

Mark Gottlieb

Thursday, February 26, 2004

Day 1

Dear Mom:

Today I performed my very first electroshock therapy! It was a lot of fun except for the smell of singed nose hair. It was on this freeker named Gottlieb. They let me do a trial run on him because he's apparently the most expendable of the lot.

You know we've been rounding up seditionists, zealots, and crazies. Gottlieb's all three in one whackjob package. He seems to be some sort of religious leader, preaching sermons on the joys of evil to a heathen cult of "magic" addicts. I don't know who's scarier, Mom, the preacher or the unsavories that read his warped missives. Gottlieb is clearly insane, and he's willfully spreading his insanity to the masses. It's just that kind of moral decay that's decaying our morals! Even worse, Gottlieb was doing it on the sly—his anti-sanity tracts were spread on a machine called an "Internet." I never heard of it either, which is why it took so long to catch him. But don't waste too much pity on him. A couple of noggin zaps and he'll be right as rain.

Love,
Jimbo

Day 6

Dear Mom:

Remember Gottlieb? He's been given to me as my own special project! Apparently the electroshock has been having no effect other than, according to the only lucid thing he's said so far, making his "brain tickle itself." It's not surprising. His brain was pretty fried to begin with. Three days ago, all he kept mumbling, over and over, was "Two Welding Jars and Disciple of the Vault is not an infinite damage combo. Two Welding Jars and Disciple of the Vault is not an infinite damage combo." Gibberish, huh? I patted his shoulder and said, "I know." It seemed the humane thing to do. But that just set him off; he said he's gotten that suggestion *twice* from his readers!

The more time I spend with him—feeding him oatmeal, reading him stories, sending 400 volts through his cerebral cortex—the more I wonder whether he's inducing insanity in his cult followers, or whether he's actually absorbing it from them instead. Last night, while I was doing his laundry, I found the following note stitched into his Cookie Monster Underoos:

"Adapted from AJ Richardson."

"Swapped out Sliths for Workers & Stingers. Added Trees. Adjusted numbers."

Arcbound Scourge



Main Deck

60 cards

8 Forest

4 Arcbound Crusher

4 Decree of Savagery

4 Tree of Tales	2 Arcbound Overseer	3 Reap and Sow
4 Urza's Mine	4 Arcbound Ravager	4 Sylvan Scrying
4 Urza's Power Plant	4 Arcbound Stinger	
4 Urza's Tower	4 Arcbound Worker	11 other spells
24 lands	3 Fangren Firstborn	
	4 Forgotten Ancient	
	25 creatures	

As you can tell, Gottlieb's underwear is disturbingly large, but I must begrudgingly admit his needlepoint work was awe-inspiring. However, despite the message's museum-quality, 5-color craftsmanship, it was both disturbing and smelly. Clearly these disciples were at least as dangerous as their charismatic, oddly handsome leader. Which is why AJ Richardson is now strapped to the Pain-o-Matic in the next room over. And it's not even my birthday! Oh, wait, it is my birthday. Never mind.

Love,
Jimbo

Day 8

Dear Mom:

Richardson snapped like a pinky finger! He couldn't take more than 16 hours straight on the Pain-o-Matic. Wuss. He told us everything: That he had the idea of combining the +1/+1 counter potential of green *Scourge* cards with the modular *Darksteel* creatures. That since both Sylvan Scrying and Reap and Sow let you search for any land, not just basic land, he can quickly get the Urzatron up and running to power out a turn 4 Overseer or a turn 5 Decree. That the Crusher is a major victory condition, since the Ravager can eat every other Arcbound creature, and then itself, to load up the Crusher for ridiculous quantities of trample damage. Not that I had any idea what that meant, so I took a crash course in **Magic**. Don't worry, Mom, it's just a way for me to understand their warped minds. This in no way foreshadows that I will learn to love the game and become part of their twisted little cult. What kind of hacky story arc would that be?



Anyway, I tested the deck, and it can be explosive. I delivered 20 damage on turn 5 with a 14/14 Crusher and a 6/6 Ravager. (They and a Worker had been boosted by a Decree, then the Ravager devoured the Worker.) I understand why Gottlieb modified the deck: The Workers are turn 1 plays in a deck that otherwise has none, and they're easy +1/+1 counter receptacles. The Stingers provide evasion the Sliths don't, and the Slith ability isn't too important here. And the Trees of Tales pump up the Crushers. See, Mom? It's working. I'm getting into Gottlieb's head, while he in no way is getting inside mine.

