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Thursday, April 22, 2004

Last week's column was immensely popular. I've received over 500 emails about it, many containing interesting afternotes that are well worth sharing. If you don't care about last week's column, feel free to skip down to the part where I start talking about sorceries!

The Return of the Attack of the Bombos!

The Wirewood Symbiote-Tangleroot bombo

There is an infinite Symbiote combo out there, but it doesn't involve an Elf. It involves a Wizard: Imagecrafter. You have Imagecrafter and Tangleroot in play. Play the Symbiote. Tangleroot gives you 🌿. Tap Imagecrafter to make the Symbiote an Elf. Use the Symbiote's ability to return the Symbiote itself to your hand and untap the Imagecrafter. Use the Tangleroot mana to play the Symbiote again, and go to infinity. It's considered a new Symbiote, so its once-per-turn restriction doesn't apply. You still need another element to take advantage of this loop (Furious Assault?), but it can be done.

The Phage the Untouchable bombo

This was wrong in more ways than I mentioned. Vronsky Unguent was under the impression that you could sacrifice multiple creatures to a single Culling the Weak. I skimmed over that since you could easily have a second Culling the Weak in hand. The second fatal flaw is that Cauldron Dance can only be played during combat. Since you need some Culling the Weak mana in your main phase to play Morgue Toad and some Culling the Weak mana in your combat phase to play Cauldron Dance, this fails. Again.

The Phyrexian Delver combo

A number of people didn't see how your creatures (except Karona) got haste. There's an Anger in your graveyard and you have a Mountain in play! (Badlands is a Mountain.)

The Bad Medicine deck

Lots of you a) pointed out that a better False Cure deck uses Reverent Silence and Skyshroud Cutter to give your opponent life, and b) you (each) invented it first. Yeah, I know. That deck's been around for as long as *Onslaught*. But I've never seen anyone use Healing Salve this way before! And I can play this deck on **Magic Online**, which is a big plus for me.

The Retract bombo

"It's not a bombo! It works if March of the Machines is in play!" Right. But March of the Machines is nowhere to be found. It wasn't in the deck due to the high number of artifact lands the deck runs. It wasn't in Kurby Byruk's suggestion. So there's no reason to assume it's there.

The Soft Lock deck

Some people tried to correct the "oversight" of this deck by suggesting some victory conditions it could easily incorporate: Cognivore! Prodigal Sorcerer! Uh, Vizzerdrix!



That misses the point. This deck *intentionally* has no victory conditions. The subversive fun is to win games (through concession) that it can't possibly win because your opponent will always assume you do have a victory condition.

Unfortunately, it turns out this deck has a victory condition after all. Sort of. If you put Memory Lapse into an Isochron Scepter, you can continually Lapse your own spells so you won't deck yourself. Meanwhile, your opponent would get decked. However, in this deck, this is more of a draw condition since you've ideally locked your opponent with Metamorphose. Now no one ever draws new cards. Wheeee! Oh well. To purify the deck, the Lapses can be replaced by Prohibits.



Victory condition? Sort of..

The Lodestone Myr-Aluren bombo

Many of you pointed out that Lodestone Myr can't be played for free via Aluren because it costs 4 mana! Oops. This was sloppy editing on my part; it wasn't clear what the word "it" referred to. Oglesburt Limpwart thought that tapping an artifact creature to pay the cost for Lodestone Myr's ability somehow targeted *that tapped artifact creature*. That's what he wanted to bounce with Cowardice, and that's what he wanted to replay with Aluren to pump the Myr with again and again.

The Mindslaver-Donate-Auriok Transfixer-Ashnod's Coupon Finally! The main event. Over 450 of you wrote in to explain this cryptic combo. Over 400 of you got it wrong. At least 150 emails were of the nature "Donate the Coupon to your opponent, then Mindslaver him to make him use it... but I don't know what the Transfixer is for." People, I already knew how the combo *didn't* work! The Transfixer was there for a reason, and I needed to know why! What I got instead was an inbox full of messages that said "I know how the combo works except for the part that I don't know how it works."



Let me cut the tension: This is a combo. It does one specific thing (maybe two) in one specific way. I'll tell you how. But first, let's see what else went wrong...

