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Saproling Cluster

Adrian Sullivan · *Single-Card Strategies*
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Fallen Empires first introduced us to the Saproling. Looking back, I remember thinking that the Thallids were pretty cool. I even had a Green/Red beatdown deck that used the humble **Thallid**. [Edward Beard, Jr.'s](#) art was my favorite **Thallid** art (it reminded me of the game Awful Green Things from Outer Space), so I made sure to play only his version. It would be a while before we'd see Saproling creating-cards that were actually good - cards like Jamie Wakefield's Best Fattie Ever Printed, **Verdant Force**, or cards like **Rith the Awakener**.

Saproling Cluster was definitely overshadowed by **Saproling Burst** when it was printed. It does have a few advantages that I was hoping to exploit:

- the creatures last
- the card is cheap
- over time, you can make a lot of creatures.

Now, it isn't all roses and chocolates. The creatures you get are pretty puny: 1/1. Also, **Saproling Cluster** is one in a long line of cards that share in one of Green's hidden subthemes. We know all about these themes. Black is the color of discard, Red is the color of direct damage, et cetera, et cetera. One of Green's subthemes is sharing – if it gets the ability, so can your opponent. This is one of the hurdles to overcome. The other that needs overcoming is that you need to discard a card to get this effect. Let's see what we can do.



Overcoming sharing with the opponent

Sharing abilities with your opponent sucks. Game theorists tend to call these abilities “symmetrical”, but that is just another word for “sucky”. Stasis is good because your opponent doesn't get to untap, the fact that you don't get to untap too sucks. **Howling Mine** is good because you get to draw an extra card. Your opponent getting to draw one too, well that sucks.

One of the top ways to handle your opponent being able to make 1/1s is being able to efficiently kill them. Some of the more aggressive decks might enjoy being able to turn their useless extra land into a 1/1 creature. Pingers can make short work of 1/1s and even are useful against a huge amount of other things you might expect to see your opponent play anyway. **Vulshok Sorcerer** can come out of the gates shooting, and makes using a Cluster almost like making the opponent sit under their own personal **Bottomless Pit**. **Goblin Sharpshooter** doesn't start off doing anything, but on the following turn a single Sharpshooter can wreak havoc on every little Saproling your opponent might have made.

Another way to overcome the symmetrical nature of the card is to work their hand and give them decent incentives to *not* make little 1/1 fungi. Cards like **The Rack** will punish them for reducing their hand size. Even simple discard is great. Against a smaller sized hand, a **Stupor** can create an interesting question: does the opponent simply drop all of their cards to get more 1/1s or do they lose out on a couple to keep cards in their hand. Generally speaking, we like cards in our hand. Making a 1/1 isn't exciting for a deck not built to discard to do it, and backing it up with more actual discard can be a good way to make it less likely for an opponent to have that extra card they can afford to discard. **Megrim** is also really nifty. Unlike **Saproling Cluster**, this card only works one way, putting some real hurt on them for daring to do what you do so well. A card like **Nezumi Shortfang** is especially good, working both the Rack angle and the discard angle at the same time.

More on discard

If you plan on playing the Cluster, you probably plan on activating it yourself, and that means that you're going to be discarding to it as well. What you're looking to overcome is the natural tension between the bonuses of having more cards around and the cost of discarding a card to have an admittedly small effect. Well, thankfully, there are several ways to accomplish this.

Massive card draw is one good way. Having a few **Accumulated Knowledge** can easily help you recover from any of the cards that you do lose. Most of the good cards here are blue. **Fact or Fiction**, **Concentrate**, **Opportunity** – anything that gets cards in your hand can be something to help keep you going.

Having discard be good is another. A lot of people wanted to hear me talk about Madness in last week's article on **Greater Good**. Well for all of you (especially rocknrobin who wrote most eloquently on the topic), I hope this is a bit of atonement. One big way that **Saproling Cluster** can better use madness than **Greater Good** is that you don't need to have a creature out to be able to trigger a discard for Madness. This means that you can turn cards like **Circular Logic** into ♣♣: stop their spell and make a 1/1, or **Basking Rootwalla** into ♣: making a lizard and a fungus.

Another way to make your own discards good is to run graveyard effects. Obviously the best one to use here would have to be **Squee, Goblin Nabob**. “General Nuisance” is what Tahngarth roared, but your opponent is liable to be doing the same thing once you get this guy into your grave. **Krovikan Horror** can be even more abusive, but it is far easier to disrupt if your opponent can just get a non-creature on top of the Horror in your yard. All it takes is a single **Intuition** for Squee, Squee, Horror and the massive Saproling production begins.

So what good is a fungus?

I know, I know, they are just a couple of 1/1 fungi. Personally, I don't even eat mushrooms, so it can't be said that I'm a fungi fan, but still there are things that can be done with a bit of fungus.

Well, we always can go back and revisit Fallen Empires when it comes to mold-lovin':

- **Elvish Farmer**: if you get sick of 1/1s, they can make a nice snack (2 life!)
- **Thallid Devourer**: eat a fungi, get bigger (a measly +1/+2)



- **Feral Thallid**: Regeneration!

Hrmm. Not so exciting. Perhaps we should look a little less into the moldy past for our Fungus King.

Nemata, **Grove Guardian** is the closest thing you are going to find to a Saproling Lord, but it does do the job pretty shockingly well. With **Nemata**, your Cluster almost becomes a lot more like that **Saproling Burst** of old, but in reverse motion. Your six 1/1s can become five 2/2s, or four 3/3s, or go all in with one 6/6. In the midst of combat, this is actually a pretty intense ability to not require any mana to activate. A flipped **Orochi Eggwatcher** is easy to achieve with Cluster out, and with a very **Nemata**-like ability, you could easily be sending huge fungi into combat.

