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
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Lethal Vapors



Adrian Sullivan · *Single-Card Strategies*
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Time Walk. When it comes to powerful cards, this is one of the best – no one will contest that. As an avid [5-color player](#) (the paper-based real world inspiration for MTGO's Prismatic format), there are all kinds of old-school cards you'd love to have in your deck. I always tell people that simply having a single **Time Walk** in your deck increases your deck's power by twelve times. "Now your deck is twelve times as powerful. Do the math!"

While there is no (real) mystical formula to figure out how much power a deck can gain from **Time Walk**, it goes without saying that the effect was too powerful. Wizards continuously makes newish versions of the card that are self-hindered in some way. The least hindered version, **Time Warp**, was only slightly more expensive, but at  the extra cost could really catch up with you. Red's **Time Walk** is **Final Fortune**. I am proud to play **Final Fortune** in all of my 5-color decks, that is, at least until I own a *real* **Time Walk**. Of course, **Final Fortune**'s drawback is pretty huge; as it's name implies, if you don't win on that next turn, you lose the game. Still, beggars can't be choosers.

Black's **Time Walk** is definitely a beggar's **Time Walk**. Despite that, there is a lot to be said for it.



The heart of the beggar

So, **Lethal Vapors** does not actually say "Take another turn." Generally speaking, your opponent is the one who gets to have control over when the Vapors gets axed. Multiplayer fans are even worse off – sadly only one opponent needs to lose their turn to remove the Vapors. Either way, unless things are going *especially* badly, your opponent gets to decide when to give you an extra turn.

Extra turns are pretty neat, actually. My compatriot on Wednesday, Mike Flores once explained to me some of his ideas of Tempo in **Magic**. One of the key ideas is how we can get full **Time Walks**. An extra turn generally means a free untap, a free draw phase, a free land drop (if we have a land) and a free attack (if we have good attackers). Sometimes we can call all kinds of

things a “Time Walk”. One of the big drawbacks of the Vapors is that it is entirely possible we won’t be able to get a “free attack” if our opponent has anything to say about it.

We have control over when we drop that Vapors, though. Depending on how we’ve built our deck, there can be a “best time” to drop it. If our Lethal Vapors deck runs few to no creatures, just dropping it can be enough by itself. If we also run creatures, sometimes we can make a judgment call and decide that even though our opponent has a creature or two out, we’ll drop the Vapors because we have a board advantage (stronger, better, and more critters). This is one of the more dangerous propositions, however. If they kill our monsters, you might feel a bit silly with creatures in your hand and a **Lethal Vapors** on the table. This is exactly one of the reasons that **Lethal Vapors** is never all that good in Sealed Deck or Draft: it can be entirely too hard to get out the Vapors and have it turn into any kind of advantage if you both are running creatures.

Generally, your opponent will deal with the Vapors like this: on their turn, they will destroy the Vapors and then drop creatures. This will mean you will get two turns in a row. A good Lethal Vapors deck will be well prepared for this situation.

Taking out their guys

Lethal Vapors works best if you are good at killing things. You know that your opponent is going to be redropping new threats as best as they can, and your best response is to be able to kill them. **Lethal Vapors** is at its worst when there are almost no creatures to be found in your opponent’s deck. In this situation, not only are you stuck with a near-useless **Lethal Vapors** in your deck, but all of your support cards to make the **Lethal Vapors** more potent also become useless.

When it comes to killing creatures, you have two general options. Point-and-click and sweep.

Point-and-click

With this method, you are using the tried and true method of killing creatures one at a time. Since you are already in black, you have access to some of the better creature elim in the game here. **Chainer’s Edict**, **Diabolic Edict** and **Smother** are great starters here. Each of those spells is capable of very effectively killing a creature.

Red spells usually have the added advantage of being usable against the other player. Any reasonable burn spell will do, here. If you’re playing in Extended (or other older environments), you’ll also have access to **Terminate**. **Flametongue Kavu** is a truly great anti-creature card, but will end up making you feel pretty silly if your opponent is running a low-to-no creature deck.

