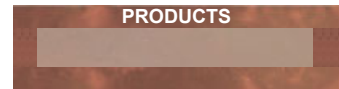


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Writer's Challenge I

Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar
 House of Cards
 Thursday, August 29, 2002



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Last month, Ben Bleiweiss asked me 1) when I was going to run another [Deck Challenge](#) and 2) if he could submit a deck. I replied that 1) I didn't know and 2) of course.



Then it occurred to me that in many respects I hog all the deckbuilding on this site. Oh, sure, Anthony will usually toss at least one decklist into each of his articles. Brian David-Marshall and Bennie Smith supply a deck per article, too; but they write only about once a month. And here I am, pumping out between three and five decklists a week like I'm some sort of sicko freak without a life who is desperately trying to get some attention and . . .

. . . wait, never mind.

Anyway, after talking to Aaron, he sent the following email to Mark, Anthony, Ben, Randy, BDM, Bennie, Rei Nakazawa, Toby Wachter, and Doug Beyer (he's the Web developer who does all the technical stuff):

Hello everyone. Jay M-S wants to do a column in which he showcases decks built by the writers of the site, and I can't argue that it sounds like a good idea. He outlined some quick guidelines below. I hope everyone can

find a few minutes to submit something for him.

--aaron

HOUSE OF CARDS WRITER'S CHALLENGE I

Hi All,

From time to time, I would like to throw out some wacky deckbuilding guidelines and see what the writers of **MagicTheGathering.com** can do. The idea is for my article to highlight your deck creations, then have the readers vote on their favorite deck of the bunch. Think of it as a way to showcase your own deckbuilding creativity.

The guidelines for the first Challenge are below, and there's a limit of one deck per person. If you'd like to participate, please have your deck to me by Friday, August 16.

If you don't want to participate, or if you can't make the deadline, then PTHHTHTHTHTHTHTH on you!

Also, if you have ideas for future Deck/Writer's Challenges, let me know.

Deck Guidelines:

Pick any *two* of the following:

- Battle of Wits
- Chance Encounter
- Coalition Victory
- Epic Struggle
- Mortal Combat
- Test of Endurance

Those two cards will be your deck's primary paths to victory. Try to make both of them viable (not a 250-card **Battle of Wits** deck with a single copy of **Coalition Victory** it will never play). I debated including **Celestial Convergence** and **The Cheese Stands Alone**, but decided to leave them out. If you feel passionately that you'd like to use one of these two (or both), let me know.



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RULES

The deck can fall under any of the following formats: *Odyssey* Block Constructed, Standard, Extended, November-Extended (without *Onslaught*), Type 1.5, Vintage, or "Casual" (allowing any card printed, including *Portal*, *Unglued*, etc.). Tell me in your email which one you chose, in case it's not obvious to me.

Tell me whether the deck is meant to be a one-on-one "duel" deck or a multiplayer deck.

Normal Constructed guidelines apply (60-card minimum deck, with a maximum of four copies of any card other than basic land, etc.).

No sideboards are allowed unless you're using Wishes.

If you want to include a brief description of the deck or certain card choices, that would be great--but it's not necessary.

Try to remember what House of Cards is all about, and have fun with the assignment. These won't be Pro Tour - viable decks, but someone might be inspired to bring one to Friday Night **Magic** or a small local tournament.

Any questions--let me know. Send your deck to me at houseofcards@wizards.com by Friday, August 16!

--j

An immediate reply came from Anthony:

See, folks, here's why we shouldn't do alternative win conditions in **Magic**: Another silly Jay Mouldenheizerowzer-Salazalazar contest.

Fine, I'll do something. Only on the condition that we all enter a binding contract *not* to do **Epic Struggle** - **Test of Endurance** - **Congregate** - **Soul Warden**.

Ben, do you need help digging up cards from older expansions, or are you all set there?

Ciao,
AA

That Alongi . . . he sure is a funny guy.

