

## **The Silvestri Center for Kids Who Can't Math Good and Wanna Learn to Do Other Stuff Good Too**

So while jamming some MODO leagues with Mono Green the other day, I ran into a mirror with a player that was new to the deck. After a failed combo attempt on their part, they were gracious enough to concede instead of forcing another 5+min of watching me combo out. After chatting with them for a bit, I decided to write about what I know about the current iteration of the deck to try and help some people out. If you happen to see this, cheers!

Mono Green Devotion is one of the strongest decks in the Pioneer metagame at the moment. Is it broken? Some say yes. These people are often found on MTG Twitter and should probably be isolated from everyone else. In seriousness, the current build of Mono G is a strong linear ramp deck with a natural infinite combo and a smidge of interaction from Karn, the Great Creator. This combination of factors gives it an edge vs the majority of other linears in the format and also hoses one of the natural predators of this type of strategy (Rakdos Midrange / Anvil). Over the past month I have a roughly 65%+ win rate over 16 leagues with the deck, including 5 trophies.

### **The Decklist** (super basic, I have like one interesting card choice)

#### Creatures

- 4 Elvish Mystic
- 4 Llanowar Elves
- 2 Sylvan Caryatid
- 4 Old-Growth Troll
- 4 Cavalier of Thorns

#### Planeswalkers

- 4 Karn, the Great Creator
- 3 Kiora, Behemoth Beckoner
- 2 Nissa, Who Shakes the World

#### Spells

- 4 Oath of Nissa
- 4 Wolfwillow Haven
- 4 Storm the Festival

#### Lands

- 1 Overgrown Tomb
- 1 Boseiju, Who Endures
- 13 Forest
- 2 Lair of the Hydra
- 4 Nykthos, Shrine to Nyx

#### Sideboard

- 1 Tormod's Crypt
- 1 Darksteel Citadel
- 1 Pithing Needle
- 1 Grafdigger's Cage
- 3 Hunt the Hunter

1 Unlicensed Hearse  
1 Damping Sphere  
1 Esika's Chariot  
1 Pestilent Cauldron  
1 Golos, Tireless Pilgrim  
1 Skysovereign, Consul Flagship  
1 God-Pharaoh's Statue  
1 Meteor Golem

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## **So why play this deck?**

### **1) Low skill floor meets high power level**

This deck doesn't sideboard in the majority of matchups which immediately reduces the skill gap if you aren't sure about how best to sideboard with normal decks. It also has a lot of topdecking power which means risky or bad keeps pay off more often than the average Pioneer deck. This is one of the worst decks to Thoughtseize due to how redundant many of the pieces are and how powerful single cards can be.

The key skills to learn are basically mulligans vs fair decks, sequencing and proper Karn Wishing. That's a heck of a lot easier than learning all the intricacies of Izzet Phoenix or something along those lines.

### **2) Mono G retains good interaction vs other linear decks**

Normally you have to give up a lot to include interaction against other linear combos in the format. Whether that be by deck design, more expensive catch-all answers or slowing your deck down. Karn is not only a key piece of the deck, but doubles as interaction against artifacts and wish targets for specific combo hate and catch-all answers. This gives you a big leg up in the current metagame, especially in game one, where the Vivien builds suffered from a much more limited toolbox.

### **3) Good matchup spread**

There's only two decks that regularly see play that I'd consider bad matchups.

Unfavored: Winota (on the draw you're unfavored) and Mono U Spirits

Neutral / Slightly Favored: Phoenix, Izzet Control, Mono Red are all reasonable matches that often come down to specific builds and play/draw. These decks have the tools to win, but can get overpowered if they keep clunky hands and often struggle with Old-Growth Troll specifically.

Favored: The rest\*

(\*Usual disclaimer applies, this is purely my experience with these matches and the ones I've played the most by a fair margin are Winota, Rakdos Mid/Anvil, Mono Red and the Mirror. If you're a deck expert with something not regularly seen in the meta and have a different opinion, feel free to share)

Your favored matches tend to be everything else unless they're teched out to beat you or are some goldfish style deck that ignores Karn. You obliterate slower aggro decks, midrange piles and can usually overpower UW Control. Decks like Enigmatic Fires and Niv to Light can still win if they get their engines going but they need to slow you down first and overpower the raw strength your Nykthos / Planeswalker engine represents.

