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Over the past couple of years, the redistribution of the **Magic** color pie has yielded many strange new affiliations. For instance, Prodigal Sorcerer, long a *Blue* card that actually saw play in a Top 8 deck by Japanese maverick Satoshi Nakamura, received a peerless upgrade in its transition into a *Red* card, the mighty Vulshok Sorcerer (the even more egregious same-color, and significant for tournament play, shift is Psionic Blast to Char, though the various Ray of Command updates also bear mentioning). The next-to-most broken boon - a senior common, like Prodigal Sorcerer since Alpha - has had its toenails clipped and shifted from Black to Red in various forms from Desperate Ritual to Seething Song. White has left behind its onetime defining suite of ridiculously undercosted removal spells - cards from Swords to Plowshares to Balance to Divine Offering - and instead carved out a niche as commander in chief of winged bears, currently spilling over its two-mana slot with Leonin Skyhunter, Azorius First-Wing, and Mistral Charger. Without a doubt, the wealthiest beneficiary of this trend of redistribution has been Green.



*Didn't this ability used to be black?*

Long the color of "sharing," Green has dug in its heels and slowly but steadily wrapped its pinions, tail feathers, and assorted maws around the core elements of the classic Blue or White control decks. There is no more obvious implementation of Green-as-Weissman than the reprinting of Savage Twister in *Guildpact* as the best *Ravnica* Block analogue to Wrath of God... Our initial U/W "Weissman" update for the format actually splashed Gruul Signets and four copies of Gruul Turf *just* to support the format's most consistent sweeper! Other Green additions are more straightforward... Disenchant to Naturalize is the most obvious, but the trend is inescapable, even on the Blue front. Krosan Tusker is a very "Green" look at Fact or Fiction or Inspiration.... It lacks the pure power of Fact or Fiction, and it searches up a *specific* land rather than a *random* land-or-spell, but the card has up-sides as well. In that it is Green, Krosan Tusker as a cycling card advantage play is essentially uncounterable, and unlike the recent crop of playable Blue cards (*viz.* Compulsive Research), it works at instant speed. In the same set that first produced both Krosan Tusker and Naturalize, Green received a solid attempt at Ophidian, in Hystrodon.

Hystrodon was a reasonable but imperfect attempt to Blue-ify Green. Obviously R&D wanted to showcase the *Onslaught* Block Morph mechanic, and via Birds of Paradise or Llanowar Elves, this card could be on the board in "down payment" mode as early as turn two. The idea of being able to deploy an "Ophidian" on turn 2 has been compelling enough in the past to play inspiration to a number of relevant decks. For example, William Jensen played a single Ophidian in his Birds of Paradise / Quirion Ranger deck that won the inaugural Masters Series in New York, and Sol Malka of "The Rock" fame put two players into the Top 8 of Northeast Regionals 2002 with a Birds and Elves deck featuring Shadowmage Infiltrator as its quick 'Phid.



**Main Deck***60 cards*

6 Forest  
 5 Island  
 1 Savannah  
 4 Tropical Island

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16 lands

4 Birds of Paradise  
 1 Deranged Hermit  
 1 Morphling  
 1 Ophidian  
 2 Quirion Ranger  
 1 Spike Weaver  
 1 Squee, Goblin Nabob  
 4 Tradewind Rider  
 1 Uktabi Orangutan  
 4 Wall of Roots

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20 creatures

4 Brainstorm  
 4 Counterspell  
 4 Force of Will  
 2 Impulse  
 4 Land Grant  
 2 Mana Leak  
 4 Survival of the Fittest

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24 other spells

**Sideboard**

4 Back to Basics  
 1 Bottle Gnomes  
 1 Daring Apprentice  
 4 Emerald Charm  
 1 Gilded Drake  
 1 Masticore  
 1 Monk Realist  
 1 Spike Feeder  
 1 Uktabi Orangutan

