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Commitment Issues, Part 2

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The original plan for this week was to go over every single card in *Ravnica* block that could kill multiple creatures. If childhood taught me anything, it was that knowing was half the battle. Also that the Sword of Omens is really cool, but that's neither here nor there.

Unfortunately for the original plan, there are a lot of cards in *Ravnica* block that can destroy multiple creatures in one turn. How many you ask? 10? 20? Try over 60. Certain cards are kind of in the middle, like *Djinn Illuminatus*, but the point is, lots and lots o' mass destruction in this block. To narrow the field a bit, this week will not be an exhaustive list, but rather some standouts from categories of multi-kill spells.



Why list them in the first place? Like we discussed [last week](#), knowledge of certain spells can and should affect your play. *Ray of Command's* existence in *Mirage* certainly changed the course of Limited games. So did *Blind With Anger* and *Temporary Insanity* affect their respective environments, but we know in *Ravnica* there's no similar effect at the four-mana mark. Since cards that can deal with multiple creatures are so powerful, it does behoove a player to know what's out there. This also involves learning about these kinds of cards as new sets are released, but that's a bit later.

As I was putting the cards together in preparation for this article, I actually consulted the list in a game, just to make sure there wasn't a card that could be devastating. In that particular game there actually was a card that would have stung (*Rolling Spoil*), so my play was slightly altered. He ended up not having the card anyway, but raising my chances just a few percentage points can pay big dividends. By the by, has this ever happened to you?

*The only way I can lose is if I play this **Moroii**. Then he would have to drop a land, cast **Flash Conscript** and double **Hellbent Taste** for **Mayhem**, and then I guess the upkeep would kill me. That seems unlikely so I'll play it, but, but*

Nooooooo!

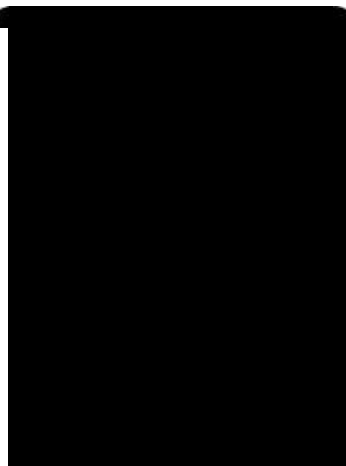
The shift from 0.02% and 0.00% seems small enough, but the gap between "can lose" and "can't lose" is as wide as the *Griffin Canyon*. Knowing your environment thoroughly goes a very long way to solidifying your chance at success. In that vein, here are a number of cards, sorted by various effect, that are worth referencing for the remainder of the RGD season.

The heavy sweepers

Savage Twister, Hour of Reckoning, Hex, Plague Boiler, Kindle the Carnage, Brightflame.

These are the cards that are mostly guaranteed to kill everything, or in the case of *Brightflame*, gain its caster so much life it dulls the swords of whatever's left. Of these, *Savage Twister* is the best, more for casting cost than anything else. Yes, *Hour* has casting/targeting bonuses, *Brightflame* gains you life, and *Hex* can be one-sided. It's just that *Savage Twister* has extraordinarily simple mana requirements, and the damage it deals is limited only by your imagination. Add in a scary uncommon status and its own capacity to be one-sided; it's clear *Savage Twister* is the {e} of mass removal, not that that distinction means a whole lot. This classification is the grouping an opponent needs to draw from when they're being assaulted by creatures of various casting costs, sizes, and colors.

Regarding *Kindle the Carnage*, this is one sorcery I believe is not getting enough respect. True, random discard is rarely fun, but there are certainly set-ups one can do at least guarantee killing everything on the board. Even if it costs you 1-2 extra cards, that's a small loss for wiping away everything at an incredibly cheap price. Add in the capacity to get lucky with your guys or your hand, and you have an imperfect but potentially game-ending card. Give it a spin for yourself and see.



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The combat-centric

Flash Conscription, Scatter the Seeds, Leap of Flame, Ends, Seeds of Strength, Master Warcraft, Development, Thunderheads

This effectiveness of this group comes from two parts. One is that a good portion of these cards work on offense as well as defense. The second is that a great many of these combat cards are commons. Admittedly, this means less than it did months ago; in triple Rav, **Seeds of Strength** was practically a guarantee compared to its relative unlikelihood today. But their commonality still forces an opponent to give them slightly more consideration than any other grouping. You can play and hope they won't have a **Hex**, and more often than not, you'll be right. That simply becomes less true when the wrecking card is **Scatter the Seeds**.



