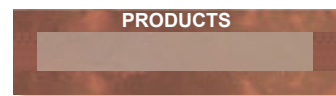


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# An Onslaught of Decks

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House of Cards  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

More than 700 people sent *Onslaught*-only decks to me for [Deck Challenge 3](#). I'll pause a moment so that number can sink in, because it *really* impresses me.

There is no way on this green Earth that I can properly summarize 700 deck submissions. Moreover, the sheer variety and creativity of the submissions surpassed the first two [Challenges](#), which is saying quite a bit. Picking ten from the bunch seemed silly, but I did it anyway.

Remember that the decks below are not necessarily the best in design. Rather, they stood out from their peers in terms of creativity and somehow managed to catch my eye. Basically, I just like these ten decks more than the others this particular week . . . how's *that* for subjective?

What follows are the basic categories that I broke the submissions into (listed from most common to least common deck type). Generally speaking, your deck had a better chance of catching my eye if it fit into one of the later categories.



## You Say You Want an Evolution

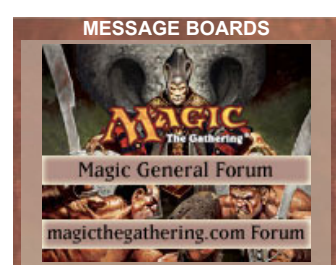
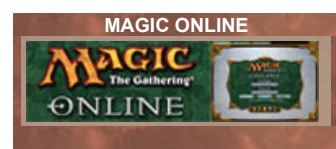
The single most submitted deck centered on [Artificial Evolution](#). Am I rubbing off on you people or is *Onslaught* really that weird? No matter what the strategy, if the deck used four copies of [Artificial Evolution](#) and the commentary began "The trick here is to play [Artificial Evolution](#) on . . .," then the deck ended up in this category.

For tradition's sake, I haven't picked a deck from the most common category as one of the ten to feature here; however, this time, the submissions were so wacky and fun that I will dedicate an entire article to them in two weeks. If you submitted a deck with four [Artificial Evolution](#), stay tuned because your deck might yet get mentioned in this column. You'll have to wait two weeks to find out, though.

## Let the Tribes Begin!

The most submitted "tribal" deck used Elves. The Elf decks were usually straightforward beatdown fare, using [Elvish Warrior](#), [Elvish Vanguard](#), [Heedless One](#), and [Voice of the Woods](#). Most Elf decks used [Steely Resolve](#). No surprises there, and none of these decks caught my eye. Some of the monogreen Elf decks used [Slate of Ancestry](#) to draw cards (this was true for all tribal decks, actually). There were also green-red Elf decks with burn, green-black Elf decks with graveyard recursion, green-white Elf decks with [Shared Triumph](#), green-blue Elf decks usually with [Imagecrafter](#) and/or the [Peer Pressure - Standardize](#) trick. These two-color decks were more interesting, but still fairly tame. As it turns out, the Elf decks that made me smile the most were those that used mana producers, such as [Wirewood Elf](#), [Birchlore Rangers](#), and [Elvish Guidance](#), to get a ton of mana. Among these decks, Mike Landers put the mana to best use via [Centaur Glade](#).

### Final Wrap-up



### Plug It In, Plug It In

Mike Landers

Main Deck		
60 cards		
13 Forest 1 Plains 4 Tranquil Thicket 4 Windswept Heath 22 lands	4 Birchlore Rangers 4 Elvish Pioneer 4 Elvish Vanguard 4 Krosan Tusker 4 Wirewood Elf 20 creatures	4 Centaur Glade 4 Elvish Guidance 4 Explosive Vegetation 3 Shared Triumph 3 Steely Resolve 18 other spells

Wizard decks showed up nearly as often as Elf decks, and I really wish I found them more interesting. I mean, Wizards of the Coast is the company that makes the **Magic** game, right? I should get excited about Wizard

decks! Still, to me, Wizard decks just blur together, much like their elvish brethren. Most Wizard decks used **Voidmage Prodigy** and other modest *Onslaught* counterspells to control the game. Some tried stealing opposing stuff with **Callous Oppressor** and **Riptide Entrancer**. Some used **Nameless One** for beatdown and others milled via **Supreme Inquisitor**. Most decks were monoblue. The two-color decks were much more interesting and fell into two basic categories: Blue-red decks used **Lavamancer's Skill** and **Thoughtbound Primoc** for a more damage-oriented approach. Blue-black decks almost exclusively tried adding **Oversold Cemetery** to recycle the Wizards lost to **Voidmage Prodigy**. Cool idea, but the decks were so similar that I couldn't pick one.



