

Phyrexian Dreadnought, art by Pete Venters

Mono-Blue Dreadnought

A Premodern primer

How Mono-Blue Dreadnought (Stiflenought) plays in Premodern: the combo, every card in the 75, the sideboard, mulligans and the matchups.

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Foreword

I'm Mario Longobardi, and I've been playing Magic: The Gathering since 2000, when, as a little kid, I was given the Starter 2000 set — in Italian. A while later a close friend handed me a chunk of his collection, and with it came my first taste of constructed: Type 2, what we now call Standard. My first ever constructed deck put Opposition next to Saproling Symbiosis. I thought it was the most powerful thing in the world.





Since then I have quit and come back to the game half a dozen times, mostly for limited rather than constructed. Then, after Covid and well into my adult years, I picked it up for good. I rebuilt my collection with the help of Galactus, the game store in Rome, who supported me all the way through it, and I started playing Legacy, in a game that had changed almost beyond recognition.

About three years ago I found Premodern, and I fell completely in love with it. It reminded me of the game I learned with my dad as a child. It is fun and remarkably balanced, and it has a fantastic, friendly and casual community around it. A big shout-out to the New York communities I play with every week, 90s MTG and the Order of the Sacred Torch — and I'm really excited that Galactus is opening a store here soon.

Mono-Blue Dreadnought was the first deck I built in Premodern. Since then I've built and played twenty or so others, and the best part of learning each one has been seeing it through the eyes of the experts who wrote primers about it. I love reading them: the Naya Terrageddon guide, the hFEB guide, Robert Luemers's Xerox Tog primer, the Stasis guide, Dr. Suiss's Replenish primer, the Burn Ward sideboard guide and more — they are all in Resources, and many of the ideas in these pages started there. What always made me a little sad was that the Dreadnought had no primer like them. The closest thing was Dvraska's Blue Shrimp primer, the deck's bible in the Parallax Tide era, which went stale when Tide was banned.

So this is my attempt to write everything I know about the deck down for others to read. I've played it for years, mostly casually, though I'm going to try to make it to Duress Fest in 2027 — a tall ask for the father of a nine-month-old. What I know, I learned from some of the best players of the deck: across the table, on streams and in videos. It isn't only my own games, either. The numbers in these pages come from a database I keep of every tournament list registered since the Parallax Tide ban, nearly seventeen

thousand of them; Resources says where they come from. And the sideboard plans owe a lot to The Shrimp, the Premodern Dreadnought Discord, whose players discussed them with me and helped me review the first drafts.

I wrote the first version of this primer with the help of Claude Code. It interviewed me at length, turned a very long brain dump into the chapters you're reading, and drafted the text from it. I reviewed and corrected every section, and every practice puzzle was checked line by line by independent AI reviewers. The mistakes that remain are mine.

Where to start. If you're new to the deck, read the combo and the glossary in the next chapter, then How the deck plays and Mulligans, and finish with the practice puzzles. If you already play it, start with the puzzles to see how you do, then dig into the card entries and the matchups, and keep the census of answers to the Dreadnought as a reference.

This is a living document. I'm not the best pilot of the deck — I'm not even close — and there are certainly places where I'm wrong. When you find one, start a conversation about it — I'm Flario on The Shrimp, or open an issue — so that the primer keeps getting better.

What this deck is, and where it stands

Mono-Blue Dreadnought, also called Stiflenought after its two key cards, is the most-registered archetype in Premodern since the Parallax Tide ban. In my database of every tournament list from January to October 2026, it is ahead of Sligh, Goblins and Enchantress. It wins with a one-mana 12/12 trampler whose drawback is answered by a one-mana instant, protects that with the cheapest counter suite in the format, and does it on seventeen basic Islands: mana that is consistent, works with every blue card in the deck, and is hard for the opponent's mana denial to attack.

Where it is played matters more than how much. As of October 2026, it is the most played and best-performing deck online: roughly one list in seven, with a match win rate near 60% across thousands of recorded matches, and at the 138-player MTGO Championship Week Finals it won and put four lists in the top 12.

In paper it is a good deck rather than the best one: about one list in twenty, fifth most played, with a match win rate under 50% and no top-16 finish from thirty-one lists at the 326-player Lobstercon. That one surprised me as much as anyone: many players went in with a plan not to lose to the Dreadnought, and it worked. It is the deck to beat, in a format balanced enough that beating it is a plan people can carry out. What it does in paper is convert at big events — it makes the top 8 at about one and a half times its share of the field at tournaments of 100 or more, the best conversion of any deck — with wins at the Portuguese Nationals (on the UW build), Bogardan War II and the European Championship, and top 8s at the Danish and UK Nationals, the New England Regional and the Italian Nationals. Since the ban it has won well over a hundred events of all sizes.

So: the deck to beat online, a top-five deck in paper, and the deck most likely to turn a big-event entry into a top 8.

The combo, before anything else. The game is about casting a Dreadnought and having the trigger do nothing. Every chapter after this one is detail on top of three cards.



then



or



Cast it
For one mana. Its trigger — sacrifice it unless you sacrifice creatures with twelve power — goes on the stack. Everything happens while that trigger is waiting to resolve.

Stifle the trigger
It is countered, and the Dreadnought simply stays: a 12/12 trampler for two mana.

Charm the Dreadnought
It phases out, the trigger resolves on nothing, and it phases back in at your next untap step, untriggered — the same 12/12, with the Charm doubling as protection against removal cast in response.

The whole deck is in this picture. Eight enablers for four Dreadnoughts; the other 48 cards find the pieces and protect the turn.

Nine words the rest of the primer leans on.

- *Enabler*: Stifle or Vision Charm, the card that makes the trigger do nothing.
- *Jam*: cast the Dreadnought as early as the hand allows and race.
- *Build-up*: trade your interaction for their key cards until your hand has outgrown theirs, then commit once with everything.
- *Commit turn*: the turn you cast the Dreadnought with the intent of keeping it.
- *Plan B* or *the Freeze plan*: cut the Dreadnoughts and win by milling with Brain Freeze.
- *Storm*: the number of spells cast before Brain Freeze in the same turn, by either player; each one is a copy that mills three more.
- *The pitch*: the Island and the card Foil discards instead of paying its mana.
- *Xerox*: cheap cantrips standing in for lands, which is why the deck runs seventeen.

The argument for the deck is mana efficiency on interaction turns. Dreadnought costs one. Stifle and Vision Charm cost one. Daze, Foil, Gush and Thwart cost nothing. The opponent's answers — Swords, a Blast, a counter, a sweeper — cost as much or more, and they have to find that mana on turns when they also want to develop. Played well, the window in which they can interact gets compressed until they can't.

What it does well:

- A combo that is fast and redundant: four Dreadnoughts, eight enablers, and a two-attack clock.
- Mana that is consistent and works with the spells. Seventeen Islands cast everything on curve, and they are part of the free spells: Daze returns one, Foil pitches one, Gush and Thwart return two and three. Wasteland and the other answers to nonbasics have nothing to hit; what still hurts is the land destruction that hits any land — Stone Rain, Armageddon, Choke — and Rishadan Port, which taps an Island like any other land.
- A counter-dense shell — Counterspell plus seven free counters in Foil, Daze and Thwart — with eleven cantrips, Gush and Flash of Insight to sculpt hands.
- Three real game plans in one 75: jam, control into a protected Dreadnought, or mill with Brain Freeze. The sideboard reshapes the deck rather than patching it.

What beats it: cheap threats that pressure you before your hand comes together, boards that assemble quickly and take over the game, decks that bring many answers to the Dreadnought, and lock pieces that tax or stop your spells. Against one of those that has few threats of its own, or a deck that casts enough spells to build the storm for you, Brain Freeze is often the better plan, on its own or beside the Dreadnought; that is why it is in the 75. The chapter on every answer to the Dreadnought and the matchups name the cards.

















History: from Tidenought to the jam

The deck you'll meet today took shape after the Parallax Tide ban in January 2026. Before that, the standard list was a control-combo deck built around Parallax Tide, and almost everything written about it from that era describes a different deck.

The Tide era. The standard list ran sixteen Islands, two Mishra's Factory, and three Parallax Tide in the sideboard, often alongside Misdirection and sometimes Accumulated Knowledge. Tide with Stifle on the return trigger was a one-sided Armageddon, and it gave the deck a third mode beside jamming and building up: tide the opponent out of lands and win with Factory or an unopposed Dreadnought. Factory was there as a Tide-proof win condition against Stasis and control, and Misdirection won the counter wars. In 2025 Stiflenought, Replenish and Tide Control were about one registered list in six between them, and the ban announcement put the three at 30% of top 8s at events of 65 or more players.









The ban. Premodern was added to Magic Online in mid-December 2025. On January 18, 2026, Martin Berlin banned Parallax Tide, citing the play pattern rather than raw win rate: the card was a one-sided Armageddon showing up as a plan in several unrelated archetypes. The expectation at the time was that Replenish and Tide Control would suffer most and Stiflenought least, since Tide was a sideboard plan for it rather than a maindeck one. That is how it played out.

The jam came first. Jamming the Dreadnought wasn't new. Dave Kaplan's jam build, which resolves a Dreadnought, protects it and spends every slot on that, existed before Tidenought, and after the ban it is the strategy the deck went back to. With one difference: Kaplan's build has no plan B at all, and the lists that took over didn't commit to the jam alone. They replaced Tide's plan B with another one, Brain Freeze.

After the ban. Without Tide there was no reason to play a slower game, and the deck got leaner. Factory left, because it was only ever there to win through Tide and because every free spell in the deck wants Islands. Misdirection went the other way: it moved from the sideboard into most main decks. The sideboard reorganized around three cards that were fringe before and standard now — Brain Freeze, Essence Flare and Tsabo's Web — with Dominate and Back to Basics as the minority choices. Accumulated Knowledge stayed where it was, in about a quarter of lists. Four builds settled out over 2026; the next chapter describes them.



Brain Freeze is the plan B that took Tide's place. A no-AK list rarely out-cards an opponent who brings many answers to a 12/12 and few threats, so against those decks it stops trying and takes their library instead. Nearly every sideboard now holds two Freeze; the question the builds split on is whether one belongs in the main.

Versions of the deck: builds and splashes

Four builds of the mono-blue deck exist, and three splashes. The builds first; what separates them is how they plan to win the long game.

1. The default build: no AK, two or three Daze, Misdirection main, no main-deck Brain Freeze. This is the majority of Mono-Blue Dreadnought lists, and it is the stock list because of two Brazilian MTGO grinders, SpockVidaLoka and LuffyDoChapeuDePalha, who have top-16'd and won Premodern Challenges with it throughout 2026 — Spock took the 138-player Championship Week Finals with it — and whose exact 75 is now shared by well over a hundred registered lists. When people say "the stock list" they mean theirs.

2. The Accumulated Knowledge build: four AK, usually with two or three Daze and no Misdirection. About a quarter of lists: a card-advantage version that wins the long game against control and the mirror on cards rather than on Freeze.

3. The Freeze-main builds: a minority of lists put a Brain Freeze in the main deck. This primer's exact class — no AK, two or three Daze, no Misdirection, Freeze main — is a small one, and its most common 75 is Simone Fierro's European Championship winner.

4. The jam build: Dave Kaplan's. No Brain Freeze and no plan B at all; the long game is won by resolving a Dreadnought, and every slot serves that. Reality Ripple as a fifth and sixth enabler that also phases out a blocker or a land, Intuition to find three Dreadnoughts or three Stifles, and a sideboard built on Essence Flare and Back to Basics rather than Freeze. It gives up the mill plan for consistency at the one thing the deck does best, and it is the build this list's sideboard philosophy descends from.

This primer is written for the Freeze-main build, with the Spock and Luffy sideboard, which has come round to the jam build's Back to Basics. The splashes are a different question — not how to win the long game but whether to give up the mana base to answer the deck's weaknesses — and the rest of this chapter is the case for not doing that.

The deck is a xerox deck — cantrips standing in for lands; the 17 Islands entry explains it — and that only works because every land is an Island, and because nearly every free spell in the deck is paid for with Islands.

- Daze returns an Island. Thwart returns three. Gush returns two. Foil pitches one, plus a card.
- Back to Basics, your own sideboard card, needs them all to be basic.
- Wasteland and Dust Bowl have no targets, and the opponent's Back to Basics is blank. Port still works — of the land-based denial, it is the card that does the most against this deck. Back to Basics locks a Port after one use, but a three-mana enchantment is the wrong way to fight a card that slows your first two turns; against a deck that pairs Port with many other nonbasics, it earns its slot.



Every nonbasic you add is a card that can't pay for Daze or Thwart, can't be the Island Foil pitches, and gives the opponent's Wasteland a target. A two-land Daze hand is a keep in the mono version and a mulligan in a two-color one.

What the splashes buy. White and black are the powerful splashes, because each adds proactive disruption and a second plan rather than just removal. Red makes a different deck. All three pay the same price.

White (Adarkar Wastes and fetches) adds Enlightened Tutor as Dreadnoughts five through eight — it also finds Keg, Web and Back to Basics — plus Swords to Plowshares, Meddling Mage as a proactive lock piece, and Disenchant or Seal for Sphere, Confinement and Grid. The costs beyond the mana: Mage is a second creature to protect in a deck built to protect one, and Tutor is card disadvantage in a deck that wins on resources against control.

Black (Underground River, Polluted Delta) adds Duress to clear the answer before the jam, Smother and Diabolic Edict for creatures, and a Psychatog pivot in the sideboard: against decks that load up on artifact removal post-board, bring in Togs and win with a creature none of it touches. The pivot needs enough black sources to cast 1UB on turn three, which pulls the base further from Islands.

Red (Shivan Reef) adds Fling — throw the Dreadnought at their face with the trigger on the stack, twelve damage for three mana, Dreadnought included, and no enabler needed — with Fire/Ice and Bolt for Mage, Swarm and Lackey, and Pyroblast for the mirror and blue control. This is an all-in combo deck with two kill routes rather than a splash: it gives up the control posture, the counter wars and most of the build-up plan; and its answers to Mage, Swarm and Lackey do jobs Flare and Keg already do in the mono sideboard.

The shared cost is the one above — every painland and fetch is a land the free spells can't use and Wasteland can — and one more: every non-blue spell is a card Flash of Insight can't exile, so each one you add makes the deck's flashback card advantage weaker.

The mono-blue case is that the sideboard patches the same gaps for free. Essence Flare, Keg and the Blasts handle the small creatures; Annul, Chain and Keg handle the permanents; Brain Freeze is the second plan the black version gets from Tog. None of them ask you to play a land that isn't an Island. UW and UB Stiflenought are real decks and win events; they trade the thing no other deck in the format has — a mana base the free spells run on — for cards several decks have.


Enlightened Tutor
Instant
Search your library for an artifact or enchantment card and reveal that card to all players. Shuffle your library and put the revealed card back on top of it.
"I do not teach. I simply reveal."
—Daudi, Femeref tutor
Illus. Dan Frazier


Swords to Plowshares
Instant
Target creature is removed from game entirely, return to owner's deck only when game is over. Creature's controller gains life points equal to creature's power.
Illus. © Jeff A. Menges


Duress
Sorcery
Look at target opponent's hand and choose a noncreature, nonland card there. That player discards that card.
"We decide who is worthy of our works."
—Gix, Yawgmoth praetor
Illus. Lawrence Snelly


Psychatog
Creature — Atog
Discard a card from your hand: Psychatog gets +1/+1 until end of turn.
Remove two cards in your graveyard from the game: Psychatog gets +1/+1 until end of turn.
Illus. Edward P. Beard, Jr.
1/2


Fling
Instant
Sacrifice a creature: Fling deals damage equal to the sacrificed creature's power to target creature or player.
It's raining rats and moggs.
Illus. Paolo Parente


Ice
Instant
Tap target permanent.
Draw a card.
Fire
Instant
Fire deals 2 damage divided as you choose among any number of target creatures and/or players.
Illus. David Martin


Lightning Bolt
Instant
Lightning Bolt does 3 damage to one target.
Illus. © Christopher Rush


Pyroblast
Interrupt
Counter target spell if it is blue or destroy target permanent if it is blue.
"Just the thing for those pesky water mages."
—Jaya Ballard, Task Mage
Illus. Kaja Foglio


Adarkar Wastes
Land
: Add 1 to your mana pool.
: Add to your mana pool.
Adarkar Wastes deals 1 damage to you.
: Add to your mana pool.
Adarkar Wastes deals 1 damage to you.
Illus. Mike Raabe


Underground River
Land
: Add 1 to your mana pool.
: Add to your mana pool.
Underground River deals 1 damage to you.
: Add to your mana pool.
Underground River deals 1 damage to you.
Illus. NENE Thomas


Shivan Reef
Land
: Add one colorless mana to your mana pool.
: Add or to your mana pool.
Shivan Reef deals 1 damage to you.
Illus. Rob Alexander


Windswept Heath
Land
, Pay 1 life, Sacrifice Windswept Heath: Search your library for a forest or plains card and put it into play. Then shuffle your library.
Illus. Anthony S. Waters

The list

This is the Spock and Luffy list with one change: Brain Freeze in the Misdirection slot. Their earlier lists ran Tsabo's Web where this one has Back to Basics; lately they register Back to Basics too, so the sideboards now match. The Freeze over Misdirection is a minority choice; the Brain Freeze entry in the card analysis makes the case for it.

Main deck, 60



Sideboard, 15



Main deck (60)

4 Phyrexian Dreadnought	4 Counterspell	4 Gush
4 Stifle	4 Foil	4 Portent
4 Vision Charm	2 Daze	4 Opt
1 Chain of Vapor	1 Thwart	2 Impulse
1 Powder Keg	2 Flash of Insight	1 Peek
1 Brain Freeze	17 Island	

Sideboard (15)

3 Annul	2 Brain Freeze
2 Back to Basics	1 Chain of Vapor
2 Blue Elemental Blast	3 Essence Flare
2 Hydroblast	

The choices this 75 makes. The main-deck Brain Freeze is the flex slot, Misdirection in most lists. The sideboard Chain could be main and the main Keg in the side; I play them this way round. Back to Basics over Tsabo's Web is the one sideboard call the matchups below argue for at length. The third Daze is the card most often argued over in this build, and I play two. From here on the primer treats the 75 as fixed: the card analysis explains why each card is in it, and the matchups never ask you to change it.

How the deck plays

You only have to be one turn faster than your opponent. Everything about sequencing follows from deciding, early, which turn that is.

Three modes. Most games, and nearly all post-board games, are one of these three, and most sideboarding is choosing between them. Jam is the proactive mode: you present the threat and make them answer it. Freeze is the reactive one: you answer their threats and win off their library. Build-up sits between the two: you trade your interaction for their key cards until your hand has outgrown theirs, then commit once.

Mode	Against	The turn	What you hold	What you cut
Jam	Low-interaction aggro, fast combo	Dreadnought by turn two to four with whatever protection the hand allows; the race is the whole game	Enablers, Daze and Foil	Flash, Thwart, Freeze
Build-up	Heavy interaction with a slow clock	Turn five or later: hit land drops, hold Gush and the Flash flashback, cast Portent so its draw lands after your discard step, go to ten or eleven cards against their seven, then commit once with everything	Gush, Flash, Foil for the commit turn	A Dreadnought or two, so the first one goes the distance
Freeze	Decks with many answers to a 12/12 after boarding and few threats of their own, or decks that build the storm for you, like Enchantress	When the storm is there and a Stifle for their reshuffle (Gaea's Blessing) is in hand	Charms, Gush, the Freezes	Most of the Dreadnoughts; some stay as action they must answer

The hand-size edge. Your opponent can hold seven cards. Fact or Fiction and Standstill are worth less to a player already holding seven: whatever they draw past that, they discard. If you win over several turns they cash those in; if you win in one Dreadnought cycle they cannot have the mana for all their draw and all their answers at once. So against control you leave Gush in hand and Flash in the yard until the turn you go, then draw to ten and play through.





Mana on the interaction turn. Gush on the commit turn costs you nothing you need that turn, returns two Islands to pitch to Foil, and leaves you with the mana for Counterspell. A sample line from a stalled

board at five lands each: Portent on your turn, its draw arriving after your discard step, flash back Flash of Insight at their end step, untap and draw to ten, Dreadnought, they counter, you counter back, they counter again, Gush and pitch-Foil to win the fight, then Charm the Dreadnought with its trigger on the stack, which also takes it out of reach of their Swords. You end with a phased-out Dreadnought, four lands and seven cards; they end with five lands and four cards. That is usually enough to protect it the next turn.









When to commit. Use your cantrips before committing unless you are under a clock. Count their answers: Peek is in the deck for exactly this. Stifle is the enabler, Vision Charm is the enabler that also protects, and Counterspell has three jobs — protect the combo, buy tempo on their development, and, against combo decks, stop their win condition — that you choose between every turn.

Why the cantrips come first. The combo costs two cards before it does anything: a Dreadnought and an enabler. If they answer the Dreadnought, you have handed them a two-for-one, and the deck has little to win those cards back — Gush and Flash of Insight, and not much else. Aim for the first Dreadnought you cast to be the last. So when the hand holds the combo and an Impulse, cast the Impulse and wait a turn. In that turn they draw one card, and it is rarely the answer; the Impulse, looking at four, very likely finds the Foil, the Counterspell or the Charm that makes the Dreadnought stick. Waiting improves your hand much more than theirs. The exceptions are a clock, and a lock piece — a Meddling Mage, a Sphere of Resistance — that is about to land and shut the combo off.

The clock is two swings. A Dreadnought kills in two attacks, so the commit turn has to come at least two turns before they would kill you, and that takes combat math. They can add creatures and race your two attacks with theirs, or chump-block to stretch your clock to three turns. Within that limit, go as late as you safely can: every draw step makes the hand better.

Answers on the stack and answers on the battlefield. Most blue decks, the mirror included, hold far more counters than ways to remove a resolved 12/12. A Dreadnought that lands before their counter defense is ready — early, or while they are tapped out — is much harder for them to deal with than one cast into open mana. That is the case for an early jam against a blue deck.

Your draws are better than theirs. With seventeen lands and eleven cantrips, more of your draws are spells, and most of your spells draw, counter or protect. A control or midrange deck plays more lands and has less selection. So a counter that trades with their key threat — a Terravore, an Exalted Angel — can

buy you several draw steps, each worth more than theirs, until the hand has more protection than they have answers. And a Swords on your Dreadnought gives you twelve life, which buys the time for the next one.

Card analysis: the combo and the counters

Every card in the 60 gets one entry here: why it is in the list, then how to play it. The two enablers are the deck's most flexible cards and the lines that win lost games come from knowing every mode, so their entries are the longest; the most complex lines depend on knowing what the card can do before the situation asks for it.

Phyrexian Dreadnought (4)



The threat, and the reason the deck exists: a one-mana 12/12 trampler that ends the game in two attacks. Cast it when you can protect it fully, or when you can't wait. Against control it is a card you hold until the hand is sculpted; against aggro it is the first thing you do. It is an artifact creature, so Duress can't take it and Vision Charm can phase it out of a Swords, an Edict, a Deed or a Wrath.

How to play it. The trigger is the whole card: when the Dreadnought enters, its ability goes on the stack, and you sacrifice it when the ability resolves unless you sacrifice twelve power. Everything happens while it waits. You respond with Stifle or Charm; the opponent responds too, with a Blast or a Counterspell on your enabler, which kills the Dreadnought, or with a Chain on the Dreadnought itself, which returns it to your hand: you keep the card, though an enabler already spent is gone — don't fight that one.

Cast the second copy to untap the first: sacrifice the tapped one to the new trigger, which matters for blocking and under Stasis. A phased-out Dreadnought stays under your control the whole time, so it is not summoning sick when it returns: a Charmed Dreadnought attacks the turn it phases in.

Read the Oracle text, not the printed card. The original printing says to bury the Dreadnought; the Oracle text, which is what the rules use, says you sacrifice it unless you sacrifice twelve power. The difference matters when an opponent steals it with the trigger on the stack. The trigger is still yours, and when it resolves it tells you to sacrifice the Dreadnought — but a player can't sacrifice a permanent they don't control, so nothing happens, and they keep a 12/12 that never has to be fed. Dominate in response to the trigger is the way this comes up. Chain your own Dreadnought in response to Swords or Vindicate when you have no Charm; it costs a turn and a second enabler but keeps the card. (A Keg at 1 can still be cracked with the Dreadnought out — see the Powder Keg entry.)

After sideboarding. When the plan is to go off on turn five or later, trim it: a hand with two Dreadnoughts and one enabler is a hand that two-for-ones itself. When the plan is Freeze, keep some: a Dreadnought on the stack is action the opponent has to answer, and either the answer comes and the way to a Freeze turn opens, or it doesn't and the 12/12 ends the game. An opponent who knows you have cut all four can prepare for the Freeze turn, or simply stop casting spells. The exception is a deck that has to cast spells and draw cards to function and has no way to win without doing so — Enchantress and Replenish, which can't win without Opalescence and can't mill you first — and there all four can go.

Stifle (4)



The enabler that does everything else. Half the format runs on activated and triggered abilities, and a one-mana instant that counters any of them is, in the right spots, a Stone Rain, a Disenchant, a removal spell or a counterspell for their best card. Stifle count scales with Dreadnought count when you trim, except where it has a job of its own: Blessing decks, Freeze mirrors, and anything built on abilities.

Beyond the Dreadnought trigger. The targets, roughly in order of how often they come up.

- Their removal. Seal of Cleansing is the white deck's second-commonest Dreadnought answer after Swords, and it is an activation: sacrifice the Seal, destroy the artifact. Stifle it and the Seal is gone, the Dreadnought isn't, and the sacrifice is already paid. Aura of Silence's second mode and Seal of Removal work the same way. So does their Powder Keg cracked at 1 with your Dreadnought on the table: Stifle keeps the Dreadnought and costs them the Keg.
- Their engines. Hermit Druid. Altar of Dementia, so the sacrificed Devourer is wasted. Recurring Nightmare, where they lose the sacrificed creature and get nothing back. Goblin Welder's exchange. Tradewind Rider. Pernicious Deed. Survival of the Fittest is a different case. You never want the card itself to resolve — it is too powerful — so counter it on the way down whenever you can. Once it is on the battlefield, though, Stifling its activation is rarely worth the Stifle: it costs them one green mana and a card they wanted to discard anyway. When you have no answer to the Survival, Stifle what it finds instead — the Orangutan's or the Vigilante's trigger: they get the body, and the threat to the Dreadnought is gone until they find another one, and most lists run one or two.
- Their mana. A turn-one Stifle on a Delta or a Strand against a fifteen- to nineteen-land Gush deck is a Stone Rain, and it is the most tempting play in the deck. Save it for the times it is an advantage you can name. You are fighting on the stack and the fetch is what pays for the next spell, the one you can't answer: Stifle it. They have missed land drops and the land they finally found is a fetch: Stifle it. You kept a hand with three Stifles and one Dreadnought: Stifle it. Otherwise the Stifle has better uses coming, and a turn-one Stone Rain against a deck that makes its land drops is one enabler fewer for the turn that matters.
- Their lock. Forsaken City's upkeep untap, so Stasis can't be paid for — against a player who isn't playing around it; see the Stasis matchup for the sequence that does. Gaea's Blessing's shuffle, the most common answer to a Freeze. Their own Brain Freeze's storm trigger: the original resolves, the copies never exist.
- Madness. Stifle the trigger and the card stays exiled: an Arrogant Wurm or a Rootwalla that is never cast, for one mana.
- Creatures that are nothing without their ability. Lackey's damage trigger. Vigilante's flip, Orangutan's entry trigger, and Deranged Hermit's — four Squirrels that never arrive, and a 1/1 they still have to pay

echo on. Siege-Gang's tokens. Mother of Runes, the Shapeshifter's discard activation, a Psychatog pump, a Tinkerer activation aimed at the Dreadnought.

- The rest. the soldiers from Decree's cycling trigger, when they have the mana for three or more, Eternal Dragon's return, Specter's discard, Yavimaya Elder's death trigger, an Oath trigger, a Portent's delayed draw.

What it can't touch. Mana abilities never use the stack, so Lotus Petal, Priest of Titania, Rofellos, Gaea's Cradle and Elvish Spirit Guide are not targets, and neither is a Mox. Static abilities aren't abilities on the stack either: Sphere of Resistance, Humility and Chill can't be Stifled. Replacement effects aren't either — Sutured Ghoul's "as it enters, exile creature cards" never uses the stack, so the Ghoul arrives at full size whatever you hold. And nor can a cost already paid — the Seal's sacrifice is paid before you respond, which is exactly why Stifling it costs them the Seal. Fetchlands are targets because their ability isn't a mana ability.



















Vision Charm (4)



The enabler that also protects: in response to the trigger, or in response to removal, or in response to a Welder exchange or an Oath trigger. It phases out their Dreadnought or Mox too, fogs a turn on defense, and mills four with Brain Freeze. It is good in every Freeze plan for the mill mode, but not always necessary: against decks that go through their own library fast — Enchantress — the four cards it mills matter less than the slot, and against Gaea's Blessing every mill can flip the shuffle, so two can go and Stifle matters more.

Mode one: an artifact phases out. The rules first. A phased-out permanent is treated as though it doesn't exist: it can't be targeted, doesn't count as a creature for Oath or Edict, and doesn't take Wrath. It phases in during its controller's untap step, and since its controller kept it the whole time, it comes back ready to attack. Under Stasis there is no untap step, so it never comes back — your own Dreadnought included, so don't Charm it under Stasis unless you mean to lose it. Auras and counters on it phase out with it.

- Your Dreadnought, in response to its trigger or to removal — Swords, a Wrath, a Deed, an Edict, a Welder exchange. Phasing out dodges all of them.

- Your Powder Keg, or a Tsabo's Web in the lists that run it, in response to Disenchant, Naturalize or Overload. The removal fizzles, the Keg phases back in at your untap with its counters, and they are down the card.
- Their Dreadnought, in the mirror, to win the race or to fog a turn.
- Under Stasis, their Black Vise. There is no untap step, so it never phases back in.
- Prison pieces at their end step: Ensnaring Bridge, Sphere of Resistance, Tangle Wire, Winter Orb. Defense Grid is the one prison piece Charm answers badly: the Grid only taxes you on their turn, and a Grid phased out at their end step is back at their untap, so it was never in your way; on their turn the Charm itself costs four. Annul it on cast, Keg it at 2, or Chain it. A Mox, to turn off a color for a turn.
- An animated Mishra's Factory, for tempo.



Mode two: a player mills four.

- The mill plan. Three Charms mill twelve. A first Brain Freeze as the fourth spell mills twelve more, a second as the fifth spell mills fifteen. Thirty-nine cards for seven mana, no Gush required.
- Mill yourself. In a lost position with five mana: Charm your own library hoping to hit a Flash of Insight, flash it back, find the Counterspell. A long shot. The deck's job in a lost position is to find the out.
- Against Gaea's Blessing decks every mill is a coin flip; hold Stifle for the trigger.
- Against decks that care about the order of their graveyard. Volrath's Shapeshifter has the full text of the top card of its controller's graveyard as long as that card is a creature card, and the Hermit decks line it up so that it enters as a Palinchron or a Karmic Guide and gets the enters-the-battlefield trigger. With the Shapeshifter on the stack, mill them four: if none of the four is a creature, the Shapeshifter enters as itself, and if any is, they choose which goes on top and it enters as that — unless the mill hands them another copy of what they set up, the trigger never happens. And the Hermit decks run Krosan Reclamation to shuffle cards back into an emptied library; after the Reclamation resolves, mill them again.

- After they Portent themselves. They have just arranged their next three draws; four cards off the top sends all of them to the graveyard and gives them three random ones instead. This is the same class of play as Stifling a fetchland: it costs you an enabler or a protection spell, so it is wrong most of the time, and right when you are ahead on cards, board or mana and the job is to stop them catching up. Keep it in mind for exactly that spot.









Mode three: lands of one type become a basic type of your choice until end of turn. The mode with the most text and the least use, and the one that wins the strangest games. It changes every land of the type you name on the table, theirs and yours, and nothing else. In Premodern the only lands with a basic land type are the basics themselves — there are no dual lands, shocklands or anything else that carries "Island" or "Mountain" in its type line — so painlands, fetchlands, Factories, Ports, Forsaken City and most other nonbasics are untouched. The exceptions are the Lairs and the Urza's lands: the type you name doesn't have to be basic, and Lair and Urza's are land types. Against a deck on painlands and fetches, the mode does nothing to their mana.

- Against Goblins with a Siege-Gang Commander, turn their Mountains into Islands at the beginning of combat, before they attack. They can float the red mana in response, but it empties before attackers are declared, so every shot they fire sacrifices a Goblin that then won't attack (and won't pump a Piledriver); they can't have both the combat damage and the shots. Wait until the attack and the floated mana can still go into shots before blocks.

- Against Mono-Blue Frantic Storm, in response to the untapper — Snap, Cloud of Faeries, Frantic Search — turn their Islands into Mountains. The lands untap into the wrong color, nothing blue can be cast off them, and the turn dies.

- A turn's delay. When Peek shows a sorcery-speed threat that needs a color from their basics, turn those basics into Islands on their turn and the spell waits a turn.

- Lairs. Name Lair, and every Lair on the table becomes an Island until end of turn. When a Rith's Grove is their only source of a color, it taps for blue instead, and the spell that needed it waits a turn.

- Tron. UW Tron is rare, but you can meet it. Name Urza's and Mountain in their upkeep, and the Mine, the Power Plant and the Tower become Mountains: three red mana instead of seven colorless, for the

turn. Mana they float in response empties at the end of the upkeep.

- Splashes with no lands. Simone Fierro won the European Championship with Tranquil Domain in the sideboard and no green source, Charming Islands into Forests to cast it.



Counterspell (4)

The deck's hard counter, and the card you trade one for one with most often. It has two jobs, and every turn you hold it you are choosing between them. The first is protecting the combo: the Counterspell for their answer to the Dreadnought, or for the counter they point at your enabler. The second is tempo — countering their development so that the game is still winnable when you combo. The second job is the one people underrate, because sticking a Dreadnought is not the end of the game: you still have to deal twenty before you are dead, and a board you let resolve can race a 12/12 or gang-block it to death. So there are turns when the right Counterspell target is a 3/3, not because the 3/3 beats you but because the clock it adds does, and reading those turns is most of what playing the card well means. It almost never leaves the deck.

How to play it. Counter the card that beats you, not the card in front of you: an engine over a threat, a removal spell aimed at the Dreadnought over a creature, and never a cantrip unless the storm count is the point. In a counter war, count before you start — their free counters against yours, their mana against yours — and remember that the Dreadnought trigger is already on the stack, so you only need the last

word. In the mirror, countering the Dreadnought is the default and the conservative choice: it is one of four, while an enabler is one of eight. When you are heavy on countermagic there can be value in fighting over the enabler instead and stripping enablers out of their hand — but every spell in that fight lengthens the storm chain, and a long chain is what their Brain Freeze is waiting for. Weigh it each time. And when the Counterspell mana is up and nothing worth countering comes, that mana becomes an end-of-turn Opt or Impulse.



Foil (4)

Foil's cost is cards, and it is at its best in the plans where cards are not the resource that matters. There are two. Against decks with many answers to a Dreadnought, the plan is often to overload those answers on the commit turn: tap out for Dreadnought and enabler and still counter their Swords and their Disenchant for nothing. You go down two cards for each Foil and it doesn't matter if the Dreadnought connects. And on Freeze plans, the best Freeze turns end a long counter war; every Foil in that war is a spell cast for zero mana that adds to the storm count, and the war needs Foil beside Counterspell to be winnable at all. Pair it with Gush on the commit turn: the two returned Islands are the pitch and the rest of the hand stays as interaction. Foil is trimmed where the pitch cost spends the resource they are attacking — Islands against land destruction and Sphere, cards against heavy discard — and where the game is attrition with no commit turn to overload.



How to play it. Count the interaction left after the pitch. Draw to eight, Dreadnought and Stifle, pitch-cast Foil: three cards remain. Do the same with a Gush in the middle: six remain. The Gush pays for the Foil twice, once in Islands and once in cards. The pitch needs an Island in hand, and the deck has three cards that put one there — Daze, Thwart and Gush. When you hold none of them, it is often right to keep an Island in hand rather than play it, so that Foil stays online: a land drop you don't need is worth less than a free counter you might.

When to pitch it. A pitched Foil is three cards for their one: the Foil, the Island and the other card. So pick the spot. Spend it to protect a Dreadnought that is going to win you the game, or to stop a threat that would win them the game. Against anything you can answer another way — a Counterspell or an early Daze on the stack, a Keg once it lands, or Chain of Vapor and a counter when they recast it, two cards for their one — pitching it is often wrong, unless letting it resolve loses you the game on the spot. The main deck has Keg and Chain for the permanents that get through, and the sideboard has many more answers.

Sylvan Library is the common example. It is a strong card: with fetchlands and other shuffle effects the selection alone is a real advantage, and some players will pay for extra cards even when it puts them in range of a single Dreadnought hit — a hard trade-off for them, but theirs to make. Either way it isn't worth three of your cards. And they play more than one. A second Library adds little while the first is on the battlefield, so it is close to a dead card in their hand; Foil the first, and that dead card becomes the Library you spent three cards to stop. Counter it one for one, with a Counterspell, an early Daze or an Annul, and keep the Foil for a spell that matters more.

And as the game goes on, Foil stops being only a pitch spell. At four or five lands it is a Counterspell you can hard-cast for 2UU, and from then on the question each turn is which of the two costs is cheaper for you right now. The same arithmetic applies to Thwart, whose four mana is the easier cost once you have it.

Two rules on the alternative costs: Sphere of Resistance adds one to them, so Daze, Foil, Gush and Thwart all cost a mana under Sphere; and Defense Grid adds three to spells cast on the opponent's turn, alternative costs included, so under Grid the free counters only work on your own turn.

Daze (2)



The free counter that makes a turn-two Dreadnought on the play work: they Annul, you Daze returning the tapped Island, they can't pay. In game one it bridges to Counterspell mana against Mage, Sphere and Lackey, and it catches a Terrageddon player's early Mox Diamond or Sylvan Library before you have two Islands up. Whether it stays after sideboarding is a read, not a rule; the Daze counts in the matchup rows are defaults. Opponents try to sneak value engines and cheap threats in before your Counterspell mana is up, and on the play they are often forced to play those into Daze; keep copies on the play unless the plan is a very long, grindy game. If Daze obliterated them in game one they will respect it and play around it, and it comes out. If they tapped out and disrespected it all match, it comes back in for the games you're on the play.

How to play it. Return the tapped Island, not the untapped one, so the Stifle mana is still there — and if every Island is untapped, tap one for mana first and return that one; the mana stays in your pool until the end of the step, the same trick as Gush. Daze a spell you don't care about just to get an Island for Foil. Daze your own cantrip when the storm count needs the spell more than you need the card. Keep count of how many Dazes are left in the deck and whether they have tapped out; those are outs you are drawing to, not just cards.

One trap: Elvish Spirit Guide. The Hermit decks — Full English Breakfast, Angry Hermit — run it, and a tapped-out opponent with a Guide in hand exiles it to pay for Daze and keeps the Hermit. Against them, tapped out is not tapped out until you've seen the hand.





