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The Truth about Split Cards

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Latest Developments
Friday, April 28, 2006



First off, I did a live chat about *Dissension* this past Monday here on the site. Those of you that missed it [can read the transcript here](#) (Thanks to PhoenixLAU).

Employee Prerelease

Every time a set comes out, Wizards has a nice little four-round employee prerelease event one evening after work. The *Dissension* one, held last Tuesday night, stood out to me for two reasons. One, it was attended not only by the usual cast of characters but also luminaries from the European and Australian offices, including Gis Hoogendijk and Dale Aitken, here on official business. Two, our product mix was a tourney pack of *Ravnica* two boosters of *Dissension*, and *one booster of Guildpact*. That meant what we'd be working with was close to what Grand Prix and PTQ players in this format would have at their events. Yes, we were a bit *Dissension*-heavy, but we still had to parse all ten guilds at once. Yikes!

Here's my card pool. See what catches your eye.

WHITE

- Votary of the Conclave
- Beacon Hawk
- Mistral Charger
- Gate Hound
- Absolver Thrull
- Aurora Eidolon
- Wojek Apothecary
- Conclave Equenaut
- Wojek Siren
- Conclave's Blessing

BLUE

- Drift of Phantasms
- Crystal Seer
- Tidewater Minion
- Ethereal Usher
- Vision Skeins
- Compulsive Research
- Convolute
- Infiltrator's Magemark
- 2 Flight of Fancy
- 2 Skyscribing

BLACK

- Infectious Host
- Stinkweed Imp
- Sadistic Augermage
- 2 Entropic Eidolon
- Keening Banshee
- Enemy of the Guildpact
- Cremate
- Darkblast
- Brain Pry
- Delirium Skeins
- Necromantic Thirst
- Seize the Soul
- Disembowel

RED

- Kill-Suit Cultist
- Frenzied Goblin
- Scorched Rusalka
- Sparkmage Apprentice
- Sell-Sword Brute
- Goblin Fire Fiend
- Ogre Gatecrasher
- Coalhauler Swine
- Stalking Vengeance
- Seal of Fire
- Taste for Mayhem
- Pyromatics
- Cackling Flames
- Flash Conscripton

GREEN

- Elves of Deep Shadow
- Elvish Skysweeper
- Simic Initiate
- Civic Wayfinder
- Gristleback
- Simic Ragworm
- Gruul Scrapper
- Dowsing Shaman
- Gruul Nodorog
- Street Savvy
- Utopia Sprawl
- Fists of Ironwood
- Scatter the Seeds

MULTICOLORED

- Phytohydra
- Dimir Infiltrator
- Perplex
- Grave-Shell Scarab
- Golgari Germination
- Flame-Kin Zealot
- Rally the Righteous
- Streetbreaker Wurm
- Blind Hunter
- Conjurer's Ban
- Azorius First-Wing
- Palliation Accord
- Rakdos Ickspitter
- Vigean Hydropon

ARTIFACTS

- Terrarion
- Gruul Signet
- Rakdos Signet
- Simic Signet
- Cyclopean Snare
- Evolution Vat

LANDS

- Sacred Foundry
- Dimir Aqueduct
- Rakdos Carnarium

HYBRID

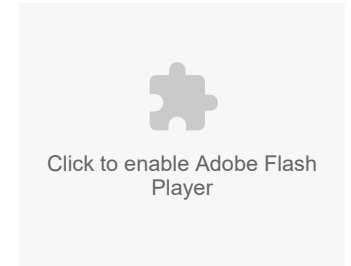
- Centaur Safeguard
- Gaze of the Gorgon
- Wild Cantor
- Azorius Guildmage

There were a few things that stood out to me as being powerful enough to try to build a deck around: the scads of black removal, Azorius Guildmage, Grave-Shell Scarab, Dowsing Shaman + Seal of Fire or Flight of Fancy, and Evolution Vat.

In the end, I looked at what colors my mana fixing (Signets and Karoos, plus green stuff like Civic Wayfinder, Utopia Sprawl, and Elves of Deep Shadow) were in and how much of the "good stuff" I could get out of those colors and ended up playing Black/Red/Green.



