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# Into the Light...

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House of Cards  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

One word describes your [Second House of Cards Deck Challenge](#) submissions:

Wow.



First, you managed to send in over 400 decks (with a limit of one deck per person!) in just over a week. For the first time since I have started this column, I couldn't respond to everyone who wrote me. Some of you received "thank you"s from me and some of you didn't; I assure you that my response was dictated entirely by the volume of submissions that particular day and not the quality of your deck.

Second, your submissions were fantastic. The overall creativity and diversity of decks -- as you'll soon see -- was phenomenal. Many more decks than appear below had me scratching my chin and muttering "Okay, now *that* is a cool idea." Nicely done. In fact, the decks were so great that it made my inability to respond even more frustrating. Moreover, for the most part the decks followed The Rules.

Finally, you inflated my ego beyond recognition. Pretty much everyone interpreted my call for submissions as *requiring* you to compliment me. Although some of you are horrifically bad at positive feedback, many of you had me blushing. Next time I won't make any jokes about sucking up, because I don't think my chest can survive much more puffing.

Thank you all. The [first](#) Deck Challenge was about as fun for me as it was exhausting. This Challenge was a lot more exhausting, and exponentially more fun.

Remember that the decks below are not necessarily the best in design. Instead, they stood out from their peers in terms of creativity. Basically, I just like them.

But enough babbling! Let's explore some wacky green and white possibilities for Type 2 with *Judgment* as seen through your eyes...

## THE PHANTOM MENACE

The single most submitted deck involved using the new Phantom creatures alongside creature-pumpers such as [Elephant Guide](#), [Armadillo Cloak](#), [Glorious Anthem](#), [Mirari's Wake](#), and [Seton's Desire](#) (to name a few). The result, of course, is creatures that can't die to damage at all. Many decks added to an opponent's misery by using [Benevolent Bodyguard](#) or [Sylvan Safekeeper](#) to further protect their critters, and [Ironshell Beetle](#) or [Fleetfoot Panther](#) to replenish +1/+1 counters.

I fully expect people to start playing decks like these after *Judgment* is Standard-legal in July. For that reason -- and because it was the most common decktype -- I couldn't find any decks that stood out as particularly creative (recall that a similar thing happened in the results of Deck Challenge I). They all looked solid and scary, but none made my toes tingle.

## ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES

Next in quantity, people tried very hard to use the new alternative win conditions. [Test of Endurance](#) by far received

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## The "Phantom Trick"

### Why it works - from the FAQ

- Each time a Phantom would be dealt damage, prevent all of that damage. Then remove one +1/+1 counter from it. It doesn't matter how much damage would be dealt to the Phantom at any one time. You still remove only one +1/+1 counter from it.
- A Phantom's ability prevents damage even if there are no more +1/+1 counters on it. So if a Phantom's toughness is raised by some other effect (like [Elephant Guide](#)), it becomes impossible to destroy with damage unless an effect like [Flaring Pain](#) states that damage can't be prevented.

the most submissions of the two, with pretty much every gain-life card attempted at some point or another. Many people rode **Atalya, Samite Master** to victory with the most successful attempts hiding behind some combination of **Ensnaring Bridge**, **Orim's Chant**, and **Solitary Confinement**. Kudos to people who remembered that **Reverse Damage** is in *Seventh Edition*.

The real problem with most **Test of Endurance** decks was that they either looked like they were as likely to win with creature damage as the Test (and thus weren't focused), or they didn't look to me like they would gain 50 life faster than they would lose to opposing decks.

One unique approach came from Lord\_Shiner (yes, parents are cruel), who used the model of many **Nantuko Shrine** decks to try something just crazy enough to work...

