

Note: Way back in 1995, I was into Magic: The Gathering. I wrote this article one evening and sold it to Duelist Magazine. If you don't know the game it won't make much sense, but it still makes me chuckle. Enjoy.

- Doug Weathers, Las Cruces, NM, April 2009

Landless Magic™

by

Doug Weathers

As Anna and I settled into our seats at the Coliseum, I began to take an inventory of our supplies. “Lessee - we’ve got our Winterhawk flags, Portland neck scarves, the pocket binoculars, the life stones, the lap boards – Sweetheart, where’s the cards?” Anna stared at me. “They were next to the radio. Didn’t you pick them up?” I reached into the bag for the radio and came up with a Terry Pratchett novel and a granola bar. “Oh no,” I groaned, “I left our decks at home! Now what are we gonna do? We’ve both read *Eric* already, and I was really looking forward to trying out my new Vampire Cloak deck.”

The man to my right leaned over to me. “I’ve got my emergency starter deck – you wanna borrow it?” Anna shook her head. “Thanks, but we’d have to sort through it and divide it into two decks, and we always fight about who gets the Prodigal Sorcerer or whatever.” Next to Anna, a woman put her hand on Anna’s arm and said, “You could always leave the Sorcerer out

and play a game for it. I'll hold it for you - it's no trouble." Mortified, I stood up. "I'm gonna run down to the concession stand and see if they have any starters. We can play a couple of cold decks, if that's OK?" I looked at Anna imploringly. "Well, I guess we can use the lands to make a pair of lamp shades," she said. "Go ahead. Get me a pretzel if they have any, please?" I gave her a hasty kiss and started pushing down the aisle. Behind me, the players were skating onto the ice.

When I got to the head of the line, I could see that the starter decks were all gone. "What can I get for you?" the kid in the hat asked. "No more starters?" I asked mournfully. "Nope, nothing left but boosters. Big crowd tonight. Can I get you anything?" he asked again. The crowd made a large excited noise as something interesting happened on the ice. I thought fast, and an idea hit me like a Lightning Bolt. "Uh, give me a medium Cherry Coke, a pretzel, and eight booster packs." "Sorry, only got six Fourth Edition boosters left. You want a couple of Ice Age?" "Sure, that'll do." I carried my purchases back to my seat.

Anna was watching the duel on her left. From what I could see, the woman's opponent was going to have some trouble against her Stasis. "I like blue decks," Anna murmured as I slid into my seat. "The guy next to me has a red weenie horde," I said. "I never got mine working right, but he's doing OK." I handed her three Fourth Edition boosters and an Ice Age. "What am I supposed to do with these? Bookmarks? We don't have any land!" I grinned. "I have a cunning plan..."

"Look, cold decks are fun, right? It's fun to play with a deck when each card is a surprise." "Yeah, it's like our first two decks," Anna said. "But what about the land? I hate to pay for more land cards. We've already got a ton of them. Besides, these aren't starters. Four boosters is sixty cards, just like a starter deck, but there won't be any basic lands in them!" I looked at her, and she grew thoughtful. Slowly she said, "We could use spells as land. When played as a

land, a red card would be considered a mountain, for example.” “Right,” I said excitedly.

“Artifacts played as land would give colorless mana, and multicolor cards would act like dual - or triple - lands.”

The man next to me played a Keldon Warlord and immediately put down four Kobolds. He turned to me and said, “That sounds like fun! It would improve the mana/spell ratio, because if you have lots of black spells, you automatically have lots of black mana. Four boosters should play better than the average starter deck.”

“Here’s what I thought we could do,” I said to Anna. “You get to play one of your cards as a land each turn. Next turn, you can tap it as land, or you can use it as God and Richard Garfield intended. You could either tap that Llanowar Elves as a forest for one green mana, or you could tap it as a creature for one – uh, bad example.” “Hmmm,” Anna said. “That would allow you to play one really expensive card for free each turn. If you can do that, why do you need mana at all?” “For fireballs?” I said hopefully. My vision of free Polar Krakens and of actually being able to play an Aladdin’s Lamp began to fade.