Thwart (1)

A hard counter that costs three Islands or four mana, and a free counter that feeds Foil: the three Islands it returns are three pitches. That is its best mode — overloading a turn with interaction, Thwart and then Foil and then Foil again off the same lands, more counters than they have answers. Beyond that it is at its best against the decks that attack your lands, where it counters the Armageddon outright or, in response to a Thermokarst, takes the targeted Island home; and against Stasis, where three tapped Islands returned to hand are an untapped land drop a turn and two Foil pitches; and as a topdeck after discard, since it needs Islands on the table rather than cards in hand. It is at its worst in tempo games, where giving back three land drops loses, and where Gush is the engine and the two cards compete for the same Islands. In the mirror it stops only one storm copy of a Freeze, where Stifle stops them all, but hard-cast it still counters the Dreadnought or the card-advantage spell.



How to play it. Tap the Islands for mana before you return them; the mana stays until the end of the step. In response to an Armageddon you can't counter, three Islands go home and survive it, to be replayed one a turn. Against a Port deck, returning Islands you were going to lose a turn of anyway is nearly free.









Card analysis: the engine and the utility

Gush (4)



Free card advantage that also pays for Foil — but only if the cards stay in your hand. Gush is how the deck refills after it has spent its hand, and a Gush cast into a full hand you aren't about to unload just draws two and discards two at end of turn: selection, not advantage. The question before every Gush is whether the two cards survive your discard step. Hold it. With five cards and no land drop you can Gush without discarding. With fewer than five, Gush is your refill: save it for the turn you have no land drop and no cantrip to cast, so it isn't spent on a job another card could do. Against control it waits for the commit turn; against land destruction it waits for the commit turn too, because returning Islands into Thermokarst is how you lose. Its drawback is smallest on the turn you already have all the mana you need.

How to play it. Gush is the reason the deck functions on two lands, and it is easy to cast wrong. The short rules for this deck:

- Cast it in your main phase, floating the mana. Tap both Islands for UU, return them to Gush, draw two, replay one Island as your land drop, and spend the floated mana on the cantrips or the Dreadnought. You have paid nothing: the mana is still there, the land drop is still made, and the hand is two cards bigger.
- Gush guarantees a land drop. On a turn with no land in hand, Gush returns two and you play one. That is why a Gush hand with two Islands is a keep and why missing drops is cheap.
- Gush is what lets you make every land drop and still hold Islands for Foil. The returned Island that isn't replayed is the pitch, and a hand with an Island in it is a hand Thermokarst and Armageddon can't empty.
- Gush at their end step is almost never right. Returning two Islands at instant speed when you have nothing to spend the floated mana on throws away the mana and gains nothing you wouldn't have had next turn. The exceptions are real but rare: in response to land destruction, to save the targeted Islands; in response to a threat, when the two cards might be a Foil or a Daze you can cast now; and under Choke or Stasis, where two tapped Islands returned to hand are an untapped land drop and a Foil pitch. Hard-casting it for five mana is right in almost no game this deck plays.
- Gush is a free spell for storm. Two Gushes on a Freeze turn are plus two storm, plus four cards for nothing — you still make only one land drop a turn — which is why the Freeze lines in this deck start with them.

Portent (4)



Eleven cantrips are the land count, and Portent is the best of them: a sorcery whose draw arrives at the opponent's upkeep, after your discard to hand size. Most of the time you cast it on yourself; targeting the opponent is the rare exception, covered below. Being a sorcery has a cost the instants don't pay: it spends mana on your own turn, so there are turns when the right play is to hold it until you can cast it and still hold up your interaction. A turn-two Portent with a Counterspell in hand turns the Counterspell off for a turn; the same Portent on turn three, with the mana for both, costs nothing.

How to play it. The hardest card in the deck to play well, because of the delayed draw: the card arrives after your discard step and during their turn, where a Counterspell or a Stifle is live but a Dreadnought is exposed to discard before you can cast it — not to Duress, which can't take a creature, but to a Cabal Therapy, and Therapy players who see Islands name Phyrexian Dreadnought in the blind.

The ordering follows from that. The top card is the Portent draw; the second is your next natural draw; the third is the one after. Put the instant you want on their turn on top and the card you want to cast before they can discard it — the Dreadnought, the Freeze — second, so it arrives in your draw step and is cast before they untap. If all three are bad, shuffle.

The slow trip is the other half of the card: a Portent cast with seven in hand draws you to eight on their upkeep, after your discard, so against discard-to-hand-size and against your own Gush turns it is card advantage the discard step never sees. Beyond that: hold it when you don't yet know whether you need a land, when you're about to Gush and don't want to discard, or when you already know the top cards.

In paper, remember the draw. The delayed draw is the easiest trigger in the deck to forget, and the best players in the world forget it too. Make it a habit: when you cast Portent, put a die on top of your library, or move the top card of your library face down beside it, and draw when you see the reminder. Remembering is your job, not your opponent's; if their upkeep passes and you haven't drawn, the card is gone. Online, the client draws it for you.

On the opponent. Targeting the opponent with Portent is rare, and the test is whether you are ahead. These are the situations that qualify: they are low on cards, so their next three draws are most of what they have left; you have seen their hand with Peek and know they hold no answer to the Dreadnought, so the only answer is on top of their library; they have missed a land drop and the top three decide whether they recover; or an Oath is about to trigger and you need to know whether a Terravore is waiting.

Then you have three tools. Give them one bad card: put the worst of the three on top and leave the rest. Give them three bad cards: if none of the three is what they need, leave them all in the worst order, and against a mana-screwed opponent that means every nonland stays on top. Or shuffle, when the three are good and the odds of three random cards being worse are better than certain.

A fetchland or a cantrip of their own undoes your arrangement, so leave the stack only when they can't shuffle it away, and shuffle them instead when they can. With two Portents in hand on the same turn, cast one on each player: a second Portent on your own library looks at the three cards you just arranged and tells you nothing, while the same spell on theirs is information and a draw step taken away. Portent them, then Charm them, is the last version — arrange their best three on top and mill four — and like the Charm on their own Portent it is a play for when you are ahead.

Opt (4), Impulse (2), Peek (1)







Three instants that do three different jobs. Opt filters between classes of card: when the question is "do I need a land or a spell?", scry one answers it cheaply. Impulse digs four deep and finds a specific card — the Dreadnought that closes a race, the enabler for the Dreadnought in hand — which is why it is the last cantrip to leave against aggro and the one with Flash of Insight that you reach for when you know what you are looking for. One thing the printed Impulse gets wrong: under current Oracle wording the three cards you don't take go on the bottom of your library in any order — no shuffle. That makes Impulse a third tool, with Opt and Flash, for arranging the bottom of your deck, and against an opponent who still plays it as a shuffle you know more about both libraries than they do. Peek selects nothing; it is the deck's information spell: against counters, Swords decks and combo it tells you whether the jam is safe; against aggro and discard decks its information is worth little and it goes first.

When to cast them. The default is the end of the opponent's turn, with the mana having sat untapped as a Counterspell threat all turn and nothing having needed it; you give up nothing and see the card before your own draw.

Two exceptions. The first is when the card is needed now: digging for a land drop in your own main phase, or for a Foil before they untap. The second is the moment the opponent taps out. Cantrip right then, in their main phase, rather than waiting for the end step: having tapped out they are unlikely to have another play, so the end step gains nothing, and the cantrip might find a Daze — which, with them tapped out and a spell on the stack, is the best card you can draw.

Beyond that, hold Opt as storm for a Freeze turn, or to tuck a card you've just seen off Portent; and Peek goes first among the instants at their end step when you plan to Portent them on your turn, because

knowing their hand decides what to leave on top.

Flash of Insight (2)



A two-for-one that survives counters and discard, because the second half lives in the graveyard where Duress can't reach it. It is slow, so it leaves against anything fast, and it is the best card in the deck in a long game.

How to play it. The graveyard is where this card belongs, and the first job is getting it there cheaply. It is the best card in the deck to pitch to Foil and the best card to discard to hand size — nothing is lost, and the flashback is waiting. Short of a free route, cycle it: cast it from hand for X=1 with spare mana, or spend the mana a little aggressively, unless you are holding it as the Foil pitch.

Then find the turn for the flashback. That is where the card earns its slot: for 1U and the graveyard, selection deep enough to go up in cards on the one turn that decides the game, cast at instant speed — in response to the spell you need to answer, exile the yard and find the Counterspell; or at their end step before Phyrexian Furnace or Withered Wretch can exile the yard.

Against heavy discard it does something no other card does: the best card is safer in your library, where a big Flash reaches it, than in your hand where a Duress or a Therapy takes it. And in the mirror it is a rescue: when a partial Brain Freeze is on the stack and the card you need — your own Freeze, the last Charm — is in the part of the library about to be milled, flash back Flash in response and take it before the mill resolves.

Charm your own library to grow the yard and the X. And remember there are two. The first flashback doesn't have to go to maximum depth unless you need one specific card right now; leaving some cards in the graveyard makes the second Flash bigger.

The bottom of your library is yours to arrange. Opt, Impulse and Flash all put cards on the bottom, and in a long game you will draw that part of the deck. A big Flash late in a game can stack your entire remaining library. So never put cards back at random: decide the order, and remember it. Knowing which cards are in which part of the deck, and what you are about to draw, is an enormous edge — and it starts at the mulligan, with the card you bottomed. The deck has one shuffle effect, Portent's, and only when you choose it; if you never shuffle, the information holds for the whole game. Online, keep notes. In paper, remember the key cards and roughly where they are — the bottom five, the bottom ten, the bottom twenty.

Chain of Vapor (1 main, 1 side)

One mana that takes back a permanent, and the measure of it is how much they paid to put that permanent there. Its best targets are the ones that cost two or more cards to deploy: their Dreadnought in

the mirror, a Mox Diamond that cost them a land, a Graveborn Muse or a Phyrexian Arena that was Ritualed out, anything that arrived off a Show and Tell. The best of all is a reanimated creature: a Chain on the Akroma or the Phantom Nishoba they just Reanimated sends it back to a hand it can't be cast from, and to try again they need another discard outlet to get it into the graveyard and another reanimation spell to bring it back — and if that spell is Reanimate, the life as well. Bouncing any of these is a two-for-one that also costs them the tempo. Beyond that it is the only post-resolution answer to Stasis, Confinement or Choke. On Freeze plans with no Dreadnought out it is one-sided. Shroud stops it: Argothian Enchantress, Nimble Mongoose and anything under Sterling Grove can't be targeted, and a creature protected by Mother of Runes is protected from blue.











How to play it. In response to a Tog or Shade pump, after the discard. On a Dryad or a Shapeshifter as a reset. On your own Dreadnought as a save, and on your own Keg or Back to Basics in response to the Disenchant. Whenever you Chain your own permanent, remember the copy is yours to make too: sacrifice an Island and point the copy at one of their permanents, and the save becomes a save plus a tempo play, at the cost of a land — worth it when you have Islands to spare.

The rule is to avoid casting it with your own Dreadnought on the table against a deck with lands to spare, because they will sacrifice one to copy it at your Dreadnought. When you have to anyway, you have three ways out. Recast the Dreadnought, which costs another enabler. Charm it in response to the copy, which costs a Charm. Or the best of the three, which people miss: the copy is a spell on the stack, and Counterspell, Foil, Daze or Thwart counters it like any other.

Powder Keg (1)

The settings are the card. 0 kills Moxes, Elephant and Decree tokens, face-down morphs and an animated Factory or Treetop, and never touches your Dreadnought. 2 kills Dryad, Werebear, Mongrel, Meddling Mage, Sphere of Resistance, Grid, Altar, Argothian Enchantress through shroud, and Goblin Tinkerer before it untaps. 3 kills Terravore, Psychatog, Specter and Negator; 4 kills Ravenous Baloth, Graveborn

Muse and Blastoderm. 1 kills every dork, Lackey, Swarm, Welder and Scroll — and your Dreadnought, so the sequence is Keg, crack at one, then Dreadnought, or hold it at zero once the Dreadnought is down. Its activation is not a spell, so it works under Standstill; its counters are added at upkeep, so it works under Stasis; and it doesn't target, so shroud, protection and Mother of Runes save nothing from it.



How to play it. It does not hit enchantments; Annul and Chain do. The counter climbs through every mana value on the way up, and your own Dreadnought is at one: a Keg at one with your Dreadnought on the table is cracked only once the Dreadnought is already phased out — Charm first, let it resolve, then activate; otherwise crack it before you commit, or let it climb past. Against Welder decks, a cracked Keg is an artifact in your graveyard, and the next Welder can exchange your Dreadnought for it. Stifle the exchange or Charm the Dreadnought in response.

The harder skill is not cracking it. A Keg sitting at the right number is a threat the opponent has to play around every turn: they hold the second Mage rather than cast it into a Keg at two, they keep the answer they'd rather deploy on your turn, they stop developing the board the Keg is pointed at.

Often the last possible moment is the right one, when the board has filled with the things it kills and nothing they do can take it away first. And often it isn't: there are turns when now is the time, the next permanent is the one that beats you, and waiting a turn for one more target is how the game is lost. There is no rule that covers both. What there is, is the habit of asking, every upkeep the Keg goes up, what cracking it now buys and what holding it threatens — and of remembering that an opponent who respects the threat is already paying for it.

Brain Freeze (1 main, 2 side)



The plan B. It mills three cards per storm count. The storm ability triggers on cast and puts the copies on the stack when it resolves, so Counterspell on the original still lets every copy resolve, Misdirection moves only the original, and what stops it is Stifle on the storm trigger or a card that shuffles a graveyard back — Gaea's Blessing above all. Storm counts every spell cast by anyone that turn, countered or not. It is at its best against three kinds of deck, which overlap: decks with many answers to a Dreadnought, where the Freeze is often the better plan; slow control decks that play a card-advantage game rather than a tempo game, where the long turns build your storm and nothing of theirs pressures you; and decks that draw a lot of cards through an engine — Attunement, Argothian Enchantress and Enchantress's Presence, Horn of Greed — and so thin their own library for you. Three copies matter for two reasons: discard exists, and one Freeze lost to a Duress shouldn't end the plan; and the turns that win are the ones where two Freezes go off together for a lethal mill that doesn't arrive too late in the game, which three copies make a realistic

thing to assemble rather than a lucky one. It is at its worst against aggro, where it is a dead card, and against Gaea's Blessing decks, where every mill has to be played around with a Stifle held for the trigger, and with two or more Blessings in their deck the Stifles run out before the library does. Against Psychatog or Genesis decks it needs care: a non-lethal mill feeds them.

Why one in the main: the flex slot. This is the one slot in the 60 where the right card depends on you and your field. Most lists give it to Misdirection (see Close candidates). I play the Freeze for game one of the mirror: against a mirror with no main-deck Freeze, it is the only win in either 60 that doesn't need a Dreadnought to survive, and that makes game one favorable. The cost is a card that is dead against aggro, which is why it is the first card out in those rows. A second Powder Keg, for a field full of Mages, Spheres and small creatures, or a third Flash of Insight, for a grindier one, are good choices too; with another card in the slot, the Freeze plans run on the two in the sideboard. Play what you like, and what fits your local meta and the way you play.

The math. Each Freeze mills three for itself and three for every spell cast before it that turn, by anyone. A second Freeze in the same turn counts the first, so the two together are worth more than double. Cards milled, by the number of spells already cast when the first Freeze goes on the stack:

Spells cast before the first Freeze	One Freeze	Two Freezes	Three Freezes
0	3	9	18
1	6	15	27
2	9	21	36
3	12	27	45
4	15	33	54
5	18	39	63
6	21	45	72
7	24	51	81
8	27	57	90

A library of forty-five after a few turns of draws needs two Freezes off a storm of six, or one off a storm of fourteen. Vision Charm in the chain is the other half of the arithmetic: it mills four on its own and adds one to the storm, so each Charm is worth seven cards with one Freeze to follow, ten with two, thirteen with three. The next two grids are the first table again, split by how many of the spells before the first Freeze were Vision Charms pointed at their library that resolved — each adds four milled cards of its own on top of the storm it counts for. The first grid is the two-Freeze turn, which is the one you are building toward; the second is a single Freeze.

Two Freezes	1 Charm	2 Charms	3 Charms	4 Charms
1 spell before the first Freeze	19	—	—	—
2 spells before the first Freeze	25	29	—	—
3 spells before the first Freeze	31	35	39	—
4 spells before the first Freeze	37	41	45	49
5 spells before the first Freeze	43	47	51	55
6 spells before the first Freeze	49	53	57	61
7 spells before the first Freeze	55	59	63	67
8 spells before the first Freeze	61	65	69	73
One Freeze	**1 Charm**	**2 Charms**	**3 Charms**	**4 Charms**
1 spell before the first Freeze	10	—	—	—
2 spells before the first Freeze	13	17	—	—
3 spells before the first Freeze	16	20	24	—
4 spells before the first Freeze	19	23	27	31
5 spells before the first Freeze	22	26	30	34
6 spells before the first Freeze	25	29	33	37
7 spells before the first Freeze	28	32	36	40
8 spells before the first Freeze	31	35	39	43

Read it with the mana in mind: one per Charm, two per Freeze, and the rest of the storm from free spells and one-mana cantrips. Three Charms and nothing else, then two Freezes, is thirty-nine cards for seven mana; put a Gush and an Opt in front of them — five spells, three of them Charms — and the same two Freezes mill fifty-one for eight. That is the turn the whole plan is built to reach.

Building the storm. The tools, in the order you reach for them: Vision Charm, because it mills while it counts. The free spells — Gush every Island back to hand, and Daze, Foil and Thwart on anything, including your own spells, since a spell countered still counted. When they have cast a single spell and your hand is full of counters, you don't need your own spells as targets: hold priority and counter theirs again and again. Every counter counts for the storm, and three or four thrown at one spell before the Freeze is not unusual. Flash of Insight from the graveyard, which is a spell for the storm and finds the next Freeze. The one-mana cantrips, which count for one and dig for the rest. Count the mana before you start: everything in the chain, the Freezes themselves, and the Stifle you are holding up for a Gaea's Blessing or for their own Freeze. A full chain usually needs either a lot of mana under you or very few cards left in their library.

When to Freeze. Their upkeep is the best time, because they are about to draw and have the least chance to respond; it is also when you have the fewest spells to count, since they won't cast their own to feed your storm, so the chain has to come entirely from your hand. Their end step uses the storm a big turn of theirs built for you, and carries a risk: in a mirror or against any deck with Freeze, they can Freeze you back in

the same window, and then you draw first and lose. So a Freeze on their turn means holding Stifle for their Freeze, or deciding to gamble that they don't have it.

Some decks can make you draw at instant speed — Opportunity, Cephalid Coliseum — and against those there is no safe window; Freezing in response to their draw spell protects you a little. The third option is your own turn: use the Dreadnought as the storm-builder, jam it and let the counter war happen, then Freeze after the dust has settled, and they are the ones drawing next.

How big. Lethal is the aim. A non-lethal Freeze puts them on a clock and is often fine, but it is a gift to anything that uses a graveyard — Terravore, Psychatog, Reanimator, their own Flash of Insight and every other flashback spell — so against those, wait for lethal unless discard is about to take the Freezes out of your hand first. Freezing in two instalments across turns can work and can backfire for the same reason.

Choosing a seat. In a post-board mirror, where Freeze is the main line of attack on both sides, being on the draw is often the better seat. You get one extra card in hand, and with the mirror's sixty-one-card row you also start with more cards in your library than an opponent on sixty: when both sides trade off all their resources, they are the first to draw from an empty library. The extra card is worth more than the tempo when neither side is racing. Think before you take the play.

A bait Freeze draws their Stifle before the real one.









17 Islands

Sixteen is a touch too few to Counterspell on turn two reliably; eighteen floods in a format where Gush and Daze already make extra Islands dead cards. Seventeen with eleven cantrips is the compromise, and it is what nearly every list plays. Against Elves and Goblins you mulligan aggressively for the Dreadnought, not for lands; the Islands and the cantrips find the second land.

The xerox principle. The land count only makes sense through it. A deck that wants to see a land every turn can get there two ways: play more lands, or play cheap cantrips that see more cards. The cantrip route is the xerox idea, and the rule of thumb is that two one-mana cantrips do the work of one land: they find the land drop when you need it and turn into spells when you don't, which an eighteenth Island never does.

This deck takes the idea nearly as far as it goes — seventeen Islands plus eleven cantrips plus four Gush is the land count of a twenty-two-land deck that rarely floods — and everything downstream depends on it: the one-land keeps, the two-land operating level, the Foil pitches, the Freeze storm counts, and the fact that a 60 with four Dreadnoughts and eight enablers finds them. The corollary is the one people get wrong at the sideboarding table, and it has its own rule in the sideboarding chapter: the cantrips are not do-nothing cards you cut to make room. They are the lands.



Mana base: the one-land keep

Seventeen Islands and eleven cantrips means you will keep one-land hands, and the deck is built to survive them. Two Islands is the deck's operating level: Counterspell, Impulse and Gush all turn on at two, and once Gush is live you are past the point where screw decides the game. Missing the third and fourth land drop is fine against aggro and combo; it matters against control, where Foil, Thwart and Flash want the extra mana.









The one-land keep. From a seven with one Island, the question is the second land by your second land drop. A one-lander has one mana a turn, so it's one cantrip a turn, and the order matters. The chance of the second Island, by what you cast on turns one and two:

Cantrips in the one-land hand	Second Island by turn 2, on the play	On the draw
None	35%	62%
Peek	57%	75%
Opt	71%	83%
Opt and Peek	79%	87%
Opt and Opt	85%	90%
Portent	86%	91%
Portent and Peek	90%	93%
Portent and Opt	93%	95%

How the numbers are made, so you can check them: a one-land seven leaves a library of 53 cards with 16 Islands and whatever Portents, Opts and the Peek aren't in your hand. Peek sees one card. Opt sees two, because the scry bottoms anything that isn't an Island before the draw — not a second Opt, not a Portent; only the land is kept. Portent sees three, puts an Island on top if there is one and shuffles if there isn't, and its draw arrives at the beginning of the next upkeep — on your turn-one cast that is the opponent's upkeep, so the card is in hand before your turn-two draw step.

Plan A is one cantrip on turn one, Portent if you have it, and the Island in hand when turn two's main phase begins. If that misses, the table also counts one recovery, which costs you tempo: a second Opt or Peek, drawn or held, cast in your turn-two main phase so the land is played at once — a turn spent not holding Counterspell and not casting the Dreadnought. A turn-two Portent is never that recovery, since its draw can't arrive in time. Each line was checked by exact enumeration and by simulation, and the two agree.

Three things fall out. Portent is the best single cantrip for finding land by a margin, because it sees three cards and the shuffle gives it two more random looks when they miss. Peek helps less than Opt and far less than Portent, because it cycles without choosing. With Opt and Peek together you Opt first: the scry filters what Peek then draws blind, and Peek stays in hand for the turn its information matters. And with Portent and Opt in hand you always Portent first. Opt first leaves Portent's draw arriving a turn late, so by the turn-two drop that line is no better than Opt alone, 71% on the play against 93% the right way round. A second Portent adds nothing by turn two for the same reason.

So a one-lander with Portent and a Dreadnought is a keep, a one-lander with Opt and a Dreadnought is a keep on the draw, and a one-lander with neither is a mulligan, however good the rest looks.

The sideboard

Fifteen cards, six roles, and nothing in it is a one-matchup bullet. The shape of it — Essence Flare as the removal suite, Back to Basics over Tsabo's Web — follows Dave Kaplan's lists, where the Flare and Back to Basics pairing came from; the stock list has since adopted Back to Basics as well, so this is now also the Spock and Luffy sideboard card for card. For reference, nearly every Mono-Blue Dreadnought sideboard carries Annul, Flare, Brain Freeze and the blasts, then Web or Back to Basics; Dominate and a second Keg are the minority choices.

Annul (3)



The premier answer and the reason the artifact-and-enchantment matchups are winnable. It counters Dreadnought in the mirror, Survival, Deed, Sphere, Oath, Library, Mox, Aura of Silence, Seal of Cleansing, Hidden Gibbons, Standstill, Humility, Grid, Opalescence, Stasis, Vise, Root Maze, Zombie Infestation, Aluren, Dream Halls and every artifact in a Devourer deck, for one mana. Size it by how many targets they have and how much they matter: roughly one copy per three or four in their 75, but all three when a few of them decide the game, as the Dreadnoughts do in the mirror, and against most of the artifact-and-enchantment decks.

Back to Basics (2)



The lock for decks built on nonbasic lands, and the answer to manlands and utility lands.

Versus Tsabo's Web. Most lists have played Web; the stock list has moved to Back to Basics, and so have I. Web stops lands with non-mana activated abilities (Port, Factory, Treetop, Wasteland, Dust Bowl, and the cycling lands, since cycling from a land is an activation), replaces itself, and is an artifact Charm can protect. B2B also stops painlands, Gemstone Mine, City of Traitors, Rith's Grove and Ancient Tomb, costs three, and dies to enchantment removal. Against Terrageddon (almost no basics), Devourer and the Hermit decks (none) and GAT (colors from City of Brass and Gemstone Mine) B2B is a lock, or a heavy tax where mana creatures carry them, and Web is a nuisance. Against Moneyball it turns off their Factories and Wastelands, and mono-black has little enchantment removal to answer it. Against Landstill, Replenish and Ponza the two are close. The decks where Web is better are the ones where neither card matters much.

Blue Elemental Blast (2) and Hydroblast (2)





Four blasts for Sligh and Goblins, where they counter Fireblast, Lackey, Warchief, Pyroblast and Pillar and kill Pup, Lavamancer and any goblin. The 2/2 split is for Cabal Therapy and Meddling Mage. They don't come in against decks that merely contain red: two red Blasts in a Terrageddon sideboard aren't worth four slots, and GR Oath Ponza's red is mostly a splash for its own Pyroblasts, with a few Stone Rains in some lists — too little to hit, and answering their Blasts alone isn't worth the slots (Mono-R Ponza, a different and rarer deck, is a blast matchup: its Stone Rains and Pillage are all red).

Brain Freeze (2)

Two in the side plus one main gives three for the Freeze plans: mirror, Enchantress, Replenish, Landstill, Tog, Stasis, BW Control, GAT. See the Brain Freeze entry for why three.



Chain of Vapor (1)

The second copy for the matchups where tempo on a permanent is the plan: Mox decks, Mage decks, Negator and Specter decks, Tog pumps, Dryad. It stays out against green decks with lands to spare — Elves, the Rock — where it gets copied onto your Dreadnought. In the mirror it comes in for the Keg: after sideboarding the game is a counter war, and a one-mana instant that answers their Dreadnought on your terms is worth more than a permanent they can see coming.



Essence Flare (3)



The deck's removal: one mana, enchant a creature, +2/+0, and a −0/−1 counter at each of its controller's upkeeps. It is in the 75 because the format's best anti-Dreadnought creatures are mostly X/1s.

What it kills. Every X/1 on their next upkeep, and every X/2 in two. The prime targets are the X/1s that decide games: Goblin Lackey, Xantid Swarm, Hermit Druid, Welder and Plaguebearer — and with them Pup, Lavamancer, Mother of Runes, Wirewood Symbiote, Priest of Titania, Deranged Hermit and Knight of Stromgald. The 2/2s are good secondary targets: Meddling Mage, which stops the one spell the game is about; Hypnotic Specter, a must-answer in every black deck, because a Specter left alone turns a three-card combo into a one-card-a-turn hand; and Withered Wretch. Don't hold back from Flaring a 2/2 because it lives a turn longer. Think of it as a Dismember (a newer card, not legal in Premodern): you pay one mana and some life — the hits it gets in with the +2 power while it dies — and the creature is gone. That is a fine trade, and the Mage or the Specter left alone costs more.

Rules. The −0/−1 counter goes on at the beginning of the enchanted creature's controller's upkeep, and they can respond to that trigger with the creature's own abilities — a Hermit Druid activates, a Symbiote bounces, a Tog pumps. Flare the Symbiote first, because it bounces any other Elf in response; Flare Mother the turn she lands, while she's summoning sick; and Flare doesn't stop a Hermit Druid from activating in response to its own death. Be careful Flaring a creature that pumps: the +2 power is theirs, and a pump in response to the counter keeps it alive through that turn — Tog, Shade, Mongrel and Rootwalla attack bigger and die at the end of it, while Quirion Dryad's +1/+1 counters are permanent and can outgrow the Flare.

Flare your own Dreadnought. The use that isn't obvious. The +2/+0 makes it a 14/12, the −0/−1 counter at your upkeep means nothing to twelve toughness, and an opponent who has done careful combat math

and passed the turn at thirteen or fourteen life has made a mistake they can't take back. Games get won that way.

Close candidates not in the 75



Accumulated Knowledge. The other way to build the deck. Four AK turns the long game against control and the mirror into one you win on cards rather than on Freeze, and they pitch to Foil. The cost is four slots whose first copy is a two-mana Opt without the scry, in a deck whose other slots are one-mana interaction, and a weaker Freeze plan, since the AK lists win the long game on cards and play fewer Freezes; being an instant, it at least fits the draw-go turns where the deck holds mana up. And against the decks that play AK too — Psychatog and the other heavy blue control decks — your copies are significantly worse than theirs. You never want to be the one who casts the first AK, because it makes all of theirs better, and with fewer lands than they play you will often be forced to cast it to find your next land drop. Without AK the deck needs two or three Freeze to sideboard properly; this list has three. The two builds are both correct; this one trades the AK war for consistency at finding Dreadnought plus enabler.



Misdirection. The other card for the flex slot, and the one most lists play there: main in the Tide era and in the default build today, and often called the Force of Will of the format. It costs no mana, only a blue card from your hand, and it doesn't just stop their best spell, it turns it against them: a burn spell or a Swords onto one of their own creatures, a Naturalize onto their own Sylvan Library or Sphere of Resistance, a Counterspell or Force Spike onto the Misdirection itself in a counter war, or onto a spell of theirs. Those swings win games. It needs a spell with a single target and a second target worth moving it to, and that is where it runs out: Annul can only target artifact and enchantment spells, so there is rarely a second target for it, and Duress says target opponent, so the only legal target is still you. It is nearly blank against Enchantress and Goblins and poor against Replenish. I play Brain Freeze in the slot because I value game one of the mirror more, but Misdirection is a strong choice, and the better one in a field of removal-heavy decks.

Mishra's Factory. The Tide-era win condition against Stasis and Landstill, and the deck's way to buy time against aggro. It left because the Tide plan left, because it is a land that can't be returned to Daze, Thwart or Gush or be the Island Foil pitches — the colorless mana itself is no real concession, since it casts the Dreadnought — and because sixteen Islands plus two Factory was too few Islands. If Stasis comes back in numbers, it is the first card to reconsider.









Prohibit, Force Spike and Mana Leak. Prohibit is the first of the extra counters to look at, and very nearly a fifth Counterspell. For two mana it counters anything with mana value two or less, and kicked, for four, anything up to four: that covers most of the answers to the Dreadnought — Swords, Disenchant, Naturalize, Seal of Cleansing, Smother — and most of the threats and lock pieces that beat the deck, Sphere, Oath, Meddling Mage and Glowrider among them. It also dodges a Cabal Therapy that names Counterspell. Unlike Mana Leak it doesn't lose its value late in the game, when the opponent has the mana to pay. What it misses are the spells of five mana or more, and it costs four to reach a three- or four-drop, which is why it is a fifth counter, not a replacement for the four.

Force Spike and Mana Leak are Daze without the free mode. Force Spike is a fine third Daze in the jam build on the play. Mana Leak is a worse Counterspell against the decks that can pay and an equal one against the decks that can't; I prefer the fourth Opt, but either is a reasonable choice.

Annul main. Several lists have run two to four. Against Enchantress, Replenish, Stasis, Devourer, Mox decks and the mirror it is a one-mana Counterspell; against Sligh, Goblins, Tog and Moneyball it is blank. The sideboard count of three is the compromise; the moment the field is more than half artifact-and-enchantment decks, two go main.

Tsabo's Web main. It cantrips, so it is close to free, and it shuts off Port, Factory, Treetop, Wasteland and Dust Bowl. Against the decks that don't run those it is a two-mana Opt. See the sideboard section for Web versus Back to Basics.

Dominate. The AK build's plan B, and a good one: let them spend their resources committing a threat, then steal it and fight on that front without ever casting a Dreadnought of your own. It is great in the mirror, where the stolen Dreadnought is the game; great against Psychatog; and it takes manlands, so a Treetop Village becomes yours. The reasons it isn't here are that this list already has a plan B in Brain Freeze, and that the Treetop plan conflicts with Back to Basics or Web, which lock the land you'd want to steal. A bit situational for my liking, but a real card, and the one to look at if the Freeze plan ever stops working.













Intuition, Reality Ripple, Boomerang. Cards Dave Kaplan has played in his lists, and the three with the strongest case for a slot that isn't in this 60. Intuition for three Dreadnoughts or three Stifles is a tutor for whichever half of the combo you're missing, at three mana. Reality Ripple phases out an artifact, a creature or a land, so it is the Charm's protection mode plus a tempo card: fog a Terravore or a Tog for a turn, phase out their Treetop or their only black source on their upkeep. It gives up the mill and land-type modes. Boomerang is a Chain that can hit lands and can't be copied against you, at twice the cost. All three are good choices; whether one is right over the card it would replace depends on your meta and the way you play.

Mage's Guile. Another way to protect the Dreadnought: shroud against Swords and the other targeted answers, and a cycle for one when there is nothing to protect. It doesn't handle an Edict or a Wrath, as the Charm does, and it doesn't function as an enabler.







Morphling and Masticore. Morphling is the coolest finisher in blue control. It is expensive to play, but once one hits the board it is great: it needs no enabler and protects itself — shroud, untap, flying, all for blue mana. It isn't here because it costs five in a deck built to cast everything for one or two. Masticore machine-guns small creatures, Mages, Lackeys, Elves and Glowriders alike, but its upkeep discard taxes the resource the deck's long game runs on, and every artifact answer in their deck already aimed at your Dreadnought hits it too.

Faerie Conclave. A win condition that survives Wrath and ignores Humility, in older control-leaning lists. Same objection as Factory, with the added cost of entering tapped.











Sideboard candidates: Hibernation, Submerge, Chill, a second Keg, a third Flash. A second Powder Keg, for Mage and Sphere decks. Hibernation is a one-sided reset against Elves, Terrageddon and Hermit decks; Submerge is a tempo card against green that doesn't kill anything. Chill, for Sligh and Goblins, though the four blasts already cover them. Each is a fair swap for the third Flare or the second Back to Basics, depending on the field you expect. A third Flash of Insight is a swap for the third Brain Freeze instead: it grinds better in the long matchups, and it digs out the second Freeze when you need it, so losing one to discard doesn't stall the plan.

How to sideboard with this deck

The first question in every matchup is which turn you want to go off. Everything else is massaging the numbers for that turn, choosing the pivot, and answering the permanents that stop it. If the answer is turn two to four, you are jamming. If it is turn five or later, trim Dreadnoughts and enablers so the first one you cast goes the distance. If the answer is never, cut them and Freeze.

What usually leaves, and why. None of this is a rule; every row in the matchup chapters is the judgment applied, and the judgment is what follows.

- Thwart leaves when it can't do its job: when you won't have three Islands on the table on the turn you jam, so it can't protect the Dreadnought; when giving back three land drops is too big a commitment in that matchup; or when the matchup simply doesn't need that much protection. It also competes with Gush for the same Islands, so in the matchups where Gush is the engine, Thwart is at its worst. It stays where it is the free counter you need after your hand has been taken apart.
- Brain Freeze leaves from every plan that isn't a Freeze plan, where it is a dead card.
- Flash of Insight leaves when you are jamming, because it is slow, and stays in every long game.
- Peek is the first cantrip to go, because it selects nothing. Its value is information, and post-board that information is worth less: expect every opponent to have brought at least one answer to the Dreadnought, so the coast is rarely as clear as Peek says. It stays where knowing their hand changes the commit turn: against Elves, where a clear coast lets you go a turn earlier, and against Sligh, where it tells you how much protection the jam needs.
- Opt goes only when something has to and you would rather keep Peek. Impulse doesn't go.
- Daze is a read on the opponent, not a rule: it stays on the play against opponents who tap out, and leaves against opponents who have shown they will play around it, or on the draw against decks that don't tap out.
- Foil is trimmed where the pitch cost spends the resource they are attacking — Islands against land destruction, cards against heavy discard, where a hand under Duress and Therapy can't afford to pay two for a counter — and where the game is attrition with no commit turn to overload.
- Keg leaves when its targets do, when no one setting catches enough of their board, or when Chain does its job better, as in the mirror. Chain mostly doesn't: I keep one copy in the deck in nearly every matchup as insurance against the thing that got through permission — a lock piece, a threat too big to race, something that needs countering on the way down a second time or bouncing for a turn of tempo. One copy in a deck that cantrips this heavily is an out you will find; without it, the same board is a scoop.
- Dreadnoughts and Stifles move only with the plan: cut one to three Dreadnoughts and one or two Stifles on build-up or Freeze plans, with Stifle scaling down with the Dreadnought count except where it has a job of its own; against Replenish, all of them go, and against Enchantress and BW Control all the Dreadnoughts go while the Stifles stay, for the Gaea's Blessing trigger and the Decrees.

What comes in, and for what. Essence Flare is the prime answer to Goblin Lackey, but that isn't the test for bringing it in: it comes in against any deck with one- and two-toughness creatures that matter, and especially against decks that plan to pressure you with many small threats, where three one-mana removal spells are worth more than the cards they replace. Back to Basics is for manlands, Kor Haven and the other utility lands that beat a counter deck, and for greedy mana bases — Terrageddon, GAT, Hermit FEB, Replenish — where it is a lock rather than a tax. Annul comes in by how many targets they have and how much each one matters: three or four per copy is a rough guide, but a few that decide the game — the Dreadnoughts in the mirror — are worth all three. The blasts are for the red decks, not for decks that merely contain red. Brain Freeze comes in with the plan, never alone.

Habits.

- I try not to go down two cantrips. It is tempting to read Opt, Peek and Impulse as cards that do nothing and cut them to make room for silver bullets, but they are the land count: cut three or four and the deck stops finding its answers, its Dreadnoughts, its land drops and the sideboard cards you just brought in. If the ins outnumber the acceptable outs, I would rather bring fewer cards in.
- One row per deck, split only where the deck itself splits into variants. Daze counts are defaults: adjust them for the play or the draw and for what you see at the table.
- A plan's cards come in packages. A Freeze plan trims Dreadnoughts and brings the Freezes together; a jam plan keeps all four with Daze and Peek. The awkward middle — four Dreadnoughts and no Daze — does neither.

Sideboard against their sideboard, not their main deck. This is one of the most played and most successful decks in the format, and most opponents who register a 75 have spent slots on it. Expect dedicated answers in most sideboards: artifact removal, red Blasts, Meddling Mage, Xantid Swarm, Gaea's Blessing against the Freeze plan. The pattern is the same everywhere: they cut their expensive cards, add one-mana answers, and stop tapping out. So build the row for the deck you will face in game two, not the one you saw in game one — the specifics are in each matchup entry, and the census chapter below lists what exists by color. That is why Daze so often leaves and why the build-up plan exists.











