

Mark Gottlieb

Thursday, February 24, 2005

Today I think I'll reveal the mystery of life.

Sure, a **Magic** column on the Internet isn't the most likely place to make such an earth-shaking philosophical revelation, but since over 2.3 billion people read this column each week, it's the best way to get word of mouth going. Who do you trust more: CNN, or me?

First, a little background. The mystery revealed itself to me on day #143 of my mountaintop meditation. (The last 20 weeks of this column have been generated by a bot; sorry.) Finally, perfect conditions had been achieved. The angle of the sun's rays breaking over the horizon, the ambient temperature, the color of the mist that had settled into the valley—I thought it might take a decade to reach total physical, geometrical, and spatial harmony. The fact that it took less than half a year is actually explained by the revelation itself, which is all part of its perfection. But I'm getting ahead of myself. At that moment, the earth, the sky, the universe, and I were one. We shared one mind, and our thoughts merged into the consciousness of the cosmos. I understood what it meant to be alive, to be free, to be a particle in a system too great to be beheld, and to be that system made up of infinite particles. The song sang, the breeze blew, and everything that was everything spoke to me because I was part of that everything and it was part of me.



And I knew.

But first, let's follow up on last week's Heartless Hidetsugu discussion.

Eat Your Heart Out

Heartless Hidetsugu combos with Overblaze. Got it. Lots of people figured this out on their own, including Wizards of the Coast R&D, who put it into both the *Betrayers of Kamigawa* Player's Guide and the Dark Devotion theme deck. But the Heartless fun doesn't have to end there. There are other combos to be had!

Vince Colman suggests giving the legendary Ogre Shaman a Loxodon Warhammer. Giving Ogres Warhammers really doesn't seem safe, but Vince is apparently a pretty reckless guy. But hold on—a pretty remarkable thing happens when you do that. You gain a ton of life. Awwwww, Hidetsugu ain't so heartless after all. He's just a big softie. With the Warhammer equipped, you'll gain life equal to the damage Hidetsugu deals. That means you'll get a refund on the half of your life he bashed out of you, and you'll pick up the half of your opponent's life total he lost. (Finders keepers.) I don't really talk about multiplayer here since that's Anthony Alongi's thing, but this is sick in multiplayer. You better hope that extra 50 life serves you well while you're Public Enemy No. 1.

Marc Calderaro suggests putting Spirit Link on the Scourge of Minamo. It does the same thing as the Warhammer, and it's much cheaper—though it brings an extra color into the picture (white is



supposed to gain life; monored isn't) and the enchantment won't live past Hidetsugu's demise.

Adam Venezia had quite a different combo: Heartless Hidetsugu-War Elemental. With one Hidetsugu activation (preferably in response to War Elemental's comes-into-play ability being put on the stack), the Elemental becomes X/X, where X is either your opponent's remaining life total (if he was at an odd amount of life), or your opponent's remaining life total + 1 (if he was at an even amount of life). A creature as big as your opponent is... that seems like it could be useful.

Let Us Sway

I know I should get back to the mystery of life thing, but I do have an obligation to talk

about **Magic** decks in this column. Don't worry, the mystery has a whole patience clause in there. It'll all work out.

A couple of folks wrote in recently with Sway of the Stars deck ideas. The presumably Australian Chris suggested a combo of Day of the Dragons with Sway of the Stars. Besides the obvious poetic synergy, this will leave you with a number of creatures on an otherwise empty board. You play out some creatures, you play Day of the Dragons to remove those creatures from the game, you play Sway of the Stars to remove everything from play and start over—and when Day of the Dragons leaves, your vacationing creatures come back. From there, it's a cakewalk to victory! The only glitch in this plan (and it's not really a "glitch," since it doesn't prevent the plan from working) is the same glitch in every Day of the Dragons plus Something Else combo. If you have a board full of flying 5/5 Dragons, you should win the game without any extra help.



BJ Roberts had some more compelling ideas. His decklist contained Heartbeat of Spring to play Sway of the Stars as quickly as possible. These two cards pair up well: the Heartbeat lets you actually play the Sway in a reasonable amount of time, and the Sway negates the drawback of the Heartbeat (that it lets your opponent do whatever he wants) by erasing your opponent's side of the table from existence. BJ also had cards like Parallax Wave and Otherworldly Journey to accomplish, in a more reasonable way, what Day of the Dragons would do here. Remove some (or even just one) of your own creatures from the game, start the game over at 7 life apiece, and then watch your unconscious creature stagger back into the game with a dazed look on its face as it wonders where the heck it's been and what the heck happened while it was out.

Spells that temporarily remove your own creatures are good, but creatures that have this ability hardwired are even better. Hikari, Twilight Guardian can vanish for a time if you play a Spirit or Arcane spell. Phasing creatures like Breezekeeper can't stop bouncing in and out; just reset the world while it's off-plane. And Anurid Brushhopper may be the easiest and most stable of the bunch. Its discard cost isn't even steep since you'll be drawing back up to 7 cards momentarily. If you could start the game over at 7 life apiece, except that you had a 3/4 creature and your opponent didn't, wouldn't you?