- Some people couldn't figure out what the Transfixer was for.
- Some people thought tapping the Coupon with the Transfixer would activate its ability.
- Some people thought tapping the Coupon with the Transfixer could prevent its ability from being activated.
- Some people thought Pyftig Jork thought tapping the Coupon with the Transfixer would activate its ability.
- Some people thought Pyftig Jork misread his cards.
- Some people thought forcing your opponent to activate the Coupon would make him buy *you* a drink.

- Some people thought Mindslaver could make your opponent give you the drink he got from the Coupon.
- Some people thought Ashnod's Coupon makes your opponent drink the drink.
- Some people thought Mindslaver could make your opponent drink the drink.
- Some people thought Ashnod's Coupon could be used to have your opponent send you (or himself) to Hawaii.

Nope to all. This combo does not, under any circumstances, get YOU a drink. If that's what you want, Ashnod's Coupon will do that by itself. From the Comp Rules about Mindslaver: "507.3c The controller of another player's turn can't make choices or decisions for that player that aren't called for by the rules, or by any objects." You can't make your opponent take off his pants, and you can't make him give you his drink. A lot of other ideas are snuffed out by the *Unglued* QAS (Questions Asked Sometimes):

Ashnod's Coupon

Q: Can I use Ashnod's Coupon to force my opponent to go to Hawaii for a special drink that's only available there?

A: No. The rules governing unsportsmanlike behavior still apply. A player should ask only for something that can be reasonably acquired.

Q: Can I force a minor to get me a beer?

A: For years we've tried to avoid acknowledging this fact, but I guess it's time the truth finally came out. Your national government's laws actually supersede all **Magic** rules. I just hope some nations don't pass new Mulligan laws.

Q: While my opponent is away, can I perform other tasks, like picking the next action for Bureaucracy?

A: No. Ashnod's Coupon's effect does not resolve until the drink is returned. (Where else but an *Unglued* QAS can you hear a line like that?)



As for the dozens of you that thought this combo would make your opponent drink either poison or large quantities of alcohol: Nowhere on the Coupon does it say anything about making anyone drink the drink. It only covers buying the drink. (And I don't think poison, or bleach, or any of the other nasty liquids that were suggested count as a "drink.")

So... what does the combo do? A golden few (well, a golden couple of dozen) got it, and I thank you for enlightening me. **It makes your opponent give you all his money!**

1. You have Mindslaver, Ashnod's Coupon, and Auriok Transfixer in play.
2. Tap your Coupon with the Transfixer.
3. Donate the tapped Coupon. *This is why the Transfixer is necessary.* If you Donate an untapped Coupon, your opponent can use it immediately while he isn't under your control. You must Donate it tapped for the combo to work.
4. Mindslaver your opponent.
5. On your opponent's turn, have him activate the coupon. The word "you" on the card refers to your opponent, since he controls the Coupon. Choose the target player (probably your opponent himself) and the target drink (the can of soda you brought with you). Now your opponent must buy the soda from you, and he must pay all costs for the drink. But it's your soda. You own it. So you can set whatever price you deem fair. May I suggest \$500.00?

That's it. The combo forces your opponent to give you large sums of money (or concede the game). Is this what the elusive Pyftig Jork had in mind when he wrote to me? I have no idea, because he never wrote back. Can you consider a \$500 can of soda to be "reasonably acquired"? Hard to say. Is it hilarious? That's up to you. But that's what it does.

(An alternate answer is to force your opponent to buy a ridiculously expensive beverage. Some suggested a bottle of Chateau d'Yquem Sauternes (1787), the most expensive wine according to the Guinness Book. It runs upwards of \$56,000 per bottle.)

So what's the point of all this? **Lesson 1: When you send a combo to me, tell me what it does!** Don't assume I'll figure it out just because I'm a supergenius. And, while I'm at it, why did I write about bombos in the first place? There were two reasons. The first, of course, is because I take pleasure in other people's misery. The second is **Lesson 2: You must understand the rules before you can warp them to your sadistic will.** I'm not saying everyone should go become a rules lawyer. But the more you know about the intricacies of **Magic**, the easier it will be for you to find the loopholes and combos lurking in the corners.