Master Warcraft is one of those cards that's insane when it's good, but just a **Fog** when it's not. It's a tough card to play around, but its own situational nature helps. It's cards like **Ends** and **Thunderheads** and **Flash Conscription** that require a bit more attention. These are the cards that can definitely swing an over-aggressive player's plan askew. Be wary of the player who reaches the six or nine mana mark with these colors and plays nothing with a bunch of cards still in hand. He or she may be setting you up for an [attack-step devastator](#).

[Click here](#) for a Constructed example of something similar. In that game, Moreno knew his opponent had **Odds // Ends**, where you might have to wait until game two to know for sure. Still, if that's the only card that can wreck you...

Incidentally, the reason these cards can be common despite their potential sweeping effects is that they're reactive. Whether they're used on offense or defense, they all rely on the opponent actually taking some kind of action, like an attack or block. The exception on this list is **Master Warcraft** and surprise surprise, that's a rare.

The low-toughness killers

Rolling Spoil, Rain of Embers, Hypervolt Grasp, Electrolyze, Tibor and Lumia, Pyromatics, Plagued Rusalka, Orzhov Pontiff, Twinstrike, Flame Fusillade, Darkblast, Ulasht, the Hate Seed, Gelectrode.

Oof, that's a big list. Having a low toughness seems to be a big drawback in *Ravnica* block. This particular group didn't even count the cards that merely go one-for-one with teeny tiny toughness, like **Riot Spikes** or **Sparkmage Apprentice**. It's the existence of these kinds of cards that particularly concern me with small-butted guys. Should you feel the need to play creatures with one toughness in your deck, I'd suggest a few guidelines. Ones that give a card back are fine, like **Coiling Oracle** or **Sparkmage Apprentice**. Ones that can deal with multiple and/or large creatures are also good, like **Minister of Impediments** or **Gelectrode**. The rest of them are far more dangerous, but still fine when you only have a single one out. It's when you play multiple **Centaur Safeguard**, **Thoughtpicker Witches**, and various **Rusalka** you open yourself to a devastating **Electrolyze** or **Rolling Spoil**. If you're going to put yourself at risk, at least use what's out there to minimize that vulnerability, if possible.

The creature generated

Rakdos Guildmage, Drooling Grootion, Stormscale Anarch, Gelectrode, Sisters of Stone Death, Niv-Mizzit, the Firemind, Living Inferno, Lyzolda, the Blood Witch, Hammerfist Giant, Trophy Hunter



What a potent collection of quality creatures. Thankfully, these monsters are of the uncommon and rare variety. Their repetitive power is *slightly* offset by the opposing side gaining a turn's grace to counteract. There's also rarity to consider, and the extreme casting costs of a couple of others.

Still, they're a powerful bunch. Besides the quality of reusability, these creatures also come packed with an actual board presence to take advantage of an opponent's empty field. It's possible a clutch **Hour of Reckoning** leaves both sides empty of creatures and hand. Then it just becomes a topdecking war. Not so with **Living Inferno**, who, after killing stuff, turns its sights on life totals.

A list of good creatures is nice, but the relevant question is how to play against them. Well the instinct would be to save your **Brainspoil** for one of these deadly, killable

bombs, especially if you already saw one in the first game. That's not bad if that's actually the only way you could lose, but what often happens is you forego too much damage by not removing blockers, and that gives them time to draw their second and third bombs, or **Bathe in Light**, or whatever.

In practice, I've found most players with high-powered creatures tend to overvalue their rares. It's a natural instinct; opening, drafting, and getting to actually play **Niv-Mizzet, the Firemind** is quite a gift. No one wants to just throw their presents away.

For you, oh opposing player, that means these creatures are more vulnerable to discard, since they're often the last creature played out of hand. By the same token, counterspells are slightly more valuable, since you can play your mana curved, tempoed game and still have mana left over in the later stages to keep around for a **Convolute** or **Induce Paranoia**, even for a cheap threat like Lyzolda.

Also in the style of overprotection, an opponent will rarely place their **Sisters of Stone Death** in combat the first turn they come into play, wary of **Orzhov Euthanist** or **Gaze of the Gorgon**. Whether that's the correct play or not is irrelevant; that's the turn you get to attack with your creatures, knowing they'll have one less blocker. If they're risk-adverse, definitely give them a chance to engage that fear. This in turn allows you to deal damage. Why is dealing damage good? Well each player starts at 20 life and the game is over when... Wait, why is dealing damage good?