### Test of Endurance!

by Lord\_Shiner

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**Main Deck**  
61 cards

<p>20 <b>Plains</b></p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>20 lands</p>	<p>0 creatures</p>	<p>4 <b>Chromatic Sphere</b></p> <p>4 <b>Skycloud Egg</b></p> <p>4 <b>Sungrass Egg</b></p> <p>4 <b>Life Burst</b></p> <p>4 <b>Sterling Grove</b></p> <p>4 <b>Aven Shrine</b></p> <p>4 <b>Test of Endurance</b></p> <p>4 <b>Ancestral Tribute</b></p> <p>3 <b>Darkwater Egg</b></p> <p>3 <b>Mossfire Egg</b></p> <p>3 <b>Shadowblood Egg</b></p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>41 other spells</p>
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**Epic Struggle** produced fewer submissions partly because, I think, people realized that with 20 creatures they were far more likely to win with damage than some silly green enchantment. Most decks that stuck to winning with **Epic Struggle** tried to reach 20 creatures by casting **Parallel Evolution** in conjunction with cards like **Squirrel Nest**, **Acorn Harvest**, and **Saproling Symbiosis**.

A more interesting idea, in my opinion, is the use of **Epic Struggle** in combination with **Nature's Revolt**. A few people came up with the same notion, all of them with good decks. It was a tough choice between Matthew O Watkins, Marten Pijl, and Scott Zirngible, but in the end I liked the focus of this deck on the alternate win condition:

### Epic Struggle/Nature's Revolt

by Marten Pijl

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>4 <b>Krosan Verge</b></p> <p>10 <b>Forest</b></p> <p>10 <b>Plains</b></p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>0 creatures</p>	<p>4 <b>New Frontiers</b></p> <p>4 <b>Rampant Growth</b></p> <p>4 <b>Sterling Grove</b></p> <p>4 <b>Ensnaring Bridge</b></p> <p>4 <b>Deep Reconnaissance</b></p> <p>4 <b>Squirrel Nest</b></p> <p>4 <b>Nature's Revolt</b></p> <p>3 <b>Epic Struggle</b></p> <p>3 <b>Dueling Grounds</b></p> <p>2 <b>Delaying Shield</b></p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>36 other spells</p>
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## TOKEN OF APPRECIATION

I should point out that a significant number of people used **Epic Struggle** as a secondary win condition in dedicated token decks. These decks relied heavily on **Parallel Evolution** and **Overrun** to make opponents cry. I tried not to hold these decks' bad timing against them since MagicTheGathering.com did Token Week during the submissions window, but in the end I didn't see any one deck that stood apart from the others.

Two kinds of Token decks became their own deck categories: Squirrels and Wurms. Magic players' fascination with fuzzy wuzzy squirrels is alive and well judging by the number of Squirrel decks I received. I think I'll save some of the submissions for the Squirrel Week we talk of doing some day. As for Wurms, for some reason Wurm enthusiasts usually use too little land in their decks to support their favorite token creatures.

## MY SPECIAL LITTLE PLACE



Many, many decks abused **Solitary Confinement**. This is bad news for players like me who are annoyed by lock decks. Here is what you can expect from a meanie near you: Drop **Solitary Confinement** on the table along with either **Symbiotic Deployment**, **Verduran Enchantress**, or **Genesis** in the graveyard. Lots of decks tried **Howling Mine** too, but that doesn't work since you're skipping your draw step. In any case, each deck had a different way of eventually winning, but the most evil used **Spirit Cairn** or madness creatures. Imagine **Solitary Confinement**, **Symbiotic Deployment**, and **Spirit Cairn** at one time and you will start to see the wickedness of this strategy.

I'm not showing these decks to you. So there. Meanie.

## WRATH OF FROG

Ask a hardcore tournament player which is the best card on **Judgment** and you will often hear **Anurid Brushhopper**. The ability to evade death, win after a reset like **Upheaval** or **Obliterate**, and be a 3/4 for 1\* is very good. Lots of submissions decided to take the Brushhopper for a test drive and really see what it can do. Given the color restrictions of the Deck Challenge, most people used **Anurid Brushhopper** in combination with madness spells like **Basking Rootwalla**, incarnations like **Glory**, and big sweepers like **Wrath of God**.

In fact, one deck tried so hard to get the most out of its Wraths that I had to give it kudos despite what is probably too little mana. **Wrath of God** may kill most creatures, but not Barry's, dangit! I particularly like the idea of **Elephant Guide** on a **Penumbra Bobcat**...



