

Darksteel Edition

MagicThe Gathering.Combos

Bennie Smith

Monday, March 15, 2004



- [Bennie Smith Archive](#)

In the spirit of the "Picks and Tricks" column from the old *Duelist* magazines, Aaron Forsythe launched "[MagicTheGathering.Combos](#)" (that's "Dot-Combos") late in 2002 as an irregular feature on this very website. If you're like me you were probably wondering if this feature had gone the way of the dodo with Aaron moving to a new job and likely busier than ever. Well, the good news is that the feature is back, and while Scott Johns has Adrian Sullivan more than [ably covering](#) my old Single Card Strategy duties, I get to step into Aaron's shoes! I'll do my best to follow his excellent example.



Let's kick this off by reminding ourselves of Aaron's vision for the feature:

*"MagicTheGathering.Combos will cover interesting two- or three-card combos (usually using newer cards) that should inspire deckbuilding... Maybe you've thought of them on your own already, and maybe you haven't. But in each one there's a kernel of a nifty deck that should surprise your friends and may even get you some wins at Friday Night**Magic** some day down the road." -- A.F.*

In short, while other features may delve pretty deeply into the strategy behind a particular card or deck, MagicTheGathering.Combos gives it to you a whirlwind tour of ideas. These are combos that tickle my fancy, and will come from things I've seen, read or cooked up on my own. Hopefully you'll find them fun too.

Okay, let's kick this off, shall we?



Aether Vial + Coretapper

While [Skullclamp](#) is understandably getting a lot of press as one of the best cheap artifacts from *Darksteel*, [Aether Vial](#) is not one you should overlook. Good all on its own in a deck where many creatures have the same mana cost, there is also combo potential with *Darksteel's* [Coretapper](#), letting you power out a higher-cost creature much sooner than many decks can handle.

For example, you play [Aether Vial](#) turn one. Turn two you add a counter to the Vial and play a [Lightning Greaves](#). Turn three you add another counter to the Vial, tap it to put [Coretapper](#) into play. Equip it with Greaves and tap it to add a third counter to the Vial. Turn four add a fourth counter to the Vial, tap the Coretapper to add a fifth counter, then sacrifice it to add two more. Now you can tap the Vial to put into play your seven-mana fattie of choice, perhaps a [Thorn Elemental](#)? Equip it with the Greaves and start your three-turn clock right there on the spot.

Tears of Rage + Lightning Coils

Rage and Lightning, what images could be more indicative of a beatdown deck's attitude? Both of these cards are great complements to an aggressive strategy, with the Tears providing an alpha strike early on, and the Coils allowing you to continue the offensive if your opponent stops the first wave of creatures. They also complement each other quite nicely, with the sacrifice of Tears feeding the Coils, and the token army from the Coils already sacrificing at the end of the turn so why not boost the attack with Tears?

Check out this scenario: you're playing a fast Goblin deck that's churned out three Goblins by turn 2 and you drop [Lightning Coils](#) on turn 3. Turn 4 you cast two more goblins but your opponent responds at end of turn with a [Starstorm](#). On turn 5 remove the five counters from the Coils to create five 3/1 elemental tokens with Haste and attack. Cast [Tears of Rage](#) to give each token +5/+0 and you've got 40 points of damage coming across. That's some serious pain!

Vedalken Engineer + Aphetto Alchemist

The Engineer has already made a splash in Limited for its amazing mana acceleration for artifacts, but I've been trying him out in some Constructed decks. If you run a base of Engineers and [Talismans](#) you can begin casting some pretty expensive artifacts quite early in the game. [Mindslaver](#), [Platinum Angel](#), [Bosh](#)... there's a whole host of expensive artifacts that can make the cut with the right acceleration.

So what if you add [Aphetto Alchemist](#) to the mix? This forgotten uncommon from *Onslaught* taps to untap a creature or artifact. If you build your deck with plenty of artifacts that tap to do things, he becomes quite versatile. He untaps [Talismans](#), artifact lands and Engineers to produce more mana. You can make [Crystal Shards](#) and [Icy Manipulators](#) twice as effective. Power out a quick [Juggernaut](#) and the Alchemist can have him untap to block after he attacks.

