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Greater Good

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Single-Card Strategies
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"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

Well, not every **Magic** player is going to have the charisma of a JFK, but that doesn't mean you can't get every one of your creatures a chance to really sacrifice themselves to the **Greater Good**. This week we're going to take a chance to look at one of those quality enchantments that I've come to love, even though I never managed to get it into a big tournament win.

Magic is a game of give and take. The costing system in **Magic** is designed so that hugely powerful effects generally cost some huge amount - except cards like **Time Spiral**, which are free, but everyone kind of acknowledges that was kind of a mistake. The cost "sacrifice" is a little bit sneaky. Take **Diabolic Intent**, for example. It might initially seem like a very cheap "fixed" **Demonic Tutor**; after all, it costs the same mana. The cost we sometimes forget about is the mana we spent to actually cast the card we're going to sacrifice. When it comes to sacrificing something, we'd better get a decent effect out of it.

The basics package, without the frills

So what is that effect? With a **Greater Good** out, you can sacrifice a creature at any time and potentially improve your hand. Now, obviously sacking a small creature isn't going to get you nearly as far as sacrificing a big creature, but either way, as long as it isn't a **Birds of Paradise** or other zero-power creature, you're going to be seeing more cards. In order to break even on the drawing and discarding, the sacrificed creature has to be three power, so finding (or making) bigger creatures than that is a pretty good idea, but in a pinch, you can sacrifice something smaller if you really need to dig.

One thing to remember is that you can sacrifice your creature at any time. Damage on the stack? Okay, now sack! Will a **Lightning Bolt**, **Wrath of God**, or **Terror** kill your guy? Even with their last breath, these guys can still spit at the opponent, if only for hate's sake. Being able to sacrifice a creature doesn't mean that you'll want to do so at every turn - sometimes it's nice to attack with your Huge/Huge creature. When it comes time, though, you can rest assured your creatures will act for the **Greater Good**.

Big guys on a budget

Big creatures are best, of course, but big creatures on a budget... that's the ticket! Some of the best creatures in the world to use with **Greater Good** are cheap, large creatures. Somehow or other, though, Wizards decided that these cheap creatures needed to have "drawbacks" to "balance" them. Well, we'll see about that!

The reigning supreme champion of all of these Big Guys has got to be **Phyrexian Negator**. Negator is one of those cards that is very dangerous, but very fast. I can't count the times that I've dropped a really fast **Phyrexian Negator** and prayed that I wasn't playing against Red burn spells. A 5/5 Trampler for only three mana generally makes pretty short work of an opponent, but losing a permanent for every point of damage that it receives is incredibly punishing. When a red player has out three mana and casts **Volcanic Hammer** on your Negator, it can be a hard decision - keep the Negator around and hope that you can lay enough permanents that it will go all the way, or lose it and two other permanents you have laying around. You still have to make the same kind of decision with **Greater Good** on the table, but you are no longer ever on that excruciating "risk everything" decision. If things begin to go bad, drawing 5 cards and discarding 3 is a pretty good deal, especially if your opponent had to lose a card to make that happen.

Even more risky than the Negator is the nearly unplayable **Desecration Elemental**. 8/8 for four mana is an incredible deal at the incredible cost of losing a creature every time a player casts a spell. **Greater Good** keeps a card like this useful if you run out of tokens or your gamble of emptying their hand doesn't work out.

One of my favorite creatures to go with **Greater Good** is **Argothian Wurm**. The **Argothian Wurm** is a scary 6/6, but when it comes into play it could be put back on top of your library if your opponent is willing to sacrifice a land. In some cases this can be great, giving you the equivalent of a continuous **Lay Waste** against an opponent that needs their mana. In some cases this can be awful, giving you the equivalent of a continuous **Lay Waste** against an opponent who doesn't need any of their land. Since the sacrifice of a land creates a trigger to put the Wurm back on top of your library, you can respond to it and sack the Wurm to fill up your hand.



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Phyrexian Negator, Desecration Elemental, and Argothian Wurm have a lot in common. They are big, they are cheap, and sometimes you just don't want to see them anymore. Essentially what you're looking to do is get some kind of use out of something that can be difficult, dangerous, or annoying to keep around. It could be a **Goblin Goon** that can no longer do anything because he's outnumbered, a **Grinning Demon** that is going to kill you before it kills your opponent, or a **Cosmic Larva** that has outlived its usefulness.

Live fast, die young (and leave a good looking corpse)

"The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long - and you have burned so very, very brightly, Roy." – Tyrell, *Blade Runner*

There is another whole class of creatures that tend to work well with **Greater Good**. The creatures that weren't meant to last. **Ball Lightning** and **Blistering Firecat** are some of the glaringly obvious creatures here. Generally these creatures have short lifespans specifically because they have such a high power. At other times, these creatures are merely expensive to upkeep, or, like the **Blastoderm**, Fade out over time. Here are a couple of other nice cards to consider:

- **Chimeric Coils** – X+1 mana turns into a big attacker and a net of X-3 cards.
- **Ancient Hydra** – If you're taking out an army of 1/1s, the card advantage can be really ridiculous
- **Yavimaya Ants** – Green's **Ball Lightning** can stick around for a steeply increasing upkeep.
- **Genju of the Spires** – Every mountain can turn into a huge draw engine!

