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# All the Little Things...

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Swimming With Sharks  
Thursday, August 24, 2006



PRODUCTS

MAGIC ONLINE

Following is basically the scariest deck in the history of **Magic: The Gathering**:

| Basic Trix  |                         |                     |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Scott McCord, 3rd place Grand Prix--Philadelphia 2000 |                         |                     |
| Main Deck   | Sideboard               |                     |
| 60 cards  |                         |                     |
| 4 Gemstone Mine                                       | 2 Brainstorm            | 3 Annul             |
| 3 Island  | 1 Contagion             | 2 Contagion         |
| 6 Swamp   | 4 Dark Ritual           | 1 Hoodwink          |
| 4 Underground River                                   | 4 Demonic Consultation  | 3 Hydroblast        |
| 4 Underground Sea                                     | 4 Donate                | 4 Phyrexian Negator |
| 21 lands  | 4 Duress                | 2 Unmask            |
|   | 4 Force of Will         | 15 sideboard cards  |
|   | 1 Hoodwink              |                     |
| 0 creatures   | 4 Illusions of Grandeur |                     |
|   | 4 Mana Vault            |                     |
|   | 4 Necropotence          |                     |
|   | 3 Vampiric Tutor        |                     |
|   | 39 other spells         |                     |

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## How Did Trix Work?

Once upon a time, Trix was the next step in **Necropotence** combination deck technology. We looked [last week](#) at Tony Dobson's Skull Catapult, sometimes called "Cocoa Pebbles" in a time when all combination decks were named after breakfast cereals (hence the name Trix for this deck). Tony and the British used **Necropotence** in that deck to set up their **Enduring Renewal** combination. Trix did the same thing, except instead of a three-card combination (**Enduring Renewal**, **Goblin Bombardment**, and either **Shield Sphere** or **Phyrexian Walker**), Trix required just a two-card combination: **Illusions of Grandeur** plus **Donate**. With or without **Necropotence**, the Trix player would play **Illusions of Grandeur** and gain 20 life. Then he would **Donate** the aforementioned **Illusions** to the opponent, who would at some point (hopefully soon) fail to pay the Cumulative Upkeep and lose 20 life. Conveniently, players start with exactly 20 life.

Now all the same things about having a ton of **Necropotences** (**Demonic Consultation**, **Vampiric Tutor**, sometimes **Brainstorm**, **Necropotence** itself) applied to this deck as well, but because it was only a two, rather than three, card combination, Trix had extra room for cards like **Force of Will**. This deck eventually forced out Cocoa Pebbles like Cro-Magnon kicking the last Neanderthal down into a valley of outmoded stegosaurus and dodo bones. Trix was just a tighter combination deck that could actually protect its **Necropotence** and moving parts with counterspells even after tearing the opponent's hand to shreds a turn or two earlier.

Trix was the scariest deck in the history of **Magic: The Gathering** for several reasons. First of all, it had the best cards, tuned together the best way, and therefore held trump from the outset. Clunky **Illusions of Grandeur** combination aside, this was a deck packing **Brainstorm**, **Demonic Consultation**, **Duress**, **Dark Ritual**, **Force of Will**, **Mana Vault**, **Necropotence**, and **Vampiric Tutor**. No deck played in serious formats before or since has touched Trix's mana efficiency and raw card power from top to bottom. Second, it was a lightning fast deck, capable of winning in the early turns by luck, superb manipulation, or the overwhelming vigor of the Skull. Third, and possibly most importantly, it was a difficult deck for a beatdown player to defeat for the simple fact that it gained 20 life in the middle of the combination. For their part, control decks had real problems dealing with **Necropotence** (protected turn 1 by **Force of Will** or turn 2 by **Duress**) feeding purely threats... not to mention all the mid-game disruption.

