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Art Decko

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House of Cards
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

First, here are the results of last week's [Writer's Challenge](#)! A whole slew of you voted, and your favorite deck appears to be (drum roll) . . .

| Deck | Creator | Votes | Percentage |
|---|-------------------|-------------|---------------|
| 5 Lands, 8 Guys, a Lot of Rares, and a Whole Bunch of Winning | by Ben Bleiweiss | 1142 | 40.4% |
| Infinite Wood | by Aaron Forsythe | 429 | 15.2% |
| All or Nothing | by Mark Rosewater | 323 | 11.4% |
| Challenge, What Challenge? | by Toby Wachter | 265 | 9.4% |
| How Lucky You Died | by Anthony Alongi | 177 | 6.3% |
| Boggle | by Rei Nakazawa | 144 | 5.1% |
| Coalition Endurance | by Doug Beyer | 119 | 4.2% |
| Just Win, Baby | by Randy Buehler | 118 | 4.2% |
| Epic Combat | by Bennie Smith | 109 | 3.9% |
| Total | | 2826 | 100.0% |

Ben pretty much smoked the competition, proving both that bigger truly is better and that stuffing your deck full of rares won't kill your chances of winning. Ben's deck does probably win the award for most versatile by trying to win using almost every alternative win condition suggested. I think Aaron's deck (and Randy's, too, for that matter) would have gotten more votes had I done a better job of explaining their combos. But it's clear that Ben's deck is the favorite for round one of the Writer's Challenge. Nice job, Ben!

Only a few people wrote in to guess *my* favorite of the bunch. Oddly, they all guessed correctly. I personally loved Rei's funky counters-tokens-creatures deck. I mean, **Flock of Rabid Sheep**? Come on, people!

It goes without saying, but if you have ideas for future Writer's Challenges, let me know. I will do this sort of thing only occasionally (probably once every few months), but I'm always up for creative column ideas. For all of you chomping at the bit for the next Deck Challenge, you need wait only about four weeks.

Now, let's talk artist theme decks.

Art is an obvious place to look when assembling theme decks, because a card's art gives it a great deal of its thematic flavor in the first place. The original version of **Might of Oaks**, for example, clearly belongs in a Squirrel theme deck, even though its mechanic suggests nothing at all about Squirrels. Choose some cryptic topic like "North" or "World War II" or "Easter Bunny" and assign people to make theme decks. My guess is that many people will rely heavily on art, which will result in, for example, **Kezzerdrix** in the Easter Bunny decks.

Card names, mechanics, and flavor text all suggest themes, but a deck with consistent art is somehow *more* thematic. When you shuffle your "Night" deck and draw your opening hand, it just looks cool if it has mostly black and dark blue art. In addition, if you have clearly tied your theme deck to art, it's usually easier to envision what's happening in the "game world" as you flip cards across your dining room table.

An artist theme deck ties together the deck in a slightly different--but no less aesthetically pleasing--way. I define an artist theme deck as "a deck in which all the cards, except possibly basic land, are illustrated by the same artist." Beyond that simple definition, you can supply your own guidelines for deckbuilding. I naturally tend to build decks using two additional rules:

- "Normal" Constructed guidelines apply (max of four of each card other than basic land, 60-card minimum deck, etc.).
- Cards may be from any set, including the *Portal* and *Unglued* sets, and the *Starter* game.



In an artist theme deck, the most relevant information on the card is the illustrator.

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You can throw out these two rules if you want. For example, wouldn't it be interesting if you made artist theme decks that were *Mirage* block, 40-cards minimum, and you had no maximum on the number of each card you could use?

If you don't understand why someone would *want* to build an artist theme deck, then you probably don't understand the House of Cards column. Restricting yourself to one artist means using creativity to turn a very limited card pool into a playable deck. Artist theme decks are a challenge, and deckbuilding challenges are fun. Artist theme decks are fun to build, and they feel thematically consistent because the same hand painted all of the cards. In short, they're spiffy looking.

Like most theme decks, I strongly advise you to play artist theme decks against other artist theme decks. Hold a "theme party" for which everyone brings an artist theme deck and plays round-robin. Otherwise, your deck will look cool, but will probably get slaughtered by any nontheme Constructed deck. For example, when building a "Mark Brill" deck, your creature-removal possibilities are pretty much *Agonizing Demise* and *Flameshot*. These choices are fun if you're playing someone else who has similar limitations, but not so fun when your opponent busts out *Jackal Pup*, *Ball Lightning*, and *Fireblast*.

In an artist theme party, my personal preference is to have one artist per party. It's not as interesting if two "Mark Tedin" decks face off against each other because they will probably be too similar. Instead, I like to see what happens when Mark Tedin faces off against "Phil Foglio." Usually, this is as easy as having your friends agree on who's playing which artist, or to draw names out of a hat. Oh, and don't invite your friend Joe if his first reaction to your idea of a theme party is "Who painted *Morphling*?"

