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**W**elcome to the Promised Land. Welcome to the Golden Age. Welcome to *Fifth Dawn*, possibly the greatest Johnny set of all time.

Some people can't handle the combo power. Whenever a new set comes out (or whenever a new set doesn't come out, or whenever it rains, or whenever plums are purple) Mark Rosewater receives email proclaiming that the end is nigh, Armageddon (uh, the Biblical catastrophe, not the card) is coming, and he has ruined **Magic** forever. It's not a question of whether he receives email like this or not. It's only a question of how many he gets per day and how fevered their collective pitch is. Lately they've been on Panic Factor 8, which is highly amusing.

I get some runover email myself as people now tend to write to me as well—as if I had anything to do with it, or somehow hold within my grasp the power to change it. I was very hands-off on *Fifth Dawn*, as I am with just about every **Magic** set. I designed a handful of cards to fill holes in the file, but the only one that made it into print was Cackling Imp. If you think *that's* broken, I don't think you want to look too closely at Disruption Aura. I didn't even participate in my normal capacity as a card name and flavor text writer except for a little patch-up stint at the end. I've found that I have the time and energy to be a **Magic** columnist or a **Magic** card text creative writer, but not both. There's only so much **Magic** creativity my brain can spin up before it snaps... which it did on November 13, 2003. Quite a shame, too. Sometimes I really miss sanity.

Anyway, the Chicken Littles of the world are screaming at the tops of their lungs that the sky is falling, even though the much smarter Henny Pennys of the world are auctioning off bits of blue-tinted glass as "Authentic Fallen Sky Shards" on eBay. Is Krark-Clan Ironworks busted beyond belief? I dunno. Maybe. I was one of the voices calling for it to be killed back when it was in development. Then again, I never broke it. Hey, just be happy it no longer costs 3. Is Pentad Prism unacceptably dumb? Eternal Witness? Beacon of Tomorrows? Relentless Rats? You will find no answers here. I don't provide answers. I am merely a mystical conduit that serves as the log flume ride deep into your own soul. Yes, yours! And for an extra \$5 you can have the Polaroid my assistant snapped of you on your way down.

## A Tree-Filled Hourglass in Outer Space

But why dwell on the ridiculousness of the cards R&D created? Let's dwell on the ridiculousness of the card *you* created. I haven't seen too much press on Crucible of Worlds lately, partly because it was roundly discussed when development was finished many months ago, and partly because it's overshadowed by even more audacious rule-breaking cards in its set. Who cares where your lands come from when you have no upkeep step and can play instant Wrath of Gods? Well, I do.

Maybe half a dozen people, including Rama Lokon and Vincent McCue, sent me the Type 1 combo of Crucible of Worlds, Fastbond, and Zuran Orb. Play a land, sacrifice it to the Orb, play it from the graveyard, sacrifice it to the Orb, etc.—infinite life. If you tap the land each time you play it, you have infinite mana too. If one of those lands is an artifact land and you also have a Disciple of the Vault, you also have infinite life loss to deal out. Otherwise you'll just have to find something better to do with your infinite life and mana.

But Type 1 combos don't thrill me; the format has so many insane combos already that another one is merely a teardrop in the ocean. Jacob Krokum wrote in to suggest pairing the Crucible with Seismic

Assault. I'm pretty sure he veered into bombo territory here; although he didn't say so explicitly (and I apologize if I've misconstrued his intent), his note that this could "kill on turn 2 courtesy of an infinite graveyard recursion combo" leads me to believe he thought Crucible of Worlds lets you use a land in your graveyard to pay for Seismic Assault's cost. You can't, of course. The Crucible lets you play land cards from your graveyard *as though* they were in your hand—but they're *not* in your hand. And their use from your graveyard is strictly restricted to playing them, not discarding them, cycling them, or anything else. But Jacob was right in his general concept (and that's why I've kept his real name intact): Seismic Assault and Crucible of Worlds make a neat pair. What they're missing is Trade Routes.



Add Trade Routes and cycling lands to the mix and the deck becomes a lot more interesting. So interesting, in fact, that it was a staple of the Future Future League for a while. I played it myself for a week or two. Cycle a Lonely Sandbar to draw a card, then play the Sandbar from your graveyard as your land for the turn thanks to the Crucible. Even better, with Trade Routes out, you could pay 1 and discard a Mountain to draw a card, play that Mountain from your graveyard, pay 1 by tapping that Mountain to return it to your hand, and pay 1 to "cycle" it through Trade Routes again! You've essentially paid 2 and skipped your land drop for the turn to draw 2 cards with a Mountain. The finisher was Seismic Assault. Why play your land from your hand when you could funnel it through the Assault for two damage, then play your land from your graveyard? And the clock was always ticking... at some inevitable point, you'd be able to pick up all your land from the table with the help of Trade Routes, then throw it all (plus any extra lands in your hand) directly at your opponent's head for the win.