There were many, many successful, Trix decks. It felt in the spring of 2000 like that hated deck was even more popular than Vial Affinity in the summer of 2004 (it probably wasn't). I chose Scott's deck because unlike many that played **Peat Bog** or splashed Red for **Firestorm**, McCord's "Basic Trix" had a fairly high count of, surprise surprise, basic lands. This was important because one of the only ways Trix could be defeated *at all* was to disrupt its mana, either keeping it off the critical mass required to hit the combo or desperately costing it the cumulative upkeep over a two-turn **Donate** sequence.

To give you an idea of its eventual significance, Trix was instrumental in getting any number of cards banned in Extended, even before the most recent rotations. **Mana Vault**, **Dark Ritual**, **Demonic Consultation**, and eventually **Necropotence** itself were all shown the door because the deck was so good that almost nothing could compete with it. Trix made for an un-fun Constructed season.

I am beginning with Trix because, regardless of how unstopably scary it was, people would still shake their heads and point at the possibilities where the deck could betray its evil master. They desperately, and in most cases laughably, tried to build against perceived inefficiencies. For the most part, they failed. What if the opponent has an **Erase** when **Illusions of Grandeur** is on the stack? What if there is an **Elvish Lyryst** or **Seal of Cleansing** *already in play*? You will take 20 points before your 20 free points resolve! **Hoodwink**? Really? What if the opponent has but a simple **Spike Feeder**? You'll have to go through it all over again... Then again you should have 20 extra life points to fuel your **Necropotence**, but that's not the point. The most legitimate criticism of the deck was simply that Trix could lose to a bad Consult. **Demonic Consultation** was conditionally dangerous, and I have seen some of the best players in the world deck themselves on turn 3 and pull their hair out afterward. But you know what?

*Not one of these was a good enough reason not to play the scariest deck in the history of **Magic: The Gathering**.*

Sure, you might lose one game per tournament to a bad **Demonic Consultation** (and I'm just counting the ill luck where two of your remaining three **Donates** are in the top six, and the third is the second-to-last card in your deck rather than the desperately greedy games where you go for the singleton **Hoodwink** after you have already passed the **Illusions of Grandeur** to the opponent in order to deny him a turn or need the **Contagion** to eat a Lyryst)... But the card - essentially an instant speed **Demonic Tutor** for one mana - will win you many more games than you give up to bad beats.

The reason I am starting this week with this powerful and much hated deck is that after last week's article, which concluded with Terry Soh's 12-2 deck from Pro Tour--Charleston, I was met with a slew of emails... How could the onetime **Magic** Invitational Champion be so incompetent as to play **Dark Confidant** and **Hit // Run** in the same deck?



Many Rakdos mages in Charleston made the same choice, and they for the most part said that the combination *just didn't come up*. Were they aware of the danger? Of course they were! Patrick Sullivan once flipped his **Hit // Run** and was forced to Hit his own Maher in order to preserve any chance to win the game... which he did. Even given the danger of the interaction, the ability to take out **Simic Sky Swallower** and punish his master for a couple of extra points (like, say, half his remaining life total) was too much to pass up for a risk that was never going to punish Terry or the others anyway.

Imagine the worst has happened and you flipped **Hit // Run** with **Dark Confidant**. You go down eight life... But what happens when you tag that **Simic Sky Swallower** or **Skeletal Vampire** (presumably with Bats on the stack)? You are probably pretty happy with the seven or six you are dealing right back, while taking out some amazing threat. You're really only one or two points down in the relative race, and because your Rakdos deck is so aggressive, chances are you aren't behind at all. Then of course there is the huge percentage of games against methodical control or mana destruction decks where losing eight life has a negligible effect on game state, if any at all, and just ends up the difference between winning on 12 versus 20 life.

No one is saying you leave in **Hit // Run** against Ghazi-Glare... But it proved a fine spell in the main, and let's remember Terry had probably the best overall Swiss record of the largest Pro Tour in history! In fact, it is all *the little things*, like bravely playing two seemingly disparate spells next to one another to form a more powerful deck that can sometimes give you the edge you need to succeed in tournament trials. Anyone can win a blowout, and most people know how to take advantage of a manascrew, but it is the little things that often draw the line between early exit and tournament victory. This article is dedicated to discussing some of those small elements and explaining why they make sense in the current Standard format.

