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Nature's Will



Adrian Sullivan · *Single-Card Strategies*
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From time to time, various members of Wizards of the Coast's crack team of card designers give us a glance behind the curtain into their secret world. In a way, though, I always imagine that the picture they show us isn't the real one. Instead, for some reason, I like to think that the way things really work is more akin to some kind of wacky sitcom. There's a part of me that will always picture "wacky neighbor" Mark Rosewater sneaking cards into each and every set. In my reality, he's never actually been on the Design Team for *any* set. Instead, I see him sneaking into Aaron Forsythe or Randy Buehler's cubicles and slipping in a bunch of extra cards. The actual Design Team always give each other little winks when Mark isn't looking, pretending not to notice the extra cards, and Mark gets a kick out of seeing his cards actually get made. It's a weird system, but it works.

If it wasn't for this system, we probably wouldn't see half of the Johnny cards that we do. Instead, we'd be stuck with a bunch of *Call of the Herds*, *Wrath of Gods*, and *Diabolic Edicts* made for the pleasure of serious **Magic** players like Randy. Mark's hijinks bring us the cards that require a little bit of massaging to get them to work. Over the years, his love of clever cards have even begun infecting R&D - new recruits like Nate Heiss get so enamored with the spirit of Johnny that by the time they've become more experienced Brian Schneiders, even they can't help but be swept up in Mark's sense of fun. So, three cheers and a hearty thank you to Mark for Johnny-ism.

Nature's Will isn't a big flashy Timmy card. It's not a sleek, powerful Spike card. It's a clever little Johnny card, and if we're going to make it work some **Magic**, we're going to have to put on our thinking caps.



And what is Nature's Will?

As always, one of the first things to do is think about what it does when it isn't being exploited in any way. A lot of Johnny cards have one slight hitch: they might not do *anything* when they are

in play on their own. **Nature's Will** is one of those cards. Unless you manage to get a creature on the table and have it hit your opponent, like a bump on a log, all it does is sit there.

So, at the very least, we're going to need some creatures. This isn't too big a deal. For the most part, damage is the way that most people tend to win games of Magic, and creatures are one of the most efficient ways to deal damage. Besides, green is a good color when it comes to creatures, isn't it?

One of the main things that **Nature's Will** accomplishes once your creatures have managed to hit your opponent is tapping down your opponent's mana. In a lot of ways, this makes **Nature's Will** much like a **Pygmy Hippo** or **Xantid Swarm**. While there are certainly ways that the opponent *can* cast after they've been hit while **Nature's Will** is on the table, they'll need some kind of alternate mana something or other. This can come from **Birds** or **Elves** or **Diamonds** or simply cards that have an alternate cost like the new **Shoals**. If they are going to avoid or minimize the effect, they're going to need to do a bit of work to get there. This is most powerful against a control deck packing **Counterspells**, turning every single one of your creatures into a huge foil against their entire strategy.

The second thing that **Nature's Will** does is untap any of the land that you've tapped before the attack. If you have useful things to do before you've gotten in there with your creatures, in a lot of ways **Nature's Will** can act like a personal **Mana Flare**. There's only so much that we can do in a turn. Sometimes you have to choose between casting one spell or another. Why choose? Do one before combat and the next afterwards.

All of this, of course, assumes that you're getting some creatures through. Let's begin there.

Before the first swing

It's the things you do before that first swing that end up being virtually free. For example, if your opponent doesn't have anything back to block (or simply not enough to block), **Nature's Will** might as well have the Untap (or Free) Mechanic. Any creature you might already have on the table can attack after the casting of a **Nature's Will** and untap all of the mana you spent on the Will in the first place. Just like a **Cloud of Faeries** or a **Time Spiral**, the mana you put into the Will is given back to you, and with a bit of luck you can have some more thrown in to boot. Any time you get that attack to hit your opponent, you've virtually employed one of the most powerful mechanics the game has ever seen.

