

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



BoaB Unplugged: Budget Cards To Think About, Part 1

Ben Bleiweiss
Building on a Budget
Wednesday, April 16, 2008



Hello everyone, and welcome back to Building on a Budget! **Magic Online** is currently undergoing an upgrade to version III, so BoaB is going unplugged for the next couple of weeks! Once MTGO is back online, I will immediately return to the [Round Robin](#) series (picking up with the Bringer / *Deathrender* deck).

This column comes to you from England and Italy—I was overseas attending a Vintage tournament in Piacenza over the past week! A special note to Mark Rosewater, who is one of the world's foremost pizza aficionados: if you are ever in Piacenza (which is a short train ride from Milan in Northern), be sure to stop by at "Le Caravelle," a Bar Pizzeria Ristorante. It was recommended by our Italian friends Federica and Federico. I grew up in New York City, so it is not lightly that I say that "Le Caravelle" had the best pizza I've ever had in my life! I went there for dinner four nights straight, and ordered the *buffalo y crudo* (prosciutto and mozzarella) pizza all four nights. Others enjoyed the *pizza flambe* (pizza, set on fire, with tobasco sauce) along with a great cup of *sorbertini* to finish off each meal. I can't recommend this pizzeria enough if you have occasion to be in northern Italy!

Speaking of recommendations, this week's column is focused on cards that I've *almost* used in decks in this column, or have touched on very briefly. I only write one column a week, and usually a deck lasts anywhere from one-half to two full columns, so there isn't enough room to play around with every card I'd like to play around with. In addition, sometimes I just run out of time to test a card before it rotates out of Standard—I get as excited about playing with the new cards as anyone else, so when *Morningtide* came out, there were some *Lorwyn* and *Time Spiral* block cards that fell off my radar.

I pulled up a list of all the cards in Standard, and went through set-by-set to make a list of the cards I'd like to play with, but haven't. As mentioned above, a couple of these cards have been mentioned or been briefly used in a deck, but forgettably so in those cases. This week, I'm going to look at the cards in Standard that I see good uses for (and might use in the future), and next week's column will look at Extended. Maybe you'll see some cards here that make you want to build a deck, or maybe I'll discuss a card that you absolutely want me to build around. In either case, please, by all means, feel free to talk about the cards on this list in the forums of this article!

Morningtide

Cream of the Crop / Abundance: Both of these are similar in that they increase the quality of your card selection if you are playing green. **Cream of the Crop** operates based off of creatures, whereas **Abundance** feeds from drawing cards. Of the two, **Abundance** is the more abusable—you are immediately displacing the cards you do not want, and getting the nonland (or land) card immediately. **Cream of the Crop** has a one-turn (or half-turn, if you are playing flash creatures) delay, but hits the board very early in the game. **Abundance** works with multiple draws a turn (such as with *Sift*), whereas **Cream of the Crop** sets up your next card, so multiple creatures do not affect multiple draws (though you can dig deeper into your deck if you do not want the top card of your library after the first creature).



Abundance traditionally has been abused with **Sylvan Library** (since you can replace draws completely, and keep all three cards without paying 8 life—just a note for you online classic players!) as a control or combo engine, but **Cream of the Crop** fits great into a deck that focuses more on an offensively oriented creature attack. It drops early enough that you don't have to give up much of your curve (for instance, first turn creature, second turn **Cream of the Crop**, third turn three or four power guy, depending on the drop), so you will likely get use out of it early. If you are dropping creature after creature, chances are that **Cream of the Crop** will keep this chain going—and since it is a triggered ability, it works great with **Primal Forcemage** (stack the **Cream of the Crop** trigger first, then the Forcemage's ability, and then dig three cards deeper than you might have otherwise).

It is easy to see the value in playing cards that give you pure card advantage (such as **Harmonize**), but sometimes, in the numbers, you lose sight of the fact that if you draw better cards than your opponent the entire game, you will have an advantage. Playing **Cream of the Crop** or **Abundance** will set you down a card in the game, since neither affects the board or the game in and of themselves. However, their effect on card quality is tremendous, and both can drop your late-game chance of drawing useless lands to nil.