## Henke's Howling Mine

| Tobias Henke                            |                                   |   |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| German Nationals 06 Top 8 - Boros Aggro |                                   |  |
| Main Deck                               |                                   | Sideboard   |
| 60 cards                                |                                   |   |
| 4 <b>Battlefield Forge</b>              | 4 <b>Char</b>                     | 3 <b>Faith's Fetters</b>  |
| 2 <b>Mikokoro, Center of the Sea</b>    | 4 <b>Flames of the Blood Hand</b> | 4 <b>Ghostly Prison</b>   |
| 7 <b>Mountain</b>                       | 4 <b>Howling Mine</b>             | 3 <b>Kami of Ancient Law</b>  |
| 3 <b>Plains</b>                         | 4 <b>Lava Spike</b>               | 1 <b>Mountain</b>   |
| 4 <b>Sacred Foundry</b>                 | 4 <b>Lightning Helix</b>          | 2 <b>Paladin en-Vec</b>   |
| 20 lands                                | 1 <b>Seal of Fire</b>             | 1 <b>Pithing Needle</b>   |
|   | 3 <b>Shock</b>                    | 1 <b>Plains</b>   |
|   | 4 <b>Volcanic Hammer</b>          |   |
| 4 <b>Isamaru, Hound of Konda</b>        | 28 other spells                   | 15 sideboard cards  |
| 4 <b>Savannah Lions</b>                 |                                   |   |
| 4 <b>Scorched Rusalka</b>               |                                   |   |



**Howling Mine** is one of those cards that seems to creep up every couple of years to kick butt at some National Championships or sneak a couple of roguish Izzet decks into the Top 8 of a Standard Pro Tour. It is a "symmetrical" card, and worse yet, gives your opponent the first chance to draw the extra card (back in the days of Turbo Stasis, the worst was when you played **Howling Mine**, the opponent drew two, and then **Disenchanted** your key engine piece - up a card - before you ever had a chance yourself). How can it be good? Isn't Henke's deck just a bad look at Boros? And what about Owling Mine from Honolulu? Is it any wonder that Antoine and Tiago got face planted as badly as they did by the tournament finalists?

Certainly the recent **Howling Mine** decks would rather get, um, *any other pairing* than a burn or Boros or Zoo deck, but it is very interesting to look at the card outside the context of those decks. For instance many Standard Blue decks spend all kinds of mana on their own turns for **Jushi Apprentice**, **Compulsive Research**, **Tidings**, and even **Invoke the Firemind**. The majority of Standard Black decks have this awful 2/1, sort of like a personal **Howling Mine**, but one that makes you pay eight life to flip over your anti-**Howling Mine** card (see above). The point is other decks put tons of effort and main phase mana into their draw engines... **Howling Mine** equalizes the board. Frankly a B/W deck can't kill **Howling Mine**, at least in the main - they're pretty much stuck with it. All of a sudden you are keeping pace with Maher and **Compulsive Research** and they have so many cards they are discarding.

They are discarding.

If they're discarding, that means that they're not really getting any card advantage at all, that any extra cards they are drawing might be classified as better *selection*, still good, but no longer legitimately getting ahead of the game despite an investment in draw engines. Meanwhile Henke's deck is so mana efficient with its many one-mana threats that it is *not* discarding, and is in fact aiming **Lava Spikes** and **Lightning Helixes** annoyingly at the opponent's face every turn until he is dead.

The trick, here, is that no Blue deck can realistically run with Henke and his **Howling Mine**. Today's counters, with the exception of **Spell Snare**, all cost as much or more mana than whatever Tobias would be playing or pointing. Furthermore, even the really heavy counter decks have maybe 16 appropriate answer cards, many of which are not permanent solutions to absurdly inexpensive problems. On the other hand, Henke is drawing two or more per turn, threatening all the way. The Blue deck, knowing it cannot keep pace defensively indefinitely has to at some point try to race.