For example, the Rakdos decks in particular are just incredibly poorly positioned to beat a deck of this nature due to how the sequencing of the two decks end up. You may think it'd be similar to how the Phoenix or Izzet Control matches go since they both need to interact early and turn the corner before you recover, but Rakdos lacks the power card Thing in the Ice represents. They need the correct mix of early pressure, answers and mana efficiency to keep up with Mono Green. Often times they struggle because they have to play early turns inefficiently to deal with mana dorks\*, can't effectively corral Kiora and struggle with both Old-Growth Troll and Cavalier of Thorns.

\*On the draw against an open black mana? Play Oath of Nissa and you can feel the awkwardness from the opponent on their 2nd turn when they have to decide what they want to do. Especially when your current suite of 2-mana accelerants all dodge creature removal. This only gets worse when they were leaning on Stomp to actually accomplish something in the early game.

The Food & Anvil builds should be better positioned to deal with what Mono G wants to do, but they fold completely to Karn which basically throws any advantages they had directly in the dumpster. The deck basically can't beat Kiora - OGT and if they can't answer Karn immediately, just upticking it will often put them in a no-win scenario if they don't have exactly Dreadbore. Against the Anvil builds if you don't play into Voltage Surge, they'll be soft locked out of the game.

Lotus Field you can often race or win via Karn.

UW Control has fallen off the face of the Earth from my experiences, but also struggle because the move toward noncreature permanents really puts a strain on their resources. The Yorion builds don't even run enough Supreme Verdict to really stop you from just spamming the board in their current state.

So this deck is amazing right? Where's the catch? I'm glad you asked. There's two big issues with the deck that can't easily be solved.

## **The Problems**

### **1) The mirror is trash and the only way to get ahead is to specifically tech for it**

You can apply 'Draw better' to any mirror in Magic, but there are certain ones where it applies doubly so. For example the Caw Blade mirror pre-NPH was largely skill based. Meanwhile the old Affinity mirror was skill based IF one player didn't just nut draw the other. Then you have

things like combo mirror matches where the only thing to do is win faster... That's what this one is.

This is one of those times as your interaction doesn't particularly work in the mirror and it's just a race for the first person to dump half their library into play or combo. Of course post-board this changes because some people will have the tech, which currently consists of T1 Elf, T2 Hunt the Hunter and playing another accelerator and basically nothing beats that start in the mirror unless the rest of their hand is air.

Polukranos is another card that's underwhelming in most matches and can absolutely crack open a Devotion mirror by not only cleaning up smaller threats, but also generates a huge threat that ends the game quickly. I used to like Voracious Hydra in the mirror, but ever since Wolfwillow Haven and Sylvan Caryatid became a bigger part of it, I'm less of a fan. Still it eats elves and that's often the difference between being a turn too late or a devotion short in the match.

TL;DR- Mulligan hyper-aggressively for combo hands, Hunt the Hunter or (as a far 3rd in preference) turbo Karn starts

## **2) Lack of maindeck space to adapt to future metagame shifts**

As a big mana linear, you are able to be teched against rather easily without having much room to respond unless you want to shave on combo elements like Nissa, Oath of Nissa or cut into the plan B of Old-Growth Troll.

Cards like Archon of Emeria and both Thalia, Guardian of Thraben & Thalia, Heretic Cathar can do a lot to slow you down and make you open to early aggression. Brutal Cathar and Skylave Apparition often can be played with relative safety and being on the draw and getting your accelerator eaten while your opponent develops their board is an easy way to get stuck in a corner.

There's obviously a lot of potential options out there, but I'll warn you not to over sideboard. Ultimately this deck still folds to the same thing as most linears, early pressure combined with some disruption. Your goal when playing against Mono G shouldn't be to try and answer everything they can do, it should be to disrupt the aspects that hurt you the most while getting a clock going.

I love playing against decks that just wipe my first three cards and don't do anything else until turn 5/6. I hate playing against decks that deploy a threat and answer two of mine.