We're going to pump you up

Making your creatures go large in some fashion can be another way to exploit **Greater Good**. A risky play with a pair of **Psychatogs**, for example, can increase their reach by a little bit if just a single **Greater Good** is in play. A **Dragon Whelp** can hop in for one last dying attack and turn into a whole hand full of cards.

Equipment and creature enchantments are the way to go to really pump your guys up. A **Cranial Plating** is great to pump things up with, but there are certainly others as well. One of my favorites is **Grafted Wargear**, but another is the newly printed **Ronin Warclub**. With some of those hasty attackers already creating huge problems for your opponent, having a Warclub hop onto a **Ball Lightning** before the attack seems pretty nifty, especially if you get to follow up with your Wargear. If a whopping 11 trampling power doesn't kill them, maybe seeing 11 new cards will.

Rancor is one of the classic old creature enchantments that also makes a lot of sense with **Greater Good**. **Rancor** in a lot of ways is like pseudo-equipment in that you get to keep your **Rancor** around even if the creature it is on ends up dead for the cause somehow. Sometimes these enchantments will make the creature so good that you'll want to keep them on the table to punish your opponent for as long as possible.

"Echo is for chumps", and other miscellany

There are a bunch of little ways that **Greater Good** can help you out. In a similar class to the temporary creatures I just mentioned are the cards with Echo. "Echo is for chumps" is one of those phrases you'll hear anywhere that Kurt Hahn and the other old-school Milwaukee-area **Magic** players have been. It's not exactly a constant truism, but sometimes you've gotten the effect you want (say, from a **Crater Hellion**) and you have something better to do than spend *another* six mana. Even if you don't have something better to do at the time, I wouldn't be surprised if you *do* have something better to do after drawing six cards.

Of course, there are plenty of times you are simply in a really difficult situation, and you need to find the exact right card. You might start out sacrificing a really good target like that **Crater Hellion**, but still not find the **Hurricane** or **Diabolic Edict** you need to survive that Akroma floating over in the air. So maybe your **River Boa** will go next. And then maybe your **Llanowar Elves** or **Sakura-Tribe Elder**. The thing that is really great about **Greater Good** is that you can use it to dig into your library without spending any mana to do so. Of course, if you keep sacrificing all small creatures, you run the risk of emptying out your hand.

Even if you're just filling up your graveyard, that isn't necessarily a bad thing. We've spent a lot of time in previous articles looking at all of the cards that go great with the graveyard, and they pop up here as well. Cards like **Ichorid** are a great example. An **Ichorid** might not gain you any card advantage when you sacrifice it, but you don't lose any either. At the same time, you're quite likely to be handing the **Ichorid** fresh meat to eat and revisit play. **Roar of the Wurm** is another great card that might find its way into the graveyard; once it's in play, it's a pretty hefty creature to have around for the **Greater Good**, if need be.

Finally, some guys work best dead. **False Prophet**, **Saprazzan Bailiff**, **Academy Rector**, or pretty much anything with a **Pattern of Rebirth** on it – these things want to be sacked. Even if you lose cards on the deal for some of these creatures, it can still be worth it.



Wrapping Up

I'm going to leave you with an Extended deck intended for casual play. The deck has a lot of really big guys to mop an opponent off, using **Greater Good** to help refill the deck as it goes. To speed it up, it also includes **Birds of Paradise** and a fun trick with **City of Traitors** and one of the Lairs from *Planeshift*.

Trigger Happy Black/Green 		
61 cards		
4 City of Traitors	4 Phyrexian Negator	4 Greater Good
3 Darigaaz's Caldera	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Call of the Herd
3 Tendo Ice Bridge	4 Blastoderm	4 Ronin Warclub
2 Forest	3 Argothian Wurm	4 Chainer's Edict
4 Wasteland	4 Mindslicer	2 Mox Diamond
4 Llanowar Wastes		4 Chrome Mox
20 land	19 creatures	22 other spells

I know I should cut a card, but I really like the numbers anyway. The Warclub is really cool in this deck, making even the Birds something worthwhile to lose to **Greater Good** and since its triggered ability doesn't target, it manages to even attach to a **Blastoderm**! The other trigger that is pretty cool is **Caldera/City of Traitors**. You can stack the two triggered ability to return the **City of Traitors** before it would destroy itself. **Mindslicer** is another nice card, allowing you to clear out your opponent's hand when you sacrifice it to **Greater Good**, but still allowing you to keep the best however many of the top cards as you see fit. There are a lot of Moxes in the deck, but this deck can really get rolling in cards, so having more ways to create mana is a good thing.

In any event, I hope you enjoyed this week's deck and this week's card. Have a great rest of your week!



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