



MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM

ARTICLES

- ▾ [Related links](#)
- ➔ [Read other articles](#)

TOURNAMENTS

MAGIC ONLINE

  
 Article Search ▾ ➔

# Trade Routes

Adrian Sullivan · *Single-Card Strategies*  
 Wednesday, June 16, 2004



Like so many other **Magic** players, I find that there are certain cards that I just can't get enough of. Your favorite **Magic** cards have a lot in common with your favorite kinds of food. One dish I can't seem to stop ordering is Pad Thai. No matter what, it seems like if I'm in a Thai restaurant, I order Pad Thai, even if someone tries to get me to order something else. On the other end of the spectrum, I can't help it, but I love hot dogs. A good hot dog is just a fantastic guilty pleasure for me. When my favorite hot dog shop in town closed down, "disappointed" was an understatement.

The **Magic** cards that we like keep bringing us back to them. So of these cards are simply good. There's nothing to feel guilty about. You can show them off to your friends and know that everyone can understand why you like it. Other cards are like chocolate-covered, fried and then frozen Twinkies. You can't be too surprised when people look at you like you just crawled out of an asylum if you tell people you like them.

For any of these cards, they might or might not be "good", but we just keep on trying to play them. It's great when one of your favorites works fine. I don't know how many times I've activated one of my favorite cards, **Sylvan Library**. On the other hand, if you're anything like me, your friends will ask you why you're trying to make something work with "that tired old card."

Which brings me to this week's "tired old card," **Trade Routes**.



When **Trade Routes** was first printed in *Mercadian Masques*, it didn't really make that big of a splash. The card was simple. For a cheap price (1 mana), it could turn your lands in hand into a new card. If you wanted to, you could also turn your lands in play into lands in hand for the same low cost.

This kind of effect isn't incredibly splashy. The problem with an effect like this all on its own is that at the time, you didn't really need it. The typical decks that had time to use it were control decks. They already had access to **Accumulated Knowledge** for a cheap card-drawer, and they

wanted pretty much every land in play that they could get their hands on. The fast decks just didn't have time to use it. They just wanted to kill you and get it over with.

One guy that used to play in our area managed to make use of it in a Masques Block deck, and played his way into the Top 8 with it as its centerpiece. I had noticed the card before, but his build, a pretty Blue/Green control deck, really made me smile and cemented the card in my mind as one to keep an eye on.

## Getting Land Back, or Just Getting It

By itself, discarding land to a **Trade Routes** is just simple card selection. You are spending a little bit of mana to try to get a better card than whatever land it was you just had. In formats where control games can go long, this card selection can be incredibly powerful. For a short while in Standard you could occasionally run into players that would have **Trade Routes** in their sideboard as a threat for control mirror-matches. The idea was that you'd get enough other card drawing that the card selection would turn the game strictly to your favor. I remember one game at Regionals quite a few years ago where I was sure I was going to lose when my opponent dropped one on the table on turn two. In the end, though, I dropped a **Thieving Magpie**, and my actual card advantage engine quickly overwhelmed my opponent's superior card selection. Card selection is powerful, but pure card advantage often overcomes simple selection. To turn that selection into card advantage takes a little bit more work. In general, Wizards of the Coast makes getting more cards a little bit harder than other things because drawing extra cards is incredibly powerful. As always, though, we can try to combine a card or two to get around them holding us back.

**Groundskeeper** – I'm going to start with the card I saw that local player, Jim Bratz, use in his Pro Tour Qualifier deck. In combination with **Trade Routes**, it's a really good fit because of its cheap cost to play and to activate. Of course, there are a few problems with him. Unless you're planning on playing Masques Block Constructed, you'd better be able to have access to better cards than this if you want to compete. Let's step it up a notch or two.

**Planar Birth** – Here, we're still looking at an Extended deck (or older), but we're starting to get into some of the stuff that is truly powerful. It does effect both players, but if you've been spending spare time and mana putting land into your graveyard, it doesn't take much work to spend another 1\* and get every single little bit of basic land back into play again. Here, you're turning that card selection from earlier into a good cause: a lot of mana. But this explosion of land in play had better be followed up with an **Early Harvest** or you'd better have a **Squandered Resources** in play, because without something explosive, the **Planar Birth** is only a nice bonus, rather than a constant increase in power over your opponent.

