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Angel Week: A scintillating series celebrating celestial seraphim. Why are we having Angel Week? It might have something to do with the fact that Mark Rosewater, fan of all things Buffyverse, is still upset that the TV show Angel was canceled. (Want to know how big a fan? Take a peek at Repentant Vampire, even though it clearly bears no resemblance to any fictional character from a different intellectual property.) Or it might have something to do with the fact that Angel is one of the most popular, enduring creature types in the game.

What's the best thing to ever happen to Angels? Matthew D. Wilson. Reya? Check. Herald of Serra? Double check. Serra Advocate? This may come as a surprise because Wizards of the Coast frowns on interoffice romances, but Serra Advocate and I have been dating for the better part of four months. She gets a little jealous of the amount of time I spend with Phage, and I wish she wouldn't head out to battle quite so often, but things look promising. I meet her parents next week.

What's the worst thing to ever happen to Angels? Me. As it turns out, Angels are not very comboriffic. For every combo like Seraph + Viridian Longbow + Death Pits of Rath, there are five combos like Warrior Angel + lots and lots of land. And that just means I'm going to have to go to extremes this week. Not quite crimes-against-humanity extremes, but... um... well, misdemeanors against humanity are much more palatable than felonies against humanity, right?



Heaven and Birth

Most combos that involve Angels are dedicated to simply getting the Angels into play because they all seem to cost **1 7*******. You can reanimate the Angels. You can break them out of Summoner's Egg. You can put them directly into play via Animal Magnetism. You can search up Cloudposts or the Urzatron. All of my decks today will have some element of cheating Angels into play. First up is... basic lands?

Oh, the mighty basic lands! This deck has its origins in the Copper-Leaf Angel + Planar Birth combo. If you sacrifice all your basic lands to permanently pump your Copper-Leaf Angel, Planar Birth can get them all back.

But wait! There are other ways to abuse Planar Birth. Angels require a lot of mana, and Planar Birth can be bent into a huge midgame mana accelerator when paired with some friends. Imagine this: Play Scouting Trek to put 15 basic lands on top of your library. Sacrifice your Gamekeeper, dumping all those lands into your graveyard and flipping up (hopefully) a gigantic Angel that pops right into play. Then play Planar Birth to move those 15 lands from your graveyard into play.

But wait! There are other ways to abuse Scouting Trek. Play it on turn 2 to stack six basic lands on top of your library. On turn 3, draw one of them, play it, and play Clear the Land to pop the remaining five directly from your library into play. By the time you get to turn 4, you can play any Angel you've got!



Loses to Mudhole



Main Deck

60 cards

12 Forest	2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath	4 Clear the Land
12 Plains	3 Copper-Leaf Angel	1 Foster
24 lands	1 Exalted Angel	1 Greater Good
	4 Gamekeeper	4 Phyrexian Vault
	2 Luminous Angel	4 Planar Birth
	1 Platinum Angel	4 Scouting Trek
	1 Pristine Angel	18 other spells
	3 Reya Dawnbringer	
	1 Silver Seraph	
	18 creatures	

The deck needs a way to sacrifice its own creatures. You have to be able to pick off your own Gamekeeper on demand to make the Planar Birth trick work. Also, as long as Bringer of the Reya Dawn is reanimating things, you might as well take advantage, right? Unfortunately, there aren't many good options available in green and white (and colorless). Spawning Pit? Animal Boneyard? I decided to go with Phyrexian Vault (also good for icing your own Luminous Angel-generated tokens) and a backup Greater Good (a fine choice when the creature you're sacrificing is an extraneous Akroma, and, randomly, a threshold enabler for Silver Seraph). As always, adapt the deck to whatever makes you happy (or whatever you have available).

Omission Mission

Let me dwell on that last point for a moment. I get about 46 billion emails a week, and though I read all of them, I only answer about 20% of them. So I'm all in favor of reducing the amount of mail I get. One of the most popular messages I receive goes something like this:

Hi Mark. I love your column and your goofy decks. But why didn't you include [insert name of card] in your [insert name of deck] deck?

