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Rukh Egg

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Single-Card Strategies
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I'm not exactly sure how long I've been playing **Magic**. I know that Beta was out, but I don't know what month it was. *Arabian Nights* would soon be on the shelves, and I would make the smart decision to invest in my first large amount of cards: two boxes. I planned on cracking that first box open for cards, and the second box I was going to sell packs from at a profit! Oh, boy, did I make a profit, as well (I charged four dollars a pack. "Impressive", eh?). My hometown of La Crosse, Wisconsin was like a lot of towns around the world - we didn't really have enough cards to go around.

I was pleased as punch with my first pack open - it had an Ali from Cairo. Strangely, so did my second pack. I had just started playing **Magic** online in a strange MUD or MUCK (an ancient text-based online gathering place), and my first pack online contained an Ali from Cairo! Ali wouldn't ever be reprinted, but one of the commons from that set would generate a ton of excitement. It's the only card from *Arabians* to have to wait over 10 years to see reprinting in a new set, and though we've had access to it since *8th* was released, it hasn't really been looked at. And before we do look at it, I'd like to look at e-mail from last week...



Last week's article on Sway of the Stars generated a great deal of e-mail. Generally, my inbox gets a bit flooded after an article comes out, but this time it was even more than normal. Whenever a card generates a lot of e-mail, I know that I've written about a card that Wizards R&D hit a home run with. There are Grizzly Bears, and then there are the cards like Sway of the Stars which just itch that special something out there in everyone.

As usual, there were a ton of great ideas. Bearclawsix6 Mike wrote to suggest Healing Salve and Hidetsugu's Second Rite (clever!) as well as using Epic spells. I imagine that he must have gotten an Ertai's Meddling on that Sway of the Stars at some point to get the Sway to work after an Epic hits, but he is right, the idea is intriguing. Jared Robertson sent me this three card combo: Sway of the Stars, Spellweaver Helix, and Spiraling Embers. If you remove both of the Sorceries from the grave with the Helix and then cast an Embers, the Helix will make a Sway resolve first. By the time the Helix resolves, you'll have 7 in hand! Nice!

One of the most amazing suggestions comes from one B.J. Roberts. He writes:

What if, instead of getting to keep all of your creatures with Day of the Dragons, you got to keep all of your permanents. Try this one: Sneak Attack (yeah, I know...), Worldgorger Dragon, then Sway of the Stars. You get all of your permanents back untapped, 7 fresh cards and an opponent who will soon be seeing Stars.

My eyes definitely kind of bugged out of my head after reading this one. Great idea, B.J.! It's definitely my favorite of all of those people sent me. Finally, one anonymous suggestion was good enough that I didn't simply delete it immediately: with a Vedalken Orrery in play, attack and place at least 7 damage on the stack, then Sway for victory. Cool, cool.

The Card

I'm sure some of you might already know that I'm talking about Rukh Egg this week. Rukh Egg is one of those unique cards that tend to be ignored by the Spikes most of the time while the Johnnies out there are always thinking about ways to use it. What makes it unique, though, is that a *lot* of the Spikes I've talked to have often considered the Rukh Egg in their decks time and time again. So far,


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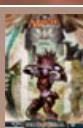
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 by Scott McGough

it hasn't made the cut in any of those more competitive decks, but it isn't often that you see a more Johnny-ish card being considered again and again by people trying to make something competitive. For me, the most recent time I looked into using the card was at this most recent State Championship tournament.

In the beginning, Rukh Egg was a lot more powerful than it currently is. Check out this original text:

If Rukh Egg goes to the graveyard, a Rukh - a 4/4 red flying creature - comes into play on your side at the end of the turn. Use a counter to represent Rukh. Rukh is treated exactly like a normal creature except that if it leaves play it is removed from the game entirely.

If you're used to the Oracle text and never played with the original text, you might not catch what was going on back in the day. The initial wording (especially when combined with the Dark Ages of **Magic** rules) made it so that even discarding a Rukh Egg would produce a Rukh. At the time, **Magic** still used the Play *and* Draw rule, so you could get it in your opening hand, lay nothing, and discard a Rukh Egg to get a 4/4. In essence, you were getting this: "1, put a 4/4 flying red creature token into play and return a land to your hand." A bit much.

Well, even without silly wording, the card has a bunch to go with it.