Overboarding. A tool for the spot where you want Dreadnought to play like a three-of but keep the fourth copy in the deck: go to sixty-one or sixty-two instead of cutting. I use it only in the mirror, where library size is also a resource. Against aggro, dilution costs more than the fourth cantrip does.

Every answer to the Dreadnought, and who plays it

The first thing that surprised me about this deck was how many colors have an answer to a 12/12 artifact creature, and from which decks they come. This chapter is the census: every card in the format that interacts with the Dreadnought plan, grouped by what it does to you, with the decks that run it main or side. Where a card is in nearly every list of a deck, I say so; percentages are left to the database.

Cards that kill it

White. Swords to Plowshares is in nearly every white deck's main — Terrageddon, both Oath Ponzas, Replenish, Enchantress, Landstill, BW Control, Deadguy, The Solution, White Weenie, Tribe, GAT, the five-color Tog — and it is why Vision Charm is the protection spell: Charm in response and Swords fizzles. Reprisal (destroy a creature with power 4 or more) sits in a third of Terrageddon sideboards and some Tribe, Weenie and Solution ones. Wrath of God is main in Landstill and BW Control, side in Replenish; Charm out in response.

Disenchant and Seal of Cleansing answer the artifact: Disenchant is main in nearly every Landstill and Solution list and a third of BW Control; Seal is three copies main in Replenish and Enchantress and appears in Oath Ponza, Landstill and Terrageddon. Aura of Silence is a sideboard card almost everywhere white can cast it — Terrageddon, Enchantress, GW Ponza, BW Control, Solution, Weenie — and does double duty: it makes your Dreadnought, Keg, Flare and Back to Basics cost two more, then sacrifices as a Disenchant.

Parallax Wave belongs here rather than among the cards that merely neutralize: four copies main in every Enchantress and Replenish list. With Opalescence on the table it exiles the Dreadnought for good, through the loop. Without Opalescence it exiles it until the Wave leaves play — a few turns at most, as its fade counters run out — and when the Dreadnought returns its trigger goes on the stack again, so you need a second enabler just to keep the card you already paid for. Stifle is not the answer — they have five counters and will spend another — and neither is Charm, for the same reason. Counter the Wave on cast, with Annul or Counterspell, or plan the game as if the Dreadnought is gone.















Black. Edicts: Diabolic Edict is main in Moneyball, Mono-Black Clerics and Pit Rack and in half of Rock lists, with Chainer's Edict and Innocent Blood beside it; Charm in response and you have no creature to sacrifice. Smother is main in every mono-black and Rock list and in UB Tog; Snuff Out is main in most Moneyball, Clerics and Pit Rack lists (free, and nonblack is all it needs); Vendetta is a one-of in a fifth of Rock and Tog main decks. Vindicate is main in BW Control, Deadguy and The Solution. Terminate is RB Goblins' answer, a third of their main decks. Plaguebearer belongs with the repeatable disruption below but kills too: three mana a time ({X}{X}{B} at X=1), as often as they can pay, main in half of Moneyball lists.

















Green. Naturalize is the format's most common Dreadnought answer after Swords, and it is not only a sideboard card: three copies main in three-quarters of Goblins lists, two in Terrageddon, three in GR Ponza, two in half of GW Ponza and Zoo, a fifth of Rock; from the side it is in nearly every Elves, Survival, Madness, Rock and Zoo list. Crumble, for one green mana, is the alternative in Tribe, Stompy, Hermit decks and some Ponza and Zoo sideboards.

Uktabi Orangutan is every Full English Breakfast sideboard and a third of Elves and Survival ones, and ZIMS runs it main; it is a 2/2 body you can Stifle on entry. Nantuko Vigilante is one or two copies main in nearly every Elves list and half the Survival lists; the flip is a trigger and Stifle stops it. Hull Breach is Welder Survival's and some Zoo sideboards'. Pernicious Deed, black-green, is four main in every Rock list and shows up in Oath decks; at 1 it takes Dreadnought, Keg and Charm's targets in one activation, so Charm in response or Stifle the activation.













Red. This is the color that surprises people. Overload destroys an artifact of mana value 2 or less unkicked, and the Dreadnought is 1: it is three copies in nearly every Sligh sideboard, half of Mono-R Ponza sideboards, a fifth of Goblins and some Zoo. Mogg Salvage is free when they have a Mountain and you have an Island, which is always: half of Sligh sideboards, a fifth of Ponza, some Goblins. Pillage, artifact or land, is main in nearly every Mono-R Ponza list. Goblin Tinkerer is two copies main in nearly every Goblins list and kills a Dreadnought a turn for R once it untaps; Keg at 2 and Stifle on the activation are the answers. Goblin Vandal is main in a few Sligh lists; it destroys the Dreadnought only when it

attacks unblocked, so an untapped Dreadnought holds one off, and Stifle or a Charm in response answers the trigger.











Colorless. Powder Keg at 1 is the clean answer and the mirror's favorite: two main in Landstill, main in half of Tog lists and a third of Stasis lists, side in a third of Moneyball, Mono-Black Clerics and Pit Rack lists and some BW Control. Nevinyrral's Disk is Mono-R Ponza's, Mono-U control's and the UW Stiflenought's.





Cards that neutralize it without killing it

They take it. Gilded Drake is the one to know: a two-mana 3/3 whose exchange is an enters-the-battlefield trigger, main in four of five UG Survival Madness lists and most Opposition-Survival lists, a fifth of generic UG Survival, and a sideboard card in Aluren and ZIMS. Stifle the trigger, or Charm the Dreadnought in response and the exchange has no target. Control Magic is in some Tog sideboards. Threaten shows up in red sideboards, Sligh and Goblins among them: it takes the Dreadnought for a turn and swings twelve at you, which ends most races. It is a red sorcery, so it comes on their turn and the blue Blasts, Daze and Counterspell all answer it on cast; or Charm the Dreadnought in response and it has no target. Dominate is the mirror's: a third of Mono-Blue Dreadnought sideboards carry it, and it is the cleanest answer to a resolved Dreadnought there is — instant speed, no trigger to fight over, and the 12/12 is now theirs and attacking you. Counter it or Charm the Dreadnought in response.









They tap or fog it. Fire // Ice is main in nearly every GAT list, a quarter of Terrageddon, and some Solution, Stasis, Zoo and splash-Stiflenought lists. Ice on your Dreadnought at your upkeep costs you the attack for two mana; consider countering it for the tempo. Whipcorder is main in White Weenie, Rebels and a third of Solution lists; Spike Weaver appears in Survival and Oath sideboards. Kor Haven prevents all damage from one attacker each turn: a fifth of Terrageddon main decks, some Landstill and Weenie. It is a land, so Annul and Chain can't touch it; Stifle the activation or B2B it.









They prevent the damage or the win. Solitary Confinement is two copies main in effectively every Enchantress list and in Doomsday sideboards. Worship is in White Clerics, Rebels, Weenie and Solution sideboards and some Enchantress lists: a Dreadnought alone cannot win through it, so the answer is Chain, Annul on cast, or Freeze. Humility is main in most Landstill lists. Elephant Grass (two to attack) is main in most Enchantress lists and is paid. Propaganda is in some Stasis lists. Ensnaring Bridge is Welder prison's, White Clerics', some Pit Rack's.













They bounce it. Chain of Vapor is main in most Stasis lists, usually several copies, three in half the Aluren lists, a one-of in a third of Tog lists, and every mirror. Waterfront Bouncer is main in half the UG Madness lists and side in most, main in a quarter of UG Survival lists, and shows up in The Solution; it is a repeatable bounce for U, so Keg at 2 or Flare it. Man-o'-War is in every Aluren list and half of Opposition-Survival. Rushing River is in most Devourer sideboards and some Frantic Storm ones, Hoodwink in a third of Devourer's, Boomerang in a quarter of Stasis main decks, Capsize in Mono-U control. A bounced Dreadnought costs you an enabler to recast, on top of the one you already spent.



Cards that counter it, or the enabler

Every blue deck fights on the stack, and the fight is over three spells, not one: the Dreadnought, the Stifle and the Charm. Counterspell is four main in Landstill, GAT, Tog, Stasis, Mono-U control and every Stiflenought, three in The Solution, and in about half the UG Survival and Oath lists. Daze is in every Stasis and UG Madness list, most UG Survival, half of GAT. Mana Leak is four in Landstill, three in The Solution, and in Replenish, Mono-U control, UG Survival, Oath and some Tog. Circular Logic is four in every UG Madness list and in a quarter of Tog lists. Force Spike is Mono-U control's; Prohibit is in half the Landstill lists; Absorb in a quarter; Arcane Denial is main in Stasis and a sideboard card in Frantic Storm; Memory Lapse in the Dimir Stiflenought and The Solution.

Foil is four main in every mirror and in most UB Tog lists, and it is the counter you can't play around by waiting for them to tap out; Thwart is the mirror's, and the one that turns their three Islands into a counter at any moment. Annul, one mana for an artifact or enchantment spell, is the cheapest counter for your Dreadnought and is in nearly every Tog, Landstill and Stasis sideboard, two-thirds of Solution's, half of UG Madness's, and every mirror. Mana Short is Stasis's main-deck card and UB Stasis's and Frantic Storm's sideboard card: it ends your turn's interaction before you take it, and cast in response to the Dreadnought it leaves you no mana for the enabler.

Pyroblast and Red Elemental Blast are the red decks' one-mana Counterspells, and nothing more exotic than that: in nearly every Sligh, Goblins, Zoo, Ponza and Terrageddon sideboard, two-thirds of GR

Ponza's, most Devourer's, and some Hermit, Welder and Survival sideboards. On a Counterspell they win the counter war; on a Stifle or a Charm with the trigger on the stack they kill the Dreadnought.































Cards that stop you comboing

These are the permanents that make the Dreadnought plan uncastable rather than answering it, and they are the reason Keg, Chain, Annul and Essence Flare are in the 75.



Meddling Mage. Main in every Solution list, half of GAT and five-color Tog lists, some Terrageddon and Aluren; three or four from the side in most Replenish and Landstill lists, a third of GW Ponza. It names Dreadnought most of the time. Brain Freeze when they've read you for plan B. Counterspell or Foil when they are a combo deck trying to force their own spell through. And sometimes your removal — Chain, Keg, Flare — when the Mage itself is the plan and they mean to beat you down with it. With two Mages the usual pattern is one on the removal and one on a plan, and the second is the one that matters. Answers: Counterspell on cast, Keg at 2, Flare (two upkeeps), Chain. The timing matters more than the answer: a Mage doesn't have to die the turn it lands. It has to die before the turn you want to cast the card it names, or before it becomes a clock you can't stop, and until one of those is close it is a reason to keep the Keg climbing rather than to crack it.

Sphere of Resistance. Four main in nearly every GR and GW Oath Ponza list, two in Welder Survival sideboards, some Mono-R Ponza. Every spell costs one more, including the free ones, so the combo that costs two now costs four — Dreadnought and enabler at two each — with protection on top of that, and Daze, Foil, Gush and Thwart all cost a mana. The decks that run it are mana-denial decks already, with Port, Stone Rain, Thermokarst, Winter Orb and Tangle Wire around it, which means a resolved Sphere is not a tax you pay but the game they are trying to win: you are being asked for four mana by a deck whose plan is to keep you off three. Annul on cast, before anything else; Keg at 2; Charm or Chain it on the turn you commit, and only then.



Pyrostatic Pillar. Main in the Pillar build of Sligh (about a third of Sligh lists) and in some Mono-R Ponza sideboards; every spell with mana value three or less deals you two. Chain it, or Annul it on cast; Keg can't touch an enchantment.



Mana locks. Choke is rare (a few Enchantress and Rock sideboards), Boil rarer; both end the game if they resolve, so don't let them through. Winter Orb is main in a tenth of Elves lists and side in a quarter, main in Opposition-Survival, side in Welder: Annul, Chain. Stasis is a deck. Arcane Laboratory is in a quarter of Mono-U control sideboards.









Repeatable disruption on a body. Plaguebearer (Moneyball, Mono-Black Clerics, Pit Rack) kills the Dreadnought every turn for three mana; Flare it on sight, Stifle the activation. Whipcorder taps it. Waterfront Bouncer bounces it for U and a discard, every turn, and the Madness and Survival decks that

run it have the discard outlets to make that free; Keg at 2 or Flare. Goblin Tinkerer kills it for R once it untaps, so Keg at 2 before it does, or Stifle the activation.









When the answer comes

Now the timing, because knowing the answers is half of it and the other half is when they arrive, which decides how you sequence the commit turn. Most of the time, a good opponent presents an instant-speed answer — an instant, an activation, a trigger — during your upkeep, and you should expect that as the default.

Two reasons. Your commit turn is the worst time for them to fight: you may be sitting on the mana and cards of a Gush, and if answering their interaction requires you to Gush, that mana is there for the taking. Your upkeep is the best time: if your protection is Vision Charm, the Dreadnought phases out through your attack step and you lose a whole turn of damage, and whatever mana you spend in that fight is mana you don't have on your turn or on theirs. There is a cost to them — at your upkeep you are fully untapped and may have the Counterspell mana you lacked the turn before — so it is a risk they weigh rather than a law, but plan for the worst time, which is theirs to choose.

The lines follow. Prefer lines where you never have to Charm on your own upkeep. If the interaction you expect is something Stifle answers — a Deed, a Keg, a Tinkerer, a Welder, a Drake trigger — then Charm is the enabler on the commit turn and Stifle is held for their upkeep activation, not the other way round: Stifle as the enabler and Charm as the upkeep answer spends the same two cards and loses you a turn of attacks. And when the opponent is tapped out and you hold both enablers, choose the one that leaves the right answer and the mana for the upkeep fight, even if that means Charming now while they can't respond rather than Stifling and finding yourself tapped below Counterspell when they untap.


Vision Charm
Instant
Choose one — Target artifact phases out; or put the top four cards from target player's library into his or her graveyard; or all lands of one type are basic lands of your choice until end of turn.
Illus. Greg Spalenka


Stifle
Instant
Counter target activated or triggered ability. (Mana abilities can't be countered.)
"If I wanted your opinion, I'd have told you what it was."
—Pemmin, Riptide survivor
Illus. Daren Orzio


Counterspell
Interrupt
Counter target spell.
"It was probably a lousy spell in the first place."
—Ertai, wizard adept
Illus. Stephen Daniele


Pernicious Deed
Enchantment
X, Sacrifice Pernicious Deed: Destroy each artifact, creature, and enchantment with converted mana cost X or less.
"Yawgmoth," Freyalise whispered as she set the bomb, "now you will pay for your treachery."
Illus. Christopher Moeller

Mulligans

In the blind, the hand I want has four pieces: two land drops, a Dreadnought, an enabler, and protection. I'll mulligan to find three of the four, and I want the Dreadnought to be one of them — unless the hand has the cards to find it. With the mana and an enabler already in place, two or three cantrips — or Gush and Flash of Insight — stand in for the missing Dreadnought: trust them to find it.

What to look for. In the blind I mulligan to hands that can present a Dreadnought on turn two or three. Not every one of them has a Dreadnought in it — the cantrips stand in — but every one can get there. The reason is game one. Against the linear decks — Sligh, Goblins, Elves — an early Dreadnought is close to a free win, because they have little or nothing for it before sideboarding. Lose that game, and the next two are played through all the answers they bring in.

Dreadnought is the hardest card in the deck to find. Four copies, and the eleven cantrips look at one to four cards each; a hand without one and without the cantrips to dig for it spends turns doing nothing, and most of the field kills you in that time. Keeping a seven with lands and cantrips and no threat feels safe and loses more games than a mulligan to five with a Dreadnought in it — many of this deck's losses are games spent digging for the Dreadnought that never arrived. The London mulligan is the tool for that: seeing a fresh seven and bottoming one costs far less than those games cost, and it is cheapest of all in the matchups where the only way to win is to present a Dreadnought in the first two or three turns. So in the blind, mulligan to the Dreadnought, or to the cantrips that will find it.

What to bottom. After a mulligan you see seven and put one on the bottom, two after a second mulligan. Bottom in roughly this order: a land beyond the third; a utility one-of the hand has no use for yet — Keg, Chain, Brain Freeze; a second Dreadnought when the hand has one enabler; a Foil with nothing to pitch to it. Remember what you bottomed: it is the first card of the bottom of your library you will arrange later.

Once you know who you're playing, the hand changes. Against anything aggressive — Sligh, Goblins, Elves, Zoo — the race is the whole game: keep Dreadnought plus enabler plus two lands, and mulligan a seven of counters and cantrips. Against control and combo, a hand of lands, cantrips and counters is a keep; the Dreadnought comes later and the hand builds toward the commit turn.

Against discard — Moneyball, Deadguy, the Rock, BW Control, anything with Duress and Cabal Therapy — keep seven as often as you can, because cards are the resource under attack and a seven is two more than a five. All the hand needs is lands and spells. A seven with two Dreadnoughts is often a worse hand there than a seven with none: the game starts with Therapy naming Dreadnought and you are on five cards before you've played a spell. In those matchups I'd rather find the Dreadnought later, when the discard has been spent and I'm ready to jam it, than hold it through their turn two.

Two-land hands with a Daze or a Gush are keeps: Gush turns the two Islands into a land drop and two cards, and Daze protects a turn-two jam without needing a third land.

Example hands. Sample sevens, each with the verdict in the blind — keep or mulligan, and where it is close I say so; once you know the matchup, the exceptions above take over. The one-land hands follow the table in the mana-base chapter; the rest follow the four-pieces rule. Each hand comes with its plan — the goldfish sequence you are keeping it for — and with what you are hoping the cantrips find, because a keep

is a plan, not a collection of cards. Several of the mulligans are marked as keeps at six: if the seven you see after a mulligan looks like this, bottoming its weakest card leaves a reasonable six. The two perfect hands come first, to show what the deck is trying to draw.



Keep, play or draw: the perfect jam hand. Two drops, the Dreadnought, the enabler, Daze as the interaction and Peek to see whether the coast is clear before you commit. Plan: Island, Peek them at their end step; if the coast is clear, Island, Dreadnought with Stifle on the trigger and Daze up for their answer. If it isn't, use the Opt to dig — for a Vision Charm, a Foil or a Counterspell, the protection that makes the jam safe — while making the land drops, and go the turn the hand is complete. The cantrips are looking for protection, because the hand already has the combo.



Keep, play or draw: the best hand the deck can draw. Two drops, the Dreadnought, the enabler, and the full protection package — Gush for the Islands, Foil to pitch them to, Flash of Insight as the best card Foil can discard. Plan: Island; Island, Dreadnought with Charm on the trigger; if they answer, Gush for two Islands and Foil the answer, pitching an Island and the Flash. Anything the draws find is a bonus.



Keep, play or draw. The same shape with a hard counter instead of the free one: two drops, Dreadnought, enabler, Counterspell, cantrip, refill. The question is whether to jam unprotected on turn two, and the

answer is the matchup. In the blind you can, and it often works; against Elves or Sligh you do, because that is how those matchups are won. Against anything that holds an answer you play it slow instead: Island, Opt; Island; third land, and on turn four tap two, Gush, replay an Island, and spend the floated mana on Dreadnought and Stifle, with the two untapped lands on the table paying for Counterspell. That line needs one more land from the Opt and the draws, and the Opt is looking for it — or for a Daze or Foil, which is the same protection a turn earlier.



Keep, play or draw. A one-lander with Portent and a Dreadnought, which the table puts at 86% and 91% to find the second Island, and everything else a jam wants. Plan: Island, Portent. Put the Island on top so it arrives at their upkeep, and put any spell you want to keep second or third, out of reach of a Therapy or a Duress until your draw step.

Turn two, with the land in hand: play it, Dreadnought with Charm on the trigger, and the protection is already there — Daze returns one of the two Islands, and that Island with Flash of Insight is the pitch for Foil, so you have a hard counter up on a two-land board. That line is also why Daze should not be spent on a development spell of theirs that doesn't threaten the combo, however tempting the free value: here the interaction is worth more as protection than as disruption. Portent is looking for the second Island and nothing else.



Keep on the draw, mulligan on the play. Opt alone finds the second Island 83% of the time on the draw and 71% on the play, and this hand does nothing until it does. On the draw the extra card tips it; on the play, with no Portent and no second cantrip, it goes back. When you keep it and the land arrives, the two Counterspells buy you the luxury of waiting: hold one up, counter their proactive plays, make the third land drop so Thwart is live, and combo when it is safe rather than when it is possible. Opt is looking for an Island, and so is every draw after it: the combo and the counters are already there.



Mulligan on seven; a keep at six. No threat and no enabler, which in the blind is the hand that feels safe and loses: it spends turns digging while the field kills it. If a six looks like this, keep it — the counters buy the turns and the cantrips find the rest — but a seven this anemic goes back for the chance of one with a Dreadnought in it. The cantrips are looking for the Dreadnought first and an enabler second, and nothing else counts until both are there.



Keep, play or draw. Two Dreadnoughts, an enabler, Gush and Peek. Plan: Island, Peek them at their end step; Island, Dreadnought with Charm if their hand is clear; Gush the next turn to refill, with the second Dreadnought ready if the first is answered. What the draws need to find is a second enabler, so that the second Dreadnought is a threat and not a dead card. The matchup exception from above applies to exactly this hand: against a Therapy deck the two Dreadnoughts are the liability, since Therapy on turn one names the card and takes both, and the same seven with cantrips in their place would be the better keep.



Mulligan, play or draw. One land and no cantrip: 35% and 62% to hit the second Island, and a hand of counters that can't do their job on one land. The Dreadnought in it is a trap.



Mulligan on seven; at six it is close, and I may even go to five. Four lands, Portent and Opt, but the hand has no threat and no enabler, and with this many lands a Gush only draws you past seven into discards. The lands are a resource in a long game, but as a seven this is a mulligan in the blind, and even as a six it is a hand that digs while the opponent develops. The cantrips are looking for the Dreadnought.



Keep, play or draw. No Dreadnought, but the mana and both enablers are there, and three cantrips on two lands: Portent, Opt and Opt see seven cards by turn three, and a Dreadnought is four of the fifty-three left. An Impulse in place of one Opt would make it better still, because Impulse digs four deep for exactly the card the hand is missing. This is the hand where the cantrips are the threat, and the one card they are looking for is the Dreadnought.



Keep, play or draw. Dreadnought, both enablers, Gush; the Freeze is a dead card until it isn't. Plan: Island; Island; on turn three tap both Islands, Gush them back and replay one — the floated mana pays for Dreadnought and Stifle, and the replayed Island holds up the Charm for the removal. There is no cantrip in the hand, so the natural draws are the only looks, and what they need to find is a counter.



Mulligan, play or draw. The same trap as the one-land hand above, with two Foils in it. One land, no way to find another, and nothing in the hand does its job until it does.



Keep, play or draw. A Dreadnought, three cantrips, a Counterspell and two lands — no enabler, but Portent, Opt and Impulse between them see up to nine cards by turn three, and there are eight enablers in the fifty-three. This is the ordinary good hand: the threat is in it and the cantrips are looking for the one card that turns it on.



Mulligan, play or draw. A Dreadnought, four lands and nothing that finds the enabler: Thwart and Freeze both sit in hand doing nothing, and the hand does nothing for four turns while the natural draws look for one of eight cards. The Dreadnought is not enough on its own.



Keep, play or draw. No enabler and no cantrip, but Gush is two cards and the three counters hold the game still while the draws look for one of eight enablers. Plan: land drops, counters up, and Gush when the hand needs the cards or the land drop. Everything the draws find is wanted, but the enabler is the one that matters.



Mulligan on seven; a keep at six. Both enablers and three counters and nothing to enable: no Dreadnought, no cantrip, no Gush, so only the natural draws look for one of four. A hand of answers waiting for a question; as a six it holds the game while it waits.



Keep, play or draw. One enabler, three cantrips, a Counterspell, two lands. The cantrips see eight cards by turn three and are looking for one of four Dreadnoughts; the Counterspell buys the turn if they don't find it at once. Thinner than the Dreadnought-plus-cantrips hand above, because the card you need has four copies instead of eight, and still a keep.



Keep, *play or draw.* No Dreadnought and no cantrip, but the mana and both enablers are already there, with a counter and the refill. Gush and the Flash are four cards of digging between them: trust them, and the draws, to find one of four Dreadnoughts. I would almost never send this hand back. Plan: Island; Island; Gush when the land drop needs it; Flash of Insight for X=1 once the third land is down, and from the graveyard later for the Dreadnought it is all looking for.



Mulligan, *play or draw.* The combo and the protection on one land, and Gush can't help because it needs two Islands. No cantrip means 35% and 62% to find the second land, and a hand this good on one land is still a mulligan.



Keep, *play or draw.* Two Dreadnoughts and no enabler on two lands, with Opt and Peek to look. The second Dreadnought is redundancy against the answer, not a second threat, until an enabler shows; Opt and the draws are looking for one of eight, and Peek is kept for the turn before the jam.



Mulligan, play or draw. The Dreadnought with a pile of utility around it: no enabler, no cantrip, three lands and three one-ofs that answer things the opponent hasn't done yet. Nothing in it looks for the card that is missing.



Keep, play or draw. Three enablers, two cantrips, two lands, no Dreadnought: the mana and the enablers are established, and the cantrips dig for the one piece missing. Portent and Opt see five cards by turn two and the draws keep looking for one of four; when it comes, the hand has an enabler for it and two more for the Dreadnoughts after. Plan: Island, Portent; Island, Opt; Dreadnought the turn it arrives with a Stifle on the trigger and another in hand.



Keep, play or draw. A Dreadnought with two Flashes and two counters and no enabler, and a plan: hold Counterspell up through the early turns, and once the third land is down, cast a Flash for X=1 at their end step each turn — three lands pay for one a turn — with Thwart online behind them. Each Flash from hand is a look now and a bigger look from the graveyard later, so the hand sees a lot of cards by the midgame while the counters keep the board quiet; the enabler is one of eight, and this hand gets to look for it.



Keep, play or draw. A one-lander with two Portents and the combo. The second Portent adds nothing by the turn-two drop, but the first one's 86% and 91% is the number that matters, and once the second Island lands the hand has the Dreadnought, the enabler, and Daze and Foil for protection. Plan: Island, Portent for the land; Island, Dreadnought with Charm, Daze behind it, and Foil pitching the Island Daze returns and the spare Portent.

Matchups

One entry per deck, in roughly the order you will face them. Each gives the verdict, what the deck does, what the game hinges on, how game one and the sideboarded games are played, the row (out / in, sixty cards unless noted) with the reasons for it, and the interactions worth remembering.

Dreadnought Mirror



Verdict. Even. It is a blue mirror in the old style — two players with full hands passing the turn — and the people who enjoy that enjoy nothing more. Game one is favorable for this list against mirrors without a main-deck Brain Freeze, which is the main reason the Freeze is main. Post-board it is a mill game on both sides, long and grinding, and the player with more patience usually wins it.

What they do. The same deck, in one of four builds: the stock list with Misdirection, the AK build, the Freeze-main build, or a jam list with no Brain Freeze, like Dave Kaplan's. Find out which as early as you can — a Misdirection, an Accumulated Knowledge or an early unprotected jam tells you — because the build decides how much the Dreadnought matters and whether a Freeze is coming.

The golden rule. Usually the first player to move loses. It isn't true every time, but it is the right posture, and the mindset to be in from the first turn: this is a mill game and a resource game before it is a

Dreadnought game. Learn to play it fast, in paper and online. Mill games run long, and in paper some matches time out before game two is over — which is one more reason winning game one matters so much here.

What the matchup hinges on: not going to discard. With neither player committing to the board, each turn is a land drop and a cantrip, and the player who can't make the land drop, or who casts the card-advantage spell — a Gush, a flashback Flash, an Accumulated Knowledge for two or more — is the player who goes to discard at the end of the turn. Discarding a Flash of Insight is fine; discarding anything else is a card lost. Portent is the best way to defer the problem by a turn, since its draw arrives after your discard step. While you cantrip, the priorities are in order:

1. Early, make the land drops and acquire permission and interaction — Counterspell, Daze, a Chain of Vapor — for the early jam the opponent may try. Jamming early yourself is a way to win this game when you have the nuts, or when a Peek shows the coast is clear; but if it backfires you usually lose, because every Dreadnought you commit is a card down, every Foil you pitch-cast (or Misdirection, in the lists that run it) is a card down, and a jam protected by a Foil that meets a Counterspell and a Daze is two cards down for nothing.

2. Once the interaction is adequate, keep making land drops and acquire the storm cards: Brain Freeze, Vision Charm, and Stifle as protection for the storm trigger.

This is also the matchup where the bottom of your library matters most. Every Opt, Impulse and Flash puts cards there in a known order, the game is long enough that you will draw them, and nothing shuffles unless you choose to Portent yourself and miss. Arrange them deliberately — the Dreadnought you don't want yet below the Charm you do — and keep the map in your head or in your notes; knowing your next ten draws is worth more than most spells in the deck.

Every Vision Charm counts, so early in the game use Stifle as the enabler for a Dreadnought and save the Charms. Once all eight Dreadnoughts have been neutralized, the player who resolves more Vision Charms at the other's library usually wins — especially before sideboarding, when neither side has the extra Freezes.

Game one: Dreadnought and Keg are not dead cards. They are the cards you play when you are about to go to discard. If the end of turn would cost you a card anyway, jam the Dreadnought, or land the Keg — which then sits at one for the rest of the game as the answer to their Dreadnought. Gush is the easiest way to set these turns up: both players on seven, your mana well developed, and now they have to answer a threat. Trading answers one for one is fine, and you can also let the Dreadnought go: their resource for a card you were about to discard is a trade you take.

When you jam, they may respond by jamming their own Dreadnought, to block yours and trade, or to race by Charming yours on your upkeep. Chain of Vapor lets you interact with their Dreadnought on your own terms — let it resolve, set up the turn when you play your hand down to size, and Chain it then — at the cost of making their Vision Charm a relevant answer to the Chain.

And the Dreadnought has one more job here: it is the best way to start a lethal Freeze chain on your own turn. Jam it, protect it on the stack, and every spell in that fight — yours and theirs — is storm; when the

dust settles you have the count, the mana you floated, and they have spent their counters on the Dreadnought rather than holding them for the Freeze. Do this when the resources under you are enough to build the whole chain and still beat their Stifles, not before.

Counter the Dreadnought or the enabler? It depends. Countering the Dreadnought is the default and the conservative choice. When you are heavy on countermagic, or they can't pay for two enablers, there is value in fighting over the enabler instead: the Dreadnought dies to its own trigger and the enablers come out of their hand. Every spell in that fight lengthens the storm chain their Brain Freeze is waiting for, so weigh it. And an enabler drawn out is rarely wasted: every one they spend defending a Dreadnought is one not milling you and not Stifling your storm trigger.

After sideboarding. Both sides have Annul and Chain, and most opponents board out some Dreadnoughts, so it takes very unlucky draws to be beaten by the 12/12: don't play scared of it. One caution: some mirrors board in Dominate, and a Dreadnought you were happy to lose becomes a 12/12 attacking you. A Counterspell for the Dominate, a Charm in response, or a Chain on the stolen Dreadnought afterwards is worth holding when you've seen the card or suspect the build. The game is about not getting milled before you mill them. A Freeze on their end step after they tap out uses their cantrips as your storm; hold a Stifle for their Stifle on your trigger, and bait it with the first Freeze if you hold two. When their partial Freeze is on the stack and you need a card that is about to be milled — your own Freezes most of all — a Flash from the graveyard in response takes it out of the library before the mill resolves.

With Freeze the plan on both sides, it is often correct to take the draw when you win the roll: you get an extra card in hand, and with the sixty-first card in the deck you also start with more cards in your library than an opponent on sixty, so when both sides trade off all their resources, they are the first to draw from an empty library.

Sideboarding (61): −1 Dreadnought, −2 Daze, −1 Peek, −1 Keg / +3 Annul, +2 Brain Freeze, +1 Chain.

Out 5



In 6



Why these. Annul is the one-mana answer to their Dreadnought — it counters the artifact spell on cast, before the trigger fight, so no enabler ever matters — and to their Keg; it does nothing against the Freeze, which is an instant, and that is what the Stifles are for. The two extra Freezes make three, enough that one Stifle on your storm trigger doesn't end the plan, and enough to threaten the two-Freeze turn that mills forty-five after six other spells.

Daze leaves because the opponent isn't tapping out. Peek is the cantrip that goes: it selects nothing, and in a game this long the hand it shows is out of date by the turn you commit. Thwart stays: it is a hard counter, and in a game this long you usually hard-cast it for four mana rather than send three Islands back in a game decided by land drops and hand size. Like any counter, it stops only one storm copy of a Freeze, but it counters the Dreadnought, a Dominate or the card-advantage spell outright. Three Dreadnoughts stay as the action that forces answers and the turn-two window on the play. Keg leaves and the second Chain comes in. After sideboarding the Dreadnought is the smaller threat and the game is a long counter war, and Chain is the better card in it: one mana at instant speed, it answers their Dreadnought on your terms, after they have spent an enabler on it, sends back a stolen one, and, being an instant, adds to the storm count on the Freeze turn. Keg has to be cast into open counters and Annul, then sits on the table telling them what it does, and its best setting is the Dreadnought you are no longer afraid of.

And the deck goes to sixty-one rather than cutting a sixth card: in a mill race, library size is a resource, and one card of library is cheaper than any card in the sixty.

Sligh



Verdict. Favorable. Game one is very favorable; after sideboarding it gets closer, but it still leans your way. Sligh is one of the most-played decks in Premodern, fast and punishing to any stumble; you will face it constantly.

What they do. Mono-red, and built to take your life total to zero as fast as any deck in the format. Cheap creatures first — Jackal Pup, Mogg Fanatic (a one-damage spell on a stick), Goblin Patrol, Grim Lavamancer (which turns their graveyard into two damage at a time) — to establish a clock. Seal of Fire for two. Then a full suite of instant-speed three-damage burn, Lightning Bolt and Incinerate, Flame Rift in some lists for four to each player, and four Fireblast in nearly all, which is the spell that usually finishes you by sacrificing two Mountains. The biggest single threat is Ball Lightning, and the thing to expect is that it hits you on turn three. Some lists run Pyrostatic Pillar or Sulfuric Vortex, enchantments whose job is to compress the game. Cursed Scroll grinds, and Barbarian Rings add reach at the end.

What the matchup hinges on. Whether you present a Dreadnought before their burn adds up. The great news is that before sideboarding most lists have no way to interact with the combo at all — no artifact removal, no counters, nothing. A Dreadnought on turn two or three, even unprotected, puts the game in your favor, and the clock the Dreadnought sets is faster than theirs.

Game one. Jam. The hand you want is two lands, a Dreadnought and an enabler, and nothing else needs to be there. Don't save Foil and Counterspell to protect the Dreadnought: it is very likely they have no answer for it anyway. Spend them protecting your life total instead, on the big burn: a Ball Lightning, a Fireblast aimed at your face. The small spells you can take.

Stifle has more targets here than people expect: a Sulfuric Vortex trigger on your upkeep when the two life is the difference, a Seal of Fire activation, a Mogg Fanatic sacrifice when that one damage matters. In combat, remember that Jackal Pup is no blocker for the Dreadnought: it dies, and its own trigger deals the twelve damage to its controller — so their blockers are fewer than their creatures.

One caution on the first turn: a Mountain into Mogg Fanatic is also how Goblins opens, and Goblins has main-deck Naturalize. Before you commit an unprotected Dreadnought into what might be a Naturalize, get a little more information — a second card, a Peek — unless the hand gives you nothing else to do.



A few lists play Goblin Vandal in the main deck: when it attacks and isn't blocked, they can pay R to destroy the Dreadnought. It isn't a great answer to what you are doing. It can't attack the turn it comes down, so you get a turn to see it coming, and an untapped Dreadnought blocks one, so they need two to get through. When a Vandal is out, hold the attack until you have an answer for it: a Stifle, a Vision Charm, or another Dreadnought to untap the one that attacked.

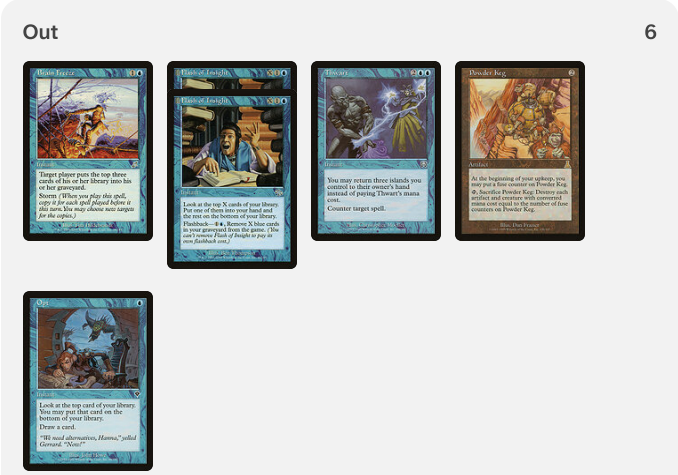
After sideboarding. This is where the matchup gets much harder, and jamming without protection stops being safe. They bring artifact destruction — three Overload in nearly every sideboard, and Mogg Salvage, a free spell that exists in their sideboard for exactly this matchup — and Pyroblast and Red Elemental Blast to fight you on the stack. Some bring Ensnaring Bridge, which you answer on the stack with a counter, after the fact with Chain of Vapor, or with two Vision Charms to attack through it twice. Most Sligh players also reshape the deck for this matchup: out go the clunky three-drops — Ball Lightning, Cursed Scroll, Sulfuric Vortex — and in come Goblin Cadets for more cheap pressure, so the sideboarded games are a stream of two-power creatures backed by Overload

and the red Blasts. Some add Threaten, which steals the Dreadnought for a turn and wins the game when it resolves; treat it as a must-counter. Their answers don't attack your life total, so the sideboard games give you a little more time to sculpt a proper commit turn than game one did.



You bring the four blue Blasts, which counter Fireblast, Overload, Mogg Salvage, Threaten and the red Blasts and kill their creatures, and Essence Flare for the creatures: Jackal Pup and Grim Lavamancer are the prime targets, and Mogg Fanatic is the third — they will sacrifice it in response for the one damage, but a Fanatic left alone adds up to a lot more than one, so it has to be answered at some point.

Sideboarding: −1 Brain Freeze, −2 Flash, −1 Thwart, −1 Keg, −1 Opt / +2 Blue Elemental Blast, +2 Hydroblast, +2 Flare.



Why these. Freeze is dead against a deck that empties its hand. Flash is too slow against a clock this fast. Thwart's three Islands are the opposite of what a race wants. Keg's useful setting here is one — Pup, Fanatic, Patrol and Lavamancer all die to it — but that is the Dreadnought's setting too, and a race has no turn to spare for a two-mana artifact that can't be cracked with the Dreadnought out. Peek stays: after sideboarding the commit turn depends on whether they hold an answer — an Overload or a Mogg Salvage for the Dreadnought, a red Blast for your Stifle or Charm — and Peek tells you whether to jam with one

piece of protection, wait for a second, or play the long game. Opt goes instead: Impulse still digs four deep for the Blast or the protection you need, and Peek's look at their hand is worth more here than Opt's scry.