Over the past week, it was:

- Bosh, Iron Golem in Affinity for Fatties (the Mycosynth Golem deck), and
- Crystal Quarry in Shake Your Fist (the Fist of Suns deck) but it's the same every week. I love how these emails expect that there was a *reason* I didn't include the card. Folks, you give me way too much credit. I slap together a trio of new decks each week. If the cards aren't available on **Magic Online**, I don't even test them. And while it is true I am a supergenius with a robotic house and a rock-climbing tree, I am not perfect. No, really. I'm not! I'll pause to let the disillusioned stop crying. It's sad when heroes die.

In the meantime, let's explore why, exactly, I didn't include Bosh and Crystal Quarry in those decks:

- **I'm a jerk and want to withhold the good tech.** Hm. First part true, second part false.
- **The suggested card is not that good in the deck.** This is the case with Bosh. This was Devin Low's deck, remember, not mine. Bosh occurred to me, but I didn't think it was worth changing the deck to add it. I discussed the idea with Devin this week, and we both agreed that Sundering Titan was better in the 8-mana slot than Bosh. But here's the kicker: *We might be wrong!* Oh, wait, it gets better: *Even if we're right, you can totally ignore us and use Bosh anyway because you like it better!*
- **I didn't think of it.** This is the case with Crystal Quarry. It simply never occurred to me. But here's the instinct I don't understand: When you realize that I left a neat, synergistic card out of one of my decks, is the correct move to a) Write to me to explore the underlying methodology of my decision-making procedure, or b) Decide you know more about deckbuilding than this chowderhead and just add the card to your version of the deck? I think the answer is pretty clear. (Psst: It's b.)

Look, I know I'm a role model. I know you want to name your first-born children after me. But my decks are not perfect. Not even close. And they're not intended to be! They're intended to present interesting ideas that you can adapt and use however you want. Who cares whether a specific card was in my decklist? Who cares why I left it out? If you like your version of the deck better, *by all means play your version of the deck*. It's probably better than mine!

Death Becomes Her

Speaking of bad decks... let's have a howler! Very few Angels present themselves as combo pieces. Haunted Angel caught my eye because it has a leaves-play trigger, and those are always potentially abusable. This particular trigger gives your opponent flying creatures. Yeah... that seems like the right path to victory. Your opponent never wants free 3/3 flying creatures. To get this deck off the ground, it needs three things:

1. A way to repeatedly swat down your own Haunted Angel.
2. A way to punish your opponent for having creatures.
3. A way to prevent yourself from being marauded by black Angel tokens.

How can we accomplish Step 1? My first thought was to use Soul Foundry to make Haunted Angel copies, but that would take far too long. The Aluren-Enduring Renewal combo occurred to me—but it doesn't work! Enduring Renewal has a replacement effect which would divert Haunted Angel to your hand instead of the graveyard, and if it never hits the graveyard, its trigger never goes off. Enter Sigil of the New Dawn. Now when your Haunted Angel bites the fuzzy enchilada, it hits the graveyard and the abilities of both the Sigil and the Angel itself trigger. Stack them so the Sigil's ability resolves first. Pay **1** and return the Angel to your hand. When the Angel's ability resolves, you won't be able to remove it from the game since it's not in your graveyard anymore (it's hiding in your hand so the game won't be able to find it), but you'll still get to complete the rest of the ability. Your opponent gets a 3/3 black Angel token with flying. Mwa-ha-ha!

Hold on, that's not even close to completing Step 1. How did the Angel boot the golden trapezoid? And how can we repeatedly generate the 2 mana needed to bring the Angel back to hand via the Sigil? If only there were an artifact named Ashnod's Altar... There is? Great! We still need to filter colorless mana into white, so Skyshroud Elf or Farrelite Priest will have to help out. OK. Now our (notice how I've made you complicit in my insanity?) combo looks like this: Haunted Angel + Aluren + Ashnod's Altar + Sigil of the New Dawn + Farrelite Priest/Skyshroud Elf = your opponent gets infinite token creatures! You'll have to tap lands to generate the Sigil payment the first time through, but after that you can run forever.

What's next? Punishing your opponent. For immediate pain, there's Stronghold Discipline. It's the wrong color, but as a route to victory it's hy-ster-i-cal! Phyrexian Tower can generate the double black mana. Worried about finding these extra combo pieces? That's what Fecundity is for. Once the loop starts, you can draw your entire deck. Even while you only have a partial loop going, it pairs nicely with Sigil of the New Dawn to help you find what you need without sacrificing what you've already got.

