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THE MOST SERIOUSLY FUN CARD(S)

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PRE-ARTICLE NOTE ON BREAK THIS CARD!

I'm sifting through [Break this Card](#) entries now, and the lines are closed to new entrants. If you haven't heard from me yet, it is possible that your entry didn't follow the guidelines. Always feel free to email me and check if you're in the dark – include the original email, if you can. (As a rule, it's a good idea to attach previous correspondence, including my own replies, when you write to me. It helps me remember you, and I'm more able to carry on a real conversation with you if I can recall the context. Thanks!) With luck, the results will be up next week – if not then, two weeks later. Thanks to all who entered!

On to the week's business...

WHAT IS MY FAVORITE CARD?

It's an absolutely unfair question. But Aaron, being Aaron, asked us writers anyway.

If you could pick only one **Magic** card to be your favorite, what would *you* choose? Start thinking about it, and you'll quickly understand my dilemma:

Do I pick the one I opened and said "wow!" when I was a new player?

Or the Most Valuable Card from the deck that really demonstrated my graduation from novice to experienced player?

Or the one that guarantees the most number of games in a single evening?

Or the card that I use the most today?

Or the one that always makes me laugh when I look at it?

On top of all of that, as a writer who has set up a lot of lists and contests, I find myself pulled in a bunch of other directions:

How about the card I've rated best in the [Multiplayer Card Hall of Fame](#)?

Do I pick the card that seems most flexible across different unsanctioned formats – chaos, team, hunt, etc.?

Or the card from past Break this Card contests that inspired the most reader creativity?

Or the card(s) that my readers seem to like the most?

The obvious solution, especially for someone as long-winded as myself, is to talk about all of them – but since I do believe in fulfilling an assignment, I will also pick one at the end that is my "true choice." That way, no one can say I'm being mushy.

Remember, these are my favorites. If you disagree with me, then by definition, you are wrong. (Maybe Aaron isn't so crazy, after all...)

BEST IN CATEGORY

Alongi's Newbie Card Award: [Sliver Queen](#).



Since I stepped through the *Portal* just in time for *Stronghold*, this was the first gold card I saw. I actually bought a box of *Stronghold* at retail – something ridiculous like \$112, or nearly twice what I could have paid on the Internet – and pulled two Queens from it.

They were beautiful! Shiny gold background, extraordinary mana cost, beautiful artwork, and it even counted as a Sliver! (I had no idea what that last meant, but I was pretty sure it was cool.) And it was a 7/7! And I only had to pay 5 mana! And I could make more Slivers – again, whatever the hell those were...

I am proud that my first newbie card turned out, in fact, to *be* a good card. Tournament players still use it! This is a way less embarrassing story to tell than if I called up, for example, [Flowstone Mauler](#). (I really liked that one, too; but fortunately I opened the pack with [Sliver Queen](#) first.)

Alongi's First MVC Award: [Grave Pact](#).



Indirectly, this is the card that started my **Magic** writing career. I built a mono-black deck around it, and I also put [Contamination](#) in it. To counter that, some of my friends started playing mono-black, too – except they went a life-drain route. After a while, virtually every one of us had a mono-black deck.

So I had to put that [Grave Pact](#) deck away! At least for a while. But it inspired the first Casual Fridays on the Dojo, and got me thinking more strategically about the game in multiplayer – is there a metagame? Should I take [Contamination](#) out of the deck? How do I deal with pesky enchantments like [Subversion](#), and direct damage like [Drain Life](#)?

