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# Use His Illusion

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*The Play's The Thing*  
Wednesday, July 27, 2005



Before I get to this week's topic, I need to tie up a loose end from last week. Many of you wrote in to say that you would have gone after the Forest rather than any of the Urza's lands in some of the examples. There are good reasons to do this, but in general I believe that it is wrong. It is far too easy for your opponent to be holding another Forest, and you are giving too much away if he does have that Forest. You also have to give up the two damage from Molten Rain, which could prove important; in the example you are playing a deck whose plan is to burn the opponent to death. If you had a particularly poor hand, this play could be considered because there is a chance that it wins the game outright against an opponent without another green source, but if your hand is good I feel this play is a poor choice.

With that out of the way, let's get to today's problems.

You're stuck on two lands, and while you had nothing your opponent hit you twice with Genju of the Spires, bringing you down to twelve, but did not attack last turn. Here is the board position, which includes a Nezumi Cutthroat that you played last turn:

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7 Cards in hand



OPP 20  
life



YOU 8  
life



7 Cards in hand

**YOU:** in play - Swamp x2, *Nezumi Cutthroat*; in hand - 7 cards

**OPP:** in play - Mountain x3, *Genju of the Spires* (enchanted a Mountain); in hand - 7 cards

It's your main phase. [What do you do?](#)

You pass the turn without attacking. On his last turn, your opponent indicated that he did not wish to attack with his *Genju* when you left *Nezumi Cutthroat* back to block, and you cannot afford to have him attack you. The fact that *Nezumi Cutthroat* cannot block is irrelevant if you are never attacked!

In the last two weeks, I've described situations where you make a play in order to deceive the opponent about what cards are in your hand. In this situation, you are reinforcing his misunderstanding of what your cards do. If he tries to attack, you can't block with *Nezumi Cutthroat*, but he clearly is making the mistake of forgetting that. Now that he has shown you that he has not read the fine print on *Nezumi Cutthroat*, your job is to keep yourself alive. If you attack, the *Cutthroat* won't be untapped and he will attack. By not attacking, you are doing two things. First, you are showing him that you have a blocker. Second, you are reinforcing his belief that the *Cutthroat* can block. If it can't block, why didn't you attack?

This is especially important if your opponent believes himself to be overmatched. The more respect your opponent has for you, the more trust he will have that your actions make sense. He will be less likely to question his assumptions. Your opponent is solving the puzzle of how he should play in the world where the *Cutthroat* can block. You are solving a different problem, because you know that it can't. That means that you want to be careful to make sure that your opponent doesn't attack with the *Genju* even if it would be a mistake to attack you in the world where the *Cutthroat* can block. That can force you to play in a way that does not make sense under either understanding of the rules, but makes perfect sense in the world where your opponent misunderstands them...

No Cards in hand

OPP 16 life



YOU 6 life

6 Cards in hand



**YOU:** in play - Island x4, Plains x2, Pristine Angel; in hand - Plains, Pristine Angel x2, Pulse of the Fields, Serum Visions, Condescend

**OPP:** in play - Cloudpost x3, Forest x6, Darksteel Colossus, Oblivion Stone; in hand - no cards

It is the first round of a Pro Tour Qualifier. This game has not been going well, but luckily your opponent has been unable to find a **Tooth and Nail**. There are no cards in your deck that can remove **Darksteel Colossus** and he knows you have the **Pulse of the Fields** in your hand. You had mentally given up the game for lost, but then you realized that your opponent was trying to figure out if you could untap your **Pristine Angel** as an instant. So, what is your plan to try and win this game, both this turn and after that?

What is your play this turn?

At this point, the reasonable guess is that your opponent does not think that **Oblivion Stone** can kill an untapped **Pristine Angel**. If he did believe that, the game would be lost. Now you have a chance. This turn, you need to stay alive while giving yourself the tools to kill your opponent before he either realizes he can kill **Pristine Angels** or draws something that lets him finish the job. That means that at all times, he has to think it is a bad time to use **Oblivion Stone** if you don't want him using it. This turn you need to attack with **Pristine Angel** and get a second one on the table to attack and block, but without giving him a chance to use **Oblivion Stone**. He doesn't know that you have a **Condescend** in your hand, so you can't cast your **Pristine Angel** as your first spell. You have to cast **Serum Visions** first. He knows you have **Pulse of the Fields**, so he'll let you untap your Angel, and

then you can cast your second one. What cards you are looking for will depend on what your long-term plan is for winning this game.

