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BoaB Unplugged: Twenty Older Gems

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Building on a Budget
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hello everyone, and welcome to the last edition in this series of BoaB Unplugged! In this week's article, I'm going to take a look at twenty older, underutilized rares available on **Magic Online**. All twenty of these cards are Build-Around-Me (BAM) gems—cards that are the center focus of a deck. In the past two articles ([here](#) and [here](#)), I've looked at cards that I've wanted to use in Standard, but haven't yet. In this article, each of these cards would be the centerpiece of their respective deck!

And for those waiting for the Round Robin—it's returning next week, so mark the date on your calendar as Building on a Budget will return, 3.0 style!



Ageless Entity / Well of Lost Dreams

Back when **Magic** was first released, life gain was considered a relatively weak mechanic. Take a look at the boon cycle from Alpha—cards that give you three of something for one mana. You have **Ancestral Recall** (three cards), **Lightning Bolt** (3 damage), **Dark Ritual** (three mana), **Giant Growth** (+3/+3 to a creature), and **Healing Salve** (prevent 3 damage or gain 3 life). **Ancestral Recall** was so good it was banned in most formats, and restricted in Vintage. **Lightning Bolt** and **Dark Ritual** were considered too powerful, and were replaced over time with other variants (**Shard Volley**, **Shock**, **Cabal Ritual**, **Rite of Flame**). **Giant Growth** is a staple, and has seen its share of tournament play.

But **Healing Salve**? Poor **Healing Salve**, just not on par with the other boons. And as went **Healing Salve**, so went life gain as a mechanic—what good is gaining 3 life, when that's one swing of an opponent's two-drop creature? Did you want to spend a card to stop **Watchwolf** for a turn? No!

Over time, Wizards of the Coast began ramping up the power level of life gain. Compare **Natural Spring** to **Nourish**, or **Warrior Angel** to **Exalted Angel**. Clearly the newer cards are more powerful, and never has this been the case more than with **Shadowmoor**. Yes, green-white has had **Loxodon Hierarch** and **Exalted Angel** and **Nourish** in the past—but in this set, you also get **Augury Adept**, **Boon Reflection**, **Dawnglow Infusion** (twice as good as **Stream of Life!**), **Fracturing Gust**, **Kitchen Finks** (which is a staple budget card—get four of these as soon as you can!), and **Oracle of Nectars** (among others). Life gain in-and-of itself won't win games, but it will allow you to win a race when attached to a creature (Finks) or card advantage (Adept), or when it is an obscene amount of life gain (**Dawnglow Infusion**, at 5♣♣♣, is a 12-point life gain swing).



Because life gain is being pushed so hard in green-white right now, it seems like there's plenty of tools now available to build around **Ageless Entity** and his friend, **Well of Lost Dreams**. **Ageless Entity** can easily be pushed to 10/10 or higher on turn six, while still shoring up your board position. **Well of Lost Dreams** turns your life gain into card advantage on the spot. With eight copies of these cards (four of each), twenty or so life gain creatures and spells, and some utility cards, it seems like you have a great basis for a budget green-white deck that can outlast other creature decks due to sheer tempo swing!

Artificer's Intuition

Back when I did set reviews for Vintage for StarCityGames.com, I picked this as the best card out of *Fifth Dawn* for Vintage. It's seen some fringe play, mostly involving decks that have **Skullclamp**, or **Auriok Salvagers** / **Black Lotus** / **Lion's Eye Diamond** for unlimited mana. By and large though, it's been a fringe rare and has only marginally been paid attention to.

