

Magic Rules Manager Mark Gottlieb returns with a plea for sanity and fairness.

Magicthegathering.Combos—*Ravnica* Edition

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Monday, October 24, 2005

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Hi folks. I know why you've come here—you want me to be funny. I'm sorry, but I don't do that anymore. I'm the **Magic** Rules Manager now. It's a very serious position. I'm serious about it. My monkey is serious about it. My army of genetically engineered nuclear mutant robot ninjas is serious about it. I used to be all supervillain this and bombo that. But now I'm all 418.5b this and characteristic-setting ability that. It's for the best. The doctors at the sanitarium think I'm much healthier this way. Of course, the doctors at the younger, sexier sanitarium I see on the side think I'm much crazier this way. (Have you *read* the **Magic** Comprehensive Rules?) The doctors at the third sanitarium don't really have much of an opinion on the matter, but that's because they think I'm a therapist named Phil and not a supervillain recruiting crazy henchmen from their maximum security ward. Zonko, Fleep, Yammerin' Tom—the walls are coming down at 11 PM on Saturday. Be ready.



One of the responsibilities I've accepted as the Rules Manager is spearheading the effort to minimize shenanigans in the game. The cards each have clear purposes, and should be used as intended. Loopholes should not be exploited under any circumstances; that would be taking advantage of lapses in the development process and is quite obviously unsporting behavior. Would that be fair to your opponent? Once we weed out all strange and unnatural occurrences of coincidental, unintended synergies—or, as the kids say, "combos"—we'll have a much better, more predictable, more stable game. Everyone can enjoy that. Finally, there won't be any advantages to being clever or creative, and the game can settle down into a satisfyingly predictable hybrid of War and Rock-Paper-Scissors, except with prettier pictures.

That's why I'm performing this public service announcement. Let's face it: The **Magic** developers have fallen down on the job. The *Ravnica* cards enable far too many combos. It's a sign of sloppy work—and I was one of the *Ravnica* developers, so I'm pointing the finger at myself too. But by alerting you to some of the most egregious combos out there, we can all avoid ever playing them. You'd want to know about that crocodile in your basement, right? Same deal. I'm trusting you all to use the honor system here. Avoid these combos!

Shambling Shell & Savra, Queen of the Golgari

The Golgari are all about unnatural corruptions of the natural order, so it figures that they're an especially bad combo offender. (You'll be seeing more Golgaririffic cards in this article.) If you've got Savra on the table, you can dredge up and then sacrifice the same Shambling Shell to make your opponent sacrifice a creature *every single turn*—and you'll be pumping up Savra (or another creature) in the process. But if you do this, the game will end in a crushing rout by you, and then you won't be experiencing the fun of playing a **Magic** game anymore! I guess you could start another game immediately, but it's just not the same, is it? (Yes, I know this combo is built into one of the *Ravnica* theme decks. Who do you think put it there? Consider it a grave warning of things to come...)

Vulturous Zombie & Glimpse the Unthinkable

Now see, this is exactly what I'm talking about. Glimpse the Unthinkable is supposed to be used as part of a decking strategy. It was certainly not designed to give Vulturous Zombie a permanent +10/+10 boost. Milling or damage, people—pick one and stick with it!

Szadek, Lord of Secrets & Fling

Same thing as the last combo! Szadek's a psionic vampire. He sucks away your thoughts and grows bigger doing it. Therefore, Szadek is supposed to win games by siphoning off your opponent's deck in ever increasing chunks. He's not supposed to do anything as uncouth as deal damage! But let's say Szadek leaves play while his combat damage is on the stack. Due to what I can only assume is a horrifying oversight, since his replacement ability won't be around anymore, the combat damage he assigned will resolve



normally. No milling, no counters, just plain ol' damage. I urge you—don't sacrifice him to Thoughtpicker Witch this way! And especially don't sacrifice him to Fling; that'll just make things twice as bad.

Bloodbond March & Remembrance

What's in the cauldron? That's not stew a-brewin'—that's trouble a-brewin'. If you get these two enchantments into play at the same time, then whenever one of your nontoken creatures dies, you get to search your library for another copy of it... and when you play that copy, you get the original one back from the graveyard. This'll just multiply as you search all four copies out of your deck. Start with a single Bile Urchin, sac, fetch, regrow, repeat, and you'll wind up making your opponent lose 10 life. From a Bile Urchin! Please, keep **Magic** fun and never play this combo!