Crucible of Seismic Routes		
<b>Main Deck</b>		
60 cards		
4 Forgotten Cave		4 Boomerang
10 Island	0 creatures	4 Condescend
4 Lonely Sandbar		3 Crucible of Worlds
7 Mountain		3 Isochron Scepter
25 lands		4 Magma Jet
		4 Mana Leak
		3 Pyroclasm
		3 Seismic Assault
		4 Serum Visions
		3 Trade Routes
		35 other spells

This deck is pretty much a deck grabbed from the FFL archives. I changed some numbers because I believe the deck that I got was from the time when Serum Visions (called Scrye Network in

playtesting, which was a riff on Spy Network, whose playtest name was actually Spy Network, and which was a baffling internal Limited *Onslaught* playtest favorite that never caught on in the real world, and thus warranted a playtest-name tribute) was an instant. Isochron Scepter was one of the reasons Serum Visions was changed into a sorcery. Imagine that alterna-universe for a second.

Oh, and I arbitrarily called the deck "Crucible of Seismic Routes" because "Trade Assault of Worlds" sounds way too much like the plot of *Phantom Menace*. Meesa sorry to have even brought that up.

### Orbital Mind-Control Lasers

There's a combo I've been getting even more email about lately that's nearly a year old to me. A handful of Mark Gottlieb's Junior Combo Rangers have discovered and mailed in a superkeen *Fifth Dawn* combo: Bringer of the White Dawn and Mindslaver. That's a good one. Your opponent gets no turns (of his own) for the rest of the game. And I thank everyone who sent that in. Lots of times readers send in combos I've never thought of. But I was ahead of the game on this one because I played it in the FFL back in October.



I thought this was going to be broken. A two-card end-the-game combo! It didn't work out as I had hoped. The combo is good, the deck is good, but it's not suited for Tier 1 competitive play. Great! That meant Bringer of the White Dawn could stay as it was, and casual games the world over could be brought to a grinding halt by a player eternally recurring a Mindslaver. Or, more likely, by people throwing heavy objects at the person eternally recurring that Mindslaver.

So what went wrong? What caused Bringer of the White Dawn to *not* get changed? Well, setting up a combo that required a creature in play and a 6-mana artifact in my graveyard was harder than it sounded. Lots of decks were packing multiple main-deck Damping Matrixes to deal with Skullclamp, and Mindslaver was unfortunately collateral damage. (Hmmm, maybe that's not a concern now...) Goblins were able to dispatch a measly little 5/5 creature pretty easily thanks to Sparksmith, Sharpshooter, and Gempalm Incinerator. In short, it was a vulnerable combo. Even worse, when I did pull it off, my opponent would invariably concede immediately. What fun was that?

### Look What I Found!



#### Main Deck 60 cards

- |                    |                             |                         |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 4 City of Brass    | 4 Birds of Paradise         | 4 Engineered Explosives |
| 6 Forest           | 1 Bringer of the Black Dawn | 4 Mindslaver            |
| 4 Island           | 1 Bringer of the Blue Dawn  | 4 Pentad Prism          |
| 2 Mountain         | 4 Bringer of the White Dawn | 4 Rampant Growth        |
| 2 Plains           | 4 Etched Oracle             | 4 Serum Visions         |
| 2 Swamp            |                             | 4 Thirst for Knowledge  |
| 1 Windswept Heath  | 14 creatures                |                         |
| 1 Wooded Foothills |                             | 24 other spells         |
| <hr/>              |                             |                         |
| 22 lands           |                             |                         |

This is not exactly the deck that I played in the Future Future League because I seem to have never filed a decklist. Instead, I took a decklist that Alan Comer used in the FFL and changed it around, possibly for the worse. He had *Condescend*, *Solemn Simulacrum*, a couple of *Chromatic Spheres*, more *Blue Bringers*, and fewer lands; I swapped them out for *Thirst for Knowledge*, *Pentad Prism*, and a *Black Bringer*, I changed the lands a bit, and I maxed out on *Oracles* and *Mindslavers*. I also distinctly remember running *Wayfarer's Bauble* back in the day, but I don't think I had the *Pentad Prisms*. I now think the *Prisms* might be better in this deck, but it's close enough that I can't tell. How you choose to configure your own version of this deck is entirely in your hands.

