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Stealing My Muse

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Building on a Budget
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There have been three writers for Building on a Budget on magicthegathering.com - Nate Heiss, JMS, and myself. Each of us has a different style of approaching the column. Of the three of us, I probably hate to lose the most. If you player profiled me, I'd either be Spike/Johnny or Johnny/Spike depending on the day, but the end result is this: I like building my own decks, and I don't like losing.

I stand behind the results posted by my decks from playtesting, and some of my decks have been hits (*Exploding Wurms*) and some misses (*Double Life*). It's important to touch on both, because you can learn just as much from a deck that didn't work as you can from a deck that did. With that said, *Stealing my Muse* was the first Building on a Budget deck that shifted the entire casual room metagame overnight, with dozens of copies of this deck flooding the casual rooms the Monday following the deck's posting. Prices on *Muse Vessel* quadrupled overnight, and people actively groused about having to face this deck over and over again.

I consider that a sign that the deck worked.

This article originally appeared on July 31, 2006

Ye be sailing the seas today, into the great Blue are ya? Well mates, I've got a story for you. A story about theft, betrayal, and battles most foul. A tale, if you will, about a wizard who took all from others, and gave to himself. Most of all, I give to you the story of that which brings inspiration for all stories...

"Self", I thought to me, "there comes a time in every young boy's life when he has to take a rare and build a deck around it with his own two hands." "Well," I countered to myself, "wherein creativity and productivity lay in congress, therein is found said deck ideas."

So a deck it would be, mates! But which ring of sixty cards would I have festooned around my avatar's neck for the week? Struck by my muse I was.

Muse Vessel, that is, indeed.

Ah, but what is *Vessel*, what is *Muse*? Part *Disrupting Scepter*, part *Grinning Totem*, all *Dissension*. Wherein to take your opponent's hand and turn it against them. A betrayal most fiendish!

Armed with creativity I was, but productivity was still in coming. To take, and to take against, that was the goal. No lackadaisical confrontation, but a forced conscription to the other side. Consultation with funds and purchases led me to these choices:

Annex, *Confiscate*, *Dream Leash*, *Eternal Dominion*, *Mimeofacture*, *Psychic Possession*.

Whereupon the hand was empty, wherefore finds the *Muse Vessel* its purpose? 'Twas told the artificer who built that glorious engine of pilfering told weakness against foes who showed empty hand and kept empty mind. Therefore, we must make him think and keep his idle hands occupied.

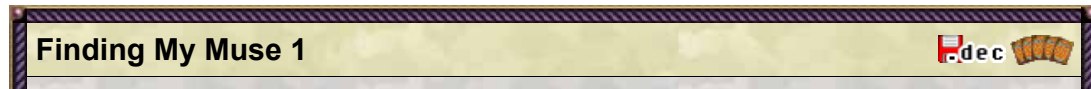
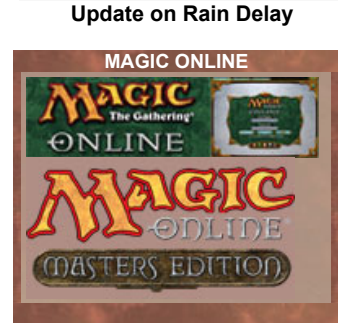
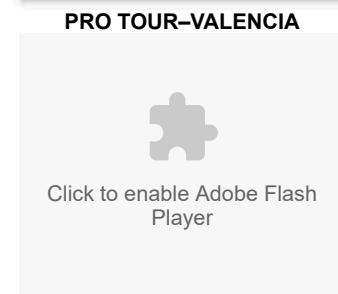
Boomerang, *Consuming Vortex*, *Evacuation*, *Exhaustion*, *Eye of Nowhere*, *Mark of Eviction*, *Remand*, *Repeal*, *Skyscribing*, *Temporal Adept*.

Should it be fair that I spend four mana and three to take, and not be able to use? Nay, my dishonest work has led to no reward henceforth. It should be that I receive, and I engage. Solve this, and solve the *Vessel*.

Annex, *Confiscate*, *Fellwar Stone*, *Shifting Borders*, *Spectral Searchlight*, *Vedalken Plotter*

A foul brew to distill! To fleece, *Annex* and *Confiscate* serve true times two. To reseal, *Boomerang*, *Eye of Nowhere* and *Repeal* would be the suite. *Remand*, a denial. *Temporal Adept*, the captain at the helm. A *Searchlight*, guiding the ship to the Islands, finding an *Eternal Dominion*.

"Rare enough," my sole concurrence. "It would cost no more than ten and five, hence no *Eviction*, no *Mimeofacture*, no *Dream Leash*, no *Psychic Possession*." A *Mark of Eviction* would tell no tales against the lands, the *Plotter* only with. Perhaps later I'll find use for my other tools. Perhaps not.



