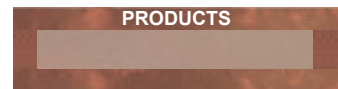


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Extending Masques

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House of Cards
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

I thought that I would wait a week or two before continuing my quirky [look](#) at the sets that will be legal in Extended come November. But then "Alternate Play Cost Week" fell from the sky, and what's a guy to do? *Mercadian Masques* began a block full of alternative casting costs. Most of these cards fall into the fairly traditional deck world and border on the ordinary. It isn't terribly difficult, however, to put my own weird what-is-he-thinking lens on *Masques* block to include plenty of alternative costs.

As with all articles in this series, keep in mind that although the decks here will be Extended-legal come November, none of them benefit from the *Onslaught* set. Thus, consider them merely thought experiments. In fact, consider them bizarre thought experiments because I have gone out of my way to choose spells you might otherwise overlook. After all, the whole idea of this series is to get you thinking in new ways.

I hope that the cards below will tickle your creative funny bone. They all either interact in interesting ways with newer sets or suggest oft-forgotten tricks all on their own. Sometime before November, expect a similar look at both *Invasion* and *Odyssey* blocks.

Final Wrap-up
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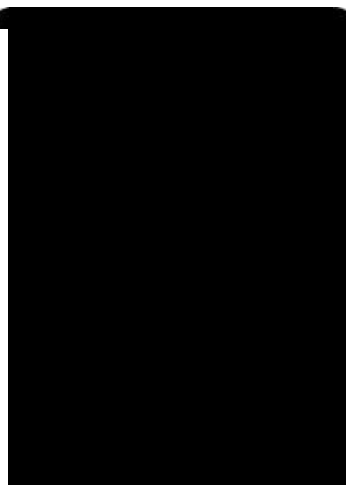
Now it's time to leave your annoying Rebel decks, *Rishadan Ports*, *Nether Spirits*, *Rising Waters*, and *Saproling Bursts* behind. Heck, even toss *Blastoderm* out the window for a moment. Welcome to a world of . . . *Food Chain*?

Food Chain

The appeal of *Food Chain* is pretty obvious. With the Chain, you can transform your little creatures into big creatures. For example, imagine a scenario in which you play a turn-one *Llanowar Elves*, a turn-two *Vine Trellis* and another *Elves*, and then a turn-three *Food Chain*. On turn four, you can calmly drop a fourth forest, tap your critters, sacrifice everything to *Food Chain*, and then play a whopping 13/13 *Ivy Elemental of seething green fury!!!* Woo hoo! Sign me up!

Of course, what has made *Food Chain* so problematic is that a single counterspell can utterly ruin your day. *Bounce* is also a big bummer, and making the decision to remove your creatures from the game just feels too permanent to be a good idea.

Enter *Living Wish*. Now you can happily remove creatures because you know that you can get them back if needed. And if counterspells are prevalent in your local card shop, recent spells like *Insist*, *Gaea's Herald*, and so on can lessen the sting of blue decks. *Bounce* is still a bummer, but now at least you have *Seedtime*, right?



Although **Food Chain** itself is not an alternative-cost card, it works splendidly with **Vine Dryad**. Not only is the Dryad effectively like five free mana of any color with Chain on the table, but it can also be played on an opponent's turn when the Chain would otherwise sit innocuously.

The deck below operates on a few **Food Chain** tenets:

- **Living Wish** and **Vine Dryad** belong in a **Food Chain** deck.
- Mana-producing creatures are good with **Food Chain**.
- Creatures that allow you to draw a card are good with **Food Chain**.
- Creatures that can be played as instants are good with **Food Chain**.
- **Food Chain** decks should strive to play a creature using thirty mana. Wheeee!



Chain Gang

Extended Food Chain Deck 🏆

Main Deck
 60 cards

2 City of Brass 12 Forest 4 Yavimaya Coast <hr/> 18 lands	4 Birds of Paradise 4 Jungle Barrier 4 Llanowar Elves 4 Merfolk Traders 4 Multani's Acolyte 4 Mystic Snake 4 Simian Grunts 2 Verdeloth the Ancient 4 Vine Dryad <hr/> 34 creatures	4 Food Chain 4 Living Wish <hr/> 8 other spells
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Kyren Negotiations

I find two features of **Kyren Negotiations** particularly attractive. First, it promotes a deck with lots and lots of creatures. Second, it provides a win condition on the off-chance those creatures can't attack because of a superior opposing defense, such as **Teferi's Moat**, **Orim's Chant**, **Web of Inertia**, and so on. The fact that your creatures can damage your opponent the turn they come into play is nice, too.

One interesting deck idea using **Kyren Negotiations** is to get lots of land out using cards like **Rampant Growth**, **Skyshroud Claim**, and **Yavimaya Granger** before dropping **Kyren Negotiations** and **Nature's Revolt** (or **Natural Affinity**, et al.) to quickly end the game. Any deck that can win by pinging an opponent to death with land gets my vote as a-okay.

Yet it strikes me that two **Judgment** cards are terrific at creating piles of creatures. The first is **Firecat Blitz**, which, coincidentally, is red. A monored deck with both of these cards along with **Mogg Alarm** (alternative cost!), **Goblin Marshall**, and maybe a **Battle Squadron** or two would be great fun.