On the Wizards' heels were the Goblins. I actually found the Goblin decks to be pretty peppy and fun reads. Again, most were monored and had the usual suspects of **Goblin Burrows**, **Goblin Pyromancer**, **Reckless One**, **Goblin Taskmaster**, and **Skirk Fire Marshal**. Many people realized how *spiffy* **Goblin Sharpshooter** is. Aside from the speed red Goblin decks, some used **Brightstone Ritual**, **Mana Echoes**, and **Skirk Prospector** for big effects like **Gratuitous Violence**, **Rorix Bladewing**, **Dragon Roost**, and **Insurrection**. Some splashed green for **Steely Resolve** and **Tribal Unity** or black for **Cabal Slaver**. Many used **Slate of Ancestry**. As always, my favorites were those that made me blink. For example, Celeb Derksen and Major Owie each splashed white to use **Glarecaster** with **Skirk Fire Marshal**, which is an immensely fun idea. Richard Jacobson, meanwhile, tried every way possible to avoid taking **Fire Marshal** damage. His deck looks a little slow and inconsistent, but I have to applaud the effort.

### Goblins Like to Blow Stuff Up

Richard Jacobson

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>4 <b>Goblin Burrows</b></p> <p>12 <b>Mountain</b></p> <p>7 <b>Plains</b></p> <hr/> <p>23 lands</p>	<p>4 <b>Embermage Goblin</b></p> <p>4 <b>Goblin Sledder</b></p> <p>4 <b>Goblin Taskmaster</b></p> <p>1 <b>Jareth, Leonine Titan</b></p> <p>4 <b>Skirk Fire Marshal</b></p> <p>4 <b>Skirk Prospector</b></p> <p>2 <b>Sparksmith</b></p> <hr/> <p>23 creatures</p>	<p>4 <b>Brightstone Ritual</b></p> <p>4 <b>Circle of Solace</b></p> <p>4 <b>Crown of Awe</b></p> <p>2 <b>Demystify</b></p> <hr/> <p>14 other spells</p>
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## Those Other Two Mechanics

After those first three tribes, people showed great creativity in exploring morph and cycling. As you would expect, most morph decks used **Ixidior**, **Reality Sculptor** as their centerpieces, often using morph creatures they could never otherwise cast. Frequent targets for **Ixidior** were **Exalted Angel**, **Quicksilver Dragon**, **Grinning Demon**, **Silent Specter**, and **Krosan Colossus**. Of these decks, I particularly liked Frank Myers's use of **Future Sight** in combination with **Dream Chisel** to really crank out the 3/3s. I also liked Scott Seville's combination Wizard/morph deck, which actually used **Crafty Pathmage** as a key card (unblockable face-down 2/2s, **Riptide Entrancer**, **Cabal Executioner**, and so on). I also give major kudos to Peter Vieren for a monogreen morph deck whose only noncreature, nonland card was **Kamah!s Summons**.