What is he supposed to do? Tap out for a Dragon?

Recent versions of B/W Orzhov might have their **Shining Shoals**, but Henke's deck isn't a **Sudden Impact** build... It attacks with many small packets of burn, and is therefore less vulnerable to having an "all-in" reversed. They are spending all these cards and all this mana on card advantage from **Dark Confidant** and **Ghost Council of Orzhova**, but Henke's deck can just hang back, hold the ground with **Scorched Rusalka** (take one, friend), and send seven or eight damage for the same mana that the B/W player is spending on his Ghost Council.

Definitely **Howling Mine** is a streaky card. It isn't always good, and in some metagames it looks flat-out funny. But in a diverse format with sometimes awkward mana and many dedicated sources of incremental card drawing, it can fit in especially to surprising success.

## Everything's a Strip Mine

Even before we got the amazing **Ravnica** Block lands, the twenty dollar **Steam Vents** and all-star common **Orzhov Basilicas**, mana and non-basic lands in general were already a hot button issue. How many basics? How many Centers to this particular Sea?

There was a short window when the Standard 'Tron decks - especially those with **Breeding Pool** for **Simic Sky Swallower** - were playing *no* basic lands at all! Why would they? By the time we hit the Top 8 of U.S. Nationals, Tim Aten and Ben Lundquist made a little change and were running two or three basic Islands each. Why would they?

Right now you almost *have* to play some basics because of a previously overlooked **Dissension** card called **Ghost Quarter**. If you don't have any basics, **Ghost Quarter** is just **Strip Mine**. Even when you have basics, **Ghost Quarter** is an important anti-bomb card. It breaks up the 'Tron, kills Boseiju (often the only way certain decks can beat certain other decks), and defends its own master from **Annex**; the subtle "Ghost Quarter myself" strategy has actually bent mana bases by one or two basics, such that a deck that might actually only want Islands would play a single Plains with the outlook of running the Quarter like the worst **Thawing Glaciers** ever (still good).



Another subtle and highly effective angle on the land department can be seen in the classic Vore listing. Let's look back at Nik Nygaard's deck from Honolulu that was the catalyst for most of the rampaging **Magnivores** we see today:

| Nikolas Nygaard                  |                       |                             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Main Deck</b><br>60 cards     |                       | <b>Sideboard</b>            |
| 7 Island                         | 4 Compulsive Research | 2 Boseiju, Who Shelters All |
| 1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge | 4 Demolish            | 1 Mana Leak                 |
| 7 Mountain                       | 4 Eye of Nowhere      | 1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror |
| 1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds    | 1 Genju of the Spires | 1 Pyroclasm                 |
| 4 Shivan Reef                    | 3 Mana Leak           | 4 Remand                    |
| 4 Steam Vents                    | 3 Pyroclasm           | 3 Shock                     |
| 24 lands                         | 4 Sleight of Hand     | 3 Volcanic Hammer           |
| 3 Magnivore                      | 4 Stone Rain          | 15 sideboard cards          |
| 3 creatures                      | 3 Tidings             |                             |
|                                  | 3 Wildfire            |                             |
|                                  | 33 other spells       |                             |

Oboro, Palace in the Clouds. Check.  
 Minamo, School at Water's Edge. Check.  
 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep... Not so much.

Vore is a mana control deck that wants to keep the opponent at four or five lands so that when **Wildfire** hits, his mana base will be - hopefully irrevocably - crippled. Oboro and Minamo are generally played by control decks, decks that can fight Vore's land destruction and rob the deck of the tempo it needs to get the advantage required to win on **Wildfire** or **Magnivore**. Against these decks, Oboro and Minamo are just **Strip Mine**.