How to stay alive? Well, this iteration of the combo goes off in one stupid turn. But Haunted Angel never had a better friend than Light of Day. So your opponent gets black creature tokens? So what? They're useless! Pair that with the theme-appropriate Angel's Trumpet and you have a slow way to accomplish the same trick. Darkest Hour grinds the entire game to a halt in case your opponent has more attackers than your defense can handle.



Loses to Spawning Pit 🃏

Main Deck
60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Forest 4 Krosan Verge 3 Mirrodin's Core 2 Phyrexian Tower 7 Plains 2 Windswept Heath <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>24 lands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Angelic Wall 2 Farrelite Priest 4 Haunted Angel 2 Skyshroud Elf <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>12 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Aluren 2 Angel's Trumpet 4 Ashnod's Altar 2 Darkest Hour 4 Fecundity 3 Light of Day 4 Sigil of the New Dawn 2 Stronghold Discipline <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>24 other spells</p>
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The thing I really like about that deck is that it uses cards from 11 different sets, and nearly all of them are important. I suppose *Fallen Empires* could be eliminated by using only Skyshroud Elves for color-washing. But why would you ever eliminate *Fallen Empires*?

Shades of Gray... No, Wait, Angels of Gray

Most Angels are white, of course. But they have an interesting relationship with black. Black is the color with the second-most Angels (topping blue). The color lays claim to Fallen Angel, Crypt Angel, and Desolation Angel. Wayward Angel turns black. Seraph and Avenging Angel have turned black (sort of) since their most recent incarnations are Soul Collector and Aphetto Vulture, respectively. And then there's the Angel that *is* black and white.



Selenia, Dark Angel is another one of the few combo-enabling Angels. Its ability requires no tapping and no mana payment, thus making it Johnny fodder. Let's assume that you have a free way to put Selenia into play. In that case, Selenia + Angelic Chorus (ring that theme bell!) = infinite life. Or Selenia + Pandemonium = burn your opponent out as long as you have a reasonable life total to start with. If you're at 5 life and Selenia's in your hand, you can deal 9 damage this way. If you're at 15, you can deal 24 damage.

Fantastic! On with the deck... Oh, you want to know what my mystical "free way to put Selenia into play" is, huh? Aluren isn't going to cut it this time. One of the methods of cheating giant creatures into play that I haven't mentioned yet is Cryptic Gateway. I like this one; I've used it before. Toss in some pseudo-Angels like Mistform Wall and Proteus Machine, or even reasonably cheap Angels like Guiding Spirit and Tormented Angel, and the Gateway can pop out any Angel you want regardless of mana cost. Normally, that's enough: You just want to use the Gateway to get your behemoth into play; once it's there, the Gateway's work is done. Not this time, though, as Selenia needs to make a grand entrance over and over. Intruder Alarm completes the puzzle—when Selenia enters, the Alarm untaps the creatures that tapped to bring her out. You're ready to return her to your hand and start again.

Gateway to Heaven



Main Deck

60 cards

2 Adarkar Wastes	4 Exalted Angel	1 Angelic Chorus
2 Bloodstained Mire	3 Guiding Spirit	3 Compulsion
4 Coastal Tower	1 Iridescent Angel	4 Cryptic Gateway
2 Flooded Strand	1 Platinum Angel	3 Fact or Fiction
4 Island	4 Proteus Machine	

3 Mirrodin's Core
1 Mountain
5 Plains
1 Swamp

3 Selenia, Dark Angel
3 Tormented Angel

19 creatures

3 Intruder Alarm
3 Pandemonium

17 other spells

24 lands

The Iridescent Angel and Platinum Angel are there because sometimes it's good not to lose the game. And I want to take full advantage of the Gateway by sneaking out 7-mana creatures! The Exalted Angels are there because they're good, they keep you alive, they're *really* good, and they'll act as face-down decoys for your Proteus Machines (or vice versa) so your opponent can't be sure what you've got hiding under there. Guiding Spirit is there mainly to unlock the Gateway, but you never know when you'll need to get your Selenia or your Platinum Angel back.

Until next week, have fun with Angels!

Mark

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