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15 sideboard cards

**Million Dollar Man****Main Deck***60 cards*

3 Darkwater Catacombs  
 7 Forest  
 2 Island  
 4 Llanowar Wastes  
 4 Swamp  
 4 Yavimaya Coast

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24 lands

4 Birds of Paradise  
 4 Llanowar Elves  
 4 Shadowmage Infiltrator  
 4 Spiritmonger

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16 creatures

4 Call of the Herd  
 4 Chainer's Edict  
 4 Duress  
 4 Fact or Fiction  
 4 Pernicious Deed

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20 other spells

**Sideboard**

4 Compost  
 1 Haunting Echoes  
 4 Jungle Barrier  
 3 Lobotomy  
 3 Slay

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15 sideboard cards

Hystrodon was an imperfect attempt to showcase the power of Birds-into-Ophidian because as much potential as playing the Morph might have, there were simply greater incentives to flipping something else, generally better, on the third turn. Hystrodon attempted to overcome these disincentives with a bigger body than Ophidian *or* then-analogue Shadowmage Infiltrator (traditionally 1/3) and adding a built-in evasion element, but the fact remained that *two* turns of mana commitment for a card - even if it was an Ophidian actually *attacking* and probably *connecting* on the third turn (rather than simply being played on that turn, as was the custom) was not enough of an inducement to playing the card as, say, Exalted Angel as one's Morph. Exalted Angel curved better, spending three-into-four rather than three-into-three and stranding a land, offered a superior body, and in some matchups, generated more card advantage with its four life than simply peeling another slice of cardboard off the top... Hystrodon may have been great in another spot, but it simply couldn't weather the contemporary competition in a dual land rich Standard. As such, other creatures made bigger contributions to Green decks - even "Beast" decks (viz. Gary Wise's Top 8 mid-range from Chicago Masters 2003) - and even dedicated Beasts tribal decks, where Hystrodon could ostensibly have contributed by playing complement to Canopy Crawler, redundant Morphs to Exalted Angel, or simply replaced Exalted Angel with better mana, eschewed it; Hystrodon made the cut not even in Block.



## PT Chicago Masters: Beasts



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Brushland	3 Beast Attack
3 City of Brass	4 Call of the Herd
2 Contested Cliffs	4 Living Wish
6 Forest	_____
1 Mountain	11 other spells
3 Plains	
4 Wooded Foothills	

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23 lands

4 Anurid Brushhopper
4 Birds of Paradise
3 Exalted Angel
3 Glory
4 Llanowar Elves
4 Ravenous Baloth
4 Wild Mongrel

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26 creatures

### Sideboard

1 Anger
2 Compost
1 Contested Cliffs
1 Genesis
1 Glory
1 Goblin Sharpshooter
1 Intrepid Hero
3 Naturalize
1 Nullmage Advocate
1 Silklash Spider
2 Worship

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15 sideboard cards

Jordan Berkowitz



**Main Deck**

*60 cards*

4 Contested Cliffs  
6 Forest  
3 Forgotten Cave  
5 Mountain  
4 Tranquil Thicket  
4 Wood Foothills

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26 lands

4 Avarax  
2 Barkhide Mauler  
4 Canopy Crawler  
4 Krosan Tusker  
4 Ravenous Baloth  
4 Tephraerm  
4 Thoughtbound Primoc  
4 Wirewood Elf

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30 creatures

4 Shock  

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4 other spells

**Sideboard**

4 Broodhatch Nantuko  
4 Gempalm Incinerator  
4 Naturalize  
3 Wirewood Savage

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15 sideboard cards

The card I am previewing today, Ohran Viper, is another attempt to cleave out that particular chunk of the color pie and hand it to Green. Ohran Viper may be a smaller Ophidian than Hystrodon, but it possesses a great many advantages over its direct predecessor, and barring colored mana requirements, is far superior to the defining original in essentially every way.



First off, this card has a notoriously not difficult mana cost for a three-drop of this power level. Look up a few paragraphs and check out how Sol built his Million Dollar Man mana base with the unusual Darkwater Catacombs. The only reason you would want to do that is to ensure that you hit your Shadowmage Infiltrator on the second turn. If you have Birds of Paradise, generally, you still need another colored source if your first land were a Forest, and with Llanowar Elves, you not only have to have set up with a Llanowar Wastes or Yavimaya Coast, you need the opposite mana as your second turn drop, or *you're not hitting Finkel mana* at all. In recent months, designers have had the exact same issue with second turn Dimir Cutpurses, generally erring on Elves of Deep Shadow over the newly minted and savage *9th Edition* Kev Walker Llanowar style to help hit their Cutpurse or Hypnotic Specter mana. There is no such dilemma with Ohran Viper. Traditionally you play your first turn mana accelerator with Green. What do you need for the follow-up? Unless your initial play is in fact a minority Elves of Deep Shadow, the answer is "anything" (i.e. a second basic Forest is more than fine).

Forget about the fact that it will many times hit the board a turn faster for a moment; once it's in play, Ohran Viper is at least twice as good as an Ophidian. Rather than dealing 0 damage on a successful connection, Ohran Viper *actually gets to hit the other guy*. This might seem superficial given the amount of damage we are talking about, but please remember that this is a *Green* creature. What do you think the opponent is going to do on his turn? These are the early turns of the game, remember, and Ohran Viper is the kind of

***With its added dimension as creature killer, Ohran Viper should be far more annoying than Ophidian ever was.***

card that can immediately turn a game into a blowout if it starts connecting on the second turn... The best response would be to kill it immediately, but a close runner up is that the opponent will tap out for some sort of Watchwolf and hope to scare the Viper into not attacking. It is just such a "pull my pants down around my ankles" move that Ohran Viper's Krosan Tusker-rather-than-*actual*-Inspiration nature will rear its scaly head. Any and every self-respecting Green mage will at this point plop something on top of the Viper, making it "ridiculous" and swing anyway... Might I suggest a Moldervine Cloak? Remember what I said about *actually hitting* the other guy? This isn't a question of zero-or-one, but a question of zero-or-four for a *Green* creature in our hypothetical!