However the decks that play **Shinka** are the decks that are most likely to kick Vore's butt. Vore can't get in an early game shootout with a beatdown deck. Rather than giving Vore a conditional Strip Mine as the blue Legendary Lands do, Shinka just puts Vore in the spot that it will be manascrewed at the wrong time. The little twist here is to *not* play an ostensible automatic inclusion because the land destruction deck sometimes doesn't want to trade lands.

## Tiered Mana Costs

Tsuyoshi Fujita's burn base for Zoo Pants at Pro Tour--Honolulu was four **Shock**, four **Volcanic Hammer**, four **Lightning Helix**, four **Char**, and four **Flames of the Blood Hand**... one third of the influential 20/20/20 lineup that has been the baseline for any number of Boros and Zoo decks since. The introduction of **Seal of Fire** in *Dissension* might have had you thinking that **Shock** would get the boot (hey, that's how it works in Extended), or failing that, **Flames of the Blood Hand** (the least efficient of the group, and great only in a Hierarch format, which the post-*Dissension* Standard was never and is today not). However, in a maddening twist of tuning, it has been increasingly common to see **Volcanic Hammer** leave, **Shock** stay, and the lowly **Giant Growth** get played in recent lists.



**Giant Growth?** Why?

Zoo designers have identified a great big weak point in their strategy: *Dissension's* **Spell Snare**. While it is basically impossible to make a Standard deck that doesn't give the Snare, arguably the best card in the format, *something* to kill, they have rallied to the cause and tried as much as possible – that is, without losing their awesome Watchwolves or **Lightning Helixes** – to play around this card. Perhaps the most rewarding Zoo returns come in the mirror, when the opponent waits until the attack to try to burn an oncoming creature... only to eat an extra three from that lowly **Giant Growth**.

An interesting similar change may be on the horizon for Blue mages themselves. Just as Blue's opponents have had to modify their mana costs to play around **Spell Snare**, it is entirely possible that Blue players will be chopping up their mana costs to better work with *Coldsnap's* degenerate **Counterbalance**. With *Sensei's* **Divining Top** still in Standard until *Time Spiral*, it will likely profit the Blue mages to float a two mana spell (of which they should still have plenty) the whole game, especially against opposing Blue players with their **Rune Snags**, **Mana Leaks**, and **Remands**... But running some **Rewinds** might suddenly be right [again?]. Thanks to **Counterbalance** (specifically **Counterbalance / Top**), Blue should be able to tap six or seven for the endgame bomb without fear of **Wrath of God**.

Really, is there anything more disheartening to the opponent who has just attempted to play **Wrath of God** with a hand sculpted to fight a counter war with a two or three mana advantage, than just *showing* him a **Rewind** on top of your deck... And then maybe drawing it? ... Or maybe not?

## Can That be Right Rite?

My friend Patrick Sullivan sometimes likes to do the unthinkable: In a surprising number of matchups, Pat *sides out* **Lightning Helix** in his Boros deck.

This was really puzzling to me when he brought it up. Barring the awesome combination of **Paladin en-Vec** plus **Umezawa's Jitte**, **Lightning Helix** is like the best card in the deck! It burns! It keeps you alive! It makes for great television! As usual, Pat, the quintessential Red Deck player in the United States, had a really good reason: If you cut **Lightning Helix**, you have all even damage.

Why exactly is it that you would *want* to have all even damage again? Well a few months ago, our style of Boros was siding in a little known but explosive, and surprising, and oftentimes humiliating spell against control, combination, and life gain decks: **Hidetsugu's Second Rite**.

For **Hidetsugu's Second Rite** to work, and by "work" we mean "completely annihilate the opponent," he has to be on exactly ten life. When you have some even and some odd damage sources, it can be very difficult to put the opponent to exactly ten. Pat's "unthinkable" strategy just made it less difficult for him to sculpt the game state where he could successfully fire for ten.

