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Tuesday, March 29, 2005

Control: A subject near and dear to every supervillain's heart. Control, simply put, is power. Control is usurping someone else's free will and replacing it with your own will. If I tell you to give me your lunch money or I'll punch you in the face, that's control. If I put you in a cage, that's control. If I implant a Brain-O-Cise neuron override chip in the base of your neck, that's control.

Need for control has its roots in insecurity. Confident people think the world is humming along smoothly enough and they can take care of their personal slice of the pie. That'd be enough to keep themselves happy, so why not let everyone else go about their business? It's the insecure people that fear the future. They fear that others are coming to get them, or are destroying the environment, or are decaying the moral fabric of society. Those other folks need to be stopped. Their decisions aren't as wise as your decisions would be. You need control over them. You need to tell them what to do or they'll screw it up. You need to regulate them via money, or force, or suspension of their freedoms, or guilt... or of the *threat* of any of those things. Fear is the motivation behind grabbing control, and fear is the primary means towards keeping control.

I am a very insecure person.

I am a control freak.

If I'm not in control, someone else is. Someone else is in control of me. And that's intolerable.

Normally, this is where I try to not-entirely-ineptly segue the topic into how it applies to **Magic**. I don't have to this week. There's no need to draw a few tangled and tattered threads from the prefatory matter of the column to the deck-specific part of the column. Why? Because it's exactly the same in **Magic** as it is in life.

When playing **Magic**, someone else *is* out to get you. You are under attack. Your safety and your freedom are in jeopardy unless you do something about it—unless you take control of the game first. In the broader sense of the word “control,” there are many ways to do this. You can simply win the game first. Winning the game through beatdown, for example, means your will over the course of events has come to pass, and your opponent's will has been subverted. Another way is to create a dominant board position such that your opponent can't dismantle it. Again, your goals are achieved and your opponent's are denied. But that's not the “control” we're really interested in, is it?

The narrower, more literal use of the word “control” is to make your opponent subservient to you. Your plan is to prevent your opponent from achieving his plan. When he is stifled at every turn, when his deck can't gain any sort of positional advantage, then you will win the game. How you do it is nearly irrelevant at that point, because your victory is inevitable... unless your control is broken first.

This is where things start to sound strange coming from me. This sounds like it's describing a “permission” deck: counterspells, counterspells, maybe some bounce, and then more counterspells. And permission decks are the bane of combo decks. Since a combo deck needs many interlocking pieces to come together, one well-timed counterspell aimed at a critical support beam can bring the whole wobbly structure crashing down. Plus they're no fun. Heck, they're boring. But while permission is the most obvious example of a control deck, it is by no means the only flavor. And many combo

decks are, ultimately, control decks: The combo, when running successfully, grinds your opponent's deck to a halt. Prevent your opponent from possibly achieving victory and your victory is assured.

Sour Cream and Archives

I thought I'd browse the archives looking for control decks I've posted before, and I was surprised how many there have been. Check these out:

Wacky permission

Just say no to your opponent's spells.

- The Silent Fountain deck uses a Decree of Silence-Power Conduit engine to automatically counter every spell your opponent plays for the rest of the game.
- The Verdant Snakes deck sets up a 4-card combo that powers a Mystic Snake recursion engine so you can counter every spell for the rest of the game.
- The How Bazaar deck pairs Bazaar of Wonders with the *Unhinged* card ____ to give you the ability "①: Counter target spell."
- The Crucible of Seismic Routes deck actually uses those small blue spells, but in a supremely annoying fashion.
- The Soft Lock deck goes one better by having no victory condition in the deck—your opponent will nearly always just concede when you've established total game control.

Bizarre creature control

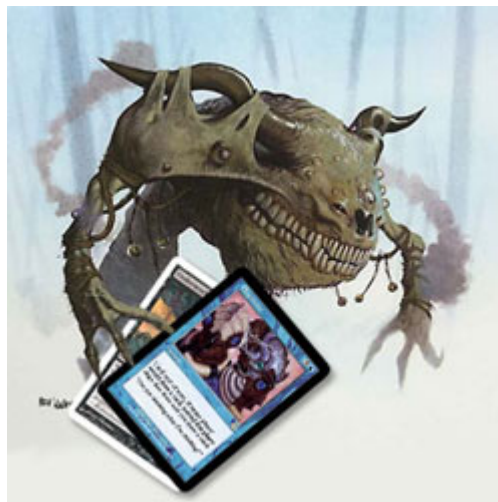
Counterspell is probably the greatest, most useful control card ever printed. Wrath of God may rank second. If your opponent intends to achieve victory by using those repetitive damage sources known as "creatures," Wrath of God will keep him off his game.