Toby quickly followed:

Let me get this straight: You want me to put together a **Battle of Wits** decklist?

Wow. That really is a challenge. I don't know if I'm up for it, but I'll try my best.

Toby

Check out [here](#) to see why Mr. Wachter, too, is a funny guy.



Despite the *hilarious* commentary, the deranged and motley crew rose to the Challenge. In fact, they even decided to make it *at least two* win conditions rather than exactly two. I asked Aaron to participate as well, making ten total contestants in this deck beauty pageant.

The decks are listed below, with who created them hidden until next week. Peruse at your leisure and vote for your favorite deck. Trust me: It will take a while because all of the decks use a bewildering array of tricks. All I can say is that I am now *very* afraid of my colleagues.

The descriptions below are mine, not those of the creators. It turns out that if you give writers a chance to explain their decks, you get a veritable novella on card interactions. I'll do my best not to swing the vote one way or the other.

Chance Encounter - Mortal Combat

What do you get when you combine coin flips and a full graveyard? A whole bunch of creatures that threaten to destroy themselves through coin flips. That, and a few Djinnns and Efreets that can merrily flip coins until **Lord of Tresserhorn** or **Avatar of Woe** decides to take them out. Note that the **Frenetic Efreet** "trick" with **Chance Encounter** no longer [works](#), although 'Freet still fits the deck perfectly. Best quote from the creator: "Goblin Kites are [expletive] broken in this deck; I should have packed in four."

How Lucky You Died



Type 1 Chance Encounter - Mortal Combat Deck

Main Deck 60 cards

11 Mountain	1 Avatar of Woe	2 Chance Encounter
5 Swamp	4 Chaotic Goo	1 Crooked Scales
4 Underground Sea	3 Frenetic Efreet	1 Goblin Festival
4 Volcanic Island	1 Lord of Tresserhorn	1 Goblin Kites
24 lands	2 Mijae Djinn	1 Impulsive Maneuvers
	4 Mogg Assassin	1 Mask of the Mimic
	4 Orcish Captain	2 Mortal Combat
	4 Viashino Sandswimmer	1 Puppet's Verdict
	2 Ydwen Efreet	1 Squee's Revenge
	25 creatures	11 other spells

Coalition Victory - Epic Struggle

What do you get when you combine several colors and lots of critters, some of them many-colored? A deck that aims to fill the board with land and recur **Time Warp** and **Time Stretch** an obscene number of times (with counterspell backup), eventually playing **Sliver Queen** followed by either **Coalition Victory** for the immediate win or Sliver tokens and **Epic Struggle** for a slow, painful death. **Howling Mine** and **Helm of Awakening** keep multiplayer opponents happy before you "go off" and beat them. Best quote from the creator: "The deck can't quite take infinite turns, but it can come close enough that you should have no problem winning with whatever victory condition suits you."

Just Win, Baby

Extended Multiplayer Coalition Victory - Epic Struggle Deck

Main Deck 60 cards

8 Island	2 Sliver Queen	1 Coalition Victory
4 Tropical Island	2 creatures	1 Counterspell
4 Tundra		1 Epic Struggle
4 Underground Sea		1 Ertai's Meddling
4 Volcanic Island		4 Force of Will
24 lands		4 Helm of Awakening
		4 Howling Mine
		2 Power Sink
		3 Recall
		4 Relearn
		4 Sapphire Medallion
		1 Time Stretch
		4 Time Warp
		34 other spells

Epic Struggle - Mortal Combat

What do you get when you combine lots of critters with a full graveyard? A deck that tries to 1) mill a bunch of creatures into your graveyard with **Hermit Druid** and win with **Mortal Combat** or 2) use **Living Death**, **Dual Nature**, **Deranged Hermit**, and **Recurring Nightmare** to win with **Epic Struggle**. **Genesis** and **Monk Idealist** fish out the necessary enchantment(s) from your graveyard if needed. Best quote from the creator: "The nice thing about using the 'I Win' enchantment approach is that you can dedicate your entire toolbox to your own combo instead of tainting the process with ways to deal with your opponent's schemes."