Why is **Hidetsugu's Second Rite** Good? Think of **Hidetsugu's Second Rite** as a Red **Fact or Fiction**. Scratch that. Think of it as two copies of **Fact or Fiction**.

**Fact or Fiction**, one of the most fearsome cards in the modern Blue arsenal, gets played because it is essentially three cards - with selection - for four mana. The piles are going to go 0-5 (only when he has some kind of Storm Seeker, let's be honest), 1-4 (the big **Impulse**), or 2-3 (the customary split)... You can always get three cards if you just want three cards. After spending a card (the **Fact or Fiction**), you end up +2.

[The Philosophy of Fire](#) states that all Red burn spells are worth a baseline of two damage; with ten spells, you win the game. **Hidetsugu's Second Rite**, then, essentially acts as five **Shocks**, or +4 cards by Red's queer way of counting these things. Now of course a successfully struck **Second Rite** is just game most of the time, but even when the opponent has *something*, like a **Shining Shoal** for three or four of the damage, you are still getting twice the net card advantage (by Red's way of reckoning these things) as **Fact or Fiction** would have given you had you been a Blue mage.

Now **Hidetsugu's Second Rite** loses a great deal of its potency when people know it's coming... They do annoying things like mana burn at the end of your turn or otherwise play around the boogeyman of your endgame strategy. Then again, recent Boros players have stopped playing **Hidetsugu's Second Rite**; in the future, they may, as Tsuyoshi Fujita has suggested, play just one copy. Anyway, Red players *like* it when people randomly damage themselves. That's like free cards, too.



**"I suggest you start IM'ing your friends... I know I am." -Patrick Sullivan, after a Magic Online win on a mulligan to three**

## Fun with Cantrips

When it started appearing in tournament decks, a disturbing number of forum posters didn't know why anyone would play it ("it's not a *hard* counter")... From there, **Remand** catapulted to "best spell in the format" status by the Japanese (if not best overall card) by Pro Tour--Honolulu. **Remand** is versatile, powerful, and best of all, cheap. It's obvious this card will be contributing to Blue's success - and ruining the turns of inefficient threat players - for the duration of **Ravnica** Block in Standard, and probably force through **Psychatogs** in Extended and even bigger formats for, um, *forever*.

Why Exactly is **Remand** Good?

First and foremost, **Remand** is cheap. Even if it is not a permanent counterspell, **Remand** answers a threat in the short term immediately and for just two mana. In this way, it is reliably, like **Spell Snare**, one of the only counters in Standard that is consistently less expensive than the card it is fighting. The cheap cost of **Remand** is a selling point in that Blue players can keep land light hands in the early game, buy a turn with **Remand**, and draw into additional lands. Because Blue players just need *time* to win (that is, they aren't being killed by a **Scab-Clan Mauler**), running this card as even a temporary measure gives them a tremendous advantage. Just countering a second turn **Watchwolf** against Zoo is often like drawing between four and seven cards for a Blue player because an unopposed **Watchwolf** might outright kill him... The additional time the Blue player buys with that little **Remand** literally gives him additional topdecks that he would not otherwise have.

The permanence of **Remand** is something that is sometimes annoying and sometimes irrelevant. Many of the Standard decks that pack **Remand**, such as 'Tron, Heartbeat, and Vore, will just kill you the next turn, so the fact that you would otherwise get a chance to re-play your spell after a late game **Remand** is completely irrelevant. **Remand** is perfect because in the early game it gives control players the time and mana they need to get to the endgame, and on the second-to-last turn, it actually steal's the *opponent's* shot at an answer.

**Remand** is also awesome in counter wars. Because it only costs two mana, **Remand** will often help a threat resolve, or win, or strategically lose, a counter war against an opposing dedicated Blue deck. While the opponent is setting up his turn with a **Rewind** - free in a second, but costed like that diamond in **Titanic** in the short term -

**Remand** can shine... like, um, that diamond in *Titanic*. What many players don't realize is that in some counter wars, it is optimal to **Remand** your own spell!

