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A couple weekends ago, Star City Games--a store in Roanoke, Virginia and home to a popular **Magic** website--held a Vintage "Five Proxy" tournament in nearby Richmond. The store owner, Pete Hoefling, thought it would be cool to have a member of Wizards R&D in attendance, so he contacted Randy Buehler to see if anyone was interested. Randy had just become a father, so he asked me if I was interested. I in fact was, being a closet Vintage fan, and Pete and Randy made arrangements for me to appear at the event.



The fact that I got to go was rather remarkable, considering our strong company stance against proxy cards here at Wizards of the Coast. My presence was not meant to endorse the use of proxies, but rather to research the phenomenon of the proxy Vintage scene, check on the concurrent States Standard tournament while I was there, and talk to as many players, dealers, and collectors as were willing to chat about whatever was on their minds.

Personally, I found the whole idea very cool. One of the things I miss most now that I work here is being "paired up," meaning getting that little rush of anticipation as you check the pairings before each round of a tournament to see who you have to play against. Because the tournament was not sanctioned by the DCI (because of the proxies), I could actually play in it!

I haven't put a lot of time into playing Vintage since the days before *Tempest*. I had a nice halfway-powered control deck that was actually undefeated (two local tournaments) until some scumbag stole it out of my backpack. I lost a Black Lotus (that I won in an *Ice Age/Alliances* sealed deck tournament), plus three Moxes, the power blue (Time Walk, Timetwister, and Ancestral Recall), a Library of Alexandria, and two Mana Drains, all of which I paid for with cash. At that point I decided it wasn't worth investing in those cards if it wasn't ever safe to carry them around. To this day I haven't reacquired any power cards except for Ancestral, and that one only because it's so fun in formats like 5-color.

Even though I don't play Vintage much any more, my job requires me to study the format from a distance. So I keep abreast of all the new deck types, who's winning what, and how new sets are impacting the metagame. So it wasn't tough for me to build a reasonable gauntlet of Net decks and recruit some other R&D members to help me play them against one another. Matt Place, Mike Turian, John Carter, Paul Barclay, Worth Wollpert, and Brian Schneider all chipped in a little of their time at work to help me get my chops back in shape with the broken cards.

If I had no shame and lots of time to practice, I probably would have made some personal tweaks to existing versions of decks that play Mishra's Workshop and Juggernaut. I enjoy the feeling of security I get hiding behind a Trinisphere as my opponent struggles to find three lands. Plus, if anything in the format fits my style of play, it's the deck that attacks with 5/3's. Who needs power cards when you can have a 5/3?

I gave a lot of different decks a good long look (another one that piqued my interest was an oddball number called "Crushing Chamber," which I described as a Type 1 *Darksteel* theme deck. I was drawn to the deck because I--now don't repeat this--actually enjoy playing with Skullclamp), but I was getting a little depressed because they'd all been tuned to within inches of perfection, leaving me little chance to innovate. As I was resigning myself to playing a deck that was 96% copied from

people that play the format infinitely more than I do, Matt Place told me, "It would make me really sad if you played a Net deck."

"But, Matt," I replied, "These decks have all been tuned to within inches of perfection, leaving me little chance to innovate." Or something.

"Are there any new cards that do anything?" he asked, referring to *Champions of Kamigawa* and its mild impact on Vintage.

I told him that I believed Oath of Druids with Forbidden Orchard was the most powerful interaction *Kamigawa* added to the format, and that seemed like enough for him. "We'll work on something with that tomorrow," he commented, then headed home.

## An Aside on the Orchard

I submitted a card for *Fifth Dawn* design called "Myr Headquarters."

Myr Headquarters

Land

T: Add one mana of any color to your mana pool. Each opponent puts a 1/1 colorless Myr creature token into play.

While the land would have been a decent fit with the five color theme of *Fifth Dawn*, we decided we were already "token high"--meaning we had enough token-making cards in the set--so it was left out.

As *Champions of Kamigawa* was coming together, Randy was asking around for cards to add to the set. I revamped the Headquarters a little so that it gave a token to only one opponent when you used it, hopefully making it more appealing to the multiplayer crowd. It was printed just like that.



In development, talk of using the card with Oath of Druids came up, but quickly passed when it was noted that Oath was banned in every format but Vintage, and (as one of our favorite sayings goes), "Type 1 can handle it."

## Back to Our Story...

I spent that night thinking about what creatures would be good to Oath up, but I couldn't get past Cognivore, Darksteel Colossus, and Akroma. Big creatures have definitely gotten better as **Magic** has aged; the fact is made obvious when looking for the best targets in any deck that can bypass mana costs. While those three all seemed like fine beaters, I didn't think they'd cut the mustard in Type 1.

Only Cognivore could kill in one turn, and your deck would have to be built in some completely absurd way to make it work. The others took three turns to win with, and that seemed like too many.



Matt came back to work the next day with an answer to that very problem. He devised a strategy based on combining the kill of current Vintage Storm decks, the setup of the old Extended Hermit Druid decks, and the new Oath/Orchard combo. It could win the game a decent amount of the time the turn it activated Oath, and almost always a turn later at the worst. The only creature?