The cycling decks were truly inspired and fell into three basic categories. Several decks used cycling in conjunction with **Words of Wilding** to create a ton of Bears. I particularly liked X\_calibur's (sheesh . . . why can't people use their names?) use of **Kamah!**, **Fist of Krosa** with **Slice and Dice**'s cycle-trigger to animate lands and then kill them off. Another type of deck used **Astral Slide** and morph creatures, taking advantage of the ruling that face-down critters removed from the game return face up. With some well-timed cycling, these decks hoped to put **Krosan Colossus** or **Quicksilver Dragon** into beatdown mode on Turn 4. Of these decks, Andy Jacks's impressed me the most. The third category of cycling decks used both **Words of War** and **Lightning Rift** to send damage straight to the face of an opponent. These decks used some of the best cycling cards in *Onslaught*, including **Starstorm**, **Solar Blast**, and **Slice and Dice**. DragonKain3 (sigh) used white-red. Matthew Koelbl used blue for **Read the Runes**, **Trade Secrets**, and **Complicate**. And Laura Mills -- fast becoming one of my favorite deckbuilders -- had the insight to use **Enchantress's Presence**.

### Who Casts Creatures Anyway?

Laura Mills

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>6 <b>Forest</b></p>	<p>2 <b>Centaur Glade</b></p>
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4 <b>Forgotten Cave</b>	0 creatures	4 <b>Custody Battle</b>
4 <b>Grand Coliseum</b>		2 <b>Dragon Roost</b>
7 <b>Mountain</b>		4 <b>Enchantress's Presence</b>
4 <b>Wooded Foothills</b>		4 <b>Lightning Rift</b>
25 lands		3 <b>Naturalize</b>
		4 <b>Slice and Dice</b>
		4 <b>Solar Blast</b>
		4 <b>Starstorm</b>
		4 <b>Words of War</b>
		35 other spells

## Back to the Tribes

Cleric decks made a strong showing, though their numbers were diluted by the next category. Most were black-white, using **Rotlung Reanimator**, **Cabal Archon**, **Doubtless One**, **Nova Cleric**, and **True Believer**. Several were monoblack and used **Misery Charm** and **Oversold Cemetery** to recycle the Clerics feeding the **Reanimator** and/or **Archon**. A few brave souls made monowhite Cleric decks, of which I liked Paul Weissenborn's the best. Probably because I was expecting Cleric decks like these, I didn't see anything that really stood out.

A number of people, inspired by the Prerelease, decided to combine two tribes into one deck. Most of these decks were Cleric-Zombie decks, usually using Clerics along with **Rotlung Reanimator**, **Soulless One**, and **Shepherd of Rot**. In addition to these decks, I saw Elf-Beast decks (think **Wirewood Savage**), Goblin-Elf, Soldier-Cleric, Goblin-Cleric, Goblin-Zombie, Beast-Goblin, Wizard-Goblin, and Cleric-Wizard. Quite a menagerie, and far too dizzying to highlight any one deck here.

For some reason, I *really* liked the Beast decks, and all of them used **Wirewood Savage**. The question is, how do you reliably cast those expensive beasties, especially if you want to use the also-expensive **AETHER Charge**? Many people avoided putting enough mana into their decks and hoped I wouldn't notice. The better attempts used Elf mana, **Krosan Tusker**, **Explosive Vegetation**, or all the above. Marco van de Wijdeven made a cool monogreen Beast deck with **Cryptic Gateway** to get his expensive **Krosan Colossuses** and **Krosan Groundshakers** into play. Carl van Ostrand made an excellent three-color deck that used black for **Wretched Anurid**, **Doomed Necromancer**, and **Cover of Darkness**. And Tristan Gally made a Beast-less Beast deck, relying on **Riptide Replicator** to crank out the critters. Above all, I was drawn to the deck submitted by Eric Wright, who was the only person in more than 700 people to use four copies of **Chain of Acid**. His rationale was that it made the deck kind of like Beast-Armageddon. I don't know if he's right (and I made his deck from fifty-seven to sixty cards), but I like the idea.

