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Cowardice



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I'll be honest: I like bounce. Years ago, I picked up my first tournament win with a deck that was chock full of bounce. I ran **Boomerang**. I ran **Time Elemental**. I ran **Unsummon**. I ran **Black Vise**. Eventually, I moved out of the small **Magic**-playing pond I was in, and ended up somewhere that my tourney-winning deck got eaten alive. It turns out that even though I really liked making people recast their spells, that by itself wasn't necessarily all that hot.

Eventually, I came to realize that there are some decks where bounce is good. I learned that **Boomerang** really wasn't a bad card, it just wasn't good in every deck. I still loved bounce cards, but I made sure I used them when it made sense to.

So, years ago, just when *Mercadian Masques* came out, I was sure that I could do something to break this:



In the end, I ended up playing other decks in actual tournaments, but I loved my Cowardice deck. **Cowardice** was just such a cool card. Most people win with creatures, and in theory a Cowardice deck should be able to keep nearly every single creature off the table. Of course, theory and practice are two different things. My Cowardice deck back then was filled with **Rishadan Cutpurses**, **Glowing Anenomes**, and **Jolting Merfolk**. It was a lot of fun to play, and after *Masques* was no longer legal in Standard Type 2 tournaments, I stopped working on Cowardice decks.

But, before that happened, I couldn't help it. I never did end up playing any of them, but I kept making them. When *8th Edition* was released, and I saw that Wizards had decided to include good ol' **Cowardice**, I was more than a little pleased.

What **Cowardice** does is really quite simple. Any creature that gets targeted gets bounced instead. **Lightning Bolt** and **Terror** become **Unsummon**. Certainly, there are a ton of cards that will trigger **Cowardice**. All you have to do is search for the phrase "Target creature" and a huge list will be available to choose from. The trick is finding cards that are cheap to use, or especially good at doing the job.

Being a potentially repeatable source of targeting is very good. Not being a creature is good, since it allows that card to dodge being hit by an opponent's targeting spells. Being able to hit creatures cheaply, or many at a time – those are also good. Having a powerful ability by itself is also good. So, I hope that I save everyone a ton of time and don't receive a few e-mails from readers saying things like “[Timberwatch Elf](#) is a great card to use with [Cowardice](#)!”

With [Cowardice](#), the world literally becomes a world of [Unsummons](#) and [Time Elementals](#). So, how do we make this world a world where we reign supreme?

Getting Ahead in a World of Cowards, Part One: Don't Be Scared

The simplest way to make sure that you get the better of [Cowardice](#) is to not play any creatures. For a moment, let's assume that your opponent isn't playing this game too (there isn't too much that we can do about this... for now). Without creatures, anything that an opponent might have to target your non-existent creatures is completely dead, whereas you can bounce all of their creatures with little effort. Permanent targeting sources like [Scale of Chiss-Goria](#) or [Tooth of Chiss-Goria](#) aren't all that useful unless the [Cowardice](#) is out, but they are cheap. [Icy Manipulator](#) is especially good here, since it can target almost any permanent; it's still useful even when they haven't replayed their creatures.

Another way is to avoid having your creatures get scared. As so many of you readers already know, [Multani](#), [Maro Sorcerer](#) cannot be targeted. He's not the only lucky untargettable creature though. [Troll Ascetic](#) is a very powerful untargettable creature. Even the lowly [Nimble Mongoose](#) is safe from [Cowardice](#). One neat card to use to save your whole team is [Steely Resolve](#). If most (if not all) of your creatures are of the right type, not one monster on your team can be messed with! A bit more unreliable is using [Lightning Greaves](#) to keep a creature of yours from being targeted – just make sure you equip the Greaves before you lay the [Cowardice](#).

Getting Ahead in a World of Cowards, Part Two: Embrace Your Fear

Another way to approach the problem of creatures bouncing is to make bouncing them a *good* thing. There are any number of creatures that can come into play and do some useful ability. The least useful of these, ironically, are some of the most powerful without [Cowardice](#). [Nekrataal](#) is a fine card, but spending that much mana to just bounce an opponent's creature is not that exciting. Come into play effects like [Nekrataal](#)'s have been traditionally called “187” effects, and there are plenty of them to choose from.

To get the most from the card, one of the best approaches is using 187s that either kill a non-creature, or that give you something. [Aaron Forsythe's recent column](#) where he previewed “Regrowth Guy” is a great example. [Eternal Witness](#) (maybe better nicknamed “Regrowth *Gir*”) can be used to get back anything that your opponent may have dealt with as you lock them out, including [Cowardice](#). [Viridian Shaman](#) is a great card to play and replay again against an artifact-playing opponent. With enough 187 cards like these, you can make it so that your opponent doesn't even *want* to bounce anything of yours.

Another idea is to use [Cowardice](#) at first to bounce your opponent's creatures, but then to change things around a bit. There is a natural reaction in all of us to resist what someone does to us. If someone grabs our hand and pulls, we naturally want to pull our hand back. It's the same with the bouncing. If someone keeps bouncing our creatures, we want to put them back. At some point when all of this is happening (usually when they are tapped out from laying down all the creatures that they can), instead bounce *your own creatures*. After you follow that up with a [Wrath of God](#) or a huge [Starstorm](#), you can bring all of your guys back into the fray.



