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You know what the worst thing a writer can do is? The absolute worst thing? Write about writer's block. What a self-referential, self-obsessed, self-serving cop-out. It smacks of laziness and creative bankruptcy. When a writer has nothing to say, he shouldn't write -- he shouldn't write about having nothing to say. I can't imagine anything more boring than that. It's practically unforgivable.

That's why I swore I'd only do it as a last resort.

I've got a temporal hangover, man. It's 2005. Two thousand five! And although the fresh new year is boldly, yet wobbly, taking its first steps away from the remnants of its shattered eggshell, my brain is still stuck back in the past . . . 1987, to be precise. I panicked for a minute there when I couldn't find my cassette of *The Joshua Tree*, but it turns out it was in the pocket of my Members Only jacket. Radical!

And that's the sad state of affairs within my head. *Betrayers of Kamigawa* previews start next week. I just got back from a two-week trip to the land of reruns. I'm in a psychic no-man's-land, which is surprisingly crowded for being a land with no men in it. I'm here with the guy whose job it is to oversee the Times Square ball drop. And the artisans who maintain the animatronic Santa's workshop store window displays. And the fashion designers who specialize in haute Claus couture (this year: jingle bells and bushy white beards are in!) In fact, they're all wondering what I'm doing here. At least they have an excuse.



Have I mentioned that this week's column will be all filler?

OK, maybe that's a bad plan. Maybe I'll write about some decks instead.

A Theme, a Theme, My Kingdom for a Theme

One of my special little unmarketable skills is a knack for seeing patterns. It certainly helps me when making and solving puzzles and when building decks, but it's not something I put on my resume. Anymore. (Apparently, employers would rather read about "education" all of a sudden.) So while the theme that ties today's decks together could be "the best of the random leftover ideas readers have sent me that I've passed over for other columns but I better use now before *Betrayers* rotates in," I prefer to think of it as "tying *Champions* to the past." One deck focuses on a *Champions-Mirrodon* combo with a misplaced *Champions-Onslaught* combo I threw in, one is *Champions-Fifth Dawn*, and the third is *Champions-Apocalypse*.

Wicked Things Besides Candles

David Moser built a deck that slaps a Viridian Longbow on Wicked Akuba. Whenever you have a creature with some kind of damage-based ability, it's always worth checking to see if the ability cares if it's *combat* damage or not. If not, the combo possibilities abound. David's deck tried to squeeze the most out of each Akuba ping by going the mega-black mana route. He had Cabal Coffers and Dark Rituals along with Drain Life, Consume Spirit, and Nantuko Shade. What, no B.F.M.? Putting the Akuba alongside the Shade is interesting. If you have a Longbow out, would you rather draw the

above-the-curve chase rare from *Torment* or the same-cost, same-power, *bigger-toughness*, also-deals-extra-damage-for-each-☠-you-pump-through-it common from *Champions*? They're not even close to being the same, of course; the Akuba is locked into the size and shape of Grizzly Bears while Nantuko Shade can do its Barktooth Warbeard impersonation at a moment's notice.



I don't really believe that Dark Ritual exists (it's a figment of other people's imaginations), so my inclination is to snap the deck into being at least Extended legal (and, preferably, Online Extended legal). That left some space, so I incorporated The Indomitable Bug's suggested Horobi, Death's Wail-Goblin Sharpshooter combo. I know, adding red to the deck is a terrible idea. Terribly fun!

Something Wicked

Main Deck

60 cards

<p>4 Bloodstained Mire</p> <p>1 Mountain</p> <p>15 Swamp</p> <p>4 Tainted Peak</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>2 Crypt Rats</p> <p>4 Goblin Sharpshooter</p> <p>2 Grimclaw Bats</p> <p>4 Horobi, Death's Wail</p> <p>4 Nantuko Shade</p> <p>3 Twisted Abomination</p> <p>4 Wicked Akuba</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>23 creatures</p>	<p>4 Consume Spirit</p> <p>3 Phyrexian Arena</p> <p>2 Soul Burn</p> <p>4 Viridian Longbow</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>13 other spells</p>
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The Indomitable Bug also suggested enchanting Horobi with Diplomatic Immunity, and Stifling Horobi's suicidal triggered ability in response. Do that and you've got the anti-Skulking Ghost: It gives everything the Skulking Ghost ability except itself. (Well, it still has it, but it can't be targeted, so it's as though it doesn't have it.)

Which Recycling Bin Do Golems Go Into?