Sunforger & Absorb

Sunforger is the property of the Boros guild. It's intended to get red instants and white instants. Combat tricks? Sure. Direct damage? OK. Protection and damage prevention? You bet. But countermagic? No way! Bounce? That doesn't seem red or white to me! Please follow the spirit of the card and never, ever fetch Absorb, Suffocating Blast, or Stand/Deliver. We all know that Absorb is really a blue spell, so even though it's technically white and you can technically fetch it from your deck and play it for free just by paying RW and unattaching Sunforger doesn't mean you should—especially not for four turns in a row. Split cards are so bizarre that they shouldn't be played under any circumstances, but especially since the Stand half lets you find the card with Sunforger and you can then play the Deliver half instead. Stick with a reasonable Sunforger combo, like Sunforger +Overblaze + Boros Swiftblade.

Dimir Doppelganger & Phage the Untouchable

I have an apology to make to the entire **Magic** community. I was the one who designed Dimir Doppelganger, and I'm truly sorry. I never would have done it had I thought about Phage the Untouchable. Get the Doppelganger in play and Phage into your graveyard, and you can turn the former into the latter, thus avoiding both Phage's 3BBB cost and her "you lose the game if you don't play her from your hand" drawback. That drawback was put there to avoid exactly these kinds of tricks, and I ruined everything! It only gets worse if you have Dimir Doppelganger mimic Dimir Infiltrator (or some other unblockable creature) first—attack, wait until the Doppelinfiltrator becomes unblocked, then turn it into a DoppelPhage.

Chorus of the Conclave & Etched Oracle

I have another apology. Yep, I also designed Chorus of the Conclave (except for the forestwalk bit; that was pure Forsythe). But, again, due to my shortsightedness, I never thought about Etched Oracle. The Oracle costs 4. Let's say that you pay an additional 4 mana via the Chorus, since the Chorus's existence makes it likely that you have 8 mana available. Now let's say that out of the 8 mana you spent on the Oracle, you get all 5 colors in there. The Oracle will come into play with five +1/+1 counters due to sunburst and four +1/+1 counters due to the Chorus, for a monstrous 9/9 scholar. You could remove four counters to draw three cards and still have a 5/5 creature! Draw another three cards and the Oracle is still alive! It makes a travesty of the whole game, doesn't it?



Carrion Howler & Slagwurm Armor

Carrion Howler is a nice, simple creature. It's 2/2. You can pay 1 life to use its ability and make it 4/1. Why complicate matters? Why artificially boost its toughness, knowing that you can then potentially boost its power by twice that amount? Just to confuse your opponent? Just to make your opponent cry? It's not worth it! Sure, you can pay 7 life to turn your Slagwurm Armored Carrion Howler into a 16/1 creature—but is it worth the tears?

Dream Leash & Copy Enchantment

Dream Leash has a restriction that forces you to target a tapped permanent. This restriction applies only while you're choosing a target as you play Dream Leash. Copy Enchantment, on the other hand, has no such restriction. After your Copy Enchantment resolves, if you turn it into a Dream Leash as it comes into play, it'll be far too late at that point for the targeting restriction to apply. All that's left is to enchant a permanent. Any permanent. Even an untapped one. And that's just wrong. Dream Leash's restriction is there for our own protection. We're not savages, people!

Woodwraith Corruptor & Plague Boiler

More of the Golgari's nefarious tricks. Plague Boiler is supposed to blow up all creatures, artifacts, and enchantments. But that's not what it says—it says that it blows up all nonland permanents. What's the difference? The difference is that you can use Woodwraith Corruptor to permanently turn your Forests into 4/4 creatures. Now when Plague Boiler boils plague, your Durkwood Boars-sized lands will be left all alone on an empty board. Does having a bunch of creatures on the table immediately after your Plague Boiler exploded sound the least bit fair? Nope. It sure doesn't. Shame on anyone who victimizes his or her hapless, helpless opponent this way.

