

Mark Gottlieb unveils the answers to the Great Combiner Search. Magicthegathering.Combos – *Time Spiral* Edition

Mark Gottlieb and the Cult of MaGo

Monday, October 30, 2006

- 
- 



- [Mark Gottlieb and the Cult of MaGo Archive](#)

Welcome to MaGo Week! Unfortunately, due to some sort of interpreter snafu, “MaGo Week” has been translated as “Wizard Week” in English. Those of you who speak Portuguese or Italian, though, know where it’s at! “MaGo” is more accurately translated as “mage,” which is how it’s used in Spanish card titles (but not Spanish creature types). However, in both Portuguese and Italian, the creature type “Wizard” actually appears on cards as “Mago.” It was nice of Scott Johns to name an entire week after me, but next time maybe he could include the whole globe in the celebration of my excellence at being me. (No one does it better!)

Of course, I’m not the only MaGo to be feted today. *Time Spiral* Wizards that show up in the following combos include [Lim-Dûl the Necromancer](#); [Endrek Sahr, Master Breeder](#); [Mangara of Corondor](#); [Magus of the Mirror](#); [Magus of the Candelabra](#); and [Magus of the Disk](#) (which my Brazilian friends will recognize as the outstandingly named “Mago do Disco”). Even [Tidal Visionary](#) makes an appearance!



Of course, you're not interested in hearing me blather on and on about myself all day. (Which I'll do. Dare me.) No, you're interested in the answers to The Great Combiner Search test! Unless you've been living under a rock for the past six weeks (I'm looking at you, pill bugs), your life has undoubtedly revolved around this unprecedented promotion run by Wizards of the Coast. (Though it seems that many people who wanted to participate in this accidentally participated in a different promotional test with a similar name we were running at the same time. Oops.) The goal, of course, was to find out who the best Combiner out there is, and the winner will get the unprecedented prize of becoming the Magicthegathering.Combos author!

I know you're eager to find out who won, but first I'll go over the answers to the test so you can see how you did.

The Great Combiner Search!!

#1) R&D normally doesn't like to enable two-card combos that automatically win the game. Explain, then, why Stuffy Doll & Guilty Conscience is awesome.

1. It's not awesome.
2. It uses frickin' Stuffy Doll!
3. It uses frackin' Guilty Conscience!
4. Answers 1 and 2
5. Answers 1 and 3
6. Answers 4 and 3
7. Answers 6 and 2, minus 3

8. Answers 4 and 1, minus 2
9. Answers 7 and 8, minus 1
10. Answers 9 and 5, minus 4 and 8

The correct answer is 10. Any answer that includes 1 is incorrect because it focuses on how this combo is not awesome, which is an unreasonable position given how awesome it is. Answer 10 is right because it's equivalent to answers 2 and 3. Can you believe you instantly win the game with two of the most ridiculous cards in recent memory?



Have [Stuffy Doll](#) ping itself. Its triggered ability triggers, which would cause it to deal 1 damage to the chosen player (I'm guessing you chose your opponent), but ignore that for now because it never actually gets to resolve. [Guilty Conscience](#)'s ability also triggers, and it deals 1 damage to [Stuffy Doll](#). This makes [Stuffy Doll](#) deal 1 damage to your opponent, which causes [Guilty Conscience](#) to trigger again, and I think you can see where this is going. (If you put the two initial triggers on the stack in the other order, you'd get the same end result.)

(Bonus points: The Standard-legal [Stuffy Doll](#) & [Pariah's Shield](#) combo won't win the game immediately, but it'll prevent your opponent from damaging you. Try it with pain lands!)

#2) Which of the following cards makes the best combo with Ghitu [Firebreathing](#)?

1. [Pardic Dragon](#)
2. [Shivan Dragon](#)
3. [Lightning Dragon](#)
4. [Rakdos Pit Dragon](#)
5. [Celestial Ancient](#)


The correct answer is 5. Once both [Celestial Ancient](#) and [Ghitu Firebreathing](#) are in play, you can repeatedly pay $1\{2\}$ to bounce and replay the Aura, which puts a +1/+1 counter on each creature you control.