Feudkiller's Verdict: I haven't built a white-blue control deck in a while, or a white-red control deck based around mutual damage effects (**Manabarbs**, **Molten Disaster**, **Sulfurous Blast**), but **Feudkiller's Verdict** would have a home in either—a 5/5 creature attached to a 10-life swing. Chances are that when you play this spell, you *will* get the Giant. Six mana is a lot to pay, but how often have you played a sixth turn **Beacon of Immortality** at 10 life or less? In this case, you are giving up instant speed for a large body—and if you are being beat down, a 5/5 creature is an invaluable asset. Even if you are ahead in the game before you play the **Verdict**, a 5/5 for six mana (with 10 life attached) is still a healthy four-turn clock.



Idyllic Tutor / Enduring Renewal: Wayyyyyy back in the day, there was a deck called Pebbles (not to be confused with Ben Peebles-Mundy), based around the combination of **Enduring Renewal**, **Goblin Bombardment**, and zero-cost artifact creatures (**Shield Sphere**, **Phyrexian Walker**, and/or **Ornithopter**, at the time). Several variants along the theme were made, but the glue that held this deck together was **Enlightened Tutor** (and, in some versions, **Vampiric Tutor**). Since every piece of the combo engine was either an artifact or an enchantment, **Enlightened Tutor** could fetch up the missing third of your combo, no matter what it was.



When **Enduring Renewal** was printed in **Time Spiral**, the best people could do was build a deck based around **Wild Cantor**, but without the tutoring power to get the deck going, it was not a viable deck. You had to have an enchantment (**Enduring Renewal**), a creature (**Wild Cantor**) and an engine (a storm spell, probably **Grapeshot**), and there weren't enough tutors on-color to make the deck work. **Idyllic Tutor** lets you, at the least, have a way to fetch **Enduring Renewal**. While I'm not sure there is a good Standard-legal engine to work with now that **Wild Cantor** is out of the format, this makes the deck more reliable for Extended, where you could combine **Wild Cantor** and **Grapeshot** to deal infinite to the head. **Summoner's Pact** goes a long way here as well, since it can get **Wild Cantor**, even if you have **Enduring Renewal** up (since it brings the creature straight to your hand).

Maralen of the Mornsong: I envisioned Maralen in a deck with a heavy discard element and **The Rack**, so that once Maralen hit the board, even if your opponent got a card to immediately kill Maralen, they would lose a minimum of 6 life (3 from Maralen, 3 from **The Rack**), and be set up to lose another 3 life from **The Rack** on the following turn. As yet, I haven't seen this use for Maralen online, but I think that the draw of this card is enough that I would want to run this deck at some point for this column.



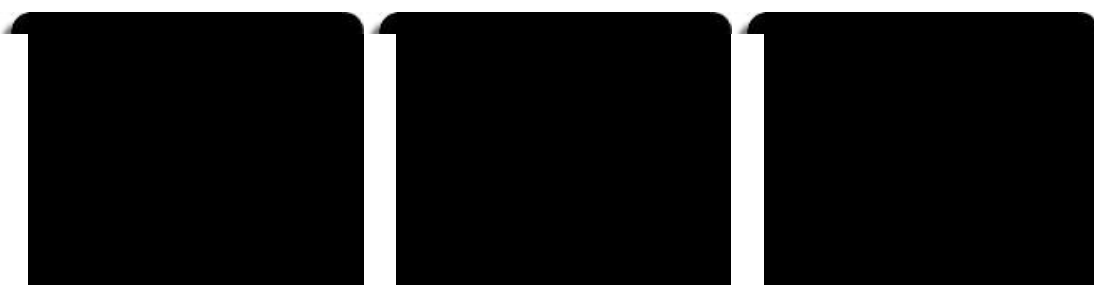
Scapeshift: I will be honest—the main reason I have not used **Scapeshift** (and probably will not do so) is because the best use for **Scapeshift** is to fetch multiple **Cloudposts** and Urzatron pieces at once, and the deck I built would be too similar to my **Cloudpost / Vesuva** deck [from two years ago](#). Otherwise, this would be a splendid card to use—major mana acceleration on turn four, a huge boost towards threshold, or a way to thin most of the cards out of your deck. In Standard, I'd probably get a quartet of **Treetop Villages** or the like.



Stonehewer Giant: The use for **Stonehewer Giant** is obvious—get him in a deck with lots of equipment! The problem in Standard is that the equipment you'd want to get is pretty narrow at this point (**Loxodon Warhammer**? The new cycle from Morningtide?), so his best use would be in Extended. Well heck, even in Standard, why wouldn't you want a 4/4 creature that tutors **Loxodon Warhammer** straight into play? Another solid built-around-me card that I just haven't had time to play around with yet.

