's Portal to put Serra Avatar into play, play Lotus Petal, sac the Petal for red mana, and play Flowstone Strike on the Avatar to get a 21/19 hasty creature. Wow. You don't see too many nine-card first-turn wins these days.



Matt to the rescue. The uniquely named Matt restricted himself to Extended (and only 6 cards; I guess he lent one to Kevin). Here we go: City of Traitors, Mox Diamond pitching a land (Chrome Mox would work too), tap both for mana, play Seething Song, play Sneak Attack, activate Sneak Attack to send a Serra Avatar screaming in your opponent's direction, laugh uproariously at the new banned list.

Practical? Not particularly, though I can see Matt's deck working. Entertaining? You bet. (Wait, wait, slow down. Despite what you're thinking, this is NOT a request for first-turn kills. This is a request for interesting email. The twelfth email containing a first-turn win is no longer interesting.)

## DON'T: Write an email to Anthony Alongi while pretending to be me to suggest mechanics for the 2005 large expansion

I wish that one went without saying. But no, some chowderhead thought this was a good idea. There were some flaws in his plan. He spelled my name wrong. He called Mr. Alongi "Andy." I don't work on **Magic** design. Anthony doesn't even work at Wizards of the Coast. His spelling and grammar was less than stellar. And his mechanic didn't even make sense (creatures could have +1/+1 or -1/-1 for every different color!) Genius. The only thing he got right was hacking the return address so when Andy—I mean Anthony—wrote back to tell him that his clever ruse didn't quite work, that email came directly to me.

## DO: Think bigger than the latest set

*Mirrodin* decks are great, and there's still plenty of room to explore. But there are other sets out there, and while being buried by the avalanche of Dross Scorpions and Disciples of the Vault, a recent throwback can be a nice change of pace. Andrew Peterson noticed the *Eighth Edition* combo of Natural Affinity and Pyroclasm and built a deck around it. He included Terravore and the new Lightning Coils to take advantage of the jury-rigged Armageddon, and he had Starstorm as a Pyroclasm backup. Andrew also included Birds of Paradise, Diligent Farmhand, Harrow, and Rampant Growth as mana acceleration. I changed that portion of the deck: I felt the Birds are too vulnerable to the mass burn, and although having more lands in play lets you get the most out of your 'Geddon, I'd rather have mana sources that live through the burn. I also found another way to capitalize on your manland destruction: Caller of the Claw. If you have 5  and the three requisite cards, you can destroy all lands (remembering to float three mana), then put more than half a dozen 2/2 creatures into play. For 6 , you can sub in Starstorm and do it as an instant.



**PyroFinity** 

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

8 Forest	3 Caller of the Claw	4 Lightning Coils
4 Forgotten Cave	2 Cartographer	4 Natural Affinity
4 Mountain	4 Krosan Tusker	4 Pyroclasm
4 Tranquil Thicket	4 Terravore	4 Starstorm
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Vine Trellis	3 Talisman of Impulse
24 lands	17 creatures	19 other spells

Until next week, don't do the don'ts, but do do the do's!

Mark

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