Getting Ahead in a World of Cowards, Part Three: Being Good at Being Scary

As I mentioned earlier, there are a ton of targeting cards, but not all of them are really all that great. Here are some of my personal favorites that manage to stand out:

Fireball

Sure, there are a lot of spells that can target multiple creatures, but this is simply one of the best. For 1 mana, you may not be doing damage to a single target, but you are targeting it. Each additional mana can add another creature (or player) as a target. That translates into being one of the cheapest ways to target multiple creatures. A lot of people will talk about things like **Choking Tethers**, but **Fireball** is just as good at the job. The other great thing about the card is that you can use it against creatures even if **Cowardice** isn't out, or against a player's head when the time is right.

Sway of Illusion

This **Invasion** card is awesome if you want to target creatures. For a mere two mana you can target every creature you want to, *and* draw a card. There isn't much incentive in changing all of the creatures' colors without some other card in the works, but that isn't much of a drawback for getting to draw a card and comboing so well with **Cowardice**.

Whipgrass Entangler and Zealous Inquisitor

Here we dip into the Clerics. Both of these guys have a useful ability if a **Cowardice** isn't out, but they can also use their ability again and again. Since they are both Clerics, we have the added bonus of being able to fit **Steely Resolve** into the mix. From there, other good clerics with targeting abilities can easily fit in.

Scattershot

After your opponent has dropped down all of their creatures, you can use the Storm mechanic against them. For every creature that they dropped down, you can bounce them all right back up again, and add in another one just for fun.

Nefashu and Triskelion

These two share one huge disadvantage: they are expensive. What they both get to do, however, is smash face. **The Nefashu** will probably be making every potential blocker get out of the way, bouncing up to 5 creatures when the cowardice is out (and weakening them greatly when it isn't). **Triskelion** can send lots of creatures back and then target itself so that it can bounce back home, ready to come back for more.

Quicksilver Elemental and Neurok Transmuter

These two basically both have the same big advantages: they are both Blue, and they only require a single Blue mana to activate their ability as many times as you might like. Personally, this makes me greatly prefer the **Neurok Transmuter**. Since it can be cast for only 3 mana, you can lay a Transmuter as an early blocker if you need to, and after a **Cowardice** is out, even if your opponent bounces it, every free mana you have after casting it lets you bounce something of theirs! Quicky the Elemental may be big, but who cares – essentially it is the weaker cousin here.

Sunstrike Legionnaire

This one is perhaps the biggest gem of them all. If we lived in a dream world, you could get a **Lightning Greaves** on it before the **Cowardice** hit the table. In that world, our Legionnaire would be safe to do something amazing: bounce every creature that ever gets played from now on (if you want). Every time someone lays a creature he gets to untap and bounce someone new. Fantastic! It's still good even if you can't keep him from being targeted. Try **Mass Hysteria** to make it so that you can use him even if he does get bounced.



Send back x guys for x mana!



Coming through!

Getting Ahead in a World of Cowards, Part Four: Punishing the Scared

In a sense, **Sunstrike Legionnaire** is a perfect example of "Punishing the Scared". What you are doing is punishing someone for having their creatures bounced. When they relay their creatures the **Sunstrike Legionnaire** is ready to knock it right back to their hand. Overall, though, all that is happening is that they are having their creatures bounced again. We can do more...

Hurting their mana supply is my favorite way. You can use a card like **Mana Breach**, but you might have a lot of spells of your own that you want to cast. Here **Overburden** might be just a wee bit better, making them have a land bounce every time they replay a creature. Certainly you will get hit by the same issue, but your deck is made to target creatures so it should be happening far less often. A bit more die-hard of an approach is to use **Tainted Aether**, killing each player's land whenever they replay a creature.

A different approach can be made with **Warped Devotion**. Rather than turning every targeting into an **Unsummon**, instead you make it a lot like a **Recoil**. Truly sadistic players can include both **Warped Devotion** and **Overburden** or **Mana Breach** to really make people hate them.

Getting Ahead in a World of Cowards, Part Five: Being Really Mean

There are lots of ways to be mean, but I thought I would share one truly mean thing you can use the card to do: bounce their lands after you bounce their creatures. All it takes is something to turn their creatures into land.

Thankfully, right now both **Kamahl, Fist of Krosa** and **Natural Affinity** are both in print. **Natural Affinity** will still require you to find a way to target their newly creature-fied lands. **Kamahl** is actually the really awesome card here: if you target the land a *second* time, it bounces back to their hand.

This makes me think of a cool decklist.

Blue-Green Cowardice		
60 cards		
8 Forest	4 Neurok Transmuter	4 Cowardice
12 Island	4 Eternal Witness	4 Choking Tethers
4 Mirrodin's Core	4 Triskelion	4 Natural Affinity
24 land	2 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa	3 Pulse of the Grid
	14 creatures	4 Journey of Discovery
		3 Darksteel Ingot
		22 other spells

Wrapping Up

I hope that you enjoyed this week's article almost as much as you seemed to enjoy last week's. I know that I certainly received a ton of e-mail about Relentless Rats. Many readers wrote in to ask what the various Relentless Rat decks would do if they faced off against a Lobotomy or a Meddling Mage. I would have to say that they wouldn't like that, but that would be a weakness of the card, I suppose. Here are the results of last week's poll:

Which Rat deck did you like better?		
DespeRat Research	7061	58.8%
Green-Black Rat-Shrine	4938	41.2%
Total	11999	100.0%

For my part, I definitely preferred DespeRat Research.

For your part, which Cowardice article did you like more:

My Article

[Nate Heiss's Article](#)

You can vote for Nate, I won't mind. But I'm still voting for mine! See you next week.

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