Here's a list of artifacts of note in Extended you can fetch with **Artificer's Intuition**:

Æther Spellbomb, **Bonesplitter**, **Brass Gnat**, **Chromatic Sphere**, **Chromatic Star**, **Claws of Gix**, **Conjurer's Bauble**, **Heap Doll**, **Liar's Pendulum**, **Locket of Yesterdays**, **Lotus Bloom**, **Meekstone**, **Mishra's Bauble**, **Moratorium Stone**, **Myr Servitor** (combo!), **Ornithopter**, **Paradise Mantle**, **Pithing Needle** (okay, maybe not this one—that's not budget!), **Pyrite Spellbomb**, **Scrabbling Claws**, **Sensei's Divining Top**, **Springleaf Drum**, **The Rack**, **Tormod's Crypt**, **Wanderer's Twig**, **Wayfarer's Bauble**, and the six artifact lands from *Mirrodin* and *Darksteel*.

Just off the bat, there's a lot of utility in a potential **Artificer's Intuition** deck—you have bounce and creature kill (**Spellbombs**), ground control (**Myr Servitor**), graveyard removal (**Heap Doll**, **Tormod's Crypt**), mana acceleration (**Springleaf Drum**, **Paradise Mantle**, **Lotus Bloom**, **Wayfarer's Bauble**), and card drawing (**Conjurer's Bauble**, **Mishra's Bauble**, **Liar's Pendulum**), not to mention the combo-riffic **Locket of Yesterdays**.



Bioplasm / Timesifter



There are a lot of ways to set up the top card of your deck, especially in green: **Treefolk Harbinger**, **Elvish Harbinger**, **Worldly Tutor** (for Classic online), any scry card—so it seems like you could make sure that **Bioplasm** is extremely huge on any given attack. Combine this with **Undying Flames** / **Riddle of Lighting** / **Erratic Explosion**, and you've got the core of a red-green "mana cost matters" deck where you can win the game in one (literally) explosive turn! Add in **Timesifter** to make sure that your opponent doesn't take another turn for the rest of the game!

Braids, Cabal Minion

Once a tournament staple, Braids has fallen to the budget range online (2.5 tickets each). Braids works best in a deck that can generate a lot of

extra creatures early, and so usually you'll see her in a black-green deck. There are a ton of token creature generators in *Lorwyn* block, so pairing Braids with Elves might be a way to start locking down your opponent early in the game without having to give up anything other than an **Imperious Perfect** token.



Chisei, Heart of Oceans

One of the problems with **Chisei** is that you usually don't want to remove counters from your own cards—in general, counters on your cards are beneficial, although there are exceptions (**Dark Depths**, cumulative upkeep cards' age counters, etc). Once *Shadowmoor* hits, you'll have a slew of -1/-1 counters that you actively want to remove from your own creatures, especially those with persist. **Chisei** would be a great offensive weapon in a world where you are playing creatures that are undercosted by the addition of -1/-1 counters (**Chainbreaker** and **Leech Bonder**, in blue or artifacts).



Equilibrium

It surprised me, when researching this article, that **Equilibrium** only goes for about a ticket each online. The ability to recursively bounce your creatures (**Momentary Blink**, anyone?) or take your opponent's creatures off the board for a single mana is powerful! **Equilibrium** lets you race, and win the race, against other creatures decks. **Riftwing Cloudskate** turns from a **Boomerang** into an **Undo**, and you can recur **Nekrataals** or **Murderous Redcaps** against one another! **Equilibrium** is on-par with **Cloudstone Curio**—while the former only focuses on creatures, you are gaining the ability to keep your opponent's creatures off the board.



Eye of the Storm

The main problem with **Eye of the Storm** isn't that it costs seven mana—it's that after you spent seven mana to play it, you still need to have spells left in hand to make it work. This works extremely well with suspend instants and sorceries, since you can align them to work all at once, after you've gotten **Eye of the Storm** on the table.





Gleancrawler

Gleancrawler seems like he would work really well as the center of a deck filled not only with creatures that self-sacrifice, but with persist creatures as well—bring them back after they've died a second time! **Gleancrawler** is also a huge monster on its own (6/6 trampler for six), and while there aren't any black-green hybrid cards in *Shadowmoor*, it wouldn't be a stretch to include **Gleancrawler** in a green-X or a black-X deck without the need for playing both colors.