Daze stays, because they tap out, and Fireblast and Salvage are often cast with no mana open, so Daze catches them. All four Foil stay: the resource they attack is life, not cards. Chain stays for a resolved Pillar or Bridge, or a Vortex they kept. Counterspell is for Fireblast and for their answers to the Dreadnought — Overload, Threaten, a red Blast; the blue Blasts and Flare handle the rest.

The Pillar build gets the same row. Neither Annul nor Keg is in it, so the Pillar is answered on the stack — it is a two-mana sorcery-speed enchantment cast into your untapped Islands, and Counterspell, Daze or Foil all do — or by Chain once it has resolved.

Enchantress





Verdict. Slightly unfavorable, and very close to even when played correctly. The catch is that the correct way to play it is counterintuitive for anyone new to the deck — it asks you not to do the things the deck is built to do — which is why most people feel this is a hard matchup to win. Enchantress is one of the most powerful decks in the format right now and it finishes well at large tournaments, so it is worth learning the plan properly.

What they do. The deck is almost entirely lands, engine pieces and enchantments; the only exceptions are a few Swords to Plowshares and the Replenishes. The engine is Argothian Enchantress and Enchantress's Presence: one on the table is a card for every enchantment they *cast* — the enchantment doesn't have to resolve, the draw is on cast — and two is two. Their early game is landing one of those, ideally two, and from there every turn buries you deeper. The mana keeps pace: Exploration for extra land drops, Wild Growth, and Serra's Sanctum, which taps for one white per enchantment and turns a board into a storm of them in a single turn.

The midgame is a lock on several fronts at once. Opalescence with Parallax Wave is a full lock on every non-shroud creature and enchantment on the board, exiled at instant speed; Solitary Confinement means you can't damage them or target them; Sterling Grove gives their enchantments shroud so you can't interact with those either. They finish by animating the enchantments with Opalescence and attacking.

What the matchup hinges on. Three things are wrong for the Dreadnought player at once: their card-advantage engine is better than yours, their main deck is full of answers to a resolved Dreadnought — Seal of Cleansing, Parallax Wave, Swords — and they can lock you out, or slow you down with Elephant Grass or Confinement, before the 12/12 connects twice. Fighting on all three fronts and coming out ahead is hard. Not impossible: this deck is great because when you have the nuts you can jam into anything and win, and that line is often there. But the game-one plan I'd suggest is a different one, built on the deck's one weakness — it has a single win condition.

Game one: counter the win conditions and nothing else. Enchantress wins with Opalescence, two to four copies in the main deck, with one or two Replenish that can return it from the graveyard — call it four win conditions on average. So counter those four and do nothing else. Hold the Keg for an Argothian Enchantress (below). Don't jam a Dreadnought. Don't counter the engine or the value spells. Let them goldfish their deck, and counter the Opalescence when it hits the stack, and the Replenish only when an Opalescence is already in the graveyard. Some lists run a single main-deck Abeyance, and a good pilot will

try to overload your permission — two Opalescences in one turn, an Abeyance in front of them — so the Abeyance is the one you have to counter first when it comes.

The rest of your game is sculpting for hard counters (Daze won't cut it here, since they have the mana), making land drops, and using your end-of-turn mana to mill them: every Vision Charm goes at their library, and so does the main-deck Brain Freeze when the storm allows. The mill does two things — it takes win conditions out of their deck so there are fewer to counter, and it runs them out of cards, which a deck that draws this much does to itself anyway. Often they draw their entire library and lose. Before sideboarding, expect no Gaea's Blessing in the main deck.

One expiry date on the plan: a resolved Solitary Confinement means you can't target them, so the Charms and the Freeze have to have done their work before it lands — counter it, or Chain it.

Interactions worth knowing. Stifle the Seal of Cleansing or Aura of Silence sacrifice, and the Sterling Grove activation. Mill them with Charm after a Sterling Grove or an Enlightened Tutor has put a card on top, before they draw it. The same idea works proactively: Portent them first, and if an Opalescence, a Replenish or an Enchantress effect is in the top three, leave it there and Charm the four away — a win condition countered for one mana and no Counterspell. Chain a Confinement or an Elephant Grass to attack for lethal.

Powder Keg has almost no targets here, with one exception that makes it worth having: Argothian Enchantress at two, which has shroud and dies to nothing else you play. After an Opalescence resolves, Keg can also hit a slice of their board, since the enchantments are creatures now — but don't plan on that line; once Opalescence is down you are badly behind.

After sideboarding. They bring a lot. To beat your interaction: Xantid Swarm, which stops you casting spells on any turn it attacks — Flare kills it before it can — and more Abeyance or Orim's Chant for the same reason. More Replenish, so the threats you've already countered come back with one spell. More answers to the Dreadnought to respect the jam plan: Aura of Silence, more Swords, more Seals. And one or two Gaea's Blessing to respect the Freeze plan.

The counter-the-win-conditions plan no longer works on its own: the extra cards overload your permission, and if you only counter the win conditions and the lock pieces while you mill, the engine snowballs and buries you first. So games two and three change drastically. Cut every Dreadnought and go all in on the mill, but fight differently — counter the Enchantress effects early, to slow their development, while the extra Freezes let you mill much more aggressively than game one allowed.

The enablers to counter are the Enchantress effects, and the reason is what the deck looks like without them. Enchantress needs its card advantage to function: with no Argothian and no Presence on the table, all it has is the selection Mirri's Guile gives it, and it slows down to a crawl — one land and one enchantment a turn, churning through anemic draws until it finds the next engine piece. Every one of those turns is a turn you spend sculpting your hand, making the land drops a proper Freeze turn needs, and preparing for the next Enchantress effect down the line, so that when it comes you have the counter and the storm. Counter the engine, and the game becomes one where you have time; let it resolve, and the game becomes one where you don't.

Solitary Confinement after sideboarding. Post-board the plan is to mill them proactively on one big turn, and a resolved Confinement stops that cold, so the question of whether to counter it comes up every game. The answer depends on how many Enchantress effects they have out. The lock needs two to sustain itself. With one or none, let it resolve: they skip their draw step under it, so every enchantment they hold becomes either the next enchantment or a land drop, the chain of upkeep discards runs dry once the hand has turned into lands, and the Confinement is sacrificed on its own — and a Stifle on an Enchantress draw trigger in that spot makes sure they don't see the next enchantment. With two or more effects out it is a different card: the lock sustains itself and it keeps the Freeze turn off the table, and then it is something to counter on cast or Chain in earnest.

Sideboarding: −4 Dreadnought, −2 Daze, −2 Vision Charm, −1 Peek / +3 Annul, +2 Brain Freeze, +3 Flare, +1 Chain.

Out 9



In 9



Why these. Annul is the extra answer to their enchantments, and its prime target is Enchantress's Presence. Flare is for Xantid Swarm. The second Chain bounces the permanent that is beating you — Confinement, Sterling Grove, a Presence. Daze goes because they have the mana to play around it; Peek goes because what is in their hand at the end of their turn rarely matters here; two Charms go because their deck empties itself fast enough that the third and fourth Charm's mill matters less than the slots, and because every Charm has to be weighed against the Blessing they now hold. The permission stays, and all four Stifles stay, for the Blessing trigger. In my experience the plan that looks wrong — not jamming, and in game one not fighting the engine — takes this from unfavorable to slightly unfavorable or even.

Elves



Verdict. Unfavorable, and one of the matchups that often needs some luck to win. It is also one of the main reasons the mulligan chapter tells you to go to six for a Dreadnought: against this deck the Dreadnought in the opening hand is the game.

What they do. Snowball into a massive board with unlimited mana, fast. Two engines do it. Wirewood Symbiote untaps Priest of Titania for another burst of mana while resetting a value creature — a Multani's Acolyte for another card, a Deranged Hermit for another four Squirrels, and the Hermit is their main finisher. Survival of the Fittest finds the right toolbox creature for the moment and puts Squee, Genesis or Anger in the graveyard for value on the way. Left unchecked, the deck buries you by turn three or four. Some lists add mana denial — Winter Orb, Tangle Wire — but the recent ones lean toward the combo end.

What the matchup hinges on. Whether a Dreadnought lands before the snowball. Pre-board their only real interaction is Nantuko Vigilante, one or two copies and clunky to use — it has to be found with Survival, cast face down, and flipped — and the flip is a trigger, so Stifle saves the Dreadnought when it happens. If you are late to the party, their board races a 12/12 easily, or simply blocks it with enough power to kill it.

Game one. Jam, and don't wait for protection: you don't have that luxury here. The ideal is a Dreadnought scammed into play on turn two. Survival of the Fittest is the first counterspell target: it is the engine, and

you can't beat it once it is down — counter it on sight, whatever else is in hand. Wirewood Symbiote is the next: it untaps Priest of Titania and keeps the snowball going. Two more are must-counters: any morph creature, which you assume is the Vigilante, and Deranged Hermit, for its closing power. Beyond those, let them have the dorks: your counters are for the Survival, the Symbiote, the morph and the Hermit, and the Dreadnought is for the clock.

After sideboarding. They bring more answers to the Dreadnought — Naturalize, more Vigilantes — so the unprotected jam gets riskier, though it stays the plan more often than you'd like. You bring three Annul, aimed at Survival and at Tangle Wire, and three Essence Flare for the dorks that matter. Sometimes killing a mana elf buys a valuable turn, but the prime target is Wirewood Symbiote: once it is on the table every Elf of theirs can be saved from your removal by bouncing it, and the Symbiote isn't an Elf, so it has to die before anything else can. The ideal game is one where the interaction slows their development enough to find protection for the Dreadnought jam. That doesn't happen very often. More often you jam an unprotected Dreadnought early and hope they don't have the answer, which is why this matchup takes some luck.

Sideboarding: −2 Flash, −2 Daze, −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Thwart / +3 Annul, +3 Flare.

Out 6



In 6



Why these. Flash is too slow for a deck that kills by turn four. Freeze is dead. Daze leaves because they have far too much mana to be caught by it. Thwart leaves because the game is decided before the third Island matters. Annul is the one-mana answer to Survival and to Tangle Wire; Flare is the one-mana answer to the Symbiote, then the dorks. Keg stays, and it is very good here: at one it sweeps Llanowar Elves, Fyndhorn Elves and the Symbiotes in a single activation, which is most of their mana and their best engine piece at once — just not with your own Dreadnought on the table, unless it is phased out first (see the Powder Keg entry). Chain stays for a resolved Survival or a Winter Orb.

Goblins



Verdict. Fairly even. The deck swarms the board with synergistic Goblins and starts attacking at once; the common construction now splashes green for main-deck Naturalize, which is the part that matters to you.

What they do. The main threat is Goblin Lackey, usually on turn one. Unanswered, it scams an expensive Goblin into play on turn two — expect Siege-Gang Commander, Goblin Goon, a Ringleader or a Warchief off the trigger — and builds a commanding board before you have done anything. Goblin Warchief is the other engine: a cost reducer that gives the others haste, it compresses the game and turns a Tinkerer into an immediate threat. Goblin Matron tutors. Goblin Piledriver is the beater, +2/+0 for every other attacking Goblin. Goblin Ringleader refuels the hand and is, with Matron, their card advantage.
The cards that are problems for you specifically are the two or three main-deck Naturalizes and the Goblin Tinkerers.

A mono-red version is gaining popularity. The good news is that it has no Naturalize; in exchange expect more Tinkerers, sometimes Overload or Mogg Salvage from the side, and a faster, more aggressive posture built on Ruby Medallion. The plan against it is the same.

What the matchup hinges on. Two things: whether you answer the turn-one Lackey, and whether a Tinkerer ever gets to untap. A resolved Tinkerer that has lost summoning sickness is very hard to beat — a

good pilot activates it in your upkeep, which makes Vision Charm a non-answer and means you need a Stifle for each activation. Don't let one come down if you can help it, and don't let them develop toward it through Warchief.

Game one. The goal is to commit a Dreadnought with adequate protection before their board can ignore it — attacking past it, or forcing you to hold it back as a blocker. Which enabler depends on the Tinkerer. With no Tinkerer on their side, Stifle is the better one, because a Stifled Dreadnought can block on their turn and a Charmed one is still phased out. With a Tinkerer out, Charm is the enabler and Stifle is held for its activation in your upkeep, as in the answers chapter. The untap trick is at its best in this matchup: attack for twelve, then in the second main phase cast another Dreadnought with no enabler and sacrifice the tapped one to its trigger, so you have an untapped blocker again before the final swing.

On their side, the countering priorities are specific. Counter the Matron, not the card she fetches: she is their best card plus a 1/1 body, and the body is not something to underestimate — every Goblin that attacks beside a Piledriver is three more damage a turn. Consider spending a counter on Warchief to buy time. Ringleader is worth a counter or a Stifle on the trigger to keep them in the dirt. The other Stifle targets: the Lackey trigger, Piledriver's pump so you don't take the massive hit, Siege-Gang's tokens, and a fetchland when you sense a Forest is coming for a Naturalize — one of the times Stifling a fetchland is clearly right.

After sideboarding. Expect them to cut the cards that are weak against you — Ringleader, Sharpshooter, Gempalm Incinerator, Mogg Fanatic — and bring a lot of answers: more Naturalize and Crumble, extra Tinkerers, Overload, Mogg Salvage, Hearth Charm, Hull Breach and Threaten, with Terminate, Smother and Cabal Therapy in the black-splash lists, and the red Blasts to fight you on the stack. Skirk Prospector lets them develop and still hold up Blast mana, so a tapped-out board is not always tapped out. You bring Essence Flare, a fantastic answer to their one-power creatures and above all to the Lackey that arrives before you have Counterspell mana, and the four blue Blasts, the best cards in your sideboard here: stack interaction against the red Blasts and a removal spell for every creature they have, with the one exception of Piledriver, which has protection from blue and must be answered on the stack.









Flare, the Blasts and Daze on the play are the efficient answers to the turn-one Lackey, and that shapes the mulligan in games two and three: keep a hand with the Dreadnought and one of those answers. If you

keep one that can't answer the Lackey and they have it, the game is usually not winnable — and they know how good the Lackey is against you, so some of the time they will mulligan into one.

Sideboarding: −1 Keg, −2 Flash, −1 Thwart, −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Peek, −1 Foil / +4 blasts, +3 Flare.

Out 7



In 7



Why these. Keg looks right and isn't: it forces you to tap out of interaction on your own turn, it rarely catches the Lackey in time, and their curve spreads mana values widely enough that any one setting misses most of the board. Flash is too slow, Thwart's cost is wrong for a race, and Freeze is dead. Peek goes because you know what is coming. Daze stays: against an opponent who isn't playing around it, it is one of the best cards in the matchup, and it takes a Foil's slot rather than its own; if the opponent has shown they play around it, swap that Foil back in for the Daze.

Terrageddon





This entry assumes the Naya build, the common one; 4C Terrageddon, which adds blue for Meddling Mage, is covered at the end with its own row.

Verdict. Slightly unfavorable. Game one is close, and can lean your way when they are slow to build a clock; after sideboarding their pressure and the number of answers they bring tilt it toward them.

Counter Sylvan Library. It is their biggest development threat, in every game of the match: every turn it stays is a turn they get further ahead on cards and closer to the answers they need. Counterspell it in game one; after sideboarding, Annul it. Don't pitch a Foil at it, though: it is a strong card, but not worth three of yours, and a second Library is close to a dead card in their hand while the first is on the battlefield — Foil the first and the second does its job anyway (see Foil).

What they do. A Naya midrange deck built around two cards: Terravore, which grows with every land in every graveyard, and Armageddon, which turns a board of creatures into a game that is very hard to come back from. Around those, the engine is Sylvan Library, which is both card advantage and card selection — the best card of their top three every turn, and more when they will pay the life for it. Mox Diamond is the acceleration: it fixes their three colors, puts lands in the graveyard for Terravore and threshold, and survives their own Armageddon. Weathered Wayfarer is the toolbox, fetching a land whenever they are behind on lands — Wasteland, Rishadan Port, Treetop Village, City of Traitors, a cycling land — and it is how they keep Wasteland and Port coming — though against you only Port matters, since every land you play is a basic Island and Wasteland has nothing to hit. The threat suite varies from list to list: Nimble Mongoose and Werebear, which both turn on with threshold, Call of the Herd, an Anurid Brushhopper, and Wild Mongrel in some versions. Expect four Swords to Plowshares in the main deck, and both Naturalize and Disenchant alongside them.

What the matchup hinges on. Their clock against your sculpting. Sylvan Library makes them hard to out-card, though in a longer game this deck is fully capable of it; what you can't do is jam into a hand full of answers. So the game is about finding a hand that protects the Dreadnought before their creatures and their Library add up — and if the game goes long, your cantrips, Gush and Flash keep pace with the Library. Armageddon is weaker against you than against most of the field — you operate on two lands, and Gush saves two of them — but Rishadan Port still taps the mana you need on the commit turn.

Game one. Sculpt a protected hand, and judge their clock to know how long you have. If they are slow to develop pressure, or can't find threshold, you have time to wait for Counterspell plus Charm and the land drops to cast both; if Mongoose and Werebear are already threshold-sized, you have to go sooner, with what you have.

Once they reach Armageddon mana, keep Gush ready: Gush in response to Armageddon returns two Islands to your hand before it resolves, and you rebuild faster than they do. Chain of Vapor on a Mox Diamond is a Stone Rain — they have to replay it and pitch another land — and it is best just before you jam. Mind the copy: they can sacrifice a land to point it at your Dreadnought, so have a counter for the copy or the Dreadnought not yet on the table. Powder Keg at zero kills every Mox Diamond and every Elephant token without touching your Dreadnought. Charm in response to Swords, not pre-emptively.

Stifle has plenty to do here: the sacrifice of an Aura of Silence or a Seal of Cleansing, a Weathered Wayfarer activation, a Windswept Heath when they are short of a color. Keg has more settings than zero: two kills a Werebear, three a Terravore, zero an animated Treetop Village as well as the Moxes and the tokens.

After sideboarding. They bring more answers to the Dreadnought: Aura of Silence in most sideboards, more artifact removal, Reprisal in some lists, and the red Blasts to fight you on the stack — expect one on the Counterspell that protects your Dreadnought, and hold a Foil for it. Some bring Ray of Revelation for your Back to Basics, more likely in game three once they have seen it; it is narrow, since it does nothing to the Dreadnought, and most prefer answers that hit both. Many pilots go further and cut Armageddon and Terravore against you altogether: they lower their curve, keep mana up on your turn, and bring in Hidden Gibbons, which becomes a 4/4 the first time you cast an instant — and a deck this full of instants can rarely avoid casting one. Annul it on cast, before it can turn. With fewer lands in their graveyard and more answers in their hand, the game becomes pressure plus disruption against your sculpting.









Your plan is to control the game until you can either resolve and protect Back to Basics or jam a protected Dreadnought. Back to Basics attacks their very greedy mana base, and it also overloads their artifact and enchantment removal, so the Naturalizes and the Auras aren't all pointed at the Dreadnought.

Sideboarding: −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Thwart, −2 Daze, −1 Flash / +3 Annul, +2 Back to Basics.

Out 5



In 5



Why these. Annul is the answer to their Libraries, their Auras and Hidden Gibbons: the Aura first, because it taxes the Dreadnought by two and then sacrifices as a Disenchant, then the Library, then a Mox — and Hidden Gibbons on cast ahead of all of them, on the opponents who bring it, because once it resolves your first instant turns it into a 4/4. Back to Basics is far better than Web here: it locks Gemstone Mine, Rith's Grove, City of Traitors and the painlands, leaving them Forests, Plains, Windswept Heath and Mox Diamond, and Back to Basics also turns Rishadan Port into a land that taps once and never untaps; Web stops only the lands with activated abilities — Port, Treetop Village, the cycling lands. The second Chain stays in the sideboard: resetting a Mox is cute, but not worth a card that hands them a copy to point at your Dreadnought.

Brain Freeze is dead against a deck that doesn't draw itself out. Daze leaves because they play draw-go with Swords up and rarely tap out into it. Thwart leaves to make room: Annul does its job against the cards that matter here — Library, Aura, Gibbons — for one mana and no Islands. One Flash goes because their deck is fast enough early to punish a slow card, and one stays for the long game that follows a resolved Back to Basics. Keg stays for the Moxes and the Elephant tokens.

4C Terrageddon. The same deck with blue added for Meddling Mage in the main, and that makes the matchup unfavorable: a Mage naming Phyrexian Dreadnought, or the enabler you are short of, shuts the combo off for as long as it lives, and it comes down early enough to name the card before you can protect it. Counter it on cast when you can; after sideboarding, Essence Flare kills it in two upkeeps, and a Keg already sitting at two kills it at once. The rest of the plan is the Naya one. Their mana is worse than Naya's — to fit four colors they cut the cycling lands for more multicolor lands — so Back to Basics hurts them even more.



Sideboarding (4C): −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Thwart, −2 Daze, −2 Flash, −1 Peek / +3 Annul, +2 Back to Basics, +2 Flare.

4C

Out 7



In 7



Why these, against 4C. Flare is the answer to the Mage that you can cast at sorcery speed on your own terms. Two Flares come in, and Peek makes room, so Annul stays at three: a Mage is the card that matters more than any one Library or Aura, but their Libraries, Auras and Moxes are still the targets that decide the long game. Both Flashes leave: the game turns on answering the Mage early, not on the long game.

Oath Ponza





This entry covers GW Oath Ponza, including the greedier versions that splash more colors; they play and sideboard the same way. GR Oath Ponza is covered at the end, with its own row.

Verdict. Slightly favorable to even. The five-color versions are harder — they are built to beat you — and GR is the easiest version to face.

Counter Sphere of Resistance. On sight, every game. It turns your two-mana combo into a four-mana one and makes every free spell cost a mana: paying for Gush and Foil is extremely taxing. When you can't counter it, consider paying two for Vision Charm to phase it out at their end step before your commit turn, so it isn't taxing you on the turn you go off.

What they do. A land destruction deck — Ponza — with mana denial on every front: Rishadan Port and Wasteland — though against you only Port matters, since Wasteland has nothing to hit — Sphere of Resistance, and six to eight land destruction spells: Winter's Grasp and Thermokarst, and Stone Rain in the red build. The popular build adds white for Swords to Plowshares, and sometimes splashes black for Vindicate, which takes the place of some of the land destruction and doubles as removal. Expect Naturalize in the main deck as well. They almost always play four Sylvan Library for card advantage and selection.

The five-color versions. Some lists, popularized by Claire Ackerman, play a greedier mana base, with City of Brass and Gemstone Mine, to splash Meddling Mage and Vindicate beside the white answers. They

are built as anti-Dreadnought lists, and they are the hardest version of the matchup. Read their lands in game one: a City of Brass or a Gemstone Mine tells you it's one of them, and that a Mage may be coming even in game one.









They win two ways. Manlands, seven or eight of them between Treetop Village and Mishra's Factory, and Oath of Druids into Terravore. There is no Armageddon here: Terravore grows on the land destruction spells and on Oath itself, because an Oath trigger puts every card it reveals before the creature into the graveyard, and many of those are lands. A single Oath trigger can present a very large Terravore. Don't underestimate it.

What the matchup hinges on. Whether you keep your mana and your free spells working while they attack both. Sphere is the card that ends games; Swords and Naturalize — and Vindicate, where they have it — answer the 12/12; Oath turns your Dreadnought into their Terravore; and the manlands are a clock that Counterspell can't touch.

Game one. Four things to worry about, and a fifth against the five-color versions.

1. Sphere of Resistance, as above: counter it on sight.
2. Swords to Plowshares, Naturalize and sometimes Vindicate answer the Dreadnought in the main deck. Charm in response to any of them.
3. A resolved Oath of Druids gifts them a Terravore after you've gone off, because your Dreadnought is the creature that turns the trigger on. This is relatively easy to play around. Charm the Dreadnought rather than Stifling its trigger: it is phased out through their upkeep, so you get your first swing in before Oath ever triggers — and a Terravore smaller than twelve can't kill the Dreadnought in combat, though every trigger after the first makes it bigger, because the lands in the graveyards only accumulate. You can keep Charming the Dreadnought after combat, or in their upkeep with the trigger on the stack, so that it does nothing when it resolves; or Stifle the Oath trigger itself. And you can Portent them: if a Terravore is in their top three, you know exactly how many cards the trigger will mill on the way, and so exactly how big it will be, and you can choose your play accordingly.
4. Eventually the manlands establish a clock you can't easily interact with. You have tempo plays — Stifle the activation, or Charm an animated Mishra's Factory in the declare-blockers step — but they

aren't long-term fixes.

5. Against the five-color versions, Meddling Mage. A Mage naming the Dreadnought, or the enabler you are short of, shuts the combo off for as long as it lives: counter it on cast when you can. Keg at two kills it without touching your Dreadnought.

What to counter. Spend your counters on Sphere, on Sylvan Library, and on protecting the Dreadnought; consider countering an early Terravore too, because it can snowball. Counter the Library one for one, not with a pitched Foil: it is a strong card, but not worth three of yours, and a second Library is close to a dead card in their hand while the first is on the battlefield — Foil the first and the second does its job anyway (see Foil). You can usually let Oath of Druids resolve, unless you hold a lot of counters — the ways to play around it above are cheaper than a counter.

Gush is your best friend against the land destruction and Rishadan Port. Gush Islands that have been Ported, and Gush Islands back to hand in response to a land destruction spell. Daze does the same job: Daze the spell by returning the Island it targets, even when they have the mana to pay — the Island is back in your hand and the spell fizzles for lack of a target.

After sideboarding. Most pilots side out Oath of Druids for the same number of Call of the Herd: you are too agile around Oath, and they would rather stick proactive threats. They bring more answers to the Dreadnought — Crumble, Naturalize, Aura of Silence, Seal of Cleansing, Reprisal, Disenchant — and some bring Choke, Hidden Gibbons or Hull Breach. They bring Glowrider, and the five-color versions bring Meddling Mage, or more of them.









Glowrider is the card to respect. It works like a Sphere for noncreature spells: each costs one more, the free ones included, so a pitched Foil costs an Island, a card and a mana, and Daze and Gush cost a mana each. Only the Dreadnought itself escapes the tax. And it is a creature, so Annul can't touch it. Counter it on cast, or Flare it — two mana under the Glowrider — and the 2/1 dies on their next upkeep. It taxes their noncreature spells too, so it hurts you most on the turn you commit; a Glowrider that resolves while you are playing the slow game can wait for a Flare.

Play the slower game. After sideboarding this is a control game, and you don't need to stick a Dreadnought early: they have to kill you eventually, and a Dreadnought you have to protect pulls your counters away from Sphere, Glowrider and the land destruction. Don't pitch a Foil in a hurry on the first

two turns to stop a Glowrider or a Mage; a Flare a turn or two later is the one-for-one trade. With three Dreadnoughts and no Freeze, each copy matters: don't run one into open Swords mana without a Charm or a counter behind it. Back to Basics buys so much time against their mana and their manlands that it works like a win condition of its own, and cast early it is often a better one than the Dreadnought.

Sideboarding: −1 Dreadnought, −1 Stifle, −1 Brain Freeze, −2 Daze, −2 Foil, −1 Peek / +3 Annul, +2 Back to Basics, +3 Flare.

Out 8



In 8



Why these. Three Flares for Glowrider and the Mage, the two creatures that tax or stop the deck: Glowrider dies on one upkeep, the Mage on two. Annul has more targets here than anywhere outside the artifact-and-enchantment decks: Sphere, Oath, Aura, Seal, Library, Mox Diamond, Choke and Hidden Gibbons. Back to Basics shuts down most of their mana and their manlands at once: a Treetop Village enters tapped and never untaps, and a Factory that has been tapped stays tapped. The second Chain stays in the sideboard: they have lands to spare to copy it onto your Dreadnought, and the main-deck copy is enough for a resolved Sphere or Oath. Thwart stays, because it is at its best against a deck that attacks your lands: it counters the land destruction outright, answers Sphere and Oath on cast, and against Port its three Islands are nearly free. Brain Freeze is dead. One Dreadnought leaves because you aren't racing: Back to Basics does as much to win this game, and three Dreadnoughts are enough for a game you win late. A Stifle goes with it: once Oath leaves their deck the Stifles have fewer jobs, and three still cover the manland activations. Peek makes room; Opt stays, because when your mana is under attack you need help finding Islands. Both Dazes leave: under Sphere or Glowrider each one costs a mana, Gush does the same Island trick against the land destruction, and the slots are worth more as answers. Two Foils leave: the pitch spends an Island in a game where they are attacking your lands, and under Sphere or Glowrider it costs a mana on top. The two that stay are for the turn you commit, to the Dreadnought or to Back to Basics. Both Flashes stay: in a slower game they are the card advantage that wins the long game.

Keg stays: at zero it kills Moxes, Elephant tokens, an animated Factory or Treetop and a face-down morph, at two Sphere or a Meddling Mage, at three Glowrider or a Terravore, all without touching your Dreadnought. Blue Blasts don't come in, even against the red versions: their red is mostly a splash for Pyroblasts, with a few Stone Rains in some lists, and answering their Blasts alone isn't worth the slots.

GR Oath Ponza. The green-red build exists mostly to support Pyroclasm. It has fewer answers to the Dreadnought in the main deck, often none beyond Naturalize, so jam earlier: Oath triggers and Sphere are your real concerns. After sideboarding it brings Naturalize, Pyroblast and Red Elemental Blast, and sometimes Hidden Gibbons.









Sideboarding (GR): −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Flash, −1 Peek, −2 Foil / +3 Annul, +2 Back to Basics.

GR

Out 5



In 5



Why these, against GR. Against GR you are still the faster deck: it has few answers to the Dreadnought and no Glowrider or Mage, so all four Dreadnoughts and the Stifles stay, and Flare stays in the sideboard. Daze stays: it counters any land destruction spell, whether or not they are tapped out, by returning the Island it targets, and it stops a turn-one Mox-Sphere on the play. Two Foils leave, as against GW: Foil is bad against mana denial, where Islands are at a premium, and its real job — jamming a Dreadnought through a pile of removal — matters less against a build with so few answers in it. One Flash leaves: you are jamming earlier here, and Flash is slow.

Moneyball Black



Verdict. Slightly unfavorable. They attack the one resource the combo can't do without — cards in hand — and they do it from the first turn.

What they do. Mono-black discard, built to empty your hand before you can assemble the combo. Four Duress, four Cabal Therapy, four Ravenous Rats and four Hypnotic Specter. Rats and Therapy are a combo of their own: Rats makes you discard a card (your choice), then Therapy names one and flashes back by sacrificing the Rats to name another, three cards from your hand for two of theirs. Specter, left alone,

takes a random card every time it connects. Four Dark Ritual power out the explosive starts: Ritual into Specter on the first turn, Ritual into Phyrexian Arena in the lists that run it, or two Rituals into Graveborn Muse.

Around the discard: pump creatures that use their mana every turn, Nantuko Shade and Knight of Stromgald, and Withered Wretch, a beater that can also exile your graveyard — which makes your Flash of Insight worse. The removal is Smother, Vendetta and Snuff Out, with Diabolic Edict or Chainer's Edict beside them, and many lists play Plaguebearer in the main deck — one of the most annoying anti-Dreadnought cards you can face: for three mana it kills your Dreadnought, and it does so again every turn. They grind with Cursed Scroll and with four Mishra's Factory, and play Wasteland alongside them.

What the matchup hinges on. The fight over cards. Their deck usually empties its hand within the first couple of turns, so the game becomes cards in hand against cards in hand, and every trade you make has to be one for one or better. Whatever they are still holding after that is most likely removal you need to account for. And after both hands are traded off, the Factories are the clock that finishes you.

Mulligans. As Mulligans says for every discard deck, you can't mulligan aggressively here: keep nearly any seven with lands and spells, because every card is a card they have to strip. Cabal Therapy cast blind after seeing an Island will very often name Phyrexian Dreadnought, so a hand with more than one Dreadnought is a risky keep — one Therapy takes both.

Game one. Fight over the cards, and don't hand them two-for-ones.

Daze is at its best against the Ritual starts, when they have tapped out to put a threat down on the first turn.

It is often correct to Counterspell a Duress or a Cabal Therapy: a Therapy when you hold the Dreadnought, either of them when they already know what to name or take. The discard would likely take that Counterspell anyway, or a better card, and by countering it you also hide information that would make their next Therapy better. Remember that Therapy comes twice, and Mishra's Factory gives them the creature to sacrifice: the Factory taps for the mana to animate itself, then goes to pay the flashback. Say a Duress shows them two Dreadnoughts and a Counterspell: with Therapy and a Factory they cast Therapy naming the Dreadnought, and when you counter it, they flash it back off the Factory and take both anyway. When Gush is the best card in your hand, Gush in response to a Duress or a Therapy: you draw two before the discard resolves, and at least go up a card.

Flash of Insight is one of your best cards here: the copy in your graveyard is a card they can't strip, there when you need it. Only Withered Wretch threatens it, by exiling it or the blue cards you would remove to flash it back. Duress can't take the Dreadnought — it's a creature — but Therapy can, and so can a Specter hit; Rats makes you discard, but you choose what.

This is a great matchup to Portent the opponent when you're ahead. Once their hand is empty they are living off the top of their library, so setting their next three draws — lands on top, the Specter or the removal at the bottom, or a shuffle when all three are good — can strand them for turns while you build your commit.

Withered Wretch, Nantuko Shade and Knight of Stromgald are quick clocks, and they will force you to jam earlier than you want to. Charm the Dreadnought in response to Smother, Snuff Out or Vendetta (a Vendetta that resolves on the Dreadnought costs them twelve life); against an Edict, Charm in response leaves you no creature to sacrifice.

Stifle's targets all have tempo value. A Mishra's Factory activation. A Graveborn Muse or Phyrexian Arena trigger, to keep a card from them when they are digging for an answer. A Specter trigger, when the card at risk is worth more than the Stifle. A Cursed Scroll activation, to stay alive and win the race.

Powder Keg at two kills Rats, Shade, Knight, Wretch and Plaguebearer without touching your Dreadnought; at zero, an animated Factory. Cursed Scroll needs Keg at one, the Dreadnought's own setting, so Charm the Dreadnought first.

What to counter. Specter on sight. An early Graveborn Muse or Phyrexian Arena, before the extra cards start. Therapy when it would hit the Dreadnought, and Duress or Therapy when they already know your hand. Their removal, when the Dreadnought is in play and Charm isn't there.

After sideboarding. They bring more removal — Diabolic Edict, Smother, Snuff Out — and more Plaguebearers. Many bring Tormod's Crypt, which empties your graveyard of the Flash of Insight you were counting on. Some bring Powder Keg, which at one kills the Dreadnought on its own: Charm the Dreadnought in response when they crack it.









You bring Essence Flare as an extra answer to Specter, Plaguebearer and Withered Wretch. A second Chain of Vapor sends back whatever they Dark Ritualed in, so the Ritual is a card spent for nothing. Back to Basics cuts their mana — the Factories and Wastelands stop untapping — and keeps a Factory that has attacked tapped for good; mono-black has little that can remove it.

Sideboarding: −1 Dreadnought, −1 Stifle, −2 Foil, −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Peek / +2 Back to Basics, +1 Chain, +3 Flare.

Out 6



In 6



Why these. After sideboarding you play the control side. Many lists trade some of their early beaters for more removal, so there is less pressure to jam, and three Dreadnoughts make their blind Therapies miss more often. A Stifle goes with the Dreadnought: its tempo jobs here are real, but none of them is worth a card in a hand that is under attack. Two Foils leave: your hand is under attack, and early on you often can't afford to pitch a card to cast one. The two that stay are for later, when the discard has run out and you have spare cards to pitch, such as a Flare with no creature to enchant. Peek goes because they empty their hands so quickly that there is often nothing much to look at. Brain Freeze goes because you aren't on the Freeze plan here. Flare's targets are Plaguebearer and Knight, which die in one upkeep, and Specter, which takes two — though they can answer the Flare trigger on Plaguebearer by activating it at your Dreadnought, so have Charm or Stifle behind it. Wretch is a target too, but not one you need to answer on sight: Flare it when its clock is adding up quickly, remembering that the extra power hits you for the two turns it takes.

Daze stays for the Ritual starts. Keg stays: at two it kills five of their creatures, at three Specter, at four the Muse. Flash stays, because it is the card advantage they can't discard, though Wretch can exile it. Thwart stays: it is the free counter you need once your hand has been taken apart.

Mono-Black Clerics





Verdict. Slightly unfavorable.

What they do. A mono-black strategy like Moneyball Black, and the matchup plays out in a similar way, so read Moneyball Black first: they have the full discard suite, and they attack your hand the same way.

They are also a tribal creature deck with two value engines. The first, and the most threatening, is Rotlung Reanimator: every time it or another Cleric dies, they get a 2/2 Zombie. Once it is on the battlefield, the deck has plenty of ways to sacrifice its own creatures — Cabal Archon, Phyrexian Tower, Cabal Therapy's flashback, Recurring Nightmare and Dark Supplicant — and those quickly snowball into a large board of Zombies.

The second engine is Dark Supplicant. Untap with it and enough Clerics around it, and it sacrifices three of them to find Scion of Darkness, a 6/6 trampler and a fast clock.

Priest of Gix and Recurring Nightmare can also loop: the three mana from the Priest entering the battlefield pays for Recurring Nightmare again, so watch out for that combination.

What the matchup hinges on. The engines. Your highest priority is to counter Rotlung Reanimator and to Stifle Dark Supplicant's activation — Stifle it after the three Clerics are sacrificed as the cost, and they have given up three creatures for nothing. They don't play much removal, so jamming a Dreadnought early wins a lot of games.

Sideboarding: −2 Foil, −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Peek / +1 Chain, +3 Flare.



Why these. The Moneyball Black plan, all three Flares included — their creatures are what you sideboard for — with two differences: Back to Basics stays in the sideboard, since their mana is Swamps, and all four Dreadnoughts and Stifles stay, since they play little removal and an early jam wins games.

Pit Rack













Verdict. Even.

What they do. A mono-black deck that shares a lot of its cards and its plan with Moneyball Black (read Moneyball Black first), with fewer creatures and more ways to attack your hand: Funeral Charm, Chain of Smog, and Bottomless Pit, which makes each player discard a card at random every upkeep.

Their win condition is The Rack, which punishes you for a low hand count: at the beginning of your upkeep it deals one damage for each card you hold below three. They also play Cursed Scroll, since they empty their own hand quite fast, and some lists register Pox as well, which is also a removal spell: it makes each player sacrifice a third of their creatures, rounded up, so a lone Dreadnought goes.

Game one. Use Gush, and Flash of Insight's flashback, to bring your hand back up to three — cast from your hand, Flash only replaces itself. Both are instants, and The Rack counts your hand when its trigger resolves, so you can do it in response to the trigger. When they Chain of Smog you, you may copy it and

point the copy back at them — but not while you still have cards in hand. Whoever is targeted can copy it again, so the copies go back and forth until both players have no cards, and an empty hand on both sides is exactly what the Pit Rack player wants.

