

Magicthegathering.Combos—*Dissension* Edition

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As we all know, I am awesome. And as my plans for total world domination near completion, I thought I'd take time out to share my awesomeness with all of you. If you poor schlubs out there knew a mere fraction of what I do about life, maybe yours wouldn't suck so badly. That's why, in an uncharacteristic act of generosity (but a very characteristic act of self-demagoguery), I have decided to encapsulate the lessons I've learned about life—let's call them "Life Lessons"—and teach them to you. It's the only way you'll learn.



In order to illustrate each lesson, I've included a representative **Magic** combo using one or more cards from that brilliantly designed *Dissension* set. If you can grok the combo, I think you can grok the lesson. If you'd like to celebrate Simic Week, you'll be especially interested in meeting my mentor Dr. Zero, as well as learning Lessons 4 (tangentially), 5, 8, 11, 14, 15 (a proto-Simic combo), and 17.

Life Lesson #1

When I was a young boy, I used to spend lazy summer afternoons helping my mentor Dr. Zero in his lab. I liked it because Dr. Zero had lots of cute, furry animals there, which we would feed, and pet, and perform cruel, painful, nature-defying experiments on. It sure beat a paper route!

One afternoon, as we were about to attach a set of electro-antlerenna (y'know—part antler, part antenna) to a squirrel, the Chipmunk Avenger burst into the lab and engaged Dr. Zero in an epic battle to the death. This was horrifying on a number of levels. For one thing, the Chipmunk Avenger was three hours early. We schedule showdowns for a reason, and this appalling lack of protocol was dirty pool. For another, that poor squirrel lived out the rest of its days without ever getting a clear

NBC signal. But the most awful thing might have been watching my mentor deviscercapitated in front of me. (If you don't know what that is . . . you don't want to.)

The death of Dr. Zero was the primary formative experience of my youth. It scarred me psychologically and twisted me into the depraved megalomaniac I am today.

Lesson: Great things can be born of tragedy.

Combo: [Protean Hulk](#) & [Nantuko Husk](#) & [Ornithopter](#)

As the death of Dr. Zero shaped me into the successful supervillain I am today, so can the death of [Protean Hulk](#) shape your success. When it goes belly-up, fetch a [Nantuko Husk](#), four [Ornithopters](#), four [Phyrexian Walkers](#), and a [Crafty Pathmage](#). If you do it on the end of your opponent's turn, you can untap, make the Husk unblockable, sacrifice all your other creatures to make it 20/20, and swing on in!

Life Lesson #2

In elementary school, a trio of bullies had set up a lunch money racket, shaking down the smaller kids for a couple of bucks a day. I saw the error of their ways. After they were expelled due to some carefully planted evidence, I took over their turf, and immediately expanded their operation from simple thuggery into blackmail and extortion. Unlike my predecessors, I didn't settle for the small kids just because they were easy pickings. No, I took the lunch money of the small kids, the big kids, the teachers, the administration, the janitors, the bus driver, everyone. I ate a *lot* of lunch. When the next eager young supervillain-to-be came along and tried to plant evidence against me, her efforts failed—everyone already knew I was guilty (so “evidence” was pretty pointless), and no one was left to stand against me.

Lesson: Why settle for “some” when “all” is within your grasp?

Combo: [Might of the Nephilim](#) & [Transquild Courier](#)
[Might of the Nephilim](#) can give [Grizzly Bears](#) +2/+2, it can give [Watchwolf](#) +4/+4, it can give [Lightning Angel](#) +6/+6, and it can give [Glint-Eye Nephilim](#) +8/+8 (which is a pretty good combo itself). But unless you get the full +10/+10 for 2 mana, you're leaving power on the table. Other cards that fit the same themes include [Blessing of the Nephilim](#), [Quickchange](#), and [Shyft](#).



Life Lesson #3

When I was in Evil College (also known as MIT), I joined an underground student group that pulled off one of the greatest hacks of all time (even better than the [Campus Police car on top of the Great Dome](#)): We invented paperwork.

I can't take too much credit here. I didn't found the group, I didn't lead the group, I wasn't even that involved. My contributions were small, the most notable being the invention of Form 1040 Schedule SE, the phrase "in triplicate," and a couple insidious things down at the DMV. I was just proud to be a part of such a great masterwork of annoyance. It's slowly but surely grinding civilization to a halt from the inside, and everyone's going along with it! Sometimes when I'm feeling blue, I head down to the DMV, sit off to the side, and watch society crumble.

