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# Psychic Vortex



Adrian Sullivan · Single-Card Strategies  
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If you work on decks a lot, you'll find that most of them aren't that good. Something is wrong with the deck, in general. It isn't good against the decks that are good. Maybe the rules make the deck clunky (or they simply don't let the cards do what you want them to do). Maybe there aren't enough good cards to go with the ones you want to use. Like any other creative process, it takes making a lot of decks before you get to a good one. In the end, most of the cards you might want to use end up on a shelf, tucked neatly away.

One of the great things about **Magic** is combinations of cards coming together. Wait long enough, and nearly any card that has a glimmer of hope can see the light of day. The rules will change ever so slightly, an errata will be made on a card, or a new card will come into the light, and suddenly, BLAMMO! your deck is back.

**Psychic Vortex** is one of those cards for me. I'll tell you straight up, the decklist at the end is going to include some burn cards. Seeing as it is the beginning of the *Unhinged* Preview week, and I have to wait til *next* week to talk about my card, I thought I'd pick a pretty crazy one. And, gosh-darn-it, there are so many interesting things about **Psychic Vortex**, and so many possible ways to go with the card. **Psychic Vortex** and I go way back, you see – there's some history there, and I'll tell you a little bit about it.

Back in *Mirage* block, I was testing, testing, testing, trying to qualify for my first Pro Tour. I would eventually qualify early in the season, but not before testing the hell out of a home-brewed Red-Blue deck with **Psychic Vortex**. It was beating everything. It was great. It included this fantastic combo in it and no one could... and then another player (Drew) walked by, "Oh, that combo doesn't work. Because of Rule XYZ point 234." I consulted with another person, a DCI judge. Yep, my deck didn't work. Rule something something something. Oh, well.

But time was on my side, as they eradicated that rule a while ago, and now I can smile and talk about this fine, fine card.

## The danger of Psychic Vortex

First of all, let's take a good look at the card.





I've always loved the art. It always makes me think of the Illuminati, and at that point I'm stifling a laugh. Cumulative Upkeep of drawing cards? Who *wouldn't* like that cost? Of course, there is danger in the card as well.

The first thing that is dangerous about the card is its seductive nature. You think to yourself "Wow, *cumulatively* more draws *every* turn" and it is easy to be hasty. Do not do it, my friends. The turn you drop a Vortex, at the very best, it doesn't do anything yet and you lose a land at the end of the turn. On your next upkeep, you'll draw a single extra card, and on the next upkeep, you'll draw two extra cards (finally putting you as far ahead in cards as casting a single Inspiration). That's the best case scenario. At worst, you'll cast it, and discard a mitful of cards as well. In the subsequent turns, you might fail to drop a land. Suddenly, all the cards you've built up don't mean all that much when you can't cast very many.

Don't be hasty. Wait until your hand is mostly depleted before dropping a **Psychic Vortex**. Cumulative cards take a bit of time to build up, but the losses from a Vortex are immediate. Should you fail to make a land drop somewhere in those subsequent turns, you'll *really* be hurting. Let's not even talk about the awful pain of land destruction...

The other major restrictive factor of **Psychic Vortex** is that it is a very active card. You don't get to keep any of these cards in your hand at the end of your turn, so your opponent knows exactly what your hand is on their turn: nothing. This means you can't be reactive. Counterspells lose a lot of their luster if you can only cast them on your own turn.

Active, then, is good. Getting in a bit of damage on your opponent is just fine, even at the cost of card advantage when you have a Vortex out. The Vortex will supply you with more.

## Breaking ground (and other things)

One of the first ways to go about fighting the drawbacks of **Psychic Vortex** (and eventually exploiting the mass card-drawing potential of the card) is to push out the mana. Losing a land every turn is costly, and you need to come back from this. As usual, the best two paths to this are artifacts and green.

Artifacts allow any deck you want to be able to cheat a little bit on the mana sources. You are limited to one land a turn, but you aren't limited to only a single artifact mana source a turn. With this in mind, you can use various different Stones (**Fellwar Stones**, **Mind Stone**), Moxen (Chrome, Diamond, and Saphires for those with the oldest cards), and Rocks (**Fire Diamond**, **Talisman of Indulgence**) to build up your mana supply. Even if you lose all of your land to the Vortex for some awful reason, you can still continue to build up your mana.