Love,
Jimbo

Day 11

Dear Mom:

I'm finding it increasingly difficult to believe that Gottlieb was sowing madness and evil thoughts into the tilled soil of his followers' minds during the planting season of... Oh, you know I flunked Metaphors 101. When I'm not lighting up his brain like a Christmas tree or crushing horse tranquilizers into his strained peas, we've started to get along. I noticed that he developed a secret code to communicate with me: He's been blinking messages in a Morse code variant of his own creation! The great thing is he never told me he was doing it—I could just tell. He spells words wrong, and some letters are exactly the same as some others, but I've been logging all his blinks, and I get the gist of what he's saying. Inspired by Richardson (poor, poor Richardson), he tried pairing *Darksteel* cards with cards from other sets. His next creation came from melding a *Darksteel* theme with an *Exodus* theme... which are actually the exact same theme!

Exodus featured two cycles of cards that rewarded players for having less than their opponents. The Keepers were creatures, and the Oaths were enchantments, and in most cases, they had the same trigger and the same result. For example, Keeper of the Beasts and Oath of Druids both reward the player who has the least creatures by providing a creature. *Darksteel* revisited this theme with a cycle of spells called the Pulses. If you lag behind your opponent in the area the spell addresses, you get the spell back to do it again. For example, Pulse of the Tangle creates a Beast token, then goes back to its owner's hand if an opponent still has more creatures. Across six years' time, three of the colors match condition and effect perfectly: green, red, and blue. Red deals damage if your opponent has more life. Blue draws cards if your opponent has more cards. (White and black weren't consistent.) It's hard to use all the green cards together because you can't guarantee your opponent will keep creating creatures. But the red one is easy because you can use pain lands and mana burn to zap yourself down to a low life total. (I like to think my electroshock sessions were an inspiration for that!) And the blue one is easy because you can empty your own hand while bouncing permanents back to your opponent's hand. Why, I almost said "Turbulent Dreams" before he blinked it! The deck came together after that.



Keeper of the Pulsing Oath



Main Deck 60 cards

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 3 Barbarian Ring | 2 Keeper of the Flame | 4 AEther Burst |
| 3 City of Brass | 2 Keeper of the Mind | 3 Chrome Mox |
| 1 Grand Coliseum | _____ | 2 Circular Logic |
| 5 Island | 4 creatures | 1 Epicenter |
| 2 Mirrodin's Core | | 2 Fiery Temper |
| 2 Mountain | | 3 Flame Rift |

4 Shivan Reef
1 Tarnished Citadel

21 lands

2 Forbid
1 Mind Bomb
2 Oath of Mages
2 Oath of Scholars
3 Pulse of the Forge
3 Pulse of the Grid
2 Seismic Assault
1 Swirling Sandstorm
4 Turbulent Dreams

35 other spells

It's a pretty motley assortment. The denial and permission cards either assist (Forbid, Dreams) or reward (Aether Burst) your card-ditching plan. Circular Logic does both. The Moxes accelerate you into your 2 and 3-cost spells, which covers just about everything, while helpfully reducing your hand size. Swirling Sandstorm and Epicenter are there just in case you need them after achieving threshold. The bizarre little Mind Bomb depletes both commodities the deck trades in; it even kind of trades one for the other. So as you keep your opponent locked up, you burn both of you down at an alarming pace while drawing into the cards you need, then you finish the job with Seismic Assault, Fiery Temper, and the Pulse of the Forge you should still have in your hand.

But I started to wonder. It's clear Gottlieb's not thinking straight. What's the point of mixing the red with the blue? The red can be brutal by itself! Max out on Flame Rifts, Lava Hounds, and Pulses of the Forge and you should end the game before you even need to draw cards. In theory. Not that I care about such things. Oh, I've gotta go... the puddle of drool is dripping off the table.

Love,
Jimbo

Day 15

Dear Mom:

In the electroshock room, they have a poster. It's got an orangutan with its head inside a clay flowerpot. It says "Crack Down on Crackpots." It always used to lift my spirits. But today, when I was sending wave after wave of angry electrons between Gottlieb's ears, the hairy armpits of that criminally insane orangutan couldn't even make me smile.

