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**I**t worked! It worked! The time machine worked! Now I'll have more time to write my column each week! Since the deadlines are now further apart... aw, nuts. Stupid temporal mechanics.

While moving over to Tiu's Day from Thor's Day (Where I really belong is Loki's Day, but that doesn't seem to exist... yet), I made a quick pitstop at December 2, 2004, when I promised to one day get into my rant about the theories of time travel. Now (if you give any credence to the relative and self-contradictory concept of "now") seems like an appropriate time (if you give any credence to the relative and self-contradictory concept of "time") for that.



As we all know, there are two prevalent sci-fi theories of time travel, and most stories and movies screw them up because they can't maintain consistency through the paradoxes. Pick a theory and stick with it, people!

### **Theory 1: *The Terminator* theory.**

There is, was, and ever will be *one* timestream. This allows certain types of paradoxes to occur (but not others). For example, John Connor can send Kyle Reese back to the past, where he becomes John's father. This only works if, in the very first linear runthrough of this timestream, Kyle Reese was already there in 1984 to sire John Connor, long before John sends Kyle back in 2029. If John Connor were poultry, it'd be a literal chicken-and-the-egg question—and the answer is that the chicken and the egg came into being simultaneously because you can see all the pages of the calendar spread out before you and they don't ever change.

Other types of paradoxes can't happen under this theory. There was no way the Terminator could ever have killed Sarah Connor because we know John Connor will get born because we know Kyle will be sent back in time. Things get very predeterministic. Why should Sarah bother to run if her life wasn't really in danger? Because she had to; the actions she took are the actions that had to have been taken by her to forge the one timestream the way it came out.

### **Theory 2: *The T2: Judgment Day* theory.**

Uh-oh. Despite the fact that *T2* is, in my opinion, a vastly superior film to the glorified zombie movie ("There's an unkillable monster hunting us") that was *The Terminator*—and don't even get me started on *Alien* or *Jurassic Park*—it irks me to no end that they switched time-travel theories between one film and the next.

In this theory, there are multiple timestreams. Let's make up some terms: The "linear future" is the future in terms of the calendar. March 11, 4219 is in the linear future from now. Your "personal past" is an event in your history, regardless of when it occurs on the calendar. John Connor sticking Kyle in a time machine happened in the linear future, but in Sarah Connor's personal past. So, back to the topic: In this theory, taking a specific action can change the course of the linear future, even if it would also change your personal past (which is impossible under the first theory).

In this film, we start out with a paradox built off of Theory 1 dynamics: Skynet births itself. The cyborg technology from the future, which was sent to the past in the first film, becomes the basis for creating Skynet, which then creates the cyborg technology in the future. Another chicken-and-the-egg question. If the T-800's right arm hadn't existed in 1984 in the first place, Skynet would never have arisen and the T-800's right arm couldn't be sent back to 1984. So far, Theory 1 is consistent. Then Sarah and John destroy this technology. Skynet doesn't rise on schedule. The war doesn't start on schedule. The ripple effect changes everything from that point onwards. The situation in this new 2029 (or whenever), when John sends Kyle back to the past, can't possibly be exactly the same as in the old 2029—but that part isn't changed because it already happened. Those calendar pages are ripped off, stored safely, and replaced with different ones. Voila, multiple timestreams.



*T3: Rise of the Machines* tries to bridge the gap between the two theories. Sarah and John's paradox-inducing actions in *T2* didn't *prevent* Skynet; they just *delayed* Skynet. There's still a war, there's still a Kyle. So now we have a hodgepodge theory that forces some leeway into the predeterminism, but leaves the inevitabilities intact. (You *will* eat oatmeal for breakfast on Saturday, but it's up to you whether it's Apple Cinnamon or Maple Brown Sugar.) I don't buy that for a second—if there's wiggle room, then events can happen in which the whole train is derailed.

**Corollary: Time fluctuations do not affect the time travelers.**

Most time-travel stories follow the *T2* model. It's more fun, there's more danger. Predeterminism takes all the suspense out of everything. But an awful lot of them employ this corollary. It's kind of a cheat. Take *Star Trek: First Contact*. The Borg have traveled back to pre-warp days on Earth. Enterprise is hot on their tail, but hasn't made the jump yet. So while they're hanging out in the Borg ship's temporal wake, still in 2356 or whenever (I admit, I have no idea what year it is when the film starts), they see the effects of the Borg's work: A completely Borg-inhabited Earth. Yet they're somehow shielded by being in the temporal slipstream. Dude, they should have ceased to exist! If they can see the Borg's success at annihilating humans hundreds of years ago, they are witnessing a timestream in which they were never born and the Enterprise was never built... yet there they are. *Back to the Future 2*, which gets really wiggly with timestreams and pulls it off pretty deftly, uses the same crutch. (And Jennifer sleeps through the whole thing on her porch???)