Pulse of the Fields + Fireball

Longtime **Magic** players may remember 5 Color Donais, a control deck sporting all five colors that played few if any permanents, kept a full hand and cast [Gerrard's Wisdom](#) over and over while controlling the board and shuffling relevant cards back into the deck with [Gaea's Blessing](#). [Pulse of the Fields](#) offers the possibility of recurring life gain and promises to be a nightmare card for beatdown decks to push past if they don't take mana burn to keep their own life totals low. So what's a controlling, life-gaining deck to do to stop their nefarious countermeasures?

Splash for [Fireball](#), of course! The beauty of this plan is that with a white base for [Pulse of the Fields](#), along with [Wrath of God](#) and [Akroma's Vengeance](#), you can also easily splash all five colors with [Mirrodin's Core](#), [Grand Coliseum](#) and [City of Brass](#). If you take early damage from your painlands you can easily recoup them with the Pulse.

Dismantle + Darksteel Reactor

While [Dismantle](#) is quite utilitarian in simply destroying artifacts your opponent controls, it starts to shine when interfacing with the numerous creatures in *Mirrodin* block that sport +1/+1 counters. Obviously, killing one of your opponent's artifact creatures and moving their counters over to your Reactor is quite handy, but there's an even cooler trick: Targeting your own [Darksteel Reactor](#) with [Dismantle](#).

But isn't the Reactor indestructible? Sure, and it ignores the "destroy target artifact" part of [Dismantle](#)'s text. But it's the next sentence that makes [Dismantle](#) such a great combo card with the Reactor-- you take the number of counters already on the Reactor and can double them since the Reactor is still in play! Accumulating twenty charge counters for the win might not take too long after all, huh? I've seen quite a few people pick up on this combo, and though it



didn't make a splash at [Pro Tour Kobe](#) it's possible someone might cook up something for the Block Constructed PTQs.

Quicksilver Behemoth + Contested Cliffs

Since *Onslaught*, red and green have been well known for their efficient beasts, and [Contested Cliffs](#) have long been a staple of Beast-theme red/green decks. But did you realize that blue had some large beasts too? [Broodstar](#), [Chromeshell Crab](#), [Mischievous Quonar](#) and *Darksteel's* [Quicksilver Behemoth](#) are all sizable and playable beasts. So how does a blue Beast deck make use of the red and green mana-activated [Contested Cliffs](#)?

I think the key lies in the Affinity beasts. If you build an Affinity deck you already have access to [Glimmervoid](#). Run [Talisman of Impulse](#), [Tree of Tales](#) and [Great Furnace](#) and you should have no problem powering up a Cliffs by the time you've got a big Affinity beast in play.

Echoing Decay + Natural Affinity

People are already turned onto [Echoing Decay](#) as an incredibly efficient answer to the horde of Soldier tokens from a cycled [Decree of Justice](#). But pair it up with [Natural Affinity](#) and you've got some instant speed land destruction that's sure to take your opponent by surprise!

[Natural Affinity](#) has seen some high level play in conjunction with [Massacre](#) for what was often both an [Armageddon](#) and [Wrath of God](#). Those decks also played [Death Pit Offering](#) to break the symmetry, keeping your own lands around while destroying those of your opponent. With [Natural Affinity](#) and [Death Pit Offering](#) in *Eighth Edition* do I smell a new deck cooking? While [Echoing Decay](#) will only kill multiple copies of the same type of land, you can also play [Infest](#) to fill the [Massacre](#) role.

Arcbound Crusher + Genesis Chamber

Many decks for Pro Tour Kobe had [Genesis Chamber](#)s in the sideboard, presumably to bring in against decks that didn't run [Skullclamps](#) themselves (since the last thing you'd want to do is give your opponent more fodder for his [Skullclamps](#)). What if you'd like to run the Chambers maindeck? They have a powerful effect that has the unfortunate drawback of being symmetrical. How do we break that symmetry to give us much more benefit than our opponent?

