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Huntin' Heads and Takin' Names

Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar
House of Cards
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

In discussing the cards for this first week of Onslaught previews, Aaron conceded that I had the "weakest" card. Maybe so, but my card has the coolest name. Thragg? *Hystrodon*? Puh-lease. Let's talk about the *Headhunter*!

I am immensely happy that a card finally has the name *Headhunter*. *Witch Hunter* arrived very early in *Magic's* lifespan, with *Bounty Hunter* and *Treasure Hunter* coming much later. I hadn't even realized I missed *Headhunter* until it was sitting there in front of me, and now I wonder how I refrained from outrage all these years without it.

The question is: How do I use *Headhunter*? I must use it; The name alone compels me to do so. The fact that it's actually affordable (both in mana cost and as an uncommon) only seals *Headhunter's* pudgy, zombie-stealing body into future decks of mine.

Let me break down *Headhunter* for a moment and tell you what I see in terms of possibilities. I will be talking Type 2 here--the Type 2 where *Invasion* has left us in its multicolor wake--because when allowed a default, I default to Type 2. Keep in mind, too, that any decks I post are merely thought experiments. Any "real" Type 2 decks will have access to the rest of *Onslaught*.

To start things off... Why would I want to play *Headhunter* without morph?

First of all, as I just said, it's affordable. 1 is reasonable even for a 1/1. Just look at *Werebear*, *Ravenous Rats*, *Waterfront Bouncer*, *Mogg Maniac*, or *Beloved Chaplain* as examples of 1/1s for two mana that belong in plenty of decks. *Headhunter* may not be an offensive powerhouse, but it's just fine for the price.

Second, if it actually makes it to your opponent, *Headhunter* can cause some hefty disruption. *Ravenous Rats* is great because it usually provides a 2-for-1 card advantage--it nabs a card right away via discard and then it requires another card to kill it. Given enough time and a way to remove blockers, *Headhunter* can turn out to be a much better deal than 2-for-1.

Ah, deck idea: Try *Headhunter* in combination with other creatures that do cool things when they deal combat damage, using either red burn or blue bounce to get rid of blockers. Intuitively, I like the idea of bounce best since *Headhunter* can then strip the bounced creatures away from an opponent's hand. Besides, bounce is a more reliable way than burn to remove potential blockers.



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Waltzing By

Type 2 Headhunter deck

Main Deck
60 cards

8 <i>Island</i> 8 <i>Swamp</i> 4 <i>Underground River</i> 2 <i>Darkwater Catacombs</i> 1 <i>Tainted Isle</i> <hr/> 23 lands	4 <i>Headhunter</i> 4 <i>Cephalid Constable</i> 4 <i>Shadowmage Infiltrator</i> 3 <i>Faceless Butcher</i> 2 <i>Thieving Magpie</i> <hr/> 17 creatures	4 <i>Duress</i> 4 <i>Peek</i> 4 <i>AEther Burst</i> 4 <i>Chainer's Edict</i> 2 <i>Howl from Beyond</i> 2 <i>Deep Analysis</i> <hr/> 20 other spells
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Finally, *Headhunter* is a Cleric. This fact might seem irrelevant now, but trust me that when *Onslaught* is released you will care a lot about creature types. (as a sidenote, this also may seal *Onslaught* as my all-time favorite set ever.)

Deck idea: Use *Headhunter* in a Cleric deck. Unfortunately, *Caves of Koilos*, *Vindicate*, *Spectral Lynx*, *Death Grasp*, and *Gerrard's Verdict* will no longer be in Type 2 to spruce up white/black decks. But *Master Apothecary* and *Tainted Field* are a fine starting point, and the combination of *Headhunter* and *Confessor* is kinda cute.

Unholy

Type 2 Clerics deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
10 Plains	4 Confessor	4 Duress
10 Swamp	4 Beloved Chaplain	4 Chainer's Edict
4 Tainted Field	4 Headhunter	4 Megrim
24 lands	4 Shieldmage Advocate	2 Skeletal Scrying
	4 Master Apothecary	2 Smother
	20 creatures	16 other spells

Okay, so I might find a way to use **Headhunter** even without morph. But this morph business is even more interesting.

Why would I want to play **Headhunter** as nameless, colorless, typeless critter?

First off, I've already noted that **Headhunter** is fairly anemic on offense. As a 1/1, he's also very fragile. Sometimes--usually late in the game--I might want a 2/2, not a 1/1. Or perhaps I see an opportunity to end the game early by taking advantage of a manascrewed opponent. Or maybe my opponent has dropped a **Caltrop** which would otherwise nullify **Headhunter**. Whatever the case, sometimes it is nicer to have a beefier creature that can deal and take a bit more damage.

Deck idea: Use **Headhunter** in a fast, beatdown black deck. **Headhunter** will serve as disruption in its normal form and can add to the beatdown in its other form. Simple, straightforward, and maybe a little deadly.