I'd say Gottlieb was getting worse, but when we dragged him in here in the burlap sack, there wasn't much more crazy left to go. He had been playing Bobbing for Crazy, and the tub was empty. He was surfing the Crazy Pipeline off of Bonkers Beach. He was wearing the secret decoder ring from a box of Crazy-Os. He was writing a thesis titled "The Effects of Synthetic Crazy Supplements on Crazyfish in the Crazy River." If you sat a thousand monkeys at a thousand typewriters, one would type *Hamlet* and the other 999 would type "Mark Gottlieb is crazy." His acceptance speech for the Lifetime Achievement Award for Crazy was in his pocket, scrawled on the back of a Crazy Glue wrapper, using only the letters B and Q. He was driving a Jeep Grand Crazy on Route Crazy from Crazyburg to Crazyville. His favorite band was Crazy Town—and not because of the name; he actually liked that awful "Butterfly" song that was popular three years ago!

The notion that he was insidious enough, diabolical enough to methodically corrupt the once-sane minds of his cultists was laughable, and so I laughed. Then he laughed. Then the orangutan in the poster laughed. (I think.) And then Gottlieb whispered "Shadowfoxten" and nodded in the direction

of his alphabet soup. In it was a decklist for a concoction that merged *Darksteel* with *Planeshift*. (He had been given a *lot* of alphabet soup that day—and danged if I know how he got *numbers* in there!)

Unpainted Gate		
Main Deck 60 cards		
3 Ancient Den	2 Fleetfoot Panther	2 Echoing Ruin
3 Great Furnace	2 Horned Kavu	4 Fabricate
8 Island	2 Lava Zombie	4 Mycosynth Lattice
4 Seat of the Synod	2 Marsh Crocodile	1 Natural Emergence
3 Tree of Tales	2 Sawtooth Loon	4 Oxidize
3 Vault of Whispers	2 Shivan Wurm	4 Talisman of Progress
	1 Silver Drake	4 Thirst for Knowledge
24 lands		
	13 creatures	23 other spells

According to his file, Gottlieb had been using Mycosynth Lattice a lot lately to turn all permanents into artifacts. This was different—now his main purpose was to turn all permanents colorless and to wash mana. With a Lattice out, you can play the 3/4 Horned Kavu for 2 mana with no gating at all—you have no green or red permanents to return to your hand! Fleetfoot Panther is a 3-mana 3/4 instant creature. Silver Drake is a 3-mana 3/3 flyer. All those *Planeshift* creatures become ultra-efficient! Plus the Lattice makes removal easy. Oxidize turns into a 1-mana super-Vindicate. I was impressed... until I thought about it some more.



Mom, this deck does nothing—*nothing*—unless it can find a Lattice and keep it in play! It's a ridiculously cool gimmick, sure, but it's not competitive. You might get beaten to a pulp before ever playing a creature (except for the Loon—how appropriate—which serves as card cycling before you have to pick it up). If everything goes perfectly, this deck can provide a 3/4 and a 7/7 on turn 6. There are better ways to do that! Points for panache, but even the colorless gimmick is old, since Thran Lens did the same thing. No, what I would do with the Lattice is much better. Why use it to enable efficient creatures and efficient removal when it can be used to enable efficient theft? You already need blue to find and protect the Lattice. Continue in blue: With a Lattice in play, Steal Artifact becomes a discounted Confiscate! Domineer becomes a discounted Persuasion—heck, it's a discounted Control Magic! Copy Artifact copies *any* permanent, as does Sculpting Steel. You don't need a strategy of your own. Just grab your opponent's and whale away at him with his own stuff. That's a creative plan... an ingenious plan... a crazy plan... an evil plan. Oh, yes. Oh yes! Oh—oh, no! No! That's not me! Gott—Gottlieb! Nooooo! Noooooooooooooooooo!!!!!! (I know it was odd for me to write that instead of just saying it out loud Mom, but I wanted to give you the gist of what was going on.)

With a heavy heart and a writhing snake-filled brain,
All my love,

Goodbye,
Jimbo

Mark may be reached at houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com. Send rules-related **Magic** questions to ask@wizards.com.

© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