Sideboarding: −2 Foil, −1 Daze, −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Peek / +3 Annul, +2 Back to Basics.

Out 5



In 5



Why these. Their engines are permanents, so all three Annuls come in: counter The Rack and Bottomless Pit on cast. Both Back to Basics come in for Mishra's Factory, as against Moneyball Black; their Wastelands, and the Rishadan Ports some lists add, suffer too. Flare stays in the sideboard: most lists don't play enough creatures to give it a target. Two Foils leave: The Rack punishes every card below three in your hand, and Bottomless Pit takes one every upkeep, so a counter that costs two cards works against you. The two that stay are for the turn you commit to the Dreadnought. One Daze makes room. Brain Freeze and Peek leave for the reasons they leave against Moneyball Black.

Replenish











Verdict. Favorable. Game one should be very favorable. The sideboard games are closer, once their creatures and more Abeyances come in.

What they do. Another very powerful enchantment combo deck — it took first and second place at Lobstercon in 2026 — and it shares cards and mechanics with Enchantress. It is blue-white, and it plays the sol lands — Ancient Tomb, and City of Traitors in the few lists that kept it once Parallax Tide was banned — to support a higher curve of spells. The goal is to put powerful enchantments into the graveyard and bring them all back at once with a resolved Replenish.

The engine is Attunement, a repeatable way to put cards into the graveyard while digging for Replenish and land drops. Frantic Search does two jobs: the same as Attunement, and ramping off the sol lands — it costs three, and untapping Ancient Tombs leaves them with more mana than they spent. Intuition is the third engine card: it finds three cards, you choose which one goes to their hand, and the other two go to the graveyard, where the deck wants them — so they search for three cards where every split is good for them. They also use it to dig for Replenish, for answers such as Swords to Plowshares, or for lands when they are short.

The combo is three cards on the table: Opalescence, Parallax Wave and Decree of Silence. With all three in play they have a complete lock. Decree counters any spell you cast. Opalescence makes every other enchantment a creature, so Parallax Wave can exile enchantments as well as creatures — itself included. Wave targeting itself leaves the battlefield and comes back with fresh fade counters, and that is how they reset it.

The ordering is what makes the combination so threatening. Holding priority, they activate Wave to exile one of your creatures — a Dreadnought, say — and then activate it again targeting Wave itself. The second activation resolves first: Wave leaves, and its leaves-the-battlefield trigger resolves too, returning everything it had exiled so far. Only then does the first activation resolve and exile your Dreadnought, and since the Wave that exiled it is already gone, nothing will ever bring it back. They can do this to your creatures and enchantments as many times as they like. The same tool protects their own permanents from removal, exiled in response and returned, and resets or untaps their enchantments whenever they want — all while their animated enchantments attack you every turn.

You have two ways to break it. When Wave exiles itself, Stifle the leaves-the-battlefield trigger: Wave never comes back, and neither does anything it had exiled. And when there is a single Opalescence on the battlefield, Chain of Vapor on it ends the combination. All of this is moot once Decree of Silence is on the battlefield as well: it counters the Stifle or the Chain like any other spell. The Stifle line in particular isn't one to build around: it is a game-one trick, and after sideboarding the Stifles are gone and the focus is the mill.

Being a higher-curve deck, they run plenty of cheap answers to faster threats, and that is bad news for the Dreadnought. Most lists play four Swords to Plowshares, three or four Seal of Cleansing and four Parallax Wave in the main, all fetchable with Intuition. Newer builds also play one or two Abeyance main: cast in response to the Dreadnought, it stops you from casting the enabler, and the sacrifice trigger resolves. Some lists run Mana Leak in the main — a few play four — but many play none: don't assume they are packed with permission just because you see Islands.

What the matchup hinges on. Their win conditions against your counters, and the clock your mill puts on them. They main-deck too many answers to the Dreadnought for jamming to be a good plan; the plan is the Enchantress one, with one big difference — Replenish has no card-advantage engine. It plays cards that are card disadvantage instead: Attunement and Frantic Search both cost them cards. Your selection and your card advantage keep you ahead of their must-answer threats.

Game one. Counter their win conditions: Opalescence, and Replenish when an Opalescence is in their graveyard. Counter Abeyance when you think they can combo after it. Then use the rest of your resources to sculpt your hand and to mill them.

Time the mill. Start it only once the combo is already assembled in their graveyard, or when you have a lethal mill: milling earlier puts enchantments into the graveyard for them, and helps them cast a fast Replenish. Once the mill starts, every Vision Charm goes at their library, and Brain Freeze when the storm allows.

Intuition is a card to welcome when it searches for something you can answer on the stack: three Replenish, say. Countering the one you hand them is a two-for-one, and the two copies in the graveyard are gone from their library. Consider countering the Intuition itself when it would set up the combo whichever card you give them — a Replenish and the enchantments it returns — or when you have seen that they are stuck on mana and it would find lands.

Decree of Silence matters even when it isn't hard-cast. With enough mana they can cycle it for six to counter a spell of yours: Stifle the cycling trigger. And if they reach a lot of mana, you may have to counter a hard-cast Decree, or it shuts your deck off for too long.

Don't jam the Dreadnought into Swords, Seal, Wave and Abeyance. If you hold one, keep it for a turn when they are tapped out.

After sideboarding. There are two philosophies. The common one brings creatures: Meddling Mage and Exalted Angel, and some lists already play a few main. The other is creatureless, bringing more Abeyances and Orim's Chant to overload your counters and jam; that is very rare nowadays, so expect creatures.

Some bring Defense Grid against you too, which makes your counters cost three more on their turn — another Annul target.









The plan stays the same: counter the win conditions, and mill once the combo is in their graveyard — just sooner, because their threats now come from two directions. Counter Meddling Mage on cast when you can; Keg or Flare the ones that resolve. Keg a face-down Exalted Angel at zero when they can't pay to turn it face up in response, or counter it.

You take out the combo: no Dreadnought, and no Stifle, since the cycling Decree is its one good target here. You bring Annul as another answer to Opalescence and to their engine, Essence Flare for Meddling Mage, two more Brain Freeze to speed up the mill, and one Back to Basics against their greedy mana base: Adarkar Wastes, Skycloud Expanse and Ancient Tomb are close to half of their lands, and that hurts a deck trying to cast four-drops.

Sideboarding: −4 Dreadnought, −4 Stifle, −1 Peek / +3 Annul, +2 Brain Freeze, +3 Flare, +1 Back to Basics.

Out 9



In 9



Why these. After sideboarding they have more threats and likely more Abeyances, so you compress the game by speeding up the mill: all four Vision Charms stay, and Brain Freeze goes to three. Annul counters Opalescence, Parallax Wave, Decree, Attunement, Seal and Defense Grid for one mana. Flare is for the Mage. Peek goes with the Dreadnought plan.

Daze stays. Enchantress has the mana to pay for it — Serra's Sanctum, Wild Growth, Exploration — and casts cheap enchantments; Replenish is mana-constrained, wants to cast three- and four-drops, and often

taps out to do it. Keg stays for Meddling Mage at two and a face-down Exalted Angel at zero. The full counter suite stays to answer their win conditions, and Chain stays for Meddling Mage and a resolved Opalescence. A resolved Decree is beyond it: Decree counters the Chain like any other spell.

Landstill



Verdict. Even, and it stays even after sideboarding: Meddling Mage and Exalted Angel are hard to answer, and they give Landstill enough of a proactive plan to win some of the time.

What they do. The most popular control deck in the format. It answers threats both on the stack and once they have resolved, while it builds up a big advantage in lands and cards, and every answer is trying to trade one card for one or more of yours. That is why it doesn't play Foil, and it doesn't play enough Islands for Gush, Daze or Thwart, so it usually has no free spells at all — which makes the first couple of turns its weakest.

The removal is four Swords to Plowshares, Disenchant, Seal of Cleansing, Powder Keg, Wrath of God, and Aura of Silence, usually from the sideboard. The counters, around eight of them, are Mana Leak, Counterspell, Prohibit, Absorb and Forbid. Watch their open mana: in the early turns they often struggle to find the mana for Counterspell, and in the late turns a Mana Leak can rot in their hand if you can always pay three.

Most lists also play a lock piece in the main deck: Humility. Under it your Dreadnought is a 1/1 that they can chump-block with anything, and a resolved Humility is extremely hard to come back from. Treat it as the proactive card it is: something they can do to lock the game out.

The main plan is the namesake card, Standstill. They have a deck full of lands and answers, and two win conditions, neither of which needs them to cast a spell: their manlands, Mishra's Factory and Faerie Conclave, and the 1/1 Soldier tokens from a cycled Decree of Justice. Cycling Decree is an activated ability followed by a triggered one, and neither breaks Standstill. So they park a Standstill and attack you with lands and tokens.

Their card advantage is mostly Fact or Fiction, fired at the end of your turn to spend their mana, and a broken Standstill.

What the matchup hinges on. Time. They need mana to cast several spells a turn, and you have free counters; the longer the game goes, the more of their lands and cards they get to use, and the harder it becomes for you.

Their clock, on the other hand, is extremely slow. They like to pass with mana up, so they stretch the game out rather than attack with their manlands from the start: expect no aggression before turn six or seven, and then only a couple of points of damage a turn. You have a lot more time to sculpt here than against almost anything else in the format. What runs short is not your life but the window before their mana lets them answer everything at once.

Mulligans. That slow clock changes the keep. Your priority is to make your land drops for the first four or five turns, so keep hands that can do that — a five-land seven included.

Game one. You are the beatdown. Present a Dreadnought with two or three layers of protection before they have the mana and the cards to throw three or four answers at it.

To do that, your commit turn usually uses Gush or Flash of Insight to go up in cards. For example: with seven cards in hand, Gush among them, float two mana, Gush up to ten, go off and drop to eight, fight their Counterspell with a Charm or a Counterspell of your own and pass with seven. Ideally they don't have the lands to Fact or Fiction at your end step, and a Standstill now does them no good, because you have the bigger threat on the table. You will be up on cards next turn, and when they try to interact at your upkeep, you can fight them off with Foils and Vision Charms.

The cards of theirs you need to answer:

- **Fact or Fiction.** If you want to stay in a long game, counter it, or you fall far behind on cards.
- **Standstill.** Counter it for the same reason. Once one resolves, the game gets better for them every turn, so at some point you have to break it. The best time is their end step, when they already hold seven cards: they draw three and have to discard three. They still get plenty of selection, but it is the smallest of the blows.
- **Humility.** Counter it on sight.
- **A late Decree of Justice cycled for three or more Soldiers.** Stifle the trigger that makes the tokens, not the cycling: Stifling the cycling activation only counters the draw.

Splitting their Fact or Fiction. When one resolves, you make the piles, and that is harder than it looks because it gives you a lot of choice. The easiest way to think about it: most players take the bigger pile no matter what. So pick the two cards you least want them to have and put those in the smaller pile; if they take the small pile anyway, you have usually made a good split. Two other ways to build the piles. Lands against spells: spells are hard to deploy without lands, and lands do nothing without spells, so make them choose. And put two copies of the same card in the same pile: most cards don't do much in multiples. Split most piles three and two. Going four and one makes sense only in the rare case where one card is backbreaking and you have little to answer it with. Remember that they don't know which cards they need to beat your hand, so a three-two split with the two best cards in the small pile will, more often than not, take those cards out of their hand and their deck for good.

If game one goes long because they never present a threat, remember that you can also sculpt a win with the main-deck Brain Freeze — especially after a long counter fight over a Dreadnought late in the game. Picture the turn: Gush two or three times, go off, Counterspell, Foil, Foil, Flash of Insight once or twice, then Vision Charm them and Brain Freeze. That is likely half their deck or more.

Once you are on the mill plan, their own card draw helps you: a broken Standstill takes three cards off their library, and a Fact or Fiction five. When you are well placed to deliver a Brain Freeze kill, let those spells resolve and let them do the math for you.

A common pitfall: you can't get out from under a Standstill by Stifling its trigger. Casting the Stifle is a spell too, so Standstill triggers again, and they still draw three.

Powder Keg is a great tool here. Keep it at zero most of the time — after sideboarding, at two when a Meddling Mage has to die. At zero it threatens every animated manland and every Soldier token, so they stop attacking with their manlands and think twice before cycling Decree. If they can't answer it, they will eventually start sending a single manland at your life total, one they can afford to lose to the Keg. Judge then whether it is time to trade, or whether that clock is too small to matter.

Kor Haven shows up in some lists, and it fogs your Dreadnought every turn. Your main-deck answers are Stifling the activation, committing a second Dreadnought, or the Vision Charm trick when their only white mana comes from Plains: turn their Plains into Mountains in your beginning-of-combat step, and they can't activate Kor Haven when you attack. That isn't a reliable plan, though, since they play Coastal Tower and Adarkar Wastes as well.

Phyrexian Furnace is particularly annoying: it makes your Flash of Insight worse in a matchup where you want that long-term selection and card advantage. It isn't worth a Counterspell, though.

After sideboarding. They bring Annul, a more efficient answer to the Dreadnought; Meddling Mage; sometimes Exalted Angel; and more artifact and enchantment removal: extra Seals of Cleansing and Aura of Silence.

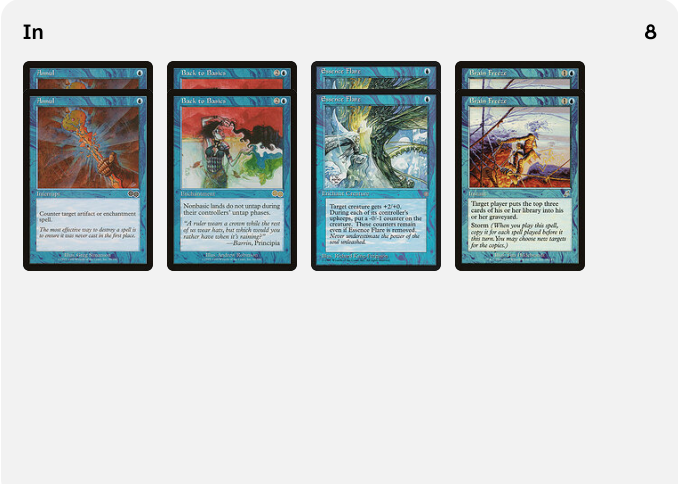


You bring Back to Basics, because their mana base is greedy and full of nonbasics, among them their manlands and sometimes a Kor Haven. A resolved Back to Basics is often a big advantage, cutting off their mana and their manland plan at once. Annul is for Standstill and Humility, and Essence Flare for Meddling Mage. And you bring Brain Freeze as a second way to win: it overloads their Meddling Mages, which now have two win conditions to name instead of one, and it gives you a win condition their counters struggle with — the storm copies aren't cast, so each counter stops only one of them — to fire late in the game, after a fight over a Dreadnought has raised the storm count.

Back to Basics and the Freeze plan force them to play more proactively, and they let you take a more controlling approach in the sideboard games. The ideal is a game where they are stuck holding several Swords to Plowshares while you set up the mill.

Sideboarding: −2 Dreadnought, −1 Stifle, −2 Daze, −2 Foil, −1 Peek / +2 Annul, +2 Back to Basics, +2 Flare, +2 Brain Freeze.





Why these. Daze leaves because in a long game they will very often have the mana to pay for it. Two Foils leave because Foil is card disadvantage, and this is a game about cards. Two Dreadnoughts leave because this is a longer game and you won't be under pressure early: you have the time to find one, and you want to avoid jamming several times, which is card disadvantage too. A Stifle goes with them: there are still good

targets, but not enough to want four, and you don't expect them to bring a Brain Freeze plan of their own, so you won't need Stifle for a storm trigger. Peek makes room.

Thwart stays: it is free, and unlike Daze it doesn't care whether they can pay. The second Chain of Vapor stays in the sideboard. Two Annuls are enough for Standstill and Humility.

Blue-White Web Control









Verdict. Even.

What they do. Very similar to Landstill in construction and philosophy (read Landstill first), but without manlands and without Standstill. That makes its mana much more consistent and hard to attack — consistent enough to play Tsabo's Web in the main deck or the sideboard, which gives the deck its name. It plays full sweepers in Akroma's Vengeance, and tries to win off Decree of Justice alone; some versions add a couple of top-heavy threats in the main, Eternal Dragon or Exalted Angel.

The plan is the Landstill one; only the sideboarding changes.

Sideboarding: −1 Dreadnought, −1 Stifle, −2 Daze, −1 Foil / +3 Flare, +2 Brain Freeze.

Out 5



In 5



Why these. No Back to Basics: there are no manlands to stop, and their mana is too consistent for it to matter. No Annul either, with no Standstill and no Humility to aim it at. The third Flare comes in instead, for Meddling Mage as against Landstill, and an extra Dreadnought, an extra Foil and the Peek stay in.

UB Psychatog



Verdict. Favorable. Game one is the harder half, and the main-deck Brain Freeze is what keeps it close; after sideboarding, with three Freezes against a deck that plays no Stifle, it leans strongly your way.

What they do. A Xerox blue deck with a black splash, built very much like yours: Impulse, Opt, Portent and Gush to run the mana, Counterspell and Foil to fight on the stack. Black buys them Psychatog, Duress, and removal in Smother, Sickening Dreams and sometimes Vendetta, plus the sideboard cards. They play more lands than you do.

In the counter war they are the better control deck. Accumulated Knowledge gives them more card advantage than you have, and Duress lets them trade a one-mana spell for one of your counters before the fight starts. On the draw, expect a first-turn Duress aimed at a second-turn Dreadnought: with a Dreadnought and a single enabler in your hand, they take the enabler. They play around Stifle: they crack Polluted Delta early, or while you are tapped out.

Their plan is to cast cantrips and interactive spells until the graveyard is full, then resolve a Psychatog and attack for lethal. Tog gets +1/+1 for each card they discard and for each two cards they exile from their graveyard, so learn the Tog math: one, plus half a point for each card in their graveyard, plus one and a half for each card in their hand — and five more for each Gush they can cast, since two Islands and two cards to discard, plus the Gush itself in the graveyard, is six and a half points of power for no mana. With

that count you can tell when an attack is lethal before they declare it. On a lethal attack they cast Gush in the declare-blockers step, after you have chosen your blocks, so the mana and the cards to pump arrive when you can no longer answer them by blocking. Some lists play Wonder, which gives Tog flying from the graveyard and lets it fly over your Dreadnought.

The Dreadnought dies to Smother — it is mana value one — and to Vendetta, which costs them twelve life; Charm in response to either. Many lists also play Powder Keg, and at one it kills the Dreadnought: Charm in response when they crack it.

This entry is the blue-black build. The other Tog decks — Grow-a-Tog, with or without main-deck Meddling Mage, and Esper Tog — play much more like each other than like this one: see Grow-a-Tog.



What the matchup hinges on. Their four win conditions against your mill. Counter the Psychatogs while you mill them. Spend the rest of your turns cantripping, sculpting your hand and making land drops, holding countermagic up to fight over a Duress or a Tog. They don't play Stifle, and few lists play a Brain Freeze of their own, so this is the mill game you play in the mirror, and most of them can't play it back. Their real answer to the Freeze is Duress, before you cast it. The games you lose are the ones where they win a counter fight over a Tog before you have milled them out.

Game one. You have two ways in. Early, before they have their counters up, a protected Dreadnought can take the game by itself. Or play for the mill, fighting their Psychatogs while you build to it. Most games become the second.

Duress is the card that beats the mill plan: it can take a Freeze, or the Stifle and Charm that protect a Dreadnought, out of your hand. Whether to fight over it depends on your mana and your hand. Counter it and you have spent a counter; let it resolve and they take one. Either way it costs you a counter, so the real trade is mana for information: countering it costs mana and keeps your hand hidden, letting it resolve keeps your mana open and shows them everything. A Brain Freeze in hand changes that when you are on the mill plan: now the card Duress takes is the Freeze, not a counter, and countering it is worth much more. Duress into Psychatog is their key play, so fight over the Duress when you have the mana to counter it and still fight over the Tog that follows; let it resolve when you need that mana open for the Tog. When the Freeze is the card that matters, Portent can hide it: put it second from the top, below the card Portent's delayed draw takes, and it waits in your library where Duress can't see it.

The best time to Freeze is their end step after a long fight over a win condition, because every spell in that fight counts toward your storm. Picture their turn: Duress, your Counterspell, Psychatog, your Counterspell, their Gush, their Foil — the Tog has landed, and the storm count is six. At their end step, two Freezes mill forty-five cards, which is usually lethal at that stage of the game. If they cantrip a lot at your end step instead, you can fire it there too, when the count gets you to the right number.



Know exactly what is lethal before you fire, and go well over it when you can. When you are lethal by three cards or fewer, they may counter a single copy, stay alive, untap with Tog and attack you for lethal. A partial Freeze is dangerous here. Each card it mills is half a point of power for Psychatog, so it can hand them a lethal Tog turns earlier than they would have had one; and it puts fuel in their graveyard — a Flash of Insight or Deep Analysis to flash back, a Wonder that now gives Tog flying. Fire a partial one only when Duress is about to take the Freezes out of your hand.

You can also use a Dreadnought as the storm builder on your own turn: jam it, let them fight it, and every spell in that fight — theirs as well as yours — adds to the count; when it is over, the count is high and they have spent their mana and their cards on the Dreadnought.

The Dreadnought is also bait. When you are about to go to discard, cast one rather than discard it — even with no plan to use an enabler. They will usually fight over the Dreadnought itself, and a counter spent on it is one of their cards eaten by a card you were about to lose anyway.

The answers to Psychatog itself:

- **Counterspell it on cast.** It is one of only a few threats.
- **Powder Keg.** Build it to two as soon as you can and usually leave it there: at two it answers their own Kegs, and at three it kills Tog without touching your Dreadnought. When they stick a Psychatog, add the third counter at your upkeep and crack it on their upkeep.
- **Chain of Vapor once they have pumped it to lethal size.** If the Chain resolves after they have discarded and exiled, the cards they discarded and the cards they exiled from their graveyard are gone for nothing, and Tog goes back to their hand. That sets them back a long way. They can sacrifice a land to copy the Chain onto your Dreadnought, so it is best with no Dreadnought of yours on the table, or with a counter for the copy.
- **Essence Flare is too slow.** It kills Tog only after two of their upkeeps, gives it +2/+0 until then, and they can hold Tog in hand until it is lethal, then cast it, untap and attack before Flare matters.

A resolved Dreadnought blocks Tog as long as they can't pump it past twelve power — but with Wonder in their graveyard, they can fly over it.

Stifle has targets with no Dreadnought involved: their Polluted Delta on the first turns, when it is their only blue source; their Keg when it is about to kill your Dreadnought; and the madness trigger of a

Circular Logic, in the lists that play it — Stifled, the Logic is never cast.



After sideboarding. They bring Annul and more Powder Kegs, and some bring the fourth Duress or a Diabolic Edict; they take out Sickening Dreams and some of their card draw. Against the Edict, Charm in response: a phased-out Dreadnought can't be sacrificed. Some bring Dominate or Control Magic to steal your Dreadnought, so play around them. Dominate is an instant and takes the Dreadnought for four mana, even in response to its trigger — you can't sacrifice a Dreadnought you no longer control, so they keep it (see Phyrexian Dreadnought). Charm in response, or keep a counter for it. Control Magic is an Aura cast at sorcery speed: counter it. Chain of Vapor on the Control Magic gives you the Dreadnought back, but they can sacrifice a land to copy the Chain onto the Dreadnought and bounce it, so it isn't a great play. When you cast a Dreadnought as bait, don't use the enabler: Dominate in response to the trigger still takes it, but you haven't spent a Stifle or a Charm, and you have more cards for the fight that follows.









The plan after sideboarding is the same, and now you have an incredible edge: three Brain Freezes alongside the four Vision Charms, against a deck with no Stifle. It is very hard to lose after sideboarding. The Freeze is how you win, and the Dreadnought becomes the card that makes them spend counters rather than the way you win.

Sideboarding: −1 Dreadnought, −2 Daze / +2 Brain Freeze, +1 Chain.

Out	3	In	3









Why these. The two extra Freezes make three, the main plan for the sideboard games. Both Dazes leave: this is a long game, they rarely try to stick an early Psychatog, and with more lands than you they will usually have the mana to pay. One Dreadnought goes with them; three stay, with all four Stifles, as the threat that makes them spend counters and as the storm builder for the Freeze turn. The second Chain is for a pumped Psychatog.

No Annul: its only targets are their Kegs and a Control Magic, and neither touches the Freeze plan. No Back to Basics: their Deltas fetch basics, and a few Underground Rivers aren't worth a slot. No Essence Flare, for the reasons above.

Stasis



Verdict. It depends on their build. Slightly favorable against lists without Gaea's Blessing; unfavorable against lists that run Blessing and a Brain Freeze of their own, more so after sideboarding.

What they do. Mostly mono-blue, and built to lock you out of the game by resolving a Stasis and keeping it on the battlefield. Under Stasis nobody has an untap step: your Islands don't untap, your Dreadnought doesn't untap, and — the one that catches people out — phased-out permanents don't phase back in, because phasing happens in the untap step.

Their main way to keep the lock is Forsaken City. Both it and Stasis trigger at the beginning of their upkeep: with the triggers on the stack they tap the City for blue mana and float it, the City's trigger resolves and they exile a card from their hand to untap it, and the floating mana pays for Stasis. They can keep that going indefinitely — the card they draw each turn is the card they exile next upkeep — and with an Island untapped beside the City they pay for Stasis and still hold two mana for a Counterspell. The City isn't their only way, either. Gush, Thwart and Daze pick up their Islands, and as long as they can make a land drop each turn, the replayed Island stays untapped to pay for Stasis at their next upkeep.

They win with Black Vise. Under the lock you eventually can't play the cards in your hand, and Vise deals one damage for each card over four at your upkeep. Even without Stasis, its real job is to keep you at four cards, which is the opposite of how you want to play this matchup.

Around the lock: Counterspell, Thwart, Daze and, in many lists, Arcane Denial, whose drawback hardly matters to them: under a Vise you will usually decline the cards. Most lists run several Chain of Vapor. They Chain their own Stasis at the end of your turn, so they get a full untap and you don't, then cast it again; Chain is also their answer to your Dreadnought, with Powder Keg in the lists that run it. Forsaken City makes mana of any color, which lets some lists splash Root Maze, a green card, for a full lock: lands and artifacts enter tapped, so once you are tapped out you can't build your way back — and a Dreadnought enters tapped too, so under Stasis it never attacks. Most lists play a Mana Short, which is very good against you: cast in response to a Dreadnought, it leaves you no mana for the enabler, and under Stasis it taps you out for good. Many lists also play a Brain Freeze in the main deck, Gaea's Blessing in the sideboard or the main, and a Cephalid Coliseum.







What the matchup hinges on. Whether they are on the Freeze plan too. Sticking a Dreadnought is a poor plan here: they have too many answers, and once you tap out for a Dreadnought and an enabler, they have the resources to put you under Stasis, where each Dreadnought gets at most one attack. So sit back, counter their win conditions, and mill them. Against a list with no Blessing that is much easier; against one with Blessing and a Freeze of its own, they can be the better Freeze deck. You often won't know which build you face, so plan for the worst: assume they are on the Freeze plan and can answer your Freezes with a main-deck Blessing.

Game one. Counter Black Vise: it is what kills you here. Counter Stasis too, when you don't think you can operate from under the lock. Late in the game, with lots of untapped Islands and answers in hand, it can

be fine to let a Stasis resolve; so can an early one they won't be able to support.

Once Vise is on the battlefield, you are on a clock, and it can make sense to jam a Dreadnought just to bring your hand down. When you do commit one, prefer Stifle as the enabler: a Dreadnought phased out by its own Charm doesn't phase back in if Stasis resolves, while one enabled by Stifle stays on the battlefield.

Mill them while you do the rest. Plan every Freeze as if Gaea's Blessing is in their deck: hold a Stifle for its trigger. Charming their library at their end step a few cards at a time runs the same risk of milling a Blessing, so have the Stifle ready for that too. And watch for Cephalid Coliseum: once they have threshold, they can sacrifice it to make a target player draw three, at instant speed. When a Freeze fight leaves both libraries empty, the player who draws next loses; a Coliseum lets them make you draw first, so with one on their battlefield you can't rely on timing. Mill them out while you still have at least three cards in your library, or Stifle the Coliseum activation.

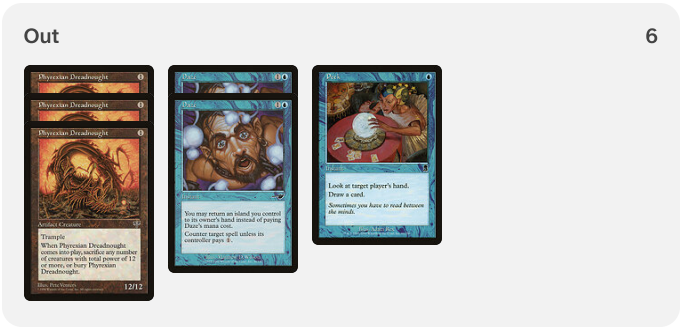
What to do under Stasis:

- **Charm their Black Vise.** It stays phased out.
- **A second Dreadnought gives you another attack.** Once the first has attacked and stays tapped, cast the second and sacrifice the tapped one to its trigger. The new one is summoning sick, but it entered untapped (unless Root Maze is out), so it attacks on your next turn — no enabler needed.
- **Rebuild your mana.** Gush, Thwart and Daze pick up your tapped Islands, and each Island you replay as a land drop comes in untapped, unless Root Maze is out.
- **Chain of Vapor on Stasis** at their end step gives you a full untap step while their lands stay tapped.
- **Stifle the Forsaken City untap.** A player who sequences it right has already floated the mana for Stasis, so it doesn't break the lock this upkeep — but the City stays tapped, and next upkeep they need another way to pay. Watch every upkeep anyway: a player who taps the City at the wrong moment, or enters the upkeep with it tapped, can hand you the game.

After sideboarding. What they bring depends on the list, but expect them to lean toward the mill race: Annuls for your Keg and Dreadnoughts, Mana Short, extra Brain Freezes, and Gaea's Blessing in the lists that have it, usually trimming some of the lock to make room. Stasis and Black Vise can matter less in these games, and some players cast them as bait to draw out your counters. Against a list that boards into the Freeze plan, it is a mill race, and the player with more Freezes and the Stifles to protect them usually wins it.



Sideboarding: −3 Dreadnought, −2 Daze, −1 Peek / +3 Annul, +2 Brain Freeze, +1 Chain.





Why these. The two extra Freezes make three for the mill race. Annul counters Black Vise, Stasis and Root Maze for one mana. The second Chain answers a resolved Vise or Stasis, the two cards you most need to stop; as with any Chain, they can sacrifice a land to copy it onto your Dreadnought. Vise and Stasis still matter after sideboarding even when they come down as bait. Three Dreadnoughts leave because jamming isn't the plan; the one that stays is for dumping your hand under Vise. Both Dazes leave: the games are long, and they usually have the mana to pay. Peek makes room. Keg stays: at one it kills every Black Vise at once without costing you a counter — and your own Dreadnought with them. All four Stifles stay, for Blessing, the City and their Freeze; Thwart stays, at its best against a deck that wants your Islands tapped; and the Charms stay to answer Vise under Stasis and to mill.

Full English Breakfast



Verdict. Favorable. Game one is a pure race they are poorly set up for: they have almost no answers to a resolved Dreadnought, and their combo has more fragile steps than it looks. After sideboarding they bring answers, and you can play a more controlling game.

What they do. Full English Breakfast is a green Survival combo deck, with black for discard and reanimation and splashes for whatever its kill needs. Hermit FEB (hFEB) is by a large margin the version

you will face; classic FEB (cFEB) is the older, more dedicated Survival combo deck the name comes from. This entry is about hFEB, but most of what follows about Survival applies to both.

Their goal is to resolve one of two engines. The first is Survival of the Fittest: discarding a creature finds another, so any creature card and some mana turn into every other piece, starting with Volrath's Shapeshifter, with Palinchron untapping their lands when they need the mana. The second is Hermit Druid. They play no basic lands, so a Hermit activation mills their whole library and lets them pick the order of their graveyard. Then Unearth brings back a Volrath's Shapeshifter with Karmic Guide on top of the graveyard; the Shapeshifter enters as a Guide and starts the chain. The stock list has every finish, and which one they pick depends on whether they feel it is safe to go to combat: Devourer and Triskelion, with Battlefield Scrounger putting the right cards back, kills without combat; a Shapeshifter pumped as Psychatog, then turned into Akroma, attacks in the air.

Animate Dead gives them a way round needing Guide on top. They animate the Guide itself; its protection from black knocks Animate Dead off, the Guide is sacrificed and lands on top of the graveyard, and its own trigger returns the Shapeshifter, which enters as a Guide.

If they have no Unearth in hand and the Hermit mills it, Krosan Reclamation's flashback shuffles it into the empty library for them to draw. So without a reanimation spell in hand, they usually activate the Hermit at your end step or in their upkeep, to reach their draw step without passing a turn on an empty library. With one in hand they don't need the draw, and they can activate in their main phase and go straight into it. When they activate tells you whether they are holding a reanimation spell (Shallow Grave, below, blurs this).



A few lists are trying Shallow Grave at the moment, and it opens many lines. It returns the top creature card of their graveyard with haste, at instant speed. On a Hermit Druid that has just died, the top creature card of their graveyard, it lets the Hermit activate at once. After a Hermit activation, it combos at your end step or in their upkeep, without waiting for a main phase.

Against blue decks, the Shallow Grave player can sit on the Hermit and the Grave and play draw-go, comboing when you tap out. Or they activate the Hermit on your turn and dare you to answer the Krosan Reclamation: if you counter it or mill the cards it shuffled back, the Grave usually still kills before their draw step. Either way you need two answers, one for the Reclamation and one for the Grave. So when Shallow Grave may be in their list, don't count on the sorcery-speed timing of Unearth, and don't trust a mill in their upkeep to end the game on its own.

They fight you with discard, Cabal Therapy and Duress. Mana creatures — Birds of Paradise, Wall of Roots — and Elvish Spirit Guide let them put an engine down early, on the first turn with a Spirit Guide.



This is one of the most complex decks in the format to pilot and to understand, and to play well against it you need to know their lines and every point where you can interact. Their primer is excellent and a recommended read: it shows how the deck works from the inside.

What the matchup hinges on. Their engines against your interaction. Every kill needs a lot of pieces to fall into place, but every one starts with an engine card and mana, and Survival needs only those and any creature card: it is close to a one-card combo, and you should be scared of it. Once an engine is down, the rest of the combo is fragile. Counterspell and Foil hit the follow-ups — a hard-cast Shapeshifter, the Krosan Reclamation, the Unearth — Stifle hits the triggers and activations along the way, and Vision Charm and Brain Freeze hit the library. The Hermit kill runs into all of that, and since a Hermit line can leave them losing to their own empty library, every piece of interaction is bad news for them. The Survival kill is the slower of the two, since it needs more mana and more setup, but it is the dangerous one: once Survival and a Shapeshifter are on the battlefield, they can combo at instant speed, in response to anything you do, and the discard to Survival is a cost, so the top of their graveyard has already changed before you can respond. Survival is the card to counter above all.

Game one. They usually need a few turns of setup, and they mulligan hard for Survival or Hermit Druid. Keep hands that can answer a turn-two engine — turn one with a Spirit Guide — and still put a Dreadnought down early, around their discard; those usually win. The points where the combo breaks:

- **Stifle the Hermit Druid activation.** Their library stays where it is.

- **Stifle the enter-the-battlefield triggers:** Karmic Guide's, Palinchron's untap, a Shapeshifter that has entered as one of them.
- **Stifle Animate Dead's enter-the-battlefield trigger.** It is the trigger that returns the creature, so the Karmic Guide never enters at all. Later in the line, Stifling the trigger that sacrifices the Guide works too: the Guide stays on the battlefield instead of going to the top of the graveyard, and the Shapeshifter enters as whatever is on top.
- **Mill them at the key moments.** After Krosan Reclamation has shuffled the Unearth back into a library of one or two cards, Vision Charm or Brain Freeze in their upkeep mills it before they draw — and with an empty library, they lose on the draw, unless they have a Shallow Grave. With a Shapeshifter cast from hand and a Guide or Palinchron on top of the graveyard, Vision Charm milling four usually changes the top card, and the Shapeshifter enters as something other than what they set up; without Survival, they can't fix it again.
- **Chain of Vapor on the Shapeshifter, in the combat lines.** It is at its best once they have exiled their graveyard to pump it: bounced then, they usually have no way left to win. The same line gives them chances to Cabal Therapy you several times before they attack, though, so you may have to fire the Chain earlier, at something else that disrupts them. With your Dreadnought on the battlefield, they can sacrifice a land to copy the Chain onto it; with a lethal Shapeshifter in front of you, that is a trade you take, or counter the copy.
- **Vision Charm on a Shapeshifter copying an artifact** is a narrow out. As a Devourer it is an artifact creature, so Charm can phase it out — but only when they can't respond by discarding a Triskelion to turn it into one and fire its counters at you: no Triskelion in hand, or no mana to discard it. The moment it works is in response to the Survival activation that discarded the Devourer, before they have found the Triskelion.

Watch for the slow Hermit line. With enough mana they can activate Hermit Druid on their turn, flash back Cabal Therapy once for each creature they can sacrifice, then flash back Krosan Reclamation in their next upkeep and Animate Dead their way to a kill. It gives you a turn; the mill in their upkeep is the usual way to use it, though against Shallow Grave it may not be enough on its own.

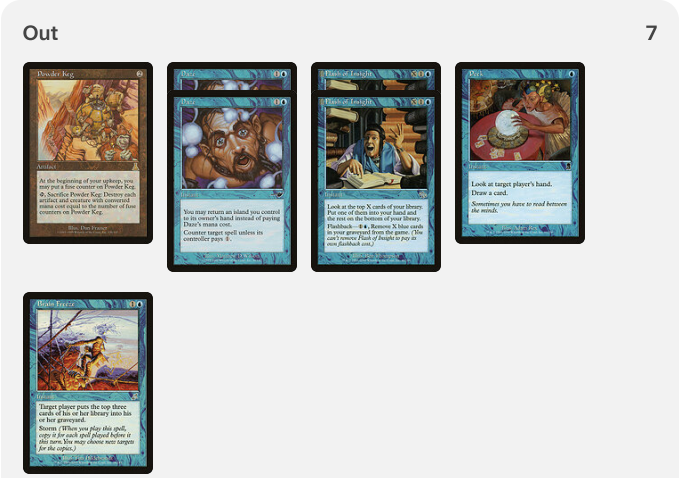
After sideboarding. They bring answers to the Dreadnought — Uktabi Orangutan, Naturalize or Crumble, Swords to Plowshares — more Duress, and Xantid Swarm, which stops you casting spells on any turn it attacks and so turns off your interaction while they combo; Stifle its attack trigger if you must. The Swarm is also why they favor the Scrounger finish: they attack with it, so you can't cast spells for the rest of the turn, then combo after combat. Expect them to play with a lot more patience: discard first, then answer the Dreadnought, then combo.