### Now what?

After casting **Serum Visions** and **Pristine Angel**, your opponent will attack you down to three with both Angels blocking. You will now untap, attack with both Angels and play some spell to untap them while leaving up the mana for **Pulse of the Fields**. The attack puts him at eight, but you can't risk using **Pulse of the Fields** in response to the attack because he might hope that you have no instant and use **Oblivion Stone** in response, a critical mistake you must not make.

Once your Angels are untapped you can cast **Pulse of the Fields** to go to seven. Now here is the problem: There is a good chance your opponent will use the **Oblivion Stone** in desperation when you attack for the win and you need to be able to survive that. Hopefully the opponent doesn't use the stone and you just win right there, but even if that doesn't happen this game isn't hopeless yet.

So, assuming your opponent uses the stone in desperation, your Angels are gone and number three comes out, but the attack is about to kill you as you are at seven. That means that you must now cast **Pulse of the Fields** to stay alive, which means you need nine lands in play at this point. In this scenario, you'll have drawn three extra cards: One this turn, one last turn and one from **Serum Visions**. You will need to play a spell to untap the Angels, so you'll need to play all four cards. Therefore if the spell does not save you from the Colossus you will need a cantrip to win this game, which in this deck must be a second **Serum Visions**. The only other card that can save you from the Colossus without provoking your opponent to use **Oblivion Stone** would be another **Pulse of the Fields**, which you should manage to "accidentally" show your opponent to make sure he does not think it is your only copy.



Your opponent also has another way out of this, which is to mana burn himself to prevent you from getting back **Pulse of the Fields**, but you must hope he does not do this. Chances are that he won't even notice the possibility given his rules mistake. He also has to draw no cards relevant to the game, but so many of his cards focus on mana that there is a good chance this will happen.

As it turned out, the game went exactly as planned and I won the match despite losing two **Pristine Angels**. The look on my opponent's face when I buried them was priceless.

An important word of warning is in order. You are under no obligation to tell your opponent the rules if the opponent isn't asking any questions. But, if he asks, you need to tell him the truth and when the time comes you have to make sure the rules are enforced. Not doing so is cheating.

You can win more than your share of matches by assuming that your opponents will play correctly, but often you can do better. If he forgets that one of his creatures is in play, factor in the chance he will continue to forget. Also factor in how likely your actions are to cause him to remember.

In advanced situations of this type, you need to figure out how your opponent will react. Take into account everything he knows and everything he believes. You may need to manipulate your opponent by revealing information or making decisions that would be disastrous if he played correctly. In the second example, it is vital that he knows at all times that you can untap the **Pristine Angels** at instant speed. The fact that this should be irrelevant is not your concern. In your opponent's world it matters, so you need to adjust your tactics accordingly if that's the most likely way to win.

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Now, in the previous examples the main issue was an opponent that was probably making rules mistakes. But, the same principle also applies when opponents misunderstand principles of strategy rather than the rules. Weaker players often misvalue the importance of their cards (and yours) in a given match because they don't have the same grasp of the match-up that you do. For example, when you need to cast a test spell to see if your opponent has countermagic, the best spells to lead with are the ones that don't matter but that your opponent will think are worth stopping. Again, you're taking advantage of your superior understanding of the match-up by giving the opponent a chance to make a mistake of judgment. You know that particular test spell isn't too important, but you give the opponent the chance to make the mistake of thinking it is. Once that spell is out of the way, you're now clear to drop the *real* spell you wanted to resolve. It's a myth that **Magic** doesn't take much skill to play once you've gotten to a certain point. One of the most important points of this game is identifying where you understand the game better than your opponent and then adjusting your tactics accordingly.



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