The deck is not at all suited to my personal style; I don't like taking long complicated turns with decks that try to be as non-interactive as possible (I still remember stumbling through an Academy kill as a young Kai Budde sat across the table with his head in his hands at Pro Tour - Rome many years ago). But it was new and cool and packed full of powerful cards, so I made up my mind to go with it. I played a good number of games with it and changed just a few cards from his original build. Here's the deck as I played it:

Storm Combo Oath		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
1 Ancient Tomb	1 Ancestral Recall	2 Ancient Tomb
3 City of Brass	1 Black Lotus	1 Chain of Vapor
4 Forbidden Orchard	4 Brainstorm	3 Cursed Totem
4 Gemstone Mine	4 Dark Ritual	2 Darksteel Colossus
		4 Defense Grid

1 Library of Alexandria	1 Demonic Tutor	1 Gaea's Blessing
1 Tolarian Academy	3 Duress	1 Hurkyl's Recall
<hr/>	1 Force of Will	1 Oath of Druids
14 lands	2 Hurkyl's Recall	<hr/>
	1 Krosan Reclamation	15 sideboard cards
	1 Lion's Eye Diamond	
1 Eternal Witness	1 Lotus Petal	
<hr/>	1 Mana Crypt	
1 creatures	1 Mana Vault	
	1 Memory Jar	
	1 Mind's Desire	
	1 Mox Diamond	
	1 Mox Emerald	
	1 Mox Jet	
	1 Mox Pearl	
	1 Mox Ruby	
	1 Mox Sapphire	
	1 Mystical Tutor	
	1 Necropotence	
	3 Oath of Druids	
	1 Regrowth	
	1 Sol Ring	
	1 Tendrils of Agony	
	1 Time Walk	
	1 Timetwister	
	1 Tinker	
	1 Vampiric Tutor	
	1 Wheel of Fortune	
	1 Windfall	
	1 Yawgmoth's Will	
	<hr/>	
	45 other spells	

A few card-by-card notes:

- **Oath of Druids** . Only three. That may have been wrong, but the deck is still a combo deck and you don't need the Oath to win. What you don't want is to draw a hand of three Oaths in the middle of going off. The fourth is in the board for defense against decks with creatures, or to enable the backup Darksteel Colossus plan.
- **Eternal Witness** . The plan is to Oath up Witness, dumping a large chunk of your deck into you graveyard. Ideally, the Witness will get you back Yawgmoth's Will, and you'll win that turn. If that doesn't work, get Time Walk, Oath again, mill your whole deck, Krosan Reclamation the Will back in, then win. Of course sometimes the Witness is the third card you flip, and you have to take something lame like Dark Ritual. Those are the hard games.
- **Library of Alexandria** . Might be wrong, but I'm greedy and like powerful cards. It's still a great opening play going second. A lot riskier going first since Duress is popular. My mana base was 100% vulnerable to Wasteland, but I couldn't see a good way to avoid that.
- **Ancient Tomb** . Insurance against Trinisphere. It's easy to Hurkyl's off of two lands when one is a Tomb. The ones in the board were there for Trinisphere decks, as well as to help power out Defense Grids against control.
- **Force of Will** . Yes, just one. We found we had room for either Forces or Duresses, and the matchup against four-color control was so bad we opted for Duress. But we always wanted the threat of Force of Will at the very least so we shoehorned one back in. It was great. People either didn't expect it, or played around its imaginary brethren all day.
- **Yawgmoth's Will** . This card is dumb. IF we ever decide that we want to change our policy about not banning cards in Vintage because of power level--and I'm not saying we have plans to--it

would most likely be because of this card.

- **Brainstorm** . This card is way more powerful than a lot of people are willing to admit. It's not high on anyone's radar here right now, but it is similar enough in function to Ancestral Recall in addition to all the other little tricks it does that you shouldn't take it for granted.
- **Darksteel Colossus** . People can sideboard in combo hate (Arcane Lab, Tormod's Crypt), so I needed a backup. Akroma might have been better because of all the Goblin Welders around. But I did beat a Welder with my Colossus thanks to...
- **Gaea's Blessing** . It just felt like I'd need this card. It did its job by making Dragon unable to kill me with Ambassador Laquatus, and by shuffling all the chaffy artifacts back into my deck when I Oathed up Colossus against a tapped Welder.
- **Defense Grid** . Xantid Swarm seems like the counterspell hoser of choice, but I can't see how that fits into Oath. Maybe it can. But I settled for Defense Grid. I got it out against 4cControl in one game and it was wonderful.
- **Cursed Totem** . Anti-Welder, anti-Fish. Not that great for me actually.



John Carter and Worth Wollpert were nice enough to loan me all the cards I needed (no proxies for me!). The deck looked lovely--everything was black bordered except for the Lotus, and that was signed. I was nervous carrying the darn thing around, thinking about how in the world I'd be able to afford replacements if something happened. This format takes nerves of steel!