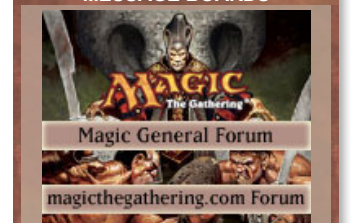
PRO TOUR-VALENCIA



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MESSAGE BOARDS



RULES

Dissension Employee Prerelease Deck

Aaron Forsythe

Main Deck
40 cards

40 cards

7 Forest	1 Elves of Deep Shadow	1 Terrarion
4 Swamp	1 Elvish Skysweeper	1 Utopia Sprawl
1 Mountain	1 Stinkweed Imp	1 Darkblast
1 Sacred Foundry	1 Civic Wayfinder	1 Seal of Fire
1 Dimir Aqueduct	1 Gristleback	1 Gruul Signet
1 Rakdos Carnarium	1 Centaur Safeguard	1 Rakdos Signet
13 lands	1 Rakdos Ickspitter	1 Fists of Ironwood
	1 Gruul Scrapper	1 Cackling Flames
	1 Ogre Gatecrasher	1 Seize the Soul
	1 Keening Banshee	1 Scatter the Seeds
	1 Dowsing Shaman	1 Flash Conscript
	1 Streetbreaker Wurm	1 Disembowel
	1 Grave-Shell Scarab	12 other spells
	13 creatures	



The toughest cuts were **Pyromatics**, which is a great card if you have enough red, and I most certainly did not; and **Simic Ragworm**, which would just be a Hill Giant. I played the Gatecrasher over the latter, hoping to get a greedy two-for-one off of random defenders instead of just playing the guy that would be easier to cast. I did kill a **Grozoth** (no jokes) with the Gatecrasher, but I doubt it was right to play it main. I also briefly considered the Vat as a simply an awkward souped-up **Dragon Blood**, but it just wasn't as good in my deck as the other cards I played.

It was also tempting to try cramming the little red beaters in the deck (**Frenzied Goblin**, **Sell-Sword Brute**, **Scorched Rusalka**) and go Gruul aggro, but the lure of **Seize the Soul** and **Keening Banshee** were too strong.

The mana worked out great for me, and I ended up going 4-0, defeating department mates Mark Gottlieb and Devin Low in the last two rounds. My only game loss was in round one when I kept a hand with a Signet, a Karoo, and **Elves of Deep Shadow**... but no basic land. Fifteen land is perfectly acceptable in this format.

Building decks in full-block sealed is a crazy challenge, but can be very satisfying when you manage to cram all the good stuff into a deck and still have the mana work out. Look for Noah Weil to be dishing out much more solid advice than I can give here when our "Limited Information" column starts up again next week.

7-10 Split

The "gold" split cards are one of *Dissension's* highlights, but also one of its main trouble spots for rules issues and bizarre card interactions. I'm sure Carter gets his fill of questions about how the split cards work in various situations, but I wanted to go over their rules implications in some amount of detail now before they become legal in constructed and people start playing decks that don't work quite right.

But first, a few development tidbits about *Dissension's* split cards:

- The "Ends" half of **Odds // Ends** came in from design as "3 — Destroy all attacking creatures." That ability proved demoralizing and absurd in practice, so it was changed to something a little less devastating.
- The "Bound" half of **Bound // Determined** was originally the unexciting "2 — Each flying creature gets -6/-6 until end of turn." (You know, as if they were "bound" to the Earth or something. I don't know...) The printed version is a much more thought-provoking card.
- The "Research" half of **Research // Development** came in as " — Look at target player's library and sideboard. Draw a card." Mildly amusing, but in no way the open-ended wackiness that is the current version of Research.
- The "Punishment" half of **Crime // Punishment** was initially " — Put target land on top of its owner's library. That player chooses a card from his or her hand and puts it on top of his or her library."—basically a combination of **Fallow Earth** and **Painful Memories**. The development team felt this card was ridiculously mean and powerful (it's a **Plow Under** that is just as effective against a single land), so they asked for new submissions. I came up with the current one and had little faith that it would be selected, but lo and behold it was printed.



On to the rules issues. Reading various message boards, I've seen all manner of misinformation regarding how split cards work with things like **Dark Confidant**, **Isochron Scepter**, Shoals, transmute, and so on. So here are the basics you need to know, plus some specific examples that should help you play more correctly in the coming months.

Key Rule #1: In every zone except the stack, split cards have two sets of characteristics (card type, color, mana cost, etc.).

This is pretty simple to understand for most parts of the card. For instance, **Assault // Battery** is both red and green, and if you were hit with a **Persecute** for either color, you'd have to discard **Assault // Battery**.

It gets tricky when talking about mana costs. *Assault // Battery* has two mana costs, ♣ and ♠ . It also has two converted mana costs, 1 and 4. *The converted mana cost of Assault // Battery is not 5. It is 1 and 4.* Similarly, the converted mana cost of *Supply // Demand* is 2 and 3.

What does this mean?

Key Rule #2: In any zone other than the stack, effects that ask if a split card's characteristic matches a given value get an answer of “yes” if either side of the split card matches the given value.

Example A: Void

You play *Void* and choose the number five. In my hand are *Serra Angel*, *Assault // Battery*, and *Crime // Punishment*. What do I discard?

