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# Sunder



Adrian Sullivan · Single-Card Strategies  
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One of the great, fun aspects of **Magic** is looking at your pet cards. I think we've all sat around brainstorming and thinking of clever ways to make our friends and enemies go just a little bit crazy. One of my favorite pieces of such brainstorming in recent memory was Mark Gottlieb's "[Geddon Warmer](#)", a modern classic of evil. I had more than a couple of friends that were howling with laughter reading that piece.

There is something really insidious about wreaking havoc. We all like to do it. Whether we play with friends at home or in a shop or take long journeys to a big tournament, it all boils down to the same thing: we want to wreck people.

It was looking at Geddon and Geddon effects that made me want to write about this week's card, **Sunder**. For last week, tireless editor Scott Johns told everyone that we were going to be doing Sorcery week (after tricking us all first by calling it "Instant" Week). I had been all excited to do a fun instant. At the time my heart was set on **Evacuation**, but after thinking about **Armageddon** and **Evacuation**, I went back to **Sunder**. **Sunder** does a lot of what I like to do. Mostly, though, it does a good job of wrecking people.



## Wrecking People with Armageddon

**Armageddon** has always been one of those classic greats. In a world with **Armageddon**, the control decks have always had something to fear. Very nearly every color has had their **Armageddon**. White gets the official "Geddon", but it also gets gifts in the form of lesser or "different" Geddons (**Cataclysm** and **Catastrophe** spring to mind). Red has had two shots... a cycled **Decree of Annihilation** works as an instant Geddon, and **Tectonic Break** is basically an **Armageddon** as well. Black and Green have to work together to get off a Geddon, but they do manage it in several exciting ways like **Jolrael** plus **Forced March**, **Natural Affinity** and **Massacre**, or **Kamahl** and **Infest**. Blue's **Armageddon** is **Sunder**.

One of the first ways to abuse **Armageddon** is to make it less fair, and the same should hold true for **Sunder**. For many decks (maybe even most decks), land is the only mana that a deck has. In a sense, **Armageddon** is "fair" because it destroys *all* of the land. However, if your deck is full of other mana sources, you can wreck the balance. Past **Armageddon** decks typically packed all kinds of alternate mana to plan ahead for those pending Geddons. You can do the same with **Sunder**.

Talismans, Diamonds, Moxes and Stones, oh my! Artifact mana has been a staple for a long time. Besides these, we have the other obvious choice: mana creatures. First and foremost will always be the **Birds of Paradise**, perhaps the all-time MVP of mana creatures. After that, things like **Llanowar Elves**, **Vine Trellises**, and **Walls of Roots** are good. Old-school cards like **Sea Scryer** and slightly less old-school cards like **Sapphire Medallion** can also supply access to mana. All of these cards do the obvious: make the Geddon much more one-sided.



Plan ahead...

Probably the most classic use of **Armageddon** was always in White Weenie. Good ol' White Weenie. A bunch of little white dorks running with their swords out, backed up by a kick to the opponent's shins from **Armageddon**. In a similar fashion, Ehrnam-Geddon was a simple deck: play out a monster that was big, and then cast an **Armageddon**. In Blue, you can play the same mean trick. Drop a bunch of wimpy blue guys (Probably Merfolk, but maybe, just maybe, Wizards) and then **Sunder**.

If you are going to play the weenie trick, you've got a bunch of options available to you. If you're going to be knocking all of the lands off the table in the first place, using Blue's free cards is a great way to back up a weenie rush. **Gush** for some cards before a **Sunder** resolves. Use **Thwart** to help get it off. After a **Sunder**, **Foil** comes into play nicely to stop anything that might actually be threatening. **Misdirection** has *always* been one of my favorite cards in a deck like this. All of these cards have the added bonus of either fueling a weenie rush (in the case of **Gush**) or protecting it (with the countermagic). One card that straddles the line of both aspects of this is **Spiketail Hatchling**, serving as a weak beater, or as a great post-**Sunder** counterspell.

## Wrecking People on a Teeter-Totter

**Sunder** might be a virtual **Armageddon**, but it isn't the only way to think about it. We can always think of the balancing effects of cards like sitting on a teeter-totter with your opponent. **Wrath of God** and **Armageddon** and **Sunder** and **Obliterate** effect all players equally. Our job, as humble deck-builders, is to make sure that it affects some people more equally than others, thus throwing off the balance in our favor.

There are many cards that affect people symmetrically which can be accentuated by a well-timed **Sunder**. In most of these cases, it's best if the **Sunder** is done on your own turn (or at least in response to the teeter-totter ability going on the stack).

### Braids and Smokestack

With both **Braids** and **Smokestack**, everyone starts losing permanents. With **Sunder** in the mix, however, people have a lot less options for what they are going to want to start sacrificing first. One of the ways that both **Braids** and **Smokestack** are able to not be completely ridiculous is that they aren't incredibly cheap, and you often have a lot of options about what to sack to them. With **Sunder**, your options are pretty drastically reduced. I strongly recommend **Sundering** on your own turn here, and then relaying one of the lands you picked up. It gives you just a wee bit more options. One fun trick: after the requirement to sacrifice a permanent is on the stack, if you resolve a **Sunder**, they are forced to sacrifice a non-land. Not all that incredible, I know, but it is something.