Who Needs Genesis?		
by Barry Ives		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
4 <b>Brushland</b>	4 <b>Suntail Hawk</b>	4 <b>Moment's Peace</b>
4 <b>Elfhome Palace</b>	4 <b>Penumbra Bobcat</b>	4 <b>Elephant Guide</b>
2 <b>Sungrass Prairie</b>	4 <b>Reborn Hero</b>	4 <b>Still Life</b>
4 <b>Nantuko Monastery</b>	4 <b>Anurid Brushhopper</b>	4 <b>Wrath of God</b>
4 <b>Forest</b>	4 <b>Penumbra Kavú</b>	2 <b>Rout</b>
4 <b>Plains</b>		
22 lands	20 creatures	18 other spells

## THE FAT AND THE GREEDY

Players were equally enamored with **Hunting Grounds**. Any card that can slap a **Phantom Nishoba** directly into play is worth a look, even if it usually is an enchantment that does ABSOLUTELY NOTHING (does anyone else find this hysterical?). I lumped **Hunting Grounds** decks with general "fattie" decks that tried other (read: **Elvish Piper**) ways of skirting large creatures' casting costs.

I sure love big creatures. I sure love **Hunting Grounds**. I sure wish that one of these decks had stood out from the others. But alas, most decks couldn't justify how they would reach threshold reliably. The last deck submitted to the Challenge, by Blake Contreras, did a good job using **Rites of Spring** and **Howling Mine**. Actually, my favorite is an unsigned deck using **Anurid Brushhopper**, **Wrath of God**, and lots of cantrips but, well, that would crowd out Barry.

On the other hand, I absolutely fell in love with the decks that focused on producing obscene amounts of mana to actually cast big, enormous, and otherwise large spells. These decks earned the moniker Lot-O-Mana decks, and several of them deserve to be highlighted:

- Hans, who sent in a deck with 30 (!) **Forests** along with **Molimo**, **Maro Sorcerer** and **Uktabi Wildcats**.
- Reed Karriker for his **Druid/Nature's Revolt** deck.
- Alex Patterson for his valiant attempt at making a deck to actually cast both **Roar of the Wurm** and **Crush of Wurms...** with **Mirari**.
- Teleute for his weird **Nature's Revolt**, **Mirari's Wake**, **Life/Death** deck.



In particular, I admit to a keen fondness for the following deck from Alex Churchill, who also did a terrific job in Deck Challenge I. Alex probably needs more win conditions, but he managed to splash red into a deck while sticking to a G/W feel, proving that House of Cards "rules" can be bent...

Megamana
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by Alex Churchill

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

4 Krosan Verge  
2 Rith's Grove  
8 Forest  
6 Plains  
3 Mountain

23 lands

4 Birds of Paradise  
3 Ivy Elemental  
3 Silver Seraph  
10 creatures

4 Sterling Grove  
4 Harrow  
4 Overabundance  
3 Hurricane  
3 Aura Shards  
3 Mirari's Wake  
3 Crush of Wurms  
2 Unquestioned Authority  
1 Sphere of Duty

27 other spells

## CALL HIM MYTHSTER NOMAD

I admit that I completely glanced over **Nomad Mythmaker** when looking at *Judgment*. Luckily, many of you zeroed in on the amazingly fun possibilities of a Mythmaker deck. Usually the decks revolved around recurring **Elephant Guide**, **Unquestioned Authority**, or **Armadillo Cloak**. Jim Cawlo and Adam Kalafarski had the evil realization that **Nomad Mythmaker + Pariah** is a scary duo.

In the end, I realized I wanted very badly to show one of these decks but couldn't decide between the **Beloved Chaplain/Commander Eesha** approach of Jake A. or the recurring Elephant token approach of Luis Almeida. Both submitted very cool decks. Luis gets points for using his last name, including **Thaumatog** and **Seeker of Skybreak**, and for a 12-word deckname. But the idea of an invincible Chaplain is a little too tempting...

