

Mark Gottlieb

Tuesday, June 14, 2005

So it's Arcane Week, huh? I guess that means I should construct decks with Arcane cards in them (as opposed to what I've been doing since *Champions of Kamigawa* was released). Let me get right on that: blah blah instant, blah blah splice, blah blah Dampen Thought. OK, now it's time for something more interesting.

Arcane (capital "a") is a spell subtype. Arcane (lowercase "a") means mysterious or obscure. Cryptic. Weird. I can do weird. I can do weird in my sleep.


And so can my readers.

## Probing Question

Before getting down to business, I want to post a response to a question about the screenshots I put up last week.

The real question suggested by your MTGO screenshots is, what was your opponent doing with 3 Psychogenic Probes, a Darksteel Ingot, a Thunderstaff, a Spellweaver Helix, and a Locust Miser? I can think of no synergies between any of those cards.

--Ben Allen

I'd have responded to Ben, but he didn't include a return address in his email. Poor Ben can't think of any synergies. Well, Darksteel Ingot creates mana. That usually helps you play other spells. Thunderstaff is pure defense, and it worked: It completely nullified my army of Gnat Misers while true Incendiary built up his combo pieces. Spellweaver Helix gives you free spells. So what are we left with? Three Psychogenic Probes and a Locust Miser... while I had 7 Gnat Misers out. The Locust Miser belongs in *my* deck, and true Incendiary likes it a lot when I shuffle my deck. And true Incendiary has 5 tapped lands, so he spend  on something. And there's a Bribery in his graveyard, which you can see in screenshot No. 2. (I hope the puzzle pieces are coming together now.) If true Incendiary hadn't drawn especially poorly, he would have easily won that game; I was giving him plenty of extra cards in the early part of the game before I locked him. Luckily for me, Eradicate is a dead card against me and Quash is nearly useless as well.



## Let's Get Lowercase "a" Arcane!

I get the craziest mail (and love it):

Enter the Dungeon + R&D's Secret Lair + Revelation

Have fun. I do.

--Curiously Silver

Enter the Dungeon says that both players play a subgame of **Magic** under the table. R&D's Secret Lair says that you play cards as written. And Revelation — *as written* — says "All players play with the cards in their hands face up on the table." Uh-oh.

If you get this going, you and your opponent will be *under* the table, but your hands will be face up *on* the table. That makes things difficult. We in R&D (including Mark Rosewater) decided that the best course of action would either be to have some sort of wonky periscope, or to play under a glass table while there's a mirror on the ceiling. You could have a friend there to tell you what cards you've got in your hand, but that smacks of coaching. Perhaps some sort of robot could help...

## The Master Plan

My Esteemed Mentor:

Long have I enjoyed reading of your sinister exploits with Magic. You have opened my eyes to sinister combos that make other players squirm. I have chuckled while watching my opponents struggle while I locked down their lands with a Mycosynth Lattice. I have cackled with glee after donating a Summoner's Egg to an opponent with a Phage imprinted. I put a pinky to my puckered lips after locking out an opponent's draws with Chimney Imp.

But now, Mr. Gottlieb, I have done you one better.

I have created a deck that will let me conquer the world. Behold!

**Dehydrate.dec** 

Casual World Domination deck

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

4 City of Brass	4 Auriok Salvagers	3 AEther Spellbomb
3 Forest	4 Trinket Mage	2 Artificer's Intuition
11 Island	_____	3 Ashnod's Coupon
3 Plains	8 creatures	3 Chromatic Sphere
_____		2 Engineered Explosives
21 lands		3 Lion's Eye Diamond
		3 Lotus Petal
		1 Pyrite Spellbomb
		2 R&D's Secret Lair
		3 Reap and Sow
		3 Sylvan Scrying
		3 Wayfarer's Bauble
		_____
		31 other spells

All it will take is one hapless player. The deck masquerades itself as a simple cog control deck, hiding its sinister nature until the final turn. After playing R&D's Secret Lair, I use Auriok Salvagers and Lion's Eye Diamond to create a huge amount of white mana, before playing Ashnod's Coupon, repeatedly cycling it via the Salvagers, to take control of the entire supply of liquid in the world. After doing so, I will setup my own fluid-based economy, doling out meager rations of water only to those I choose. The plan is foolproof!

So, in short, thank you, Mr. Gottlieb. I learned from the best.

Perhaps I'll lend you a drink.

--Bob



This is bad news: No one takes over the world but me! It's a brilliant plan, though; I wish I could find a flaw. Fortunately, Bob has the weakness inherent to all supervillains and explained his diabolical scheme to me. All I can do is spread the word — if everyone on earth knows about this, Bob will never find the hapless player he needs to make his vision come true!

