

Mike Flores

Thursday, September 29, 2005

Players who have been slugging it out in competitive **Magic** tournaments for only the past couple of years probably don't see as pronounced a difference between what we consider "control" decks and what we term "beatdown" decks as long time sharks like myself. Superb creature cards like Psychatog, Morphling, and most recently, Keiga, the Tide Star and Meloku the Clouded Mirror, as good as they are, are still just creatures, suped up Wild Mongrels and death defying Leonin Skyhunters that just fit better in sit-there decks than the more aggressive versions that populate aggressive decks. As with any other creatures, they are expected, can be countered, and die with frustrating frequency. But part the mists of history, and you will find a very different character to control decks and their kill cards; it is to that time that we go today.

Though not particularly germane to our topic today, it seems appropriate at this point to give props to the first of **Magic's** great control decks:

## The Deck, Brian Weissman (circa April 1996)



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 City of Brass  
4 Island  
1 Library of Alexandria  
3 Plains  
3 Strip Mine  
4 Tundra  
2 Volcanic Island  

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21 lands  
  
2 Serra Angel  

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2 creatures  
  
1 Amnesia  
1 Ancestral Recall  
1 Black Lotus  
1 Braingeyser  
2 Counterspell  
1 Demonic Tutor  
4 Disenchant  
2 Disrupting Scepter  
1 Jayemdae Tome  
4 Mana Drain  
1 Mirror Universe  
2 Moat  
1 Mox Emerald  
1 Mox Jet  
1 Mox Pearl  
1 Mox Ruby  
1 Mox Sapphire  
1 Recall  
2 Red Elemental Blast  
1 Regrowth  
1 Sol Ring  
4 Swords to Plowshares  
1 Time Walk  
1 Timetwister  

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37 other spells

### Sideboard

2 Blood Moon  
2 Circle of Protection: Red  
1 Disrupting Scepter  
2 Divine Offering  
1 Feldon's Cane  
1 Fireball  
1 Ivory Tower  
1 Jayemdae Tome  
1 Moat  
2 Red Elemental Blast  
1 Tormod's Crypt  

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15 sideboard cards

This deck, popularized by Schools of Magic (the first article series that more-or-less launched **Magic** strategy on the Internet) taught all of the world's aspiring Magicans to draw extra cards, absorb the opponent's attack, and win the long game. In an era when **Magic** allowed players to go for strong offensive cards like Kird Ape and Psionic Blast, Weissman concentrated on only one element of the game: complete control. In their kitchen table metagame, Brian and his friends played with 50 point life totals because they believed that the game's core rules were too constrictive, made games end too quickly... this allowed him to work through his distinctive and single-minded fortress, to produce the above.



The Weissman deck seeks to hide behind Moat and set up Disrupting Scepter and Amnesia so that it can drop a Serra Angel. With the opponent safely under Disrupting Scepter lock, Weissman's Serra Angels could win the game in five swings, blocking if need be, with essentially no danger of death.

Though The Deck is archaic to our modern eyes, it serves as an important foundation for every control deck to follow. Many decks ran with Brian's torch, tweaking and tuning the details, but still following his creature-hostile lead, setting up for the long game of card advantage and endurance.

A good example of such a deck is Hammer Regnier's from the first Pro Tour in New York. Though it was Mike Loconto who won PT1 with U/W control, history looks more fondly on Hammer's deck than the champion's. Unlike Loconto's, Hammer's deck stuck to 60 cards and had a more focused overall plan of countering his opponent's threats. For our purposes, it is important to note that Hammer killed not with the accepted finisher Serra Angel, but Millstone:

## U/W Control, Shawn "Hammer" Regnier - Pro Tour I



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Adarkar Wastes	1 Balance
1 City of Brass	4 Counterspell
4 Island	4 Disenchant
3 Mishra's Factory	3 Icy Manipulator
6 Plains	1 Ivory Tower
1 Ruins of Trokair	3 Land Tax
4 Svyelunite Temple	3 Millstone
-----	4 Power Sink
23 lands	1 Recall
-----	4 Spell Blast
0 creatures	4 Swords to Plowshares
	4 Wrath of God
	1 Zuran Orb
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	37 other spells

