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A powerful card that perhaps never got the attention it deserved?

Mindslicer

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We are smack dab in the middle of Core Set Week. I, for one, am incredibly pleased with *9th Edition*. Somewhere in the long, long past I wrote an article about a theoretical set that would include some of the cards with the most character. My set didn't include any cards that were strictly bad, though it did include some cards that were only good in narrow circumstances (my version of a “bad” card). I like my sets like a toolbox, packed full of things I can use, even if it is only every once in a while.

Well, I'm not on R&D and I don't make the decisions about what gets into the sets. That said, I think *9th Edition* is probably the best Core Set we've ever seen. It has an incredible number of tools for everyone. Any set that includes Form of the Dragon, Biorhythm, Blackmail, and all of the pain lands has already got a ton going for it. It even has one of my favorite constructed cards ever, this little guy:

Okay, well, maybe not so little.

Introductions, all around

Of course, Mindslicer was initially printed back in *Odyssey*. It never really saw much tournament play at the time, which is kind of surprising if you think about it. In *Odyssey* Block at the time, there were only a pair of sets out, and the most common form of creature kill you could expect to play against were Edicts. The decks ran

few to no creatures, generally, and if you had any kind of presence on the table, a Mindslicer was just ridiculous – killing it would often be a fatal mistake for your opponent.

My little think tank (Cabal Rogue) worked on decks nonstop. Like everyone else, we had figured out Black Control, Madness, and Psychatog as the big bads, and in the end everyone that went to Japan to play at that Pro Tour played Black Control. I wasn't going, and in the end, I couldn't convince anyone to give up on the rock-paper-scissors game and go with my Mindslicer deck. Here it is:

RoarRites

I can't remember who all helped worked on this deck – I want to say Nate Heiss and a few other present and former Cabal Rogue members, but I can't remember. There are a couple of weird numbers, mostly set that way because of Entomb. There was something really pleasurable about playing this deck back then. Watching a Black Control deck squirm and hunt for their Mutilate to take care of your board, and then discarding Roar of the Wurm to the Mindslicer when they sweep the board is good times. In the end, fear of Aether Burst squelched their desire to play this deck in Osaka, and even my chiding couldn't sway their opinion. Who knows, maybe they were right? I just know I had faith in my little Mindslicers. When the final set of the block came out, too many things got better and the deck's window was closed.

Making that moment

A Mindslicer is a beater, and an efficient beater at that. Be that as it may, you don't play a Mindslicer expecting it to live. You play a Mindslicer knowing that it could die at any moment. If you've got a deck running Mindslicer, you had better be prepared for it.

One of the best and most obvious ways to prepare is to have some kind of plan to use the graveyard. Clearly my deck for Osaka had that going for it. Flashback cards like Roar of the Wurm may be one of the most intimidating things to have at the ready, but there are other ways to handle the graveyard as well. Recursive effects are a great example. Akuta, Born of Ash is an interesting one. Akuta might not return to play immediately (everyone lost their hand, after all), but, similar to Exile Into Darkness, if your opponent wants to play anything at all, they are going to have an Akuta on their hands.

You can also try to trigger things like Madness, or use the Mindslicer to get reanimation targets into your graveyard, but this is pretty unexciting. The opportunity to discard and trigger Madness probably requires more effort than it is worth, and even if a Mindslicer serves as a method to discard for reanimation, you need to put a bunch of work into protecting your reanimation method from the discard as well. Very enh.

Bringing back things like a Shard Phoenix or Pyre Zombie, on the other hand, are really effective. These cards have the added advantage over other methods like Flashback (not to mention Madness) in the degree of control and utility they have. You have far more control over deciding when it is useful to bring them back, and the cards themselves don't need to be in the graveyard to be effective. A Hammer of Bogardan is a Hammer of Bogardan, and it can be used to hit someone on the head whenever it is convenient. If you happen to discard it to a Mindslicer, it's not skin off your back.

Having a little foresight is great with Mindslicer. There are plenty of times when our hands are empty or they might as well be. Turning the game into a topdeck war can be very dicey, unless you know what is on top of your deck. Sensei's Divining Top, Scroll Rack, and Brainstorm all can give you a clear indication of the next several turns. Not sure if you should block? Use Sensei's Divining Top and discover how great the next turns look (or how poor) and then make your decision accordingly.

There are a few other methods of preparation. Protecting your hand is one way. Sure, you can use Gustha's Scepter, but Moonring Mirror is way more suited to your needs. Even if the Mirror doesn't have any cards underneath it yet, you can “swap” hands with the Mirror in preparation for the discard you have coming. The worst that can happen is your opponent will destroy the Mirror in response to the death of the Mindslicer – and it

isn't like you weren't expecting to have everyone have an empty hand at some point, anyway. Even putting a spell on an Isochron Scepter or Panoptic Mirror is a way of “protecting” it.

Mindslicer as a pawn

Every creature and every other kind of spell we play could in some way be considered a chess piece. We use them up and hope that they end up serving some kind of greater purpose in the game. When we sacrifice any piece, we hope that we get some greater good out of it, and losing a Mindslicer is no exception – there is just a little bit more at stake when it is sacrificed.