**Enchant**  
by Jake A.

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

4 Brushland  
9 Forest  
9 Plains  
22 lands

4 Suntail Hawk  
4 Beloved Chaplain  
4 Nomad Mythmaker  
4 Commander Eesha  
2 Penumbra Bobcat  
18 creatures

4 Call of the Herd  
4 Elephant Guide  
4 Armadillo Cloak  
2 Floating Shield  
2 Unquestioned Authority  
2 Creeping Mold  
2 Serra's Embrace  
20 other spells

In addition, many people used **Nomad Mythmaker** in Enchantress decks. These decks differed from the basic Mythmaker decks in their emphasis on **Verduran Enchantress** and **Yavimaya Enchantress**. Datenshi Bry and Robert Partridge submitted what look to me like the most solid and well-built Enchantress decks.

## WHICH CARD? DIS-CARD

Obviously the entire *Odyssey* Block places a heavy emphasis on the graveyard. In *Judgment*, the Incarnations add the final wrinkle to mechanics like flashback, threshold, and madness. Many submissions attempted to mash all of these together and create a graveyard-focused deck. **Wild Mongrel** made an appearance in all of them, usually alongside cards like **Patrol Hound**, **Spirit Cairn**, **Genesis**, **Brawn**, **Glory**, **Valor**, **Anurid Brushhopper**, **Basking Rootwalla**, and **Arrogant Wurm**. Interestingly, **Silver Seraph** also made a heavy appearance.

Most of these decks, I think, missed the correct balance of cards that allow you to discard with card that are useful to discard. Many, though, were really slick and could probably make great tournament decks. Try as I might, I couldn't decide on a single deck of the bunch to feature.

## FLY, WEENIE, FLY!

In the last significant category of decktypes, many people attempted a pure beatdown strategy. Those that stood out were the monowhite submissions, since green and green/white make for more natural aggressive decks. The White Weenie decks still, sadly, looked pretty weak. But many people realized that Bird decks actually can inflict some serious feathery pain. Here is a good example:

**Birrds**  
by Petri Heiramo

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

22 Plains	4 Suntail Hawk	4 Soulcatcher's Aerie
22 lands	4 Mystic Familiar	4 Battle Screech
	4 Skyshroud Falcon	4 Wrath of God
	4 Soulcatcher	
	4 Aven Cloudchaser	12 other spells
	4 Phantom Flock	
	2 Commander Eesha	
	26 creatures	

Special recognition goes to Steve Spurgeon for using **Mirari** to enhance **Battle Screech**, **Lead Astray**, and **Life Burst**, as well as Doug for using **Sterling Grove** to search out and protect **Soulcatcher's Aerie**.

The rest of the aggro-decks received the generic label of Beatdown. Many used the Phantom-enhancement trick but it wasn't the focus of the deck. In fact, I'd say many of them used a lot of different tricks from all of the decktypes listed here. If you sent a deck that sought to win with creatures of four casting cost or less, and if I didn't think it matched any of the other deck categories, I called it a Beatdown deck.

## ROGUES GALLERY

All of the submissions I've discussed so far fell into fairly recognizable -- and large -- categories. A few truly insane-- er, creative individuals blazed their own trail. That is, each of the categories below contained anywhere from one to five decks. Thus not only are these *designs* neat, but the original *idea* behind the deck is innovative.

- **Combo:** I'm not usually a big fan of true combo decks, but I appreciate the effort from folks like Corwin Kelly, Justin Wan, Dan, and Erik Peterson to build around an infinite-mana engine of **Nantuko Tracer**, **Verdant Succession**, and **Phyrexian Altar**. Here's an example:

Green Mana Machine		
by Michael Kioski		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
4 Sungrass Prairie	4 Werebear	4 Stream of Life
17 Forest	4 Nantuko Tracer	4 Phyrexian Altar
1 Plains	4 Wood Elves	4 Verdant Succession
22 lands	4 Battlefield Scrounger	4 Creeping Mold
	2 Nemata, Grove Guardian	3 Sterling Grove
	1 Ivy Elemental	19 other spells
	19 creatures	

- **Reanimator:** Mmmm... **Breath of Life**. Oh, and **Pulsemage Advocate**. And **Death or Glory**. And huge monsters. Thanks to Charles Sterling and Andrew Taylor for creating reanimator decks with that not-very-black flavor.
- **Erhnam-Geddon:** Although I personally like the revival of Erhnam-Geddon to revolve around **Epicenter**, I love what Purraj of Urborg (I know, I know... parents again) has built surrounding **Erhnam Djinn** and **Global Ruin**. Sideboard included because of the lone **Living Wish**.