Your plan changes too: keep your interaction up, and stick a Dreadnought in a window where you can still answer their engine. Swords and the artifact removal are the answers to respect; Uktabi Orangutan usually needs a resolved Survival to find it, and it can be countered on cast or its trigger Stifled.

Flare on a Hermit Druid before it has activated doesn't stop it: the counter goes on at their upkeep, and they can activate the Hermit in response. But it forces their hand. Activating in their upkeep means they need the mana to flash back Krosan Reclamation (or cast a Shallow Grave) before the draw, and to get through your Stifles, Vision Charms and counters, and they may not go for it to respect your answers. Then the Flare is removal.

Sideboarding: −1 Keg, −2 Daze, −2 Flash, −1 Peek, −1 Brain Freeze / +3 Annul, +3 Flare, +1 Back to Basics.





Why these. Annul counters Survival and Animate Dead for one mana. All three Flares come in: they kill Xantid Swarm and pressure Hermit Druid. One Back to Basics: they play no basics at all, and although their mana creatures and Spirit Guides still cast spells under it, it cuts them off from the mana a combo turn needs. Keg leaves: at one it kills Birds and Swarm but your own Dreadnought too, at two Hermit Druid and Wall of Roots, and the Shapeshifter changes mana value whenever they want. Both Dazes leave: they play around it with a land kept untapped, and an Elvish Spirit Guide in hand pays for it, so a hard counter is usually better. On the play, Daze can be worth keeping over a Foil or an Annul, since their

early engine comes down before they have spare mana; the Spirit Guide is the risk you take. Flash leaves because you don't expect a game long enough to get value from the flashback. Peek leaves because knowing their hand usually isn't worth the card here. Brain Freeze leaves too: the Vision Charms are enough to mill what Krosan Reclamation shuffles back.

Chain stays: it is the only answer left to a resolved Survival and to a Shapeshifter that is about to kill you.

Grow-a-Tog



Verdict. Unfavorable. They have lots of answers to the Dreadnought, and Meddling Mage can name it.

What they do. One of the best tempo decks in the format: lots of cantrips, cheap threats that grow as they play spells and fill their graveyard — Quirion Dryad and Psychatog — and mana acceleration in Mox Diamond. Early on they control the board and disrupt you until they stick a threat, and they keep interacting once it lands. Dryad, and Nimble Mongoose in the lists that run it, get better as the game goes on; Psychatog is the finisher, and earlier in the game a blocker that holds the ground. Around the threats they play Counterspell, Daze, Fire // Ice and Swords to Plowshares. They are a Gush deck, and some builds are an Accumulated Knowledge deck as well.









Lists vary a lot, and the Tog family has several branches. Grow-a-Tog proper is Dryad and Psychatog in a green-blue deck that splashes for its answers, and it comes with or without main-deck Meddling Mage. The lists with main-deck Mages are the harder version for you. Esper Tog, white-blue-black, plays no Dryad. It uses Mox Diamonds to bring the Mages down early, with four Swords to Plowshares, counters and card advantage, and often Gaea's Blessing in the sideboard. It is the hardest of them, and one of this deck's toughest matchups.

Beyond those, some lists don't run Mox Diamond; some run Nimble Mongoose, Call of the Herd or Armageddon — which resets the game with a threat or a Mox Diamond already on the battlefield — and a few play Winter Orb. UB Psychatog, without the green or the white, has its own entry. The usual tip-off that you are facing GAT is the mana base and the choice of cantrips: it is one of the few decks running Portent, Sleight of Hand or Fire // Ice alongside white and green cards; Esper Tog shows white and black with no green. For this entry, assume a list with main-deck Meddling Mage, Quirion Dryad and Psychatog; against Esper Tog the plan is the same, with more respect for Swords and the Mages.









Their biggest weakness is their mana. A four-color deck — five, counting the Fire in Fire // Ice — is hard to support in Premodern, and they fix it with City of Brass, Gemstone Mine, Flooded Strand and Mox Diamond. The mana is fragile and painful.

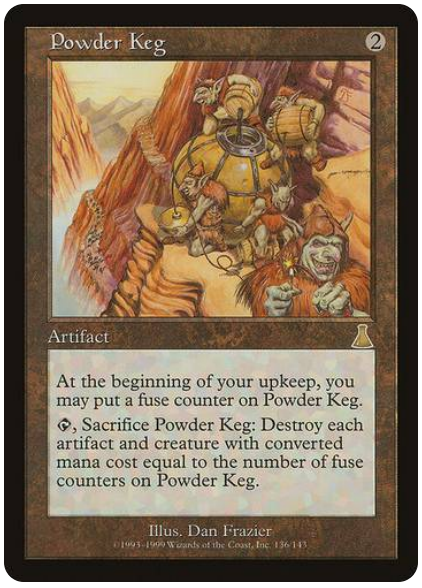
What the matchup hinges on. Meddling Mage, and their mana. The biggest threat in game one is a Mage naming Phyrexian Dreadnought; if you can't answer it, the single main-deck Brain Freeze is your out, though a slim one in game one.



Game one. The Freeze plan is unlikely to work before sideboarding: they can present a clock that is hard to answer quicker than you can mill them. So look for a window to jam a Dreadnought and protect it through their interaction, before a Meddling Mage comes down and before a Psychatog can grow big enough to deal with it.

Powder Keg at two sweeps Dryad and Meddling Mage without touching your Dreadnought.

This is one matchup where attacking their mana is part of the plan. Stifle their Flooded Strand to keep them off white early in the game, and Chain of Vapor on a Mox Diamond sets them back too. Play around Armageddon when you can; if it is going to resolve, Gush in response to pick your Islands up.



After sideboarding. The game becomes mostly the mill plan, on the same terms as against UB Psychatog: Freezes that are lethal, not partial ones that feed their Tog. The difference is that your plan B, the Dreadnought, faces more removal than against UB Psychatog, and they have more threats to build a dangerous clock. They may bring more removal for the Dreadnought, such as Seal of Cleansing or Aura of Silence, and Gaea's Blessing against your pivot to the Freeze, so hold a Stifle for it.







Back to Basics taxes their mana further: with it resolved, City of Brass and Gemstone Mine stay tapped, so red for Fire, black for Psychatog and green for Dryad have to come from a Mox Diamond.

Sideboarding: −2 Dreadnought, −1 Charm, −2 Daze, −1 Peek, −1 Foil / +2 Brain Freeze, +2 Back to Basics, +1 Chain, +2 Flare.

Out 7



In 7



Why these. The two extra Freezes make three for the mill plan. Back to Basics strands their colors. The second Chain hits a Mox Diamond when you are on mana denial, or resets a resolved Dryad. Essence Flare is the extra answer to Meddling Mage, which it kills in two upkeeps; it is weaker on Dryad, whose counters can outgrow it, and it can't target a Mongoose. Two Dreadnoughts leave because the Dreadnought is now plan B. A Vision Charm goes rather than a Stifle, out of respect for Gaea's Blessing: every Charm aimed at their library risks flipping one. All four Stifles stay, for the Blessing and their Flooded Strand. Both Dazes leave: they play a tempo game and keep the mana to pay. Peek and a Foil make room.

Adjust to what you see. Because lists vary, treat this line as a starting point and change it with what they show you. If you see no Meddling Mage, you don't need the Flares. If no Gaea's Blessing turns up in game two, cut a Stifle instead of a Charm for game three. And if the Freeze plan looks weaker against whatever they are doing, keep more Dreadnoughts in.

Black-White Control





Verdict. Slightly favorable. Game one turns on a commit turn through their answers; after sideboarding the Freeze plan turns their removal into blanks.

What they do. A control deck with answers on two fronts. For the Dreadnought: Swords to Plowshares, Wrath of God and Seal of Cleansing in the main deck, Disenchant in some lists, and Vindicate, a sorcery-speed answer that can just as well take an Island early and leave you short of mana. For your hand: Duress and Gerrard's Verdict. Verdict can target themselves too, discarding lands to gain three life each. Some lists play Phyrexian Furnace, which exiles your graveyard a card at a time and makes Flash of Insight — your card selection and card advantage in a long game — much worse. Some play Skeletal Scrying for card advantage and few threats: Decree of Justice tokens, Exalted Angel, and sometimes Eternal Dragon, which keeps coming back once they have the mana to return it from the graveyard.

What the matchup hinges on. Their answers against your plan. In game one they have plenty for the Dreadnought, and their discard picks your counters apart before the commit turn. After sideboarding you leave the Dreadnought plan behind, their removal has nothing to hit, and the game is whether you can build a Freeze turn before their threats get there.

Game one. Two ways to win. Overwhelm their removal and discard with a commit turn — a Dreadnought with more protection than they have answers — or grind them into a mill game with the Charms and the Freeze. The mill game is the harder one before sideboarding: they have enough threats and enough discard to overpower you eventually, and once they have the mana to recur Eternal Dragon, the long

game usually goes their way. So lean toward the commit turn, and keep the mill for the games where it is clearly there.

Vindicate on an Island is a Stone Rain you can blank: return the targeted Island with Daze or Gush. Charm the Dreadnought in response to Swords or Wrath, and Stifle the Seal of Cleansing's ability.

After sideboarding. Go all in on the mill. With every Dreadnought out, their Swords and Wraths have no targets, and their Seals, their Disenchants and the Aura of Silence some of them bring have only the Keg. What is left of their deck is the threats, the discard and the card advantage.

They don't cast many spells and they won't fight you on the stack, so they won't build the storm for you: you have to pick the moment to build your own Freeze turn. The best one is a spell of theirs. With a hand full of permission, hold priority and counter the same spell again and again — every counter counts for the storm — and cast the Freezes on top. Duress and Gerrard's Verdict can take the counters you are holding for that turn, and Duress can take a Freeze you don't want to lose.

Hold Stifle for Decree of Justice, and Stifle the right ability: the trigger that makes the tokens, not the cycling. Eternal Dragon's return from the graveyard is an ability too, and Stifling it wastes the mana they paid for it. Very few lists play Gaea's Blessing, but when you mill, consider keeping a Stifle open for one.

Sideboarding: −4 Dreadnought, −2 Daze / +2 Brain Freeze, +3 Annul, +1 Chain.

Out 6



In 6



Why these. Annul is for their value permanents: Phyrexian Furnace, Phyrexian Arena, and the occasional Jester's Cap, which can exile all three of your Freezes from your library. Late in the game consider letting an Arena resolve — it helps you empty their library — and don't counter a late Skeletal Scrying either. The second Chain is for tempo — bounce an Exalted Angel they paid to turn face up or a hard-cast Eternal Dragon, and it costs them the turn you need to set up the Freeze — or as the cheap spell that starts a Freeze chain. Keg stays: at zero it kills the Soldier tokens and a face-down Angel. All four Stifles stay, for the Decrees and the Dragon. Daze goes: late in a long game they have the mana to pay for it. Back to Basics stays in the sideboard: bring it in if you see Mishra's Factory, which most lists don't play.









Madness (Blue-Green, Green-White, ZIMS)

Coming soon.

Sideboarding: UG and GW Madness: −1 Brain Freeze / +1 Chain. ZIMS: −1 Thwart, −1 Brain Freeze, −1 Peek, −1 Daze / +3 Annul, +1 Chain.

UG and GW Madness

Out 1



In 1



ZIMS

Out 4



In 4



Tinker Fling / Devourer

Coming soon.

Sideboarding: −1 Brain Freeze, −2 Flash, −1 Thwart, −1 Peek, −2 Daze / +3 Annul, +2 Back to Basics, +2 Flare.

Out 7



In 7



The Rock

Coming soon.

Sideboarding: –2 Daze, –1 Brain Freeze, –2 Foil / +3 Annul, +2 Back to Basics.

Out 5



In 5



Zoo

Coming soon.

Angry Hermit

Coming soon.

Reanimator

Coming soon.

Mono-Blue Storm

Coming soon.

Iggy Pop

Coming soon.

Deadguy Ale

Coming soon.

Sideboarding: –1 Brain Freeze, –2 Foil / +3 Flare.

Out 3




In 3



Quick-reference sideboard map

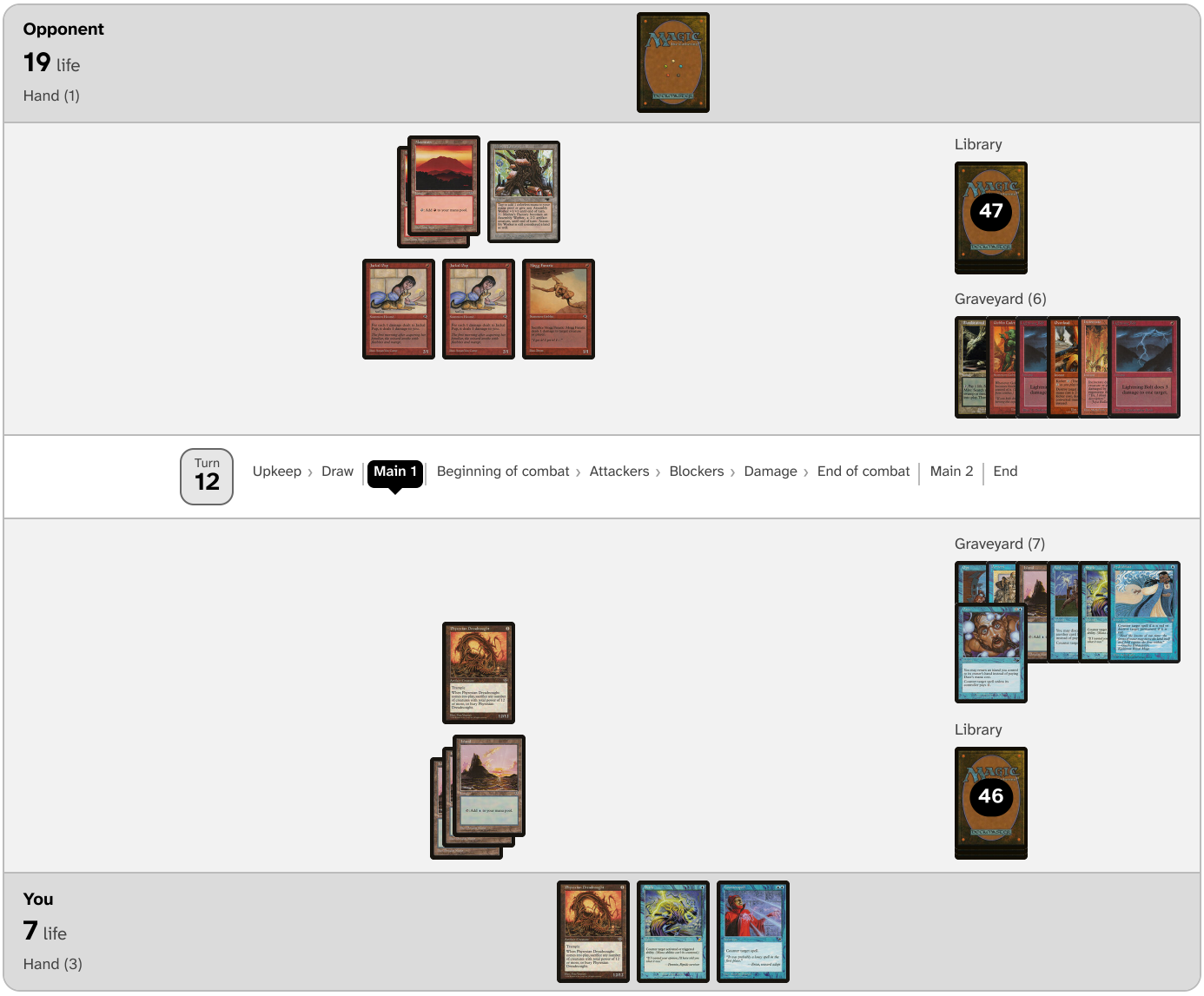
Sixty cards unless noted. DN = Phyrexian Dreadnought, VC = Vision Charm, BF = Brain Freeze, B2B = Back to Basics, Blasts = 2 Blue Elemental Blast + 2 Hydroblast. Daze counts are defaults, not rules; see the Daze entry for when to keep them on the play.

Matchup	Out	In
Mono-Blue Dreadnought mirror (61)	1 DN, 2 Daze, 1 Peek, 1 Keg	3 Annul, 2 BF, 1 Chain
Sligh	1 BF, 2 Flash, 1 Thwart, 1 Keg, 1 Opt	4 Blasts, 2 Flare
Enchantress	4 DN, 2 Daze, 2 VC, 1 Peek	3 Annul, 2 BF, 3 Flare, 1 Chain
Elves	2 Flash, 2 Daze, 1 BF, 1 Thwart	3 Annul, 3 Flare
Goblins	1 Keg, 2 Flash, 1 Thwart, 1 BF, 1 Peek, 1 Foil	4 Blasts, 3 Flare
Naya Terrageddon	1 BF, 1 Thwart, 2 Daze, 1 Flash	3 Annul, 2 B2B
4C Terrageddon	1 BF, 1 Thwart, 2 Daze, 2 Flash, 1 Peek	3 Annul, 2 B2B, 2 Flare
GW Oath Ponza	1 DN, 1 Stifle, 1 BF, 2 Daze, 2 Foil, 1 Peek	3 Annul, 2 B2B, 3 Flare
GR Oath Ponza	1 BF, 1 Flash, 1 Peek, 2 Foil	3 Annul, 2 B2B
Moneyball Black	1 DN, 1 Stifle, 2 Foil, 1 BF, 1 Peek	2 B2B, 1 Chain, 3 Flare
Mono-Black Clerics	2 Foil, 1 BF, 1 Peek	1 Chain, 3 Flare
Pit Rack	2 Foil, 1 Daze, 1 BF, 1 Peek	3 Annul, 2 B2B
Replenish	4 DN, 4 Stifle, 1 Peek	3 Annul, 2 BF, 3 Flare, 1 B2B
Landstill	2 DN, 1 Stifle, 2 Daze, 2 Foil, 1 Peek	2 Annul, 2 B2B, 2 Flare, 2 BF
UW Web Control	1 DN, 1 Stifle, 2 Daze, 1 Foil	3 Flare, 2 BF
UB Psychatog	1 DN, 2 Daze	2 BF, 1 Chain
Stasis	3 DN, 2 Daze, 1 Peek	3 Annul, 2 BF, 1 Chain
Full English Breakfast	1 Keg, 2 Daze, 2 Flash, 1 Peek, 1 BF	3 Annul, 3 Flare, 1 B2B
GAT	2 DN, 1 VC, 2 Daze, 1 Peek, 1 Foil	2 BF, 2 B2B, 1 Chain, 2 Flare
BW Control	4 DN, 2 Daze	2 BF, 3 Annul, 1 Chain
UG / GW Madness	1 BF	1 Chain
ZIMS	1 Thwart, 1 BF, 1 Peek, 1 Daze	3 Annul, 1 Chain
Tinker Fling	1 BF, 2 Flash, 1 Thwart, 1 Peek, 2 Daze	3 Annul, 2 B2B, 2 Flare
The Rock	2 Daze, 1 BF, 2 Foil	3 Annul, 2 B2B
Deadguy Ale	1 BF, 2 Foil	3 Flare

Practice

Each puzzle below sets up a board and asks for the right play. Work it out before you open the answer: the reasoning matters more than the card you pick. Each puzzle assumes you've read the matchup it comes from. In the PDF, each answer starts on the next page, so you can solve the board before you turn it. The board is drawn the way MTGO shows it, with your opponent at the top. Cards with an eye are known to the other player — a card in their hand that you have seen, or a card in yours that they have. Tapped cards are turned sideways, attacking creatures have a red arrow under them, face-down cards are ones you haven't seen, and a number on a card is its counters. Spells and abilities on the stack sit in the band across the middle, leaning toward the player who put them there, with the top of the stack on the right; the bar below shows the turn and the current step, with the arrow pointing at the player whose turn it is.

Puzzle 1: the Sligh race



Game two against Sligh. Your Dreadnought came down last turn and can attack. They have one card in hand; assume whatever they draw next turn is a Mountain. What's the play?

Attack with the Dreadnought. Then, in your second main phase, cast the other Dreadnought without Stifle and sacrifice the tapped one to its trigger. Keep the last two Islands up for Counterspell.

Why attack. They are at nineteen, so the Dreadnought needs two hits, and at seven life against a deck full of Bolts and Fireblasts every turn you give them is another draw aimed at you. The attack puts them at seven, or not far above it if they chump: the Dreadnought tramples over a blocker, and whatever blocks comes out of their attack.

Why you need a blocker. Once the Dreadnought is tapped, their board is lethal on its own: two Jackal Pups, the Fanatic and an animated Factory swing for seven, and sacrificing the Fanatic adds one more. Something has to be untapped on their turn.

Read their card. A Sligh player holding one card this late is most likely holding a finisher, a Fireblast or another burn spell waiting for your life total to drop into range, an answer to the Dreadnought, an Overload or a Mogg Salvage they didn't want to fire into your untapped Counterspell, or a Ball Lightning kept in after sideboarding and waiting for the third Mountain. Each of those is lethal unless you make the right play, so you have to play around all of them.

The tempting blocker. The second Dreadnought, with Stifle on its trigger. That spends two of your three Islands and strands Counterspell in your hand. The blocker stops one attacker and you go to one, and their card is free to finish you: a burn spell to the face, or Overload or Mogg Salvage on the blocker to let the whole board through.

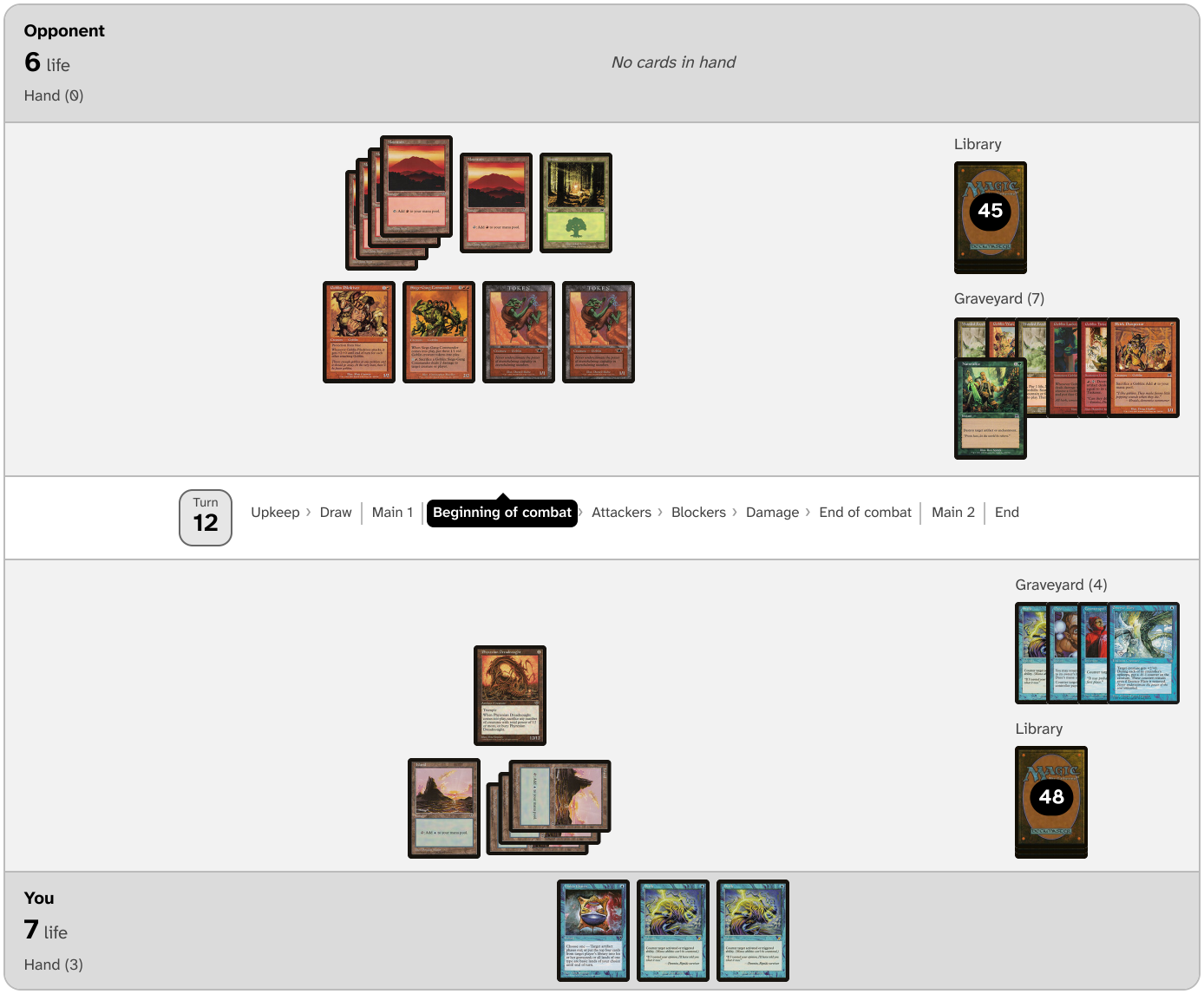
The play. The second Dreadnought's trigger asks for twelve power of creatures, and the tapped Dreadnought has exactly that. Sacrifice it, and for one mana you have swapped a tapped Dreadnought for an untapped one with Counterspell still up. On their turn the Counterspell meets their one card, whether that's a burn spell, an Overload, a Salvage, a Ball Lightning or a Threaten, and the Dreadnought blocks. With one blocker the most they can get through is six, the Fanatic included, and you are at seven. If it blocks a Jackal Pup, the Pup's own trigger deals the twelve damage to them, but it doesn't kill them on the spot: the trigger goes on the stack, and they can respond with whatever they have left, a burn spell or the Fanatic's sacrifice. That is why the Counterspell matters even here: with their card countered, the Fanatic only takes you to one, and then the trigger resolves and the game is over. Most of the time they won't attack with the Pups at all, and the Dreadnought swings for the win next turn. The Stifle stays in hand too, and with two Islands open it takes the Fanatic's sacrifice if their card turns out to be a land.

If they respond to the trigger by destroying either Dreadnought, that is the spell to counter.

Doing nothing is an option. Not attacking at all also survives: the untapped Dreadnought blocks a Pup or the Factory, Counterspell takes their card, and Stifle takes the Fanatic. It isn't the best play — it leaves them at nineteen and gives them another turn of draws, where the swap gives you the same defense and puts them a turn from dead — but it is a reasonable choice. What doesn't work is attacking and keeping all three Islands up for Stifle and Counterspell: their attack alone is seven, and you are at seven. Nor does walling with both Dreadnoughts: not attacking and casting the second with

Stifle leaves one Island, and a single burn spell for three to your face, followed by the whole board into your two blockers, gets the last points through.

Puzzle 2: the Siege-Gang swing



Game two against Goblins. They have moved to combat, and none of their Goblins is summoning sick. What do you do?

Vision Charm their Mountains into Islands now, at the beginning of combat. If they attack, block the Piledriver with the Dreadnought, and keep both Stifles for your turn.

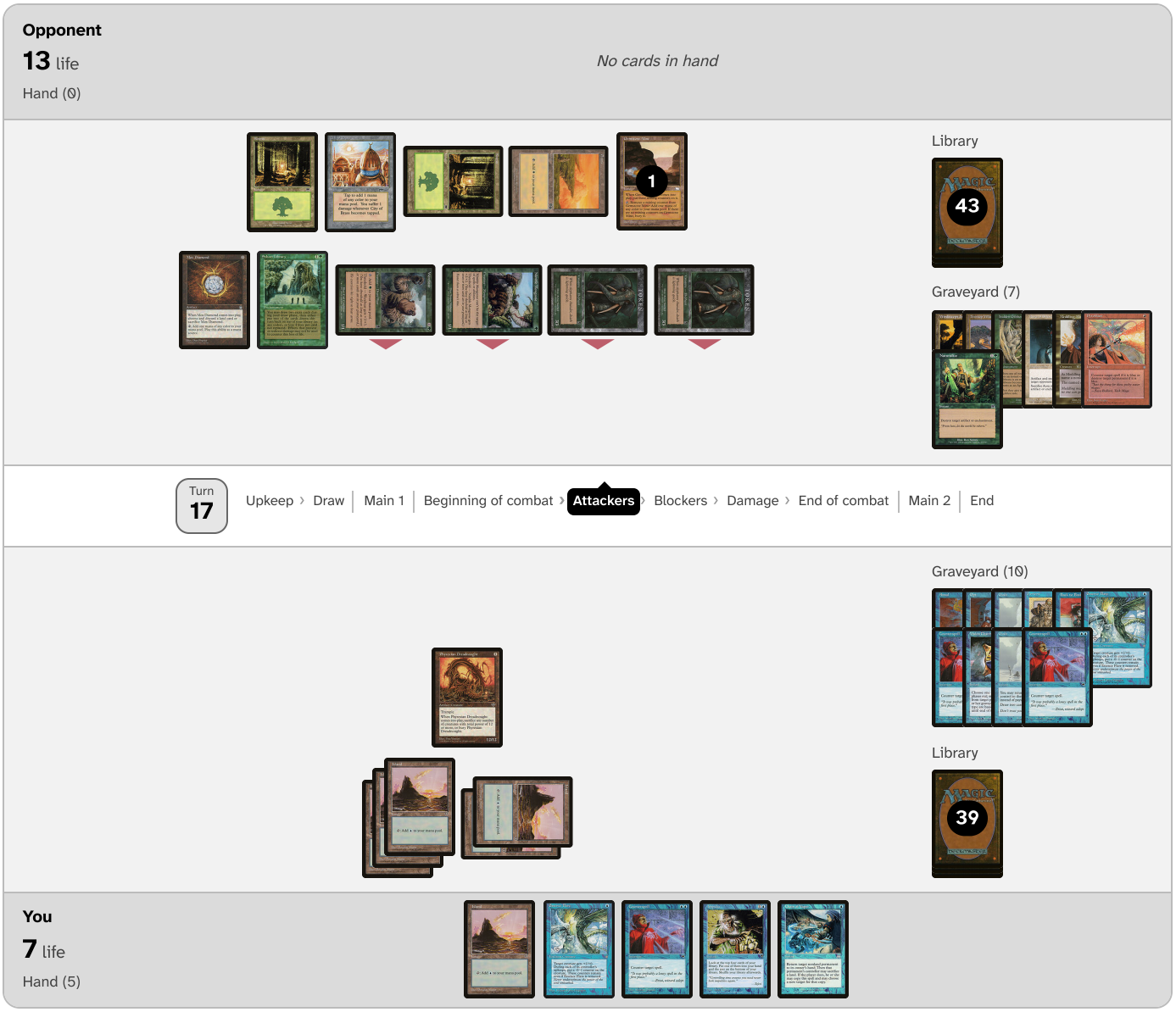
Count it first. If they attack with everything, the Piledriver's trigger makes it a 7/2, with three other Goblins beside it. Protection from blue doesn't stop the Dreadnought, which is colorless, from blocking it, and it has to: anything else lets it through. That leaves four damage from the Siege-Gang and the tokens. Then the Siege-Gang finishes it. Each shot costs two mana, one of it red, and sacrifices a Goblin for two damage, and after damage every Goblin that has already hit you is ammunition. Five Mountains and a Forest are three shots; your one Island Stifles one of them, and four plus four is eight. You are at seven.

Why now. The Charm leaves them no red mana for the rest of the turn; the Forest can pay for the generic part of a shot but not the red. Mana empties at the end of each step, not when a spell resolves, so they can respond by tapping the Mountains and floating the red mana, but cast now, that mana is gone before attackers are declared. Any shot they want this turn has to be fired now, before attackers are declared, and each one sacrifices a Goblin that then won't attack and won't count for the Piledriver. They can't have both the combat damage and the shots. Aimed at you, the most they get is six, and you are at one. Aimed at the Dreadnought, whatever they sacrifice also comes off the Piledriver it has to get past, and the shots and the block together come nowhere near twelve.

If they keep the Goblins. Then they attack without the shots: block the Piledriver, take four, go to three. The shots wait for your turn, when the Mountains are Mountains again, but you untap first: four Islands and two Stifles against three shots. One gets through and you are at one. Stifle counters the ability, not its cost, so every shot still sacrifices a Goblin. Holding the Goblins back to block doesn't save them either: at six, they can't soak up enough of a twelve-power trampler.

Why not wait for the attack. Charm in response to the Piledriver's trigger and they float the mana, let the trigger resolve, and spend it before blocks: three shots at the Dreadnought, and it still has to block the 7/2, so it dies. Charm after blockers and the blocked Piledriver becomes a free shot: that is eight, and you are dead. Stifling the trigger shrinks the Piledriver to a 1/2 but leaves them all their red mana: block the Siege-Gang and they fire three shots before damage, seven in all; block anything else and the Siege-Gang shoots after damage.

Puzzle 3: racing the Elephants



Game two against 4C Terrageddon, the Meddling Mage build. They have just attacked with everything. What do you do, this turn and next?

Block the Werebear. Chain of Vapor an Elephant token, and Counterspell the copy when they sacrifice a land to point it at the Dreadnought. Take six and go to one. Then, on your turn, Essence Flare your own Dreadnought and swing for fourteen.

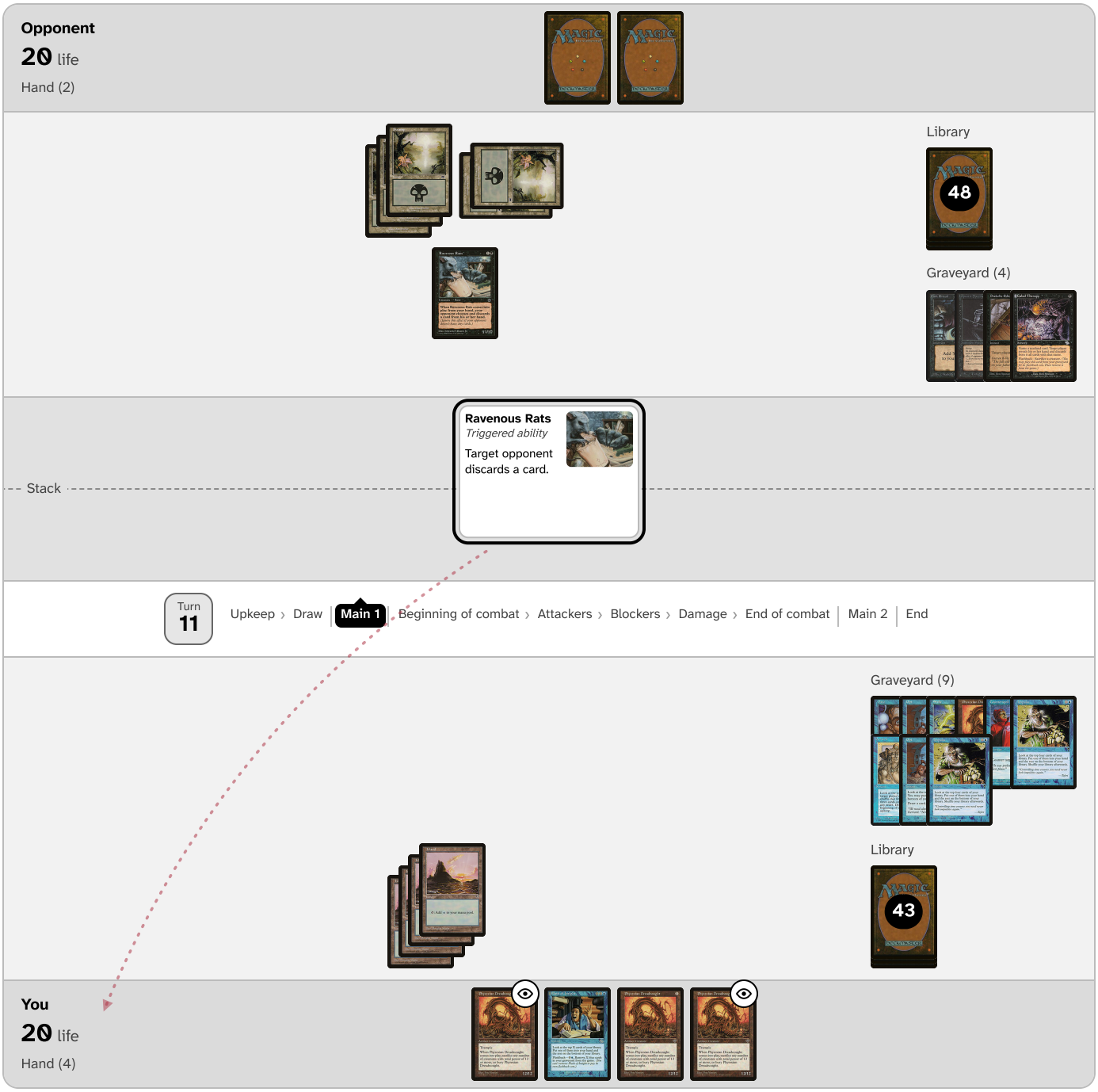
Count their attack. Thirteen power is coming: the Werebear is a 4/4 with threshold, the Mongoose and the Elephants 3/3s. Blocking alone stops four of it, and nine kills you. So something else has to leave combat, and Chain is the only way. The Mongoose has shroud, so it can't be the target, and the block and the Chain have to take out the Werebear and an Elephant: block the Mongoose or an Elephant instead and seven gets through, which is exactly lethal.

Why the token. Chaining the Werebear and blocking an Elephant also leaves you at one, but the Werebear goes back to their hand, not away. They recast it after combat, and on your turn it is an untapped 4/4 standing in front of the Dreadnought. A token that leaves the battlefield simply stops existing.

The copy. Chain lets them sacrifice a land to copy it, and the copy goes straight at the Dreadnought. The copy is a spell, and Counterspell counters it. That is what the Counterspell is held for here.

Why you can't stay home. At one, with the Mongoose and an Elephant left, their next attack kills you: one blocker against two attackers. And a twelve-power Dreadnought into thirteen life doesn't end it. But everything that attacked you this turn is still tapped on yours, and the Werebear is dead, so nothing can block. Essence Flare is +2/+0: the Dreadnought swings as a 14/12, and the −0/−1 counters it would pick up from your next upkeep on mean nothing to twelve toughness. Thirteen life, fourteen damage.

Puzzle 4: the Therapy that ends it



Game one against Moneyball Black. They have just cast Ravenous Rats, and its trigger is on the stack. Their Cabal Therapy, now in their graveyard, showed them your hand earlier: of the cards you hold now, they have seen the two Dreadnoughts with the eye. What do you do?

Discard the Flash of Insight to the Rats. When they flash back Cabal Therapy by sacrificing the Rats and name the Dreadnought, flash back the Flash in response: exile all eight blue cards in your graveyard, look at the top eight, and take a Counterspell or the Thwart to counter the Therapy.

What's coming. The Rats are the body for Therapy's flashback. Their first Therapy showed them two Dreadnoughts, so the flashback names it, and it takes all three in your hand; the fourth is already in your graveyard. If that Therapy resolves, the game is over.