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## **Deck Construction Notes**

I'm not going into why you should run 8 Elves or Nykthos in your Mono G Ramp / Combo deck. All the obvious stuff is exactly that.

3 Kiora / 2 Nissa: The reason I lump these two together is because they play a similar role in the deck and that affects the number choices. Kiora is one of those cards that relies on other parts

of your deck to function, she's just a basic accelerator on her own. However with Nykthos she represents potentially 20+ mana per use. With Old-Growth Troll and Cavalier of Thorns she nets you a few cards per game. With Wolfwillow Haven you can jump ahead in development without opening yourself up to creature removal.

However multiples of her are awful until you start to pop off with Storm the Festival, since she rarely gets attacked directly due to her high loyalty and you still only have 8 cards to trigger her draw ability with. Nissa on the other hand is a ramp engine all on her own and she generates threats that have to be dealt with in many matches. Of course she costs 3GG for that privilege instead of just 2G.

When you're entering the storm phase of the deck, these two are practically interchangeable, so it comes down to what mix of good early/late game cards you want. Nissa is amazing at turning your extra resources into something usable and Kiora is good at getting you those resources in the first place. That's why you often see the current 3/2 split instead of 4/1 or playsets of both. You like seeing one Kiora early and one Nissa once you're established, while all 5 copies can be used during combo turns.

The maindeck flex spots of the deck as currently constructed is typically the 2 Sylvan Caryatid and arguably the 4th copy of Oath of Nissa. Just about everything else is set in stone or requires cutting into more important pieces of the deck.

Sylvan Caryatid has been the winner of the flex slots because people are conditioned to kill your Elves on sight and you usually don't want both your early plays to die. So Caryatid compliments Wolfwillow Haven nicely as accelerants in the slower matches aiming to buy a lot of time with cheaper removal. Saving a few life points via blocking is also not irrelevant in games vs Red or 5c Humans.

Notably for the 2-drop slot, Burning-Tree Emissary used to be the go-to over Wolfwillow Haven or in addition to it. At the moment it's been dropped because while it creates more explosive starts, it loses a lot of juice after turn 2, is medium unless in multiples and doesn't directly accelerate you without Nykthos. It allows for some disgusting turn three starts, but I've much preferred the newer builds and consistency Wolfwillow Haven provides.

On Wolfwillow Haven- Double drop them on the same land and get rewarded when you play Kiora. The number of people spreading out Wolfwillow Havens for no reason is too damn high. Other flex choices I've seen are running a few Vivien, Arkbow Ranger and only 12 accelerants in the main. This helps in creature matches and theoretically can give you a little more flexibility with your sideboard since you can play cards like Reclamation Sage, Kolga, Ulamog and Titan of Industry. It's really clunky against the decks you're already weak against though so it's not something I've wanted recently.

Voracious Hydra was a card I played for a long while but it felt a little too situational on the draw to keep running. If the majority of matches I saw were Elf based I'd reconsider it, but the

metagame is diverse enough right now you don't particularly need these. They aren't bad by any means and besides their obvious uses at eating elves and plopping down as 10+ power threats, you can run them out on turn two for 2 devotion if you have a strong Nykthos hand. For right now they just don't get enough work done in other matches for me. Of course one of your potential bad matches is Winota and it helps in the mirror so if the meta skews more, I wouldn't be surprised to see more of these or play them yet again.

There's a handful of other cards I've seen here or there, but those seem like the primary ones in contention for those remaining slots. Honestly I think I'd rather have a 4th Kiora before adding any of these non-Caryatid choices, but YMMV.

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### **Sideboard Choices**

For the sideboard the general rule of thumb is just making sure the card you choose to add is either absolutely dominating in a match or a good catch-all.