More Ancient History to present day

One of the first ways that people exploited Rukh Egg legitimately came about during Legends. Hell's Caretaker/Rukh Egg decks were common in my hometown, and when I traveled north to go to events in other places, I would see the same thing.

Sure, people had started out occasionally using a Stone Giant (usually to make the Egg a Serra Angel blocker), but that took a third card to make work. (Stone Giant can only throw something with Toughness less than its power. We used Unholy Strength at the time.) Hell's Caretaker was good because it was self-preserving. If you lost the first Hell's Caretaker, a second one could sacrifice a Rukh Egg and get it back. The death of the Rukh Egg, whether at the hands of a Stone Giant or a Caretaker would always result in the same number of permanents, and so it never really was like losing anything. In the case of the Caretaker, you could easily get a loop of Eggs to Rukhs, and heaven help the person facing off from two Caretakers and two Rukh Eggs.

The lesson here is the value in sacrifice effects, especially if they come with some gain. Take Diabolic Intent. Demonic Tutor was always a great card, but if Diabolic Intent can be Demonic Tutor plus a red Air Elemental, you have to say you've got a good thing going. The number of sacrifice effects out there is almost limitless. Whether it is a Braids, a Reckless Assault, or a Greater Good (not a great or a good choice to sacrifice a Rukh Egg to, generally speaking), you'll end up with your 4/4.

The cause of death

Other times, you aren't specifically looking to sacrifice a Rukh Egg, you're just expecting Rukh Egg to become a casualty. After all, you can't make a Rukh without breaking an egg. (Har har.) One of the times I remember a player mentioning sideboarding Rukh Eggs was in reference to beating Ponza. They couldn't for the life of them beat Ponza decks running Wildfire, and in Wisconsin at the time, that was pretty much an expected matchup. They were dead set on running Rukh Eggs until I told them that any decent player would just Incinerate the Rukh Egg at the end of his turn, and on their own turn cast the Wildfire eliminating the Rukh.

Rukh Egg does end up having a place in a deck that runs a card like Wildfire, though. While not being a great answer to a Wildfire deck, if you play it *in* a Wildfire deck, you can use the Egg for a great purpose: defense. One of the things that a Rukh Egg is generally good at is deterring the attack. A lot of players might build up their forces to attempt to minimize the problem a Rukh will give them. They might wait until they can get an elim in their hand to handle a Rukh. Either way they can give you time to get the mana to Wildfire. At that point, unless your opponent intercedes, your Wildfire will kill the Rukh Egg and make a Rukh.

Other cards can also simply cause the death of the Rukh Egg. Wildfire's cousin, Crater Hellion, is one such example. Wrath of





God is another. Much like with Wildfire, a Wrath can take some advantage from an opponent attempting to extend out to overwhelm the Rukh that might emerge. Living Death is probably one of the best. Later on in a game, a Living Death might not only create Rukhs but return to play new Eggs to give your opponent headaches.

Copying the Rukh Egg with a Kiki-Jiki might be the modern day equivalent of the Hell's Caretaker. The copy of the Rukh Egg might break, but not before it has had a chance to potentially block something and then hatch out a Rukh at the end of the turn when it dies. This Rukh doesn't remember it came out of the Mirror Breaker's Egg, and it doesn't care. It's in the world now, and it is going to stay.

Other cards that cause the death of the creature as a side effect can also be potent. Sneak Attack might have a home in a deck that doesn't already include Rukh Eggs, but surprise blockers are fine

too. Berserk won't do too much to a Rukh Egg, but a Soulshriek might.

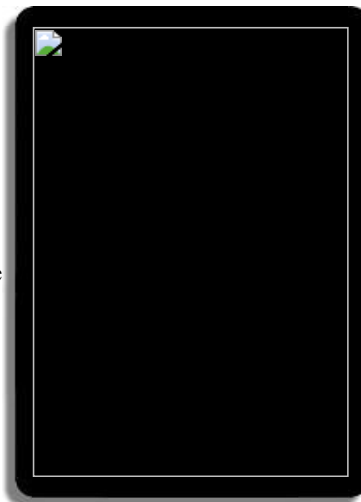
Soulshriek and other reasons to be blocked

One final way to make the Rukh Egg somewhat frustrating for your opponent is to make them *want* to kill it. Generally, powerful creature enchantments might make a creature a target, but this often ends up with the added problem of simply throwing away the enchantment when they kill it. Granite Grip might make a Rukh Egg big, but we can do better.