The answers, in order, are: yes, yes, [Nevinyrral's Disk](#), and [Claws of Gix](#). Here is the deck as it stands today – the only deck I've kept together for four years:

A GRAVE PACT INDEED



DECKLIST**STATS****SAMPLE HAND**SORT BY: Overview ▼***Creature (16)***

4 Blood Pet
 4 Skittering Skirge
 4 Bottle Gnomes
 1 Skittering Horror
 2 Prowling Pangolin
 1 Delraich

Sorcery (5)

2 Corrupt
 2 Diabolic Intent
 1 Unearth

Artifact (10)

3 Hornet Cannon
 4 Claws of Gix
 2 Nevinyrral's Disk
 1 Jinxed Idol

Enchantment (5)

4 Grave Pact
 1 Lurking Skirge

Land (24)

20 Swamp
 2 Cabal Coffers
 1 Volrath's Stronghold
 1 Phyrexian Tower

60 Cards

Those interested in copying the deck should know that the only absolutely necessary rare is [Grave Pact](#) – and you *do* need four, because you'll lose them. Everything else is a matter of style. About 1,428 different cards work really well with [Grave Pact](#), from [Lord of Tresserhorn](#) to [Worthy Cause](#) to [Thalakos Deceiver](#) to [Breeding Pit](#) to [Giant Caterpillar](#) to [Death Pit Offering](#) to [Freyalise Supplicant](#). (Yeah, go ahead, click on that last link. You know you want to.)

Whatever you play with [Grave Pact](#), expect attention. That deck above draws furious fire from our group whenever anyone recognizes it...and still sneaks out a win, perhaps once every three or four tries. That's good enough for me. This deck will stay together, and continue to evolve. I just can't imagine breaking the Pact! Most Valuable Card, indeed.

Alongi's Fast-Game Favorite Award: [Furnace of Rath](#).



It's appropriate, just a couple of weeks before *The Two Towers* comes out, to remind readers of one of Gollum's favorite riddles:

*This thing all things devours
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers
Gnaws iron, bites steel,
Grinds hard stones to meal,
Slays king, ruins town,
And beats high mountain down!*

The answer is "time." Once the Furnace hits the board, everybody in the game now has half as much. A great option for those times when you're approaching the end of the night, and you just want to force in "one more quick game"! The point of **Magic** is to play, and this card lets you play more games, more quickly, than just about any other single card. That's good for something.

Alongi's First Golden Oldie Award: [Spirit of the Night](#).



No, it's not a real golden oldie. (I also bought a [Nicol Bolas](#) that day, but this story's better.) You have to realize that for a player who came in during *Stronghold*, *Mirage* was pretty darn old – plus, I didn't know what all those expansion symbols meant, anyway. A palm tree? Looks old. Heck, it could have come out of Alpha, for all I knew. There it was, hanging in a sleeve pinned to the shop's cork board. Under *glass*. I mean, it's *already* good, right? Then I took a look at it. Three black symbols... and another 6! Why, that's...(counts on fingers)...*nine mana!* This sucker's going to be *good*.

Protection from black! Geez, it doesn't even like its own color. That's buff. Kinda like how the really cool teenagers don't like their own high school classes, or think their hometown is lame. All right, that's everyone maybe, but you still get my point.

Flying! Trample! No summoning sickness! Get the net!

It cost me fifteen dollars. (Do you all get by now that I used to spend way too much money on this game, and that I understood nothing about card value or bargains? In any case, let's hear it for websites that compensate their writers, or my kids wouldn't be eating today.)

Okay, Alongi's First *Real* Golden Oldie Award: [Maze of Ith](#).



In my first [returning veterans article](#), I hinted at what this did to a fellow newbie and I upon our first meeting. The next day, I was at the local card shop buying two of them (one for each of my favorite decks, since they used to be Type 1 restricted). I've backfilled a good deal of my collection with the most useful rares from the older sets, but to me, old-school will always mean [Maze of Ith](#).

Alongi's Favorite Collectible Award: L'Abisso ([The Abyss](#), Italian).



As far as collectibles go, there are certainly better cards, even in my own collection. Something like this goes for a fair chunk, but it's not anywhere near three figures, and I have a couple of cards in that higher range.