## Oh Yes: One with Nothing

So apparently there's some kind of hullabaloo about One with Nothing. People don't like it. Rosewater wrote a column justifying its existence. Let me assure the naysayers out there: Some people like this card. They like the challenge it represents. I've received a few decks that put it to use, so it's clearly got something going for it. Amazing badness is still amazing.



What you may not realize is that One with Nothing is a direct-line descendant of Black Lotus. It's Black Lotus's grandchild. Alan Comer figured it out, really. Black Lotus is the most broken card of all time: Its cost is 0, and its effect is 3 mana. It was "fixed" into the aforementioned Lion's Eye Diamond, which added a drawback to Black Lotus: Now its cost is 1 and the cards in your hand, and its effect is 3 mana. But that was still broken and had to be restricted in Vintage. So, again, it was "fixed" into One with Nothing, which merely increased Lion's Eye Diamond's mana cost by 4 (from -3 to 1): Now its cost is 4 and the cards in your hand, and its effect is 0 mana. To make it a little more appealing, it was pushed to instant speed, and you don't have to lose your hand until resolution. But really — how could a fixed Lion's Eye Diamond be all that bad?

The first One with Nothing deck I saw was posted on the House of Cards message boards a couple of weeks ago. I know not everyone reads the message boards, so many of you missed this deck. It is

brilliant, and the best use of One with Nothing I've seen so far. Here's Landman's deck:

<b>Nothing But Cheese</b>		
Casual The Cheese Stands Alone deck		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
4 Ancient Den	4 Phyrexian Walker	4 Enlightened Tutor
2 Crystal Vein	4 Steel Wall	4 One with Nothing
4 Darksteel Citadel	_____	4 Paradise Mantle
4 Seat of the Synod	8 creatures	4 Peer Through Depths
4 Vault of Whispers	_____	4 Pentad Prism
18 lands		4 Retract
		4 Serum Visions
		2 The Cheese Stands Alone
		4 Thoughtcast
		_____
		34 other spells

"So in the end, the cheese stood alone?"

"Yea... he won with nothing!"

Every permanent in the deck is an artifact or the sacrificeable Crystal Vein. Get The Cheese Stands Alone on the table, play Retract, then play One with Nothing. Victory! My hat is off to you, Landman.

## A Lot of Nothing

Noel deCordova came up with a crazy plan for using One with Nothing. First, put it in an Isochron Scepter. Then Donate the Scepter to your opponent. Then Mindslaver your opponent and make him use the Scepter and play One with Nothing. If he doesn't immediately concede out of embarrassment and shame, take advantage of the discard with Megrim and Geth's Grimoire... and, while you're at it, funnel the Grimoire draws through a Words of Wind ... while Warped Devotion is on the table.

Is it efficient? No. Is it a particularly good path to victory? No. Is it evilly delicious to force your opponent to play One with Nothing? Oh my goodness yes.

## Even More Nothing

Robby Bullis was so enchanted with One with Nothing that he sent me the following email, which is astounding on many levels. I've never seen *Cool Hand Luke*, so I can't vouch for the quotes, though I know what the movie's about (a guy in a prison/chain gang). Regardless, I can appreciate a highly themed theme deck when I see one, and the One with Nothing inclusion is inspired both thematically and mechanically. Robby's explanation of the deck follows at the end.

This card just seemed so broken that I had to make a deck around it. I figured I should try to pair the greatest card of all time with (arguably) the greatest movie of all time..

### One with Nothing

**Dragline:** He beat you with nothin'. Just like today when he kept comin' back at me—with nothin'. **Luke:** Yeah, well, sometimes nothin' can be a real cool hand.

### Devouring Greed

**Luke:** I can eat fifty eggs.

**Dragline:** Nobody can eat fifty eggs.

### Soul Feast

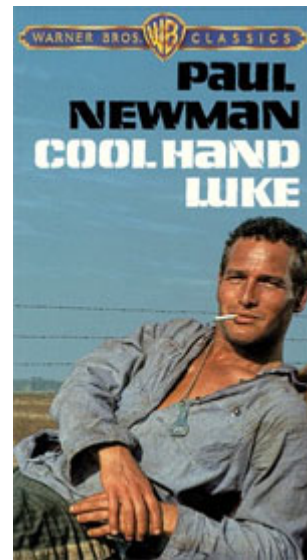
**Luke:** Oh come on! Stop beatin' it! Get out there yourself. Stop feedin' off me. Get out of here. I can't breathe. Give me some air.

### Consume Spirit

**Boss Paul:** That ditch is Boss Kean's ditch. And I told him that dirt in it's your dirt. What's your dirt doin' in his ditch?