Saproling Symbiosis can double a creature count that is likely to be quite high (and even do it as in instant with kicker in a pinch). Even without the double, you can easily have quite a few saproling to play with. A **Coat of Arms** can be incredibly dangerous – even though your opponent can make their own Saprolings, you are likely to have more. Let's pretend that you have out 3 Saproling when a Coat hits, your opponent is facing a lot of potential damage (you can discard cards during combat to grow your saps), but if they discard to make their own creatures, everything gets even bigger. With you ahead in the race for shrooms, if they don't draw a bunch of cards and drop even more Saprolings down than you can, they will die quite quickly as they make your unblocked Saprolings into true monsters. A bit less exciting is the card **Symbiotic Deployment**. It can power itself into creating a bunch of creatures, sure, but it really needs a bit of gas to get going in the first place.

Of course, the best thing I can think of to do with all of these creatures is to turn them all into little **Icy Manipulators**. Opposition seems to be the top pick to me, here.

Oppose this!

Opposition is a big enough deal, it warrants its own little section. We already saw some great success with one Opposition deck in the last extended season. Check out the [Alabama PTQ Top 8](#) if you don't believe me. Opposition took 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. Here is the finalist's decklist – maybe he can provide us some clues for using **Opposition** in another deck:

Lance Loden / Kiki-Opposition		txt
2nd Place in Birmingham		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
5 Forest	2 Counterspell	1 Shivan Reef
4 Island	2 Mana Leak	1 Dust Bowl
1 Mountain	3 Opposition	1 Gilded Drake
1 Shivan Reef	3 Living Wish	1 Monk Realist
4 Yavimaya Coast	4 AETHER Vial	1 Seeker of Skybreak
2 City of Brass		1 Spike Weaver
2 Karplusan Forest	14 other spells	1 Tradewind Rider
2 Reflecting Pool		2 Naturalize
21 land		1 Ravenous Baloth
2 Flametongue Kavu		1 Siege-Gang Commander
3 Mystic Snake		2 Viridian Shaman
4 Birds of Paradise		1 Oxidize
2 Tradewind Rider		1 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker
4 Wall of Blossoms		15 sideboard cards
1 Siege-Gang Commander		
3 Eternal Witness		
2 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
25 creatures		

Wow. He has a lot of creatures that can provide card advantage. **Eternal Witness**, **Wall of Blossoms**, **Flametongue Kavu** – even **Sakura-Tribe Elder** can provide card advantage with the right block.

If we're going to think about running **Opposition**, let's take a lesson from this. If both you and the opponent are going to be getting the use of the **Saproling Cluster** to create creatures, any kind of card advantage works to the same effect as **Wall of Blossoms** in this deck. Here, we have more of a reinforcing of that idea. Other than just creatures who gain card advantage through some come-into-play effect, powerful card drawing is also a good way to make the most of **Opposition** when you have a Cluster to take advantage of.

Wrapping Up

For this week's deck, I'm going to update a deck made by Matt Greuel about a million years ago for Standard, placing it into Extended. This deck makes use of the **Saproling Cluster/Opposition** engine and adds a lock element with **Static Orb**. I spent a lot of time tuning and retuning the deck for Extended, but as the new cards came out, it never quite managed to make it up to snuff for a big tournament. At the same time there are a lot of great interactions. Let's check it out:

Cosine – A Casual Extended deck		
60 cards		
3 Windswept Heath	3 Squee, Goblin Nabob	4 Accumulated Knowledge
4 Forest	3 Eternal Witness	3 Intuition
4 Yavimaya Coast		3 Opposition
11 Island	6 creatures	3 Static Orb
22 land		4 Saproling Cluster
		4 Brainstorm
		3 Gush
		3 Daze
		2 Thwart
		3 Foil
		32 other spells

This deck works like a control deck, countering threats as it builds up **Static Orb/Opposition/Saproling Cluster**. At that point, you generally quickly overwhelm any decks ability to lay down an offense, leaving them only cards like **Disenchant** or **Boomerang** to safely escape the lock. At this point, you should hopefully have a counter or two at the ready to keep them from breaking out.



One of the things that can really help make this deck tick is the **Intuitions**. You can use it to power up your card drawing with **Accumulated Knowledge**, it can be a tutor for a missing lock element, or you can use it with **Eternal Witness** to have access to a variety of great cards. **Intuition** also helps as another shuffler to rearrange after a **Brainstorm** and to fill your hand with Squees after you get out a Cluster.

The rest of the deck is just more manipulation and counters. Cards like **Daze**, **Gush**, and **Thwart** all can supply food for a Cluster if you need to just drop Saprolings on the ground and beat down. **Gush** can also be mana production in a deck with this low a land count, giving you a temporary boost in mana by giving you a land to drop. The few fetch-lands can be useful if you want to side into a **Solitary Confinement** style deck (just include a plains and fit in some **Compulsion**).

The Clusters fit into this deck quite nicely. They are a cheap threat against control, and you do have a fair amount of card draw (**Accumulated Knowledge** and **Eternal Witness** does that, somehow). With cards like **Squee** and **Gush**, you can often have way more of an ability to discard, and once you get out an **Opposition**, things really get out of hand. I know that a deck like this made the rounds up in Minnesota during **Fires of Yavimaya's** heyday, so it is sitting pretty comfortably on the shoulders of some decent deck work. I really hope that you enjoy the deck and this little look at **Saproling Cluster**.

Have a great rest of the week!



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