The reason I like it is because of how I won it. It was during *Invasion* block, in my limited heyday (which to many established pros would be a dry spell!), where I seemed to always choose the right card in draft, make the right sealed deck, and play

the right card at the right time. For a while, my rating hung above 1800, which is average for a player who practices. (None of your business what it is now! Let's just say I didn't practice as well with *Odyssey* limited.)

In any case, during *Invasion* block's reign, I frequented a local shop where many of the best players in Minnesota gather. One particular evening, during a stretch where everyone was practicing for a PTQ, I won a 16-person draft (two pods of 8) with a white-blue deck, which is completely *not* my style. The sole "bomb" was [Teferi's Moat](#), which didn't show up as much as I wanted it to. To win, I had to fight through several players who had made the Pro Tour, including one I hadn't beaten until that day, in the finals. More importantly, I didn't ever feel like I made a single one of those stupid play mistakes that always seem to trip you up as the event progresses and you start to get excited that you might actually win it. I've won competitively at local stores many times, but this one was special.

At the end of the winning game of the final match, I didn't go nuts and wave my arms in the air, but I did smile wearily (the night ended at 2 AM) and quietly applied my store credit award toward the best card it could buy. The fact that I can trace my paternal ancestry to Sicily was a little bonus, given the language.

I don't play with it. It looks just fine where it is, in the hard plastic case it wore in the store where I probably played the best **Magic** of my life to date. If I ever do better, I might break it out and find a deck for it.

Alongi's Most Worn Edges Award: [Wall of Blossoms](#).



It's simply the card (beyond basic lands) that's in more of my decks than any other, and has been for some time. [Mystic Snake](#) is a close second, and [Wild Mongrel](#) ain't that far behind either. I am playing an awful lot of green nowadays! It must be getting good. With luck, [Naturalize](#) will let me

phase out my white decks altogether...(no, I don't mean it. All you white mages can calm yourselves. Just [Pay No Heed](#), or whatever you do when the going gets rough.)

Alongi's Multiplayer Card Hall of Fame Champion: [Pernicious Deed](#).



There is no card in multiplayer that saves your butt with the alarming frequency, thoroughness, efficiency, and even politeness (it keeps lands, and you can set it to save a few choice creatures) that this board-clearer does.

I have two different decks that run [Pernicious Deed](#). Here is my current favorite, and a deck that has the most successful record of any I've played. Yes, it has plenty of rares. This is what happens when you slowly build up a deck over a year and a half – it gets pretty good, and pretty expensive:

EVERYTHING BUT THE SHAMBLER



DECKLIST

STATS

SAMPLE HAND

SORT BY: [Overview](#) ▼

Creature (25)

4 Gaea's Skyfolk
2 Wall of Blossoms
2 Raven Familiar
4 Man-o'-War

2 Jungle Barrier
4 Mystic Snake
4 Doomsday Specter
2 Spiritmonger
1 Anavolver

Sorcery (1)

1 Recall

Instant (6)

2 Spinal Embrace

2 Bone Harvest

1 Fact or Fiction

1 Spelljack

Enchantment (4)

4 Pernicious Deed

Land (24)

1 Strip Mine

4 Underground Sea

4 Tropical Island

4 Bayou

5 Island

4 Forest

2 Swamp

60 Cards

For a while recently, I was worried because several players in our group began to groan when they recognized the deck. "Oh, man," they'd mutter. "[Pernicious Deed](#). Great." The theory, they maintained, was that the Deed makes the games go on too long. On the contrary, I would suggest – they helped me win *much* more quickly than I normally could! But this is not the sort of logic that is helpful to others, apparently.

So last week, I promised myself (and the group) that I would set the deck in storage for a month or so, both to force myself to try new deck ideas and to give them a break from Deed.

Can anyone predict the end of this story? If your friends are dorks like mine are, well then yes you can. Two different players independently built decks with [Pernicious Deed](#)! That's not counting the guy who built one before I set mine aside. So now, instead of one Deed deck, there are three! But don't let that fool you: *my group doesn't like [Pernicious Deed](#)*. Yeah, right.

