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Greetings from the Arctic hinterlands! To really get into the spirit of *Ice Age* Week, Scott Johns sent me trekking through the merciless icescape at the top of the world. Thanks, Scott! This really is a refreshing change from all that pesky August warmth and not-freezing-off-my-toes that was, frankly, getting a bit monotonous. I've been not freezing off my toes all my life, so I guess it was time for a change. While I'm up here, I've been inventing games like Polar Ball (bop the polar bear in the nose with a snowball = +5 points, get your arm mauled off = -15 points) and What Does the Stuff in the Thermometer Taste Like? But my real purpose in being here was to find the three *Ice Age* Sages, and I'm happy to report that my mission has been accomplished. Stay tuned as we rap about three prisony, lockish decks based around combos that hinge on *Ice Age* cards.

Do You Feel a Draft?

The first Sage I found, chilling out in his igloo, was O'Shea Jackson. I beseeched him... er, besought him... well, I asked him some questions.

Mark: Hi!

O'Shea: That's not a question.

Mark: Oh. So... What wisdom can you share with me, O wise one?

O'Shea: Don't bother with Krovikan Vampire.


Mark: I was kinda looking in its direction for a deck. Back in the day, it was always way too difficult to net creatures with it. But now I can slap Viridian Longbow on it while Death Pits of Rath is in play. Bingo, bango, I steal my opponent's creatures. Escape Routes, or some other sort of bounce, can rescue my Vampire in case any damage is sent towards it. Even better, if I bounce my Vampire after it exsanguinates a creature but before that creature comes back from the dead at the end of the turn, the "lose control" clause won't be in effect and I can keep my new undead minion forever. What's wrong with that?

O'Shea: Sure, that's a good plan. But don't use that Vampire. As will happen over an 11-year evolution, costs and power curves have been adjusted and redefined. Soul Collector is strictly better than Krovikan Vampire in five different ways.

Mark: Five!

O'Shea: ...

Mark: Oh, wait. Let me try that again. Five?

O'Shea: They're both  Vampires with nearly identical reanimation abilities. But Soul Collector has +0/+1, it has flying, it has morph, the dead creature returns immediately, and you keep that creature permanently.

Mark: Maybe I don't want the creature to return immediately. Maybe I want the creature to return later so I can Tremor or Wrath during that window of time while it's not on the table.

O'Shea: Uh, yeah. Sure.

Mark: What else is strictly worse in *Ice Age* than in later sets?

O'Shea: Lots of stuff. Plenty of the early cantrips, like Flare. Altar of Bone is painful compared to Eladamri's Call. Soldevi Machinist is no Vedalken Engineer, though the creature types are different so it's not a strict upgrade.

Mark: Is anything better in *Ice Age*?

O'Shea: Sure. Costs were still new, so fluctuations from what we now consider the norm happened on both sides. Just look at Rime Dryad next to Norwood Ranger or Woodland Druid. Crazy!

Mark: Do you have a deck for me?

O'Shea: You know it. It's Total War. And when I'm finished, it's gonna be a bloodbath.

The Imps of War



Main Deck

60 cards

2 Mirrodin's Core	1 Goblin Sharpshooter	2 Bullwhip
2 Salt Marsh	1 Iron Myr	2 Ensnaring Bridge
4 Snow-Covered Island	1 Leaden Myr	2 Icy Manipulator
4 Snow-Covered Mountain	3 Nettling Imp	2 Leonin Bola
2 Snow-Covered Swamp	3 Norritt	2 Talisman of Dominance
4 Sulfurous Springs	4 Silent Arbiter	2 Talisman of Indulgence
4 Underground River	1 Silver Myr	4 Total War
2 Urborg Volcano	2 Varchild's War-Riders	16 other spells
24 lands	4 Zuran Spellcaster	
	20 creatures	

Parts of this deck have existed for years, and some elements even predate *Ice Age*. Back in Alpha, pairing Icy Manipulator with Nettling Imp was almost as good a way to ice a creature as pairing it with Royal Assassin. Force your opponent's creature to attack, then tap it so it couldn't attack. It would die of shame at the end of the turn. *Ice Age* reintroduced Icy and gave us a new Nettling Imp—one that could untap Zuran Spellcaster if it had nothing better to do.