The poor cousins in all of this are Blue and Green. Blue mostly only has bounce and a few “Tim” effects like **Prodigal Sorcerer**. Green is even more limited to hoping that **Wing Snare** can hit, or using a **Thornscape Battlemage** (with a bit of help from Red) to knock out a creature. If you’re lucky enough to be playing against artifact creatures, Green really shines, but outside of Standard, Artifact creatures are a bit harder to find.

White has a few spells as well. Of course, there is always the “best elim ever”, **Swords to Plowshares**. Most of their more recent spells, you have a bit less to work with, but it is still there. **Arrest** and **Pacifism** are both fairly reasonable spells. Where White shines a bit better is in the “Sweep” department.

Sweep

No mention of creature-sweeping effects would feel right without mentioning **Wrath of God**. All of the Wrath effects are to be looked at here. **Winds of Rath**, **Rout**, **Akroma’s Vengeance** – all of these spells smash the board of creatures. With any luck, you’ll be able to follow these spells up with another **Lethal Vapors**. Both Black and Red also have reasonable access to sweep. **Starstorm**, **Massacre**, **Barter in Blood**, **Infest**, and **Earthquake** can clear the table pretty well. Outside of those colors, about all you have access to is **Evacuation**.

One of the best ways to use sweep is to mix it with point-and-click. **Wrath of God** effects are best when they are able to knock out more than one creature. If your opponent tries to slowly play out their creatures one at a time, only having sweep effects can be tedious. If, however, you have access to a bit of point-and-click, they are in the awkward position of trying to guess which cards you have in your hand.

Breaking the symmetry

One of the key goals that I've gone over again and again in this column is looking at cards for ways to break the inherent symmetry of an effect. Many of the spells we play were initially designed to have some kind of symmetry as a way to balance the card. A classic example of this is the card **Balance**. With **Balance**, nearly everything both players have is equalized. While the card is still powerful if you just throw it into any old deck, it gains even more power when your deck isn't hurt nearly as much by the same cards.

Just as **Wrath of God** is even stronger if you don't have any creatures to lose, so too is **Lethal Vapors** stronger. If there is no way for the **Lethal Vapors** to hurt effect you, you'll never be caught destroying it yourself. Another reason that **Lethal Vapors** can be problematic is when it comes to killing off your opponent. If you are sitting with a bunch of creatures in your hand, just waiting to kill your opponent, but your own **Lethal Vapors** is sitting on the table mocking you, it is *not* a good feeling.

Using "man-lands" of various kinds can be a great way to get around the vapors. Cards like **Stalking Stones** and **Blinkmoth Nexus** don't trigger the "comes into play" clause of the **Lethal Vapors**. This gives you a viable path to victory that can dodge an in-play Vapors. Also, running more mana is just another great way to increase the stability of your deck. Of course man-lands aren't the only way to dodge the Vapors.

Creatures (with benefits)

Creatures with benefits. In essence, these guys serve two purposes: give you a path to victory and also kill opposing creatures. You'll usually want to have your deck at 60 cards, so any card that can serve two purposes for your deck is bound to be a good idea. I already mentioned **Flametongue Kavu** earlier, but he has one major drawback: he can't usually come into play unless there is a creature for him to kill.

What we want, then, are creatures that can kill other creatures, but don't require someone to kill. Here are just a few of the better options available in Standard.

- **Nekrataal**
- **Bane of the Living**
- **Skinthinner**
- **Skirk Marauder**

There are a lot more to choose from, of course, but this gives you the idea. Of all of these, my favorite is probably **Bane of the Living**. Having a potential 4/3 body is great, as well as a potential **Wrath of God** on legs.

But there are other kinds of benefits as well...

One more mana...

Lethal Vapors only "destroys". This opens the door for Regeneration.

