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# Into the Darkness...

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 House of Cards  
 Thursday, February 14, 2002



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Many obstacles stood in the way of a successful House of Cards [Deck Challenge #1](#).

First was the fact that the Challenge itself didn't actually make it into my article until mid-day due to some miscommunication. Second, the several days surrounding the Challenge were fraught with Wizards' server problems which made access to the site nearly impossible. Third, I asked people for *Torment*-only decks in an article in which I myself made decks with both *Torment* AND *Odyssey*... that just *had* to cause confusion. Fourth, I asked people to make decks for a non-sanctioned format. Lastly, I asked for submissions with no prize support... just a promise that I would read your deck and maybe talk about it a little. In expressing my concerns to my wife over dinner, she agreed that I might not have enough material for this article. How embarrassing.

I needn't have worried. The pile of printed submissions on my desk grew... and grew... and grew some more. I started sorting the decks into categories, then into sub-categories as the piles became unwieldy. Then a new concern crept into my head: Egads, what happens to Challenge #2 if those barriers *aren't* there???

To whit: You people are crazy.

I'm so proud.

You sent in a mountain of fascinating *Torment*-only decks. Below is my summary of the submissions, including the most common decks and those that I consider abnormally creative. I apologize if I don't mention your deck here. I wish I could print them all. Luckily for me, I promised absolutely no objective criteria for selection. These are just decks I think are cool. They aren't perfectly constructed, but they are all unique, viable concepts.

## MONOCOLORED DECKS

**Black:** As expected, the most submitted deck was mono-black (the second most common color combination might surprise you). Some of the decks were fast, using *Nantuko Shade* and *Carrion Rats*. Others were slow, using *Mutilate*, *Sengir Vampire*, and *Laquatus's Champion*. Many used *Organ Grinder* as a late-game win condition. Some were Nightmare decks based around *Chainer*, *Dementia Master*. In all, I saw *every single* black card in *Torment*. Yes, even *Cabal Surgeon*.

The problem is that all of those *Swamps* started to blur together after awhile. Many decks looked highly competitive and creative, but I found it hard to distinguish among them. In the end, none of the black decks stood out enough to discuss explicitly. One yahoo named Aaron Forsythe did send a deck with 4x *Hypnox*, *Cabal Ritual*, *Cabal Coiffers*, and 48 *Swamps*. His advice? "Mulligan aggressively."

**Red:** The red pile was far more manageable and fell into three basic categories: 1) Barbarians, 2) Burn decks, and 3) Mana denial decks using *Devastating Dreams*, *Petravark*, etc. Most red decks suffered from a lack of rationalization about how *Grim Lavamancer* fit into the same deck with threshold cards like *Pardic Arsonist*. In the end, one caught my eye as particularly scary. It is simple, but deadly:



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RULES

### Red Devil

by Kwejibo

22 Mountain

- 4 Grim Lavamancer
- 4 Longhorn Firebeast
- 4 Hell-Bent Raider
- 2 Possessed Barbarian
- 4 Overmaster
- 4 Sonic Seizure
- 4 Flaming Gambit
- 4 Skullscorch
- 4 Fiery Temper
- 4 Violent Eruption

Oh, and the best deck name of the whole Challenge came from Spimdj: "Temper? TEMPER? BARBARIANS ARE BACK! BRRAAAAAARGH!!!!"

**Blue, Green, White:** If you can believe it: ONE mono-blue deck, ONE mono-white deck (both of these submitted by Blaze) and – in the eleventh hour – TWO mono-green decks (submitted by Mike Radecki and Alex Churchill). Blue should be particularly ashamed by this showing because it holds just as many cards in *Torment* as red. I think the lack of good countermagic and a solid win condition scared people away. Tee hee... I bet now you're thinking to yourself that you could probably build a viable blue deck with *Torment*. Too late!

## TWO-COLOR DECKS

**Blue/Green:** Amazingly, U/G decks were the second-most common behind monoblack. Even more amazingly, almost every single one used blue's card-dumping (with *Compulsion* and *Cephalid Vandal* the mainstays) in combination with recyclers *Gurzigost* and *Anurid Scavenger* as the core of the deck. Weird that so many of you had the same idea. I gave special points to those of you who realized that shuffling your deck was an important element to the "combo." I've listed an example below in the Honorable Mention category.

**Black/Blue:** Coming in a close third behind U/G, U/B decks made a strong showing. These decks were all over the map in terms of construction. Here's my best attempt at classification, from most to least common:

- Reanimator decks, using either "Thriller" or *Chainer* to bring scary things like *Hypnox* back to life. The most unique variation on this theme was to make a U/B Nightmares deck, again by Alex Churchill.
- Decks that look to win via *Mortal Combat*. No kidding. These decks tended to be huge (90+ cards) and full of critters. Unfortunately, most needed more land. But it's a great idea:



### Pushin' Up Daisies

by Kyle

4 Tainted Isle	4 Carrion Rats	4 Mortal Combat
18 Island	4 Putrid Imp	4 Breakthrough
14 Swamp	4 Cephalid Illusionist	4 Compulsion
	4 Cephalid Vandal	4 Turbulent Dreams
	4 Mesmeric Fiend	4 Circular Logic
	4 Ambassador Laquatus	4 False Memories
	4 Balshan Collaborator	4 Deep Analysis
	4 Cephalid Sage	4 Insidious Dreams
	4 Possessed Aven	4 Plagiarize
	4 Shambling Swarm	
	4 Cephalid Aristocrat	

- Beatdown decks, using blue's card-drawing, black's creature removal and things like *Balshan Collaborator*.
- **Llawan** decks, using *Alter Reality* for a soft lock very similar to what I described [last week](#). I loved these decks, but no one of them in particular.
- **Organ Grinder** decks, using the tricks of the reanimator decks to fuel the Grinder. In fact, the very first submission I received by Harm van der Schans followed this strategy.