Ice Age also gave us Total War. This red enchantment basically said that if any of your creatures attacked, all the rest of them were automatically Nettled: They better attack too, or they'll croak. That could combo with either pesky Imp to force all of your opponent's creatures to attack... which doesn't necessarily help you. Enter Silent Arbiter. (You could also use Dueling Grounds, but if you're going to go 5-color, I can think of better plans.) Norritt forces one of your opponent's creatures to foolishly charge into battle. The Arbiter forbids the rest of his creatures to attack as well. (Trust me. Or at least trust Rule 500.2.) Then Total War kills the rest of his creatures. Talk about crowd control. Note that these two combos don't work together; you have method A for destroying one creature and method B for destroying all but one creature. If you have Total War, Norrittize something, then tap that something, your opponent is off the hook for that combat phase... though you still take out whatever you poked with Norritt.



Varchild's War-Riders are in the deck to make sure your opponent has some creatures you can send to their doom this way. Also, giving him some 1/1 tokens makes the Total War combo much better than if he would otherwise only have, say, a horde of 6/6 creatures. And the War-Riders and the Arbiter are good buddies. There are various alternates and redundancies built into the deck; you can try to build it with whichever pieces you have. Its main weakness is that almost all of its creatures are tiny. Earthquake is not your friend. Pyroclasm is not your friend. Tremor stole your girlfriend and ran over your dog.

Why does the deck include snow-covered lands? Because it's *Ice Age* Week, dangit!

Counter Culture

The next Sage I sought out... er, seached out... well, the next one I found was Tracy Marrow making snow angels.

Mark: Hey, how's it going?

Tracy: I got my brain on hype. Tonight'll be your night.

Mark: Cool. Share some wisdom about *Ice Age*.

Tracy: Back then, the color pie wasn't as fully baked as it is today. For example, look at the green card Freyalise's Winds. That card was so powerful that when it was redone for *Invasion*, it was weakened to not affect artifacts, its cost was bumped up, and it was shifted to blue!

Mark: Wait, it was never powerful...


Tracy: And Conquer wasn't strong enough, so when that was moved to blue for *Onslaught*, a mana was shaved off it!

Mark: Was anything *not* moved to blue?


Tracy: Green's direct damage and permanent destruction didn't wind up in blue, but Sage #3 will have more about that. Oh, wait, those cards are from *Alliances*, not *Ice Age*. Never mind.

Mark: Any other oddities besides Temporal Distortion, Annex, Splintering Wind, and Tornado?

Tracy: This was back in the day when lots of colors could counter stuff. Red had Pyroblast, black had Stromgald Cabal, and white had Order of the Sacred Torch. Those last two didn't say "counter" at the time, but we all knew what they meant.

Paint It Black 		
Main Deck <i>60 cards</i>		
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Blind Seer	2 Capsize
4 Coastal Tower	2 Jasmine Seer	1 Circle of Protection: Red
3 Island	4 Order of the Sacred Torch	1 Convalescence
3 Plains	1 Puppeteer	2 Hibernation
4 Snow-Covered Island	3 Vodalian Mystic	2 Hydroblast
4 Snow-Covered Plains		1 Light of Day
1 Soldevi Excavations	14 creatures	3 Mind Bend
<hr/>		4 Rule of Law
23 lands		4 Serum Visions
		3 Staff of Domination
		<hr/>
		23 other spells

This is a lock deck, and although it's blue-white, it relies on the white part for the countering! Order of the Sacred Torch + Vodalian Mystic means you can counter any one spell a turn for the cost of 1 life. Throw in Rule of Law (or Arcane Laboratory), and your opponent only gets to attempt one spell a turn!

Replace the Mystic with Blind Seer and you can do the same thing for  and 1 life. It's more expensive, but Blind Seer is better in the long game than the Mystic. It's more versatile: It can hit

permanents, which interacts well with your *Ice Age*-era Circle of Protection, your Light of Day, your Hibernation, and your Hydroblast. It's bigger: Beating down with its 3/3 bulk is your victory condition... after you remove all your opponent's permanents from the board. And you can activate it multiple times: This is key if you need to counter a spell on your turn, then untap your Order and counter a spell on your opponent's turn. Untapping one permanent is doable thanks to Puppeteer and Staff of Domination, but untapping both the Order and the Mystic is a tall order.



It's not a total lock yet, though, because countering all your opponent's spells will still chew away at your life total. But the Staff can replenish that life, as can Jasmine Seer or Convalescence. Jasmine Seer, like many cards in this deck, can benefit from the loving touch of Mind Bend. And yes, in an earlier iteration of this deck, Balduvian Shaman was in there. If you've got the moxie to include it, I tip my cap to you.