**Luke:** I don't know, Boss.

**Boss Paul:** You better get in there and get it out, boy.



### Plunge into Darkness

**Carr:** Them clothes got laundry numbers on them. You remember your number and always wear the ones that has your number. Any man forgets his number spends a night in the box. These here spoons you keep with you. Any man loses his spoon spends a night in the box. There's no playing grab-ass or fighting in the building. You got a grudge against another man, you fight him Saturday afternoon. Any man playing grab-ass or fighting in the building spends a night in the box. First bell's at five minutes of eight when you will get in your bunk. Last bell is at eight. Any man not in his bunk at eight spends the night in the box. There is no smoking in the prone position in bed. To smoke you must have both legs over the side of your bunk. Any man caught smoking in the prone position in bed... spends a night in the box. You get two sheets. Every Saturday, you put the clean sheet on the top... the top sheet on the bottom... and the bottom sheet you turn in to the laundry boy. Any man turns in the wrong sheet spends a night in the box. No one'll sit in the bunks with dirty pants on. Any man with dirty pants on sitting on the bunks spends a night in the box. Any man don't bring back his empty pop bottle spends a night in the box. Any man loud talking spends a night in the box. You got questions, you come to me. I'm Carr, the floor walker. I'm responsible for order in here. Any man don't keep order spends a night in...

**Luke:** ...the box.

### Ensnaring Bridge

**Captain, Road Prison 36:** You gonna get used to wearin' them chains after a while, Luke. Don't you never stop listenin' to them clinking. 'Cause they gonna remind you of what I been saying. For your own good.

**Luke:** Wish you'd stop bein' so good to me, cap'n.



### Mindstorm Crown

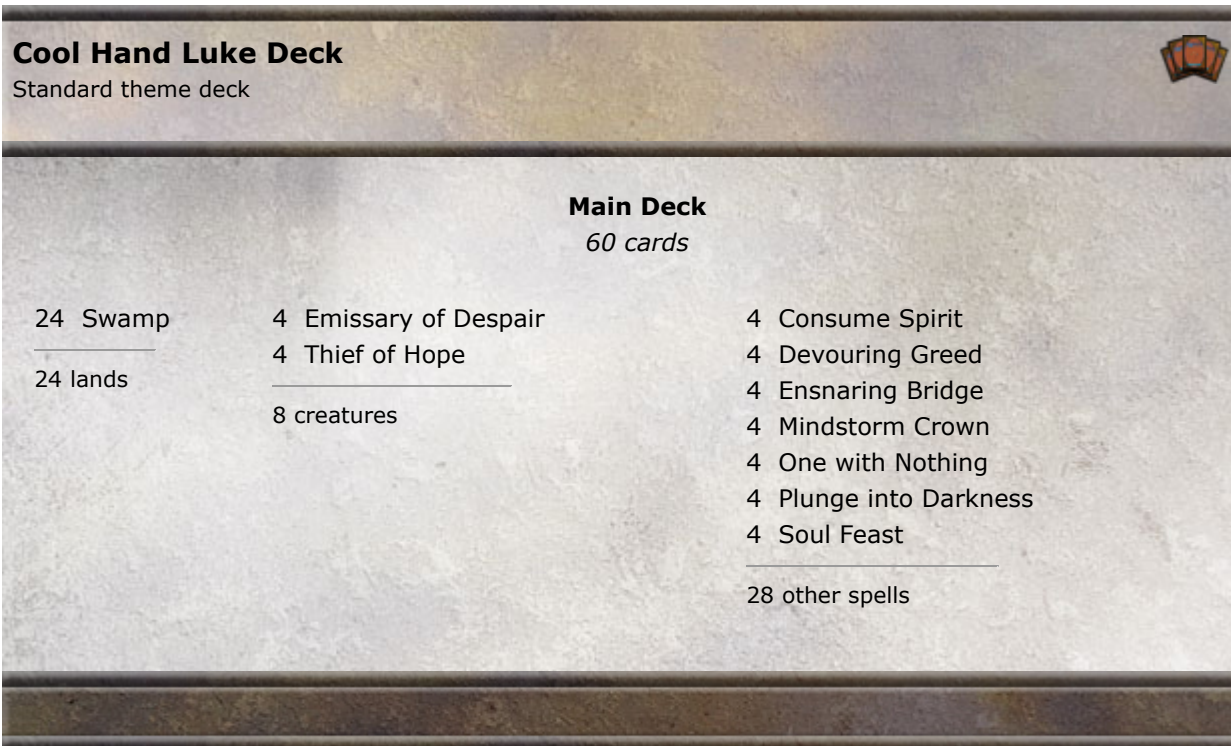
**Captain, Road Prison 36:** You run one time, you got yourself a set of chains. You run twice you got yourself two sets. You ain't gonna need no third set, 'cause you gonna get your mind right.

