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The Magic of Magic

By: Magicgeek

Is there even more to Magic than cards and strategy?

I am going to try something different this month. Rather than write about something that I know, I'm going to write about something that I am considering. Before I tell you exactly what I'm considering, let me tell you how I started thinking about what I'm thinking. Did you ever wonder (in my best Andy Rooney voice) why some cards make a big impact in the competitive Magic environment while other cards, similar as they may seem, get virtually no play at all? Or have you wondered why some decks seem to 'go off' consistently without the benefit of the so called 'God-draw' while other decks bog down at turn four and leave you hoping to top deck an answer? Well I have, and thinking about the answers to those questions has cost me a lot of sleep. Yeah, I know, I have issues.

I was involved in a conversation a few days ago that caused me to reconsider my approach to understanding successful cards and decks in Magic. Without going into much detail, the discussion was about oil paintings and their perceived beauty/value. The result of that discussion got me to thinking about both the Fibonacci sequence and the Golden Ratio, and if either applied to Magic: The Gathering. Is it possible that playable cards and tournament dominant decks in the competitive MTG world are so because they somehow follow the Fibonacci sequence? And if so, will understanding those connections turn me into a better deck builder, drafter, card value speculator, and Magic player? Well, if nothing else, at least it is something to consider.

Before we get started with the MTG, let me clarify some terms. The Fibonacci sequence is a series of numbers where each number in the sequence is the sum of the preceding two numbers. Starting with zero and 1, the sequence goes 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13... So to get the next number in the sequence you would add 8 and 13 to get 21. Then add 13 and 21 to get 34. This sequence continues indefinitely, and as far as mathematics goes, it is beautiful. As the numbers in the sequence get higher, the quotient of two consecutive numbers gets closer to the Golden Ratio. The Golden Ratio is approximately 1 : 1.618. This ratio is seen throughout nature (nautilus shells, flower petal arrangement, pinecone structure, human anatomy, etc) and was widely recognized in Renaissance paintings classified as masterpieces. Incidentally, the odds of drawing any one card from a 60-card deck are 1/60 or 1.66%. Interesting? If you need to stop reading and do some Googling I will understand. Or just read on and hopefully I can do a better job at making sense of my thinking for you. Either way, we can still be friends.

Ok, now back to Magic. When building a deck, most players put at least some thought into the deck's mana curve. This is the term used to describe how many cards in the deck have the same casting costs. Often when you hear players talk about their deck they break it down into how many one-drops, two-drops, answers and finishers their deck has. Generally speaking, we know high casting cost cards are more powerful than low casting cost cards, but drawing them early without the mana to play them makes them worthless. But although having a deck with a low overall curve does increase the likelihood of being able to cast whatever you draw, you decrease the likelihood of drawing a powerful finisher or answer to games that go long or reach a stalemate. Here is where I'm thinking Fibonacci may come into play. What if there were more to quality deck construction than just considering the mana costs and interactions of the cards you were playing? Would your deck be better (i.e. win more often) if the higher power of the Golden Ratio was at play influencing the result?

Let's look at two of today's most powerful metagame decks and see how often the Fibonacci numbers come up. First, a look at Next Level Bant:

Main Deck

1x Scute Mob	2x Sphinx of Lost Truths	4x Vengevine	4x Seaside Citadel
2x Birds of Paradise	2x Path to Exile	4x Wall of Omens	1x Stirring Wildwood
4x Noble Hierarch	2x Oblivion Ring	1x Bant Charm	4x Celestial Colonnade
3x Elspeth, Knight-Errant	1x Borderland Ranger	4x Sea Gate Oracle	3x Sunpetal Grove
3x Jace, the Mind Sculptor	2x Ranger of Eos	1x Gideon Jura	4x Misty Rainforest
2x Island	5x Forest	1x Plains	

A typical Fibonacci play might go something like this:

First turn: play a Forest, tap for green, and cast a Noble Hierarch. That is a 0/1 on turn 1 (0, 1, 1 for those paying attention).

Second turn: play a tapped Citadel, tap Forest to cast a BoP, swing for 1 with your exalted Noble (more 0's and 1's to keep track of)

Third turn: play any land that doesn't come into play tapped. Tap all resources to cast the Sphinx of Lost Truths (a.k.a. Rape Lion).

Draw 3 cards as the 3/5 comes into play. Pitch any Vengevines to fulfill the discard component of the spell. Smile as you think of the next turn's possibilities and harmonic beauty of your play so far.