**Sprouting Vines and Far Wanderings** – One of these two can be very much like casting an **Opportunity**. **Far Wanderings** is a nice example of a card that can be very likely to have threshold if you've been using a **Trade Routes**. Here, it doubles as an excellent land fetcher, but it takes a bit more effort to return those extra lands to hand and then dump them into more cards. **Sprouting Vines** is a bit better here. At the end of a busy turn, **Sprouting Vines** can easily net you four or more land. I'm willing to bet you won't be able to get rid of them right then, but over the next couple of turns you'll slowly replace them with more powerful cards.

**Crucible of Worlds** – Now here's the real ticket. In a way, having out a **Crucible of Worlds** is like having a **Sprouting Vines** for infinite. Every time that you draw a land, you can immediately put it and all of its friends into the graveyard in exchange for another card, and still have a land drop every turn. If you didn't happen to draw a land that turn and your graveyard is empty of land, you can pick up a land and drop one into the yard to have a land to play and still get a card out of it.



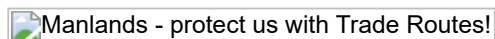
## Protecting Your Good Stuff or Making it Better

This one is a little bit more straightforward. Essentially, as long as you have a single mana open, any one of your lands is defending from any kind of harm. One of the great things about **Trade**

**Routes** is that the spell only costs 2 mana, a full mana cheaper than most of the land destruction spells that you are likely to be playing against.

What this translates to is that anytime you play against land destruction effects, what you're doing is changing every land destruction spell into a bounce. While this still keeps certain cards (like **Dwarven Blastminer**) somewhat potent, it does continue to greatly hinder them. Other cards (like **Stone Rain**) are nearly pointless to cast.

This ability is especially good when you have particular lands that are worth keeping safe from harm. "Man lands" are one of the best categories of cards to keep safe. There are, of course, the ones currently in print: **Stalking Stones** and **Blinkmoth Nexus**. Other than those, you still have older cards like **Faerie Conclave** and **Mishra's Factory**. After the man lands, you still have other valuable land you might want to save.



I play a bit of 5-color and in that format the current World Champ, Jim Hustad, has been made fun of quite a bit for his **Trade Routes**. The only thing is this: he has a lot worth protecting. Aside from making sure that he keeps his colors protected by keeping his dual lands safe, he has his **Tolarian Academy** (a Restricted card) and his **Library of Alexandria** (another Restricted card) to keep safe.

Beyond keeping these cards safe, a **Trade Routes** can work as a mini **Candelabra of Tawnos**. By returning the land and replaying it, you've essentially just untapped it. With a **Tolarian Academy** or a **Gaea's Cradle**, if you can make more than 1 mana, you can accelerate your mana just a bit. Add in a **Fastbond** and you can potentially accelerate your mana a *lot*. It's not all that uncommon to see a **Tolarian Academy** make 4 or 5 mana in 5-color, and then watch a **Trade Routes** turn it into 7 or 10 (or watch a **Fastbond** turn it into 30).

## When A Land in Hand is Worth Two...

Sometimes, we just want to be able to manipulate the number of cards we have in a particular place. Maybe we just want to have more cards in hand, or maybe we want to have less land in play. Whatever the case may be, **Trade Routes** can manipulate how much we have, where. There are a few cards we can use to really make this potent.

**Seismic Assault** – This is the one that comes to mind constantly. For years, I've worked on different versions of Blue/Red control. The idea would be that you could use the Blue/Red control elements to burn things and keep the game under control until you got both a **Seismic Assault** and a **Trade Routes** into play. At that point, each land could tap itself to return to your hand and immediately translate into 2 damage.

**Multani and Maro** – At a whim, you can return land to your hand to grow these guys incredibly quickly. As threats go, this is a surprisingly inexpensive way to make these guys threaten to kill your opponents that much more quickly.