(Bonus points: [Bramble Elemental](#) will create two Saprolings by doing the same trick, though if you've got both combos going at once, the counters will be put on your creatures before the two new Saprolings come into play.)




#3) Which 7 of the following 8 cards are most likely not the least appropriate cards to combo with [Paradox Haze](#)?

1. [Enduring Ideal](#)
2. Bringer of the [insert color here] Dawn
3. [Chlorophant](#)
4. [Form of the Dragon](#)
5. [Darksteel Reactor](#)
6. Honden of [insert abstract metaphor here]
7. [Followed Footsteps](#)
8. [Shizuko, Caller of Autumn](#)



The correct answer is 5. [Enduring Ideal](#) is ridiculous with [Paradox Haze](#). Not only do you get to fetch multiple enchantments per turn, but you can fetch the Haze itself with the Ideal. Bringers double their effects, [Chlorophant](#) doubles its counter production, [Form of the Dragon](#) deals 10 damage a turn, [Darksteel Reactor](#) threatens to end the game very quickly, [Paradox Haze](#) acts like the missing super-Honden, [Followed Footsteps](#) ramps up, and Shizuko gives you  each turn. And that's if you just have *one* [Paradox Haze](#) in play. So, in short, they're all good. But since I didn't really understand the question that I wrote, I arbitrarily decided that the answer was 5. I've just always hated that number, ever since a 5 killed my grandfather. (Technically, it was a V, but we were on vacation in Rome at the time.)

#4) From a Combiner perspective, what is the greatest problem with the [Vesuvan Shapeshifter](#) & [Brine Elemental](#) combo?

1. Turning the Shapeshifter face up as a [Brine Elemental](#) every turn to eternally deprive your opponent of untap steps costs   – but [Stasis](#) only had an upkeep of . (Though, granted, [Stasis](#) also affected *you*.)
2. While you're Stasis-locking your opponent, he can play fresh lands untapped.
3. Your opponent will probably concede before you get your [Momentary Blink](#) & [Draining Whelk](#) combo going.
4. It deprives you of the chance to copy [Thelonite Hermit](#) with your Shapeshifter.
5. Flipping the Shapeshifter up and down so much may aggravate your carpal tunnel.

The correct answer is 3. Ironically, getting your [Momentary Blink](#) & [Draining Whelk](#) combo going may cause your opponent to concede before you get your [Vesuvan Shapeshifter](#) & [Brine Elemental](#) combo going.

#5) Which of the following combos gets its combo groove on before the game even begins?

1. [Gemstone Caverns](#) & [Serum Powder](#)
2. [Phthisis](#) & [Sheltering Ancient](#)
3. [Herd Gnarr](#) & [Icatian Crier](#)
4. [Deathspore Thallid](#) & [Supply // Demand](#)
5. [Scryb Ranger](#) & [Spectral Force](#)

The correct answer is 1. If your opening hand contains both [Gemstone Caverns](#) and [Serum Powder](#), the Powder is the perfect card to pitch to the Caverns. If your initial seven cards contains [Serum Powder](#) but not [Gemstone Caverns](#), you can toss it out and try again with a fresh seven. If your opening hand contains [Gemstone Caverns](#) but not [Serum Powder](#), well, the whole point of this combo was to maximize your [Gemstone Caverns](#) chances, so you're happy. And if your hand contains neither card then you're sad, but that'll only happen 1/3 of the time.

Note that if you're playing first, this combo is awful, and I instead recommend any of the other lovely combo options presented above.

#6) It's your upkeep. You have [Magus of the Mirror](#) in play. You play [Angel's Grace](#). Then you play [Spoils of the Vault](#). Which of the following cards should you name as [Spoils of the Vault](#) resolves?

1. [Bone Flute](#)
2. [Booby Trap](#)
3. [Krovikan Fetish](#)
4. [Endrek Sahr, Master Breeder](#)
5. [Rabid Wombat](#)

The correct answer is 5. The idea here is to name a card you don't have in your deck. That way, you're guaranteed to lose life equal to the number of cards that were in your deck, sending you way below 0 life. You won't lose the game, though, due to [Angel's Grace](#). Then you swap life totals with your opponent. Then your opponent cries.