[Arcbound Crusher](#) comes to mind. This four-mana Arcbound creature comes out tiny but has the potential to quickly grow into a real threat. When Crusher comes into play it will trigger the Chamber, and when the 1/1 Myr token comes into play, the Crusher gets another +1/+1 counter. Each time you or your opponent plays a creature your Crusher grows larger under the Chamber, and even with their bevy of chump blockers, the Crusher's trample ability lets him roll right over them.



Spawning Pit + Tombstone Stairwell

Between [Skullclamp](#) and [Genesis Chamber](#), it's obvious *Darksteel* brought some really powerful and cheap uncommons to the table. But let's overlook [Spawning Pit](#)! This two-mana artifact gives any deck the ability to effectively "store" any creature they were going to lose anyway to removal or combat as half of a 2/2 Spawn token. The real strength of this card is that you can sacrifice *any* creature, including tokens, so each of your Spawn tokens themselves can feed future Spawn tokens.

[Spawning Pit](#) combines particularly well with one of the most powerful token generators ever printed, [Tombstone Stairwell](#). Creatures sacrificed to the Pit also feed Tombstone Stairwell, and the zombie tokens you create during each player's upkeep can in turn be sacrificed to the Pit. The more players there are around the table, the more tokens you can crank out of the Stairwell and feed to the Pit.

Thunderstaff + Humility

R&D goes to great lengths to make a wide variety of interesting creatures with cool abilities we can all have fun with. But lurking in the shadows awaits a little white enchantment from *Tempest*, [Humility](#), ready to spring forth and spoil the fun. Even the most text-tacular creatures become simple little generic 1/1 peons under the power of [Humility](#).

Still, even little 1/1's can whittle your life total down if given the opportunity, so that's where [Thunderstaff](#) comes in. Untapped, it completely neutralizes attacks from your opponent's humble army. But what if you've got some little dorks of your own you'd like to attack with? [Thunderstaff](#) works on the offense too, letting your 1/1s hit twice as hard.

Drooling Ogre + Hidden Guerrillas

Fans of artifact-infested Type 2 and block probably saw [Drooling Ogre](#)'s drawback as too great to be even remotely playable. Fans of Extended and Type One probably saw the Ogre as an incredibly



undercosted 3/3 beating stick. It all depends on the environment you're playing in and how many artifacts are being tossed around.

In the new Extended, where Tinker has been neutered, there might not be enough artifacts to overly concern yourself with the Ogre's drawback, and you can even run a good amount of your own artifacts just to make sure. If it turns out your opponent is running a home-brew artifact concoction, you can bring [Hidden Guerrillas](#) in from the board to punish him for playing an artifact and trying to steal your saliva-challenged ogre buddy.

Geth's Grimoire + Words of Waste

[Geth's Grimoire](#) is an incredible casual card that inspires all sorts of card advantage combinations. Costing no mana to activate, and multiple copies providing a cumulative effect, this is a great card to build a deck around. Just off the top of my head cards like [Syphon Mind](#), [Wheel of Fortune](#), and [Memory Jar](#) produce incredible card drawing under the auspices of Geth, the more players around the table, the better.

A particularly nasty combo with Grimoire is [Words of Waste](#). Trigger the Words when you draw a card to instead make a player discard. The discard triggers Grimoire's card-drawing effect, which you can again use to trigger the Words... basically letting you strip someone's hand of a card for each mana you wish to spend. Add [Megrims](#) for spice!



Darksteel Forge + Nevinyrral's Disk (+Mycosynth Lattice)

Nine mana is a hefty price for an artifact even in casual play, but enterprising players can figure ways around the cost ([Tinker](#)) or just build in enough mana acceleration ([Tolarian Academy](#)). Once it's out there though, oh the things you can do! Numero Uno on your list of sick and twisted is [Nevinyrral's Disk](#).

It's often assumed that "popping the Disk" involves sacrificing the artifact as part of its activation cost. A closer look at the text reveals that it's actually the Disk's effect that typically destroys itself, but if the Disk is indestructible then you can use it over and over to destroy all of your opponent's artifacts, creatures and enchantments each turn. If you add [Mycosynth Lattice](#) to the mix, your Disk-o-Matic can take out all of your opponents' lands too.

Yes, I know this isn't very nice. I suggest you smooth everyone's feathers by playing your fun Beeble deck for the next game.

