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Tuesday, February 21, 2006

Last week's column caused something of an uproar. E-mail after e-mail popped into my inbox, claiming that I had attacked the good name of a card that deserved no such dishonor. They accused me of misunderstanding what the card was for and not knowing about all the cool things that it can do. It seems I touched a nerve. In retrospect, this doesn't seem so surprising given that the reason I chose the topic was that Ghostway touched a nerve in the first place.

Such a large response may not automatically demand a response, but it does mean that I need to look back and see if action is called for. In this case, more clarity on my part would have helped matters. First, I also should have remembered to choose the title; I keep forgetting, and Scott Johns keeps messaging me that he can't believe I forgot to give my article a title again, while I wonder how I could have forgotten again. I think this is a good time to take stock of things and explain what this column is and what it is not.



First, I want to address Ghostway. I was not trying to say that Ghostway is a worthless card, or that it should never be put into a deck. Far from it, because there are lots of cool things to do with Ghostway. For example, you could...

- Save your creatures from all forms of removal, not just mass removal.
- Save all of your creatures from combat damage.
- Untap all your creatures.
- Trigger all your coming into play effects again.
- Get rid of various debilitating effects on your creatures.
- Use your own global removal spell.

That's six good reasons to play Ghostway, and here's a seventh: The card is fun. All my creatures are safe. Whee! See, that was fun already. A deck that could profit from many of these uses on a regular basis would have a solid case for considering a card like Ghostway. That goes double if the player in question was out there to have some fun. It's important to be able to learn to get the most out of all of our cards, both because most of us end up playing Limited or someone else's deck at some point, but also because at some point we'll be building a deck whose goal is not simply to maximize its chance of winning. It could even happen that a confluence of events makes an unlikely card the right choice.

Maximizing the card means playing to its strengths, and having an effective game plan means making good use of your resources. What I was trying to explain last week was that using Ghostway as an answer card for spells like Wrath of God is not a particularly effective way of doing business. The problem is that you end up saving mana for something that will often have minimal utility, causing you to choose between leaving yourself vulnerable or losing a lot of valuable tempo. Either choice is giving your opponent the chance to get back into the game. If you're going to have to use Ghostway as a removal solution, you'll need to work to get to a place where you can afford this loss of time.

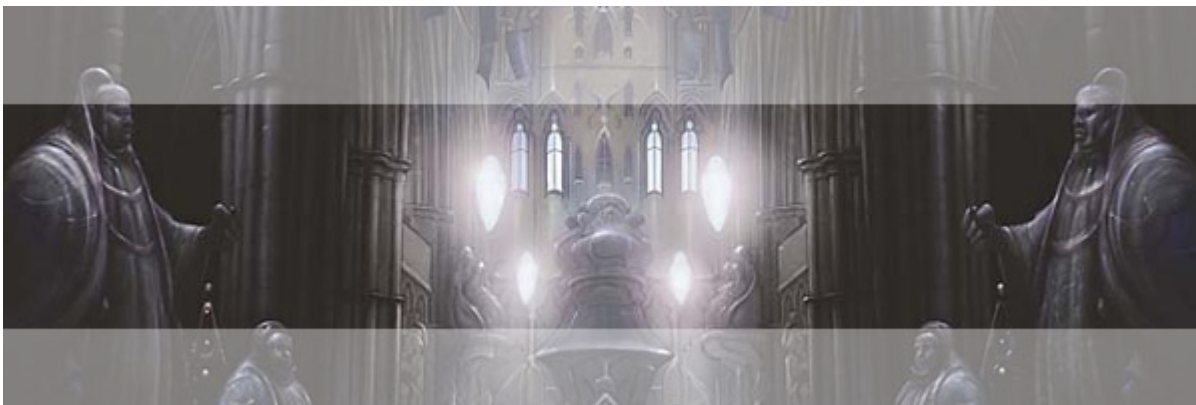
That means you often need to be even more aggressive early on to set up a situation where you can give back the time.

The other key with cards like this one is to look for all of their uses. In the examples I gave, the cards didn't have much other utility. That was intentional. I didn't want to muddy the waters by offering up other potential things for the cards to do. The right way of doing things is to pick a deck with comes into play effects that are beneficial to your cause and that gets into a decent number of big creature combats. At that point, you can try to set up for a situation where you can save multiple creatures with your one spell. Alternatively, you can save the one thing that's so important that you don't need to save anything else.