Void essentially asks if each card in my hand has a converted mana cost of five. *Serra Angel* obviously answers yes to that question. *Assault // Battery* says no because it costs 1 and 4, which is different than 5. *Crime // Punishment* says yes because it costs 5 and 2, which means it does indeed have a converted mana cost of five. So I discard the Angel and *Crime // Punishment*.

Example B: Isochron Scepter

When I go to imprint a card on *Isochron Scepter*, the Scepter asks the card two questions: “Are you an instant?” and “Do you have a converted mana cost of two or less?” Luckily, all twenty existing split cards have the same card type on both halves, so the “instant or no” question is easy to answer.

As for the converted mana cost question, remember that only one half of the card needs to meet the requirement in order to qualify. Can I imprint *Hide // Seek*? Yes. It is an instant with a converted mana cost of 2 and 2, so it is legal. How about *Bound // Determined*? Yes. It is an instant with a converted mana cost of 5 and 2, which means it does indeed have a CMC of 2 or less. Can I imprint *Assault // Battery*? No. While its converted mana cost fits the bill (1 and 4), it is sadly a sorcery.

Split cards that can be imprinted on *Isochron Scepter*:

- *Bound // Determined*
- *Fire // Ice*
- *Hide // Seek*
- *Illusion // Reality*
- *Night // Day*
- *Odds // Ends*
- *Research // Development*
- *Stand // Deliver*
- *Trial // Error*
- *Wax // Wane*



The great thing about the Scepter is that once the card is imprinted, you can play either half when you activate it. The CMC restriction only limits what can be imprinted in the first place, not what can be played. So you can play *Development* every turn for a measly two mana!

Example C: Sunforger

Sunforger is a finicky card. Not only does it care about card type and converted mana cost, but color as well. All those parameters add up to some significant shenanigans when it comes to split cards.

When you attempt to tutor for a card with *Sunforger*, *Sunforger* asks the card three questions: “Are you red or white?”, “Are you an instant?”, and “Is your converted mana cost four or less?” Any card that fits all three can be fetched and played with the mighty hammer.

Can I fetch *Hide // Seek* with the ‘Forger? Certainly. It is an instant that is red or white, and its CMC is 2 and 2. Once I fetch it, I can choose which half I want to play. Hopefully I won’t Hide my own *Sunforger*.

Can I fetch *Research // Development*? Let’s find out. Is it red or white? Yes. Only half the card needs to be the requisite color in order for the answer to be “yes.” Is it an instant? Yes. Is its converted mana cost 4 or less? Yes, its CMC is 2 and 5, so it qualifies. Once I fetch it, I can play either half. The interesting thing about *Sunforger* and R//D is that neither half of R//D would work with *Sunforger* if they were printed as individual cards, but because they appear on the same card, one half’s “redness” combines with the other half’s CMC of 4 or less to make it a legal mark.

Split cards that can be fetched with *Sunforger*:

- *Fire // Ice*
- *Hide // Seek*
- *Hit // Run*
- *Night // Day*
- *Odds // Ends*
- *Research // Development*
- *Stand // Deliver*

- Trial // Error
- Wax // Wane

The important thing to remember when asking these questions is that “yes” overrides “no.” All that matters is if “yes” is a true answer.

Example D: Shoals

We'll start with **Sickening Shoal**. Many people seem to think that, when playing the Shoal for free, it has the text, “As an additional cost to play Sickening Shoal, remove a black card in your hand from the game. Target creature gets -X/-X until end of turn, where X is the converted mana cost of the removed card.”

That's not how it works at all, although in 99% of the cases you can't tell. A quick reminder of what the “real” text is: “You may remove a black card with converted mana cost X in your hand from the game rather than pay Sickening Shoal's mana cost.” You choose X before you pay costs, then you must RFG a card in your hand with a CMC of X. Subtly different.

Your opponent has a Keiga in play and you want to Shoal it to death at the end of your turn. You announce “Shoal for 5,” and then you need to remove a black card from your hand with a CMC of five. Can you remove **Pain // Suffering** to do this? **Pain // Suffering** is certainly black, but its CMC is 1 and 4, not 5. Not legal. You can Shoal for either 1 or 4 with **Pain // Suffering**.

Can you remove **Crime // Punishment** to Shoal for 5? Yes. It is black and has a CMC of 5 and 2, so that lets you Shoal for 5.

Can you remove **Hit // Run** to Shoal for 5? Yes! The card is black and has a CMC of 3 and 5, so it can be used to Shoal for 5, even though the “black half” only has a converted mana cost of three. Wacky.

Disrupting Shoal works essentially the same. You RFG a blue card from your hand to counter a spell that has the same CMC as the card you removed. Let's say you have a blue Shoal and a **Bound // Determined** in your hand. Which of the following spells can you counter: **Umezawa's Jitte**, **Wrath of God**, **Kodama of the North Tree**, and/or **Debtors' Knell**?

