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Elvish Aberration



Adrian Sullivan · *Single-Card Strategies*
 Wednesday, September 15, 2004

Years and years and years ago, Mark Rosewater and friends asked me, “What is one of your favorite mechanics?” I didn’t have to even think about my answer. One of my favorite mechanics of all time is cycling.

As far as mechanics go, I like them simple and elegant. This idea came to light recently when our regular draft group was talking about the upcoming *Champions of Kamigawa* set. Somehow we started talking about what the rules were like back in the dark ages of **Magic**, and we all had a good laugh talking about phasing and banding. Courtney, one of the newer players, asked, “What’s banding?” The rules for banding are so complicated in comparison to almost every other mechanic, none of us wanted to actually describe it. Eventually, we all laughed because no one had answered the question yet.

Cycling, on the other hand, is simple. Spend a few mana to get rid of a cycling card. Draw a card. Cycling is a simple way to reduce the luck inherent to shuffling a deck of cards. When *Onslaught* Block introduced Landcycling in *Scourge*, it was a great way to reshape the mechanic into a simple, new idea. It was simple, elegant, and, like the original, it helped reduce the impact of luck on the game.

Clearly the strongest of the Landcyclers is **Eternal Dragon**. Maybe I like to imagine **Dan Paskins** frowning, but I like Elves. Sure, I could like **Wirewood Guardian**, but I find myself leaning pretty heavily towards **Elvish Aberration**.



What it is, and when to use it

So, what do we get from an **Elvish Aberration**? Essentially, we get a split spell like **Fire/Ice**. ☞♣ is a summon spell that makes a fairly large mana-producing elf mutant and ♠ is an uncounterable instant that searches your library for any forest. Like almost every decent split card, you really should only play it if you feel like you can make use of both sides of the

equation. If you don't have some way to make use of the “elf mutant” half of the split card, perhaps a forest or some other green-producing mana card might be more to your liking.

A perfect example of a deck using both sides of the split is Domenic Minicucci's Elf and Nail [deck](#) from the North American Challenge.

Domenic Minicucci		
Elf and Nail 60 cards		
1 Mountain	1 Sundering Titan	3 Tooth and Nail
4 Wooded Foothills	1 Darksteel Colossus	4 Vernal Bloom
16 Forest	1 Triskelion	4 Skullclamp
<hr/>		
21 land	2 Duplicant	11 other spells
	1 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa	
	3 Vine Trellis	
	4 Birds of Paradise	
	4 Wirewood Symbiote	
	4 Wood Elves	
	3 Wirewood Herald	
	3 Viridian Shaman	
	1 Elvish Aberration	
	28 creatures	

Here, the deck made use of **Elvish Aberration** being an Elf (he could search for it with **Wirewood Heralds** – more on this later), he could use it to simply get a forest, and he could use the mana ability of the creature to go from the 6 mana required to cast it on one turn to 9 mana on the next turn – coincidentally just enough to cast a **Tooth and Nail** with entwine. When you're building any deck with a landcycler, one of the great things about it is that if you have enough mana (and you don't need any more), it can turn itself into a potential threat.

It's also important to note that the **Elvish Aberration** can search for *any* forest. This includes **Bayous** and **Tropical Islands** (and any other green dual land you might wish to find). While not typically a consideration, I know that my last 5-color deck (shilling for www.5-color.com) ran 4 **Elvish Aberrations** at one point, for that very reason.

Elvish Aberration: a big, fat elf



As a big, fat elf, the Aberration suddenly becomes a part of a much larger picture. First of all, Dan Paskins would award you points for killing one in a tournament. Secondly, and more importantly, it looks and smells like a big, fat elf, so you can track it down like one.

Obviously, this means that a dying **Wirewood Herald** can find it. This is actually a pretty significant little feat. Oftentimes, a turn 2 **Wirewood Herald** is a reasonable early game defender. The card can kill a 1 toughness creature in the early game, and if you should happen to be short of mana, those two mana you spent on the Herald can find you the third mana.

Another excellent card that can find an Aberration is the **Fierce Empath**. **Fierce Empath** is a truly potent little card. One of my favorite playtest partners, Ben Dempsey, created a White/Green deck for *Onslaught* Block with three or four of these little guys. Not only could the Empath find an Aberration (or an **Eternal Dragon**) if you were a little land hungry, but once you had enough mana, you could use it to find other powerful expensive cards like Akroma or Kamahl. The Empath is a great card to pair with an Aberration for this very reason: in any deck that might want to power out mana for one of those big guns late in the game, an Aberration could be a fine way to do it.