Green can pull off the same trick. **Birds of Paradise**, **Llanowar Elves**, and **Wall of Roots** are just some of the better options here. Essentially, any of green's simple mana producers – the ones

that simply make a mana – can do here. Another variant of this can be found in cards like **Wood Elves** or **Sakura-Tribe Elder**. Getting a land into play isn't just the realm of green. Artifacts can do this too. **Wayfarer's Bauble** is a very, very decent card.

But the better trick that green can pull off is simply being able to actually *play* more land. When you are continuously drawing cards, you will find yourself drawing patches of land. Being able to play more than your usual one per turn means that you can pull out of the mana trap that **Psychic Vortex** can set for you. The simplest and most effective is probably **Exploration**. Now, even if you miss a turn of laying land, you can easily come back with more. **Azusa, Lost but Seeking** and **Budoka Gardener** can also allow you this same luxury. Of course, since you are already going to lose all of your hand every turn anyways, **Manabond** isn't a terrible idea either. Type 1 players get access to **Fastbond**, of course, but **Psychic Vortex** might be a bit slow for most games using the Type 1 card pool.

One card that is definitely noteworthy (especially for **Exploration** and Azusa players) is **Crucible of Worlds**. You'll definitely have land in your grave to take advantage of here, so you'll never have to worry about missing a land drop.

## Solving suicidal cards

Every turn, you get all kinds of cards... and then lose them.

One way to take care of this is to live in the moment. What you need here are the cards that are fast and furious. You want something that does it and does it now. Forget about tomorrow, tomorrow is another day.

There are fast cards of every color, but what you really want are cheap cards. If we can already assume that a 1.5 legal deck will include something to keep the mana stoked, it's not unheard of to have silly turns where you drop every card you drew that turn into play right away. An easy example:

Upkeep: Draw 3 cards  
Draw: 1 more, please  
Main: Lay a land (5 mana in play), Lay **Isamaru, Hound of Konda**, **Savannah Lions**, and **Paladin En-Vec**

(next turn, your opponent casts a **Wrath of God**, killing everything)

Upkeep: Draw 4 cards  
Draw: 1 more, thanks  
Main: Lay a land (5 mana in play, 'cos you lost one last turn), Lay **Isamaru, Hound of Konda**, **Soltari Priest**, and two **Bonesplitters**

A person can only **Wrath of God** so many times. Drawing lots of cards means you get to keep laying your guys without fear of it all going wrong. Usually, it is a lot smarter to save back threats in case things go wrong. In this case though, saving them for a rainy day won't get you anywhere if you have to discard them.

It's not just creatures, either. Burn spells work here to. Draw them and point and click at their head or at their board. **Sickening Dreams** or **Firestorm** can convert all of your extra cards straight into damage. **Turbulent Dreams** can dump all of your extra cards on all of your opponent's permanents. **Mindless Automaton** (a personal favorite of mine) can become another dumping ground for extra cards, but he is a bit less useful since it costs mana to do it.

Of course, two of the best cards to dump things into are far more recent. **Psychatog** and **Wild Mongrel** are both excellent outlets for this, easily creating a kill if they are unchecked. Going 'all-in' is a lot easier if you can get all that and more back on the next turn...

## Chucking it

Another way to make use of a Vortex is to know when to chuck it. Essentially, you can get to a point where you simply aren't making use of all of the cards that you are drawing, and so you might actually be better off simply



resetting the Vortex and keeping cards in your hand. There are a few good ways to do this.

### *Claws of Gix*

This one has seen use in Stasis decks, and it is basically a simple and good card when you are drawing so many cards. You can put it into play any time you draw it without slowing down your other plays. This is always good. Finally, when the time is right, a single mana will get rid of the Vortex for you. In a pinch, the life gain can be quite decent as well.

### *Boomerang, Rescue, and Turbulent Dreams*

**Boomerang** is certainly the most powerful card on its own, for your purposes. **Turbulent Dreams** is great when you aren't planning on getting rid of the Vortex, and much less good when you are. (Losing all of those cards to the Dreams really makes you want to *keep* a Vortex, doesn't it?) **Rescue** is the cheapest, but also the most narrow.