Prodigal Sorceries

And now that I've finished with last week's column, I guess it's time to start on this week's. It's Sorcery Week, which means it's a perfect time to highlight... an artifact. When *Mirrodin* was released, I quickly set to work trying to break Spellweaver Helix. I failed. For the past few months, I've been trying to just *use* Spellweaver Helix, and I finally, finally succeeded. During *Mirrodin* Hidden Gems Week, Mark Rosewater mentioned the Helix as his Hidden Gem (before devoting the rest of his column to something completely different). I say that's debatable. To get the Helix to do anything, you need to assemble a four-card combo: Sorcery A, another copy of Sorcery A, Sorcery B, and the Helix. Even more difficult, two of the elements must be in your hand, while the other two (Sorceries A and B) must be in your graveyard. Making things tougher, the whole enterprise revolves around a fragile artifact; Naturalize, Boomerang, Shatter, and a bunch of other cards can ruin your day.



Still, after months of trying (I've worked at the Helix more than I've worked on any other card), and with the help of some sharp contributors, I now have some keen Helix decks! So let's break it down. The Helix can be used in two ways:

1. As a card-advantage engine. You get more copies of your spells than you normally would.
2. As a mana-cost loophole. Don't pay for a ridiculously expensive sorcery—imprint it on the Helix along with a cheap spell and then play another copy of the cheap spell.

What kind of sorceries work well with the Helix? (Besides the super-expensive ones.) Any sorcery you can cast multiple times, since you'll then get multiple use out of the Helix. Something with buyback is fantastic. Something with flashback is nearly as good. Sorceries with recursive aspects (Hammer of Bogardan, a pair of Revives) are also winners.

The last thing a Helix deck needs is a method to dump sorceries into the graveyard. For some decks, this method is as simple as just casting them. For others (particularly the expensive spells), other means are needed. Kenneth Nagle suggested Mesmeric Orb as a graveyard-delivery method. Compulsion is another promising idea, and the decks below have many more options.

First up is a deck that didn't make it. Tony Bendinelli (and I swear I'm not making up the names this week) wrote to me with a wild & woolly Helix combo: Bribery and Decree of Annihilation. If both sorceries are imprinted on a Helix, when you cast Bribery from your hand, the Helix-made Decree will go onto the stack on top of it. All lands, creatures, artifacts, hands, and graveyards will be wiped out—and *then* Bribery resolves! You'll have your opponent's fattest creature, and the rest of the board (barring enchantments) will be empty. I tried combining Kenneth and Tony's ideas, and I pulled the combo off once or twice, but the deck just wasn't consistent enough. (And I can't stress how bad it sucks to achieve the combo... against an *Elf* deck.) But I urge you to succeed where I have failed.

Helix Utility

This week's first deck (finally!) is a tuned version of a deck Joe Knizacky (really! I'm not making these up!) sent me. Most of the sorceries are the same as in his original version: Creeping Mold, Diabolic Tutor, Rampant Growth, Revive, Promise of Power, Decree of Pain, and Plow Under. But I wasn't happy with how it played until I added Chatter of the Squirrel and Deep Reconnaissance. Now it's a land-searching, card-Tutoring, Demon-spewing nightmare.

This deck happily casts whatever sorceries come up, then imprints onto the Helix the most useful power spell (Decree, Plow Under, Creeping Mold) it's found along with the easiest-to-recur spell (Chatter, Deep Reconnaissance) it's run across. The disruption buys time while you continue to thin lands out of your deck until you can do what you really want: Imprint a Diabolic Tutor. As your Tutoring engine kicks in, you can search for more copies of whatever spell is imprinted along with the Tutor so you can Tutor some more. Eventually, you can do what you really really want to do: Imprint a Promise of Power and start making large Demon tokens. The game usually ends quickly after that.



You don't really need three Helixes; you can often skip one or two of the steps listed above. At some point, thanks to the Tutor, you can get a Revive loop going. Have Revive #1 imprinted on a Helix. Have Revive #2 in your graveyard. Cast Revive #3 to return Revive #2 to your hand. Cast Revive #2 to return Revive #3 to your hand, and keep going. Each Revive comes with a Promise, or a Tutor, a Creeping Mold, or some other Helixified sorcery. The deck is still fragile (every deck based around Helix will be) and it might need another copy of Promise (since those two are your only victory conditions besides a handful of Squirrels). But it can keep your opponent in check until it flat-out explodes.