- Wrathless Wrath is a whole column about unusual ways to keep your opponent's creatures off the table.
- The Thumb Your Nose deck uses Wirefly Hive as a repeatable selective Wrathing machine.
- The Hammer It Home deck is all about creature annihilation and taking extra turns.
- The Flyswatter deck showcases blue-green pinpoint creature destruction. You heard me.

Bizarre permanent control

Why stop at creatures? Deny your opponents their creatures *and* mana *and* cards *and* (sometimes) turns.

- The Seizan/Plagiarize deck steals enemy draws, extracts cards from the enemy deck, kills enemy creatures, and bounces enemy permanents. (Made during the week I forgot to name my decks!)
- The Subdual Dual deck negates your opponent's ability to damage you or create colored mana before it starts to destroy his permanents.
- The Who's Buried in Transmigrant's Tomb? deck blows up every artifact and creature your opponent has, then it can even start in on his lands.
- The Home Furnacings deck uses the Mycosynth Lattice-Furnace Dragon-Neurok Transmuter combo to remove all permanents from the game except your 5/5 flyer.
- The Clouded Judgment deck puts some extra nastiness behind Death Cloud, one of the strongest control cards printed recently.
- The Shake Your Fist deck uses Fist of Suns to power out Soulscour, Hypnox, and Time Stretch, which annihilate your opponent's board, hand, and turns, respectively.



- The Batting Avarice deck doesn't destroy all your opponent's good nonland permanents—it steals them so you can use them instead.

Unorthodox lockdown

Land destruction decks are a specialized form of control that hit your opponent at an earlier development stage than permission decks. You don't stop spells; you stop the ability to play spells. The same principle applies to card-denial decks and prison decks.

- The Geddon Warmer column focused on creative ways to make your opponent's mana base disappear.
- The Lockness deck is a new-school build on old-school prison using *Betrayers of Kamigawa* cards.
- The Yes You Kanzashi deck lets you control what card is on top of your opponent's deck.
- Even better, the Chimney Sweep deck uses the obviously broken Chimney Imp to lock your opponent by forcing the same card back on top of his deck over and over.
- Even betterer, the Sit, Uba, Sit deck uses the Uba Mask-Vedalken Mastermind combo to deny your opponent card draws for the rest of the game.
- And the Look What I Found deck takes the most cruelly literal "control" card of all—Mindslaver—and puts it in a recursion loop so your opponent never gets a *decision* for the rest of the game.

Hey Ertai, Say Something Witty

How about a new control deck? In building a new deck, I decided to look for a card that could repeatedly counter spells. I found that brash, young, heroic character with gifted mystical powers who had fallen under dark influences and, deformed by wretched surgeries, had become a bloated, twisted, evil creation that had no qualms about quashing others. Yes, Anak—er, I mean, Ertai, the Corrupted would do nicely.



Ertai is white, blue, and black. The token generators it feeds off of are green and artifact (well, most of the best ones are: Squirrel Nest, Summoning Station, Nuisance Engine). Green spells would clearly be needed to get the right mana to successfully play Ertai—oh, why bother? With token generators already in the deck, Ertai can be Reweaved into play. There is, of course, a ridiculously good blue token generator floating around these days as well, so Meloku the Clouded Mirror pops in as well. Solemn Simulacrum provides more mana acceleration for Meloku and Summoning Station, and it can cantrippily be Reweaved into either one of them (or Nuisance Engine, Ertai, or a clone of itself).

There are dangers inherent in this deck. Once you have one of the two legendary creatures on the table, Reweaving a token carries the danger that you'll find its one other copy of that legend in the deck, thus annihilating them both. Oops. I know I'll get a dozen emails suggesting Mirror Gallery (multiple

Ertais can counter multiple spells a turn), so I'll beat everyone to the punch and suggest it myself. But I didn't use it; I felt I'd have to pull out something better to make room for it. The other danger in the Ertai plan is that your opponent might have two really good spells in her hand. If you tap Ertai to counter the first one, the second one might knock you out—you'd have just lost control. That sets up an interesting quandary—although you *can* counter a spell a turn, you *should* counter only when absolutely necessary. If you've found a Minamo, you'll naturally be in much better shape; after all, Ertai was at his best at wizard school.