The narrow

Blockbuster, **Cleansing Beam**, **Wojek Embermage**, **Culling Sun**, **Punishment**, **Elvish Skysweeper**

These cards are characterized by what they can affect. Clearly, every creature has a casting cost, and usually a color. The question isn't whether these cards hit, it's whether they're worth the effort of drafting and casting.

In the case of **Cleansing Beam** and **Crime // Punishment**, their low colored requirements combined with some degree of flexibility make them playable. **Culling Sun** is a little tougher to cast and manage, but it usually has a place in B/W/X decks. The **Embermage** and **Blockbuster** both require time to get working, and quite a bit of things to go right before they have major impact. **Wojek Embermage** is fine sideboard against token decks, and combines well with other cards (**Beacon Hawk**, **Viashino Fangtail**, **Graven Dominator**), but on its own is rarely worth the 1/2 for four.

Blockbuster is eminently awful, although the savvy reader may pick up on the fact that most creatures do end up tapped at some point. Regardless, it still costs a whopping seven mana and triple-red to exploit the status. In addition, three damage does not kill everything, and setting a trap makes the three damage you take extra painful. Playing it out with the intention of activating it on the following turn certainly cuts into the surprise value, as well as opening up vulnerabilities to **Seed Spark** or **Absolver Thrull**. **Blockbuster** probably isn't among the worst (see below), but it does prove that even in the realm of multi-kill effects, some cards just are not worth the effort.



Teh Suck

Moratorium Stone, **Razia's Purification**, **Valor Made Real**, **Rakdos Riteknife**

My favorite group. You are showered with blessings the day these cards manage to kill any one thing, much less multiples. **Valor Made Real** is pretty darn awful; asking a lot of stars to align to actually have an effect on the game. The **Valor Made Real** player needs:

1. To be in a racing situation (where a big block would matter)
2. To be able to win the racing situation while leaving a creature back
3. To have the opposing player not be able to suppress the Valored creature in response and
4. To have the opposing player be forced to commit all his guys to the attack, so he is maximally trapped by **Valor Made Real**.

If you can pull off tricks like that, you've got a bright future in the circus my friend. In all honesty, these points can and do happen in some games, just not often enough to make VMR worth drafting. What's more probable is being hit with **Valor Made Real** because you're playing against an inexperienced player, who doesn't yet know the card is poor. To my knowledge, **Valor Made Real** was never cast at Pro Tour--Prague. In someone's very first draft with **Dissension**? It's possible. Just be aware VMR's likelihood slightly goes up against the uninformed.

Anti-dredge? I can give you **Moratorium Stone** for that. But for actually removing something from play, well, (**Twincast** + **Lightning Surge**) + a winning lottery ticket on the day **Mana Drain** gets reprinted, if you know what I'm saying.

As for the rest, besides the costs of the cards, they give your opponent choices, and hence unreliability. An opponent knows when their opposite needs creatures dead. You can guess what won't be sacrificed that turn.



What will soon become more interesting is when a devastating card exists that can be played in any deck, at any time. You may have missed the PT Charleston coverage, if so you [can see the archive here](#). In between the coverage from the team of shockingly handsome reporters, a brand new *Coldsnap* card was revealed in all its Wrathful goodness. [Here it is again](#):



This card is clearly very dangerous, for two reasons. The first is its existence undermines the efforts to learn all the vulnerabilities and casting costs of mass killers, since it affects *all* creatures without any regard to its caster's mana situation. The second reason is that its caster can use the free ability and drop a big monster on the same turn. I would guess that play's rarely worth the effort, but the potential is strictly a positive, especially if the player is missing White mana.

So for you, O vulnerable one, come [Coldsnap Pre-Release](#), there will be a card that can wipe away armies on the cheap. A fantastic card that I'm sure will be cursed as the day goes on, but still containing the same signals as other big wrath-effects. Its owner will still have a lot of cards in hand, with a lot of mana in play, perhaps feigning fear over your growing army. Sunscour is always going to hurt, but perhaps with a little caution and awareness, you can take some of the sting out of this newest of mass elim spells.

Enjoy the next two weeks of *Coldsnap* previews. Limited Information will be back July 11th with brand new content. Until then, thanks for reading.

-Noah Weil

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