Ernie's Back!!!		
by Purraj of Urborg		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		<b>Sideboard</b>
4 Brushland	4 Harrow	3 Sylvan Safekeeper
2 Nantuko Monastery	4 Wrath of God	3 Spellbane Centaur
2 Rifstone Portal	4 Global Ruin	2 Orim's Chant
8 Forest	3 Disenchant	2 Gaea's Herald
3 Plains	2 Wandering Stream	2 Mystic Enforcer
1 Island	2 Tigereye Cameo	1 Phantom Nishoba
1 Mountain	1 Living Wish	1 Forest
1 Swamp	1 Jalum Tome	1 Nantuko Monastery
22 lands	1 Mirari's Wake	15 sideboard cards
	22 other spells	
4 Birds of Paradise		
4 Diligent Farmhand		
4 Erhnam Djinn		
3 Genesis		
1 Mystic Enforcer		
16 creatures		

- **Transcendence:** Forget **Test of Endurance**, let's break **Transcendence!** I have no idea how these two decks worked. **Transcendence** makes my brain hurt.
- **Walls:** Now WALLS! There's something I can understand! V.D. Elisan sent in a fun Wall deck, as did Chris Giovannagelo:

### Waking Walls

by Chris Giovannagelo

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>4 <b>Brushland</b></p> <p>2 <b>Krosan Verge</b></p> <p>11 <b>Plains</b></p> <p>5 <b>Forest</b></p> <hr/> <p>22 lands</p>	<p>4 <b>Prison Barricade</b></p> <p>4 <b>Sunscape Familiar</b></p> <p>4 <b>Sunweb</b></p> <p>4 <b>Wall of Swords</b></p> <hr/> <p>16 creatures</p>	<p>4 <b>Testament of Faith</b></p> <p>4 <b>Fertile Ground</b></p> <p>4 <b>Rolling Stones</b></p> <p>4 <b>Sterling Grove</b></p> <p>4 <b>Mirari's Wake</b></p> <p>2 <b>Holistic Wisdom</b></p> <hr/> <p>22 other spells</p>
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- **Clerics:** Some people can't get enough of **Master Apothecary**, particularly if it will help win via **Test of Endurance**. Johnson and jakeFuNC (sigh...) led the battle cry of the priestly vestments.
- **Anti-Black:** Only Mike Cintron dedicated his submission to crushing black into the floor. Apparently the sting of *Torment* is a distant memory to white and green mages.
- **Theme:** Finally, a few joyous souls submitted pure theme decks. The themes were, um... weird (although I must admit to laughing at Garrett Gero's "Scooby Doo" deck). Only one person submitted a theme deck that resonated (there's a pun there, but you'll get it in a second) with me:

### Let's Make Some Noise!

by Glenn Ellingson

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>13 <b>Forest</b></p> <p>9 <b>Plains</b></p> <hr/> <p>22 lands</p>	<p>4 <b>Druid Lyrist</b></p> <p>4 <b>Elvish Lyrist</b></p> <p>4 <b>Gaea's Herald</b></p> <p>4 <b>Voice of All</b></p> <p>3 <b>Blessed Orator</b></p> <hr/> <p>19 creatures</p>	<p>4 <b>Chatter of the Squirrel</b></p> <p>4 <b>Howling Mine</b></p> <p>4 <b>Glorious Anthem</b></p> <p>4 <b>Battle Screech</b></p> <p>2 <b>Roar of the Wurm</b></p> <p>1 <b>Piper's Melody</b></p> <hr/> <p>19 other spells</p>
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And that, as they say, is that.

If your deck isn't one of the ten I featured here, odds are that I still smiled when I read it. No kidding... you really did impress me with the creativity of your submissions. Thanks again to everyone who took the time to send me a deck. I'm already looking forward to Deck Challenge III!

Next Week: A common idea.

-j

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