You can't name any of the first four cards because, knowing your juvenile sense of humor, they're probably all in your deck. The only one you're sure to miss with is [Rabid Wombat](#). If you answered "Rabid Wombat" because "Rabid Wombat" is *always* the right answer, that's also acceptable.

#7) Which of the following is not a reason to play the [Word of Seizing](#) & [Greater Gargadon](#) combo?

1. You want to deprive your opponent of his best permanent.
2. You want to use your opponent's best permanent against him.
3. You want to sacrifice that permanent (as long as it's not an enchantment) when you're done with it. Why should your opponent ever get it back?
4. You have an unnatural obsession with chinchillas.
5. Your deck also contains the [Restore Balance](#) & [Greater Gargadon](#) combo, which allows you to sacrifice all your lands just before [Restore Balance](#) resolves for a GargaGeddon effect.

The correct answer is 4. As any psychoanalyst will tell you, an unnatural obsession with chinchillas is a reason to play the [Nettling Imp](#) & [Durkwood Tracker](#) combo in your deck. Though, if I may be serious for a minute, intense chinchilla obsession (or ICO) afflicts one out of every eighteen insane people in whatever country you happen to be in right now. If you, or a loved one, is spending more than five hours a day browsing chinchilla websites, pretending to be a chinchilla, and/or hiking the Andes on chinchilla quests, please contact



a chinchillologist immediately. With time and treatment, people afflicted with ICO can be weaned down the furry-animal chain from chinchillas to guinea pigs to harmless hamsters. It's not too late.

(I, of course, am unnaturally obsessed with wombats, which are five steps *up* the furry-animal chain from chinchillas. So I'm a lost cause.)

#8) [Norin the Wary](#) is, as all Combiners know, the most awesome card in *Time Spiral*. It's a Jackal Pup with an ability! It's guaranteed to see more action than any other creature you've got, if you allow the definition of "action" to include changing zones. As long as players, y'know, play spells (which players have been known to do in a game of Magic), or you attack with Norin, good things will happen. Of the following cards, which is the least appropriate to combo with [Norin the Wary](#)?

1. [Confusion in the Ranks](#)
2. [Spreading Plague](#) & [Tidal Visionary](#)
3. [Genesis Chamber](#)
4. [Juniper Order Ranger](#)
5. [Pandemonium](#) (plus, perhaps, [Primal Forcemage](#) and/or [Ronin Warclub](#))

The correct answer is 2. The first combo lets you steal all your opponent's creatures. The second repeatedly kills creatures. The third makes Norin act like a pseudo-[Verdant Force](#) (but much, much cheaper). The fourth makes [Juniper Order Ranger](#) grow bigger and bigger. And the fifth repeatedly deals damage with [Pandemonium](#), and that damage grows to nutty proportions if you can pump Norin's power every time it enters play. All the combos are great, because Norin is great! But the least

appropriate are both 1 and 3, since what you really want is [Norin the Wary](#), [Confusion in the Ranks](#), and [Genesis Chamber](#) all in play together! Unfortunately, that's a tie between two answers, so we have to average 1 and 3 together to get 2.

#9) Which of the following is the most efficient way for you to exchange your [Spawnbroker](#) for your opponent's [Simic Sky Swallower](#)?

1. begging
2. pleading
3. cheating
4. whining
5. [Sudden Spoiling](#)

The correct answer is 3. While it's true that [Sudden Spoiling](#) will remove all of [Simic Sky Swallower](#)'s abilities so [Spawnbroker](#) can target it *and* will reduce SSS's power to 0 so [Spawnbroker](#) can trade with it, thus allowing you to pull off an immensely lopsided in-game swap, cheating will do effectively the same thing for a lot less mana. Note that the question asked what the "most efficient" way was, not what the "best" or "most honest" or "least likely to get you kicked out of your play group" way was. This tripped up a lot of respondents who would have gotten the question right had they just spent a little more time reading my mind.



#10) You just played a Soulgorger [Orgg](#). Which of the following things were you most likely to have done the previous turn?

