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Thursday, March 25, 2004

Greetings from Sonoma! When Scott tipped me off that this would be Cycling Week, my only question was "Road bikes or mountain bikes?" I don't want to give the impression that I've got Lance Armstrong on my speed dial, but yes, I've pedaled in the Tour de France (and no, I've not yet gotten to wear the yellow jersey—but my fingers are crossed!) Anyway, Scott told me that I had the wrong idea about Cycling Week—I'd actually need a penny farthing. I was skeptical, but when he told me about the charity road rally he had set up in the California wine country, I was (as they say) ready to roll. Scott said the company's goal was to raise \$3000 to help asthmatic porpoises, but that was clearly ridiculous. As far as I was concerned, it had to be \$5000 minimum.

Unfortunately, the other columnists don't seem to have the dedication I do. Mark trotted out the old "I have twin babies" excuse, Randy was playing poker in the middle of the ocean, and Aaron flat-out missed the bus that drove me from Seattle down to California. I figured I'd meet all the other guys at the start of the rally, but it seems that no one is immune to travel problems. I started the 100-mile trek without them, but I'm sure they'll catch up soon. Pedaling this thing while holding both ends of the "Save the Asthmatic Porpoises" banner is slow going, so I'm looking forward to handing it off as soon as someone else catches up.

You know, all this cycling made me think of another kind of cycling—one that's much more relevant to a **Magic** column. It's rather odd that Scott wouldn't have pointed me in that direction instead. Since cycling was reintroduced to the game in *Onslaught*, I've written about a number of decks that take advantage of this useful little keyword. There's the deck that uses Decree of Savagery, the one with Decree of Silence, one with Decree of Justice, and a bizarre (and clearly *not* tournament-worthy) Astral Slide deck. Most cycling cards provide utility, and these cards (the landcyclers, the cycling lands, Starstorm, Slice and Dice, Akroma's Vengeance, Gempalm Polluter, etc.) show up as components in a number of my decks without calling attention to themselves. The ubiquity of cycling over the past year left me wondering what space was left to explore, but as my lonely little road rally has taught me, there's always a long, long way to go before you're done.

An Eye for Annihilation

I've hit three of the Decrees so far—what about Decree of Annihilation? That struck me as the most exciting cycling card I hadn't covered yet. It can certainly do some things: At full power, it's an Obliterate that costs a bit more and can be countered—but in exchange, it deals with indestructible artifacts, negates any possible graveyard recursion, and scoffs at the idea of "playing around" it to rebuild quickly because it blows away each player's hand as well. In cycling mode, it's an uncounterable cantrip instant Armageddon. Wouldn't you pay a bit more for a split card that was half-Obliterate and half-Armageddon?

The destroy-all-lands part of the card is a lot easier to build around than the super-Apocalypse part. Seven mana is significantly cheaper than 10 mana, you know it's not going to be countered (blah blah Stifle blah), and you can control the resulting situation a lot better. Since the full version removes



your hand as well, you're at the mercy of the topdeck as you start the game over—and a deck built around a 10-mana sorcery is not one that can expect to dominate the early game. It's nice to have an emergency reset button, and the fact that it doesn't remove enchantments from the game is abusable, but on the whole, I want to cycle this card 99% of the time. Hopefully while Dingus Egg is on the table.

That's right, it's the old Armageddon-Dingus Egg combo! And for a while, that's all I had in the deck. It didn't "win" as much as it annoyed my opponents on the way to losing. It had plenty of cycling cards in there to help me find my combo, but it didn't do much else. The deck's cycling cards had an anti-creature angle: Choking Tethers would keep creatures at bay, Sunfire Balm and Renewed Faith would keep me alive, and Slice and Dice and Starstorm would clear the board, all while I was hoping my opponent would get enough lands on the table for Dingus Egg to win the game by itself. It was not successful. When I cycled a Decree, the only way to avoid having the Egg fry me was to have it knock out my opponent first, and they'd often never reach the 10-land plateau.

The reason I playtest my decks is so I don't come up with a (supposedly) good idea, put a decklist together, and post it—all while completely unaware that it will lose every game you play with it. This deck needed a damage source. This deck needed a way to slow down the game so beatdown decks wouldn't ruin my fun no matter how many Starstorms I had. This deck needed a way to have some sort of advantage after casting (not cycling) a Decree of Annihilation. This deck needed Pyrostatic Pillar. I had a great mana curve, with lots of stuff to do for 2 and 3 mana—but all of it involved cycling cards, not casting them. I was pretty much Pillar-proof, and the Pillar would force my opponent into a play pattern (or a taking-damage pattern) that was very good for me. But it still wasn't enough. I added a copy of Words of War, thinking that it interacted well with cycling and it would be an excellent post-Annihilation victory condition. Why struggle to rebuild when I can just win? But it wasn't working out, and I had to accept that I was being foolishly stubborn. The deck obviously wanted Lightning Rift, which I was intentionally ignoring purely because it was a tournament card. So in its place, I was using a card that's rarer, costs more mana, and doesn't work as efficiently? Hm. There are times I can take the rogue thing a bit too far.