Myr Matrix + Mana Echoes

You know when you saw [Myr Matrix](#) you felt this incredible urge to build a Myr themed deck. Go ahead, admit it! With a large selection of the five [mana Myrs](#) from *Mirrodin* in your deck, you can accelerate to a turn four Matrix pretty easily. But what are you going to do with four mana on your third turn other than maybe cast a few more Myr?

[Mana Echoes](#). Why play fair and crank out one or two 2/2 Myr tokens with the Matrix? Go infinite instead! With five Myr in play Mana Echoes will let you generate an arbitrarily large number of Myr at instant speed along with an arbitrarily large number of extra colorless mana if you want it for something like a [Fireball](#). I'm thinking something like this:



Echo of the Matrix



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 3 City of Brass | 3 Fireball |
| 4 Darksteel Citadel | 4 Mana Echoes |
| 4 Glimmervoid | 4 Myr Matrix |
| 4 Great Furnace | 4 Thirst for Knowledge |
| 4 Seat of the Synod | 4 Thoughtcast |

19 lands

19 other spells

-
- 3 [Arcbound Ravager](#)
 - 3 [Copper Myr](#)
 - 2 [Gold Myr](#)
 - 4 [Iron Myr](#)
 - 3 [Leaden Myr](#)
 - 3 [Lodestone Myr](#)
 - 4 [Silver Myr](#)

22 creatures



With the Ravager on the board, you can go infinite during your turn and attack with available artifact creatures; if any of them go unblocked you can make them infinitely large. Similarly, [Lodestone Myr](#) has trample, so if you make a bunch of 1/1 artifact Myrs with the Matrix you can tap them all to make your attacking Lodestone lethally huge. Of course nothing says "Game Over" quite as nicely as a Fireball to the face for 20,000,000 points of damage. To be on the safe side, though, you may want to split the [Fireball](#) for 10,000,000 targeting your opponent and 10,000,000 targeting a creature on the board to make sure an untimely [Shunt](#) doesn't spoil your fun.

Bonus Non-Darksteel Section!

I'll cap this off with a few MagicTheGathering.Combos featuring some older cards for you to chew on.



Damping Matrix + Glittering Lynx

Back in early 2001, former **Magic** player and strategist Mike Mason developed a deck he called "God" that had some success in the metagame back then (you can read about it [here](#)). He had found that [Cursed Totem](#) hosed many of the creature decks in the format, so he built a deck that wouldn't be harmed by his own Totems and stumbled across some creatures that actually *thrived* under the Totem: [Glittering Lynx](#) and [Glittering Lion](#). With the Totem in play your opponent could not turn off their damage prevention ability, making these creatures nearly indestructible.

Flash forward to 2003 and the release of *Mirrodin*. We now have a card that is arguably better than Totem, the incredible [Damping Matrix](#). With tons of creature and artifact abilities available, could the Glittering crew have a new banner to rally around in Extended? Alas, we've lost poor Mike to online RPGs some time ago so we'll have to see if anyone else is up to the challenge.

Doomed Necromancer + Enduring Renewal

Veterans of competitive play recall [Enduring Renewal](#) being a vital part of the "Fruity Pebbles" combo deck from old Extended seasons past. Renewal plus [Goblin Bombardment](#) and a zero cost artifact (such as [Ornithopter](#) or [Shield Sphere](#)) gave you the ability to deal an arbitrarily large amount of damage to your opponent, winning the game that same turn. But what if you'd like to play [Enduring Renewal](#) in a more casual setting? Sure, it's great that creatures of yours that die come back to your hand, but what about the creatures you draw afterwards? Sometimes a critical creature is drawn and has to be discarded.

That's where [Doomed Necromancer](#) comes in. Say you draw a [Serra Angel](#) and [Enduring Renewal](#) forces you to discard her. With a Necromancer in play you can sacrifice him to bring her into play, and then the Renewal brings the Necromancer back to your hand, ready to be recast and poised to rescue the next creature you draw.

This concludes my inaugural MagicTheGathering.Combos, and I have to say it was quite fun! Let me know what you thought in the forums, and I'll see you next time!