### Sideboard

1 Abbey Gargoyles
1 Arenson's Aura
2 Circle of Protection: Black
2 Circle of Protection: Red
1 Divine Offering
1 Feldon's Cane
1 Fountain of Youth
2 Memory Lapse
1 Sea Sprite
2 Steal Artifact
1 Truce
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15 sideboard cards

Millstone had certain advantages and disadvantages over Serra Angel as a kill card. The greatest advantage to the Millstone deck exhaustion strategy was that by having no creatures in his deck, Hammer would "strand" the opponent's Swords to Plowshares in his hand. Every Wrath of God the opponent drew would be a wasted card, as if he had never drawn a card at all. On the other hand, Brian was famous for the so-called "Weissman Gambit" whereby he would deploy one of his Serra Angels before putting the opponent in the Disrupting Scepter soft-lock. There were times, dictated by forces beyond his control, that the first master of control decks was forced to "go for it" prematurely. In those games, Serra Angel proved her worth, winning the duel in five turns rather than the twenty or so turns necessitated by Millstone. Moreover, Serra Angel, like Morphling after her, played both offense and defense, attacking and blocking equally well.

Pundits for both strategies were equally vocal in those long ago days, so it was never clear whether Serra/Scepter or Millstone was the optimal U/W strategy. Serra Angel was quicker and blocked; Millstone drew Disenchants away from key artifacts like Zuran Orb... and the opponent would run out of cards first anyway. The opponent would leave in creature elimination against Serra Angel, which would slow down his development for games where Disrupting Scepter *would* come online. Millstone could always fall back on the multi-dimensional Mishra's Factory as an alternate win condition.

This entire debate more-or-less disappeared with the printing of *Alliances*.

Kjeldoran Outpost was the murderous dream of every U/W control player. Kjeldoran Outpost itself was not a spell. Other control players couldn't counter it the way they could Serra Angel. It wasn't a creature that players could burn, blast, scare, or Plow; it wasn't an artifact that could be Disenchanted, that was ultimately blank until the last card in the opponent's deck had been drawn. As a land, Kjeldoran Outpost was a threat for which many players would literally have no answer.

Best of all, Kjeldoran Outpost combined the merits of Serra Angel with a natural synergy with cards like Wrath of God, cards the U/W player already wanted. Unlike Millstone, Kjeldoran Outpost put the opponent on a real clock; one of the problems with Millstone was that a Necropotence or even Sylvan Library player would be under no life loss pressure whatsoever - he could draw tons of extra cards for free because his life total was not under attack. Not so against the relentless 1/1 Soldiers presented by this *Alliances* threat. Against creatures, Kjeldoran Outpost could present a stream of chump blockers. The opponent would *always* have to present multiple threats against this defensive marvel, meaning that Wrath of God would consistently get two-for-one.



Not surprisingly, Kjeldoran Outpost was a favorite of many successful sharks. During one of his many famous runs, Jon Finkel showed up for the midnight US Open at Nationals 1997, won that, and executed on a run that earned him Top 8 and very nearly a spot on the 1997 National Team. Here is the deck he played:



	Main Deck	Sideboard
	60 cards	
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Abeyance	1 Circle of Protection: Black
8 Island	4 Brainstorm	1 Circle of Protection: Red
2 Kjeldoran Outpost	3 Browse	1 Disenchant
4 Plains	1 Circle of Protection: Black	2 Disrupting Scepter
4 Thawing Glaciers	4 Counterspell	2 Dust to Dust
-----	3 Disenchant	1 Gerrard's Wisdom
22 lands	2 Dissipate	2 Karma
-----	2 Force of Will	2 Political Trickery
0 creatures	1 Gerrard's Wisdom	2 Serrated Arrows
	4 Impulse	1 Sleight of Mind
	1 Political Trickery	-----
	1 Soldevi Digger	15 sideboard cards
	4 Swords to Plowshares	
	4 Wrath of God	
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	38 other spells	

For longtime players, these two kill strategies, Millstone deck exhaustion and Kjeldoran Outpost token generation, are the iconic weapons of especially U/W control decks. Let everyone else worry about who draws more Flametongue Kavus! Those cards aren't even good against us! Who cares if he drew Jitte? If I kill all his creatures, it isn't going to do much damage, is it?