1. Play [Brink of Madness](#), because playing [Soulgorger Orgg](#) is insane.
2. Play [Acorn Harvest](#), because playing [Soulgorger Orgg](#) is nuts.
3. Play [Fool's Tome](#), because playing [Soulgorger Orgg](#) is moronic.
4. Play [Children of Korlis](#), because you can sacrifice it to gain back all the life you lose to the Orgg, leaving you at your old life total with a 6/6 trampler in play that, when it dies, gains you even more life.
5. None of the above



The correct answer is 5. Even though you *did* play [Children of Korlis](#) last turn, the test stated the incorrect reason why. You didn't play it because of the combo. You played it because you think it's gooftacular that the first two words on the card are "Sacrifice Children," you sicko. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.



#11) You've decided to use a two-card combo to decimate your opponent's side of the board. Which of the following is the most likely to make your opponent throw his deck at your face, renounce your friendship, and quit Magic (which is, after all, the ultimate goal of any self-respecting Johnny)?

1. [Clockspinning](#) & [Myojin of Cleansing Fire](#)
2. [Mangara of Corondor](#) & [Freed from the Real](#)
3. [Magus of the Disk](#) & [Yavimaya Hollow](#)
4. [Lim-Dûl the Necromancer](#) & [Death Match](#)
5. [Jaya Ballard, Task Mage](#) & [Light of Sanction](#)

The correct answer is 3.

With the first combo, you can play [Clockspinning](#) with buyback to put an extra divinity counter on the Myojin. Now if you pull a counter off to destroy all other creatures, your 4/6 is still indestructible and [Clockspinning](#) is still in your hand, so you can repeat the combo over and over. But if you manage to play the Myojin, you probably win anyway, so this comboriffic overkill won't spark a hissy fit.

With the second combo, you can tap Mangara to target a permanent, in response untap it for  with [Freed from the Real](#), then tap it again to target a different permanent, and repeat for all the  you've got. When the abilities start to resolve, you'll remove a passel of permanents from the game. But then your Mangara is gone too, so this won't cause a tantrum.

With the fourth combo, once you start the chain by killing one of your opponent's creatures, you can pay   to resurrect it on your side, which triggers [Death Match](#), which kills another one of your opponent's creatures, etc. This lets you steal your opponent's stuff rather than just remove it, but you can't get creatures with high toughness this way. Your loser opponent will probably quit the game . . . but probably won't quit **Magic**.

With the fifth combo, Jaya deals 6 damage to you, your opponent, and all *your opponent's* creatures (but not yours). Pretty brutal – but note that 6 damage you dealt to yourself. That leaves your opponent feeling too good to get the desired meltdown.








With the third combo, however, you wipe out all artifacts, enchantments, and creatures except [Mago do Disco](#), which regenerates and can continue to do this every turn for the rest of the game. And you don't even need a second spell—you pull this off with the Magus and a *land*. That'll definitely kill a friendship, but in a much more humane way than by telling your buddy to his face that you never want to see him again. After all, you're just not that cruel.

#12) Which pair of Slivers make the best combo?


1. [Sedge Sliver](#) & [Psionic Sliver](#)
2. Toupee Sliver & Logarithm Sliver
3. Fuchsia Sliver & Pickle Sliver
4. Wiggly Sliver & Argyle Sliver
5. Zeitgeist Sliver & Phlegm Sliver

The correct answer is 1. The combo will turn your Slivers into machine guns, as long as you have enough black mana to regenerate them. The other Slivers on the list all suck and don't exist.

#13) Which of the following “win-the-game” combos is the coolest?