If you take care to include Regeneration on every creature that you play with, your own creatures will be able to survive the Vapors when they come into play. For most creatures, regeneration costs a single mana. The best creatures are most likely going to be found in Extended Legal decks. **Spectral Lynx** and **River Boa** are the first two creatures that come to mind. In Standard, you have access to **Troll Ascetic**. There are certainly plenty more options of course. If you have the green mana to invest, **Silvos** is a huge monster. Though less powerful, perhaps a bit more realistic is investing in **Twisted Abomination** (a long time favorite card of mine).

And finally, while it isn't regeneration, Indestructible creatures are also good at dodging Vapors. Keep your **Wing Shards** and other sacrifice effects handy for these guys (or play your own Darksteel creatures).

The long walk

Being able to consistently play a **Lethal Vapors** can be incredibly cruel to a creature-based opponent. There are a lot of ways to go about doing this, of course. The first the ability to find a Vapors and the other is the ability to replay it.

Most of the cards that help you find a Vapors are simple tutors. **Enlightened Tutor** and **Vampiric Tutor** are perfectly good examples that are legal in Extended. Other search cards can be things

like **Tainted Pact**, any Scry card (**Magma Jet** comes to mind), or effects like **Brainstorm**. Overall, however, this is a lot less fun than simply replaying the Vapors again and again.

Though expensive, the ever-classic **Skull of Orm** is a great candidate here. As a game progresses, a **Skull of Orm** can make the life of a creature-player incredibly problematic. Running other enchantments helps increase the Skulls power. The white creature handling spells we mentioned before (like **Pacifism**) are a great idea.

Less expensive options are also in White. **Monk Idealist** and **Auramancer** can bring back the Vapors and provide you with a potential finisher. **Argivian Find** is one of your cheapest options for getting the card back to your hand, and as an instant it is even more useful (not to mention its ability to return an artifact).

Green has perhaps the most powerful option, however. The fantastic **Eternal Witness** brings with it a much greater versatility. Without being limited to merely returning the Vapors, you can bring back the (hopefully) abundant creature-kill that you've already used so far in a game. If you feel like you have the upper hand, bringing back the Vapors can make it very difficult for an opponent to get back into the game.

Losing a single turn can be bad enough, but when you can potentially get hit by a flood of lost turns, things can be truly frustrating. I'm all for giving your opponent headaches.



Wrapping Up

Here is a sample Black/White Vapors deck, using some of the ideas I've talked about:

Standard Salt and Pepper Vapors		
60 cards		
3 Stalking Stones	3 Bane of the Living	4 Lethal Vapors
2 Mirrodin's Core	3 Twisted Abomination	4 Wrath of God
2 Temple of the False God	3 Eternal Dragon	3 Smother
7 Swamp		3 Wing Shards
9 Plains	9 creatures	3 Night's Whisper
23 land		3 Pulse of the Fields
		2 Beacon of Unrest
		2 Decree of Justice
		4 Chrome Mox
		28 other spells

This deck has a lot of tools to make use of the **Lethal Vapors**. It runs a bunch of elim spells to take care of creatures on the table. **Twisted Abomination** and **Eternal Dragon** can both turn into land when they aren't useful or be cast when they are useful. **Decree of Justice** can be used for a bunch of surprise blockers (or perhaps killers), and in a late game situation can really punish someone for giving you an extra turn ("I get a free turn? Okay, I'll make four 4/4 flying Angels. Okay, on my next turn, I'll attack.")

Chrome Mox helps to speed up the deck and is another potential outlet for dead cards against non-creature decks. Right now, you can expect to see a lot of artifact kill all over the place in tournament **Magic**, so definitely consider cutting them if you are playing in a competitive field. The **Night's Whisper** help make the cost of the Mox less relevant if you do play the card. In addition, with your scads of creature control, **Beacon of Unrest** can be downright mean.

I hope that you enjoyed this week's article. I'm going to be covering mostly Standard-legal cards in the next few weeks. If there is some card that you'd like to see covered, let me know by sending me an e-mail (try the link below, and no, I'm not scheduled to do any preview articles). Enjoy the rest of your week!



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