Beast-O-Geddon		
Eric Wright		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
3 <b>Contested Cliffs</b>	4 <b>Elvish Pioneer</b>	4 <b>Chain of Acid</b>
14 <b>Forest</b>	4 <b>Hystrodon</b>	3 <b>Primal Boost</b>
5 <b>Mountain</b>	4 <b>Ravenous Baloth</b>	7 other spells
4 <b>Wooded Foothills</b>	1 <b>Snarling Undorak</b>	
26 lands	3 <b>Tephradern</b>	
	3 <b>Thoughtbound Primoc</b>	
	4 <b>Wirewood Elf</b>	
	4 <b>Wirewood Savage</b>	
	27 creatures	

Soldiers came next, and for the most part these monowhite decks had far too little land for their Soldiers. Many didn't use **Mobilization**, **Shared Triumph**, or **Daru Encampment**, making me wonder if I was missing something. In my mind, only two really cool ideas came out of the Soldier pile, both using the Gustcloak creatures. The first idea used the Gustcloaks along with **Aven Brigadier** (+2/+2 baby!) and usually **Airborne Aid**, but, again, these decks tended to be light on mana. The second idea used Gustcloaks along with **Overwhelming Instinct**. These latter decks also used the fun **Taunting Elf** - **Gustcloak Savior** combo. Andrew Taylor made my favorite white-green Gustcloak deck.



Picking up on the strong tribal theme in **Onslaught**, many people decided to pack their decks with Mistform creatures. These Illusion decks ran the gamut in terms of color choices, although almost all of them used **Peer**

**Pressure.** Some people, like Kyle Dunne, used the Mistform creatures, **Imagecrafter**, and **Trickery Charm** to turn **Endemic Plague** into a one-sided slaughter. Others, like Colin Mills and Eric Flaksman, made five-color decks that used every single Lord in the set. In the end, I kept staring at John Ormerod's monoblue deck, which seemed both straightforward and fun.

Imagecrafting		
John Ormerod		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
24 <b>Island</b>	4 <b>Callous Oppressor</b>	4 <b>Complicate</b>
24 lands	2 <b>Clone</b>	4 <b>Mistform Mask</b>
	4 <b>Imagecrafter</b>	4 <b>Peer Pressure</b>
	4 <b>Mistform Dreamer</b>	12 other spells
	2 <b>Mistform Stalker</b>	
	4 <b>Mistform Wall</b>	
	4 <b>Voidmage Prodigy</b>	
	24 creatures	

## Beats, Bears, and Multiplayer . . . Oh My!

If your deck didn't have a strong tribal theme but your commentary went something like "Basically, you want to beat your opponent to a bloody pulp as quickly as possible," then your deck got classified as a beatdown deck. These decks were almost exclusively two-color. The scariest used either base black for discard and **Grinning Demon** or base white for **Exalted Angel**. A few used base red for burn and **Starstorm** as a reset. Not super exciting, but I'm sure these decks would win their fair share of games.

Many people set out specifically to break **Words of Wilding**. These were exclusively blue-green decks that used some combination of **Trade Secrets**, **Read the Runes**, cycling cards, and **Slate of Ancestry** to crank out a flood of Bears. Scott Forster probably had the most solid build of the decks in this category. He used red for **Mana Echoes** and hoped a huge explosion of mana would fuel his **Read the Runes** and Words.

Zombie decks made up the smallest tribal deck type, which automatically meant I liked them. There would have been more Zombie decks, I think, if the pull to make Zombie-Cleric decks wasn't so strong. These decks didn't worry about **Cabal Archon** (although they did use **Rotlung Reanimator**), and instead played with cards like **Wretched Anurid**, **Shepherd of Rot**, and **Soulless One**. Some got bonus points for using **Gravespawn Sovereign**. Interestingly, a vast majority of these decks were made for multiplayer thanks to **Syphon Mind**, **Syphon Soul**, and **Death Match**. I wish Anthony could have pointed me to a particularly good one.

## These Decks Bug Me

Insects? That's right, a bunch of people made Insect decks thanks to **Broodhatch Nantuko** and the Symbiotic creatures. There were three popular ways to send those Symbiotic creatures to the graveyard. Some decks, like the one by Jared Salisbury, used a **Nantuko Husk** and **Doomed Necromancer** combination to crank out the Insect tokens. Others, like Jeremy Hoffman, focused on cards like **Starstorm** and **Slice and Dice** to make their bugs. My favorite approach, however, used both **Nantuko Husk** and **Goblin Sharpshooter** for an Insect combo to ping an opponent to death. I couldn't decide whether to feature Spim's use of **Kamah!**, **Fist of Krosa** or John Martin's use of **Riptide Replicator**. As I prefer people to give me their actual names, let's arbitrarily go with John.

