

Mark Gottlieb

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There is no need to panic. Please clear your mind of thoughts. We will think for you. Thinking has been scientifically linked to elevated levels of stress, high blood pressure, and spontaneous combustion. Please don't take unnecessary risks. We have only your best interests at heart.

There has been no conclusive link between thought and brain tumors, but why gamble with your health?

To alleviate the need—and temptation—to think, we have, at no cost to you, taken the liberty of piping a continuous entertainment data stream into your home. For a nominal fee, you can increase the data stream from mudslide to landslide. For ever-increasing nominal fees, you can increase the level of entertainment to avalanche. We have left this choice up to you. Please try not to think too hard about it. You don't want to get wrinkles.

You may be concerned about the activities of certain armies around the earth. You do not need to be concerned about that. We are in control of them and we have more information than you. Everything is fine. Please return to your entertainment data streams. You will find them soothing.

There is no need to exercise creativity. Your entertainment data streams have been engineered by professionally creative people. They are trained and skilled at being creative. You are not. You cannot hope to match them. Please enjoy their creativity instead. It is easier than coming up with your own, which may cause uncomfortable levels of frustration and failure. Don't risk worsening your life. Relax and let us make life easy.

You may notice that your entertainment data streams have been intercut with microbursts of aggressively creative entertainment. Please do what they say. If possible, they are more entertaining than the entertainment they interrupt. You will find them catchy and appealing. Their suggestions will improve your life. Please do not skip them, as they are very important. They are there to help you. I repeat, there is no need to think.

Certain bands within your entertainment data streams have been designed to provide information. Too much information is bad for you. It decreases your Fun Index, elevates your Worry Quotient, and—worst of all—incur a high risk of thinking. For your safety, we have replaced most of the information with “News,” an entertainment-based information substitute. It looks like information, it sounds like information, but it is 99% information free. You won't know the difference.

Enough of That

I stumbled onto an analogy I like right at the end there. News (both nightly network news shows and the 24-hour news channels) is a *See? Cucumbers could kill you!* synthetic information substitute. They've created it the same way one would create real information, but they've spun it out of relevance-free content. It's like (and here's the analogy) meat substitutes crafted out of soy-based protein strands, or fat-free fat substitutes, or even cucumbers. Cucumbers seem suspiciously like food, and they fill your stomach, yet they have zero nutritional value. If you ate an all-cucumber diet, you'd die. Cucumbers are natural, though, so that's not as insidious as the manmade synthetics... which, as a vegetarian, I eat all the time. As news programs report about celebrity trials or the should-be-private tragic events of any one specific family blown ridiculously out of proportion or so-called human-interest stories, or they eat time by

having professional opinion-spewers spew their opinions about said topics, they're synthesizing a show out of nutritionally empty current events and passing it off as information you need to know.

I wanted to work in a "saccharine aftertaste" line, but I couldn't get it right.

I don't know why I'm railing against television. I love television. I watch way too much of it. Besides "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" (one of my comedy paragons and the only news source I trust), I enjoy "Lost," "Alias," "Arrested Development," "The Amazing Race," all 83 "Law & Orders", and plenty more. Sure, television is bad for me, but I love it anyway. What I have a real problem with is the culture of anti-creativity. The culture of "Sit. Stay. Fetch. Heel. Good human." If nobody rocks the boat, we can all have a nice boat ride.

Yawn.

And that's why I like writing a column that promotes creativity. (And working at a job that promotes creativity, and having hobbies that promote creativity....) **Magic** decks are a narrow topic considering the world at large, but when you expand your mind in this small way, it's good practice for everything else. No preconceptions. Nothing's off-limits because there are no limits. The impossible holds the most tantalizing possibilities, and the only thing not worth the effort is the boring. Some people live their lives this way. Me? I just make **Magic** decks.

Warning! Fun Overload

Welcome, welcome *Saviors of Kamigawa*. This is a Johnny-centered set, so I'm jazzed about playing with all my new toys. There's one patently anti-Johnny card in the set (Pithing Needle), but with the new flippers, the epic spells, the Wildebeest cycle, the versatility of channel, the hand-size tricks, the Onnas, the Kirin, and all the goofy one-ofs scattered throughout, it is definitely time for some fun.

For no reason whatsoever, I'm going to kick things off with some of the Onnas. These are Spirits that each have a comes-into-play ability and a spiritcraft self-bounce ability. Haru-Onna is the green one; you draw a card when it comes into play and you can return it to your hand when you play a Spirit or Arcane spell. I recommend doing this after Haru-Onna blocks or when it's about to be destroyed, but bouncing it back when you just want more cards is a fine plan as well. Kiri-Onna is the blue one; it bounces a creature when it comes into play. It's not Capsize, but it's a repeatable bounce effect that can also attack for 2.