Why does the deck include snow-covered lands? Because it's still *Ice Age* Week, dangit!

Into the Chasm

Finally, after trudging around the icy deathscapes for so long that I was seeing the art for Touch of Death and Dance of the Dead trailing me in anticipation (I probably should have brought some mittens), I stumbled upon the third and wisest Sage. No, not Santa Claus—that guy wouldn't know a combo if it bit him on his nose like a cherry—Rob Van Winkle.

Mark: Quick, before I freeze—do you have any *Ice Age* combos?

Rob: Hmm... that set has Necropotence, Illusions of Grandeur, Enduring Renewal... nope, no combos to speak of.

Mark: What are the best cards in the set?

Rob: You can't go wrong with Ice Cauldron. Or Balduvian Shaman. They were created thanks to a licensing deal with LensCrafters, if you like to squint and say "huh?" you can't go wrong with those two.

Mark: Why are you tormenting me?

Rob: 'Cause my style's like a chemical spill.

Mark: For a sage, you don't seem very wise.

Rob: Ever gotten frostbite on your temporal lobe? I don't recommend it.

Mark: That explains a lot. Look, can you help me out with anything?

Rob: How about a long-standing game mechanic introduced in *Ice Age*?

Mark: Yeah! That sounds perfect!

Rob: Great. Cumulative upkeep it is.

Mark: Uuuhhhrrrggg...

Rob: Hey, cumulative upkeep isn't as bad as it once was. It got a lot better when Power Conduit came out because now you can remove age counters from your permanents. But that's nothing compared to Eon Hub. A lot of the cards with cumulative upkeep are really powerful, and the only thing that keeps them in check—or even keeps them bad—is that they're going to quickly become too expensive to keep around. Erase the words "cumulative upkeep" from them, and you can do some nasty things. You want a near lock?

Mark: Always.

Rob: Eon Hub and Glacial Chasm.

Mark: Yikes.

Rob: You want another?

Mark: Yes, sir, Mr. Wise Sage, sir.

Rob: Eon Hub and Ritual of Subdual.



Main Deck

60 cards

2 City of Brass	2 Arctic Wolves	4 Ancestral Knowledge
1 Forest	1 Infernal Denizen	4 Darksteel Ingot
3 Glacial Chasm	3 Squallmonger	4 Eon Hub
2 Island	_____	2 Mystic Remora
4 Mirrodin's Core	6 creatures	3 Power Conduit
1 Shivan Gorge		4 Ritual of Subdual
4 Snow-Covered Forest		2 Talisman of Dominance
4 Snow-Covered Island		2 Talisman of Impulse
1 Soldevi Excavations		3 Tornado
4 Yavimaya Coast		_____
_____		28 other spells
26 lands		

Eon Hub + Glacial Chasm means that although you never get another combat phase, you can't ever be damaged again. Eon Hub + Ritual of Subdual means that no player can produce colored mana for the rest of the game unless he's got some non-land mana sources. You do. Does your opponent? Your opponent can still play artifacts (which I hear are pretty popular these days), so the game isn't over yet, but it'll be hard to break your lock without access to Naturalize, Vindicate, or any other colored spell.



Eon Hub, art by Daren Bader

If this deck doesn't find a way to manage your cumulative upkeep costs, it will roll over. That's why Ancestral Knowledge is in there; that'll get you to an Eon Hub or, as a backup plan, a Power Conduit. Note that you want *both* of those artifacts to get best use out of Tornado, which will annihilate your opponent's side of the table. Yeah. Green does that. With a Glacial Chasm in play, you don't need to worry about pain from Talismans or pain lands... or Squallmonger, which is your primary road to victory. It's perfect: You can't attack, remember, so you need direct damage. In green or blue. That mainly costs colorless mana because you've got a Ritual of Subdual out. The Squallmonger way is just flat-out faster than the Zuran Spellcaster way. You can splash another color (I've got a Shivan Gorge and the *Ice Agetastic*, Eon Hub-loving Infernal Denizen in there), but Squallmonger + Glacial Chasm is just way too much fun.

The alternate victory condition is, when you're ready, to blow up your own Chasm with Tornado and attack with fat, cumulative upkeepless creatures. If you want to do that, definitely throw in some Aboroths.

I trust that today we all learned a little something about **Magic**, a little something about *Ice Age*, a little something about life, and a little something about setting your own foot on fire for warmth. I

know I did. Until next week, have fun with *Ice Age*.

Mark

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