Professor Mark's Guide to Dingus Egg:

When a cycled Decree sends all lands to the graveyard, Dingus Egg will trigger once per land—all simultaneously. It's your Egg, so you get to put all the triggered abilities on the stack. Put all triggers that spawned from your land on the stack first, then put the rest there. When the abilities start resolving in last in, first out order, your opponent will get zotzed to the tune of 2 damage per her blown-up land. If she was at a low enough life total before the Decree, this will take care of the rest and you'll win the game while the Dingus Egg triggers that would kill you are all still on the stack.

A word of warning: Don't try this on **Magic Online**. I'm a huge fan of **Magic Online** and play most of my **Magic** there (under the name Doctor Wombat), but I learned the hard way that this trick doesn't work there yet: All the Dingus Egg triggers look exactly the same!

Decree of Dingus



Main Deck

60 cards

3 Forgotten Cave	2 Chartooth Cougar	3 Choking Tethers
5 Island	2 Eternal Dragon	2 Complicate
1 Lonely Sandbar	2 Shoreline Ranger	4 Decree of Annihilation
2 Mirrodin's Core	6 creatures	4 Dingus Egg
7 Mountain		3 Lightning Rift

5 Plains
1 Secluded Steppe

24 lands

4 Pyrostatic Pillar
4 Renewed Faith
3 Slice and Dice
3 Starstorm

30 other spells

(The Eternal Dragons are easily replaced by Noble Templars.)

Grave Packed

The main purpose of cycling a card is usually to draw a new card. But the action has other consequences. What if the main reason you wanted to cycle a card was to put it into your graveyard? The Urza block didn't have many cycling creatures, and most of the ones it did have were small. Drifting Djinn was no slouch, but it had an upkeep cost... and the heftiest one after that was the 3/4 Sandbar Serpent. *Onslaught* trumped the Serpent with both Barkhide Mauler and Krosan Tusker, *Legions* had a handful of cycling fatties, and *Scourge* provided seven surprisingly large landcyclers all begging to be tossed into the graveyard.

What happens after you stuff a bunch of creatures into your graveyard? Option one is to pull them back out. Twilight's Call is good, but Living Death is just about perfect because the double drawbacks of icing your living creatures and providing a symmetric effect are negligible: You don't expect to have more than one or two creatures in play, and the only way your opponent should have anywhere near as many 6/6 creatures waiting for resurrection as you is if he's playing the same deck. Option two is to leave them rotting away. You can take advantage of the high-occupancy status of your graveyard with either original recipe Lhurgoyf or its extra-crispy relative Mortivore. The cole slaw of this family, Exoskeletal Armor, is good as well. Don't want to engage in creature combat at all? Cycle through your entire deck and win with Mortal Combat.



I tested this deck online too, and it was slow. While other decks amass Goblins or Myr Enforcers at lightning speed (every time I face a first-turn play of artifact land, Bonesplitter, go—which is often—I die a little inside), this deck does nothing but ditch cards to draw other cards to ditch. The solution? A card that was recently sprung from the DCI penitentiary: Fluctuator. It will allow you to zip through your deck, but it's not completely unfair here. A lot of the cycling costs will still need a colored mana, so there's a limit to how much you can cycle a turn. The landcyclers give you a basic land, not another cycling card. Since the deck needs basic lands to support the landcyclers, not every card in the mana base cycles away (as they did in tournament-level Urza block Fluctuator decks). In short, Fluctuator is a useful tool here, but it's only a socket wrench, not a rocket-powered Swiss Army knife with pneumatic drill and sledgehammer attachments.

Recycled Animals



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Barren Moor
8 Forest
8 Swamp
4 Tranquil Thicket

24 lands

4 Barkhide Mauler
4 Elvish Aberration
4 Krosan Tusker
2 Lhurgoyf
2 Mortivore
2 Scion of Darkness
4 Twisted Abomination
2 Undead Gladiator
4 Wirewood Guardian

28 creatures

4 Fluctuator
2 Living Death
2 Mortal Combat

8 other spells

Supersize!

I don't normally get political in this column, but the word must be heard. Did you know that Asthmatic Porpoise Syndrome (APS) affects upwards of *three* porpoises each year? They wheeze, go slow, and get garbage thrown at them by passersby. Having been on this bike ride for five days, I know what that's like. We have got to eradicate APS now! Unfortunately, blowhole inhalers are expensive. Only one person in the world manufactures them, and he's currently being detained in a Kyrgyzstan mental hospital. They've apparently got an unflinching "12 strikes and you're out" policy on public nudity over there.