Hammerfist Giant & Light of Sanction

Two of the worst offenders in the set are even more offensive together. Hammerfist Giant is bad enough when you equip it with Vulshok Morningstar and it can survive its own beating turn after turn. (And don't get me started on what it does to Phytohydra.) Light of Sanction is, as depraved combomeister Eric Reasoner points out, guilty of one of the most egregious acts ever perpetrated: *It*



negates Sorrow's Path's

drawback. The 2 damage Sorrow's Path deals to each of your creatures is the only thing keeping it in check! It's a land—it can't be countered! Now you can swap your opponent's blocking creatures around till the cows come home. At least—and this is the only saving grace here—Sorrow's Path still deals 2 damage to you. Put these two *Ravnica* cards together, and you start breaking the laws of **Magic** in ways that can't be justified.

Spawnbroker & Sunforger

Sunforger again. I've already explained the correct way to wield this Equipment. Using it to pump your 1/1 dork's power up to 5 so that you can then play Spawnbroker and exchange the weenie for your opponent's best creature is a perversion of justice. It's all the worse because you still control the Sunforger, so you can immediately re-equip it to one of your creatures, leaving your opponent with just the 1/1. All Spawnbroker is trying to do is make a fair trade, and this kind of shady tactic turns it into a liar and a cheat.

Hunted Horror & Necroplasm ... Hunted Troll & Trophy Hunter ... Hunted Dragon & Pyroclasm

The whole point of the Hunted creatures is that they're fair. You get a creature, your opponent gets some creatures, everyone's happy. **Magic** is, after all, about making people happy. To immediately

blink your opponent's token creatures out of existence, while you keep your beefy, undercosted critter, isn't the least bit equitable. It's also unacceptable to use Mark of Eviction or Peel from Reality on the tokens. And don't get any bright ideas about Trophy Hunter + Twilight Drover either.

Bramble Elemental & Nomad Mythmaker & Endless Wurm

Creature recursion is bad enough; the game surely can't withstand enchantment recursion. Dowsing Shaman and Endless Wurm (or Auratog or Faith Healer) let you play, sacrifice, regrow, and re-play the same enchantment over and over. That's patently unfair, but at least it's expensive. Things get out of hand when Bramble Elemental and Nomad Mythmaker get involved. For only 2W, any Aura in any graveyard can find itself back on Bramble Elemental, which spawns two Saprolings, and probably gets you some sort of comes-into-play effect from the likes of Fists of Ironwood, which spawns two more Saprolings. The Aura can be sacrificed and regrown every turn, which is why I'm counting on you all to never attempt such unspeakable acts.

Perilous Forays & Seed the Land & Stone-Seeder Hierophant

Now we're getting into the crimes-against-loxodony realm. Assemble this unholy triumvirate of green nature-lovers.



Play a land. Stone-Seeder Hierophant's ability and Seed the Land's ability both trigger. Tap the land for mana. Untap the land with Stone-Seeder Hierophant. The Hierophant's ability resolves and it untaps. Seed the Land's ability resolves and you put a Snake token into play. Use the mana and sacrifice the Snake to play Perilous Foray's ability. Put a land into play tapped. Stone-Seeder Hierophant's ability and Seed the Land's ability both trigger. Untap the land, tap it for mana, untap the Hierophant, get a Snake, repeat the process. By the time you're done, every single land in your deck will be in play tapped. This is a horrendous miscarriage of all that is right and good, but it won't win you the game immediately, so it's fine. You'd really cross the line if you had another combo piece!

Some things to steer clear of: Vinelasher Kudzu, since it'll become gigantic as you do this. Llanowar Behemoth, since you can tap each Snake for the short time it's in existence to make it huge. Or Kyren Negotiations, since you could tap each of those Snakes to deal 1 damage to your opponent.

And a few final things that should be so obvious that I'll point them out anyway:

- DON'T put Flickerform on the same creature that you put Galvanic Arc or Flight of Fancy or Faith's Fetters onto.
- DON'T fetch any Bringers with Grozoth.
- DON'T fetch either Mythic Proportions or Followed Footsteps with Auratouched Mage.
- DON'T use Moonlight Bargain to dig for Vigor Mortis (which you keep) and some giant hasty fatty in the Razia or Akroma vein (which you let hit your graveyard).
- DON'T play Scandalmonger while you're holding Reroute.
- DON'T use Searing Meditation and Firemane Angel together.
- DON'T pitch Autochthon Wurm to Nourishing Shoal to gain 15 life for free.
- DON'T use Doubling Season, Eye of the Storm, or Warp World. Ever.

Now that you're aware of these dangers, we can all not do them together. Only you can keep the game boring and straightforward—for the good of us all. Thank you for your support.

Until next time, don't have fun with combos!

Mark