Epic Combat!!!

Extended Epic Struggle - Mortal Combat Deck

Main Deck 60 cards

4 Brushland	4 Academy Rector	1 Dual Nature
4 Caves of Koilos	1 Anarchist	1 Epic Struggle
4 City of Brass	1 Battlefield Scrounger	1 Living Death
3 Forest	4 Birds of Paradise	1 Mortal Combat
4 Llanowar Wastes	1 Coffin Queen	1 Recurring Nightmare
2 Rith's Grove	4 Deranged Hermit	3 Vampiric Tutor
21 lands	1 Fountain Watch	8 other spells
	1 Genesis	
	4 Hermit Druid	
	4 Llanowar Elves	

1 Monk Idealist
 1 Phyrexian Plaguelord
 4 Vine Trellis

31 creatures

Epic Struggle - Chance Encounter

What do you get when you combine lots of critters with coin-flips? Two different things, apparently.

The first thing you get is **Giant Fan** and **Sheep**. This deck looks to put creatures, tokens, and counters to a dizzying array of uses. **Giant Fan** is there to speed up token creation or to turn +1/+1 counters into Luck counters to speed toward **Chance Encounter**. **Goblin Bookie** is there to slant coin flipping in your favor, while most of the other creatures are adept at making dorky little tokens. Best quote from the creator: "And, of course, **Flock of Rabid Sheep** has perfect synergy between our two win conditions."

Boggle		
Casual Epic Struggle - Chance Encounter Deck		
Main Deck 62 cards		
7 Forest	4 Elvish Farmer	3 Chance Encounter
4 Karplusan Forest	4 Goblin Bookie	3 Epic Struggle
7 Mountain	4 Spike Breeder	4 Flock of Rabid Sheep
4 Taiga	2 Spike Rogue	4 Giant Fan
22 lands	4 Thallid	2 Impulsive Maneuvers
	18 creatures	4 Ley Line
		2 Parallel Evolution
		22 other spells

The second thing you get is **Wood** and **Orcs**. The core of this deck is the combination of **Jungle Patrol** and **Intruder Alarm**, which, along with mana-producing creatures, can produce "infinite" silly Walls. The first option for victory, with 104,000 Wood tokens, is **Epic Struggle**. The second way to victory uses **Unnatural Selection** and **Orcish Captain** to make some of the tokens into Orcs and flip coins with them (using the "infinite" red mana the Woods generates) for a **Chance Encounter** win. Best quote from the creator: "This makes me happy because you are generating more than 20 creatures, yet attacking with them to win is not an option."

Infinite Wood		
Extended Epic Struggle - Chance Encounter Deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
8 Forest	2 Archivist	2 Bubble Matrix
2 Gaea's Cradle	4 Birds of Paradise	2 Chance Encounter
4 Taiga	4 Jungle Patrol	4 Epic Struggle
4 Tropical Island	4 Llanowar Elves	4 Intruder Alarm
4 Volcanic Island	4 Orcish Captain	2 Unnatural Selection
2 Yavimaya Coast	4 Vine Trellis	14 other spells
24 lands	22 creatures	

Battle of Wits - Mortal Combat

What do you get when you combine a big library with a full graveyard? Besides an enormously difficult shuffle, you get a deck that tries to tutor for **Battle of Wits** to win as option one, or fill its graveyard with **Traumatize** (using it on yourself) or **Cephalid Vandal** to win with **Mortal Combat** as option two. Of course, you can also **Traumatize** yourself to fuel the biggest **Mortivore** or **Psychatog** ever known to humankind. The sideboard is included because of **Cunning Wish**--it provides some extra tutoring power and defense. Best quote from the creator: "This 'Challenge' isn't much of a challenge at all." (Hurumph!)

