

Mark Gottlieb

Thursday, September 30, 2004

I'm going to let you in on a little behind-the-scenes secret at magicthegathering.com. Theme weeks are a pain in the neck. Scott Johns sits in his ivory tower all the way up on the second floor (that's the ritzy floor) of the Wizards of the Coast suburban compound and he throws darts or rolls dice or reads entrails (hey, references to my coworkers performing mystical animal sacrifice rituals two weeks in a row! Keen.) or whatever else he does to determine the theme weeks, and then we peon writers have to kowtow to his wishes. Instead of writing about what we know best, we have to twist ourselves around to make a strained attempt at adhering to the topic. I've never skipped a theme week in a year and a half (except for Mulligan Week—what was *that* about?), but no more! I'm cutting the puppet strings! You can't push me around anymore, Scott. I've been reading self-help books. It's time for me to Actualize my Life Script. My Me-Quality demands Equality! So no matter what your precious theme is this week, I'm skipping it so I can write my normal, standard, non-theme-constrained column, and there's not a damn thing you can do about it. Seriously—how the hell was I supposed to write something for Scott's so-called "Combo Week" anyway?



Copy Target Idea

Instead, I'll just build some combo decks. My archenemy Bennie "Ten Fingers" Smith suggested a Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker-Chittering Rats combo. OK. Seems fine. I myself am tickled chartreuse by the Kiki Jiki-Gemini Engine combo. It doesn't "win the game" like Bennie's combo, but there's something about doubling a Gemini Engine (via Kiki-Jiki) then doubling them again (with the Twin tokens they spawn) that I find very amusing. Throw in a Minamo, School at Water's Edge to untap Mr. Jiki, and you can have six 3/4 attackers all replicating from a single Gemini Engine and then collapsing back into it at the end of the turn. It's like playing a game in a House of Mirrors. Well it would be if they weren't all broken.

But neither of those is the real broken Kiki-Jiki combo. I've been missing Intruder Alarm combos left and right lately, so Scott Mills sent me an email to suggest the combo of:

Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker + Intruder Alarm + any other non-legendary creature





Infinite hasty creatures coming right up. Each time Kiki-Jiki makes a token creature, Intruder Alarm untaps Kiki-Jiki so you can make another token creature. Isn't that clever? Isn't that innovative? No? Maybe it's because my new archenemy Mike Flores broke that combo yesterday. (Who decided my Combo Week column would be on Thursday, after everyone else already had their turn?!) Mike didn't build an entire deck using the combo, though, so I will. While my deck ideally wants to get the Alarm out to go with the Mirror Breaker, it focuses more on which creatures you can copy for fun and profit. Creatures with comes-into-play abilities are good. (Copy a Merchant of Secrets to draw a card.) Creatures with leaves-play abilities are good. (Copy a Rukh Egg and you'll get a temporary 0/3 Egg token... and a permanent 4/4 Rukh token.) Creatures with both are very good. (Scott was partial to Solemn Simulacrum.) Since Kiki-Jiki grants its token creatures haste, even creatures with tap abilities are fine. If you have the legendary Goblin and Daring Apprentice on the table, you can tap Kiki-Jiki to counter a spell.

Kiki-Jiki/Intruder Alarm



Main Deck

60 cards

2 City of Brass	1 Daring Apprentice	4 Boomerang
7 Island	2 Gemini Engine	4 Intruder Alarm
2 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	4 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker	4 Thirst for Knowledge
4 Mirrodin's Core	4 Merchant of Secrets	4 Wayfarer's Bauble
9 Mountain	1 Rukh Egg	
24 lands	4 Solemn Simulacrum	16 other spells
	1 Triskelion	
	3 Vulshok Sorcerer	
	20 creatures	

Anything I Can Do, I Can Do Better

And now we get to the part of the column where I talk about me. I'm pretty great, huh? Yeah, I think so too. One of my innumerably many skills is being some sort of mad genius card designer. But I've learned great lessons from the people who have come before me. Both Mark Rosewater and Mike Elliott have designed so many **Magic** cards that they can't possibly keep track of them all. Well, I'm not going to make the same mistake they did. That's why I design so few. By only designing one card a year that makes it into print, I can keep track of all of them. I'm up to three. At this pace, I won't lose count for at least five more years. Yes, following on the illustrious heels of Erratic Explosion and Cackling Imp comes Seizan, Perverter of Truth. They even named it after me!

OK, they only named the second half after me. They named the first half after Paul Seizan, the French impressionist painter known as the Father of Modernism. With his colleagues Claude Mohnay and Georges Surrah, they tore up the European art world in the late 1800s. But let's get back to talking about me, the Perverter of Truth. You may find this hard to swallow, but some of the things I write about aren't quite as factual as I'd have you believe. I wish I could think of an example off the top of my head... nothing comes to mind... something untrue that I said recently... Hey, how about that time during *Champions of Kamigawa* previews when I said that there were no green cards in the upcoming set? That was a hoot, wasn't it? The crazy part was that I knew there'd be people out there who'd believe me, and I wasn't disappointed. I got some angry emails when I posted that ("How could they not print any green cards?!") and I got more when Mike Flores previewed a green card six days later ("You said there weren't any green cards in the set!?") So why'd I say it?