Possibly the best use of Theory 1 in film? I kid you not: *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*. The jailhouse sequence is tremendous, and they set it up throughout the whole film with Ted's dad's missing keys.

Have fun in the forums with this one. Really, anything you have to add to this subject is better off in the message board than in my inbox. Click the link at the bottom of the page to join the discussion.

**Orb It**



And now that I'm here on Tuesday, I guess I'll settle in with some decks. In the Extended tournament environment, there used to exist a deck called Angry Hermit II that let you dump your entire library into your graveyard in one shot via Hermit Druid. (That let you Reanimate a very large, hasty, tramply Sutured Ghoul.) Then Hermit Druid was banned. The next generation was an Extended deck called Cephalid Breakfast that uses Cephalid Illusionist and an *en-Kor* creature to dump your entire library into your graveyard. The next next generation way to pull off this feat is an Online Extended combo: Mesmeric Orb and either Seeker of Skybreak or Aphetto Alchemist. Tap the Alchemist to untap itself, and you're back where you started except that you've milled yourself for 1.

I've known about this combo for a while now, but never had a particularly compelling deck to abuse it. Kyle Kloster solved that problem. Forget Sutured Ghoul: His win condition is Exoskeletal Armor. On your upkeep step, after milling via the Orb for your normal untap, use the combo to mill away the rest of your deck. Then flash back Krosan Reclamation to put a couple of Exoskeletal Armors into your now-empty library, draw one of them, suit up one of your creatures, and deal 20 in one pop. Thanks to milling away Wonder and Brawn, your creature has both flying and trample.



The deck has 23 total creatures, so you can afford to have very few creatures in play or in your hand—they need to get in the graveyard. And you need to find Mesmeric Orb or the dream is dead. Well, that's what Merfolk Looter and Thought Courier are for, and while you're still searching for the Orb, use your Seeker and Alchemist to untap them for extra looting fun! An active Looter will let you draw both of your cached Exoskeletal Armors on that last turn, just in case your opponent has too much flying defense or something else goes wrong.

The two worst things that can happen while playing this deck are 1) You deck yourself because you're not being careful with the Orb, and 2) Your opponent bounces or kills your Armored-up creature. If you're facing a control deck, play it slow. Hit with your weenie creatures until your opponent has to tap out to respond. Mill only half your deck and create a 10/11 Birds of Paradise—you'll be giving your opponent an extra turn to live, but if she plays Echoing Truth or Glacial Ray in response to the enchantment, you'll still have some cards in your library.

Mesmeric Mulch		
 		
<b>Main Deck</b>		
<i>60 cards</i>		
11 Forest	4 Aphetto Alchemist	2 Careful Study
11 Island	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Exoskeletal Armor
-----	1 Brawn	1 Krosan Reclamation
22 lands	4 Merfolk Looter	4 Mesmeric Orb
	4 Seeker of Skybreak	4 Serum Visions
	4 Thought Courier	-----
	2 Wonder	15 other spells
	-----	
	23 creatures	

The deck can be blindingly fast. Turn 5 kills are quite achievable. In my second solitaire game (a practice game against no opponent), I created a lethal attacker on turn 3, though that's not usually how it'll go.

### Collar of the Claw



Last week, Adrian Sullivan showed us the power of Ninja. But what, wondered Tobias Aberg, about their power together? Tobias sent me his deck after Adrian's column was posted but before Nate's, so I can only assume he has some sort of time machine too.

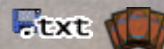
Both Ninja and Nature's Will like unblocked creatures. They both especially like first strike damage, which is why the secret weapon of this deck is—oh, yes—Sparring Collar. Imagine this: You've tapped your lands to play stuff (like, perhaps, Nature's Will). You attack with a Sage Owl that has first strike. It deals combat damage to your opponent. All of his lands tap and all of your lands untap. Now, *still in the first-*

*strike damage step*, you use the ninjutsu ability to pop in a Ninja of the Deep Hours, returning the Sage Owl to your hand. Use your lands to pay for whatever other effects you like. When the game moves to the normal combat damage step, the Ninja deals damage to your opponent, you draw a card, and your lands untap *again*. Now you replay the Sage Owl.

What you're really looking for, to take advantage of your mana advantage, is Higure, the Still Wind. With Higure around, you'll have plenty of ways to spend your excess mana. The oft-replayed Sage Owl, combined with shuffle effects (Kodama's Reach, Time of Need, Higure) lets you pull the best stuff out of your deck. Since Sparring Collar isn't the best way ever devised to get first strike, Glissa is in the deck (findable with Time of Need), as is Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep (which works much better with Higure than it does with Kira).