Murder, Inc. Type 2 Speed Black deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
22 Swamp	4 Headhunter	4 Duress
22 lands	4 Foul Imp	4 Unholy Strength
	4 Nantuko Shade	4 Chainer's Edict
	3 Ichorid	4 Smother
	3 Faceless Butcher	4 Rancid Earth
	18 creatures	20 other spells

Second, as the above deck at least partially demonstrates, Protection from black is an ability worth noting these days. In fact, **Phantom Centaur** might be one of the premier creatures in Type 2. Oh, I know that Protection from black doesn't help against black's removal like **Innocent Blood**, **Chainer's Edict**, and **Mutilate**. But it does thwart mainstays like **Nantuko Shade** and **Faceless Butcher**. When an opponent is using pro-black creatures, it often downright sucks to have a **Headhunter** on the table. In these cases, a colorless critter sounds pretty good.

Finally, the Odyssey block has turned discarding into a strategy unto itself. Madness, flashback, and threshold have made creatures like **Headhunter** at best less effective and at worst a liability. If your opponent drops a first turn island followed by **Careful Study** and a **Basking Rootwalla** or two, you may just want to keep **Headhunter** a colorless, boring creature. It's nice to have the option to do so.

Okay, now the tricky part: Why would I want to pay **Headhunter's** ☠ morph cost?

The big reason, and it holds true for all morph creatures, is deception. By dropping your nameless 2/2, you make an opponent very nervous whenever that creature attacks, blocks, etc. This "bluffing" is most effective when you use more morph creatures than simply **Headhunter**. If you have several morph creatures of varying size and ability, every combat situation is a hand-wringing nightmare for your opponent. Using creature removal like **Volcanic Hammer** is risky for an opponent too, since you might well decide to Morph your 2/2 into a 6/6 Demon as easily as a 1/1 Cleric.



The good news here is that **Headhunter**'s morph cost is so low that if it does manage to slip by blockers, you can easily morph it into a hand-stealing fat man when your **Snapping Thragg** might otherwise be mana-tied to its colorless form.

Deck idea: Use lots of morph creatures of varying size to spook opponents.

Sir Morph-a-Lot

Type 2 Morph deck 

Main Deck
61 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11 Forest 2 Mountain 8 Swamp 4 City of Brass <hr/> 25 lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Birds of Paradise 4 Llanowar Elves 4 Headhunter 4 Snapping Thragg 4 Hystrodon 4 Grinning Demon <hr/> 24 creatures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Rampant Growth 4 Deep Reconnaissance 4 Creeping Mold <hr/> 12 other spells
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I suppose another benefit of **Headhunter** specifically is that it can morph to thwart spells like **Dark Banishing** or surprisingly block creatures like **Shadowmage Infiltrator** in a pinch. I'm not sure these situations will come up very often, though, and I also don't think they inspire a deck.

Of course, some ways to use **Headhunter** are even more straightforward than those I've outlined above. For example, it can be one of many pieces of a general discard deck:

Pick and Choose

Type 2 discard deck 

Main Deck
60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21 Swamp 2 Cabal Coffers <hr/> 23 lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Headhunter 4 Abyssal Specter 4 Guiltfeeder <hr/> 12 creatures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Cabal Therapy 4 Chainer's Edict 4 Megrim 4 Rancid Earth 3 Duress 2 Mutilate 2 Mind Sludge 2 Skeletal Scrying <hr/> 25 other spells
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Or, as I have already mentioned, it can be part of a million theme decks, such as a theme deck dedicated to The Hunt...

The Hunt

Headhunter theme deck 

Main Deck
60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 Forest 7 Swamp 4 Bayou <hr/> 24 lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Sacred Prey 4 Headhunter 4 Hunting Moa 4 Bounty Hunter 4 Hunted Wumpus 2 Elvish Hunter 2 Tracker 1 Dauthi Trapper 1 Master of the Hunt <hr/> 26 creatures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Serrated Arrows 3 Pit Trap 2 Bounty of the Hunt 1 Poison Arrow <hr/> 10 other spells
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...or a theme deck built specifically around Headhunter itself...

The Headhunter

Headhunter theme deck 

Main Deck
60 cards

14 Swamp	4 Headhunter	4 Headstone
4 Badlands	4 Headless Horseman	4 Mind Knives
4 Tainted Peak	4 Deadhead	4 Death Stroke
2 Urborg Volcano	4 Faceless Butcher	2 Hand of Death
24 lands	3 Two-Headed Dragon	2 Lava Axe
	1 Two-Headed Giant of Foriys	16 other spells
	20 creatures	

Admittedly, Aaron may be correct that **Headhunter** lacks the pizzazz of **Exalted Angel** or **Hystrodon**. It may not wreak as much combat havoc as **Snapping Thragg**. It also won't be quite as surprising as Randy's card tomorrow (oooo... foreshadowing). But it *will* hit the table before all of those losers and steal their heads before they can ever get played. Ha ha! Take that!

Mostly, what I hope I have given you is a way to start dissecting creatures with this new morph mechanic, and ways to think about how and when you might use them in decks. If you don't play theme decks and **Headhunter's** name isn't enough to entice you, you can at least start to see the potential for other morph creatures. If you thought combat math with **Wild Mongrel** and **Psychatog** was brain-splitting, welcome to a whole new world of headaches.

Next week: The *Onslaught* continues!

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Jay may be reached at houseofcards@wizards.com.



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