Guiltfeeder

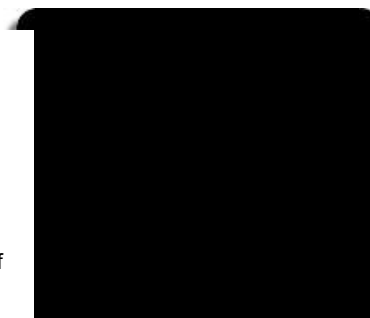
There are two huge problems with decks that revolve around a milling strategy. First, your opponent starts at 60 life (53 if you count the opening hand). Milling away 40-50 cards (counting draw phases) takes a lot longer to do than just attacking for 20 points of damage. Also, milling generally doesn't affect board position. If you play **Glimpse the Unthinkable**, you're taken out about a fifth of your opponent's deck... but you're down a card in hand, and you haven't killed a creature, a card in hand, or a land. In fact, given how many cards and abilities now key off of the graveyard (dredge, flashback, threshold), you very well may have helped your opponent out!

Guiltfeeder is a fantastic solution to the problem of how to kill an opponent with milling, besides decking them. It's entirely conceivable that **Guiltfeeder** can swing for a minimum 10 points if you are dedicating your deck to milling. Moreover, **Guiltfeeder** has evasion, so it's almost assuredly going to hit for that 10 damage a turn.



Horobi, Death's Wail

Horobi himself can die to any targeted spell or ability in the game of **Magic**. However, you always have priority after you play a spell on your turn, so you have first dibs on wiping out your opponent's army. Drop a permanent that can target multiple creatures for free (**Cauldron of Souls**, anyone?), and you've just **Wrathed** your opponent. Timing is the key here—once you target the creature, the triggered ability of "Destroy this creature" goes on the stack, killing the creature before the spell or effect resolves. Your opponent's creatures won't have persist, and you'll still have **Horobi** and **Cauldron of Souls** on the table. Given that **Horobi** himself is a 4/4 flyer for four, that should be enough to win the game.





Iname, Death Aspect

Two words: **Haunting Misery**. Next time I'm playing classic, we'll have a look at this deck!



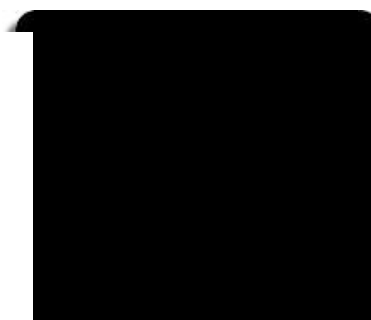
Ion Storm

There were a lot of +1/+1 counters going around in *Fifth Dawn* because of sunburst, but there were even more to be found in the world of *Lorwyn* (and *Morningtide*). **Ion Storm** is a great way to turn those extra counters into mucho damage, and at a low cost (two mana), which can be used multiple times a turn.



Proteus Staff

I used to run a deck that had token creature generators, countermagic, bounce, no actual creature cards, and **Goblin Charbelcher**. If you fail to find a creature after activating **Proteus Staff**, you can literally stack every card that is in your deck in whatever order you want. This allows you to put **Goblin Charbelcher** as your top card, and then a land as the thirtieth or so card down in the stack, for a one-shot kill. This is a deck that might be worth taking a look at due to all the great token creature generators in *Lorwyn* block.





Rakdos Riteknife

Have you noticed that a lot of cards on this list benefit greatly from the token creatures available in *Lorwyn* block? **Rakdos Riteknife** is perfect in a deck that can dish out a ton of creatures and then blow away the opponent's board. Once it gets going, you can block with your token creature, sacrifice it (or another creature) to give the Riteknife another counter, and eventually take out every permanent your opponent has in play.