### Thief of Hope

The Captain

### Emissary of Despair

"Luke, a letter come for you."



**Cool Hand Luke Deck**  
Standard theme deck

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

24 Swamp	4 Emissary of Despair	4 Consume Spirit
24 lands	4 Thief of Hope	4 Devouring Greed
	8 creatures	4 Ensnaring Bridge
		4 Mindstorm Crown
		4 One with Nothing
		4 Plunge into Darkness
		4 Soul Feast
		28 other spells

The deck is one of those decks that wants to hide behind an Ensnaring Bridge and send direct damage at your opponent. One with Nothing is your best bet at dumping your hand quickly. An empty hand also works with Mindstorm Crown. Also, and perhaps most importantly, when your opponent plays Gaze of Adamaro, you can play One with Nothing in response and say "I OWN you!" Or maybe you don't want to do that...

I thought the "Shades" might work well in this type of deck, but Cursed Ronin was the only one who seemed like he might fit into the deck. He could maybe replace the Emissary and could represent Luke. Night of Soul's Betrayal also might make some sense. That would be when Dragline comes to Luke at the church.

### And Now, A One-Act Play

That seems like enough arcane stuff for one day, no? Well, no. Pharmalade sent me the following bit of inspired insanity in support of his Katakai, War's Wage deck. (And for those of you at home who think that this kind of thing will get you printed in my column, you're right—if you're good at it. Taking a stab at humor often means stabbing it to death. Sending me your combo deck with a simple, concise explanation is almost always the best way to go.)

**Narrator:** Katakai's journey begins with a waiting room in the shipping department of Wizards of the Coast.

**Katakai:** Hiiya! I'm gonna hose all them Affinity players back down to nowheresville. They're gonna be sorry they messed with me. Me and my boy Sam is gonna whup some cake with these guys in Standard. Ravager will be soooo po'd, he'll sh...

**Mark Rosewater:** \*ahem\*

**Katakai:** What is it, Mark? I'm ready and rearing. The release date is up and I'm gonna take it to the Vault. I'm gonna kick 'em right in their Seat. Okay, sure, there's still the Disciple, but that's what you guys made Sam for, am I right? Can I get an "A'mise!"

**Maro:** I've got some... bad news.

**Kat:** Well, spill it, I'm all about it!

*Our protagonist.*

**Maro:** You know the artifact lands and Ravager and all the affinity you were supposed to hose...?

**Kat:** What? What about 'em?

**Maro:** We banned 'em.

**Kat:** ...wh... sn... huh? ... Oh! Haha! You're funny Maro. Such a kidder. \*Kat enters Suck Up mode\* I tell ya, Mago ain't got nuffin on ya...!

**Maro** (with a dead serious look on his face): I'm dead serious.

**Kat:** Oh... I... I... see.

**Maro:** Don't worry, bud! We still have a story written about you, right? And, I mean, there's still Extended and Vintage going around. You'd love to hose a Mox, right?

**Kat:** Well, sure... but...

**Maro:** Atta boy, show them you've got Spirit. Anywho, I'm going to go write another article that will really mess with people who have slow modems. I think I'll do a pop-up book style article. Whatcha think 'bout that?

**Kat:** Well... sure... sounds great.

**Maro:** Good! I'll get right on it!

**Narrator:** Maro leaves Katakai among his shattered hopes and dreams. He leaves to walk... er... float above the sidewalks while sad violin music plays.

**Violin Music:** I'm sad!



**Kat:** \*siigh\*

**Narrator:** Around the bend comes Samurai of the Pale Curtain.

**Sam:** Hey, Kat! Good to see ya! Remember in playtesting? Oh, man, you and I. Such a TEAM! Them Ravagers didn't stand a whit of a chance!

**Kat:** \*siiiiiigh\*

**Sam:** Oh... I see you've heard the news. Yeah... sorry.

**Kat:** Yeah, I have. What am I supposed to do now?

**Sam:** Oh, don't worry about it. There's still Eternal Witness and... hey, remember that Kokusho bastard? Well, I set him straight!

