

Making the Right Decision Even When Searchlight Not Matter

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Before we begin, a brief correction: Last week I forgot that the Glorious Anthem was making the Leonin Skyhunter a six power attacker, which changes the scenario in important ways. For now, just assume that Leonin Skyhunter has one less power (say, because it's actually a Suntain Hawk). The points I'm trying to make were valid, unfortunately they didn't quite apply to the situation at hand. Thanks to all the people, and I do mean *all* the people, who helped point that out to me.

I also feel like the experiment with situations that were not fully fleshed out was a success. While they can't be analyzed in the same way as complete and fully fleshed out situations, they are still useful because the focus can be on how different details would change the situation, or whether they would change the situation – I get to hone in on the ideas rather than the details. I still urge everyone to send in your examples with as many details as possible, ideally with all of them, and will try to include as many full examples as I can. However, I will continue to experiment with considering strategic questions that feature incomplete information.

There was also one other question about that example that I think is worth talking about. I received this e-mail:

I was curious why you didn't point out the possibility of a Scatter the Seeds/Overwhelm possibility in response to the first question.

Even with the six life gained (the Skyhunter is a 3/3 with the Anthem), 22 life is not sufficient to survive an attack with nine creatures at four or more power with only two blockers. He has five creatures out during our attack, but with three more from Scatter and one more from the Evangel, he would have nine at the end of turn. If we play our two creatures out, we have sufficient blocking fodder to allow only five through - receiving only twenty damage leaving us with two life.

So the decision comes down to which is a higher probability:

A Wrath of God next turn - or a Scatter + Overwhelm?

--Paul White

What do you make of this? Should this possibility be considered?



There are a lot of cards in **Magic**. Assuming you're playing Standard there are less, but there are still a lot of them. Your opponent here has a lot of mana, so there are a ton of spells he could cast. A lot

of them could have a big effect on the game, but you can't draw cards that aren't in your deck and neither can he. Which cards are likely to be in his deck? Scatter the Seeds is a plausible card for him to have. It makes sense in his deck. Overwhelm, however, is not as plausible. It would fit into his deck, but it is so difficult to use at the Constructed level that it is unlikely that even he would run it. It also runs into difficulty with Wrath of God. Your opponent is known to have Wrath of God, and you can't really run both cards in the same deck. The fact that he has Wrath rules out him having Overwhelm if he is making his deck logically.

Suppose for the moment that you didn't know about Wrath of God. What would happen then? In this case, you have to try and figure out what you know about your opponents' deck. It would make sense for him to have cards like Overwhelm, even if you may not think they are good enough to make the cut. Different players like different cards or have access to

different cards, and sometimes they do things because they're fun. You certainly would have to consider the card. Wrath could easily be a card that you don't have to worry about because you've judged your opponent as not being the type that would play it. At the same time, without the knowledge that your opponent doesn't run any flying defense, you'd also have to worry about that. I can certainly see situations where you'd judge this player as not being likely to use mass removal (I might also fear Hour of Reckoning more than Wrath of God in this spot, not that this would change things much) and therefore play the game far differently. In the example given, Wrath is your main concern.



Now that that's out of the way, here's today's main event.

Today's Situation:

I was playing a cleric aggro/control deck. I had no idea what my opponent was playing, except for what I see in play:



Opponent (18 Life)

in play:

- 3 Plains (1 tapped)
- 1 Forest (tapped)
- 1 Astral Slide
- 1 Sakura-Tribe Elder

in hand:

- 3 unknown cards

Me (20 life)

in play:

- 1 Godless Shrine (tapped)
- 1 Tainted Field (tapped)
- 1 Swamp
- 2 Dark Suppliant (1 tapped)
- 1 Withered Wretch

in hand:

- 1 Oversold Cemetery
- 1 Beloved Chaplain
- 1 Cabal Archon
- 1 Grave Pact

in graveyard

no cards

It was the end of his turn 4 and I was between the choices of sacrificing the clerics and putting Scion of Darkness in play, or keeping the creatures to control his game.

What would you do in this situation?

This is a rather bad matchup once Astral Slide hits the table. Now that he has an Astral Slide, the Scion of Darkness is unlikely to be able to make much headway, but then, neither are your other creatures. Your current set can't even attack into the Sakura-Tribe Elder safely, and the rest of your

hand isn't going to put on much pressure either. If you sit there and do nothing, the only way you win is if your opponent has nothing. If he has something, he will gradually build up more and more advantage until he eventually finds a way to kill you. Oversold Cemetery and Grave Pact won't be able to compete.