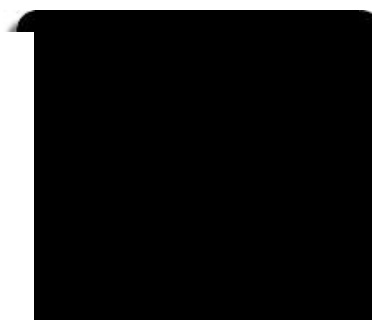
Spellweaver Helix

The Japanese pros, who are restless innovators, built a deck around **Spellweaver Helix**, **Crush of Wurms**, and draw effects. You would discard cards (**Thirst for Knowledge** / **Compulsive Research**), get a cheap sorcery (**Sleight of Hand**) imprinted on the Helix along with **Crush of Wurms**, and then go nuts making 6/6 token creatures. This deck hasn't been revisited in a long time—what would three blocks worth of sorceries do to improve this deck? Are there better options than **Crush of Wurms** available right now?



Sprouting Phytohydra

I have the basis of a combo deck here—**Sprouting Phytohydra** and **Æther Flash**. Put the two together, and you've got a theoretically infinite number of dead 0/2 creatures coming into play and going to the graveyard. Since the **Phytohydra** is a may ability, you can stop the chain any time you want to cast a sorcery, or another creature. Anyone have any ideas what to do once you've had 1,000+ 0/2 creatures come into play and die in a single turn? If so, speak up in the forums!





Three Dreams

In general, my fifth rule of deckbuilding is that you do not want to base a deck around Auras that enchant your creatures. You are just opening yourself up for card disadvantage—if your creature dies in response to being enchanted, you're down two cards for one. If your creature dies after being enchanted, you're still probably down two for one (stuff like [Griffin Guide](#) notwithstanding). **Three Dreams** nets you three-for-one card advantage—you get three Auras, of your choice, in hand. This is a very powerful effect indeed, and even if your creatures get two-for-one'd, you're still going to be up cards.

Persist creatures seem the perfect pairing for an enchantment / Aura based strategy. Yes, your creature still loses the Aura once it goes to the graveyard—but you'll still have a creature when it comes back, so you don't have the problem of "all my creatures are dead, *now* what do I enchant?" Pair this with [Auratouched Mage](#) and the new color-matters Auras from Shadowmoor, and you have a potentially viable Aura deck that doesn't roll over and die to [Terror](#) and [Shriekmaw](#)!



Zur's Weirding

I once [built a deck](#) for this column based around [Sky Swallower](#) (not [Simic Sky Swallower](#)—he's the good one! I mean [Sky Swallower](#), as in "give all your permanents to your opponent!") and was accused of the deck being based more around [Zur's Weirding](#) locks than [Sky Swallower](#) himself. [Zur's Weirding](#) is a huge lock card, and one that can potentially backfire in this world of dredge, flashback, and graveyard recursion. On the other hand, gain 2 life a turn (or have any board advantage), and [Zur's Weirding](#) is one of the hardest soft locks in **Magic**. I've always wanted to revisit a proper [Zur's Weirding](#) lock deck for this column, and this would be an interesting card to use in the future as a basis for a deck.



I'd like to hear from you about which of these cards intrigues you the most! Take these deck ideas and run with them in the forums. Feel free to use either Classic Online or Extended Online (but keep it budget, please), and I may use your deck idea (or suggestions) in a future column. And to top this off, let's have a vote to see which of these cards you, the reader, most want to see a deck built around!

Which of these ideas do you most want to see a deck built around?

- Ageless Entity / Well of Lost Dreams
- Artificer's Intuition
- Bioplasm / Timesifter
- Braids, Cabal Minion

- Chisei, Heart of Oceans
- Equilibrium
- Eye of the Storm
- Gleancrawler
- Guiltfeeder
- Horobi, Death's Wail
- Iname, Death Aspect
- Ion Storm
- Proteus Staff
- Rakdos Riteknife
- Spellweaver Helix
- Sprouting Phytohydra
- Three Dreams
- Zur's Weirding

Submit my Vote

See you all in seven days, as the Building on a Budget Round Robin picks back up with the Bringer / **Composite Golem** deck!

Ben

*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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