Lorwyn

Giants in general (**Ancient Amphitheater / Brion Stoutarm / Desolation Giant / Thundercloud Shaman**): There's a great Giant deck out there, either as a control deck or as an offensive deck (**Blind Spot Giant** is huge!). Sad thing is, nobody seems to like Giants. Their harbinger is very expensive, their curve is pretty high, and white-red isn't a very popular color combination since **Lightning Helix** rotated out. As a budget deck, I can't help but want to build Giants, since all of the best cards (**Amphitheater, Brion, Desolation Giant**) are under a ticket at this point, so I could run a lot of the great rares at a very cheap price. This is not the case with virtually any other tribe, as their top-end cards are expensive and their lands as well.





Lord Deck (Merrow Reejerey, Elvish Champion, Imperious Perfect, Lord of Atlantis, changelings): One day you are going to see "Oh My Lord!", a deck built around a ton of creatures that give other creatures +1/+1, and as many changelings as I can fit in without skimping on lands. My idea centers around the four lords mentioned above, so the outline for this deck would be those sixteen cards, and probably twenty changelings (Shapesharer, Woodland Changeling, Mothdust Changeling, Game-Trail Changeling, Amoeboid Changeling and the such). I'm not sure how many legs this deck would have, but it would be an interesting spring-off point to see where this type of deck could evolve to! (Distant Melody anyone?)



Hoofprints of the Stag: I love this card. I love the idea of trading time (in the form of cards drawn) for something you would be doing anyhow (drawing cards) in exchange for making a really large flyer (from drawing cards). I love that you can play **Careful Consideration**, draw four cards, discard three (or two) and get a (basically) free 4/4 flyer out of the deal. White-blue control traditionally has a ton of card drawing, so building this deck feels like a natural tendency—so will I do it? I know that after I wrote [my Kithkin primer](#) about aggressive decks, the #1 request was to build a primer about control decks. If I had the follow-up to the Kithkin article, it would likely be a Hoofprints-based white-blue control deck. Now, didn't I mention using **Feudkiller's Verdict** in such a deck as well?



Wild Ricochet / Imp's Mischief: I mention both of these cards together because I think I have put them on (at least a mental) list of cards I would want to use in every black and red deck I've built over the last year. Each time, I take them

off because their effect is too narrow. If I had to pull a random (yet informed) statistic out of my butt, I would say that 50% of the time, these cards would be dead in hand (no effects to redirect), 40% of the time they would be marginally useful (moving a **Shock** or **Incinerate** around), and 10% of the time completely game-winningly back-breaking (imagine using **Wild Ricochet** on a just-unsuspecting **Ancestral Vision** to draw six cards?) This would make either one good in a tool-box style deck, but too unreliable (yet very cool when they did work in that 10%) to play as a four-of in a deck that could have slots dedicated to more reliable effects.



Future Sight

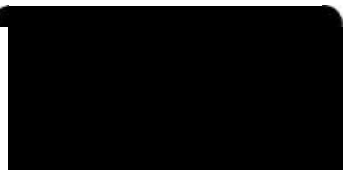
Barren Glory / Warp World: In [part 2 of the Round Robin](#), I mentioned potentially adding **Warp World** to the deck (since I already had **Overgrowth**) as a way to have an end-game finisher against control decks. This came from an idea I had of a **Barren Glory / Warp World / Claws of Gix** Standard deck, which would win by floating mana, emptying the hand, and then sacrificing all permanents to **Claws of Gix** to leave **Barren Glory** as the only permanent on your side of the board. This is another deck I might visit at some point—I've seen some great **Warp World** decks with lots of comes-into-play effect permanents, but I didn't necessarily want to go that direct route.



Cloud Key: I envisioned this in some sort of **March of the Machines** / artifact deck, which I touched on briefly in a previous column. **Cloud Key** would let you drop larger artifacts early, and then turn into a 3/3 beater later in the game thanks to **March**. Probably decent in a storm-based combo deck as well, but I've already done that deck in the past!