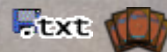
Two of my most reliable fellow madmen, AJ Richardson and Fox Murdoch, wrote in within a day of each other with the exact same combo: Nighteyes the Desecrator (the flipped version of Nezumi Graverobber) and Composite Golem. You sac the Golem for ☠☠☠☠, use that to pay for Nighteyes' ability, put the Golem back into play from your graveyard, and repeat forever. The loop needs a victory condition; the simplest is the beloved-by-everyone Disciple of the Vault. That guy's the life of the party! No one ever rolls their eyes and threatens to throw you out of their play group when you slap down a Disciple of the Vault on turn one. There are other roads to travel down than Disciple Boulevard -- Fox is in favor of the Arcbound Crusher path (possibly Dismantling the counters over to a Darksteel Reactor), while AJ lists Goblin Sharpshooter, Fecundity, Kavu Lair, Grave Pact, Death Match,



Moriok Rigger, or (bonus points for bringing up a 5-mana 1/1 rare) Vermiculos as ways to take advantage of the loop.

For this trick to work, Nezumi Graverobber has to flip. It's usually not too hard to achieve that without trying to set it up (your opponent likes to play spells, right?), but setting it up can't hurt. Necrogen Spellbomb and Wrench Mind are fast ways to disrupt your opponent in the early game, and they set up a nice, small grave that's ripe for robbery. Later in the game, you can turn these cards on yourself to discard a reanimatable fattie. There are a few other things I want to put into the deck: Tutoring (to help you find your combo pieces), giant creatures (since you've got reanimation potential), and something to take advantage of the fact that you can create $\{W}{U}{B}{R}{G}$. Bringer of the Black Dawn scores the hat trick. Other interesting choices include Pentavus, which combos with Disciple and Fecundity, and Phyrexian Plaguelord, which likes to repeatedly sacrifice itself and pop back from beyond the grave.

Composite Sketch



Main Deck

60 cards

6 Forest	1 Bringer of the Black Dawn	3 Diabolic Tutor
4 Mirrodin's Core	1 Bringer of the Green Dawn	3 Fecundity
14 Swamp	4 Composite Golem	4 Necrogen Spellbomb
24 lands	3 Disciple of the Vault	4 Wrench Mind
	2 Kokusho, the Evening Star	14 other spells
	4 Nezumi Graverobber	
	2 Pentavus	
	2 Phyrexian Plaguelord	
	3 Viridian Shaman	
	22 creatures	

False Colors

Jake Zahn found a nifty use for Swirl the Mists: Combine it with the *Apocalypse* Sanctuaries. Ceta Sanctuary becomes "At the beginning of your upkeep, if you control a blue or blue permanent, draw a card, then discard a card. If you control a blue permanent and a blue permanent, instead draw two cards, then discard a card." If you've got both Swirl the Mists and Ceta Sanctuary out, what are the odds you control a blue permanent and a blue permanent?

Jake built two decks that capitalized on this interaction. The one he describes as "slightly nastier" is a five-color green hodgepodge that contains all five Hondens and four of the five Sanctuaries (all but green). The deck Jake describes as "less competitive" is actually the one I like more. If you're playing

a deck designed to get out permanents of each color, the Swirl the Mists-Sanctuary combo doesn't actually do anything for you. The Sanctuaries will be operating efficiently all by themselves. No, the fun part is to have a Necra Sanctuary that's eating your opponent's life total in chunks of 3 even though your closest white and green permanents are in your trade binder under your chair.

The purpose of this deck is to keep the creature count on the board low (or nonexistent) while your enchantments act as repeatable damage sources. Buried in there is a Words of Winds engine. Honden of Seeing Winds and Ceta Sanctuary generate extra card draws, which you can funnel into Words of Wind to make everyone pick up permanents . . . which sets up Honden of Night's Reach suspiciously well. Vicious.



Tilt-a-Swirl



Main Deck

60 cards

1 Bloodstained Mire	_____	2 Ceta Sanctuary
10 Island	0 creatures	4 Chainer's Edict
1 Mountain		2 Counsel of the Soratami
1 Polluted Delta		4 Hideous Laughter
2 Shivan Reef		2 Honden of Infinite Rage
1 Sulfurous Springs		2 Honden of Night's Reach
8 Swamp		2 Honden of Seeing Winds
_____		4 Necra Sanctuary
24 lands		2 Probe
		2 Raka Sanctuary
		4 Standstill
		4 Swirl the Mists
		2 Words of Wind

		36 other spells

I changed the deck only slightly from what Jake submitted. I swapped out Swallowing Plague for Hideous Laughter (If I'm spending 2 skulls, I'd rather wipe out *all* the 2/2 creatures), and I took out a couple of Consume Spirits for more land. Consume Spirit has an odd interaction with Swirl the Mists: If you've already set Swirl the Mists to "blue," you can spend only *blue* mana on X. The deck can support that, but it already has plenty of creature control. Pretty freaky, though.

Until next week, have fun with 2005.

Mark