Main Deck		
60 cards		
23 Island	3 Temporal Adept	4 Annex
23 lands	3 creatures	4 Boomerang
		4 Confiscate
		3 Eternal Dominion
		3 Eye of Nowhere
		4 Remand
		4 Repeal
		4 Spectral Searchlight
		4 Muse Vessel
		34 other spells

Beware all ye who would give dalliance to this deck. Though you might find it a jittering riot to smash your foes with their own tools of destruction, denying them land, spell or creature, they might take offense. Many quit in frustration at my antics, and others cried foul. Part denial, part land destruction, part theft, all malice.

You have been warned.

Opponent #1: TrapperJ (B/W Knights)

I am assailed at every quarter by the Paladins of en-Vec, and the Hands of Honor, guided by the **Ghost Council of Orzhova** wielding **Umezawa's Jitte**. Though I hold his hordes off for twelve seasons, eventually I am overcome by sheer numbers.

Victories: 0. Defeats: 1.

Opponent #2: Halopappy (U/B Ninjas)

Alas, my beginnings are not enjoyable. I find two Islands, but no more. With **Spectral Searchlight** and two **Annex** in grip, a horde of ninjas overwhelm my very territory. **Okiba-Gang Shinobi** claw at my life and my mind, and soon I am found with neither.

Victories: 0. Defeats: 2

Opponent #3: Ockadox (Roxodon Hierarchy)

Whoin should I find but my foe from weeks past, **Ockadox!** He still harnesses the powers of the Swamps, Plains and Forests. Where he employs **Farseek** and **Sakura-Tribe Elder** to take a step forward, I use **Annex** to take a step forward *while* making him take a step back. Oh unfair day!

Temporal Adept joins the fray, holding off his Kokusho. The dragon frustrated, I accelerate ahead and find the powers to cast the epic **Eternal Dominion**. Armed with the knowledge of my opponent's deepest secrets, I summon forth Ink-Eyes, and then Kokusho on my following action, killing his Kokusho (which I had wisely left around with my Adept). Ink-Eyes makes the Dragon turncoat, and a trifecta of **Skeletal Vampires** come to my aid. All have turned against Ockadox, and all is lost for him.

Victories: 1. Defeats: 2

Opponent #4: Toddwylie (W/G Natural Affinity/Genjus)

When one plays with lands as their only route to victory, what happens when the lands turn against them? I **Annex** his Plains, use the **Eye of Nowhere** to return his Genju-enchanted Forests, and then build up towards the **Eternal Dominion**. His mind is on the **Wrath of God**, and his board on a sole **Genju of the Fields**. I steal three more, and Toddwylie concedes, with me beyond sixty life. *Victories: 2. Defeats: 2*

I have now won the day as much as I have lost... yet I find myself in a state of discontent. **Eternal Dominion**? This is not the highlight, it is the **Muse Vessel**, but I have yet to see a Vessel! I know I can delay until I find myself with ten mana, which in and of itself is a feat. This is not the goal though – the goal is to use the Vessel as an instrument of destruction. To force this issue, the Dominions may have to go shortly.

Opponent #5: Jktk0401 (Mono-Black)

He gets stuck at three lands for a couple of turns. I **Remand** his **Highway Robbers** on the sixth, draw into an **Annex**, and use it on his Swamp. He concedes.

Victories: 3. Defeats: 2

Opponent #6: Nolight (Nephilim)

I start this battle with an Island... His first play is a tapped **Temple Garden**, which I **Boomerang**, leaving him with nothing. He plays the Temple and a **Birds of Paradise**, and I play **Spectral Searchlight**. He plays a second land, and I **Eye of Nowhere** it, plus **Repeal** his Birds. I then drop **Muse Vessel** and **Temporal Adept**, and proceed to savage his hand and his board. Soon, I cast **Dune-Brood Nephilim**, and his hope is lost.

Victories: 4. Defeats: 2

It is time for a change, and to move forward. I am unhappy with the performance of **Spectral Searchlight**. In many cases, I have **Annex** in my grasp, but am unable to cast it until the fourth turn, despite a Searchlight in hand. Should the Searchlight be **Fellwar Stone**, my opponent's land would be my land. Moreover, **Fellwar Stone** serves the same purpose as **Spectral Searchlight**, but one step earlier – access to colors of mana not my own.