### **Must Have's / Cards in the sideboard I wouldn't leave home without:**

Darksteel Citadel (Or an artifact land in general)

Pithing Needle

Grafdigger's Cage

Damping Sphere

Pestilent Cauldron

Skysovereign, Consul Flagship

God-Pharaoh's Statue

Meteor Golem

### **Cards I currently run/would consider running:**

Tormod's Crypt

Hunt the Hunter

Kenrith's Transformation

Unlicensed Hearse

Esika's Chariot

Golos, Tireless Pilgrim

Polukranos, World Eater

Voracious Hydra

Shadowspear

The Immortal Sun

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I think the only controversial pick there is not putting Tormod's Crypt in the 'Must Have' section, but frankly out of 15+ leagues I've wished for it less than 10 times. Usually against Izzet Phoenix and with the printing of Hearse, I think that could just be the better choice the majority of the time. It also makes wishing for it against something like Kroxa easier to stomach since you also have a threat that sticks around afterwards. Mana efficiency is a thing though and I don't fault anyone for keeping one around.

Stuff like Shadowspear and The Immortal Sun are on the outskirts of the meta, but can be very useful, Shadowspear shouldn't need much explanation, although something not brought up is that it can represent an alternative win condition for your combo loop. If you're looping and generating a bunch of mana per loop, you can untap this or fetch it with Golos + animate with Nissa, slap a Shadowspear on it and just attack for 50 or 100 or however much mana you want to make for it.

The Immortal Sun is interesting to see, since it shuts off your own planeswalkers, but does pretty much everything else you want in a long game in the mirror or UW. If you get ahead and slam Immortal Sun, you turn off a ton of options for your opponent both on board and in terms of future plays. In the mirror you can grind through it if you already generated enough resources, but typically your creatures losing fights and them outdrawing you every turn gives you a very small window before that disadvantage becomes insurmountable.

For the non-wish targets, Hunt the Hunter and Kenrith's Transformation are my go-to depending on what I expect to see more of in a tournament. More Thing in the Ice? Jam KT. More Elves? Hunt the Hunter. I don't think you have room for both and still have the space for all the wish targets you want, but more power to you if you make it work.

For my actual sideboarding, I usually do so in other elves matchups if I'm playing Hunt the Hunter (Or Voracious Hydra) in the sideboard. So against *Winota or the mirror* I usually shave an Old-Growth Troll, a Nissa and an Oath. Other times I've cut a pair of Trolls instead and that's my current iteration of sideboarding. It's a balancing act between not dropping one of your best devotion sources while accepting the card isn't very good in these types of matches.

When I have Kenrith's Transformation, I bring it in against any deck with Thing in the Ice. Typically I cut an Elf and a Nissa and have considered cutting 2 Elf even. I've tried non-Elf cuts, but their entire deck is aimed so well at disrupting your early starts and mana creatures that I find they often are wastes of cardboard in the matchup. Fiery Impulse and Flame-Blessed Bolt often have nowhere to go if they aren't targeting Elves or need to team up to 2-for-1 an OGT. Not 100% sold, but that's my reasoning.

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### **What the Infinite Combo is**

Step 1: Have 14 Devotion in play. 14 is the base number because of the mana in the loop- Burst (5), Karn (4), Kiora (3), Nykthos Activation (2)

You can start with less than that and 'lose' a mana or two on each loop if you have an extra Nykthos land drop or extra mana, etc.

Step 2: Have Nykthos in play + 2x Kiora + 2 Karn (2nd copy can be hand or yard). 1x of each if you have a Heart of Kiran in play since you can cycle through your used planeswalkers and put them into the graveyard.

Step 3: Tap Nykthos for mana. Cast Kiora, untap Nyk. Cast Karn, wish for Pestilent Cauldron / Restorative Burst. Cast Burst targeting Kiora + Karn in the graveyard. You gain 4 life and have fresh planeswalkers for the next loop.

Step 4: Tap Nykthos and repeat the process, Karn continually wishes for Burst from exile. After X number of loops, X being the size of the opps deck (typically 8-11 loops), cast the front side as Cauldron and mill them out. You can get the black mana via Golos fetching Overgrown Tomb or Karn fetching Treasure Vault and cracking it for treasures.

This should take about 4-5min on Magic Online depending on how fast you are at clicking. If you use Heart of Kiran I wish you the best of luck if you have to do this in 2 games. I *highly recommend* you practice this via goldfishing (Go to Open Play, 1 Player) a few times. It's not the most engaging play but it's well worth the trouble it'll save you.