Challenge? What Challenge?		
Standard Battle of Wits - Mortal Combat Deck		
Main Deck 243 cards		Sideboard
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Absorb	3 Circle of Protection: Black
4 Coastal Tower	4 Addle	1 Dismantling Blow
4 Darkwater Catacombs	4 Battle of Wits	1 Disrupt

38 Island	4 Chainer's Edict	1 Divert
14 Plains	4 Circular Logic	1 Insidious Dreams
4 Salt Marsh	4 Counterspell	4 Mana Short
4 Skycloud Expanse	4 Cunning Wish	4 Teferi's Moat
20 Swamp	4 Deep Analysis	
4 Underground River	4 Diabolic Tutor	15 sideboard cards
96 lands	4 Dromar's Charm	
	4 Duress	
4 Cephalid Vandal	4 Exclude	
4 Meddling Mage	4 Fact or Fiction	
4 Merfolk Looter	3 Insidious Dreams	
4 Mesmeric Fiend	4 Mortal Combat	
4 Millikin	4 Opportunity	
4 Mortivore	4 Recoil	
4 Possessed Aven	4 Repulse	
4 Psychatog	4 Rout	
4 Shadowmage Infiltrator	4 Sleight of Hand	
4 Thieving Magpie	4 Standstill	
40 creatures	4 Syncopate	
	4 Tainted Pact	
	4 Traumatize	
	4 Undermine	
	4 Upheaval	
	4 Wrath of God	
	107 other spells	

Test of Endurance - Coalition Victory

What do you get when you combine loads of life with several colors and five-colored creatures? A "domain" deck that looks to quickly diversify its mana into all five basic land types to make good use of spells like [Evasive Action](#), [Worldly Counsel](#), [Allied Strategies](#), and--most importantly--[Collective Restraint](#). Eventually the deck uses a combination of [Death Grasp](#), [Overgrown Estate](#), and [Ancestral Tribute](#) to reach 50 life. Either that or it simply drops [Cromat](#) or [Atogatog](#) to win with [Coalition Victory](#). Best quote from the creator (Well, actually he didn't provide anything besides a decklist, but I'd like to think he wrote the following): "CROMAT! ATOGATOG! MUHAHAHAHA!"

Coalition Endurance		
Standard Test of Endurance - Coalition Victory Deck		
Main Deck 61 cards		
8 Forest	2 Atogatog	4 Allied Strategies
8 Island	2 Cromat	1 Ancestral Tribute
1 Mountain		2 Coalition Victory
3 Plains	4 creatures	4 Collective Restraint
2 Swamp		1 Death Grasp
22 lands		3 Duress
		3 Evasive Action
		1 Far Wanderings
		3 Harrow
		3 Lay of the Land
		1 Overgrown Estate
		2 Pernicious Deed
		3 Test of Endurance
		4 Worldly Counsel
		35 other spells

The Cheese Stands Alone - Coalition Victory

What do you get when you combine Cheese and all five colors? A guy with a cheese head, which is pretty funny. Plan #1 here is to play [The Cheese Stands Alone](#) and then [Kaervek's Spite](#) in response. Another way to Cheese your opponent is to play your mighty enchantment and then play [Jokulhaups](#) while discarding your hand to [Wild Mongrel](#). Of course, if worse comes to worse you can plop a five-color creature onto the board and simply Coalition your way to victory. Best quote from the creator: "The cool win is Cheese, Spite in response."