Lesson: Bureaucracy is your friend. Exploit it.

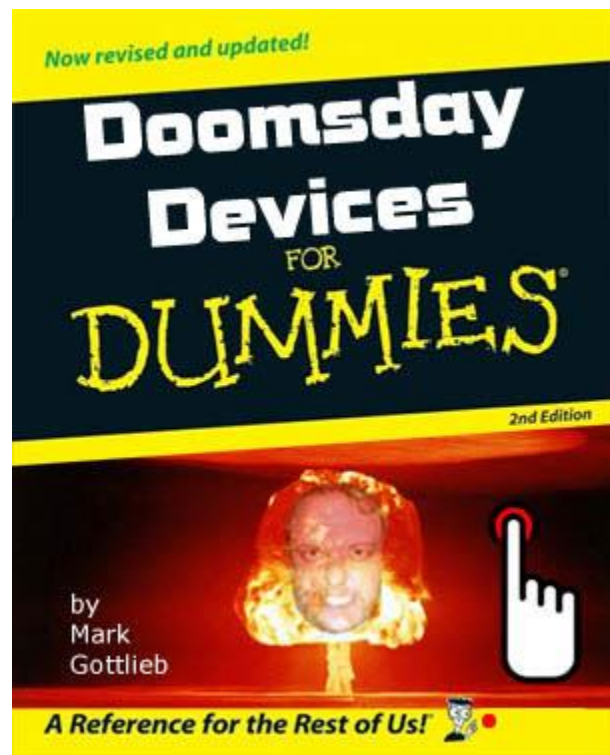
Combo: [Palliation Accord](#) & [Freed from the Real](#)

It's red tape except it's blue and white. Make your opponent go through a set of meaningless motions: Tap your creature, untap it, tap it again, untap it again, tap it once more, etc. In the end, your opponent's greatest threat is neutralized since it'll be tapped, any other threats are semi-neutralized since the shield counters you've built up on the Accord will prevent damage that would be dealt to you, and (best of all) you've really annoyed your opponent in the process.

Life Lesson #4

After I got my Ph.D. in Evilology, I was all set to embark on my career of supervillainy. There was only one problem: It was illegal! It was then that I finally understood why I got an A in Evil Ethics even though I flunked all the tests. If what I was doing was legal, it wouldn't count as villainy (to say nothing of *supervillainy!*), and I'd simply be a contributing member of society rather than an insane, self-righteous sociopath convinced that the world would be a better place if I rewrote the rules from scratch rather than allowing the populace to follow the laws and mores that have evolved over thousands of years of civilized development. Plus it wouldn't be any fun. I walked into a bookstore, walked out with a stolen copy of *Doomsday Devices for Dummies*, and I've never looked back.

Lesson: Rules are made to be broken. So are laws, treaties, international accords. . . .



Combo: [Research // Development](#) & [Isochron Scepter](#)

Five-mana spells are not supposed to get imprinted on [Isochron Scepter](#). They're certainly not supposed to be played with [Isochron Scepter](#). But split cards break the rules (well, except the split card rules) by having two sides, and two values, when the game expects only one. You can imprint the card [Research // Development](#) on the Scepter because it's an instant card with converted mana cost 2. (It also has converted mana cost 5, but that doesn't change the fact that it has converted mana cost 2.) When you use the Scepter to play a copy of the imprinted card, you choose which half to play. That means that every turn, you can spend 2 mana to play a copy of the 5-mana Development spell. Whether you get cards, Elementals, or both, you're getting a steal.

Life Lesson #5

As great as doing illegal stuff was, I'd rather subvert the system than skirt the system. It's just so much more efficient. The ninja leash laws and unregistered doomsday device fines were already becoming quite the nuisance, but when they passed the robot tax, that was the last straw.

My solution was to do what any supervillain would have done: Construct an undersea lair in international waters. Since it falls under no one's jurisdiction, everything I did there was legal. Sure, I missed having backyard barbecues, and I had to let my Kite Flyer's Club membership lapse, but those are small prices to pay when you're chasing a dream.

Lesson: When you're above the law, you can't possibly break it.