**Kat:** They aren't artifacts.

**Sam:** Oh... right. Heh! Well, sorry 'bout that buddy. Wanna go for a cup of Blood and Iron wine?

**Kat:** No thanks, I'm not in the mood.

**Sam:** (as he walks away) Sheesh! What a sourpuss. Hey! 'sup Eights! Gimme a five!

**Kat:** So alone... So alooone!

**???:** Quit your whining!

**Kat:** What? Who said that?

**Narrator:** Around another conveniently placed corner comes a green woman without much in the name of clothing.

**Tanglewalker:** At least you have SOME use. I'm USELESS! I never did see any play even when there were lands to walk over.

**Kat:** What's that got to do with me.

**Tang:** Think, you dumb spirit! You still have a chance to see play! There's Vedalken Shackles, and the two Swords, particularly Sofi.

**Kat:** I won't last against Sofi, she'll just ping me and get smarter in the process.

**Tang:** Well, there's the Jitte... oh... right, that'll kill you too. Well then, I've got nothing. At least I'm an uncommon, in my defense. Why don't you go sulk with the other junk rares over there?



**Kat:** Y... you mean... th-th... THE BINDER OF NO RETURN??? I may as well. Misery loves company.

**Mudhole:** Woe is me!

**Broodstar:** Remember back in the day? Man, I was so hot. Now LOOK AT ME! I'M NOTHING!  
\*sob sob\*

**Transcendence:** Anyone? Any takers! Please! I'll give you infinite life if you've got the patience... and the mana... and the other combo pieces to go with me... PLEASE?

**Kat:** \*sigh\* Fresh off the shelf and I don't get a chance to shine.

**Mike Lattice:** Hey, man. Don't feel so bad.

**Kat:** Mike? Is that you? Fancy meeting you here!

**Mike:** Just visiting an old friend. O! Marchie never saw the bannings coming.

**March of the Machines:** Darksteel Ingot...  
\*sputter\* Obliterate... \*hack\* Ancient Den...  
\*jibber\*

**Mike:** \*soothing voice\* There there, buddy. Everything will be fine. Soon a friendly Johnny will come along and put you to good use.

**March:** \*with a glimmer of hope in his eye\* Really? Really?

**Mike:** \*still soothing\* Sure buddy. Sure. Maybe we'll team up again sometime.

**March:** \*perking up\* Oh, I'd like that, Mr. Lattice... I'd like that a lot!

**Kat:** Hey, Mike?

**Mike:** Yeah?

**Kat:** Do you think... do you think if we teamed up...?

**Mike:** Well, sure. We definitely have something game winning going on. And maybe Second Sunrise over there could give us a hand too. A few rounds with us in play and nobody has anything left on the field. And with some Sunshine? Well, they just won't have a prayer, now, will they?

**Kat:** I don't think we'll be terribly competitive, but...



**Mike:** Sure. Casual play ain't all bad. We can't all be stars like Gifts Ungiven.

**Kat:** Don't remind me.

**Mike:** Sure bud. Y'know, this could be the start of a beautiful friendship.

**Kat:** \*wiping tears from his eyes\* It sure will be, buddy. It sure will.

\*story ends\*

So, anywho, here's the combo in a nutshell...

<nutshell>

Get both Mycosynth Lattice and Katakai on the field. Then, during the next player's upkeep, they've got to pay 1 mana for EVERYTHING. Their lands, their enchantments, their will to live, everything! Come your turn, pay mana for any creatures you want attacking, then float **1\*\*\*** and sacrifice anything else. Then play Second Sunrise. Everything you lost comes back... untapped. All set for a second round.

</nutshell>

Now, that should be enough to wipe someone out. Two turns with lands that cost mana to keep is devastating. You can just sacrifice the half of the combo you don't want to keep and keep on hurting 'em with attackers.

If you want to be truly tricky, you toss in the mistress of ridiculous, Eternal Witness... er... Witness. If you don't pay for her upkeep cost, she'll come back and bring Second Sunrise with her, so you're all set to keep your opponent locked down indefinitely.

Other support can be found in Yosei, the Skip Your Next Untap Step Star, or perhaps Leonin Abunas, who's very protective of your stuff when Mike's out.

Here's a rough (emphasis on ROUGH; sandpaper's got nothing on this) decklist.



## Katakai, War's Wage



### Main Deck

60 cards

11 Forest	4 Eternal Witness	3 Ghostly Prison
11 Plains	4 Katakai, War's Wage	3 Kodama's Reach
22 lands	3 Leonin Abunas	4 Mycosynth Lattice
	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	3 Otherworldly Journey
	3 Yosei, the Morning Star	4 Second Sunrise
	18 creatures	3 Wear Away
		20 other spells

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Watching someone struggle to no avail is fun, don't you think?  
--Pharmalade: Hurrah for Sadism in Deckbuilding!

OK, that's enough theme-shirking for me today. Until next week, have fun with arcane arcana!  
Mark

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