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Brushland	4 Anurid Brushhopper	4 Heartbeat of Spring
4 City of Brass	4 Breezekeeper	4 Kodama's Reach
8 Forest	2 Darksteel Colossus	4 Moment's Peace
3 Island	2 Hikari, Twilight Guardian	2 Otherworldly Journey
3 Plains	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	4 Sway of the Stars
2 Windswept Heath	2 Shizuko, Caller of Autumn	
		18 other spells
24 lands	18 creatures	

Better Than Aspirin

One of the best parts of the mystery of life dealie, which is surprisingly long and contains a startling amount of legalese, is the whole spiritual peace, absence of pain thing. Pain is a natural part of life, of course, but once you learn to accept it and channel it appropriately, the pain doesn't hurt you anymore. And that's exactly what Shehzad Ahmed was going for with his Opal-Eye, Konda's Yojimbo deck.

Invincibility combos whereby you set up a white simulacrum that absorbs all damage intended for you have been done before. Pariah on Cho-Manno, Revolutionary comes to mind. This new Standard version reverses the role of the damage redirection and the invincibility between the creature and the enchantment. Put Heart of Light on Opal-Eye, and you've got a creature that taps to divert damage that would be dealt to you, yet can't be damaged itself. Put Aura of Dominion on Opal-Eye as well, and you can untap it to prevent more and more damage each turn.



The rest of Shehzad's deck consists of even more stalling tactics, such as Kami of False Hope, Teardrop Kami, and Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch. To play along with these Spirits and fetch the enchantments you want for Opal-Eye, the deck features Tallowisp as well. While all of these effects prevent you from losing, you still presumably need to win, so Shehzad included Meloku and Keiga as victory conditions.

Such an overly enchanted Opal-Eye concerns me; there are enough eggs in that basket to throw the Easter Bunny's back out. And while it can't be burned, a Terror or Boomerang ruins your day. That's why I tossed Lightning Greaves into the deck, as well as a That Which Was Taken. Make Opal-Eye indestructible and you don't even need to bother with Heart of Light!



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Coastal Tower	4 Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch	2 Aura of Dominion
1 Eiganjo Castle	4 Kami of False Hope	4 Heart of Light
9 Island	1 Keiga, the Tide Star	4 Lightning Greaves
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	2 Meloku the Clouded Mirror	2 Sensei's Divining Top
9 Plains	4 Opal-Eye, Konda's Yojimbo	1 That Which Was Taken
24 lands	4 Tallowisp	13 other spells
	4 Teardrop Kami	
	23 creatures	

Mortal Synergy

It's amazing how quickly a deck can spin out of control from its initial concept. For this next one, I started off by noticing that both Lifespinner and Kodama of the Center Tree love to have lots of Spirits in play. Looking for repetitious Spirit token generators, I found Honden of Life's Web; Riptide Replicator; Oyobi, Who Split the Heavens; and Spirit Cairn. Spirit Cairn requires discarding to make it work, so Honden of Night's Reach and He Who Hungers fit right in. At this point, there was a synergyfest going on. Honden of Night's Reach obviously also makes Honden of Life's Web very happy, which in turn makes Lifespinner happy, which can fetch He Who Hungers from your deck, which can sacrifice Spirits to make your opponent discard cards which lets Spirit Cairn make more Spirits for He Who Hungers to feed on.

Neat.

I still needed more synergy, though. Whatever the Hondens can do, the Zuberass can do as well. The Ashen-Skin and Dripping-Tongue varieties provide early defense, create discards and Spirit tokens (more so when they die together), and thus they're great sacrifice fodder for Lifespinner and He Who Hungers. They can even trigger Oyobi's Spirit-making ability.

Unfortunately, there still wasn't nearly enough synergy in the deck. If I was including Lifespinner, I wanted gigantic, unreasonably priced legendary Spirits. But I didn't want to draw them—or, if I did, I wanted a way to use them... perhaps by discarding them to set off Spirit Cairn. Slumbering Tora took care of those concerns. And Goryo's Vengeance could get back any of these discarded monsters for a turn!

And now, of course, there's so much synergy that it doesn't all fit. The deck wants more of everything in there, so the key is finding the right balance between the Spirit generators, the discard effects, and giant legendary Spirits. Huh, balance... that rings a bell about something... eh, it's probably not important.





Main Deck

60 cards

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 4 Elfhame Palace | 4 Ashen-Skin Zuberá | 2 Goryo's Vengeance |
| 5 Forest | 4 Dripping-Tongue Zuberá | 4 Honden of Life's Web |
| 2 Grand Coliseum | 3 He Who Hungers | 4 Honden of Night's Reach |
| 4 Llanowar Wastes | 1 Kodama of the Center Tree | 2 Slumbering Tora |
| 4 Mirrodin's Core | 1 Kokusho, the Evening Star | 3 Spirit Cairn |
| 5 Swamp | 2 Kuro, Pitlord | |
| | 4 Lifespinner | 15 other spells |
| 24 lands | 1 Oyobi, Who Split the Heavens | |
| | 1 Yosei, the Morning Star | |
| | | |
| | 21 creatures | |

Don't you hate it when you have that nagging sense you're forgetting something?
Mark