Going for the Scion of Darkness doesn't seem like much of a plan either, because you're putting all your eggs into one basket and that basket is vulnerable to Astral Slide. It is rapidly becoming clear why this matchup is so bad for you, even if both decks were equally strong against a diverse field. Both sides have powerful long-term weapons: Slide has Astral Slide with plenty of cycling cards and recursive Eternal Witness and other creatures. You have cards like Oversold Cemetery and Grave Pact and can get Scion of Darkness. Your game plan is powerful, but his game plan beats your game plan. Both decks at their core are about gradual advantage, and his trumps yours.



What that means is, you need to press the attack and give yourself a chance to win as soon as possible. Playing for the long game is a guaranteed loss unless there are cards in your deck that I don't think are there. The Scion clearly has a far better chance of killing your opponent than any plan without him – you could strand your opponent without cycling cards and devastate him. You can also build up enough creatures in your graveyard to start using the Oversold Cemetery and try to get some game that way. Either way, a slim chance of winning is always better than none.

What happened was not unexpected:

With that hand, he decided to go get the Scion at end of his turn, then attacked and played the Cemetery and the Chaplain (he drew Starlit Sanctum). He was hoping to win before his opponent gained control and, if he ended up facing something like a recurring Wrath of God (thanks to Eternal Witness and Astral Slide), win by returning the Wretch with the Cemetery and the Archon/Cemetery/Pact combo.

Instead, his opponent cycled and Slided out the Scion in response to the attack. He then played Orim's Chant and (with the help of a Witness) locked the game, also playing a Wrath of God, another Slide and a Loxodon Hierarch.

Alfredo doesn't have to worry. He made the right choice, but there was no way he was going to win this game. He reached the same conclusion I did by a slightly different method, but they are essentially the same: This is the game I can play with this deck, so that's what I'm going to do.

With that out of the way, I present to you my Invitational Ballot. I kind of wish I'd had this when I was keeping up with the players more than I am now, but it's always good to have a voice.

My 2006 Invitational Ballot

Some votes are easy decisions: Kelly vs. Justin. Kelly vs. Richard. Kerry vs. Bush. Allies vs. Axis. Kokusho vs. Eight-and-a-half Tails. Great taste versus less filling. In each case, there was really no choice. Here there's a big choice, and I've been told: You decide! Someone is going to the Invitational, and I need to choose based on "a combination of talent and personality." In other words, it's about perception and results are not part of the picture – it's a lot like Bush vs. Kerry.

Here's the list of people under consideration:

Tim Aten; Jeff Cunningham; Antonino De Rosa; Gerard Fabiano; Tsuyoshi Fujita; Sam Gomersall; Mark Herberholz; Craig Krempels; Osyp Lebedowicz; Masashi Oiso; Neil Reeves; Jeroen Remie; Tomoharu Saitou; Tomi Walamies; Gabe Walls.

The first thing I'm going to do is eliminate Jeroen Remie, because he got the slot last year; This slot is sufficiently arbitrary that I don't think anyone needs to go twice on this basis. The second thing I'm going to do is follow the "you have to be a writer to be considered" path, because if the writers only get one slot than I'm going to help make sure it counts. That eliminates a bunch of other people. However, if I let being a totally active writer be the important thing than I wouldn't even be able to fill out five slots in a satisfactory way. Instead, I'll choose people I would like to read a report from – and I think that should be a requirement. If you go on the writers' ballot, ideally the least you can do is a little writing.

With that in mind, I'm off to choose some writers...

1. Tomi Walamies

The man has a ton of talent and plenty of personality, and it comes out in his writing. I want to give him a good reason to come along and get involved again, since showing up to a Pro Tour on a lark wasn't enough. The man is a comedian, and all reports indicate he's a damn good one. I asked myself who I wanted to see most, and he was it.

2. Osyp Lebedowicz

He's got plenty of talent and more personality than one man needs. The question is: Will he be writing a report for us? If he does, and he does it for real, he will have more than earned his place. If not, well, it would be like that time we were at the Invitational together. There were some good times, but it didn't live up to the hype. Since he was responsible for the hype, I kind of feel like that would be on him.

3. Antonino de Rosa

He gets bonus points for lots of talent, but the best reason is that this man makes me smile. He's so fun, upbeat and goofy and I feel like more of that would be a good thing. Besides, if he doesn't make it in elsewhere he should do so here. He deserves to go to the invitational.

At this point, I'm going to give the fourth and fifth slots to the current kings of the Tour, the Japanese. Let that serve as a wake up call to American writers – if you can't do the job, we'll find someone who can. While I don't have the same kinds of stories or memories of these guys, that doesn't mean that their personalities don't come through. Quite the contrary, and if I felt any other way I wouldn't be voting for them. In addition to that, they have some fierce talent.

4. Tsuyoshi Fujita

5. Masashi Oiso

All right, those are my picks. Whoever goes, I'm sure they'll have fun.