## Off to Play...

I booked my flight to Roanoke by mistake instead of Richmond, and that meant I'd have a two-and-a-half hour car ride once I landed. How dumb of me. Lucky for me, Pete Hoefling is an amiable guy and the ride didn't seem nearly as long as it was. I spent that Friday night in the hotel talking to Pete and his coworkers Matt Villamaino and Ben Bleiweiss (one of my old pals from my editing days) about every **Magic**-related topic we could think of. Good times.

On Saturday, I went and played! Pete was handing out packs of Italian *Legends* to anyone that could beat me. That was fun to explain--many players didn't know who I was or why they should get a pack for beating me. "I make the game. No, I'm not kidding. Really. From Washington. Really."

Vintage, in my mind, plays out like this. Each player has a deck that is trying to do some really unfair thing. Maybe that thing is a turn-One Oath off of an Orchard. Maybe it's a turn-one Trinisphere with Wasteland and Crucible of Worlds or plain old Juggernaut. Maybe it's some hideous combination of Tangle Wires, Smokestacks, and Goblin Welders. Maybe it's a first turn Tendrils for 28. Maybe it's a good old-fashioned Mana Drain into Mind Twist. Regardless, it's something. When one of the two players manages to pull his "thing" off, the games aren't that interesting. When the interesting stuff happens is when both decks are a card short of doing their nastiness; then the players are jockeying



for position, testing for counterspells, and all that nifty stuff. The format is known and defined by that first class of games, but it's worth playing for the second half. I was pleased to see that the interactive games came up more than you might guess from looking at the card pool.

I had my share of both kinds of games. I got "Dragoned" out on turn three, Wastelanded into next week after mulliganing twice, all that fun stuff. I had a sick turn-one kill (with a Time Walk thrown in) thanks to the lovely duo of Tolarian Academy and Yawgmoth's Will. What's important to know is that I screwed up in the "interesting games" enough to end up a lousy 4-3, costing Pete three packs of *Leggende*.

Two play mistakes really hurt me. One was getting the wrong card with Demonic Tutor--I set my hand face-down in front of me, then got a second Oath when what I needed was an Orchard. That's just plain old rust--the kind of thing we allow take-backs on in R&D. The second mistake was against a wacky Doomsday-Shared Fate deck. After Shared Fate was in play, I drew a Doomsday off his deck. I held it instead of casting it and shrinking the library he was drawing off of (mine) down to five cards. With only a Tendrils and an Eternal Witness as damage sources, I could have made it impossible for him to win. As it stood, he drew the Tendrils in the two turns I waited. That's just inexperience with the cards on my part.

My biggest flaw was that I was bad at sideboarding. Taking cards out of a combo deck is hard, and I never knew quite what was disposable in any given matchup. If I sided in the Colossuses, I'd need to take out some combo pieces, but the deck still needed to be able to win via a big Tendrils. And individual matchups were hard as well. Is Defense Grid or Cursed Totem better against Fish? Is Cursed Totem good against Bazaar Madness? I didn't test enough to find these things out; I just didn't have the time.

## Wrapping It Up...

The deck is certainly good though, and I'm confident someone else can perfect it. The Oath/Orchard combo is a strong one, as evidenced by the finishes Jacob Orlove, Steve Menedian, and the rest of Team Meandeck put up with a Counter-Oath deck that felt eerily like what people were building in Standard when *Exodus* was released.

Vintage is a fun format, although it still has accessibility problems. The creation of proxy tournaments seems like an okay fix as far as the community is concerned, but don't expect the DCI to ever get involved in them--we just can't condone that kind of thing officially. The player base is having a fine time with the format and the tournament structure available to them. Things seem about as balanced as they can be considering the enormous weight of 11 years of cards. I heard many suggestions of little things (and not-so-little-things) that we could do to accommodate the Vintage community, and I have discussed many of them with people back here. We'll see what we can do.

All in all, I had a great time in Richmond. I got to see some old friends, like Sheldon Menery, Ben Bleiweiss, Ted Knutson and my old teammate (and fellow Friday columnist) Nate Heiss. I got to meet new folks as well, like magicthegathering.combos author Bennie Smith and StarCityGames.com's resident deck builder Jim Ferriolo. The Vintage players--especially the guys from Team Meandeck and Team Short Bus--were, as always, a pleasure and it was great to "download" as much information from them as I did. (But I'm sad I missed out on playing Type 4.)

And of course, my host Pete Hoefling was a gentleman and I thank him greatly for this opportunity. Until next time, whenever that is...

## Last Week's Poll:

Which set do you like the most out of the following:		
<i>Champions of Kamigawa</i>	5159	36.9%
<i>Onslaught</i>	3071	22.0%
<i>Mirrodin</i>	2984	21.3%

<i>Odyssey</i>	2764	19.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13978</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### This Week's Poll:

Finally! Here are the ten finalists for the new name of Type 1.5. Thanks to everyone who submitted an entry, unless you submitted "Classic" even though I told you specifically not to! Vote now and name a format forever!

**What should be the new name of Type 1.5?**

- Ageless
- Comprehensive
- Enduring
- Heritage
- Legacy
- Mosaic
- Renaissance
- Throwback
- Timeless
- Traditional

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