Finding My Muse 2		Main Deck 60 cards	
23 Island	3 Temporal Adept	4 Annex	
23 lands	3 creatures	4 Boomerang	
		4 Confiscate	
		3 Eternal Dominion	
		3 Eye of Nowhere	
		4 Fellwar Stone	
		4 Remand	
		4 Repeal	
		4 Muse Vessel	
		34 other spells	

Changes:

Out: 4 Spectral Searchlight

In: 4 Fellwar Stone

Opponent #7: Tsmr (U/R Niv-Mizzet)

I Boomerang and Eye of Nowhere his first three lands, leaving his board completely empty. I follow this with Muse Vessel, and he answers with Wee Dragonauts a turn later. I get to work on his hand, taking Mana Leak, Tidings, and Repeal. For his part, he is allowing me to take the control elements, opting instead to try to burn me out with Char and Blaze. This plan almost works, as I am dropped to a precarious three life. That is as far as I will fall.

I drop a second Vessel, and go after his Mountains. I take one with Annex and one with Confiscate, leaving him without any sources of Red mana. I take a Niv-Mizzet and a Dragonaut of my own with the Vessel, and drop the Dragonaut to stop his. They trade (backed by his stolen Mana Leak against a Blaze), and Remand stops Char from finishing the game. I steal yet another Mountain, and earn a victory through concession when his Niv-Mizzet hits my side of the world.

Victories: 5. Defeats: 2

Opponent #8: Lynnpaul (B/G Legends)

I face down an early Vinelasher Kudzu, and take some damage to set up Muse Vessel. I Repeal his plant, and Annex a Swamp. He Naturalizes my Vessel, but I have another. Twin Vinelashers come down against me, but I return them to his hand when they get larger than two power. Meanwhile, Muse Vessel has taken Ink-Eyes, and I cast the Legend upon drawing a Fellwar Stone. Isao is the next to be drawn into the Vessel, and he too begins playing for my team. With this pair of Legends arrayed against him, Lynnpaul quickly falls prey to treachery and betrayal.

Victories: 6. Defeats: 2

Opponent #9: Podwangler (Samurais)

My opening hand is three Islands, two Muse Vessels, an Annex and Eternal Dominion. I draw Confiscate, Eternal Dominion, Muse Vessel, Confiscate, Eye of Nowhere, and then die to an army of Samurai. Victories: 6. Defeats: 3

My head is now clear. My losses have all come to quick waves of creatures. My hand has been cluttered by that which is too costly, and so I will make it that my hand is cluttered no more. I also have had a shortage of mana one time too many, so that must be remedied.

Many times I find myself wanting just one more turn to gain control of the game, so I figure an Exhausted opponent is an opponent who cannot do me harm. With the changes in mind, I return to battle. I would not taste defeat again.

Finding My Muse 3		Main Deck 60 cards	
20 Island	3 Temporal Adept	4 Annex	
4 Quicksand	3 creatures	4 Boomerang	
24 lands		3 Confiscate	
		3 Exhaustion	
		3 Eye of Nowhere	
		4 Fellwar Stone	
		4 Remand	
		4 Repeal	
		4 Muse Vessel	
		33 other spells	

Out: 3 Eternal Dominion, 1 Confiscate, 3 Island

In: 3 Exhaustion, 4 Quicksand

Opponent #10: Miracle Max (Mono-Black Rats)

I get Fellwar Stone, he answers with Nezumi Graverobber. I play Quicksand and Temporal Adept. He gets

Nezumi Cutthroat, which I return with the Adept. He continues to play rats in the form of the Cutthroat plus Nezumi Shortfang. I get another Quicksand down, which further stifles his offense. Muse Vessel joins the board, and I tap out to bounce his Cutthroat with my Adept. This leaves him a window to trade his Cutthroat for a Throat Slitter, killing my Wizard. My revenge is using Muse Vessel to grab the Cutthroat, plus a Kuro's Taken the following turn (which I play).



He attacks into the Taken while I am tapped out of Black, but I am willing to trade. He uses rat offering to play Patron of the Nezumi, drops Umezawa's Jitte on the table, and makes me discard with the Shortfang. Muse Vessel grabs Loxodon Warhammer, and Muse Vessel also spits the aforementioned stolen Cutthroat onto the board. Miracle Max hands his Patron a Jitte, but I Boomerang it on the attack, and he is one mana short of re-offering his 6/6 giant to the board. I am more than happy to steal it with the Vessel. I play his Warhammer to my board, leaving two Quicksands open. He empties my hand completely with Nezumi Shortfang and empties my graveyard with his Nezumi Graverobber, flipping them both. I take three damage from my empty hand, and play the Patron. He is held back by my Quicksands yet again, but equips Jitte on his 3/3. I equip Warhammer on my Patron, and then Repeal his flipped Shortfang when he blocks. He is unable to deal with my 9/6 trampling, pinging, spirit-linked monster. Victories: 7. Defeats: 3