The woman next to Anna played a Boomerang on her Stasis and joined the conversation. “I agree with her. It would completely change the dynamics of the game. It might be interesting, but there’s no telling what would happen. It wouldn’t be Magic any more, it would be more like INWO.” “We’ll try that later,” Anna said, “but right now I just want to play some Magic. How about if we say you can put a land token into play by skipping your draw phase? That would be like drawing the land, if it had been here instead of back home next to the radio.” I hung my head and pouted, and she ruffled my hair. I looked up into her smiling face and said, “But I don’t want to have to keep track of tokens. Besides, how do we tell what color they are?” “Well, we could just say they were any color we want, when we tap them,” she replied quickly.

“Or – how about this: on turn one, you get one mana of any color. On turn two, you get two, and so on. No tokens to keep track of.”

The man at my elbow played an Orcish Oriflamme, turned to me and said, “Both of those schemes would make it easy to play cards that are normally difficult to get into play, like Cosmic Horror. It would also make things like Firebreathing really nasty, since all your mana could be red. Sounds like another variant worth trying, but again it’s not quite Magic.” The woman beside Anna played her Stasis again and said, “Also, without any actual land cards or tokens, what do you do with all those spells that affect lands, like Wild Growth?”

“OK,” I said, “we need land, so we can use our Flashfires and Ley Druids. I don’t want to mess with tokens, and if my memory was good enough to remember what turn we’re on we wouldn’t have this problem.” “Opportunity,” Anna corrected me, finally taking pity on me. I thanked her and continued. “So in order to preserve the flavor of the game, let’s say that you can play any card as the appropriate basic land. Once you have played it, it stays a land. If you play your Pestilence as a Swamp, and then draw a Circle of Protection: Black, too bad – it’s a Swamp forever more.” I paused. “Unless it goes into the graveyard and comes back into your hand somehow. Since cards have no memory, you could play it again as a Pestilence this time.”

Anna thought for a moment, and finally said “That makes for some hard decisions. How do you decide whether to play a card as a spell or as a land?” “Let’s find out,” I replied. “You game?” “OK, let’s give it a try.” The air became filled with the happy crinkling sounds of booster packs being opened. Around us, the crowd roared. Something else exciting had happened down on the ice.

We shuffled, drew our hands, and looked thoughtful. I considered my Goblin Ski Patrol and asked Anna, “What about snow-covered lands? How do we keep track of which lands are snow-

covered and which are not? Put them in different rows?” “How about we say that all Ice Age cards played as land are snow-covered? With three Fourth Edition boosters and one Ice Age, the ratio is about right.” “That works for me,” I agreed, and the game commenced.

That first game was instructive. I found I was having problems getting creatures into play, because I had used them all as land. Anna was fortunate enough to have a multi-color card, played it as a dual land, and got off to a fast start. I was doing pretty badly until I drew a Diabolic Machine. I was shy one point of mana, so I grimaced, played a Lightning Bolt as a Mountain, cast the Diabolic Machine, and was safe for a while.

The fellow at my elbow sympathized with me. “Gee, it’s a shame you couldn’t use that Lightning Bolt on her Tor Giant, but I guess it was worth it.” “Watch this,” I said, and played a Fear – as a Swamp. Then I cast an Abomination. “Oooh, that pretty much shuts down your Ironroot Treefolk, dear,” the woman beside Anna said. I had decided to stop holding on to nifty spells while waiting for mana to appear – I was using them AS mana to get other nifty spells into play. This was working! We were playing a real game of Magic using only booster packs.

I won the first game. The man next to me lost his horde to a Pyroclasm, and the woman next to Anna used Mana Short plus Stasis to keep her opponent paralyzed until she wore him down. We looked briefly at the figures skating below, then shuffled and dealt again. Intermittently, the crowd roared or howled. We played on. I won the next game, and Anna won the third. “Play another?” I asked. She looked down at the ice, and then up at the scoreboard. “It looks like it’s time to go home,” she replied. “Apparently Portland won again.”

On board MAX, the man sitting across from us looked at our scarves and asked, “Good game this evening? Who won?” I replied, “Well, I won two duels and Anna won one. We’re going to go home and play some more and see if this landless deck idea keeps working.” “No,” he said,

“I meant who won the *hockey* game, not the Magic game.” “What do *you* think?” Anna replied.

“If Seattle played any better, perhaps we’d have to pay more attention to the ice.”

The man laughed. “Now, tell me about this landless deck thing. How would you play Magic with no land?” We waited, and slowly he said, “Hey, you could use spells as land! You could play a card as either a land or as a spell. How do you tell which is which?”

We missed our stop.