Skyshroud Poacher is another way to drop the big, fat elf into play, but it might be a little bit weaker here. With access to a Poacher, there are probably better elves to be getting: a **Priest of**

Titania if you need the mana, or a **Deranged Hermit** if you want access to a more offensive threat. A bit better might be a **Sylvan Messenger**. While still a crapshoot if you aren't stacking your library with **Brainstorm** or the like, it can be great to hit a card like **Aberration** and another elf. Much like a **Fact or Fiction**, oftentimes we're happy if we just get a reasonable spell and a land.

All of this landcycling is good, but why not run a Tusker?

Why not indeed?

In many ways, a **Krosan Tusker** is a far more powerful card. You get two cards instead of one. One of those cards could even end up being a spell. As a creature, the Tusker's 6/5 is more impressive than a 4/5. As a beast, the Tusker can use cards like **Contested Cliffs**. These are all big pluses. But, there are a few downsides as well.

Even if you aren't running cards to search for **Elvish Aberration**, there are times when it can simply be better. The simplest reason is that maybe you *are* running dual lands and the **Aberration** helps fix your mana more precisely. Another reasonable reason might be that you actually do use the mana acceleration of the **Aberration**. But neither of those are the most important reason.

The best reason to choose the **Aberration** over the **Tusker** is this: speed. In some decks, you might want to actually use the extra card power of the **Tusker**. At times, though, even spending just that additional one mana is too long to wait (especially when you're stuck on two lands!). When you are choosing cards for a deck, they are all constantly in competition for any other card that you might want to play in the deck. Even if **Tusker** might seem more powerful in your deck, the **Elvish Aberration** option is often worth considering, thanks to its cheaper cycle cost (among other things).

Keep it simple, stupid...

One of the simplest things that can be said about an **Elvish Aberration's** ability is that it cycles. This means that it triggers every single cycling trigger that there is. The most useful ones can be found in a single deck: **Astral Slide**.

If you get the **Astral Slide** out, an **Elvish Aberration** can be useful for any number of things. First of all, cycling all the time means that you generally have cards in your hand. If the **Aberration** is in play, you can cycle a whole heck of a lot more. Also, it generally means that you are likely to have cards in play that are helped out by **Astral Slide**. These are cards like **Fierce Empath**, **Viridian Shaman**, **Solemn Simulacrum**, and **Eternal Witness**. Using **Witness** to get back dead **Aberrations** for yet more land, or **Empaths** to get more **Aberrations** is a pretty simple, if effective, means of using the **Aberration**. Turn two cycle **Aberration**, turn three play **Witness** to get it back is a good way to get your mana base off to a great start coming right out of the gates.

Sometimes the only good mutant is a dead mutant


As a cycler, the **Aberration** automatically asks: "Am I any good in the graveyard?" Here the answer is a resounding "Yes!"

The card can really begin to shine if it begins acting like a Green **Eternal Dragon**. There are a number of cards that can make this happen. **Oath of Ghouls** and **Oversold Cemetery** both do the trick here. The **Oath of Ghouls** needs you to have more creatures in your graveyard than your opponent, while the **Oversold Cemetery** merely requires four creatures in the yard. One of the things about both of these cards is that they require these things to be true both when they go on the stack to be checked and when they are to be resolved. Running cycling creatures like the **Aberration** is a good way to begin getting creatures in the 'yard. If you run an abundance of them, it can be a lot easier to get that graveyard full enough to start returning some of these creatures. Other ways that you might want to consider include **Buried Alive**, **Avenging Druid**, **Hermit Druid**, and **Entomb**.

Other graveyard effects are also quite useful. A **Genesis** can serve the same function as an **Oath of Ghouls/Oversold Cemetery**. **Recurring Nightmare** is also worthy of consideration. It's not unreasonable to have access to an incredible amount of mana on the 4th turn. (Turn one, **Birds of Paradise**. Turn two, **Recurring Nightmare**. Turn three, cycle the **Aberration**, lay a creature, use **Recurring Nightmare** to turn it into the **Aberration**. Turn four, have 8 mana.) **Living Death** and to a lesser extent **Patriarch's Bidding** can both accomplish the same kinds of goals.