The second card is **Battle Screech**, the fastest way to four fliers that I know (and whose flashback is an alternative cost). Negotiations in a primarily white deck is neat because you can rely on creatures that don't tap to attack (think **Serra Angel**) to both attack and then tap for damage using Negotiations.

Of course, you can always try both ideas in the same deck . . .



Battle Blitz Lite!

Extended Kyren Negotiations Deck 🏆

Main Deck
 60 cards

3 Forbidding Watchtower 10 Mountain 14 Plains <hr/>	3 Diving Griffin 3 Flametongue Kavu 4 Goblin Legionnaire <hr/>	4 Battle Screech 3 Firecat Blitz <hr/>
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27 lands	3 Steadfast Guard 4 Wall of Essence 3 Wall of Swords	4 Kyren Negotiations 2 Orim's Thunder
	20 creatures	13 other spells

Delraich

Okay, hands up: Who honestly hasn't tried to use **Delraich** in a deck with **Sengir Autocrat**?

Delraich, in my opinion, is the sweetest creature with an alternative cost, partly because black has no trouble putting three creatures on the table and partly because black also has no trouble putting creatures in the graveyard to good use.

A hyperfast black deck can obviously use **Delraich** to batter an opponent and speed up the win. Another way to go is to make a black-green deck that bides its time behind things like **Wall of Souls** and **Fog of Gnats**, giving itself time to find **Delraich** and **Pernicious Deed**. Indeed, **Delraich** is awfully Deed-proof thanks to its high natural mana cost. Dropping both **Spiritmonger** and **Delraich** onto the table--with **Pernicious Deed** as backup--on turn five or six is a sure way to make someone cry.

But back to **Sengir Autocrat** for a moment. Have you noticed that it is a Minion? If you haven't, check the **Oracle**, because it's true. And have you noticed that **Balthor the Defiled** both makes the Autocrat bigger and can reanimate fallen creatures? Have you?? *Well, have you?!?!*



Black and Forth		
Extended Delraich Deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
2 Cabal Coffers 1 Phyrexian Tower 22 Swamp 25 lands	1 Avatar of Woe 3 Balthor the Defiled 3 Bone Shredder 1 Chainer, Dementia Master 4 Crypt Creeper 4 Delraich 2 Mortivore 4 Ravenous Rats 4 Sengir Autocrat 26 creatures	1 Corpse Dance 2 Diabolic Intent 4 Duress 2 Oath of Ghouls 9 other spells

Avatar of Hope

All of the Avatars are great fun, but somehow **Avatar of Hope** is most often left alone. This avoidance is understandable. After all, although few people would scoff at a 4/9 flier for **✱✱**, it possesses by far the most dangerous and difficult-to-create Avatar "condition." In fact, the ways you can lose with 3 or fewer life, even with a 4/7 flier on the table, are too numerous to mention.

Worship is the constant companion of **Avatar of Hope** because it makes using the Avatar a little less scary. But white just doesn't have many good ways to lose life on purpose. **Phyrexian Processor** is always a fun little trick for a monowhite deck, but otherwise the presence of **Worship** has never been enough for even the kooky among us to try an **Avatar of Hope** deck.

Meanwhile, **Soulgorger Orgg** gets avoided like the plague because it puts you dangerously close to death. I can't help but wonder if **Avatar of Hope** might have found a second friend in the hapless Orgg. Oh, sure, a deck like the one below has a million ways to accidentally kill you, but that one time you stomp your opponent with your beefy flier and her trampling buddy will be worth the pain.

And, yes, I know that no alternative costs appear in the deck. Three out of four ain't bad, though.



Hope and Pray

Extended Avatar of Hope Deck



Main Deck 60 cards

4 Battlefield Forge	2 Academy Rector	4 Browbeat
4 City of Brass	4 Avatar of Hope	4 Earthquake
7 Mountain	4 Bottle Gnomes	2 Enlightened Tutor
7 Plains	4 Goblin Legionnaire	4 Seal of Cleansing
3 Scabland	4 Soulgorger Orgg	3 Worship
25 lands	18 creatures	17 other spells

So ends a bizarre look at both alternative costs and Masques block. As always, I wish I had more time to expand on some of *these* weird deck ideas:

- Squirrel Wrangler, meet *Odyssey*, the set of your dreams.
- Aim *Alter Reality* at any color hoser of previous sets. *Snake Pit*, for some reason, makes me laugh when I think about it.
- Grim Lavamancer keeps *Crag Saurian* in line.
- Madness, threshold, and flashback combine with every Spellshaper under the sun--and cards like *Worry Beads*.
- Ooooh . . . consider madness with *Saproling Cluster* or threshold with *Death Pit Offering* and *Keldon Firebombers*.
- Tired of 3/3 Elephant tokens? Try an *Elephant Resurgence* deck!
- A *Task Mage Assembly - Crimson Acolyte* deck is usually great fun.
- *Midnight Ritual* combines with *Zombie Infestation* to give *Lord of the Undead* lots of minions.
- Speaking of Lords, *Caller of the Hunt* makes a terrific Saproling, Squirrel, Bird, or some other token-creature Lord.

Possibilities abound! Get creative and see what oddities you can unleash upon your less-thoughtful friends.

Next week: Writer's Challenge !!

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