1. **Endrek Sahr, Master Breeder & Pandemonium & Primal Forcemage & a five-mana creature**
When you play the five-mana creature, Endrek Sahr makes five 1/1 Thrull tokens, which become five 4/4 Thrulls thanks to the Primal Forcemage, which deal 20 total damage to your opponent thanks to Pandemonium.
2. **Triskelavus & Extruder & Doubling Season**
Remove a +1/+1 counter from Triskelavus to put two Triskelavite tokens into play. Sacrifice them each to Extruder to put a total of four +1/+1 counters on Triskelavus. Repeat until you have enough Triskelavites to ping your opponent 20 times.
3. **Basal Sliver & Hivestone & a Nether Traitor in play & a Nether Traitor in your graveyard**
Since the Nether Traitor in play has Basal Sliver's ability, sacrifice it to add  to your mana pool. The ability of the Nether Traitor in your graveyard triggers, so you pay  and return it to play. You're at your starting position, plus  in your mana pool. Repeat for unlimited black mana.
4. **Magus of the Candelabra & Freed from the Real & 2 Ravnica block bounce lands**
Tap both lands to produce four mana (at least one of which must be blue). Spend  on the Magus's ability and untap those lands. Spend  on Freed from the Real to untap the Magus. You're at your starting position, plus one mana in your mana pool. Repeat for unlimited mana. (Note that this combo can be Standard-legal with an extra bounce land, a Vigean Graftmage, and a +1/+1 counter on the Magus instead of Freed from the Real.)
5. **Academy Ruins & Mindslaver**
Play and sacrifice Mindslaver, then put Mindslaver back on top of your library. You'll need  to pull this off, but once it gets going, your opponent never gets to control another one of his or her turns. At worst, you'll win by decking your opponent.

The correct answer is 6) Mishra, Artificer Prodigy & Mishra's Bauble & Booby Trap.

Combo 1 is a trick. It actually deals too much damage, because the 5-mana creature you play would also deal Pandemonium damage. You only need a 4-mana creature with at least 1 power to win the game. Combo 2 is a trick. It costs  each time you remove a counter from Triskelavus, so this combo doesn't go infinite – it's just really sick. Combos 3 and 4 are both tricks. They'll each produce infinite mana, but that will just lead to infinite mana burn and you'll lose the game. Think about it, people! You need a Consume Spirit or a Demonfire or something! Combo 5 is a trick. Your opponent might draw a card that ruins your combo, and it's a card you can't get rid of on her turn, and it's a card she can then play on *your* turn (when she's in control of her own actions) even though all her mana sources are tapped. Something like . . . um . . . well, I have no idea. But the loophole is there!



That leaves the only possibility to be a combo I didn't list. With Mishra in play, you play his Bauble (which is thematically cool) to peek at the top card of your opponent's library, then play [Booby Trap](#), which Mishra turns into two [Booby Traps](#) (cool), and name the card you saw so your opponent takes 20 when she draws that card (cool). If the card you peek at with the Bauble is a basic land (which you can't name with [Booby Trap](#)), you can just hang on to the Trap in your hand: You've got another shot at the combo next turn since Mishra provided you with a spare Bauble in play. (Cool.)

This question was one of the most missed questions on the test, probably because I didn't list the right answer and it was actually impossible to click on the nonexistent choice #6.

#14) Which of the following combos did *not* make it into a question on the Great Combinator Search test?

1. [Endrek Sahr, Master Breeder](#) & [Fallen Ideal](#)
2. [Pardic Dragon](#) & [Deep-Sea Kraken](#)
3. [Sudden Spoiling](#) & [Pyroclasm](#)
4. [Clockspinning](#) & [Goblin Bomb](#)
5. All of the above

The correct answer is 5. None of those combos made it into the test. I didn't have room to describe how you could keep sacrificing your Thrulls to [Fallen Ideal](#) so Endrek Sahr would stick around indefinitely (while sporadically becoming a gigantic flying attacker), or to note how suspending both [Pardic Dragon](#) and [Deep-Sea Kraken](#) would punish your opponent whether she played spells or not, or even to comment that [Sudden Spoiling](#) & [Pyroclasm](#) is a one-sided [Wrath of God](#). The reason I never mentioned [Clockspinning](#) as a reliable and fast means to put extra fuse counters on [Goblin Bomb](#) is because I was [killed once](#) by [Goblin Bomb](#) and it's so embarrassing that I didn't want to mention it.

So, that was the test. And now, the moment you've all been waiting for: The winner of The Great Combinator Search is the only person to get a perfect score... me! Wow. I'm even more amazing than I thought.

Before I go, I'd like to thank Bran_Dawri, cooljeanius, Joe-Schmoe, Psionx, Tapsa, and the entire [Cult of MaGo](#) for their contributions to this column. They're the best darn cult a deity could ask for!

Until next time, have fun with combos,
Mark