When you have a spell on the stack and the opponent decides he wants to pick a fight, if it looks like you can't win the counter war, it is often a better idea to **Remand** your own threat. Sometimes he has **Hinder** on the stack and three open... If you **Remand** him, he is just going to re-cast the **Hinder**. If you **Remand** your own spell, you at least have a chance of fighting another day. The economy here is awesome. The opponent is down his **Hinder** (and whatever other counters he has committed to this little war... who knows at what point you decided that **Remand** was the right course of action) and you get back your initial threat card (or some counter you would rather have back) and if not the **Remand**, whatever the **Remand** and your deck decide they want to give you.

With *Coldsnap*, **Remand** is a cool combination with **Mishra's Bauble**, too. With two mana, you play **Mishra's Bauble** and **Remand** it. You spend nothing (**Mishra's Bauble** and the **Remand** replacement come back to your hand), and you can still re-play the Bauble. Why would you want to do this? It's not quite the classic **Urza's Bauble** or **Lodestone Bauble** and your own **Arcane Denial**, but there are certainly weaker plays to make than digging through your deck cheaply. Once you've actually sacrificed the Bauble, this play feels very much like a two mana Inspiration.

| Main Deck<br>60 cards      |                                | Sideboard                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 4 <b>Blinkmoth Nexus</b>   | 3 <b>Beacon of Destruction</b> | 3 <b>Boseiju, Who Shelters All</b> |
| 15 <b>Mountain</b>         | 4 <b>Magma Jet</b>             | 3 <b>Cranial Extraction</b>        |
| 1 <b>Swamp</b>             | 4 <b>Molten Rain</b>           | 4 <b>Culling Scales</b>            |
| 4 <b>Tendo Ice Bridge</b>  | 4 <b>Pulse of the Forge</b>    | 4 <b>Fireball</b>                  |
| 24 lands                   | 4 <b>Sensei's Divining Top</b> | 1 <b>Sowing Salt</b>               |
|                            | 4 <b>Shrapnel Blast</b>        | 15 sideboard cards                 |
|                            | 1 <b>Sowing Salt</b>           |                                    |
| 4 <b>Arc-Slogger</b>       | 4 <b>Wayfarer's Bauble</b>     |                                    |
| 4 <b>Solemn Simulacrum</b> | 28 other spells                |                                    |
| 8 creatures                |                                |                                    |

One of the strong artifact interactions of the Kuroda-style Red deck that Josh Ravitz used to make Top 8 of last year's U.S. National Championship was **Sensei's Divining Top** plus **Shrapnel Blast**. Josh would flip the Top, and with the draw on the stack, sacrifice the Top to face the opponent for five. This didn't net card advantage, but it kept him even because even though the Top didn't actually *make it* to the top of Josh's library, the game still gave him a card. Two mana to deal five damage to a creature or player with no drawback *and* digging a card deeper in your deck? This is the kind of "little thing" that you have to know to get maximum advantage from your cards.

Today, there is a similar tactic, reminiscent of *both* **Mishra's Bauble** plus **Remand** *and* **Sensei's Divining Top** plus **Shrapnel Blast**: **Sensei's Divining Top** plus **Repeal**. With this play, you flip your Top to draw a card, but with the draw on the stack, **Repeal** your own Top. You get your Top in hand, your **Repeal** replacement, *and* the card you were *supposed* to get from the Top. Rather than smashing the opponent for one quarter of his life total, this one just nets cards.

Here's to drawing extra cards, dodging inopportune **Strip Mines**, and, of course, winning after you've accidentally dealt yourself eight.

*Mike has been a leading voice in the game's strategy for as long as there has been a **Magic Internet**. He is the former editor of *The Magic Dojo* and a sometime Pro player. *Michael J. Flores: Deckade*, is a compilation of Mike's first ten years of strategy and theory (i.e. before he joined **magicthegathering.com**), and is available at <http://www.top8magic.com>.*



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