The real trick in building an artist theme deck is figuring out who painted which cards. I suppose you could sort your entire collection by artist, but then you'd have waaaaay more time on your hands than I. I have used two pretty simple methods for finding lists of cards by a particular artist. There are probably dozens more ways to do so, but these are both straightforward.

1) Get *Magic Online*. Even if you've decided that *Magic Online* is too expensive or too time-consuming for you as a player, its base price is well worth the searchable card database. To find artist cardlists on *Magic Online*, follow these steps in the "Deck Editor" section:

- Set "Sets" to "All."
- Make sure the "My Cards" button isn't clicked.
- Put your artist's name into the "Search for" field. Usually, you can even get away with searching for the artist's last name.

2) Read Toby Wachter. Toby is interviewing the various artists of *Magic*. You can already read his pieces on [John Avon](#), [Matt Wilson](#), [Terese Nielson](#), [Matt Cavotta](#), and, coming soon, rk post. A handy-dandy side effect is that at the end of each article, there's a comprehensive list of the artist's credits. Sure, the lists become dated eventually, but it's a lot easier to scan cards from *Judgment* for Matt Cavotta paintings than your entire collection.

Below you will find a few artist theme decks from my favorite *Magic* artist: Rebecca Guay. I don't know why I like Rebecca's card art so dang much, but somehow her paintings make me smile. In fact, when my wife and I recently went on a crusade to own a piece of original *Magic* artwork, my first and only stop was Rebecca. (You can see the results of my efforts below.)



The original art for Moment's Peace hangs in the Moldenhauer-Salazar abode.

Making a deck with only Rebecca Guay cards makes for some pretty interesting decision making. She's done most of her work in green and white, with almost no black or red cards at all. Then again, one of her red cards is *Tectonic Break*, and one of her black cards is *Perish*; these are obviously deck-worthy.

The first deck is built around *Nantuko Shrine*, with lots of ways to dump cards into your graveyard (the best being *Mulch*) and draw cards (the best being *Fecundity* with your little Squirrels). You can even *Dwell on the Past* to keep opposing graveyards from getting too full. *Kaysa* allows your Squirrels to be better than your opponent's, and is about the only *Overrun*-like effect available to a Guay deck.

Nantoooko!

Rebecca Guay Theme Deck #1

Main Deck
60 cards

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 12 Forest | 4 Elvish Lyrist | 4 Cloak of Feathers |
| 8 Island | 4 Kaysa | 4 Dwell on the Past |
| 20 lands | 8 creatures | 4 Fecundity |
| | | 4 Memory Lapse |
| | | 4 Mulch |
| | | 4 Nantuko Shrine |
| | | 4 Predict |
| | | 4 Respite |
| | | 32 other spells |

The second deck is built around **Transcendence** (I'm sort of doing a "bad rare" cycle here), with **Aura Fracture** to ensure you don't die by gaining too much life. The deck's best way to win is probably **Commander Eesha**, although it *does* muster a halfhearted white weenie offense.

Life-a-Lot

Rebecca Guay Theme Deck #2

Main Deck
60 cards

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 24 Plains | 3 Auramancer | 4 Aura Fracture |
| 24 lands | 4 Commander Eesha | 4 Bandage |
| | 2 Starlit Angel | 4 Reverent Mantra |
| | 4 Vigilant Martyr | 4 Serra's Hymn |
| | 4 Youthful Knight | 3 Transcendence |
| | 17 creatures | 19 other spells |

The third deck is a simple beatdown deck, using the best tools from green and black that Guay has painted. **Pine Barrens** probably doesn't fit an aggressive deck, but I like using the only multicolor land from Rebecca Guay.

Norwood

Rebecca Guay Theme Deck #3

Main Deck
60 cards

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 13 Forest | 4 Elvish Lyrist | 4 Animate Land |
| 4 Pine Barrens | 4 Heartwood Dryad | 4 Dark Banishing |
| 7 Swamp | 2 Kaysa | 4 Mind Knives |
| 24 lands | 4 Lynx | 2 Planeswalker's Favor |
| | 4 Norwood Riders | 14 other spells |
| | 4 Norwood Warrior | |
| | 22 creatures | |

I also toyed with a **Protective Sphere - Pulse of Llanowar** deck, green-white beatdown, blue-white beatdown (**Sea Drake** is nuts), blue-black control, and a **Tectonic Break - Elves** deck.



Four of Rebecca Guay's more recognizable pieces: **Commander Eesha**, **Kaysa**, **Reverent Mantra**, and **Mulch**

These are merely examples, though. Have fun with it and see what you can create from your own favorite **Magic** artist. And if you *do* end up holding an artist theme party of some kind, email me and let me know what happened.

Next week: *Onslaught* cards, ho!

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