If a Will is already out, your opponent will often find that they're going to want to hold something back on defense. Of course, you can sneak around their defenders (something we'll get to in just a moment), or you can just blow them out of the water. Obviously, Red and Black are the best here. Without a doubt, these are the colors with the best elimination. Since getting through means that you'll be able to untap all of your mana, even using expensive elimination isn't that big of a deal. A card like **Violent Eruption**, for example, is fantastic - able to tear apart a whole slew of defenders. Splice is another effect that can be more expensive (especially as the spells build up on the Splice), but being able to pull off the bigger punch can be quite worth it. One of the big keys here is to use spells that are going to be really solid even if you don't have a **Nature's Will** out. A **Shower of Coals** can be hugely effective some of the time, but other times it is just too slow and too expensive. Far better is using cards like the Eruption, **Eye of Nowhere** (with **Glacial Ray** or some other useful spell spliced onto it) or **Eradicate**. Each of these can be valuable in a whole slew of situations.

Dodging those creatures in the first place is another way to get the Will to trigger. A ton of creatures already have some kind of evasion. Fear and flying are the most common abilities that will get a creature through, but trample often works as a kind of evasion as well. Older formats have access to shadow and, [as of March 1st](#), horsemanship. Choose creatures that have these abilities and you'll likely be triggering the Will all the time. Before the attack, you can even simply cast the spells that give these abilities. **Levitation** can do the trick nicely, or you can find something similar by getting that **Wonder** to the yard. Since the Will will be untapping everything, **Careful Studying** a **Wonder** to the yard can easily be joined with the casting of both an **Arrogant Wurm** (off the Madness) and a Roar of the Wurm after the attack. In the fear department, casting a **Dance of Shadows** can make everything you own into a goodly damage source, but you don't



have to necessarily hold onto it for the killing blow - you can knock them low and then follow up with another attacker to put them on the ropes.

Using that mana

If you're going to be having access to more mana, the key is finding ways to exploit that advantage. There are a bunch of cards that have abilities that cost something. Take Equipment, for example. Putting a sword on one of your creatures costs mana, and let's face it, as good as some of these equipment can be, sometimes you're faced with a choice of either moving your Equipment to the right guy or actually casting a spell. Morph is another good example. There are a ton of Morph creatures that are fantastic, but taking the time to flip a creature over can be your whole turn. Whether it's activating **Kiku** or a **Nezumi Graverobber**, equipping a **Sword of Light and Shadow**, or flipping **Exalted Angel**, you can spend mana on that powerful ability and still have mana to do something else afterwards when you have the Will out.

Of course, it stands to reason that if you get more mana, you'll be casting more spells. That, in and of itself, is great. Great, that is, until you run out of spells.

If the **Nature's Will** is going to be doing all that much for you, having some card advantage would be great. There are a ton of ways to go about this. A card like **Firebolt** is great; not only can it pop someone out of the way early on, but when it does it later on the bigger cost isn't going to be that detrimental. The two *Mirrodin* Block swords, the **Sword of Fire and Ice** and the **Sword of Light and Shadow**, can both supply you with more fuel for the extra mana of the **Nature's Will** as well. Even simple **Ophidian** effects can be very potent here. Try out **Hystrodon**, **Seshiro the Anointed**, or **Shadowmage Infiltrator**. Seshiro can be especially effective, turning any snake you already had on the table into a draw engine.



More thoughts on land

Sometimes land has a use other than mana. With the **Nature's Will** untapping all of it, maybe you can get something out of it. Cards like **Bazaar of Baghdad** can be quite potent in the right deck, but having the equivalent of two of them can be downright scary. **Dust Bowl** is another card that can be incredibly powerful when it can be used twice a turn.

The various "Man"-lands, though, are probably the ones most easily able to exploit **Nature's Will**. Whether they be true man lands like **Treetop Village** or **Blinkmoth Nexus**, temporary mass effects like **Rude Awakening**, creature producers like **Kjeldoran Outpost**, or the new Genju, there is a mana cost to get each of them cranking out a creature. Take the Black Genju, for example. With a large amount of mana, you could activate a **Genju of the Fens** and make it into a potent creature. After it hits, all of that mana you've invested untaps again, leaving you free to do other things. Now if only you could attack again, while it is still big...

Fun with First Strike and breaking the rules

One of the really interesting things about a **Nature's Will** is that it doesn't necessarily trigger just once in a turn. While it doesn't trigger for every single creature that deals damage (the phrase "Whenever one or more" on the card safeguards against that), it does trigger whenever your creatures deal combat damage. This means that First Strikers will untap your lands also!

Imagine the following: Turn 2, **Silver Knight**; Turn 3, lay an **Exalted Angel** as a morph; Turn 4, drop a **Nature's Will**, attack with both creatures, deal your First Strike Damage, untap your lands, and unmorph the Angel.