Combo: [Vigean Hydropon](#) & [Yore-Tiller Nephilim](#)

[Vigean Hydropon](#) can't attack, which is hardly fair considering it's a 5/5 for 3 mana. But while it can't change from a "not attacking" state to an "attacking" state (an unbreakable law), it can be dropped into play already attacking. (Law? What law?) This won't win the game—it's just deliciously subversive to pull off. Of course, one of the Hydropon's colors happens to be the only color [Yore-Tiller Nephilim](#) isn't, so any deck that attempts this will be unwieldy. You can achieve much of the same thrill by replacing the Hydropon with [Rakdos the Defiler](#) (you don't have to sacrifice half your non-Demon permanents, but your opponent does), and once you're on that path, the role of the Nephilim can also be filled by [Dimir Doppelganger](#). You get all the benefits of attacking without actually attacking!

Life Lesson #6

Three months after I moved into Wombatlantis, I received a visit from a Mr. Jack Wright. You know the type: Suave, debonair superspy who has some sort of problem with government-toppling madmen. Whatever, dude! Why you gotta playa hate?

Mr. Wright wasn't that hard to catch since he's immensely famous amongst the criminal underworld, and he insists on the conspicuous habits of always ordering his signature drink, always wearing a tuxedo, and always calling himself by his *real name*. Yikes. But rather than killing him, I put him into a cell that had a built-in "escape hatch" that was actually an elaborate,

multimillion dollar Rube Goldbergish contraption involving rabid tarantulas, a pipe lined with sea urchin spines, five trap doors, a precarious swing over a hammerhead shark tank, and a fun house mirror room. All great fun, and none of it violated the Geneva Convention because the victim could've just stayed put in his cell! Long story short, he used the "escape hatch" and, thanks to a very clever device hidden in his left cufflink and the shocking betrayal of my surprisingly sexy and even-more-surprisingly scantily clad Lead Marine Biologist Shirley Scrod, escaped. I'd describe the events in detail, but it's boring.



Don't hate the player, hate the game.

Lesson: Sometimes you've got to go for the one-shot kill.

Combo: [Anthem of Rakdos](#) & [Dread Slag](#)

If you have both of these five-mana Rakdos cards on the table and no cards in hand, [Dread Slag](#) is an 11/11 trampler that, if it would deal damage, deals double that damage instead. That's a potential 22 screaming towards your opponent's head, with not a single sea urchin spine in sight.

Life Lesson #7

As you know, I have no actual superpowers. Massive genius, sure. Intense charisma, absolutely. But nothing caused by a radioactive accident on the moon, for example. Nothing that naturally violates nature.

That didn't stop superheroes from coming after me, however. Call it unfair or poor sportsmanship, but I'd be regularly subjected to supernatural attacks from freaky mutants, and there was nothing I could do about it. That's why I formed the League of Villainy & Evil.

Now that I was on a team, my colleagues had my back. Any attempts to foil my plans using X-ray vision, heat ray vision, night ray vision, or the like were thwarted by my pal Ray-Ban (though his name may change pending that copyright infringement suit). The Bank Manager's attempts to freeze my accounts were counteracted by PIN Head. Solid State was ably matched by the Liquidator. The

Human Piñata had his hands full with Party Pooper, one of the best 8-month-old supervillains of all time. And I was free to continue my nefariousness unabated.

Lesson: Convince others to share their unique powers with you.

Combo: [Guardian of the Guildpact](#) & [Concerted Effort](#)

Protection from monocolored is a neat ability, and all your creatures can have it. [Concerted Effort](#) shares any kind of protection ability, not just “standard” ones like protection from red. Toss [Enemy of the Guildpact](#) into the combo too, and you've got everything covered except colorless.

Life Lesson #8

My LoVE cohorts had started grumbling that I contributed nothing to the alliance except occasional use of my rec room—and they even complained about that because I charged them for the submarine ride to get there and they didn't like the so-called “octopus smell” in Wombatlantis. To appease them, I told them I'd build each of them a weather machine.

What I actually did was build one weather machine and preprogram it so that it would malfunction after a month. I gave it to the Liquidator, which made her happy, waited until it broke, then took it back for “repairs.” In actuality, I just gave it to PIN Head next, which made him happy, and so on. It took three years for them to catch on, and by that time I had betrayed them all in such vastly worse ways that no one was all that upset about the Storminator 5000 rondelet.