Main Deck

60 cards

7 Forest	2 Ertai, the Corrupted	4 Consuming Vortex
5 Island	2 Meloku the Clouded Mirror	4 Kodama's Reach
2 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	4 Solemn Simulacrum	1 Nuisance Engine
2 Mirrodin's Core	_____	4 Rampant Growth
1 Plains	8 creatures	4 Reach Through Mists
1 Swamp		4 Reweave
2 Tendo Ice Bridge		2 Squirrel Nest
4 Yavimaya Coast		2 Summoning Station
_____		2 Trade Routes
24 lands		1 Words of Wilding

		28 other spells

Look—a deck that would rather have Rampant Growths than Sakura-Tribe Elders! You don't want to Reweave into an Elder while hunting for Ertai.

A funny story from playing this deck online: I had not much on the board (a Solemn Simulacrum and a Squirrel Nest, I think) when my opponent played Shared Fate. Okaaaay. See, I knew something that he didn't... my deck is *terrible*! At the time, I was holding a Summoning Station, Consuming Vortex, and a Reweave. Despite the fact that I was stuck with my opponent's intentionally miserable deck (useless Terrors and Thirst for Knowledges), I was able to get Ertai on the table (with Reweave) and pump out attackers (with Squirrel Nest and Summoning Station). I never countered a single spell with Ertai that game—nothing that came out of my own deck was fearsome enough. Ah, the benefits of goofball decks!

Sometimes I Amaze Myself

And now I reveal my latest impossible feat. Now I tell you about something so ludicrous that the four of you out there who didn't already question my sanity/genius will understand what the CIA operatives who encode messages in my Alpha-Bits are talking about. Ready?

I DECK PEOPLE IN PRISMATIC.

Prismatic is a **Magic Online** format whose main restriction is that each deck must have at least 250 cards in it. There are other rules: color requirements, a banned list—but the main focus is on the giant deck size. And I have a deck whose only real win condition is to mill my opponent out.

That's right: *I mill out all 250 of my opponent's cards.* (Except for the cards they draw, of course.)

Don't misunderstand: This deck isn't good. It will lose to serious Prismatic decks that are running cards like Upheaval and Head Games and—eek!—counterspells. But it wins about 1/3 of the time, and that number is on the rise as I make adjustments. The point isn't to win each game. The point is to win in the most audacious, ludicrous, unexpected, idiotic way possible, and when I do, that giddy victory is worth whatever setbacks it took to get there.

Why talk about the deck today? Because it's a control deck. The main axis of the deck is its bazillion Wraths and Wrath variants. Once I've established that I'm not going to lose the game, I'm going to win it—and it doesn't really matter how. Sure, if I had a faster win condition, I wouldn't need to maintain control of the game for as long as I do. But I like a challenge.

Deck components:

- **Creature kill:** And how. The deck is mainly white-blue, and most of the white component consists of 4 copies of nearly every Wrath variant available. Void, Pernicious Deed, Terminate, Spite/Malice, Evacuation, and other spells make sure creatures stay off the board.
- **Life gain:** One Ancestral Tribute (especially if fueled by Mesmeric Orb) can put me far out of reach of a single creature's range, and whenever my opponent overextends to compensate, I've got a Wrath handy.
- **Card drawing:** Yup. That's most of the blue component of the deck. There are actually very few milling cards in here, and I've got to find them.
- **Mana fixing:** This is most of the green component.
- **Milling:** Wondering when I would get to this? In the initial version of the deck, there was a lot more, and I found that it was mostly ineffective. Millstone takes off 2 cards a turn. Two?! It's just not worth it. Dreamborn Muse might mill 7 a turn... or it might mill 0, and it's very easy to kill. The only milling cards worth their salt have been Traumatize, Haunting Echoes, Tower of Murmurs, Mesmeric Orb, and Ambassador Laquatus—and I'm itching to cut the Ambassador. Mana-for-mana it's more efficient than the Tower, so I've kept it around, but it has yet to do anything. I haven't see it often enough to be able to make a fair judgment yet; I almost cut the Tower until I saw it in action, and it turned out to be impressive.