Once Ghostway is already in your deck, you've already paid the price of not getting to play some other card instead. The real risk now is that you will have Ghostway "stranded," unable to accomplish anything worthwhile. At the same time, there's the other side of that coin: By burning it as soon as possible, you risk not being able to take advantage of the card later on when a better opportunity comes along. That makes it even more important than usual to evaluate how valuable the card is for you in each game. In normal circumstances, I would be happy to trade away a situational card like Ghostway as long as it did not cost me too much time to do so, but at other times the card needs to be treated like gold. I think this too could be a good topic: Situations where you have to decide whether to trade off a card of highly variable value, or hold it for a future opportunity.

More than I was talking about Ghostway, the real point I was trying to drive home was that an answer to an answer is an answer - that if at all possible you should try to choose a game plan that doesn't take a deck that normally has the advantage of asking questions, and turn it into one that is suddenly trying to provide answers. The more you let yourself slip into that role, the larger the disadvantage you will find yourself stuck with. That's not the place you want to look. When I saw someone's reaction to the question, "how do I stop a Wrath?" and it was "Ghostway" and that was repeated often enough, I decided that this was a strategic point that needed to be made.

What I was not trying to do was solicit or offer deck construction advice or tell people that they shouldn't be playing with a card. In the past, I've done a lot of that writing for other websites. Like most people writing about Constructed **Magic**, I spent most of my time evaluating and talking about the merits of decks and individual cards. I'd try to make room for some **Magic** theory, but the bulk of all of my previous columns came down to a combination of set reviews and talking about decks. For this column, the goal is to help players learn to improve their play. Card evaluations as applied to deck construction are beyond the scope of this column. Deck construction is far beyond the scope of this column. There are plenty of places out there to find that kind of material, and I encourage those who want that information to seek it out.



In the beginning, I tried constructing the column narrowly: Each week would deal with one to three game situations and analyze them, then draw general conclusions from them. That proved not to be viable on its own for various reasons, but I still want it to be an integral part of what I do here. The unfortunate part of that is that I find myself unable to use the games that I play because almost all of

them involve cards that do not yet exist. Sometimes conjuring a situation out of thin air is the answer, but I have been far happier with the results when I use real games that are sent in by you, the readers. You have a knack for selecting interesting games. Whether that's good selection or the nature of **Magic** I can't say, but either way it speaks well.

That's why I keep encouraging people to send in game situations for analysis. Often I'll notice something that several of them have in common, and that tells me that there is a strategic theme that is worth addressing. At other times, I'll find one that has far more strategic depth and interest than anyone would have expected at first glance. Every game I've been sent tells a story, whether it's a complex puzzle or an illustration of a strategic principle. There's also a little secret that I'd like to share: I don't get as many of them as you think.

I get a decent amount of mail. I don't get mail like Mark Rosewater gets mail, but I get mail. I make sure and read all of it, even though I can't reply all that often. The difference is that, in order for a game situation to be usable in the column, it has to meet a reasonably strict set of requirements. It needs to give all the information about the game state, including life totals, cards in hand and cards in play laid out in the same format as the examples in the column. There also needs to be an interesting decision to make, one that is worth talking about.

A lot of things have to fall into place, and when a reader finds an appropriate game situation and takes the time to send it in with all the necessary information, that is great for both of us. They get to learn about something that will likely help their game and find out about something they're wondering about. I get a good example I can use to help craft the column. If you send something in that meets the description I've given and have the relevant information included, your chance of that game situation making it into the column is much higher than you might think. I've had a few that I've cut because they were short and didn't fit into a complete column, but that's the only real problem I've run into. To those who have sent such game situations in already and those who will soon, I send you my thanks. You help make this column work.

Right now, I have two themes I'm looking to explore. For next week, I'd like examples of situations where you're in a game, you fear your opponent has a mass removal spell and you're not sure how best to deal with that threat. The problem can be tactical or it can be strategic. It can be turn 1 or it can be the middle of the game. The other subject is using cards that have multiple uses and that can be situationally weak or situationally powerful – cards like Ghostway.

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