Opponent #11: Phillio (U/R Izzet)

He quickly gets Izzet Guildmage, two Gelectrodes, and Honden of Infinite Rage on the table. I am pinged all the way down to six, but I take all of his Islands with Annex, allowing me one monster turn where I bounce everything at the end of his turn with Boomerangs and Repeals. I drop Temporal Adept, Confiscate Gelectrode when it is recast later, and use the Adept to keep Honden of Infinite Rage off the board. He concedes with only five Mountains on the board when I drop Muse Vessel. Victories: 8. Defeats: 3

Opponent #12: Smackeh (R/G Burn)

He gets Seal of Fire, but is stuck on one Mountain. This doesn't stop two Lava Spikes from bashing in my head. I get Fellwar Stone and a third-turn Muse Vessel, and start chomping away his hand. I grab Moldervine Cloak in time for him to draw a Forest, use Seal of Fire on me, and drop a 3/3 Scab-Clan Mauler.

I Confiscate it. He drops Seal of Fire #2. I put his Moldervine Cloak on his Scab-Clan Mauler, and swing in for six. Muse Vessel grabs Psychotic Fury, allowing me to swing for twelve and a card the next turn. He casts Simic Initiate, and I Exhaustion him, to make sure he doesn't have enough mana to burn out my/his Mauler for six. Victories: 9. Defeats: 3

Opponent #13: Grotto (G/R Genju)

He gets down a second turn Genju of the Cedars and swings on turn 3. I get turn 2 Fellwar and Annex it. I can't activate the Genju (he still controls the enchantment), but at least it stops a 4/4 from attacking. He drops Gruul Turf, I drop Muse Vessel and Eye of Nowhere his Turf. He redrops Turf, and I Boomerang, and Vessel him, setting him back to one land on the board. He begins dropping non-Turf lands, and I drop a second Vessel. My land denial has set him back way too far to catch up, and I eventually get his whole hand. This includes Earth Surge, two Moldervine Cloaks, Genju of the Spires, Earth Surge, Giant Solifuge, Borborygmos, and two Galvanic Arcs. I cast the Solifuge and the Genju, attack for ten, and then attack for ten again the following turn. Victories: 10. Defeats: 3



Opponent #14: Dason (R/W Burn)

He gets Skyknight Legionnaire. I Annex his only Plains, but he plays another and casts Centaur Safeguard. I Confiscate the Safeguard, and he Shocks it (which allows me to gain three life). I Annex his other Plains, and drop Muse Vessel. He swings, but I get Volcanic Hammer with the Vessel, and use it to kill his Skyknight.

Back to neutral, he gets Plains and tries to Lightning Helix me. I Remand, and then Annex (#3) his Plains, and grab Lava Axe with the Vessel. He refuses to be short on White mana, and drops yet another Plains, but I have a second Remand for his Lightning Helix. I get Blaze with Muse Vessel, and he finally resolves Lightning Helix against me. Muse Vessel takes (and casts) Veteran Cavalier. He casts Sparkmage Apprentice, and I Boomerang his Plains and steal it. He plays another Plains, I draw another Boomerang, and end up stealing my fifth Plains of the game! I Lava Axe him, Blaze him for nine, and finish him off with the Cavalier. Victories: 11. Defeats: 3

Opponent #15: EngineKid (G/W/U)

He's playing a lot of bounce lands, and I drop turn 3 Temporal Adept. He has no way to remove it in his deck, and I send him back to zero lands within a turn, adding Muse Vessel to the mix. He concedes at the prospect of being locked at zero lands. Victories: 12. Defeats: 3.

It was immensely fun to grab my opponent's permanents and spells over and over again, using his own tools against him to win the game. On the flip side, it was immensely frustrating for my opponents to have their permanents and spells stolen over and over again, and having their own tools used against them. In addition, the bounce aspect of the deck was also mind-rattling to play against, when used as mana-denial in the early game.

Nobody wants to be hit by three **Boomerang**-effects in a row, facing down **Muse Vessel** on turn 4 with no permanents on the board.

To sum up, I found that **Muse Vessel** itself performed admirably, and the deck went on an undefeated tear after the third revision. It could still be improved (my workmate Aaron recommended I get **Sleight of Hand** in the deck somehow, as a way to smooth out my hand on the first turn or late game), but overall I can put the Building On A Budget stamp of approval on Finding My Muse. Just please, please keep in mind that while this deck is a lot of fun to play, it *can* be frustrating to play against. Use with caution!

Next Week: The Doctor is in!

*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by StarCityGames.com, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



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