Limit their options...

### Tanglewire

**Tanglewire** works the same way as the **Braids** and **Smokestack** when it comes to occupying an opponent's time. You have the ability to do all of the same tricks as before with those cards, but you get a new one as well. Since **Tanglewire** starts out with an intense effect and then winds its way down to almost no effect, you can spend that first turn after the **Tanglewire** hits you with a bunch of mana floating in your pool. From there, cast the **Sunder** and on your main phase, lay your first land back down. On your opponent's turn, they are likely to have a huge portion of their team tapped out by the Wire since they can't choose to tap their lands. This can also be done with the **Braids** or **Smokestack**, but oftentimes isn't anywhere near as useful since a **Braids** only

knocks out one permanent and a **Smokestack** can take a while before it gets to the point where it is hitting plenty of permanents.

Of course, we don't have to play symmetrically to break this system.

## Wrecking People by Having More

If we're going to live in an unfair world, you might as well embrace it. All of us know that the world isn't fair. Some people are better looking. Some people are richer. Some are faster or stronger. Some are smarter. That's just the way the world is. **Magic**, in many ways, is no different.

If we live in a world where everyone is going to pick up their land, we might as well be damned ready for that to happen, or opportunistic enough to punish someone else for not being ready.

One way is to be faster on the recovery. **Exploration** and **Summer Bloom** are two really incredible ways to pull way ahead on your opponent. **Manabond** is similar, in an incredibly risky way. If you have the courage to run a **Manabond** in your **Sunder** deck, I salute you; you're a bit more bold than even I've been accused of being at times. **Burgeoning** and **Exploration** are both much safer options.

Another good way to manipulate the **Sunder** situation is to be able to punish people for the situation that they've found themselves in. Probably the most powerful card here is something like **Opposition**. It shouldn't be too hard to hold down most of the important permanents that are left on the table if you have any number of creatures out. **Saproling Burst** (or **Saproling Cluster**) can double as cards that take advantage of the cards in your hand and also work well with the opposition. **Patron Wizard** is another excellent way to make the **Sunder** a game breaker. One of the only ways to escape the little Wizard is to have out a bunch of lands, but a well-timed **Sunder** will have none of that.

## Wrecking People with Damage

I've always been a fan of damage, so I thought that I would save this category for last. Since they're going to have a bunch of cards in their hands, you can make them pay for it. Think cards like **Storm Seeker**, **Black Vise** (for you Type 1 people), or Red's **Storm Seeker: Sudden Impact**. In fact, if you're going to go down that path, I think you should just go all the way with the real back-breaker: **Blood Oath**. With **Blood Oath**, you can do a whopping amount of damage post-**Sunder**. Even when your opponent doesn't have 7 lands in their hand after a **Sunder**, they can still find themselves in a heap of trouble from the damage.



*Think big...*

What about the cards in your *own* hand? I'm sure Mark Rosewater would be mad if I didn't use his namesake **Maro** as the first card mentioned here. But what I find far more impressive is throwing those lands at someone's head. **Land's Edge** would be suicide, but thankfully we do have a better option in **Seismic Assault**. Here, we have a nifty twelve-card combo: take any ten land, a **Seismic Assault**, and a **Sunder**, and you should have a dead opponent.

What about cards in *everyone's* hand? Perhaps one of my favorite cards here is **Multani**. Good god, this guy makes **Maro** look like a chump. Throw something like a **Rancor** on him, and a **Sunder** should just about make him able to kill anybody in a single swat. Even if it takes two swats, I'm guessing that your opponent hasn't been able to put up much of a fight in the meantime.

One final way to really make the damage hit an opponent post-**Sunder** is to make it rough on them for laying lands. **Ankh of Mishra** has always been one of my favorites, and here it can truly punish people. Be wary of playing this kind of deck in group play, as you're likely to quickly become everyone's favorite target.

## Wrapping Up (including a cute **Sunder** thing I never did and a little poll)

This is a short, but sweet one.

I really like **Sunder**, and I was always toying with ways to include it even in decks that don't necessarily need the card. **Psychatog** was one such deck. Using **Sapphire Medallions** (or sometimes **Nightscape Familiars**) to make all of the Blue cards I was going to run anyway just a little bit cheaper, I realized that I could **Cunning Wish** for **Sunder**.

This seemed really exciting to me. With a Medallion out, casting a **Cunning Wish** for a **Sunder** seemed so cheap and economical. With a **Psychatog** out, a **Sunder** could very easily spell the end of the game right there, no matter how much piddling life your opponent had.

In the end though, I didn't ever play the two cards in the same deck. I think I played some really bad deck instead. Oh, well. And now for some feedback:

**Since I started this column, which one of my articles is your favorite?**

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- [The Forgotten Ancient Challenge](#)
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- [The Sundering Titan Challenge](#)
- [Sundering Titan](#)
- [Serum Powder](#)
- [No Fear!](#)
- [Breaking Flamebreak](#)

That's all for this week. Everyone wish me luck at Chicago's Regionals this year. I plan on being really boring and playing something a million other people will be playing. Maybe I'll see some of you there!

- Adrian Sullivan  
[adriansullivan@yahoo.com](mailto:adriansullivan@yahoo.com)



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