Demon DNA



Main Deck

60 cards

13 Forest
11 Swamp

0 creatures

24 lands

4 Chatter of the Squirrel
2 Creeping Mold
2 Decree of Pain
4 Deep Reconnaissance
4 Diabolic Tutor

4 Lay of the Land
 2 Plow Under
 2 Promise of Power
 4 Rampant Growth
 4 Revive
 4 Spellweaver Helix

36 other spells

Helix Combo

The next deck was sent in by Yifei Zhang. The deck uses flashback to its fullest to get three 6/6 Wurms into play as soon as possible. The ideal play is to use Quiet Speculation to put Crush of Wurms and two copies of Deep Analysis into your graveyard, imprint the Crush and one of the Analyses on the Helix, then flash back the other Analysis. Then win the game with giant monsters. This deck relies on extreme speed—you want to get your Wurms out before your opponent can deal with them. To that end, I tuned the fringes of the deck a bit. I added Chrome Moxes for speed, Hapless Researchers to help ditch any Crushes in your hand, and Counterspells to keep you alive. (Wrath of God the turn after you Wurm it up is bad, bad times.) The deck can now (on a perfect draw) have its Wurmy army out on turn 3 with Counterspell backup.



Not bad for turn 3

Blue Crush



Main Deck

60 cards

18 Island
 2 Lonely Sandbar

20 lands

4 Hapless Researcher
 1 Wonder

5 creatures

4 Careful Study
 4 Chrome Mox
 4 Counterspell
 4 Crush of Wurms
 4 Deep Analysis
 3 Fabricate
 4 Mental Note

4 Quiet Speculation

4 Spellweaver Helix

35 other spells

Interestingly, Ricky Man sent me a Helix deck that was the intersection of the two decks above. It featured Speculation, Crush, Chatter, Analysis, and Revive, among other spells.

Helix as Combo and Utility

Of course, what does everyone want to imprint on Spellweaver Helix? Time Stretch. (Or Time Walk, or Time Warp.) Me too. And what sorcery can be regrown and recast every single turn? Hammer of Bogardan. I've been trying to Hammer the Helix before Eric Cook and Thomas Hennessey suggested it (though I still thank them for the thought). But I had no luck. I kept trying into the last week: I was using crazy cards like Book Burning and False Memories to dump cards into my graveyard so I could pull off the Hammer-Time Stretch combo as fast as possible. But something was off. And then I had a breakthrough: The best way to realize the infinite-turn dream was to slow down. To recurse Hammer, the deck had to be heavily, heavily red. But red doesn't have the card drawing, card tutoring, or *non-random* discarding necessary to speed my way into the combo. Red can, however, blow up the board.

I turned the deck into a burn-oriented control deck. I chose to find my combo pieces, and dump some of them into my graveyard, with Read the Runes. I wanted to Read as many Runes as possible, so I had to buy time to build to a big X—and that meant rotisserie roasting any creatures that might attack me. Flamebreak, Slice and Dice, and Starstorm all made it into the deck, as did Firebolt and, of course, Hammer of Bogardan. Howling Mine provided the card drawing. Unsurprisingly, there's a tight correlation between the games I've won with this deck and the games I've had Howling Mine in my opening hand.

But just because the ultimate prize of this deck is imprinting Hammer and Time Stretch doesn't mean there aren't other plans. I've imprinted Firebolt and Time Stretch, and that can buy plenty of extra turns. I've imprinted Hammer and Slice and Dice to keep the board clear of attackers while I kept sending the Hammer at my opponent's head. Sometimes I've imprinted nothing and just Hammered away at the noggin! You've got to work with what's in front of you, not what you hope to draw.



Hammer It Home



Main Deck

60 cards

2 Grand Coliseum

2 Mirrodin's Core

16 Mountain

4 Shivan Reef

0 creatures

3 Echoing Ruin

4 Firebolt

4 Flamebreak

4 Hammer of Bogardan

24 lands

- 4 Howling Mine
- 4 Read the Runes
- 3 Slice and Dice
- 4 Spellweaver Helix
- 2 Starstorm
- 4 Time Stretch

36 other spells

And thus ends Sorcery Week and (finally, I hope) bombo week. The Spellweaver Helix decks are special to me, because it was a long journey (longer than most) before I got a good grasp on the card and could use it in successful decks. It was an enjoyable struggle.

Until next week, have fun with Spellweaver Helix.

Mark

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