The first step up from the typical creature enchantment is one that will keep coming back. Rancor is a good starting place. Of course, they can still kill the Rukh Egg in response to that. I won't sneeze at getting a Rukh, but there are probably other options as well.

From *Saviors*, we have two global enchantments that are pretty nice. Captive Flame can make both your Rukhs and the Rukh Eggs they might hatch from into pretty decent threats. In a similar vein to Captive Flame, we have the flipped version of Homura, Human Ascendant - Homura's Essence. Since we might already expect to be running cards that can sacrifice creatures, this seems like an especially good choice.

Also, we have equipment. While we can start with a card like Bonesplitter, we can probably do better yet. Generally, I've found Sword of Fire and Ice to be just a fantastic card, and one that inspires blocking. Better yet for this deck, though, is probably the Sword of Light and Shadow. Getting back those dead Rukh Eggs is pretty nice, and placing the Sword of Light and Shadow on a flier all but assures it.



Of course, your opponent doesn't have to deal with your Rukh Eggs when they are going on the beatdown. They could instead let your Rukh Egg kill them or be their own personal Abyss.

Wrapping Up

This week's deck makes use of a few of the ideas presented earlier in the article. I expect that this deck would find itself most at home in a fairly casual environment, but a lot of these cards have been rumored to be legal in upcoming expansions, so it's possible that something similar to this could be played in a future Standard or Extended.



Which came first?

60 cards

4 <u>Sulfurous Springs</u>	4 <u>Rukh Egg</u>	3 <u>Corpse Dance</u>
9 <u>Mountain</u>	4 <u>Hell's Caretaker</u>	1 <u>Living Death</u>
1 <u>Volrath's Stronghold</u>	2 <u>Crater Hellion</u>	3 <u>Diabolic Intent</u>
1 <u>Phyrexian Tower</u>	3 <u>Cabal Archon</u>	1 <u>Lab Rats</u>
	1 <u>Phyrexian Plaguelord</u>	

1 Keldon Necropolis	4 Mogg Fanatic	2 Memory Crystal
8 Swamp	4 Rotlung Reanimator	4 Talisman of Indulgence
24 land	22 creatures	14 other spells

This deck incorporates the [Hell's Caretaker/Rukh Egg](#) combo of old, but it also makes use of some newer tricks. [Rotlung Reanimator](#) and [Cabal Archon](#) supply a decent base of creatures that can be used to feed the Caretaker and keep the Rukhs coming. The defensive use of a card like [Crater Hellion](#) to sweep the table not only wipes out any Eggs, but with the Clerics on the table, it is possible to come out of the Hellion sweep with a fairly huge army.

The deck also incorporates [Corpse Dance](#). While Corpse Dancing a [Rukh Egg](#) to make a blocker is a sure way to stop attackers from being willing to come in, you still have the problem that you'll need to kill the [Rukh Egg](#) if you don't want [Corpse Dance](#) to remove it from the game. Aside from the pair of Legendary lands that will let you sacrifice it, you also have the [Phyrexian Plaguelord](#). In addition, you have the end of turn step; this can give you some time to activate the Caretaker during your upkeep and kill the Dancing creature, or let you cast a [Crater Hellion](#) or a [Diabolic Intent](#) to get rid of it.

The [Diabolic Intent](#)s let you play with your numbers a little bit. Other than the one-ofs on land, we have the Plaguelord and the [Living Death](#). [Living Death](#) is a fantastic Hail Mary play in case you've fallen behind and you aren't able to make your plan work. On the other hand, if things are going pretty decently, it can still be a great play, potentially killing a slew of creatures in play that don't particularly matter on your side, and bringing in some new blood to boot.

Another thing the Intent lets you do is play the pair of [Memory Crystals](#). Buyback isn't particularly popular these days, so you aren't likely to be helping anyone else at a table out. If you are, you probably already know that that player has a penchant for Buyback, so you could just straight out cut the [Memory Crystals](#), but what it does do is allow the [Corpse Dance](#) and the [Lab Rats](#) to become so incredibly cheap as to be a bit silly. Two is the most you'll ever need, and with Intent's to help fuel them, you should be able to get to the cards as you need them. [Lab Rats](#) is kind of nice, giving you a potentially potent creature-producing engine to either feed the [Hell's Caretaker](#) or simply just attack with.

I hope that you enjoyed today's look at [Rukh Egg](#). Have a great rest of the week!



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