Lesson: Deceive your friends. It's profitable, and it's good practice!

Combo: [Simic Guildmage](#) & [Shielding Plax](#)

In this scenario, [Simic Guildmage](#) is me and [Shielding Plax](#) is the weather machine. “Don't worry, pal,” [Simic Guildmage](#) says when it moves the Plax onto one of your creatures. “You're untargetable . . . forever!” Of course, as soon as another creature needs it, it yanks it away. But ultimately, everyone's sorta grateful to the Guildmage, and the air fresheners help with the “octopus smell,” so everything's cool. Also good to move around: [Leafdrake Roost](#) (to make multiple Drakes a turn, if you have the mana for it), or any power-boosting Aura from a creature with first strike (after it's assigned combat damage) to a creature without first strike (before it's assigned combat damage)

Life Lesson #9

I had set my sights on the Hyperdiamond of Ludicrous Power (it's sparkly). To get my hands on it, I came up with the simplest plan I could think of: an elaborate, four-month con involving five betrayals, four plot holes, three rubber face masks, two twist endings, and one extreme implausibility. It was a rollicking caper, and in the end I acquired the jewel. To put it succinctly, I followed my extreme greed and used double dealing and backstabbing to get what I wanted.

Lesson: Extreme greed, double dealing, and backstabbing is the best way to get what you want.

Combo: [Bronze Bombshell](#) & [Spawnbroker](#)

The setup: Play [Bronze Bombshell](#), then play [Spawnbroker](#) to trade the Bombshell away. The outcome: You end up with your opponent's best creature that costs four mana or less, while your opponent ends up with no creature *and* gets dealt 7 damage. That's the kind of trade I like.

Life Lesson #10



In 2000, you may have received an email from Dr. Ben Oguejiofor, Director of Projects in Nigeria, who was seeking your help in transferring \$45.1 million. You'd get a cut, of course, if you could help him with the banking fees. Well, guess who really sent you that email. It was me!!!

My latest evil plot for global destabilization and personal richmentation involved a spam scam so stupid and implausible that tons of people fell for it. I raked in the dough. And *then* I had my moment of brilliance. Why don't I do the exact same thing again, just with a different name and dollar amount? And it worked again!!! Over the past six years, I've sent out hundreds of variants of the exact same thing. Col. Ibrahim Mustapha of Nigeria? Miss Charlotte D. Fologo of the Ivory Coast? Rev.

Where will Mark scheme from today?

Sunday Nana of Liberia? Themba Funzani of Zimbabwe? All me! This was how I made enough money to put the down payment on my new lair under Mt. St. Helens.

Lesson: A good story is worth retelling.

Combo: [Proclamation of Rebirth](#) & [Kami of False Hope](#)

Feel like neutralizing your opponent's attacks for the rest of the game? Play the Kami. Sacrifice it on your opponent's turn to prevent all combat damage. Play [Proclamation of Rebirth](#)'s forecast ability during your upkeep to put the Kami back into play. Do it forever! The great part of this combo is that at no point do you need to successfully resolve a spell. The only spell you play is the initial [Kami of False Hope](#), and if that's countered, you can still get it back from your graveyard with the Proclamation.

Life Lesson #11

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Lesson: I *told* you a good story is worth retelling.

Combo: [Ocular Halo](#) & [Semic Ragworm](#)

Enchant the Ragworm with the Halo. Tap it to draw a card. Untap it. Repeat! You can pull off a less efficient version of the combo by using [Vigean Graftmage](#) instead, and an even less efficient version by using [Semic Guildmage](#) to move the Halo from creature to creature, tapping each newly enchanted creature for its free card.

Life Lesson #12

It was Arbor Day, so Chloro Phyllis had baked her traditional cinnamon babka. She had outdone herself this time; it was truly a work of art. Phyllis handed me a slice, and I found myself deeply torn about what to do. Ultimately, I decided the only option was to invent the Cosmic Bisector and split the universe into two parallel timestreams. In one timestream, I devoured the rich, succulent dessert. In the other, I simply admired it but didn't partake. Then I collapsed both universes back together. Best Arbor Day ever.

Lesson: You can have your cake and eat it too.