**Psychatog** – Speaking of threats... With **Psychatog**, cards in hand translate into more damage, but for that matter, so do the cards in your graveyard. A **Psychatog** can become a lethal force incredibly quickly with a **Trade Routes** out. Every land in play is a potential 1.5 damage, and every time you use **Trade Routes** to just discard a land, you're building up another .5 damage. In no time at all you'll be staring at a lethal 'Tog. For a less risky but less potent card, try **Wild Mongrel**.

**Threshold** – Every threshold card is better with a **Trade Routes** out. The best ones, of course, are the cheap ones. **Mystic Enforcer** and **Werebear** are the first two that spring to mind; they are both great deals for their potential power and toughness, and they can still be useful when you aren't at threshold.

**Armageddon** – Before you blow up all of the lands, you can save any extras! If your opponent can be guaranteed to have a lot of cards in hand, **Balance** will do the same thing, but can't be as easily relied upon to not make you have wasted your mana.

**Terravore** – This guy can pack quite a little punch for a mere 3 mana. Every time that you have a free mana and a land in hand, you can give him a permanent +1/+1. That's not half bad. Of all of the creature options, I have to say that he's easily my favorite.

## Wrapping Up

So, with all that in mind, here is one take at a deck that exploits the many benefits of **Trade Routes**.

<b>Red/Blue/Green Routes</b>		
Standard Trade Routes Deck 60 cards		
1 <b>Stalking Stones</b>	3 <b>Krosan Tusker</b>	4 <b>Trade Routes</b>
3 <b>Mountain</b>	3 creatures	2 <b>Seismic Assault</b>
4 <b>Shivan Oasis</b>		3 <b>Crucible of Worlds</b>
4 <b>Blinkmoth Nexus</b>		4 <b>Sprouting Vines</b>
2 <b>Mirrodin's Core</b>		4 <b>Wayfarer's Bauble</b>
2 <b>Forest</b>		4 <b>Mana Leak</b>
8 <b>Island</b>		4 <b>Magma Jet</b>
24 land		4 <b>Serum Visions</b>
		4 <b>Condescend</b>
		33 other spells

This deck makes use of a number of different avenues with the card, but leans towards my favorite one: counter-burn. On top of a counter-base, it runs **Scry** and **Krosan Tusker** to help find the **Trade Routes**. It also looks for **Crucible** to make a constant card-drawing engine out of the **Trade Routes**, and then **Seismic Assault** for a final K.O. punch. **Sprouting Vines** and **Wayfarer's Bauble** both give extra land, and the Vines themselves can potentially turn into something akin to **Stroke of Genius**. **Blinkmoth Nexus** can also provide the final kill with a **Trade Routes** to protect it if need be. For a quick base to build off of, this offers a lot, and one or more of the aspects of the deck can be clipped to make room for something else if you get the hankering to customize. I hope you enjoy it.

## Correction from Last Week

In [last week's column](#) on **Eon Hub** one of the many things that I mentioned is **Tangle Wire**. Initially, I started out pretty well, mentioning how you can use **Eon Hub** to stop people from punishing you with it. A bit later though, I carelessly mentioned **Tangle Wire** as being useful *with* the **Eon Hub** out because you would be able to skip its loss of Fading counters. A bunch of readers wrote in to mention it to me, and I want to thank everyone for pointing it out. When I began writing about the Fading aspect of **Eon Hub**, I thought of what I felt were the best Fading cards, and I didn't bother to rethink how **Eon Hub** would stop the **Tangle Wire** (as I mentioned earlier in the article). My bad. My bad.

As always, I do look forward to your e-mails (click the "Respond to Adrian Sullivan" link below). They can be a great source for feedback on what I'm doing that you like or don't like. In addition, I'm always looking for ideas on what card to write on next. Until next week!

Adrian Sullivan



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Adrian Sullivan](#) archive

WHAT'S NEW CORPORATE INFO WHERE TO BUY INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT SITEMAP PRODUCTS