Of note, you frequently will make mana during this loop since you often enable it by casting storm the festival / cavalier multiple times. So you can also do things like cast Burst for 2x Karn, use one to wish for Burst and one extra Wish for something else.

On Magic Online it is -much faster- to simply set up a lethal board, wish for God Pharaoh's Statue and anything else to remove outs for your opponent and pass. You rarely have to fully loop if you do this on turn 4/5.

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### **General Deck notes & tips**

Wolfwillow Haven is good with Kiora, especially in multiples. As stated above you want to double (or triple!) up on a single land so you have Nykthos at home in conjunction with Kiora or Nissa. Being able to power out a Storm the Festival off a single Forest shouldn't be underestimated. Also remember to sacrifice them once you've reached the tipping point for mana / devotion! The extra 2/2 can come in handy when racing or provide a key blocker against Winota if they hit Blade Historian or something.

Double check your land tapping when you're casting Storm the Festival in case you hit Nissa. It doesn't come up too often, but losing a mana or two can be the difference between winning or losing in some games.

Remember that if you have G spells in hand and a Nykthos on-board (and don't need the mana to activate Nykthos) those spells are effectively free. When you start to pop off, Old-Growth Troll is the same thing on a larger scale and Cavalier also can net you mana.

When casting Storm the Festival, there's often a real question of whether or not you want to activate your Nykthos / Planeswalkers before doing so. On one hand you risk hitting duplicates and wasting an untap or Karn Wish. On the other hand, if you activate them all ahead of time

and your Storm whiffs, you can be in a far worse position than had you waited and known the amount of resources you'd have left over.

This determination will often come down to how good your board & hand are. If you're all-in on Storm hitting to get anywhere, then I like spamming everything ahead of time and letting the chips fall where they may. The same goes for when I have a strong Wish target for the current board vs. holding back on Karn and seeing the best solution.

In a vacuum I opt toward using my untaps Pre-Storm unless I've already seen a bunch of Nykthos or Kiora or I'm trying to hit a key devotion count. Take a second to think about it though!

There's a bunch of mana breakpoints in the deck, but the numbers I quick reference are typically: 5-6-9-14

5 mana is effectively needed to do anything in the deck. Cavalier of Thorns, Karn + Pithing Needle, Kiora (+1) into Old-Growth Troll and so on.

6 mana is Storm the Festival time

9 mana is usually when you can double big spell or the start of a potential combo. For Karn it also means fetching Esika's Chariot, Boat (Skysovereign, Consul Flagship), Golos, etc.

14 is the minimum required devotion for going infinite so I shortcut that to 14 mana in my brain

This is also good to know if you're playing against the deck since you can try to map out possible future turns if your goal is to constrain the Devotion players' mana. 10 is also a good breakpoint to know as an opponent since that means Karn - God-Pharaoh's Statue which can often end the game on the spot.

Old-Growth Troll is the duality of man meme incarnated into Pioneer. If you just draw a pair of them, I think it's very hard to lose to Rakdos or Mono Red. If you draw a pair in the mirror or against Winota, you're probably getting rolled.

It is an excellent plan B card and devotion enabler and the format is still majority fair decks. So when you're on the fence about a hand, especially when looking at a card to throw back for a mulligan in G1, really ponder whether your 3rd accelerator or Karn is worth keeping over 'ol reliable. And in matches like Winota, don't be afraid to pitch them or even shave one or two if you need space for Hunt the Hunter.

Purposely running Cavalier of Thorns into a situation where it'd get killed and you can buyback a better card for the next turn is legitimate and something you want to watch out for in the mirrors.

When in doubt, grabbing Lair of the Hydra and dumping 20 mana into it is totally valid when popping off with Storm the Festival. People focus too much on trying to setup the combo and not winning the actual game.