Goblin Combo, Baby!		
John Martin		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
4 <b>Bloodstained Mire</b>	4 <b>Birchlore Rangers</b>	4 <b>Mana Echoes</b>
10 <b>Forest</b>	4 <b>Elvish Pioneer</b>	4 <b>Riptide Replicator</b>
6 <b>Mountain</b>	4 <b>Goblin Sharpshooter</b>	8 other spells
4 <b>Swamp</b>	4 <b>Nantuko Husk</b>	
4 <b>Wooded Foothills</b>	4 <b>Symbiotic Elf</b>	
28 lands	4 <b>Symbiotic Wurm</b>	
	24 creatures	

Many people zeroed their sights on abusing **Oversold Cemetery**. These decks had a great fluid feel to them and seemed like they could reliably pop four creatures into the graveyard to get going. Creatures in the decks included **Doomed Necromancer**, **Nantuko Husk**, **Rotlung Reanimator**, **Elvish Vanguard**, **Cabal Archon**, **Wall of Mulch**, **Ravenous Baloth**, **Gigapede**, **Undead Gladiator**, **Krosan Tusker**, and **Symbiotic Elf**. Kudos to Russell Sherman, Sevi Alvarez, Chris Rachiele, and David Russell for making very impressive Cemetery decks. Here's an example.

## Oversold Bestiary

Sevi Alvarez

### Main Deck 60 cards

10 Forest	2 Elvish Pioneer	4 Oversold Cemetery
4 Grand Coliseum	3 Hystrodon	4 Smother
10 Swamp	3 Gigapede	
24 lands	4 Krosan Tusker	8 other spells
	4 Ravenous Baloth	
	2 Undead Gladiator	
	2 Visara the Dreadful	
	4 Wall of Mulch	
	4 Wirewood Elf	
	28 creatures	

The final "big" category featured decks built around **Riptide Shapeshifter**. These decks focused on popping the Shapeshifter for a *huge* creature. Some people used all the Legends in *Onslaught* so that you can call "Legend," while others used a toolbox approach for creatures with different types that would serve different purposes. Most decks, however, forgot to have a plan for what to do with those huge beasts if they were in your hand. I liked Alexander Wyatt's solution to use morph creatures (plus Ixidor and Crafty Pathmage!) along with **Read the Runes** to ensure that there would be no wasted draws. I also liked David Robertson's strategy to have the only non-Shapeshifter be **Symbiotic Wurm** in a deck loaded with **Akroma's Vengeances**.



## Small Piles, Big Ideas

Seven categories of submissions had anywhere from five to ten entries. These deck types were

- **Kamahl, Fist of Krosa** decks that looked to generate a lot of mana. Lestat's was the best of the bunch, using **Kamahl** to kill off lands with the help of **Goblin Sharpshooter**, **Slice and Dice**, and **Starstorm**, with **Biorhythm** thrown in for fun.
- Theme decks showed up in small numbers, usually with an alphabet flavor inspired by the **Auction of the People**. Stijn van Goethem made a cool theme deck that tried to simulate the pit arenas, using all the Legends in *Onslaught* and **Grand Coliseum**.
- Some people tried to break **Biorhythm** along with **Riptide Replicator**, **Broodhatch Nantuko**, or **Elves**, but they usually didn't include enough mana.
- Using neither pure Wizard decks nor Illusion decks, some people focused directly on stealing opponents' stuff via **Annex**, **Peer Pressure - Standardize**, **Callous Oppressor**, and **Riptide Entrancer**. **Pubeng Phanichphant** had a cool deck here called "Mine! Mine! MINE!!!" also using **Clone**.
- With **Akroma's Vengeance**, **Mobilization**, **Exalted Angel** and a few counterspells, some people tried to revive blue-white control decks of old. Out of this log, Gua Yoo and Logan Dyer made the decks that impressed me the most.
- A few people used their submission to get as big an **Erratic Explosion**, or **Kaboom!** as possible. Quite honestly, Justin Fetter's decklist made me laugh out loud, so I think it deserves to be shown. It also has a title that'll make you go "Awwwwwww."