Or try this, in the late game with a **Nature's Will** out and a pair of **Order of the Ebon Hand**. If either of the creatures is unblocked, you can give it First Strike, throw in a bunch of mana into whichever Order you want, untap and pump some more mana into whichever one you want. But things can get better.

What about attacking again? Go in with everything and cast, say, one of these:



After the combat, you'll not only have a slew of untapped creatures, but untapped land as well. If you have the mana, you can use a [Savage Beating](#) instead, and maybe toss in a bit of [Double-strike](#) action for what will probably amount to a sure kill. For a little less mana, use [Seize the Day](#). You'll only get to untap a single creature, but with your mana untapping, you can easily pay the [Flashback](#) and do it again. With three attack phases, there are a ton of creatures that could wipe an opponent out (say almost any creature equipped with an [Umezawa's Jitte](#)).

But, why settle for the little stuff? [Aggravated Assault](#) and [Nature's Will](#) can often spell instant doom for every opponent that you can shake a stick at. If only a single creature can get through, you'll be able to untap all of your mana, activate the [Aggravated Assault](#), get through again, untap all of your mana, activate the [Aggravated Assault](#), and on and on until your opponent is dead. It doesn't matter if you're attacking with a [Scryb Sprite](#). Infinite attack phases have a way of making the wimpiest attack into a kill.

On the lockdown

As I've already mentioned, [Nature's Will](#) is a lot like [Pygmy Hippo](#). Taking a cue from the old-school [Pygmy Hippo](#) decks out there, we can combine the Will with a bit of mana disruption. The [Pygmy Hippo](#) decks ran [Winter Orb](#) - the Hippo would not only give you mana to make the Orb less painful but it would wipe out your opponent's land so that the Orb would be especially painful for them. [Static Orb](#), [Temporal Distortion](#), [Rising Waters](#), or [Hokori](#) all can pull off the same kind of pain for your opponent. [Hokori](#), [Dust Drinker](#) is especially great here; sure it can be killed, but it also can attack (and it flies to boot, so it's likely to get through). In the end, the combo of [Nature's Will](#) and any of these mana-locking cards will tend to cause an avalanche effect. Without as much mana available to them, your opponent will be able to put up less of a fight, while you're getting access to more mana so you'll be able to drive home more threats.

Wrapping Up

[Aggravated Assault](#) is probably the single coolest card I see working with the [Nature's Will](#), so I've made a casual Online Extended deck that tries to use some of the principles I've mentioned in the article.

Nature's Will		
Casual Online Extended Deck		
60 cards		
2 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Llanowar Elves	3 Aggravated Assault
4 Wooded Foothills	3 Hystrodon	4 Nature's Will
4 Karplusan Forest	4 Elvish Archers	4 Firebolt
1 Contested Cliffs	3 Flametongue Kavu	4 Glacial Ray
1 Mossfire Valley	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	4 Kodama's Might
		2 Squirrel Nest

6 Forest	18 creatures	21 other spells
3 Mountain		
21 land		

With **Hystrodon** in the deck, finding the combo of Assault/Will is a little bit easier, but if you want to be more dedicated to searching for the combo, try adding in some **Sensei's Divining Tops**. In conjunction with the **Wooded Foothills** and the **Sakura-Tribe Elders**, the Top should make it even easier to construct the combo. This deck used those slots for a few more creatures, and it sits pretty low on the mana curve. It is fully capable of getting out a creature advantage against many decks for when that Will does hit the table. An unchecked **Squirrel Nest** can easily start creating too many little beasties to deal with, and it can easily begin to go double duty after a Will. The creature elimination is good even if there isn't a **Nature's Will** out, but if it is you're going to be able to Flashback a **Firebolt**, cast a **Flametongue Kavu**, or splice together a powerful **Glacial Ray**, and then follow it up with another threat. The **Elvish Archers** allow you the "miracle draw" beginning on turn 2 of Archers, Morphed **Hystrodon**, and Will and a flip of the **Hystrodon**.

There are certainly other directions you could go with the card, but I think this one has a bit of character for a beat down deck. Besides dipping into a lot of different sets, it's always fun to exercise that Johnny a little bit and see what we can make happen.

Have a great rest of the week!



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