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**What to Wish for**

Karn Wish (-2) is one of the biggest skill checks in the deck. It rewards knowing the best cards to tutor up in a given match and gives you a huge range for your otherwise straightforward ramp deck. One of the biggest challenges is knowing when to set up a future turn with a Karn Wish, knowing that Karn is unlikely to survive the turn. If you know you'll need a Boat and upticking won't lock in it's safety, wishing for it ahead of time is a totally valid strategy. The same goes for matches where you aren't under a lot of pressure, but your mana dorks have been decimated. Nabbing Golos for a t4/5 play and to setup Nykthos turns can really pay off here.

Otherwise in the majority of situations where mana isn't a factor, you're going to setup a board, Wish for God Pharaoh's Statue, pass the turn and win shortly after.

Remember that Karn's +1 is a very real ability, not only can it take out Treasures and Blood\* tokens, but it can power up your vehicles. Turning a Boat into a 5/5 attacker or a Statue into a 6/6 can often generate so much damage that it forces bad blocks. It also comes in handy on occasion where if you do run the fight creatures, you can target something like a Damping Sphere from your opponent and kill it.

\*Yes, you have a Karn in play shutting them down. That may not always be true and there's often other things to do with them like sacrificing them to Voltage Surge, Deadly Dispute, etc.

### **Karn's Usual Wish Targets**

Generic Targets- God Pharaoh's Statue, Darksteel Citadel

Winota; Grafdigger's Cage (If ahead), Boat, Meteor Golem

Mono Red: Esika's Chariot, Boat, Burst

Mono G Devotion: Damping Sphere (If ahead), Boat, Burst, The Immortal Sun (If ahead)

Lotus: Damping Sphere

Izzet Phoenix: Tormod's Crypt, Unlicensed Hearse, Meteor Golem

Rakdos Midrange: Pithing Needle, Unlicensed Hearse, Golos, Boat

Rakdos Anvil: Pithing Needle, Unlicensed Hearse, Golos, Boat, Meteor Golem

UW Control: Pithing Needle, Unlicensed Hearse, Esika's Chariot

Mono U Spirits: Esika's Chariot, Boat

Greasefang: Tormod's Crypt, Pithing Needle, Unlicensed Hearse

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### **Mulligans**

Besides proper sequencing, mulligans are the lifeblood of the deck. Your early turns matter so much in enabling your busted engine cards later in the game. As a result this is closer to a Tron deck where you want to throw back hands that are just OK unless you've already mulled. Here are the general rules I follow:

In the dark you want to mulligan any hand without an accelerator of any sort. I keep almost any hand with 2-3 lands and 2 accelerants, regardless of which ones they are. Similarly for G1 I usually keep 2+ lands + Elf + Kiora/OGT.

The caveat being you still want to keep hands with an actual plan. Keeping 3 Forest, Nykthos, Llanowar, Cavalier, Karn doesn't accomplish anything without a lot of help. If you're going to keep a speculative hand, you much rather have one relying on a good Storm the Festival or

topdecking gas than not. Also recognize the weaknesses of your hand, keeping 2 Forest, Nykthos, Elf, OGT, other stuff can get really ugly if you don't see a Forest and your elf dies.

If I know my opponent is on a fair non-white deck (Say Rakdos Midrange) I'll keep Oath of Nissa + Old-Growth Troll hands on the play. In fact I highly value Kiora and OGT over almost anything besides lands and T1 Elf. That's how strongly I feel about OGT against fair decks that can't exile it. My ideal 'fair' hand is something like 2 Forest, Nykthos, Elf, Kiora, OGT x2

Against linear decks you want to value Karn higher in the opener. You still can't keep hands of mono accelerants + Karn in the dark, but against something like Lotus Combo? Sure.

If the hand is good, I will keep a one lander with Elf + Oath of Nissa, especially on the draw. I will not keep multiple Elf one landers, even on the draw, unless I've already mulliganed. Your average hand is too good to risk losing to not seeing land.

Much like people overvalue Winota in openers, Nykthos is not the end-all for the deck. It is very nice to have and your best hands will often contain one, but it's not that hard to find between Oath, Cavalier and Storm.

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If people enjoyed this I may do a follow-up with more in-depth mulligan discussion since I kind of glossed over it, but this is already 4K words so I'll cut it here. Also if you're interested in hosting a version of this w/ pictures for your website, throw me a message. Thanks for reading!