Barring one-of exceptions like Savage Twister, the main barrier to Green-as-U/W Control color has been the inability to kill creatures. While it is certainly not the main reason you would play Ohran Viper, the whole Thicket Basilisk layer does give Green a step in that direction, and like Krosan Tusker, a decidedly *Green* look at the same. The dilemma of creature combat, that is, to trade a card or a card *and* spent mana in the face of a raging Ohran Viper, presents an opponent with the classic "damned if you do, damned if you don't" scenario. You can let it in and let the Viper draw, or you can send early game minions in front of the Viper only to die. Hystrodon was nominally bigger than Ophidian, but it really wasn't up to the task of "busting through" against serious defenders over many turns and against a variety of decks. A humble Wall of Mulch could hold poor Hystrodon at bay indefinitely (echoing the original Ophidian's late career frustrations with Wall of Roots and Wall of Blossoms in Survival of the Fittest decks)... Compare Ohran Viper in the same spots:

Ohran Viper *looks* smaller than Hystrodon, *and* lacks trample, but it can knock down much bigger Defenders (viz. the contemporary Carven Caryatid, bane of all beatdown) and swing again next turn. Better yet, it can keep anyone from blocking at all for fear of a trick. Ohran Viper can unhinge its jaw to swallow up bears, body at a time... or frighten its way past Godo, Bandit Warlord with a shrill, blood-curdling, hiss. Simic Sky Swallower? Don't tussle with this little garden snake... He has fangs! Then there is the added problem of the Viper on defense (and by "problem" I don't mean to intimate that it would be any sort of a *problem* for Ohran Viper's controller). Not only will this creature give you an advantage in the early game, it is liable to lock up the board against much better, or at least much more expensive, creatures in the middle turns. With its added dimension as creature killer, Ohran Viper should be far more annoying than Ophidian - once considered the most annoying creature in all of tournament **Magic** - ever was.


Those first couple of points are all obvious, of course... The hidden facets of this *Coldsnap* carbuncle are in that "card type" line, you know, the one you usually register as "creature," but gloss over otherwise. First off, Ohran Viper is a *Snow* creature, whatever that means... I'm not sure personally, having never seen a spoiler, but Scott Johns assures me that it is "generally an advantage, like Arcane," meaning that Ohran Viper is probably going to be some manner of "contributing juggernaut" with other Snow effects. The bit I *can* get my mind around is the more familiar word on the card type line: Snake.

Ah Snakes! Snakes were the most popular tribe played at last year's Block Pro Tour--Philadelphia... and slithered out of the metagame like St. Patrick was a-comin' by the time the summer PTQ season rolled around. Ever since, players have huddled together in secret cabals trying to resurrect the Lovecraftian abomination of onetime popularity, Snakes, bringing it back to Tier One status in Standard. Would Gifts Ungiven be good in a Snakes deck? You can get Sakura-Tribe Elder, Seshiro the Anointed, Sosuke's Summons, and basically *anything else* and net a five-for-one at least. What about Coiling Oracle, itself portended to be the second coming of the best card in Standard... Would this card, perhaps alongside similarly color-stamped "Snakes on a Plane" Patagia Viper? Would these two Snakes help resurrect the slumbering archetype? And Coat of Arms? Really, I've got a *million* ideas...

If Snakes has any hope of making a comeback in the post-*Coldsnap* summer season, I think that Ohran Viper will probably have something to do with it, along with a humble Sakura-Tribe Shaman...

No, not the one you usually read about.



I have spent a year or so nay saying Sakura-Tribe Scout, how in *Kamigawa* Block, this 1/1 for one was a "bad Llanowar Elves," and how most decks were better off without it. However, in a dedicated Snakes strategy, the little Shaman that previously couldn't has a chance to be, if not the centerpiece, an important enabler to a strategy involving Green card advantage. Played on the first turn, this creature can be 80% of a Llanowar Elves, provided you have three lands in the first two turns, but a more significant threat in a long game. Generally speaking, you don't want to pluck a 1/1 for  on turn 10 (unless you've been ravaged by Magnivore's early salvo, maybe), but perhaps if you are getting two additional Snakes for your trouble, the short term liability of a worse Llanowar Elves becomes acceptable. Sakura-Tribe Scout is better today than it ever was in *Kamigawa* Block because of Simic Growth Chamber and other *Ravnica* Block "Karoos," which both give its tap ability greater potency and ensure that the Snake Shaman has something to do as you incrementally

empty your hand.

Make no mistake, Ghost Husk is probably still the premiere deck in Standard, and 1/1 Snakes have much to fear from the Orzhov Pontiff, but perhaps with a more robust long game and amazing new second turn play, the tribe that once was a "never was" can make a run at the top of the format come post-*Coldsnap* Standard. Even if Snakes is not the revitalized powerhouse-to-be, a singular Snake in Ohran Viper should have great significance as a threat, a card drawing engine, and in a pinch, an answer. Whether as a characteristically *Green* Swiss Army Knife played on the second turn thanks to Birds of Paradise, Llanowar Elves, Sakura-Tribe Scout, or even Elves of Deep Shadow or Ophidian itself returned thanks to Breeding Pool and Yavimaya Coast, this card should be a card to watch.

Next Week: Rebirth of the Villain 2K6... And the Hero too!

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