## Holly Monk, Will You Marry Me?

Justin Fetter

### Main Deck 60 cards

4 Forgotten Cave	2 Daru Lancer	2 Akroma's Vengeance
9 Mountain	4 Exalted Angel	4 Erratic Explosion
9 Plains	4 Goblin Machinist	1 Insurrection
4 Secluded Steppe	4 Ironfist Crusher	4 Kaboom!
26 lands	2 Jareth, Leonine Titan	2 Righteous Cause
	1 Rorix Bladewing	2 Searing Flesh
	2 Skittish Valesk	15 other spells
	19 creatures	

- Some folks tried to abuse the combination of **Words of Waste** and **Words of Wind**. Most mistakenly thought they could activate both with a single draw, and I'm not sure they thought enough about board control. Still, a very cool idea.
- Last, a handful of decks looked to make monored control decks on the back of **Starstorm**, usually with either **Dragon Roost** or **Rorix Bladewing** as a finisher.

## And Finally, the Innovators

Nine people submitted decks that were very unlike their peers' submissions. I think all nine deserve some recognition, though I will feature only a few of the decks.

James Burnett and Datenshi Bry submitted dedicated discard decks. I particularly liked Datenshi's because of his focus on **Tempting Wurm**. Frankly, I was surprised so few people tried to "break" **Tempting Wurm**.

### Intimidating Beasts

Datenshi Bry 

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>12 Forest</p> <p>12 Swamp</p> <hr/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>2 Elvish Pioneer</p> <p>4 Leery Fogbeast</p> <p>4 Ravenous Baloth</p> <p>2 Taunting Elf</p> <p>4 Tempting Wurm</p> <p>4 Wretched Anurid</p> <hr/> <p>20 creatures</p>	<p>4 Blackmail</p> <p>4 Cover of Darkness</p> <p>4 Strongarm Tactics</p> <p>2 Crown of Suspicion</p> <p>2 Chain of Smog</p> <hr/> <p>16 other spells</p>
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Sampo Hynynen and Mike314 made combo decks with mana producers that could repeatedly untap thanks to **Aggravated Assault**. One pumped all of that mana into **Centaur Glade** while the other used **Dragon Roost**.


Purraj of Urborg decided to "make Clone playable" by focusing a deck on graveyard recursion and **Doomed Necromancer**, early stall and late-game big creatures. It looked like it should have fit into an existing category but just didn't.

Behzod Sirjani and Dan Spiller focused their decks on the **Mobilization** and **Death Match** combination, with **Akroma's Vengeance** making an appearance, as well.

Tom Travis made the only deck whose only aim was to make an extremely large **Entrails Feaster**.

Finally, Matt Costanza and Christian Bausch used the surprising combination of **Ebonblade Reaper** and **Convalescent Care**. Talk about a quirky pairing! Here's Matt's deck.

### The Grim Reaper

Matt Costanza 

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>4 Forest</p> <p>10 Plains</p> <p>9 Swamp</p> <hr/> <p>23 lands</p>	<p>4 Ebonblade Reaper</p> <p>3 True Believer</p> <hr/> <p>7 creatures</p>	<p>3 Aurification</p> <p>2 Chain of Silence</p> <p>4 Convalescent Care</p> <p>3 Cruel Revival</p> <p>4 Misery Charm</p> <p>4 Renewed Faith</p> <p>2 Sandskin</p> <p>3 Strongarm Tactics</p> <p>2 Sunfire Balm</p> <p>3 Weird Harvest</p> <hr/> <p>30 other spells</p>
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Whew! Let's hope this is the longest article I ever write, but somehow I think the next Deck Challenge will produce just as many interesting ideas. Until then, enjoy *Onslaught* -- without a doubt now my favorite **Magic** set.

Next week: That's a lot of wood.

-- j

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