Another popular metagame deck is Mythic Conscription. Adding the eight mana cost Eldrazi Conscription, let's see here...0,1,1,2,3,5,8 to the Bant shard deck would be fun to breakdown, but since we've already looked at Bant iteration in the NLB deck above, let's Fibonacci something else. How about some version of UW Control?

Main Deck

4x Wall of Omens	2x Path to Exile	2x Day of Judgement	9x Plains
4x Kor Firewalkers	2x Martial Coup	4x Everflowing Chalice	7x Islands
3x Baneslayer Angel	3x Mind Spring	4x Spreading Seas	4x Celestial Colonnade
2x Sphinx of Jwar Isle	2x Jace, the Mind Sculptor	1x Elspeth, Knight-Errant	4x Glacial Fortress
			2x Tectonic Edge

Ready? Okay, here we go...

First turn: Celestial Colonnade, pass. Pretty boring, but that is a Fibonacci 0 on turn 1. (smiles)

Second turn: Plains, Kor Firewalker, pass. What? Wait. Kor? Really? Yeah. I like him in the main. Kor Firewalker is a 2/2, protection from red (which is essential against RedDeckWins (RDW) fire and turn one Goblin Guides, blocks Jund's cascading 3/2 Bloodbraid Elf (a Fibonacci wonder in itself), messes with Ajani Vengeant or a sided in Cunning Sparkmage from Superfriends, and any deck running Terminate or Siege-Gang Commander will need to find a different answer. Oh, and the life gain is nice.

Third turn: Dependent upon the field, you might play your Wall, swing with Kor and wait to Path either of your creatures to gain a land and rush a Baneslayer on turn four. Or just pay the kicker and play a Chalice to do the same.

Now it might be a stretch to connect this sequence with Fibonacci. Logic would tell us that virtually any card you played from any deck on turn one, turn two, or turn three would fit somewhere in the 0,1,1,2,3 scheme. But it is the jump to 5 that makes these decks so strong and that is why I think there might be a connection. I'm not saying that we should avoid four drops or look to always skip to the five (most planeswalkers are four mana, as is the aforementioned Bloodbraid Elf and mass removal), but it just seems that consistent decks are missing four mana-costing cards and I am thinking the higher power of mathematical beauty might be the reason. I am saying that if it is not a planeswalker or mass removal and it costs four, six or seven mana, maybe you should avoid it. Oh, and don't start yammering about Vengevine. If you're casting him you're playing him wrong.

So where does that leave us? Do successful decks win because the cards are efficient? Or are the cards efficient because they follow the Fibonacci sequence? Like I said when I started, I don't know. But it is worth considering. As M11 hits the shelves and the Alara Block rotates out, innovative players should explore every avenue when trying to breaking the ever changing Meta. I will end with some Fibonacci-related predictions of cards I like, and don't like, with regards to their potential to keep already winning decks humming and rogue decks breaking the format.

Fibonacci friendly cards from RoE

Can't Miss

Nest Invader. A 2/2 for 1G that give you a 0/1

Tuktuk the Explorer. A 1/1 for 2R that returns to play as a 5/5

Long Shot

Dawnglare Invoker. A 2/1 flier for 2W and you can spend 8 to tap all of your opponent's creatures. Right now the meta doesn't make her useful, but that is why she is a long shot.

Fibonacci friendly cards from Worldwake

Can't Miss

Loam Lion. A 1/1 for W that becomes 2/3 if you control a Forest

Cunning Sparkmage. A 0/1 for 2R that taps to deal 1 damage

Long Shot

Bestial Menace. A 3/3 Elephant, a 2/2 Wolf, and a 1/1 Snake for five mana. It's too Fibo-riffic not to work. C'mon Murganda Petroglyphs!

Fibonacci friendly cards already spoiled from M11

Can't Miss

Aether Adept. 3 mana for a 2/2 that returns 1 creature. Welcome back Man-o'-War.

Combust. 5 instant-speed uncounterable damage to a white or blue creature for 1R. Bye-bye Baneslayer, or activated Colonnade, or Wall of Omens, or useless Negate or Flashfreeze.

Long Shots

Knight Exemplar. A 2/2 for 1WW making your other Knights indestructible and gives them +1/+1. I know tribal lords have usually sucked, but having two out makes each indestructible and being Pulse-Protected for the next few months help make her shine.

Avoid

The 6/6 six-mana costing Mythic Titans. The green one has potential for the land grab, but they fit nowhere in the 0,1,1,2,3,5,8 sequence.

Until next time, Keep Gaming.

KEEPIN' IT REAL



by MAGICGEEK & MOOKA