Haru-Onna and Kiri-Onna, meet Isochron Scepter. With these creatures, you want to play cheap Arcane instants. Well, why not play the same Arcane instant over and over? And why not splice more effects onto it? To pull this off effectively, you'll want a lot of land. That's where Elder Pine of Jukai saunters in; each time you replay an Onna or play another Arcane instant, you slurp up more lands from your deck. Here's where the deck throws the hammer down: With all the lands you'll be putting in your hand, and all the Arcane spells you'll be keeping in your hand because you've spliced them onto copies of Arcane spells, and all the Onna bouncing you can do, you'll wind up with a full hand, a ton of land, and an easy-to-implement Dampen Thoughts victory condition—perfect conditions for Meishin, the Mind Cage. Negate your opponent's creatures permanently.

Cage Match

Standard Arcane deck

Don't put Evermind in the Scepter. You still won't be able to play it. Twincast is the only non-Arcane instant in here, and it doesn't enable the rest of the deck, but it seems like so much fun to either put it in the Scepter or copy a huge, splice-laden spell that I wanted to throw one in.

Promises, Promises

My next deck is based not on a combo per se, but two cards that share a common theme: Kuon, Ogre Ascendant and Promise of Bunrei. In case you're wondering, that is pronounced "bun-ray." Why are you laughing? You think that word is funny? You think that a promise of it is even funnier? Nice. Real mature on your part.

Kuon wants three creatures to die. Promise of Bunrei wants one of your creatures to die, at which point it will make more creatures that you can snuff out, which Kuon likes quite a bit. Kuon doesn't care whose creatures die, though; a timely Barter in Blood while you have some spare creatures lying around can set off both cards. When Kuon goes all morbid, he flips into Kuon's Essence, a musky aroma with accents of cinnamon, loganberries, and old gym socks. It's a newfangled The Abyss that hits artifact creatures but gives you less choice in the proceedings. Luckily, you have a bunch of token creatures, each more expendable than the last.

The entire deck creates creatures to sacrifice, helps you sacrifice them, takes advantage of your sacrifice effects, or (in the case of Ink-Eyes) takes advantage of your opponent's well-stocked graveyard. Auramancer is there to retrieve a spent Promise of Bunrei, then can be sacrificed to trigger the Promise and make more token creatures.

Kuon's Promise

Online Extended Kuon deck

You Can't Hide Your Lion Eyes

Today's final deck is actually a pre-*Saviors* holdover. I've been sitting on it for weeks now because I knew what was coming. Mike Pape came up with a fantastic cross-block combo: Azami, Lady of Scrolls and Leonin Battlemage. First reaction: Huh? Second reaction: Azami lets you tap a Wizard to draw a card, Leonin Battlemage untaps every time you play a spell, *Leonin Battlemage is a Wizard*. Whoa.

This is going to draw you some cards. Those two creatures alone give you two bonus cards a turn, plus an extra card for each spell you play. Mike's deck also included Wizard Replicas (they counter spells, they block 2/2 creatures, they fly in for damage, and they tap to draw cards with Azami around), 0-mana spells like Ornithopter and Paradise Mantle (which you can equip to Leonin Battlemage to generate mana each time you play a spell), and control elements like Boomerangs and counterspells. Mike also included Empyrial Plate as the primary victory condition; they're good on either the little flying creatures or on the Battlemage since it plays both offense and defense.

I built this deck, modified it a little since Mike's decklist contained 70 cards, and played it. I almost included it in my column a couple of weeks ago, but since it already has a "hand-size matters" card in the Plate, I decided to save it until after *Saviors* came out.

What does *Saviors* add? Minamo Scrollkeeper is a 2-mana, 3-toughness Wizard that increases my maximum hand size. Freed from the Real says "U: Draw a card" if Azami is in play. Ivory Crane Netsuke lets my life total start climbing. Oboro, Palace in the Clouds is an Island with a bonus hand-size pumping ability. Erayo, Soratami Ascendant is a 2-mana flying creature that's eminently Empyrial Platable and flips into a ridiculous control card if you can build up a 4-spell turn, which is what you're trying to do anyway. Since the hopes for a fat hand are so strong, I couldn't resist tossing in a couple of the new "Maro" cards as potential finishers.

Leonin Battlemage Goes to School v.2

Standard Azami deck

Is this version of the deck better than Mike's? Unclear. More than anything, it's just different: It's less controlly, and the focus has definitely shifted. The important thing is his brilliant central combo, which has remained intact. And thus the beauty of creativity: Mike's version, created from scratch, is valid; my version, which is a riff on Mike's, is valid; and your version, which will be different than both mine and Mike's, will be valid too. Endless ideas, endless variation, and a little self-expression in every handmade deck.

Now that the *Saviors of Kamigawa* spoiler is available, the moratorium on sending me decklists is over. I want to see your crazy *Saviors* decks and combos using *Saviors* cards. I've got plenty of ideas already, but I know there are tons more out there. Be creative! The email link is at the bottom center of the page. While I won't be able to reply to every email (and I'm not available for individual deck doctoring), I do read every message that comes my way. (Please note that if you have rules questions, you should send them to John Carter—the **Magic** Rules Manager—not me!)

Until next week, have fun with *Saviors of Kamigawa*!

Mark

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