With very few exceptions (like Worthy Cause), sacrifice effects are a part of the cost of a spell or effect. This is very relevant to a card like Mindslicer. Let's say we cast a spell like Fling, sacking the Mindslicer. We cast the Fling and pay for it with the life of the Mindslicer. That Fling hasn't happened yet, but our Mindslicer is dead, and it demands that everyone lose their hands. After that happens, boom, then comes the Fling.

This can be useful. Take Greater Good, for example. Your opponent has drawn a card during their turn, and you sacrifice the Mindslicer to the Greater Good. Everyone loses their hand, and then you get the best card out of the next four. That's a pretty solid trade. Maybe better yet is the sorcery Diabolic Intent. After everyone has lost their cards, there is only very rarely any hidden information left to worry about. You know what is on the table and there really isn't anything going on in the game that you don't know. Now, when the Intent resolves, you can get the best possible card for that situation, and not really have to worry about any surprises popping up to mess with you.

Mindslicer as a thug

If nothing else, Mindslicer is big. Big guys like to attack and get in fights. Going in with a few friends is always a wise move if you're going to get in a fight. Mindslicer is also a thug – he doesn't want a fair fight. He wants it dirty.

To keep things unfair, clearing guys out of the way is always a good idea. A card like Pyroclasm or Shard Phoenix can wipe away any of the little guys, and leave the game down to fights between anything big. Edict effects or cards like Kiku's Shadow can work wonders in clearing out opposing big guys. It also shouldn't be underestimated just how powerful it is to have the option to have a Mindslicer hit itself by casting your own Kiku's Shadow on it.

The key when on the aggressive is to have a lot of cards that can be played quickly. If your hand is small, it is a lot less incentive for your opponent to kill the Mindslicer. Conversely, if your hand is considerably larger than your opponent's, they have every reason in the world to kill it. Ideally, your opponent should be cringing at the thought of being the one to kill the Mindslicer, and that factor should give your Mindslicer special secret text of “Cannot be blocked.”

What you don't want to have happen is to lose the Slicer and find yourself at a grossly disadvantaged board position. If your Mindslicer gets in a fight with another creature and dies, mass bounce can suddenly be really scary. I've seen it happen: the Mindslicer is in a fight with a Wild Mongrel and after its death-trigger is on the stack, Aether Burst, Aether Burst – all my guys on the table are suddenly in my hand ready to discard. If there is bounce to be feared, try out cards like Spellbane Centaur. Or run your own bounce. Do what it takes to not be in the position of ever cursing the death of the Slicer.

Wrapping Up

In celebration of Core Set Week, I present to you a Far Future Standard deck. It really isn't a standard deck for *that* far in the future, but it is far enough. In addition to including a fair bit from *9th*, it also includes one from

Ravnica, Bob Maher's **Magic** Invitational card. I've been in kind of a midrange mood lately, and this Black/Red deck satisfies that mood and shows what you can do when you apply Mindslicer. I hope you enjoy it.

Far Future Red/Black

And yes, there are no bananas or Umezawa's Jittes in there. I've gotten so sick of writing down that card on decklists, I'm just not going to do it. Nope. Not gonna.

If you are lucky enough to be playing against another deck that includes Black or Red, your Fellwar Stones are likely to be doing a lot of work.

Mindslicer recovery comes in many forms. There is preparation (the Tops). There is protection (the Mirror). There is extra card draw (the Confidant). There is the graveyard (Phoenix and Akuta). You even have a fail-safe switch (ping Mindslicer with Kumano before it dies, it will be removed from the game and save you the trouble of losing your hand). A lot of these tricks interact really well, also. Sensei's Divining Top, for example, does pretty well with both Dark Confidant and with Moonring Mirror. Miren can be used at a clutch moment to make everyone lose their cards as an instant, or can kill Confidants that are bringing you too dangerously close to death.



Overall, I think that this is a really fun deck that explores a lot of what it means to make a good Mindslicer deck. It might not be as honed as my Osaka Mindslicer deck was, but it's still pretty nice.

In other news, next week will be the final Reader Challenge for the column. There are very few columns left before I'm off to the great beyond, and I read through a ton of mail with a ton of great ideas for a final challenge. In the end, I think I'm going to go with Seth Botwin's idea.

Tentatively, I'm titling this Challenge the Cranial Extraction Challenge. No, the idea is not to make a deck that uses Cranial Extraction. It is to make a deck that is tied to one card so strongly, you hope that you never even hear the words "Cranial" and "Extraction". Pick a single card (even one that I've already covered) and send in your deck that showcases that central card. I'm looking for creativity here, folks, and originality. Send your submissions with the card you are using in the title, make sure your e-mail is in the submission as usual, and only send one decklist per e-mail. Also, as always, it helps if you explain why your deck submission is worthy of being noticed. Don't be afraid to really push the envelope here! Submit early and often!

I'm looking forward to everyone's final shot at a Single Card Strategies Challenge, and I'm looking forward to *9th Edition*. I know that they're both going to be exciting, and I know that we'll definitely enjoy them.

Have a great rest of your week!

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