**Boomerang** works great because you can reset a Vortex or cheaply get rid of a threat from the opponent.



### *Kami of Ancient Law*

Let's take a nod to Pierre Canali, the newly crowned [Pro-Tour champion of Columbus](#). The Kami is great in that you can beat someone down with it, but when you're ready to, you can also use it to get rid of your Vortex. Sure, **Seal of Cleansing** could do that too (and hit artifacts to boot), but **Seal of Cleansing** doesn't attack.

## Rainy days

So, you don't have the ability to use reactive cards in general. Your hand will be empty on your opponent's turn. So, how do you create the ability to react? Well, you save up for a rainy day.

There are all kinds of cards that sit on the table waiting to be used. Make use of some of the best of these cards. These are the cards like **Mogg Fanatic** and **Seal of Fire** (and for that part, all of the other Seals). These things sit there on the table and can be used later on, when it might be more appropriate. The Spellbombs are capable of the very same affect. One of my favorite is Kai Budde himself, the **Voidmage Prodigy**.

Another way to save up cards is Flashback. Generally, you won't find all that much use for Flashback other than allowing yourself to be reactive. A **Lava Dart** in the graveyard will be a painful card to Flashback (losing a land is rough), but it does mean that you can have options on later turns during their turn.

## Sneaky tricks

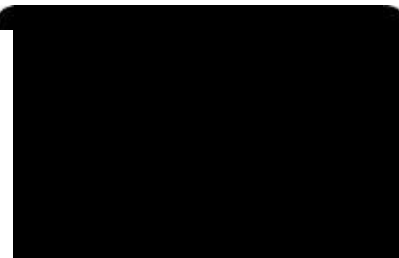
Of course, there are the sneaky tricks. Ways to just get around a lot of the real problems of the card.

Hiding the hand is a great way to do that. Using various different Baubles (**Conjurer's**, for example, or **Phyrexian Furnace**), you can save up a card draw until a wee bit later when you want to be able to have a card in your hand on their turn.

Madness is another great way to get around the discarding being such a disadvantage. Getting a discount on your **Fiery Temper** or **Arrogant Wurm** is a great start, but a card like **Obsessive Search** means that you can effectively keep a card in your hand at the end of your turn.

My favorite trick is the one that I mentioned earlier in this article. It didn't work before, but the wonders of the post-6th Edition rules have changed that.

With a **Teferi's Realm** out, every turn a player names a permanent type and that type phases out. If you name "Global Enchantments", all Global Enchantments phase out. By stacking the two upkeep effects, you will continue to cumulatively draw cards with **Psychic Vortex**, but then the Realm will remove both itself and all other global enchantments (including the Vortex) from play. It won't be around to cause you any kind of losses at the end of turn! (For reference, back at that time, timing rules were



different, and essentially, the Realm would remove the Vortex without the Vortex being able to be around to get you any cards.)

## Wrapping Up

In honor of that combo and my old deck, I am going to present to you the deck that was doing so well for me way back in the day. I've since given the deck to people to play in various different "[Block Party](#)" [Constructed Tournaments](#), and it has seen a goodly amount of success there.



### Kobayashi Maru Red/Blue

A Mirage Block Deck for Block Party  
60 cards

3 Quicksand	4 Frenetic Efreet	4 Psychic Vortex
2 Gemstone Mine	4 Suq'Ata Lancer	3 Teferi's Realm
10 Mountain	4 Man-o'-War	4 Incinerate
9 Island		3 Fireblast
24 land	12 creatures	3 Firestorm
		3 Boomerang
		4 Mind Stone
		24 other spells

In some versions of this deck, I used to run [Fog Elemental](#) ("Fly Blast" was the nickname we had for it), and there is a lot that is going on in this deck that I've already talked about. It can speed up the mana with [Mind Stone](#) (or turn that mana into a card later on). It can dish out "Suicide" burn in [Firestorm](#) and [Incinerate](#) (and [Fly Blast](#), if you choose to include him), but it also has reasonable aggressive creatures. [Boomerang](#) can be used offensively to clear something off of the table, or it can be used to keep a good hand going. The [Teferi's Realm](#)/[Psychic Vortex](#) combo is incredibly unfair, and while other sets could make that combo more unfair, for its time, this deck was mean (at least, that is, if the deck worked way back then).

Next week, I'm going to be writing about an *Unhinged* card. So I leave it up to you, on the week after that, should [Psychic Vortex](#) be the subject of a [Reader Challenge](#)?

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- Yes  
 No

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