Combo: [Dovescape](#) & [Boseiju, Who Shelters All](#)

[Dovescape](#) counters each noncreature spell, and it gives that spell's controller Bird tokens equal to the spell's converted mana cost. Those are two independent effects: There's no "if you do" clause on the card, so you'll get the Bird tokens whether or not your spell is actually countered! That means uncounterable spells do double duty while [Dovescape](#) is in play, and Boseiju makes any instant or sorcery you spend its mana on uncounterable.



Life Lesson #13

After a few years in the biz, I had proven myself as a supervillain prodigy. This was not a good thing. In my line of work, there is such a thing as “too successful.” In my case, that meant I had attracted the near-constant attention of Heroes Against Tyranny & Evil.

Then a funny thing happened. Just when I reached the top of HATE's “Most Evil” list, a mutiny struck within my organization, destabilizing it from within. Remember when Mt. St. Helens started leaking noxious gas? That was due to sabotage by my second-in-command The Echidna Kid, who had made a move to take me out and seize my empire. It worked, in part, and I was deemed a non-threat by the superhero community. There's just one catch: There was no mutiny. The whole thing was a set-up on my part. The Echidna Kid's defection and subsequent escape to Nebraska not only deflected unwanted attention, it helped me set up my Omaha branch office.

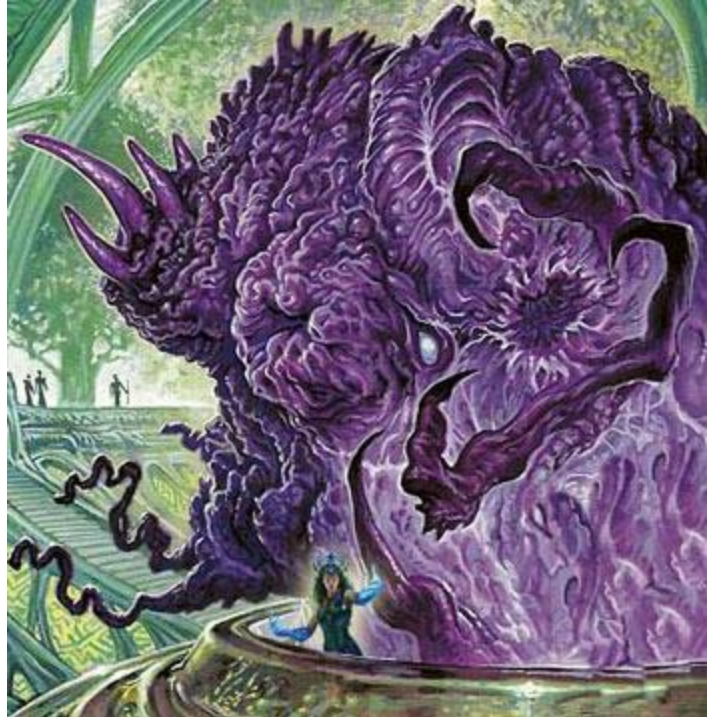
Lesson: Shoot yourself in the foot before someone else shoots you in the head.

Combo: [Azorius Aethermage](#) & [Oboro, Palace in the Clouds](#)

Voluntarily return Oboro to your hand, thus stunting your current development, and you can pay 1 to draw a card, thus helping your future development. Again, it's something you can do every turn. Oboro isn't the only option, or even necessarily the best option—that's probably [Shrieking Drake](#). [Gossamer Chains](#), [Blood Clock](#), [Meloku the Clouded Mirror](#) (or any Moonfolk), or [Trusted Advisor](#) can fill a similar (or redundant) role . . . though it's not as if Meloku needs any further help to be good.

Life Lesson #14

Supervillains aren't the only ones with mad scientists parading around secret labs performing depraved experiments. After the Omaha ruse had run its course, HATE targeted me again. They had developed a psychological "cure" for evil. Something about optimistic singing, undying hope, and brain-stem implants. If I were affected, the treatment would make my heart grow three sizes that day, turning me into a sappy do-gooder who would apply his genius toward making the world a better place. What they don't realize is that I'm already applying my genius toward making the world a better place. I just have a different (and rather more Dr. Wombat-centric) view of what "better" means.



Thanks to my allies in the evil monkey community (I used to play poker with the cousin of one of the lab's evil monkey test subjects), I learned about HATE's nefariously unnefarious plan and arranged a little accident for them. I let them catch me and apply their cure, but thanks to a reversal of the evil polarity ("evilarity") of their good electrodes ("goodlectrodes"), I managed to not only remain evil, I turned HATE themselves evil for a week and a half *and* made them completely subservient to me for that time frame.