So it turns out that only 4 cards mill away a giant deck? Yup. Mesmeric Orb does a ridiculous amount of work for a tiny artifact. It helps me as well: Ancestral Tribute, Holistic Wisdom, Recoup, and Deep Analysis like a fat graveyard. Tower of Murmurs whaling away at a deck with 250 cards is very similar to Prodigal Sorcerer pinging away at an opponent with 20 life. Traumatize is the breadwinner, of course, as it will take down 100+ cards on the first shot. Recoup on Traumatize is nice, but the real combo is with Holistic Wisdom. After the game is under control, I can start pitching those sorcery-speed Wraths to bring back Traumatize over and over, often twice a turn. Haunting Echoes is cleans up the mess started by any of the three other cards—and it takes care of any pesky cards you've put in your opponent's graveyard (Anger? Genesis?) along the way.


Deck 'Em All		
Main Deck		
250 cards		
1 Adarkar Wastes	2 Ambassador Laquatus	4 Akroma's Vengeance
1 Barren Moor	2 Ancestor's Chosen	4 Allied Strategies
2 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	4 Ancestral Tribute
1 Bloodstained Mire	2 Solemn Simulacrum	4 Compulsion
1 Brushland		4 Darksteel Ingot
	10 creatures	

4 Coastal Tower
4 Elfhome Palace
3 Flooded Strand
7 Forest
4 Grand Coliseum
13 Island
4 Krosan Verge
1 Lonely Sandbar
4 Mirrodin's Core
6 Mountain
1 Nantuko Monastery
11 Plains
1 Polluted Delta
2 Riftstone Portal
4 Salt Marsh
1 Secluded Steppe
4 Shivan Oasis
7 Swamp
4 Terminal Moraine
1 Tranquil Thicket
4 Urborg Volcano
1 Windswept Heath
1 Wooded Foothills

98 lands

4 Deep Analysis
2 Dismantling Blow
4 Evacuation
4 Explosive Vegetation
4 Fact or Fiction
4 Far Wanderings
4 Final Judgment
2 Fire/Ice
4 Haunting Echoes
4 Holistic Wisdom
4 Honden of Cleansing Fire
4 Honden of Night's Reach
4 Honden of Seeing Winds
2 Hull Breach
4 Kirtar's Wrath
4 Kodama's Reach
4 Mesmeric Orb
4 Mind's Eye
4 Pernicious Deed
4 Prophetic Bolt
4 Recoup
4 Repulse
4 Rout
4 Sensei's Divining Top
4 Serum Visions
4 Spite/Malice
4 Terminate
4 Tower of Murmurs
4 Traumatize
4 Vindicate
4 Void
4 Wrath of God

142 other spells



The control card Spite/Malice was a recent addition because while the deck could handle Rude Awakening (Rout, Evacuation, or Pernicious Deed all do the trick), it was consistently destroyed by Upheaval. Now, at least, I have a prayer.

The sad part about playing this deck is that I don't often get to see the joyous message that awaits my victory.

8:57 TeamGFCPD loses because of drawing a card with an empty library.

No, losing to my deck is a grueling and painful process, and most of my victories come via concession when it's clear that the game is mine. (I'm at 130 life, or I've just Wrathed for the fourth time, or Haunting Echoes is in the midst of resolving.)

The funniest concession came when my opponent played Myojin of Life's Web and Myojin of Seeing Winds on the same turn. I knew they were coming; I had Evacuated them both before. He popped the blue Myojin and drew a ton of cards, then popped the green Myojin to put a ton of creatures into

play. They all had haste due to an Anger in the graveyard, so when my opponent attacked with all of them, I played Rout as an instant. He used his last two untapped lands to play Counterspell, so I had no choice but to brace for impact. His creatures hit, and I took 50, going from 75 down to 25. Ow. I untapped, gained some life from Honden of Cleansing Fire, and played Final Judgment. My opponent uttered some disparaging comment about how that was too much (because starting a turn with no creatures in play and ending it by attacking for 50 is somehow fair!) and quit. Too bad, too; I had just drawn Haunting Echoes and was about to go to town on his library thanks to a Tower of Murmurs-stocked graveyard.

Until next week, have fun with control... because I told you to.
Mark

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