Tobias had a couple of Relentless Assaults (as recommended by Adrian) in the deck, but they weren't doing enough, so I pulled them in favor of a Kira and a 4th Cloudskater.

## Will of the Ninja!



### Main Deck

60 cards

10 Forest	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Kodama's Reach
6 Island	2 Glissa Sunseeker	4 Nature's Will
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	3 Higure, the Still Wind	2 Sparring Collar
2 Mountain	1 Kira, Great Glass-Spinner	3 Time of Need
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep	2 Mistblade Shinobi	
1 Shivan Oasis	4 Ninja of the Deep Hours	13 other spells
2 Tendo Ice Bridge	4 Sage Owl	
	4 Soratami Cloudskater	
23 lands		
	24 creatures	

## Over the Rainbow

Those first two decks had something unusual in common. They both featured Birds of Paradise, which is odd for me—despite the fact that it's never been out of print, it's still an expensive card. I certainly have no qualms about throwing lots of costly rares into my decks (this is *not* Building on a Budget), but for pricey support cards like that, I figure that the people who own them will know when to use them and the people who don't won't miss them that badly. The Birds are very important to both decks, however: In the first one, they can get a gigantic Exoskeletal Armor boost and start swinging for major damage; in the second one, they can attack, not get blocked, and turn into a Ninja. Sadly, in today's third deck, there is no room for Birds of Paradise. To make up for it, though, the deck features more giant rare monsters than I've seen in a while. This *really* isn't Building on a Budget.

What manner of fat does the deck sport? Eight Myojin. Four Bringers. Two Darksteel Colossi. And a Kuro, Pitlord in a pear tree. How does it cast them? \*👁️👁️👁️👁️ power!

The Bringers are pretty savvy. They know no one wants to pay 9 mana for them, so they come with an automatic mana-saving coupon. In the days of Kodama's Reach, Sakura-Tribe Elder, and Wayfarer's Bauble, assembling \*👁️👁️👁️👁️ isn't all that hard. But I'm greedy. And I'm lazy. If I can pay \*👁️👁️👁️ instead of 7👁️👁️ for Bringer of the Black Dawn, why should I pay 6👁️👁️👁️ like a chump for Kuro, Pitlord? I'm willing to pay \*👁️👁️👁️ for that too. And I'll pay \*👁️👁️👁️ for Myojin of Life's Web... if it comes into play with a divinity counter on it. Well, that's what Fist of Suns is for.

I've featured a Fist of Suns deck before. Back on June 17 of last year, I showcased a Fist of Suns-Soulscour deck that my cubicle neighbor Devin Low played in the FFL. However, I couldn't include one of the key cards that he had used, both because it came from the as-yet-unreleased *Champions of Kamigawa*, and because the version of the card Devin had been playing with was "unsafe at any speed" and had been changed. I believe I also said "That monstrosity cost 8👁️👁️👁️ at the time, and let's just say it made an entwined Tooth and Nail look like a Mudhole." Hyperactive reader Fox Murdoch wrote in to ask me what that mystery card was. Could I reveal it now? I didn't have to, because Aaron Forsythe already did. It was version 5 of Myojin of Seeing Winds, which said:

Remove a god counter from CARDNAME: You may play a card from outside the game without paying its mana cost.



Yeah. Anyway, the current Myojin of Seeing Winds is still pretty nuts with Fist of Suns. Since you are playing the Myojin from your hand (the Fist gives you an alternate cost, but you're still paying for it and putting it on the stack), it comes in with a divinity counter on it.

What do you do if you don't have a Fist of Suns? That might seem like a bit of a problem considering how many otherwise-unplayable cards the deck has, but the four Bringers and the four Etched Oracles (and the lone Fabricate) should buy you time and help you find it. Heck, if you've got a 4/4 Oracle and a 5/5 Bringer on the table, who needs Myojin anyway?

## Main Deck

60 cards

4 City of Brass  
8 Forest  
3 Island  
3 Mountain  
3 Plains  
3 Swamp

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24 lands

2 Bringer of the Black Dawn  
2 Bringer of the Blue Dawn  
2 Darksteel Colossus  
4 Etched Oracle  
1 Kuro, Pitlord  
2 Myojin of Cleansing Fire  
1 Myojin of Infinite Rage  
2 Myojin of Life's Web  
3 Myojin of Seeing Winds  
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder

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23 creatures

1 Fabricate  
4 Fist of Suns  
4 Kodama's Reach  
4 Wayfarer's Bauble

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13 other spells

Until last week, have fun with time travel!

Mark

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