I've always also been partial to **Death Spark**. One of the nice things about Cycling and Landcycling is that the discard of the spell is a part of the cost of the effect. If someone tries to destroy a non-creature after you cast a **Death Spark** (probably in response to the death of one of your creatures), you can let the **Death Spark** resolve and cycle the Aberration on top of it before they can do anything to stop you. On your next upkeep, for 1 mana you can get the Spark back since it is underneath a creature.


What GGGood is all of that mana, anyway?


At first,  may seem like a big waste of time on an **Elvish**




Sometimes you just can't get enough

Aberration. After all, if you already have access to the six mana to get out an Aberration, why would you really need any more?

Sometimes, though, you just want to have a *lot* of green mana. At , it is entirely possible that you are unable to actually cast anything that costs several green mana. **Elvish Aberration** can act as a Green **Gilded Lotus** in this scenario. **Silvos** or **Kamahl** both require a lot of green, as do **Force of Nature**, one of my old favorites **Gargantuan Gorilla**, **Weatherseed Treefolk**, **Rushwood Elemental**, and the best fattie ever, **Verdant Force**.

At other times, you might be expecting to find yourself in a mana-deprived environment. Whether it be **Armageddon** or **Cataclysm**, **Winter Orb** or **Static Orb**, getting  from a single permanent can become a pretty big deal.

One of the most useful things to do with a bunch of green mana is to cast several  spells in one single turn. The first one that comes to mind is **Eternal Witness**. Casting an **Eternal Witness** to get an **Eternal Witness** to get any other green spell can require a lot of green mana if you're planning on casting them all in one turn.

Wrapping Up

I put nearly all of these principles to use when I was making decks for **Onslaught** Block. I was working off of the Black/Green base of **Roshambo** that I designed for the **Masques** Block Pro Tour in New York, and I wanted a similar concept for **Onslaught**. Ben Dempsey and I eventually had a really exciting deck that was a complete blast to play for the Block, and about the only thing that it didn't do was use **Astral Slide**. Jacob "I won the name 'Danger' from edt back in the day so people should stop using it" Janoska also contributed a lot to this decklist.

OnBC Roshambo – Adrian Sullivan/Ben Dempsey/Jacob Janoska		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
3 Temple of the False God	3 Oversold Cemetery	4 Withered Wretch
3 Grand Coliseum	3 Decree of Pain	3 Nantuko Vigilante
11 Swamp	3 Smother	1 Smother
9 Forest	4 Infest	1 Oversold Cemetery
		1 Decree of Pain
	13 other spells	



26 land	2 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa
3 Bane of the Living	1 Visara the Dreadful
4 Ravenous Baloth	2 Krosan Tusker
3 Fierce Empath	15 sideboard cards
1 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa	
3 Silklash Spider	
1 Visara the Dreadful	
4 Elvish Aberration	
1 Twisted Abomination	
1 Krosan Tusker	
21 creatures	

The main was great. Most of the cards are 4-ofs between main and board. The particular main deck was built to try to beat both White-based control decks and Goblins. The decision to ignore Zombies does seem to be correct in retrospect.

Here the deck includes a Tusker and a **Twisted Abomination** to go with your Aberrations to fetch with **Fierce Empath** in case you want to actually gain card advantage or search for something other than a Forest.

The Aberrations were incredibly critical against White control. White can **Akroma's Vengeance** and do a bunch of other mean things in that format. One of the great cards you want against White is **Kamahl, Fist of Krosa**. If you have mana open, he can make it deadly for White to use Vengeance at all since you can animate a bunch of their lands in response. Of course, having much mana open after you cast a Kamahl can be hard. That is where the Aberration comes in: on the turn following casting an Aberration, it isn't unreasonable to have four mana open after you cast a Kamahl. Suddenly, if the opponent uses a Vengeance, they are going to lose four land. Generally, they are going to have to simply kill the elf on the turn you lay it even if they don't want to. The same principle holds true in Standard with **Wrath of God**.

If your opponent isn't kind enough to cast **Wrath of God** effects for you, you can do it yourself. With **Infest**, **Decree of Pain**, and **Bane of the Living**, you can combine these cards with the Aberration to wipe out nearly your opponent's entire board most of the time. Things can truly get nutty when the Aberration gives you enough mana to activate a Kamahl and actually cast **Decree of Pain**.

I was really pleased with the deck. I'm planning on playing it again if I ever have a chance to. While the Aberration may not be as flashy as many other cards in **Magic**, its flexible ability to improve your mana consistency while also gaining other advantages is very powerful, if subtle.

Hope you have a great rest of your week.

-Adrian Sullivan

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