Heartwood Storyteller: I've done a lot of creature-based green aggressive decks (see: [Overrunnin' Elves](#), [Thousand-Year Elves](#)), so I've been shying away from doing a **Treefolk** deck as yet. I try to have a variety of deck types and colors in the column, and sometimes a deck type is a casualty of making a choice (in this case, **Thousand-Year Elixir Elves**, or a **Treefolk**-based mana ramp deck). Maybe in the future, and if so **Heartwood Storyteller** will be a part of that deck—a way to combat creature removal from the opponent's hand.





Shapeshifter's Marrow: Basically, a proactive **Remove Soul** that leaves you with an extra creature. I'm kind of surprised this one hasn't been tried out by more people, since it doubles as **Telepathy** and ends by denying the opponent a draw (of the turn they would have gotten a creature).

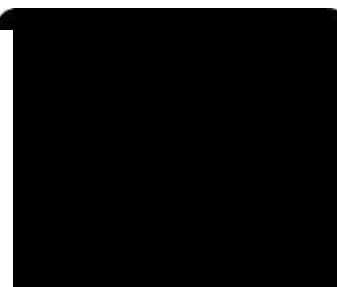


Thunderblade Charge: Madness decks have fallen out of favor for the last while—blue-green madness wasn't in favor this past PTQ season, and red-green madness, for all intents and purposes, doesn't exist. I've already done a couple of black-red madness decks, so I think I'd be open to making a red-green madness deck (**Gathan Raiders**, **Wild Mongrel**, **Violent Eruption**, **Fiery Temper**, **Basking Rootwalla**, as a start) in the future. If so, I would give **Thunderblade Charge** a very serious consideration—it's 3 to the head, and then three more once one of my guys hits, and many of the red-green madness creatures (**Wild Mongrel**, **Gathan Raiders**, **Arrogant** and **Reckless Wurms**) are usually big enough to connect.



Planar Chaos

Ana Battlemage: Looks fun. Haven't had a reason to run a deck that would need a green-blue-black creature with these effects. Not much more to say than that!





Boom // Bust: Land destruction is heavily frowned upon in the casual room, especially mass land destruction. **Boom // Bust** would be a fine card to play as a finisher, especially since so many decks in the casual room in **Magic Online** are land-intensive. I've consciously avoided using this card in decks because of this. This is an underplayed competitive card, so if I were to do a series that took a red deck into the tournament practice room, I would have no inhibitions about adding this in.



Enslave: I used **Enslave** once, but it was a two-of and wasn't played in many games. I'm a big fan of **Confiscate**, and while **Enslave** can only target creatures, it adds insult to injury (the original owner of the creature **Enslaved** takes 1 damage a turn). This is also an effect that people wouldn't expect out of a black deck—usually black kills creatures, not steals them.



Keen Sense: **Curiosity** was a heavily-played blue card, because you could drop it early, on say a **Cloud of Faeries** or **Grim Lavamancer** (for red-blue weenie), and then sit back on countermagic while your creature went to town, protected from creature removal. Green doesn't really have that sort of countermagic, but how would this fare in a blue-green deck? I'd be interested in finding out at some point, but a lot of my green card drawing has centered more around **Harmonize** and **Magus of the Library**.





Shrouded Lore: If I were to build a mono-black control deck that had, say multiple **Consume Spirit**-type effects and a lot of mana-ramping (**Gauntlet of Power**, **Magus of the Coffers**), I would run **Shrouded Lore** as a way to recur my (effectively) X-spells. You might see this deck get built once **Shadowmoor** is online.



Tidewalker: If you're playing a mono-blue control deck, chances are that you have a few nonbasic lands, such as **Faerie Conclave**, **Desert**, or **Quicksand**. This reduces the effectiveness of **Tidewalker**. On the other hand, if you are running mostly **Islands** in a draw-go variety deck, I could see **Tidewalker** filling much of the same role of **Spire Golem** in Extended—a large, cheap creature that can be protected by countermagic starting around turn four or five. Blue doesn't get many creatures that can grow as large as **Tidewalker** for so cheap a mana cost, so **Tidewalker** is worth considering as a finisher if you're not gaming a ton of non-basics.



Treacherous Urge: A card along the lines of **Wild Ricochet**, but with a black discard effect that might be more generally useful. Kind of swingy, and effectively like **Threatening** a card out of your opponent's hand.





I hope that a rundown of these cards has given you some ideas for deck building! Tune in next week as I examine further back, starting at *Time Spiral!* And remember—once **Magic Online III** is up, back to the Round Robin we go!

*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.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Ben Bleiweiss](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#)

© 1995-2008 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