As the years went by, counters got better, and true control left White. Within a year of Finkel's performance at US Nationals 1997, Mono-Blue Control with a million counters and Whispers of the Muse became the default control deck. Defensive **Magic** became all about Steel Golems and Rainbow Efreets holding off the opponent in anticipation of Nevinyrral's Disk; soon after, Morphling appeared, and the world where Millstone was good or Kjeldoran Outpost was even a possibility drifted into memory.

But with *Ravnica*, everything old is somehow new again. Two of the Guild specialty lands seem to embrace the classic U/W kill strategies.

Duskmantle, House of Shadow, Dimir's threat, is an interesting update to the Millstone offense. Duskmantle, House of Shadow only exhausts one card per use, but it has a huge leg up on the classic Millstone: it doesn't cost you a card. Unlike Millstone itself, Duskmantle, House of Shadow is a land, so you can play it, tap it for mana, use it to draw cards or otherwise advance your strategy. Once you've got a fist full of Counterspells, go ahead and start dragging your opponent's cards into his discard pile... it doesn't cost you anything but mana.

Don't worry, you've got the time.

The difference between 1996 and now, of course, is that Hammer's U/W deck didn't have to deal with the Golgari. I am a little bit skeptical of Millstone strategies in any format where Threshold or Flashback mechanics might come up, and the upcoming Standard seems to be setting up a battle between *Ravnica's* two Black-inclusive guilds. Deck exhaustion will definitely be viable against some of *Ravnica's* guilds, but I don't know if I want to advocate giving the opponent a virtual 30 card hand that includes a stack of Grave-Shell Scarabs and the ability to get them going.

That said, maybe it isn't a bad idea to use this card to mill *yourself*. Like I already mentioned, Dimir and Golgari have a color in common, and with the color fixing available -- especially via the Golgari's Green wing -- *Kamigawa* Block favorites like Sakura-Tribe Elder and Kodama's Reach -- setting up these three colors can't be that difficult. Who is to say that Duskmantle, House of Shadow can't be used to hook yourself up with a graveyard full of Dredge?

The more straightforward translation -- and one of the most exciting cards in the set for me as a deck designer -- is Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree.



I love this card so much I am putting it in Standard decks with no apparent need for White, splashing it into Extended B/G The Rock decks, and trying to cram it into otherwise Boros squads for long game gas. Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree requires a little more mana than the old Kjeldoran Outpost... but it's in Green. Who is better at setting up extra mana than Wood Elves, Birds of Paradise, and the resurgent Llanowar Elves? We think of Kjeldoran Outpost as a U/W card, but the card improved the long games of G/W and even Mono-White Armageddon decks as well, so there's precedent for the Outpost in creature decks. Now even though Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree is a bit more expensive than the original, it has a huge leg up... *You don't have to sacrifice a Plains when it comes into play*. While this doesn't make up for two additional mana in the activation cost, Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree is

nevertheless a welcome addition from the new set.

One of the great challenges that these lands present is what deck to play them in. Note that although they both echo classic U/W, neither one of these cards is U/W. Duskmantle, House of Shadow is U but not W, and Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree is W but not U. Certainly Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree can go in a "Treva" three-color deck, but what about Duskmantle? I suspect that it will be better in the "Anavolver" wedge than in a "Dromar" arc.

One thing is sure, though... If you are reeling from the Jitte wars of *Kamigawa* block, these two lands are a good place to start when seeking your refuge. Because they allow you to win the game without fighting on the opponent's terms, because they can't be countered with spells like Hinder or even Time Stop, because they resist long game defense, these land threats allow you to dictate a very different game than your opponent might expect when he shows up across the table. Best of all, if the opponent *does* have a solution -- probably a Pithing Needle -- you will still be able to exploit the mana abilities of Duskmantle, House of Shadow and Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree, which will make him feel like he wasted the most expensive card in his deck.

Good luck, and happy deck building!