Bound // Determined combines with the Shoal to let you counter spells that cost either two or five, which is this case is the Jitte and the Tree. The Knell costs seven, and even though the two halves of the split card add up to seven, it doesn't work. Remember, the CMC of **Bound // Determined** is 5 and 2, not 7.

Example E: Transmute

Hopefully this makes sense to you by now. When you transmute **Drift of Phantasms**, you can get any split card that has a CMC of three—which means either half has to have a CMC of three. The total combined CMC of the halves doesn't matter.

Transmuting Drift...

- Can you get **Pure // Simple**? Yes, the CMC is 3 and 3.
- Can you get **Hit // Run**? Yes, the CMC is 3 and 5.
- Can you get **Life // Death**? No. The CMC is 1 and 2, not 3. The fact that they add up to three is irrelevant.
- Can you get **Fire // Ice**? No. Dumb question!

Bonus: Something to puzzle through on your own... If there is a **Thought Prison** in play with **Supply // Demand** imprinted on it, what categories of spells will cause it to trigger? Discuss on the boards...

On to something more confusing...

Key Rule #3: Effects that ask for a particular characteristic of a split card while it's in a zone other than the stack get two answers (one for each of the split card's two halves).

Cards relevant for this section include **Dark Confidant**, **Erratic Explosion**, and **Hellhole Rats**. Note that each of those cards doesn't ask if a CMC of a split card matched a certain number; instead, they want to know simply *what the CMC of the card is*.

The question each of these cards asks yields two answers, and both answers are applied.

Example F: Dark Confidant

You flip up a **Hit // Run** with Bob. How much life do you lose?

The CMC of the card is 3 and 5, so you lose three and five life, which totals eight. Ouch.

Example G: Erratic Explosion

You flip up a **Spite // Malice** with **Erratic Explosion**. How much damage is dealt to the target?



The CMC of the card is 4 and 4, so four and four damage is dealt, which totals eight. Ouch again.

Example H: Hellhole Rats

Your opponent plays **Hellhole Rats**, and your last card is **Odds // Ends**. How much damage does the Rats' ability do to you?

I'm sure you get it by now. Seven damage. Ouchie ouch.

Bonus: Something to puzzle through on your own #2... There is a **Timesifter** in play. When its trigger resolves, player A removes a **Serra Angel** and player B removes an **Order // Chaos**. Who gets the next turn? Discuss on the boards...



Key Rule #4: When a split card is on the stack, it only has the characteristics of the side being played.

In essence, when a split card is on the stack, throw all the confusing stuff out the window.

Here are some rapid-fire examples:

- You can tutor for **Assault // Battery** with Demand, but you can't counter either half with Error. That's because it is a multicolored card in your library (it is red and green), but is a monocolored spell while it is on the stack.
- A **Void** for two will knock **Life // Death** out of your hand, but **Spell Snare** cannot counter the Life half.
- A **Chalice of the Void** set to three will counter Chaos, but Order won't be affected.
- An **Adlle** for red can force you to discard **Pure // Simple**, but you can't **Hydroblast** Simple when it is on the stack.
- Chill** makes Development cost 2 more to play, but doesn't affect Research at all.

Key Rule #5: The name of a split card is the names of both halves combined.

There is no *card* named "Simple." Yes, you can play a *spell* named "Simple," but the card itself is called "**Pure // Simple**." (Most people say "Pure and Simple," although just saying "Pure Simple" is okay as well.)

This rule matters when it comes to cards like **Cabal Therapy**, **Conjurer's Ban**, and **Meddling Mage**. You have to name the whole card.

In the case of the Ban and the Mage, if you name a split card, neither half of the card can be played—the card can't go on the stack, so it always has both sets of characteristics, including names.

I know this stuff is confusing. Even other R&D members get tripped up on this stuff all the time, and we are constantly getting bugged by customer service reps that want to make sure they understand how split cards work before answering customers' questions. Hopefully this rundown will save you some hassles in the future.



Last Week's Poll

Have you ever made a deck for a friend learning to play and just given him/her the cards?		
Yes, occasionally	8412	59.9%
No	3095	22.0%
Yes, all the time	2534	18.0%
Total	14041	100.0%

If you have extra cards, even just commons and lands, this is a great way to introduce people to the game. Anthony Alongi has [a good article about beginner's decks here](#).

This Week's Polls

Did you learn from this article?

No, I already understood this stuff.

No, I still don't understand split card rules.

Yes.

No opinion.

Submit my Vote

What is your favorite *Dissension* split card?

- Crime // Punishment
- Research // Development
- Odds // Ends
- Bound // Determined
- Hide // Seek
- Trial // Error
- Rise // Fall
- Supply // Demand
- Hit // Run
- Pure // Simple

Submit my Vote

*Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D., and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.*



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