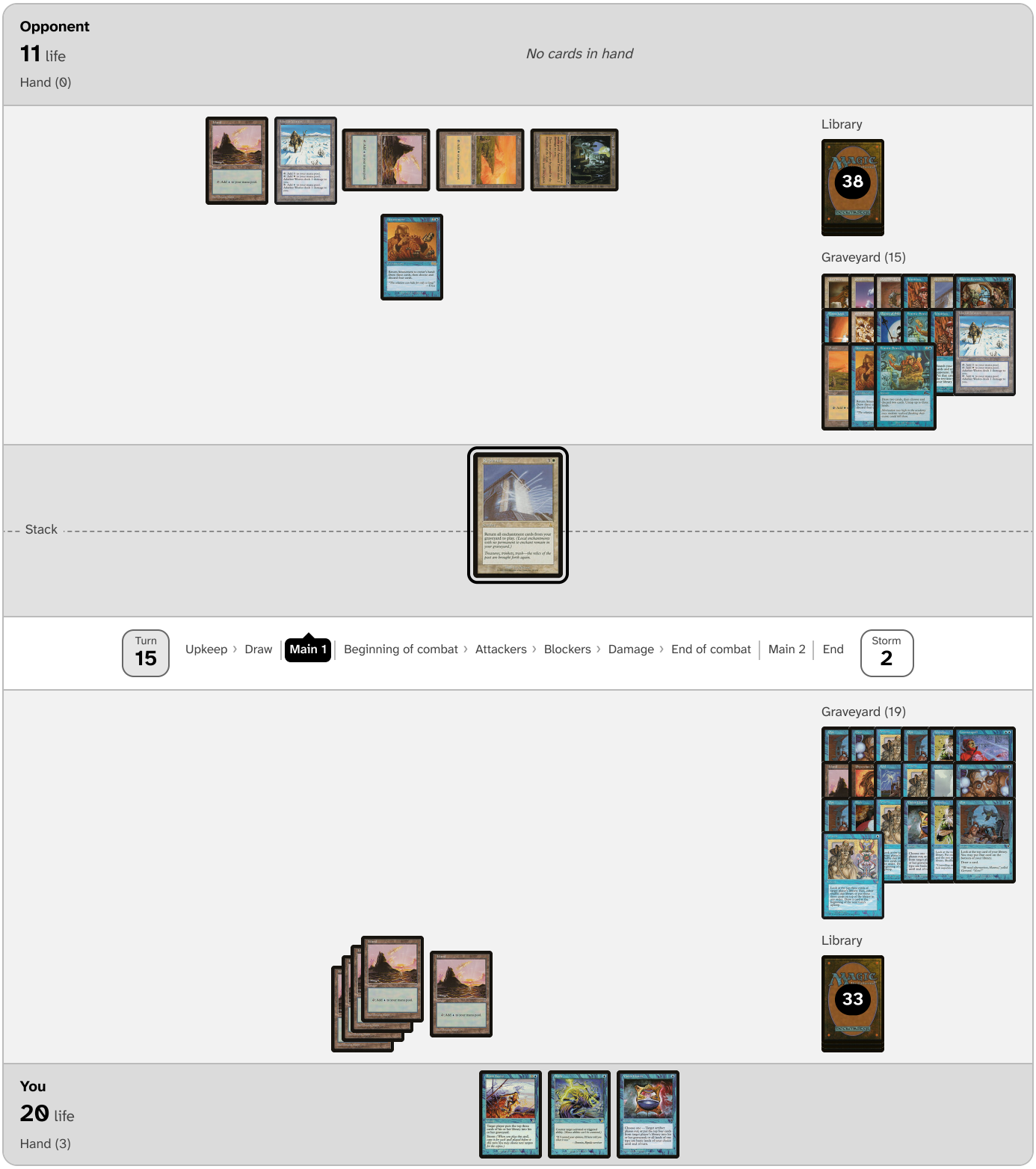
Why discard the Flash. The Rats make you discard, but you choose. A Dreadnought saves nothing, because the Therapy takes the other two. The Flash is the card they can't strip: in the graveyard its flashback costs two mana plus blue cards you already have, so eight cards cost you two Islands, and the other two are left for Counterspell. Thwart is free, returning three Islands.

Why not cast it now. Cast from hand, Flash costs X plus two, so your four Islands look at two cards and leave nothing to cast what you find. And it can't be flashed back in response to the Rats trigger: it only reaches the graveyard when the trigger resolves. The moment is the Therapy on the stack.

What else could stop it. Foil needs an Island in your hand, and you have none. Daze is no good while they have three Swamps open to pay for it.

Playing to your outs. Of the eight, take a Counterspell or the Thwart if one is there. Failing that, take a Gush: return the two tapped Islands and draw two, and with Islands in hand any Foil you draw counters the Therapy, as does a Counterspell off the two Islands still untapped. Failing that, take an Opt, or the Peek, and cast it off one untapped Island to dig for a Thwart, which still has four Islands to return, or a Gush into Foil. It isn't a lock, but every one of those outs exists only because the Flash came from the graveyard: cast from hand, the same four Islands would have bought two cards and no mana to use them.

Puzzle 5: the Replenish on the stack



Game one against Replenish. They cast Frantic Search, untapped their lands and put Replenish on the stack, with Opalescence, Parallax Wave and Decree of Silence in their graveyard. What do you do?

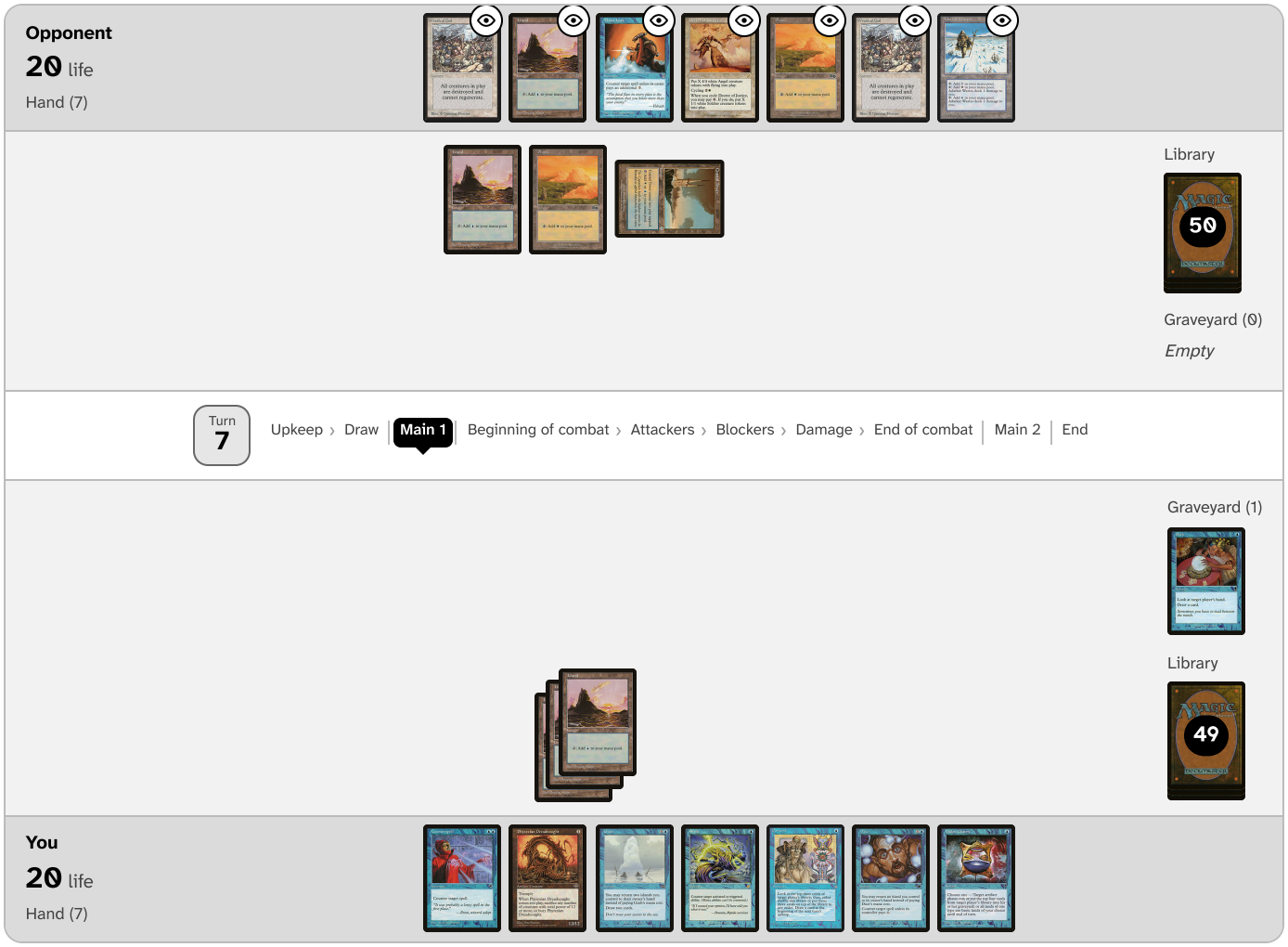
Vision Charm yourself, milling your own top four, to find a Flash of Insight: neither copy is in your graveyard, so both are in your library. If the Charm misses, Brain Freeze yourself as well. When a Flash turns up, flash it back, exiling every blue card in your graveyard, eighteen or more, and take the card that answers the Replenish with the mana you have left.

What resolving costs you. Replenish brings back the lock: Decree counters the next three spells you cast, Wave exiles whatever you block with, and Opalescence makes creatures of every enchantment they have — Wave a 4/4, Decree an 8/8, the Seal and both Attunements 2/2 and 3/3s. The Attunement already in play hits you this turn, and next turn they swing for twenty: you are dead in two turns.

Why not mill them. It looks like a Brain Freeze turn, with two spells already cast, but there isn't enough storm. The Freeze now mills nine; Charm their library first and the two mill sixteen of thirty-eight. Once Replenish resolves, Decree counters your spells; storm copies still resolve, but your turn starts the count again. Stifle has nothing to hit: Replenish is a spell.

Playing to your outs. The Flash is the only card that answers the Replenish from where you stand, and the graveyard is the only place you can afford to cast it from: two mana, with the blue cards already there paying for X — most of your library after the Charm, all of it after the Freeze. After the Charm, four Islands pay for the flashback and a Counterspell. After the Charm and the Freeze, two Islands pay for the flashback alone, and only the Thwart can be cast. If the Flash shows no counter you can cast, take a Gush. After the Freeze the Flash has seen your whole library, so you choose the order the rest goes back in: put a Foil on top, the Gush draws it, and the two Islands it returns pay for it. And whenever the Flash has seen your whole library, set up the next turns while you order it: a Dreadnought to draw next, with the Stifle in your hand to enable it, and a Counterspell or a Foil behind it for their next Replenish. At eleven life, one swing ends the game. Together the Charm and the Freeze find an answer about two times in three; nothing else in your hand finds one at all.

Puzzle 6: what the Peek showed



Game one against Landstill. At the end of their last turn you Peeked at their hand. It's your main phase, you haven't played a land this turn and have none in hand, and you haven't committed a Dreadnought yet. What's the plan for the next few turns?

Tap two Islands for mana, Gush by returning those two, and play one of them back as your land for the turn. Then Portent them, and cast the Dreadnought with Vision Charm as the enabler, keeping an Island untapped. Daze the Mana Leak whenever it comes. Next turn swing for twelve, and keep Counterspell up for the Wrath.

Gush first. Float the mana from two Islands before you return them, and the Gush costs you nothing this turn: two more cards, and with your land drop still unused, one of the Islands goes straight back down. You commit with four mana instead of three, and two more cards to protect it with.

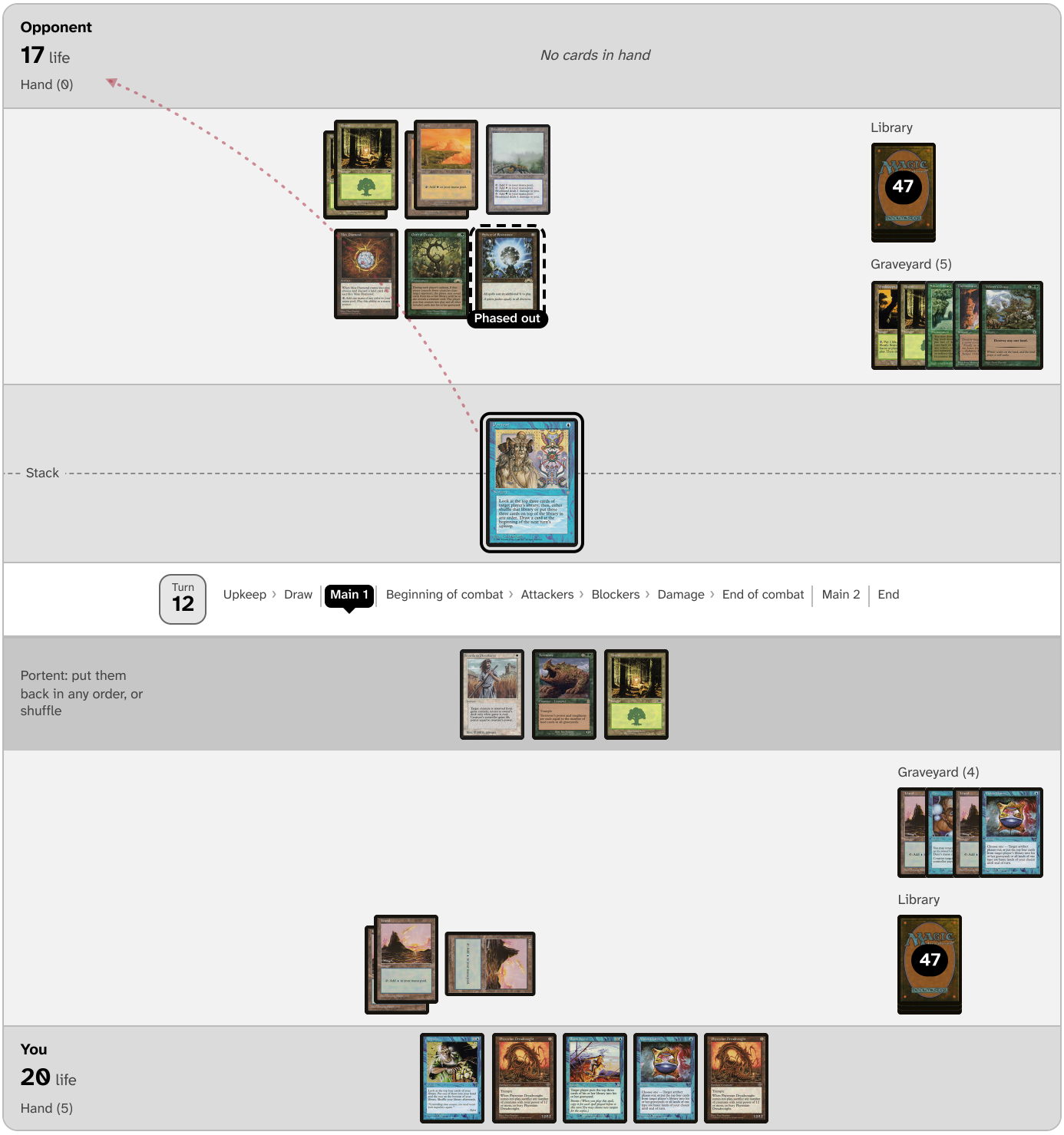
Read the hand. A Mana Leak, two Wraths, and a Plains for their fourth land: next turn they can Wrath. The Coastal Tower came in tapped, so they have exactly two lands open now — a Mana Leak, with nothing left to pay for Daze.

Why the Charm. Charmed, the Dreadnought is phased out through their turn and comes back in your untap step, ready to swing; the Wrath they can cast next turn has nothing to hit, whatever mana you have left. With the Gush's extra mana, Stifle and an Island held for the Charm would also survive it, but the Charm in response to a Wrath is a card you spend on their timing; enabling with it spends the same card on yours.

Why the Portent. The Peek told you everything except what they draw. Portent sets the two draws that matter, before your first swing and before your second: put a Swords, a Disenchant, a Humility or a Fact or Fiction third, or shuffle if more than one is there — cycling the Decree draws them one card deeper. And if they spend the Mana Leak on the Portent, let it go: they are tapped out, the Dreadnought and the Charm resolve untouched, and the Daze stays in your hand.

The next turns. Swing for twelve. On their turn they have one Wrath they can cast; Counterspell it, and swing again for the game.

Puzzle 7: the top three



Game one against GW Oath Ponza. At the end of their turn you Vision Charmed their Sphere of Resistance, so it is phased out for your turn. Your Portent is resolving on their library. In what order do you put them back, or do you shuffle? And what's your plan?

Put them back with the Forest on top, then the Swords, then the Terravore. Cast the Dreadnought and enable it with your second Vision Charm. Next turn swing for twelve. On their following upkeep, let the Oath trigger resolve, and swing again for the game.

Do it while the Sphere is away. With the Sphere in play, the Dreadnought and an enabler cost four, and you have three Islands: that is why it had to go. It phases back in at their untap step. This turn the Dreadnought and the Charm cost one each, as the Portent did; from their turn on, every spell costs one more.

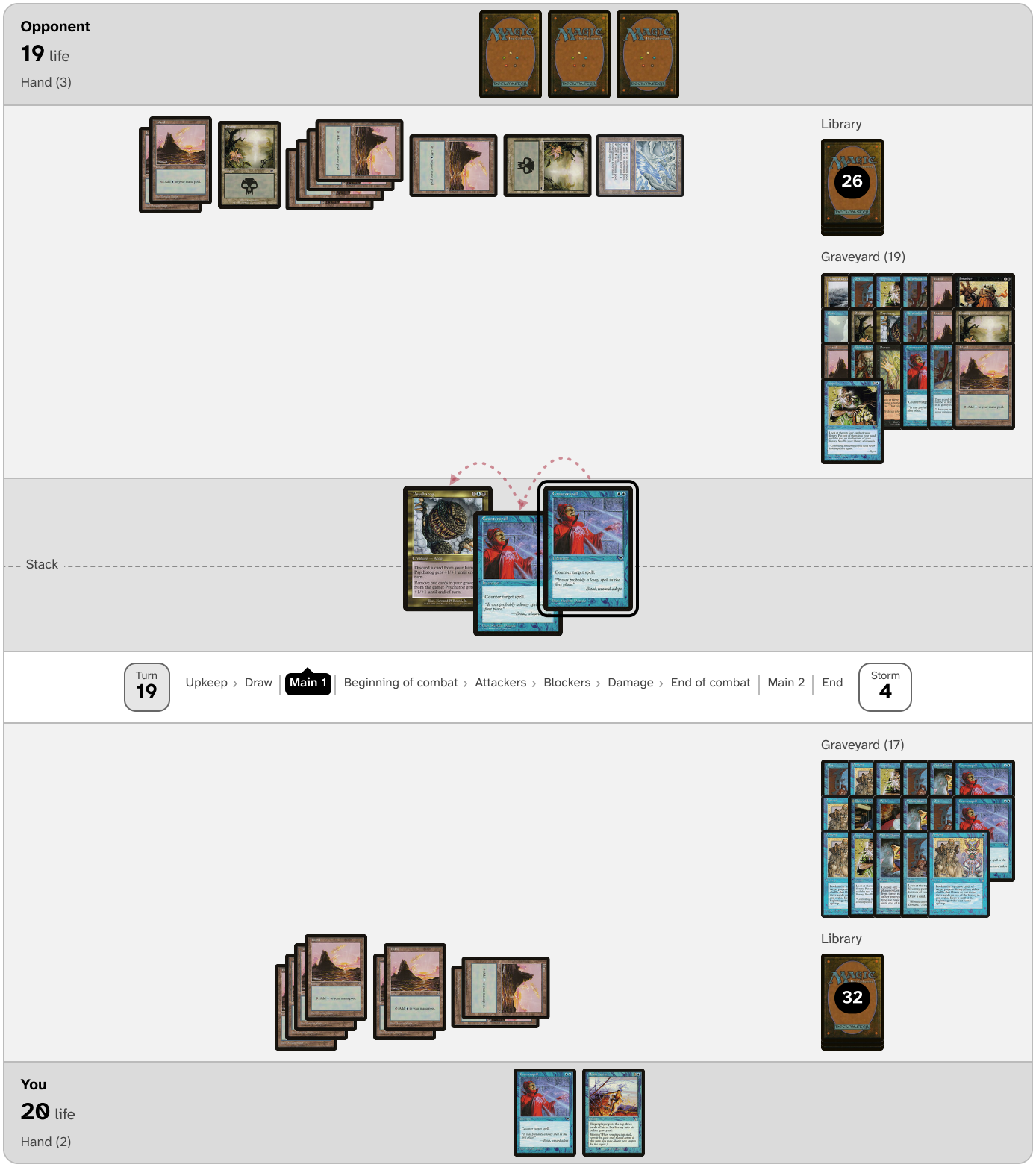
Why the Charm. Charmed, the Dreadnought is phased out through their next upkeep, and the Oath only triggers when they control fewer creatures than you: with the Dreadnought gone, they don't. There is no trigger to fight, and the first swing lands before any Terravore exists.

Let the second trigger resolve. On their following upkeep the Dreadnought is back and the Oath triggers, and you want it to: the Oath reveals cards until it finds a creature and puts the rest into their graveyard, so it reveals the Swords first, throws it away, and finds the Terravore — the Oath mills their own answer. Terravore counts the land cards in all graveyards, and nothing the Oath revealed was a land, so it counts only what is already there: their Windswept Heath and the Forest they discarded to Mox Diamond, and your two Islands. A 4/4. It can block the Dreadnought, but twelve trample over a 4/4 is eight, and the first swing has put them at five.

Why that order. The Forest on top is their next draw, harmless. The Swords anywhere they would draw it before your second swing costs you the Dreadnought: on top they draw it next turn, and behind the Terravore the Oath stops before reaching it and they draw it after. Second, between the Forest and the Terravore, is the one place the Oath reveals it and throws it away. The Terravore on top would be drawn and cast in time to block your first swing, and worse comes after: once it dies blocking, the Oath triggers again with nothing known left to find. It reveals the Swords and the Forest, then digs through unknown cards, milling every land on the way into the graveyard, and whatever creature it finds, another Terravore above all, can arrive bigger than the Dreadnought. Don't shuffle either: this order is a sequence you can win with, and a shuffle hands their next draw and the Oath's reveal to forty-seven unknown cards.

What's left. One unknown draw after the Oath, which you can't control. And the Oath is optional: if they decline it, they draw the Swords. That is the gamble in the line, and a free Terravore is a hard trigger to turn down.

Puzzle 8: the counter war



Game two against Psychatog. They cast Psychatog and you countered it; in response they cast Impulse, then countered your Counterspell. What do you do?

Don't counter back. Let their Counterspell resolve: your Counterspell goes to the graveyard, and the Psychatog is still on the stack. Flash back Flash of Insight, exiling the seventeen blue cards now in your graveyard, and look for your second Brain Freeze. If it is there, cast both Freezes, for thirty-nine cards against a library of twenty-six, before the Tog resolves. If it isn't, counter the Psychatog with the Counterspell in your hand.

The count. Four spells have been cast this turn: their Impulse, the Psychatog, your Counterspell and theirs. The Flash makes five. The first Freeze is then six instances, eighteen cards; the second counts the first and is seven, twenty-one. Thirty-nine, thirteen more than they have.

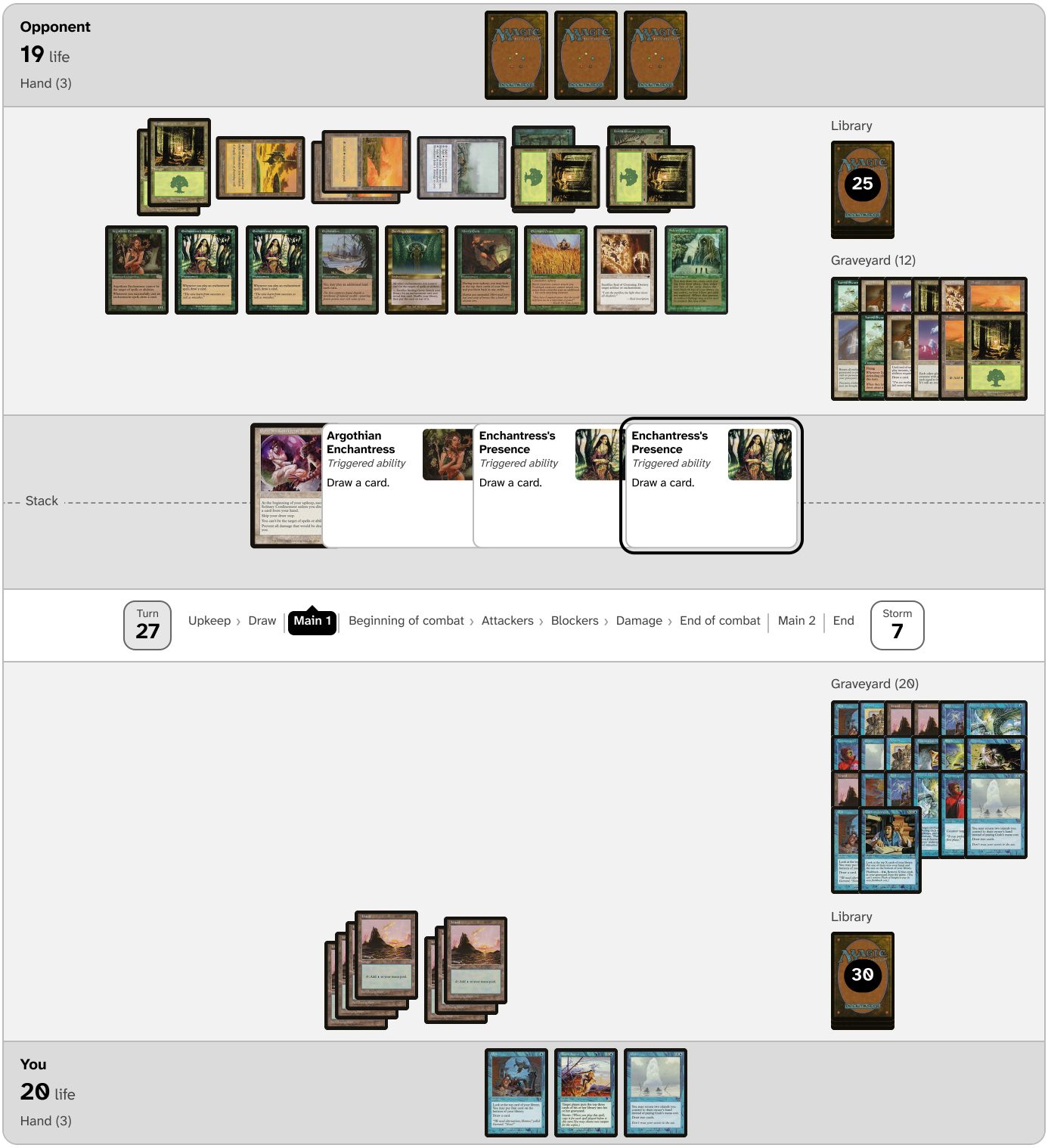
Why not counter back. It doesn't keep the Tog off the table: they have three cards and three lands open, and another Counterspell or a Foil puts it back on course. And it doesn't win: two of your six Islands go on the Counterspell, and what is left buys the Flash and one Freeze, twenty-one cards, five short. With two more Psychatogs in their library, holding this one off only buys a turn; the mill is how the game ends.

Why let their counter resolve first. It puts your countered Counterspell in the graveyard, one more blue card for the Flash to exile: seventeen cards seen instead of sixteen. And the Psychatog is still on the stack while you look, so nothing is given up yet.

What they can do about it. If they counter the Flash, they have spent a counter and a card on it, and the Tog is still on the stack with your Counterspell and four Islands behind it. If the Flash resolves and finds the Freeze, they can't stop the mill: three cards and three lands counter two copies at most, a Counterspell and a Foil, and six cards off thirty-nine still leaves thirty-three.

Playing to your outs. Both your other Freezes are among your thirty-two cards, and the Flash sees seventeen of them. It misses both only when all seventeen come from the thirty other cards, about one time in five, so it finds a Freeze about four times in five. When it misses, it almost always shows a Gush: take it, and its two draws come from the fifteen cards you haven't seen, a Freeze about a quarter of the time. That adds about one game in twenty. If nothing turns up, Counterspell the Psychatog with the one in your hand, and keep the Freeze rather than fire it short: a partial mill only feeds the Togs still in their library.

Puzzle 9: before the Confinement lands



Game two against Enchantress. They have spent their turn casting seven spells, and the last is a Solitary Confinement, with the draw triggers from their three Enchantress effects above it on the stack. What do you do?

Pounce now. Dig for Stifles first — two if the mana and the cards allow — then Brain Freeze them, Stifle any Gaea's Blessing trigger, and let their own Enchantress triggers finish the job. Tap two Islands for mana and Gush them back to your hand, cast Opt, and flash back Flash of Insight; then Freeze with whatever Stifles you have found.

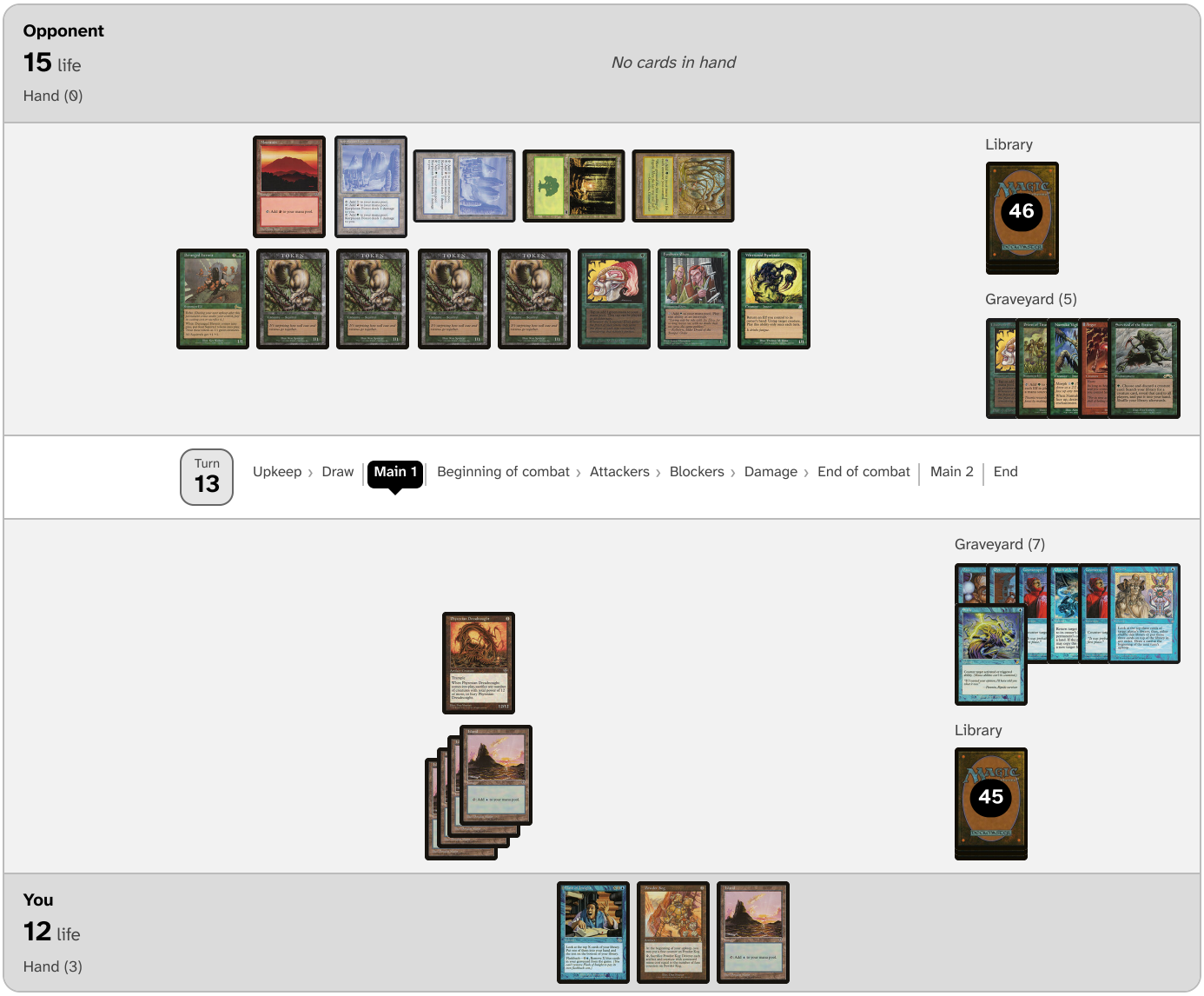
The count. Seven spells have been cast this turn; your Gush, Opt and Flash make ten. One Freeze is then eleven instances, thirty-three cards, against a library of twenty-five. And the draw triggers sit below anything you cast: once the Freeze has emptied their library they resolve, they draw from an empty library, and they lose.

Play around the Blessing. You haven't seen one, but after sideboarding they bring Gaea's Blessing, and most lists bring two. A Blessing put into the graveyard from the library shuffles the whole graveyard back in, every card the Freeze has milled with it, and a Freeze that empties their library is certain to mill any that are in it. So each one needs a Stifle, and you have none in hand.

Dig cheapest first. Seven Islands pay for exactly this: Opt one, the Flash two, the Freeze two, and a Stifle for each Blessing. The Gush costs nothing if you tap the two Islands it returns for mana first and spend that mana before the phase ends. Three Stifles are left in your library: the Gush's two cards, the Opt and the Flash's eighteen find at least one nearly every time, and two about a third of the time.

Why now, whatever you find. Once the Confinement resolves they have shroud, and the Freeze can't target them; Sterling Grove gives their other enchantments shroud, so a single Chain of Vapor can't bounce it either. The other line is to dig for a counter for the Confinement instead, but a counter spent there is one you don't have for the next Opalescence or Replenish, and those are what kill you. The storm is here now, they are short of white mana for an Abeyance with only Forests open, and their own triggers will finish them: Freeze with one Stifle if one is all you have, and with none if it comes to that.

Puzzle 10: the Squirrel army



Game one against Elves. Your Dreadnought came down last turn and can attack; you have just drawn a Powder Keg and haven't played your land. Their Deranged Hermit came down on their last turn. What's your plan, for this turn and theirs?

Play the Island and the Keg, leave the Keg at zero — no fuse counter in your upkeep, and don't crack it — and attack. Crack it only when not cracking would kill you or your Dreadnought: in response to a block that would kill it, or to an attack that would kill you.

Their engine. Survival is gone, but Anger is already in their graveyard, and with their Mountain every creature they have has haste. Deranged Hermit is an Elf, so once a turn Wirewood Symbiote can return it to their hand, and five mana recasts it for four fresh Squirrels — hasty, and 2/2 while a Hermit is out. That is the only way they make more tokens, and one Keg at zero kills every token on the battlefield.

Why not crack it now. It kills four Squirrels, and they make four more next turn: the Symbiote bounces the Hermit in response to its echo trigger, so there is no echo to pay, and they recast it. Four hasty 2/2 Squirrels, the Hermit and their three other creatures are twelve damage, your Dreadnought is tapped from attacking, and you are at twelve.

If they block with everything. Four 2/2 Squirrels, the Hermit and their three other creatures have twelve power, exactly enough to kill the Dreadnought. After blockers are declared, crack the Keg: the Squirrels die, and the Dreadnought kills everything that blocked it and tramples over — the Symbiote can save the Hermit by bouncing it, and it changes nothing. With no creatures left, Gaea's Cradle makes no mana, and their four other lands can't pay five for the Hermit. Your next swing is lethal — unless they draw a fifth land, and even then four Squirrels and a Hermit can't kill you from twelve.

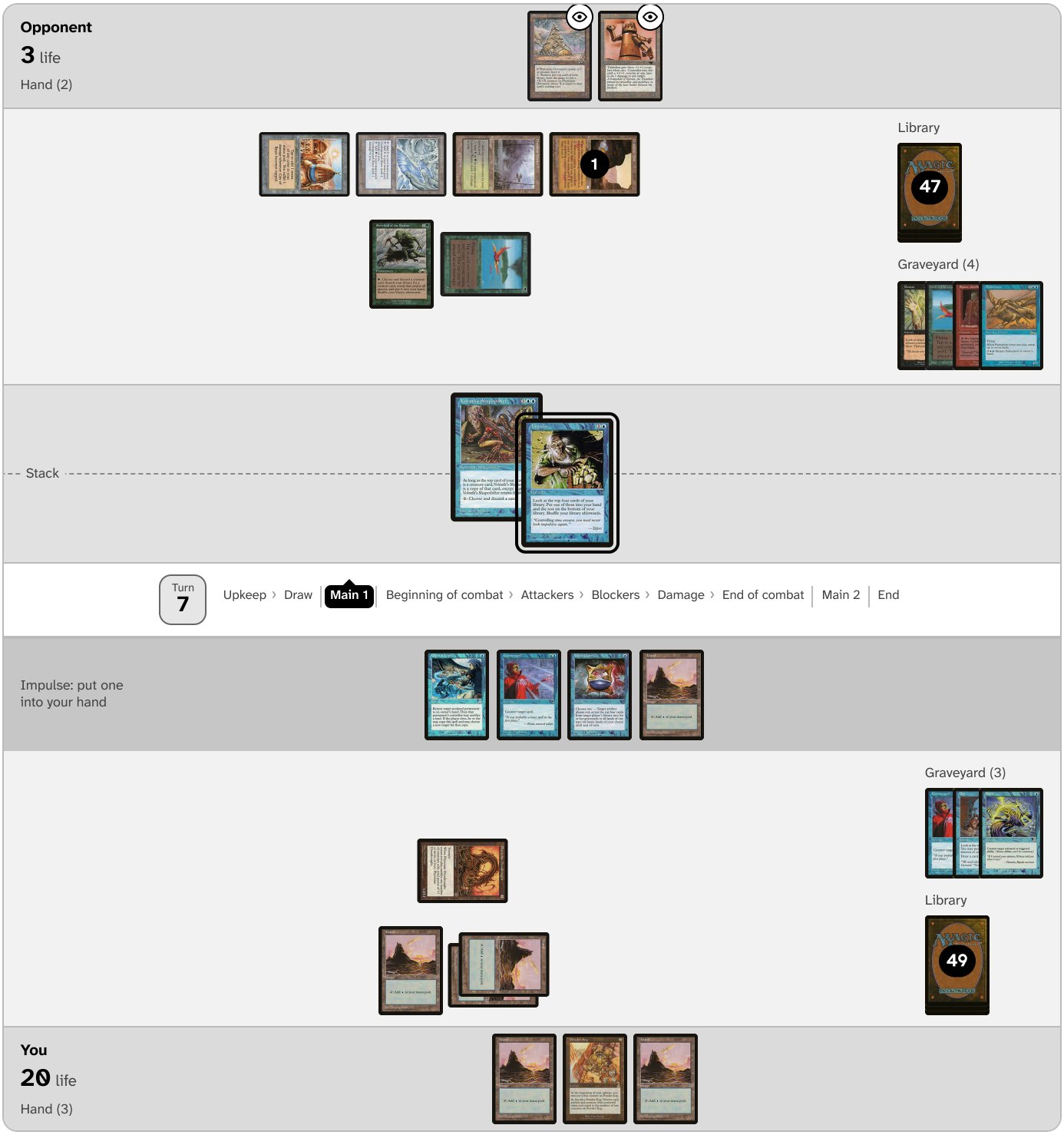
If they don't block. Twelve takes them to three. On their turn, if they bounce and recast the Hermit and swing with everything, crack the Keg once attackers are declared: all eight Squirrels die, you take four from the rest, and the Symbiote has been used for the turn. If they pay the echo instead and swing with everything, crack the Keg on the attack all the same; after combat they can recast the Hermit for four fresh blockers, and the Symbiote untaps one more on your turn — it works once in each player's turn. That wall has eleven toughness and eleven power: the Dreadnought survives it, kills all of it, and tramples one over. They have nothing left, and the next swing ends it. And if their attack wouldn't kill you, don't crack it: take the damage, and crack it after they block your next swing.