Lesson: 'Tis better to give (mind-control implants) than it is to receive (mind-control implants).

Combo: [Cytoplast Manipulator](#) & [Experiment Kraj](#)

Kraj puts a counter on an opponent's creature, then the Manipulator takes it. Kraj, of course, has about a bazillion combos available to it (it's fantastic with [Simic Ragworm](#), for example, and the trio of Kraj, the Ragworm, and the Manipulator is ridiculous), so [Cytoplast Manipulator](#)'s potential is more interesting to me. Check it out with [Aku Djinn!](#) Or [Forgotten Ancient](#), [Ley Line](#), [Shambling Shell](#), [Dragon Blood](#), [Erithizon](#), [Spike Rogue](#). . . The list goes on.

Life Lessons #15 & #16

The week and a half that HATE was under my control was one of the most fun week and a halves of my life. They went on a superspree: Superkidnapping, superbank robbing, superthreats against world governments, supergraffiti writing. They did it all. And they turned on each other so viciously it would have made Benedict Arnold blush.

Meanwhile, as panic spread and world economies devolved into chaos, I saw record evil profits. Shares of WMBT rose to their all-time high on the evil stock market. Sales of my evil greeting cards, evil car care products, and evil light jazz album *The Only Thing Achin' Is My Soul* skyrocketed, all due to the topsy-turvy zeitgeist—and I didn't have to take a single direct action to influence it.

Lesson: Psychic possession can lead to malignant growth.

Combo: [Psychic Possession](#) & [Malignant Growth](#)

[Malignant Growth](#) is an odd win condition. You're giving your opponent increasingly more cards each turn, meaning the chances of your opponent drawing something that defeats you are more and more likely. But the tradeoff to handing your opponent bushfuls of resources are that you're dealing more and more direct damage each turn, and you're gambling that'll end the game before the gambit backfires. That's where [Psychic Possession](#) comes in. Now you and your opponent *both* get the ridiculous card drawing—but only your opponent gets the pain.

That lesson was a bit on-the-nose, though, huh? Let's try again with something more general:

Lesson: Spreading evil is even more profitable than being evil.

Combo: [Nightcreep](#) & [Crusading Knight](#)

[Crusading Knight](#) is a color hoser. If your opponent controls no Swamps or black creatures, it's a massively overcosted 2/2 vanilla creature. However, if *all* your opponent's lands are Swamps and *all* your opponent's creatures are black, it becomes an unblockable anti-Molimo with an extra +2/+2 for good measure.



Life Lesson #17

Last September, The Human Piñata's birthday rolled around again, and that guy throws an amazing party. Not that I was invited. Again. I've been sending him gifts for years, hoping that maybe one day a year all can be forgiven and we could all simply celebrate and have a good time without getting uptight about "good" and "evil" and "really evil" and "super mega evil." Plus it would be a great opportunity to ambush all the superheroes at once. But no, they don't trust me. Well, who needs their stupid party anyway?

This year, I sent The Human Piñata a present again. This time it was something unique I cooked up in my astrophysics lab. Very unique. Singular, even. Its singularity was notable because it was, in fact, a

singularity. I put a black hole in a box, wrapped it in shiny ribbon, and sent it on over. Y'know, I haven't heard from The Human Piñata in a while. . . .

Lesson: Give your enemies nothing. Literally.

Combo: [Cytoshape](#) & [Aquastrand Spider](#)

This works with [Cytoshape](#) and any graft creature, modular creature, Spike, *Judgment* Phantom, or any other creature with 0 printed toughness. But let's stick with the Spider. [Cytoshape](#) turns any creature into the Spider: a 0/0 green creature with some abilities. It doesn't copy the +1/+1 counters, much the same way that it wouldn't copy any Auras or Equipment attached to the Spider. If the target creature doesn't already have any kind of toughness boosting effect, it croaks immediately for having 0 toughness. [Cytoshape](#) does plenty of other nutty things, but acting like a green-blue [Terror](#) is the most utilitarian (and the most out-of-character).

I hope you learned something today. Just be warned that if you apply these lessons towards becoming either a supervillain or a superhero and try to take me down, I'll be ready for you. After all, I taught you everything you know.

Until next time, have fun learning lessons.

Mark