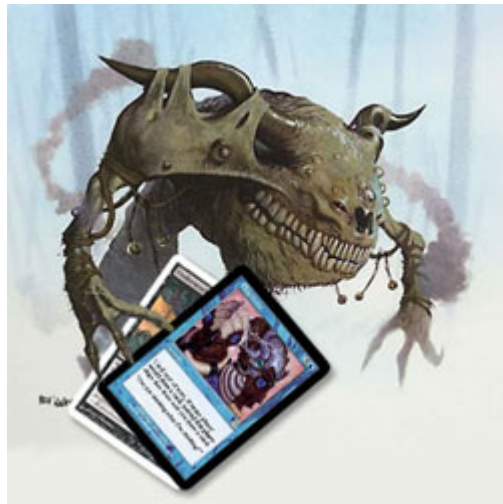
40% Ribbing Scott Johns. He had decided not to preview any green cards in the first two weeks, so I decided to call attention to that fact.

35% Causing chaos. I also decided to exploit that fact. I have a subversive streak.

25% Keeping you on your toes. The statement about skipping green was so ludicrously outrageous that it was utterly impossible. But wait... It was so outrageously ludicrous that why would I even say it if it weren't true? Don't get comfortable. You never know what I'll say, or Wizards of the Coast will do, next.

There are three things you should take away from that experience. 1) You can't spell "Gottlieb" without L-I-E. 2) Always have your sarcasm detector set to ON when reading my column. 3) I only lie about things you shouldn't believe.

So back to our friend Seizan. He's good for you (hey, an extra 2 cards a turn!) and bad for your opponent (ouch, a 2 life hit every turn!)—a win-win situation. Of course, that good-for-youness comes at a price (it'll cost you life) and that bad-for-themness comes at a price (your opponent gets cards). Are the two bonuses worth the two drawbacks? Are the effects irrelevant because they're symmetrical? Yes and no... if you can break the symmetry. This is where I mention Underworld Dreams. Or it would be if Bennie Smith hadn't already done so in his combo article earlier this week. Does it matter that I had this combo jotted down over a week ago? Nope, because he went to press with the scoop first. Well, congratulations, Mr. Smith, you've taken food out of my children's mouths once again. I don't know why you'd want their half-chewed bananas and their spoonfuls of strained peaches, but you got it. I can only assume you're making some sort of wicked Ambrosia of the Damned and ran out of ingredients.



But I remain undaunted. There are no daunts in my chassis. I'll just have to elevate my game. I will not be out-comboed with my own card. Seizan-Underworld Dreams is good, no question. But how about... Seizan-Plagiarize! Plagiarize becomes an instant Concentrate as you steal all three of your opponent's draws for the turn while Seizan still extracts 2 life out of your opponent's hide. From the time your last upkeep started to the time your next one will, you'll have outdrawn your opponent 6 cards to 0, and there's a pretty good chance you'll find another Plagiarize. Touchdown, Mr. Smith. The baseball's in your court now.



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Island	4 Seizan, Perverter of Truth	4 Chainer's Edict
2 Polluted Delta		4 Cranial Extraction
4 Salt Marsh	4 creatures	4 Howling Mine
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse		4 Peek
9 Swamp		4 Plagiarize
4 Underground River		2 Talisman of Dominance
		4 Turbulent Dreams
24 lands		4 Underworld Dreams
		2 Zombie Infestation
		32 other spells

Dr. Wombat's Book Club

If you like to read—and I've got a shocker for you: You're reading right now! Unless, of course, you're listening to the streaming audio download of my weekly Magic column/zoo crue shock jock morning show featuring Sexxxerella the Traffic Chick, Racist Jim the Sports Guy, and Bonzo the Flatulent Chihuahua—then I'd like to recommend the book I just finished, Jonathan Lethem's *Gun, with Occasional Music*, as my inaugural Dr. Wombat Book Club pick. It's the best (and only) sci fi noir detective story I've ever read. Here's how the Book Club will work: You read the book, then come back here next week and read my **Magic** column. It'll have nothing to do with the book, and I'll in fact never discuss it again, *but I'll know you read it*. Take that, Oprah.

What's In Iname?

Matthew Lubich wrote in to suggest this evil little gem:



Play Iname, Death Aspect and drop all four Kokushos into your graveyard from your deck. Then play Patriarch's Bidding naming either Spirits or Dragons. All of the Kokushos spring to life, they all see all the other Kokushos, they all die from embarrassment that someone else is wearing the same dress, and your opponent loses 20 life from the four leaves-play triggers. You gain 20 life in the process, but that's probably only incidental.

Matthew Smith (the same one from last week) emailed me an Iname, Death Aspect-Patriarch's Bidding-Death Cloud deck, but there's a combo that Alan Comer came up with I like even more:



Well, that just seems too perfect, doesn't it? He was postulating this for a Prismatic deck, but we can squeeze it into a 60-card concoction. Popping both combos into the same deck means that Iname & Patriarch's Bidding puts you in good shape, Iname & Mortal Combat puts you in good shape, and Patriarch's Bidding & Mortal Combat... umm... two out of three ain't bad.

Death from Death



Main Deck 60 cards

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 3 Cabal Coffers | 4 Ashen-Skin Zubera | 4 Diabolic Tutor |
| 1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse | 1 He Who Hungers | 3 Mortal Combat |
| 20 Swamp | 1 Horobi, Death's Wail | 4 Patriarch's Bidding |
| _____ | 4 Iname, Death Aspect | 2 Sickening Dreams |
| 24 lands | 4 Kokusho, the Evening Star | _____ |
| | 1 Revenant | 13 other spells |
| | 1 Seizan, Perverter of Truth | |
| | 3 Thief of Hope | |
| | 4 Wicked Akuba | |
| | _____ | |
| | 23 creatures | |

I guess I'll end my boycott now. If you're interested in reading about some more combo decks, I just might have one or two or a hundred stored up over here.

Until next week, have fun with combos.

Mark

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