All the tumbles off my unreasonably proportioned bicycle and resultant bone bruises remind me of the saying "the bigger they are, the harder they fall." That also happens to be a fine philosophy for a Magic deck. While scanning the Urza block cycling cards for something interesting to base a deck around, I was drawn to Radiant's Judgment, a situational removal spell that cycles in case you're not in the right situation. It's an entirely reasonable card to throw into a deck. But it can be made wonderfully unreasonable by manufacturing the situation we want rather than waiting for it to naturally happen. There's a blue-green deck that uses the strengths of the colors to jury-rig spot creature removal: Blue gives a creature flying, and green pops that creature out of the air. This deck works much the same way: Green is good at making creatures larger, and white is good at striking down large creatures. Who needs Terror?

White has a few ways to clear out the opposing creatures that you've pumped up. Besides Radiant's Judgment, there's the non-cycling version Reprisal, and the reusable Intrepid Hero. I considered Topple, but since you're going to have giant creatures yourself, its effectiveness is limited. Green has more than a few ways to repeatedly pump up a creature's power. Rancor is phenomenal; it's like a portable bull's-eye. You get the subversive thrill of putting it on your opponent's creatures—which is *not* where it's supposed to go—and when you're done doing that, you can put it on your own. (3/1 trampling Intrepid Heroes?) But Rancor is certainly not the only option. Nantuko Disciple, Narcissism, Elvish Fury, Canopy Crawler... the list goes on. And those are just the ways to give +2/+2. Green can also distribute +1/+1 counters willy-nilly. If they wind up on

your creatures, you're happy because you can smash face. If they wind up on your opponent's creatures, you're happy because now you can pick those creatures off. So while Forgotten Ancient is fine in this deck, I think it's more entertaining to twist the drawbacks of Erithizon and Ley Line into *drawforwards*. Erithizon plus Intrepid Hero is good times.

I splashed black in this deck for Cannibalize and Consume Strength. "That guy's dead, and that guy's bigger... so it's dead." And to bring the cycling theme home, the deck includes landcyclers and, more importantly, cycling lands. Both classes of cards, along with Radiant's Judgment, enable Invigorating Boon; the lands also enable Forgotten Harvest. More +1/+1 counters for everybody!

The Bigger They Are		
Main Deck 60 cards		
2 Barren Moor	4 Erithizon	2 Cannibalize
6 Forest	2 Forgotten Ancient	2 Consume Strength
5 Plains	4 Intrepid Hero	1 Forgotten Harvest
4 Secluded Steppe	2 Nantuko Disciple	4 Hidden Predators
2 Swamp	1 Noble Templar	1 Invigorating Boon
4 Tranquil Thicket	1 Twisted Abomination	1 Ley Line
23 lands	1 Wirewood Guardian	4 Radiant's Judgment
	15 creatures	3 Rancor
		4 Reprisal
		22 other spells

(The Noble Templar is easily replaced by Eternal Dragon.)

Until next week, have fun with cycling!
Mark

But wait, there's more!

I figure you're all primed and ready for another Deck Dare by now. Well, the **Magic** Invitational needs Auction of the People decks, and guess what? You're the people! Mark Rosewater asked me to include a special notice in my column about this deckbuilding challenge because he knew that you crazy, crazy, crazy folks would be the ones most excited about it—and the ones most likely to construct creative, bizarre, innovative, and otherwise unfathomable decks. Plus he thought you'd like prizes. I said no, my readers build decks for the Zen-like joy of communing with the ambient forces of the universe, the path is its own destination, they wouldn't be so materialistic to want prizes. But Mark *insisted* that there would be prizes! I don't know what to say; I'm sorry I let you down. You can donate the prizes to charity, I guess. I know some asthmatic porpoises that would be really grateful.

Here's the theme: Every card in your deck (except for basic land) must be illustrated by the same artist. Since the Invitational will take place on **Magic Online**, your entire deck must be playable there. That means you can only use cards from *Seventh Edition*, *Eighth Edition*, expansions from *Invasion* through *Darksteel*, and the three bonus cards (Morphling, Sliver Queen, and Serra Avatar). If a card has been reprinted in different sets with different art, be sure to specify which one you want to use—

and double-check that it's **Magic Online** friendly. For this deck dare, Icy Manipulator is fine for your Mark Zug deck, but not for your Amy Weber or Douglas Shuler deck.

The judges (whoever they are) will decide which submitted decks make it into the auction. They are not making their selections based on power level. Instead, they're looking for the decks that are the most interesting. If you make a deck that is fun to play or has a bizarre combo, it stands just as good a chance (in fact, it stands a *better* chance) than a killer, near-tourney-level construction. Only one deck will be chosen per artist, and each participant can only submit a single deck, so make your artist choice wisely. The deadline is April 12th. **DO NOT SEND YOUR DECKS TO ME.** Submit them here, and good luck!

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