**Black/Red:** The B/R decks were primarily beatdown-oriented, with some Barbarians and Nightmares thrown in. A truly unique deck came from Laura Mills, who built a deck that attacked with quick creatures before dropping a *Last Laugh* for a big, game-ending chain reaction. Is that cool or what?

### Chain Reaction

by Laura Mills

4 Tainted Peak	4 Carrion Rats	4 Skullscorch
9 Mountain	4 Grim Lavamancer	4 Last Laugh
9 Swamp	4 Barbarian Outcast	3 Sonic Seizure
	4 Mesmeric Fiend	3 Fiery Temper
	4 Nantuko Shade	2 Pyromania
	4 Longhorn Firebeast	

**Black/White:** The B/W decks were a weird bunch. Mostly they were reanimator decks, using Teroh's Faithful as a way of balancing out Chainer and "Thriller." Some Transcendence decks popped up (my man Frank loves them a little too much). A few people made valiant attempts at the intriguing Zombie Trailblazer-Stern Judge combo, but I didn't think they quite pulled it off. Last Laugh (a la Pestilence decks of old) and Mortal Combat made appearances here too, with varying degrees of success.

**Blue/Red:** Counter-burn decks existed despite bad counters. Most of the U/R decks tried awfully hard to exploit the madness mechanic. One neat mana-denial idea appears in the Honorable Mentions.

**Other Two-Color:** The other 2c combinations showed up in small numbers. Some G/B Nightmare decks, G/R Madness beats (I thought this would be more common), some U/W control decks, an interesting R/W Threshold deck from Blaze.

A particularly funny deck came from Tony Weisstein, one of the few folks attempting to abuse Radiate. How many cards can YOU draw by Radiating an Accelerate? (I admit it... I added the Swamp to Tony's deck.)



## Chernobyl

by Tony Weisstein

14 Mountain	4 Basking Rootwalla	4 Sonic Seizure
7 Forest	4 Arrogant Wurm	4 Radiate
1 Swamp	3 Nantuko Blightcutter	3 Accelerate
	2 Krosan Restorer	3 Fiery Temper
	2 Pitchstone Wall	3 Temporary Insanity
	2 Possessed Barbarian	2 Nostalgic Dreams
		2 Far Wanderings

Shockingly, few people thought to make an anti-black deck. In a Torment-only tournament, I have to believe something like the W/G deck in the Honorable Mentions would rock. Sure it seems easy to make (and what's with all of that mana!?!), but then again no one else *did* make it.

## MANY-COLORED DECKS

Finally, a small but significant group of decks ventured into three+ colors despite the general lack of support (the Tainted lands and Far Wanderings). These decks got mental bonus points for trying such a bold experiment, but I also tended to judge them more harshly on whether or not I *really* thought they would stand a chance in a duel.

I won't even try to characterize this menagerie of submissions. Here are some of the highlights:

- Pretty much every three-color combination with blue trying to "break" madness.
- Darned interesting tries at 5-color decks. One of them shows up in the Honorable Mentions.
- A Zombie Trailblazer + Collaborators deck by DC.

And that's that. Whew. These Deck Challenges are a lot of work. Thanks for your submissions and for making this experience so fun for me. Many of you expressed how fun the Challenge was for you too, which was the point from the beginning. It is comforting (and slightly scary) to know you are all out there, sharing my deckbuilding obsession.

Below are some other decks I thought deserved to be seen. As I said, consider them the Honorable Mentions in this non-contest of ours.

Next week: White and Green's Revenge!

### Compulsive Scavenger

by Pubeng Phanichphant

12 Forest  
12 Island

4 Basking Rootwalla  
4 Anurid Scavenger  
3 Gurzigost  
2 Cephalid Illusionist  
2 Ambassador Laquatus

4 Insist  
4 Obsessive Search  
4 Compulsion  
3 Circular Logic  
3 Far Wanderings  
3 Liquify

### Stunted Growth

by GP

15 Mountain  
11 Island

4 Longhorn Firebeast  
4 Petravark  
4 Pitchstone Wall  
3 Petradon

4 Retraced Image  
4 Devastating Dreams  
4 Circular Logic  
3 Deep Analysis  
2 Flaming Gambit  
2 Liquify

### Anti-Black Deck

by Bullock01

18 Plains  
10 Forest

4 Mystic Familiar  
4 Anurid Scavenger  
4 Nantuko Blightcutter  
4 Stern Judge  
4 Krosan Constrictor  
4 Major Teroh

4 Strength of Isolation  
4 Floating Shield

### Dark Side of the Rainbow

by Michael Schmitz

2 Tainted Isle  
2 Tainted Wood  
1 Tainted Field  
1 Tainted Peak  
7 Swamp  
3 Forest  
2 Island  
2 Mountain  
2 Plains

4 Basking Rootwalla  
2 Chainer, Dementia Master  
2 Hypnox

4 Obsessive Search  
4 Flaming Gambit  
4 Cabal Ritual  
4 Far Wanderings  
3 Compulsion  
3 Hypochondria  
3 Fiery Temper  
3 Insidious Dreams  
2 Vengeful Dreams

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