All or Nothing		
Casual Cheese Stands Alone - Coalition Victory Deck		
Main Deck 59 cards		

1 Badlands	1 Atogatog	2 The Cheese Stands Alone
2 Bad River	4 Birds of Paradise	1 Coalition Victory
2 Bayou	1 Cromat	1 Crop Rotation
2 Flood Plain	2 Sliver Queen	4 Dark Ritual
2 Grasslands	4 Wild Mongrel	1 Defense Grid
2 Mountain Valley		1 Demonic Tutor
1 Plateau	12 creatures	1 Enlightened Tutor
2 Rocky Tar Pit		2 Force of Will
2 Savannah		1 Gamble
1 Scrubland		1 Impulse
2 Taiga		1 Jokulhaups
2 Tropical Island		1 Kaervek's Spite
1 Tundra		2 Land Grant
1 Underground Sea		1 Mystical Tutor
1 Volcanic Island		1 Regrowth
		1 Show and Tell
		1 Tainted Pact
24 lands		
		23 other spells

All of 'Em


What do you get when you combine a big library; a full graveyard; and lots of life, critters, and color? A brain-splitting mess, frankly. If you're lucky, you win using **Battle of Wits** while your library is full. Otherwise, what you really want to do is **Traumatize** yourself. Armed with your big graveyard, you then **Living Death** and/or **Replenish** as necessary with the idea that at least *one* of the win conditions will be met. You may also end up decking your opponent, especially if using **Ancestral Tribute** or **Ancestor's Chosen**. Best quote from the creator: "Big plan = Traumatize."

5 Lands, 8 Guys, a Lot of Rares, and a Whole Bunch of Winning		
Type 1 Alternative - Win Condition Deck		
Main Deck		
243 cards		
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Ancestor's Chosen	1 Ancestral Recall
4 Badlands	4 Atogatog	4 Ancestral Tribute
4 Battlefield Forge	4 Coffin Puppets	4 Artifact Mutation
4 Bayou	4 Cromat	4 Aura Mutation
4 Brushland	4 Draco	4 Battle of Wits
4 Caves of Koilos	4 Goblin Marshal	1 Black Lotus
1 Forest	4 Hazezon Tamar	1 Braingeyser
1 Island	4 Hermit Druid	4 Coalition Victory
4 Karplusan Forest	4 Krovikan Horror	4 Epic Struggle
1 Library of Alexandria	4 Psychatog	2 Goblin Trenches
4 Llanowar Wastes	4 Sengir Autocrat	4 Insidious Dreams
1 Mountain	4 Shard Phoenix	4 Intuition
1 Plains	4 Shyft	4 Living Death
4 Plateau	4 Sliver Queen	1 Memory Jar
4 Savannah	4 Squee, Goblin Nabob	4 Mortal Combat
4 Scrubland	4 Squirrel Wrangler	1 Mox Diamond
4 Shivan Reef	4 Wall of Kelp	1 Mox Emerald
4 Sulfurous Springs		1 Mox Jet
1 Swamp	68 creatures	1 Mox Pearl
4 Taiga		1 Mox Ruby
1 Thawing Glaciers		1 Mox Sapphire
4 Tropical Island		4 Nostalgic Dreams
4 Tundra		4 Oath of Druids
4 Underground River		1 Recall
4 Underground Sea		4 Replenish
4 Volcanic Island		1 Stroke of Genius
4 Yavimaya Coast		4 Test of Endurance
		1 Timetwister
87 lands		1 Time Spiral
		1 Time Walk
		4 Traumatize
		4 Twilight's Call
		1 Vampiric Tutor
		1 Wheel of Fortune
		4 Wild Research
		1 Yawgmoth's Will
		88 other spells

Can you believe it? Only two writers picked the same combination--and they both used utterly different paths to victory. Wow, do I feel clever!

But so many questions remain! Which is your favorite deck? Which is my favorite? Who created which deck? Who used those *Unglued* cards? Who was the lone spoilsport who didn't submit a deck?

And, of course, which deck is the people's choice? Deadline for voting is Tuesday September 3. Tune in next week to find out the results!

What is your favorite Writer's Challenge Deck? 

- How Lucky You Died
- Just Win, Baby
- Epic Combat!!!
- Boggle
- Infinite Wood
- Challenge? What Challenge?
- Coalition Endurance
- All or Nothing
- 5 Lands, 8 Guys, a Lot of Rares, and a Whole Bunch of Winning

Jay may be reached at houseofcards@wizards.com.



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