## Egg Toss

To round out my typical triad of decks, I'd need another *Fifth Dawn* deck that I played in the FFL containing a central combo someone has since suggested to me via email. Sadly, for those who like thematic closure, no such third deck exists. I could tell you about the FFL deck I played that used *Door to Nothingness* as one of its win conditions—and won at least one game that way!—but I was testing *Earth* cards (now *Champions of Kamigawa* cards) at the time... and, as you might be able to guess by the fact that I won games with the *Door*, not all of them made it through development intact. I could showcase some of fellow developer Devin Low's wacky FFL decks, but I didn't think of that in time and I don't think he wants to get a phone call from me at home at the time of day—well, night—well, morning—I'm writing this. So I'm just going to have to do something different.

A few weeks ago, when I previewed *Endless Whispers*, I noted that the new enchantment was the easiest way yet to pull off the nigh-impossible victory of forcing your opponent to put *Phage the Untouchable* directly into play. (By the way, 20 bonus points to me for including the word "nigh" twice in one column. That's nigh unheard of!) It turns out *Fifth Dawn* also introduced a second method to force your opponent to *Phage* himself. It's a lot more convoluted than the *Endless Whispers* method, but it's still a lot less convoluted than any other method I've heard of. And it comes as a nasty, nasty surprise.



The combo was sent in by Matthew Savige. He suggests hatching *Phage* out of *Summoner's Egg*! I certainly hadn't thought of that; as far as I was concerned, *Summoner's Egg* was a way to get a *Darksteel Colossus* or a *Sundering Titan* into play on your own side. Diabolical! Matthew's suggested method of delivery (*Fractured Loyalty*) didn't work; I didn't want to have to rely on my opponent targeting my *Phage*-packed *Egg* with something to pass it over. And once my opponent got it, targeting the unsavory *Egg* with *Shatter* or *Echoing Ruin* would just send it screaming back to my side of the table before it blew up! Instead, my first thought was to swap out *Fractured Loyalty* for *Custody Battle*. But enchanting my own *Egg* with *Custody Battle* would look awfully suspicious, and my opponent would get a whole turn to crack it while I was waiting for my upkeep to hand it over. Finally I hit on my old standby: *Confusion in the Ranks*.

*I've got a present for you...*

With *Confusion in the Ranks* on the board, your opponent thinks you're playing a wacky deck. It's fantastic psychological camouflage. When the time is right, play *Summoner's Egg*. The *Egg's* imprint ability triggers and the *Confusion's* exchange ability triggers. Exchange the *Egg* first! Once it's safely on your opponent's side, imprint *Phage* face-down, then immediately blow up the *Egg* with *Shatter*. I suppose if you're some sort of sadistic daredevil you could wait to crack the *Egg*. Time is on your side. Just try not to pop with gleeful anticipation. When you do smash the *Egg* into a million pieces, the priceless part is written right there on the card itself:

its controller (your opponent) must "turn the imprinted face-down card face up." That moment of revelation, that "what-did-I-get-for-Christmas-oh-no-it's-not-Christmas-it's-Mud-Day experience", is what dreams are made of. Evil dreams, but dreams nonetheless. Sure, your opponent knows he's getting something bad at this point, but listen closely for the sound of his spirit snapping anyway. After he puts Phage into play, the Confusion will force an exchange, so Phage winds up on your side—but since your opponent put it into play, he controls its comes-into-play ability, and he will lose when that ability resolves no matter where Phage is by then. It's a wacky deck packing a dagger-to-the-heart instant win combo.

## Rotten Eggs



### Main Deck

60 cards

2 Bloodstained Mire	1 Eater of Days	4 Confusion in the Ranks
2 Great Furnace	1 Leveler	4 Diabolic Tutor
7 Mountain	3 Phage the Untouchable	3 Night's Whisper
7 Swamp	4 Summoner's Egg	3 Nuisance Engine
4 Urborg Volcano	3 Viashino Sandstalker	4 Shatter
2 Vault of Whispers		3 Slice and Dice
	12 creatures	3 Talisman of Indulgence
24 lands		24 other spells

The Leveler (also suggested by Matthew) and the Eater of Days are there so your opponent doesn't really know what he's getting out of the Egg. Neither of them are an instant win like Phage is, but they can be just as fun. I especially like the idea of busting open the Egg you gave your opponent to make him put Eater of Days into play. He loses two turns, and the 9/8 trampling flyer immediately gets exchanged back to your side of the table!

Until next week, have fun torturing your opponent!  
Mark