If they chump. A single Squirrel in front of the Dreadnought soaks two, and ten takes them to five. Next turn, if their attack can't kill you, let it through and keep the Keg; your next swing, with the Keg cracked after blocks, tramples over whatever is left.

The lesson. Cracking the Keg now looks like value: four Squirrels for one card. But a Keg on the table is a threat they have to play around, and while it sits there untouched it shapes every attack and every block they make; once it is cracked, it shapes nothing. Hold it until it answers the board that would kill you.

Never at one. The Dreadnought's mana value is one: a fuse counter in your upkeep turns the Keg into a way to kill your own Dreadnought.

Puzzle 11: the race against Survival



Game one against Full English Breakfast. They mulliganed to six, and their first-turn Duress took your Counterspell; your Dreadnought came down on your second turn and has hit them once. Two turns ago Survival of the Fittest turned a Birds of Paradise into Squee and Squee into a Triskelion; this turn it turned the returning Squee into Palinchron and the Palinchron into Phyrexian Devourer, and they have tapped out to cast Volrath's Shapeshifter. In response you cast Impulse, and it shows you Chain of Vapor, Counterspell, Vision Charm and an Island. Which do you take, and what do you do next?

Take the Vision Charm, and with your last Island Charm their library while the Shapeshifter is still on the stack. One mana left means one play: the Charm is the one that wins, and the Chain isn't. The Counterspell would answer the Shapeshifter outright, but it costs two, and you have one Island left.

What they have set up. The Shapeshifter has the text of the top card of their graveyard while that card is a creature, and the top card is Palinchron. It enters as a Palinchron, and its trigger untaps their lands. With that mana Survival does the rest: the Devourer in their hand goes to the graveyard, the Shapeshifter becomes a Devourer and grows as they exile their library, and discarding the Triskelion in their hand turns it into a Triskelion with every one of those counters to shoot you with. You are at twenty, and that is the kill.

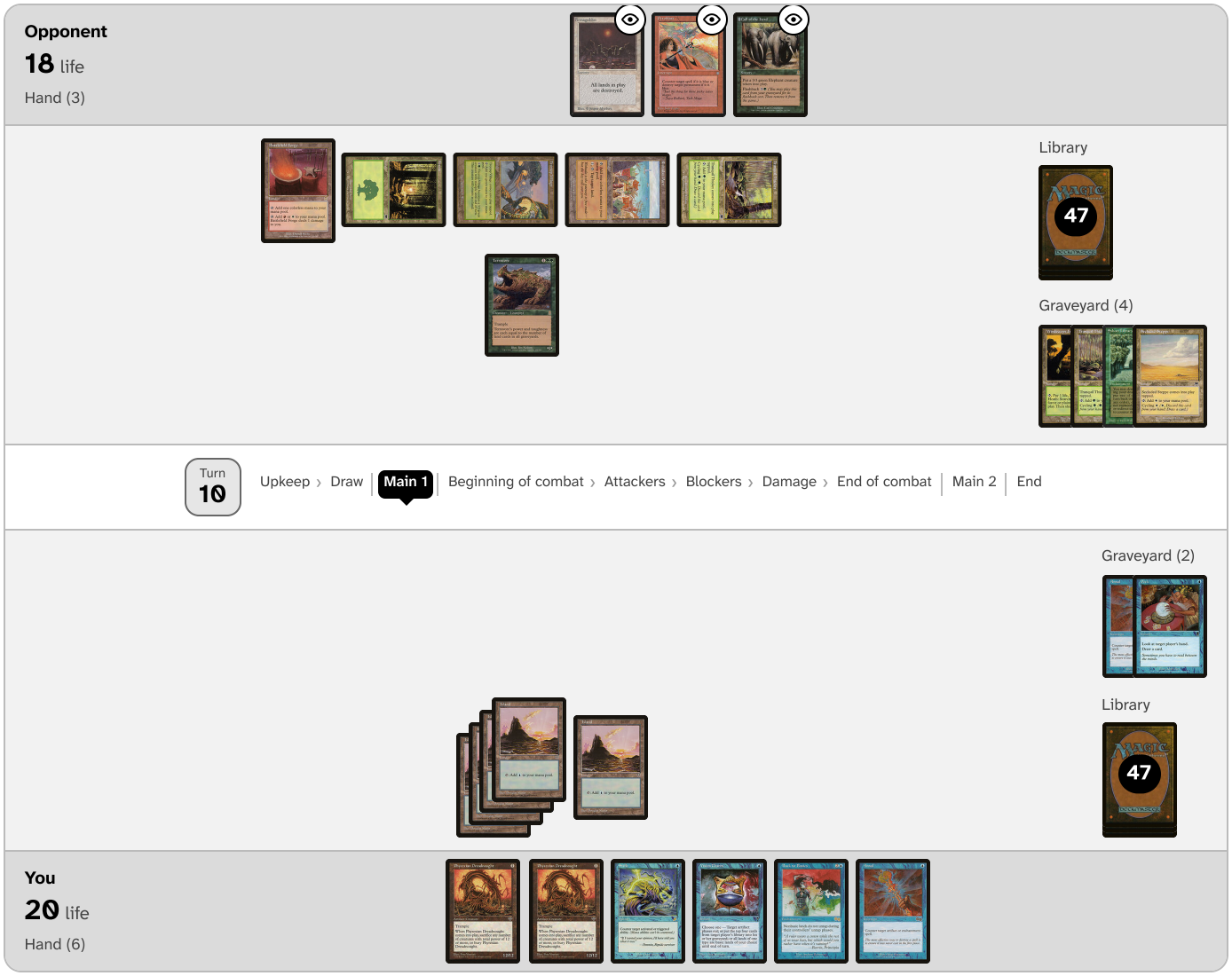
What the Charm does. Four cards from their library go on top of the Palinchron. If none of them is a creature, the Shapeshifter enters as itself; if any is, they choose which of the four goes on top, and it enters as that creature. It can't be a Palinchron, so most of the time the untap never happens; the exception is below.

Why that wins. Without the untap they are tapped out. The kill needs two more payments — a green for Survival to discard the Devourer, then a green or the Shapeshifter's two to discard the Triskelion — and nothing of theirs makes the mana for both before their next untap step. (A Shapeshifter that enters as a Wall of Roots makes one green, but discarding either 1/1 to Survival leaves it a 1/0 with the Wall's counter on it, and it dies.) Your Dreadnought swings before that untap step comes. Whatever the Shapeshifter has become can block, but it would need ten toughness to keep twelve trampling damage from killing them: they are at three.

Why not the Chain. There is no moment when it stops them. It can't touch the Shapeshifter while it is a spell, so its useful targets are Survival and, once the Shapeshifter has resolved, the Shapeshifter itself, and neither stops them. Chain Survival and the Palinchron untaps their four lands, enough to recast Survival, discard the Devourer and discard the Triskelion this turn; they can even sacrifice a land to copy the Chain onto your Dreadnought. Chain the Shapeshifter with its trigger on the stack and the lands still untap; they recast it, and it enters as a Palinchron again. Wait until the untap has happened and Chain the Shapeshifter, and they kill you in response: the mana is theirs and the Triskelion is already in their hand, so the whole kill fits in before the Chain resolves.

The risk. They order the four milled cards, so a creature among them that helps them goes on top: a Karmic Guide brings the Palinchron back and untaps their lands after all. Nothing in your hand answers that, but without the Charm you are dead this turn, so it is the play.

Puzzle 12: the quiet turn



Game two against Naya Terrageddon. They mulliganed to six. Your Peek at the end of their turn showed you their hand. What do you do?

Cast a Dreadnought and Stifle its trigger. When they Pyroblast the Stifle, let the Dreadnought go: don't Charm it. (Leading with the Charm instead of the Stifle is the same bait; keep whichever is left for the second Dreadnought.) Cast Back to Basics with your last three Islands, and next turn cast the second Dreadnought with the Charm.

What they have set up. Terravore counts every land card in every graveyard, and three are there already: it is a 3/3. They spent their turn putting it down, not on Armageddon, because Armageddon with nothing on the table wins nothing. Next turn they untap, cast it, and every land on the table goes to the graveyard: their five, your five, and the Terravore is at least a 13/13. That beats a Dreadnought, and you have no lands left to rebuild with.

Why Back to Basics wins. Their mana is a Forest and four nonbasics. Under Back to Basics the nonbasics don't untap, and the Treetop Village, the Rishadan Port and the Tranquil Thicket are tapped already; only the Forest untaps. The Battlefield Forge is the only one left, and it is their only red and their only white. Once they tap it for the Pyroblast, they have the Forest and nothing else: no Armageddon, no blast, no Call of the Herd. Next turn the second Dreadnought comes down with the Charm to protect it, and there is very little they can do about it.

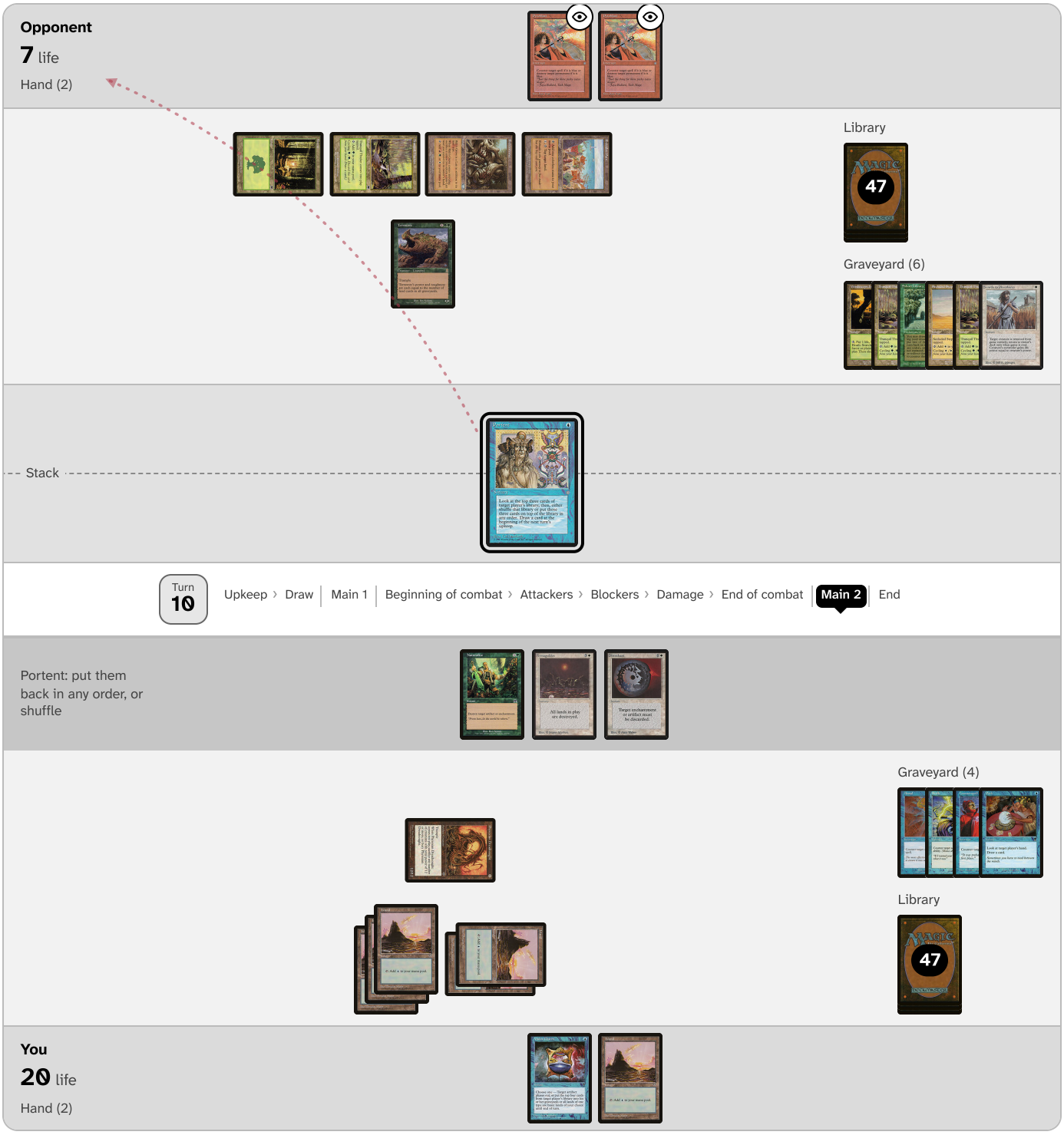
Why the Dreadnought first. Back to Basics into an open Forge and a known Pyroblast is countered, and a blast still in their hand would destroy it later anyway, so the blast has to go before it lands. The Dreadnought is the card they can't let resolve. They haven't seen Back to Basics, and from their side a 12/12 with Stifle behind it could be followed by a Gush in response to Armageddon or by another answer. The blast goes on the Stifle, and the Forge is tapped.

Why not save it. The Charm saves the Dreadnought, but it leaves you two Islands, one short of Back to Basics. They untap, Armageddon resolves, and a 13/13 beats the Dreadnought. A Dreadnought on the table is worth less than the lock: under Back to Basics the second one is far safer next turn. Casting the second Dreadnought with the Charm this turn, instead of Back to Basics, loses the same way.

Why not Back to Basics first. They blast it, and you are back to sticking a Dreadnought that Armageddon beats.

The risk. A player who reads the board and keeps the blast lets the Dreadnought resolve, then counters Back to Basics, and Armageddon wins. Most won't: they can't see your hand. After the lock, a Naturalize or a Disenchant off the top needs a basic land or a fetch to go with it, and they have no land in hand, so it takes two good draws, and by then the Dreadnought should have done its work.

Puzzle 13: three cards deep



Game two against Naya Terrageddon. They mulliganed to five. Your Peek earlier this turn showed you their hand, and your Dreadnought has just hit them. Your Portent shows you the top three cards of their library. How do you put them back, or do you shuffle?

Put Armageddon on top; the other two can go in any order. Then, in their upkeep, Vision Charm Lairs into Islands to make their Rith's Grove tap only for blue.

Where the game is. They are at seven. Next turn your Dreadnought attacks again; if the Terravore blocks, eight trample over, and they are dead. Each of the three cards would save them. Naturalize and Disenchant kill the Dreadnought. Armageddon makes the Terravore a 13/13 — the four lands in the graveyards, their four and your five — and it walls the Dreadnought and then kills it. You can stop only one of them, and it isn't the obvious one.

The ruling. On the Planeshift printing the type line just says "Land", but the text box makes Rith's Grove a Lair as well, and today's Oracle text puts it on the type line: "Land — Lair". Lair is a land type, just as Island and Forest are. Vision Charm's third mode reads "Choose a land type and a basic land type": the first type can be any land type, not only a basic one. Name Lair and Island, and until end of turn every Lair on the table is an Island. It loses its own ability and taps only for blue.

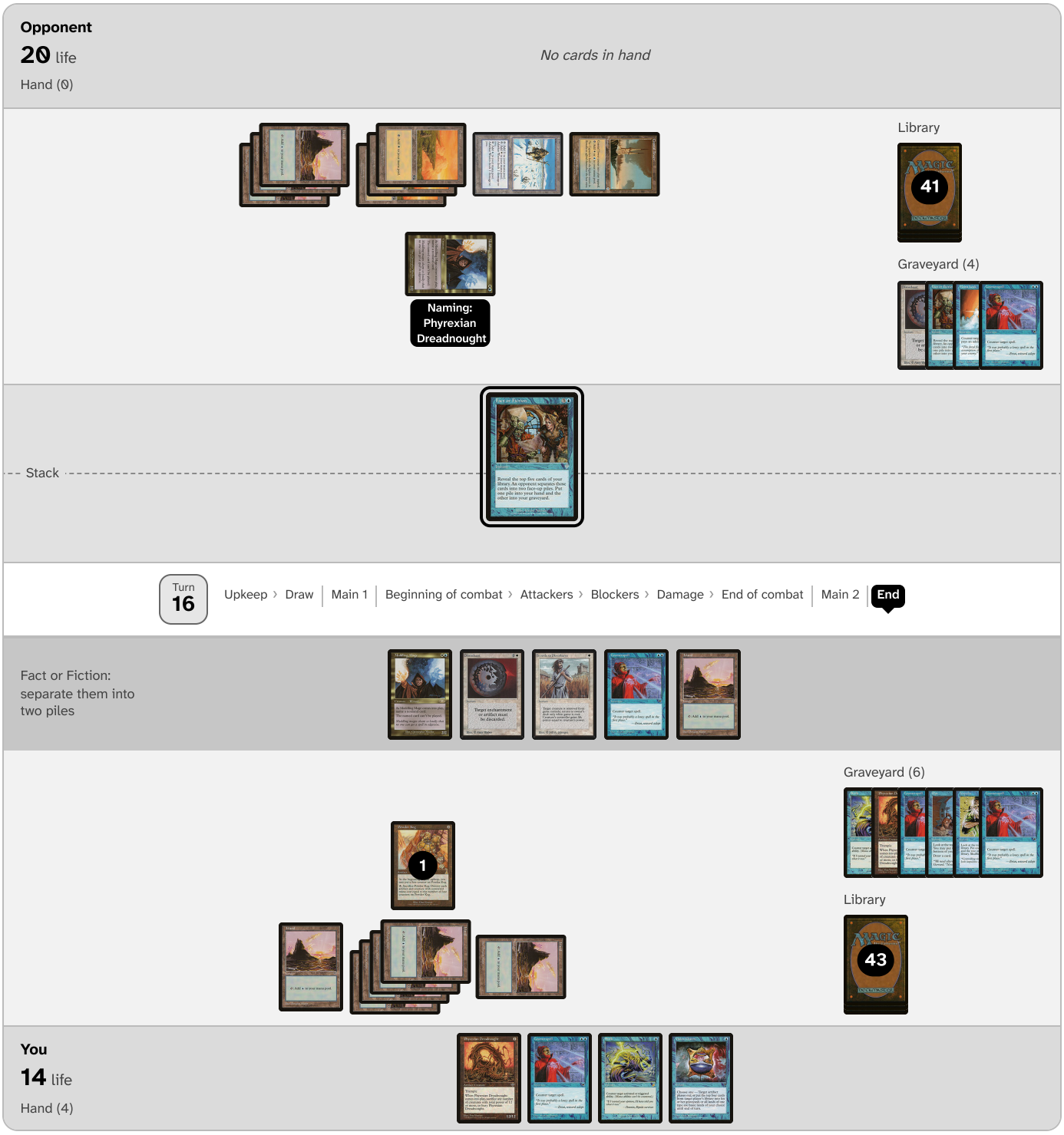
Why Armageddon. Their Rith's Grove is their only white and their only red. Charm the Lairs into Islands in their upkeep, and either way Armageddon can't be cast. If they blast the Charm, they have to tap the Grove for the red, and their white goes with it; the Grove stays tapped until their next untap step, so they have no red or white on your turn either. If they float the white in response, it empties at the end of the upkeep, before they have even drawn the Armageddon. If they let the Charm resolve, the Grove taps for blue until the end of their turn, and on your turn they hold two Pyroblasts that can't touch a colorless Dreadnought. It attacks, and they are dead.

Why not Naturalize. It costs green, and they have green in the Forest and the Thicket as well as the Grove; the Thicket has no land type for the Charm to name, and one Charm can't cover the rest. Charm the Dreadnought in response to phase it out, and they blast the Charm with the Grove: the Dreadnought dies. The blasts in their hand are why the Charm is only half an answer here.

Why not Disenchant. It needs the Grove's white, so they can't Disenchant and blast in the same turn, but they don't need to. Cast on their own turn, you would phase the Dreadnought out in response and it would phase back in at your untap step, so they wait for your turn and Disenchant at the beginning of combat. Charm the Dreadnought in response, and it phases out and misses the attack, and next turn they draw the Armageddon or the Naturalize. Charm Lairs into Islands in their upkeep instead, and they let it resolve: at the end of their turn the Grove is a Lair again, untapped, and the Disenchant comes on your turn with the Charm already spent.

Why not shuffle. Their deck is full of answers to the Dreadnought, and a shuffle trades a certain win for a random card. Charming them to mill four throws all three away too, but it spends the Charm, and their next draw is just as random.

Puzzle 14: five cards, two piles



Game two against UW Web Control. At the end of your turn they cast Fact or Fiction. You countered it, they Mana Leaked your Counterspell, you paid, and they countered it. How do you split the five cards?

Keep the Disenchant away from the Meddling Mage and the Counterspell: Disenchant, Swords to Plowshares and Island in one pile; Meddling Mage and Counterspell in the other. The Swords and the Island can go on either side; the Disenchant can't.











Your plan. Their Mage names the Dreadnought, and your Keg is the way past it. In your upkeep it goes to two, you crack it, and every Mage on the table dies: Meddling Mage costs two. Then the Dreadnought comes down with the Stifle, and the Counterspell and the Vision Charm are left to protect it: the Dreadnought is an artifact, so the Charm can phase it out in response to a Swords or a Disenchant. You have one Island until then; everything untaps before your upkeep.

Their plan is the Keg. The Disenchant isn't really an answer to the Dreadnought here: it is the answer to the Keg. Cast on their own turn, it meets your Charm, and the Keg phases back in at your untap step in time to tick. On its own, it has to wait for your upkeep, in response to the Keg's trigger, and there it meets your Counterspell. (The Charm would save the Keg there too, but a phased-out Keg misses the upkeep and comes back a full turn later, with the Mage still on the table.) Alone, the Disenchant loses; it must not get help.

Why not with the Mage. On their turn the new Mage names Vision Charm, and the Disenchant goes on the Keg: your one Island can't cast the Counterspell. Charm the Keg in response to the Mage instead, and they Disenchant it in response to the Charm.

Why not with the Counterspell. On their turn the Disenchant goes on the Keg, your Charm answers, and their Counterspell counters the Charm.

If they take Disenchant, Swords and Island. Every line has an answer:

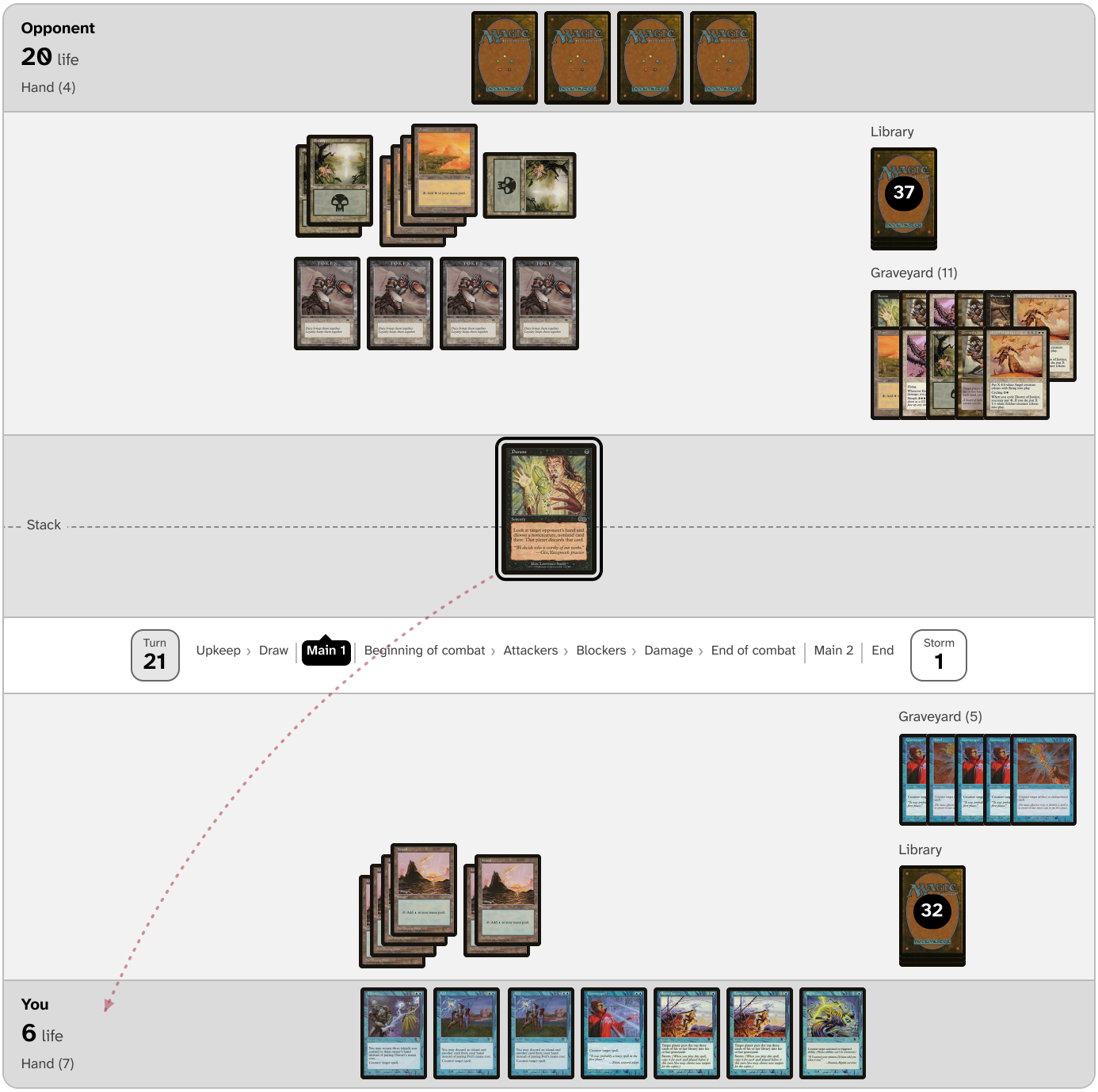
- Disenchant on the Keg on their turn: your one Island Charms it. It phases back in at your untap step, ticks to two in your upkeep, and you crack it. The Dreadnought comes down with the Stifle, and the Counterspell is left for the Swords.
- Disenchant on the Keg in your upkeep, in response to its trigger: your Counterspell counters it, and you crack the Keg. The Dreadnought comes down with the Stifle, and the Charm is left for the Swords.
- Disenchant once the Keg has its second counter: crack the Keg in response, and the Mage dies before the Disenchant resolves.
- Both saved for the Dreadnought: the Keg kills the Mage, the Stifle takes the trigger, and the Swords and the Disenchant meet your Counterspell and your Charm, one each.

If they take Meddling Mage and Counterspell. The new Mage can name what it likes: it dies to the Keg with the first one, before you cast anything it could name, and their Counterspell can't stop the Keg, because cracking it is an ability. After that their Counterspell meets yours, the Stifle takes the trigger, and the Charm is spare.

The natural splits lose. Isolate the Swords, the cheap answer to the Dreadnought, and the Mage, the Disenchant and the Counterspell go together. Isolate the Mage, the card that looks like the lock, and the Disenchant goes with the Counterspell.

The risk. They draw a card next turn, and a second counter or a second answer to the Keg off the top can still beat you.

Puzzle 15: the Duress on the stack



Game two against BW Control. They cast Duress before combat. Both your Flashes of Insight have been flashed back and exiled, and the third Brain Freeze is in your library. What do you do?

Go now, with the Duress on the stack. Thwart, both Foils and the Counterspell go on the Duress, and both Freezes follow.

1. Tap three Islands for UUU. Holding priority, cast Thwart on the Duress, returning those three Islands to your hand. Storm: 2.
2. Hold priority and cast Foil on the Duress, discarding two of the Islands. Storm: 3.
3. Hold priority and cast the second Foil, discarding the third Island and the Stifle. Storm: 4.
4. Hold priority and cast Counterspell on the Duress, paying UU from your pool. Storm: 5.
5. Hold priority and cast Brain Freeze on them with the last U in your pool and an Island. Release priority. Storm: 6. The Freeze and its five copies mill eighteen; nineteen cards left.
6. When the first Freeze and its copies have resolved, with the Counterspell still on the stack, cast the second Freeze with your last two Islands and release priority. Storm: 7. The Freeze and its six copies mill twenty-one, thirty-nine in all; their library is empty.

The count. Five spells come before the first Freeze — the Duress, the Thwart, two Foils and the Counterspell — so it mills eighteen. The second counts the first and mills twenty-one. Thirty-nine against a library of thirty-seven. Then the Counterspell counters the Duress and everything under it has nothing left to counter. Their attack takes you to two, and they lose at their next draw step.

Why hold priority. Release it after the Thwart and they pass: the Thwart resolves, the Duress is countered, and the Foils and the Counterspell have nothing left to target. Each counter has to go on the stack while the Duress is still there, and that only happens if you keep priority until the last one is cast. Say it out loud in paper. On MTGO, hold Ctrl through every step of casting each spell, from clicking it in your hand to tapping the mana, until the last counter is on the stack.

Why release it before the second Freeze. Storm counts every spell cast before it this turn, so the second Freeze counts at least six whenever you cast it this turn, and the mana you floated has already been spent. Letting the first resolve costs you nothing, and it lets you see what it did before you commit the second: against a deck that can reshuffle its graveyard, like a Gaea's Blessing deck, that is the difference between a win and a Freeze thrown into a reshuffle.

Why not counter the Duress and wait for their end step. The storm is still there, but the targets aren't. With the Duress gone, nothing is on the stack for your counters until you cast a Freeze, so the first Freeze goes first, counting only the Duress and the Counterspell: nine cards. Thwart it and Foil the Thwart twice to keep it, and the second Freeze counts six: twenty-one. Thirty, seven short. And the Islands Thwart returns only pay for anything in the step you tap them in: counter the Duress with everything now and leave both Freezes for the end step, and three Islands can't cast two of them.

Why not a later turn. Four Soldiers take you to two this turn and kill you on the next. Your turn and their next upkeep both start the storm at zero, with nothing of theirs on the stack, and the same cards mill about half of what they do now.

The order matters too. Cast the first Freeze before any one of the counters and it counts one spell fewer: fifteen, plus the second's twenty-one, thirty-six, one short. Every counter goes first; the Freezes

go last.

The lesson. A single spell of theirs is a target for every counter in your hand, and every counter you throw at it is storm for the Freeze. Their spell on the stack is the window; once it resolves or is countered, the counters left in your hand can only count by targeting your own spells, after the first Freeze has already gone.

Resources

Many of the ideas and concepts in this primer were inspired by the resources below, and every one of them is recommended reading.

Primers and guides for the decks you will face

Some of these aren't public, and some are paid. For those, ask the authors on the deck's Discord: Premodern Hub links to every Premodern Discord and to the public resources.

- The hFEB guide — Full English Breakfast, from the inside. Excellent.
- The Xerox Tog primer, by Robert Luemers — Psychatog (in the Resources section of the Psychatog Discord).
- The definitive guide to playing Stasis in Premodern, by Rodrigo Hartl — Stasis (ask on the Stasis Discord).
- The Replenish primer, by Dr. Suiss — Replenish.
- The Naya Terrageddon Ultimate Guide, by Sam White — Terrageddon (paid, on Metafy).
- The Burn Ward matchup and sideboard guide — Sligh and Burn (ask on the Burn Discord).
- The Premodern Goblins primer, by golgariguy — Goblins (ask on the Goblins Discord).
- The Survival Madness primer, by Cyberpunker — Madness (ask on the Survival Madness Discord).

More public guides, from Premodern Hub

- Sligh and Burn: the collaborative Burn guide.
- Goblins: the Goblins comprehensive doc.
- Enchantress: the Moxfield primer.
- Moneyball: a comprehensive deck guide.
- Landstill: the Landstill complete guide.
- Terrageddon: a primer on GW Threshgeddon, from Ottawa Old School.
- Replenish: the Replenish guide.
- Psychatog: the Moxfield primer.
- Elves: everything you need to know about Premodern Elves, on TCGplayer.
- Gro-A-Tog: the Moxfield primer.
- Zoo: a deck tech.
- Clerics: a deck tech and sideboard guide.
- Angry Hermit: the Moxfield primer.

For the Dreadnought

- Dave Kaplan's lists, his Lobstercon lists in particular — the pedigree for the jam build and for this sideboard's Essence Flare and Back to Basics.
- The Blue Shrimp primer, by Dvraska — the deck's bible in the Parallax Tide era.
- Mastering Stiflenought in Premodern, on the Ultimate Guard blog — a deck guide with sideboard plans.
- Lanny's quick-start video on the deck, from the Tide era; its ideas on casting cantrips first, the two-swing clock and answers on the stack shaped How the deck plays.

Content creators

- Lanny — YouTube channel and podcast, and the quick-start video above.
- Neon Mushroom, on YouTube.

Communities

- Premodern Hub — links to every Premodern Discord and the format's public resources.
- Play Premodern, the format's home site, and the Premodern Discord.
- The Shrimp, the Premodern Dreadnought Discord, where you can find me as Flario. Its sideboard discussions, and its help reviewing this primer's first sideboard plans, are all over the matchup chapters.
- 90s MTG and the Order of the Sacred Torch, in New York.

Help improve it. Spotted a mistake, disagree with a sideboard plan, or have a matchup to add? Tell me on the Shrimp, open an issue, or send a pull request: the whole primer is plain text in a public repository.

Thanks. To the members of the Shrimp whose feedback changed these pages:

- NeuroticJet42, who helped shape the Enchantress plan before the first version was written.
- switalsky, whose feedback on the mirror, Oath Ponza and Moneyball changed those sideboard plans: Chain over Keg in the mirror, more respect for Glowrider and a slower game against Ponza, and fewer Dreadnoughts against Moneyball. Thanks too for suggesting Prohibit, Misdirection, Morphling, Masticore, Mage's Guile and a third Flash of Insight as cards worth considering, and for the advice on Sylvan Library, on Peek against Sligh and on the Psychatog decks.
- RickD, for pointing out two mistakes in version 0.1.
- cjohnston55, for pointing out that Boomerang should be compared with the Chain it would replace, not a cantrip.
- Risumu, for correcting Powder Keg's settings and for the warning about Goblin Welder and a cracked Keg.
- FriedrichDürrenmatt, for pointing out that Goblin Vandal was missing from Sligh.
- loom_tall, for a careful read that caught a long list of mistakes, from Chain of Vapor and the Freeze plan to Annul, Misdirection and the mulligan hands.

Where the numbers come from. The numbers in this primer come from my tournament database: 16,796 decklists from January 18 to October 6, 2026 — MTGO Challenge and League feeds, mtgtop8 and mtgdecks, with paper events merged across sources — and 8,112 from 2025, with win-loss records where standings exist. Every share, conversion, win rate, card frequency and stock list in these pages comes from it. It stores placements, not pairings, so there are no per-matchup win rates.

What's changed

This primer is a living document: it changes as the format does and as I learn more about the deck. Each version is listed here, newest first. To suggest a change, open an issue or send a pull request, or find me on the Shrimp.

Version 0.6 — November 13, 2026.

- Pit Rack: two Foils stay in after sideboarding for the commit turn, a Daze leaves instead, and Flare stays in the sideboard, since most lists have few creatures for it.

Version 0.5 — November 4, 2026.

- BW Control: the full matchup guide. After sideboarding every Dreadnought comes out for the Freeze plan, and the Stifles stay for Decree of Justice and Eternal Dragon.
- A new puzzle against BW Control: a Duress on the stack, and every counter in your hand thrown at it to build the storm.

Version 0.4 — November 1, 2026. Changes from readers' feedback; the people behind them are thanked in Resources.

- Fixes: Powder Keg's settings (Negator is mana value 3), why a phased-in Dreadnought can attack, Spike Feeder doesn't answer the Dreadnought, Fire // Ice and Mana Short, a Chain on the Dreadnought always costs you the enabler, Stifling a single Port gains nothing, Misdirection can send a counter onto the Misdirection, why the blue Blasts stay out against GR Oath Ponza, and the cantrip counts and wording in Mulligans.
- When the Freeze plan is right: decks with many answers and few threats, or decks that build the storm for you; and building the storm by countering a single spell of theirs several times.
- Enchantress: after sideboarding, counter the Enchantress effects early, so the engine doesn't snowball before your Freeze turn.
- Annul is sized by how much its targets matter as well as how many there are.
- Goblin Vandal in Sligh and in Answers to the Dreadnought, and the Welder risk of a cracked Keg.

Version 0.3 — October 19, 2026. Changes from readers' feedback; the people behind them are thanked in Resources.

- Close candidates: the cards that aren't in this list are presented as choices, and Boomerang is compared with the Chain it would replace.
- Foil: when a pitched Foil is worth three cards, and why Sylvan Library isn't, repeated in Terrageddon and Oath Ponza.
- Sligh: Peek stays after sideboarding and an Opt goes instead.
- The Psychatog entry is now UB Psychatog, with when to fight over Duress; Grow-a-Tog now covers the other Tog decks, Esper Tog and the main-deck Mage lists included. UB Psychatog's verdict is now favorable.

Version 0.2 — October 14, 2026. Changes from readers' feedback; the people behind them are thanked in Resources.

- The mirror: the second Chain comes in for the Keg after sideboarding, and Thwart stays in place of Peek.
- GW Oath Ponza now covers the five-color versions too, with Glowrider, three Flares, and a slower game after sideboarding.
- Moneyball Black: a Dreadnought and a Stifle come out after sideboarding, and only two Foils.
- The main-deck Brain Freeze is the flex slot, with Misdirection, a second Keg or a third Flash as the alternatives, and Misdirection gets the weight it deserves.
- Close candidates: Prohibit, Morphling, Masticore and Mage's Guile, and a third Flash for the sideboard.
- The first puzzle lists doing nothing as an option.
- Fixes: Foil can pitch non-blue cards, and Spock and Luffy are Brazilian.

Version 0.1 — October 12, 2026. The first public version.

- The deck: what it is and where it stands, its history and versions, the 75, how it plays, every card in it, the mana base, the sideboard and how to use it, every answer to the Dreadnought, and mulligans.
- Matchups: a guide for most of the decks you will face, and a quick-reference sideboard map. The ones marked coming soon show their sideboard plan where there is one; their guides are on the way.
- Practice: puzzles to work through, each with its answer behind a spoiler.
- Resources: the primers, creators and communities behind these pages.

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