Anyway, [Bind](#) and [Interdict](#) are getting pretty good in our group, and any card that inspires that sort of nonsense has to be in an article like this.

Alongi's Most Flexible Format Award: [Misdirection](#).



In chaos, it comes out as a nasty surprise to the mortal foolish enough to go after you or your stuff – and as a warning to everyone else.

In team, it protects your friends from horrible things and inflicts them on the shadowy figures sitting on the wrong side of the table.

It's a nice, warm comfy feeling in your hand. (As long as you have another blue card handy!)

Alongi's Most Humorous Card Award: [Psychic Battle](#).



I do not have a [Psychic Battle](#) deck. I have never played with the card. But my friends and I crack up whenever we see it, since it just seems so ridiculous a concept. I mean, you can have the most well-designed deck in the world, and it can run off track simply because (da-da-DUM)... "It's time for a *psychic (echo echo) battle (echo echo)!*"

It turns entire games on their head, and it's a ton of fun – here's the deck that my friend Todd Petit uses when he wants to raise spirits:

PSYYYY-CHIIIC BAAAAAATTLE!



DECKLIST

STATS

SAMPLE HAND

SORT BY: Overview ▼

Creature (19)

4 Fog Bank
4 Wall of Roots
2 Spike Feeder
4 Mystic Snake
1 Rhox
1 Penumbra Wurm
2 Verdant Force
1 Polar Kraken

Sorcery (2)

1 Eureka
1 Show and Tell

Instant (3)

1 Worldly Tutor
2 Naturalize

Artifact (2)

2 Scroll Rack

Enchantment (7)

4 Psychic Battle
3 Sylvan Library

Land (27)

4 Tropical Island
2 Lonely Sandbar
2 Tranquil Thicket
1 Windswept Heath
9 Island
9 Forest

60 Cards

The land count is purposely high – you eventually need to hard-cast those upper-end creatures, if you want to win! [Windswept Heath](#) is not there to find a plains, but rather as an experiment to reset the deck if a [Scroll Rack](#) search keeps coming up empty. Of course, any of the *Onslaught* fetch lands that find either a forest or an island would work fine.

[Rhox](#) and [Penumbra Wurm](#) are metagame calls against global clearers (which, after all, get by the [Psychic Battle](#)).

Runner-up card in this humorous category: [Lexivore](#), by simple virtue of its flavor text.

Alongi's Most Successful Contest Award: [Graceful Antelope](#).



I didn't think a plainswaker could get so many [nifty ideas!](#) From [Stench of Evil](#) to [Dwarven Thaumaturgist](#) to [Caribou Range](#) to [Dual Nature](#), [Graceful Antelope](#) got a great variety of companions. At the time I was beginning to think Break this Card was a bit played out; but my readers proved me wrong. I had some terrific conversations with readers as a result of this card, so who cares if it's not that good?

And it's white. I needed to get a white card in here, somewhere. Speaking of which...

Alongi's Readers' Choice Award: [Swords to Plowshares](#).



Even when I'm not getting passionate but misguided emails from readers who think I have anything to do with the Extended format or reprints, I hear quite a bit about Swords from my friends out there. It seems consistently to appear in any deck that will support it, and it holds a special place in the heart of veteran players who (correctly) see it as the best spot removal spell ever printed. What that tells me (and there's other anecdotal data, on other cards, to support

this) is that casual/group players don't necessarily always want goofy cards. We more often want cards that can bend in strange ways, but are also capable of worthwhile effects, like [Astral Slide](#) or [Genesis](#). (And yes, [Graceful Antelope](#) was stretching it, but in a good way!)

By the way, I'm looking into a way where I can set up a poll to let you guys have a *true* Readers' Choice Award. But bear in mind, even choosing nominees would likely get everyone fired up. Let me think about it, and I'll try to find a reasonable way to organize this...

BEST IN SHOW

So from the choices above, I have to pick one, eh? Very well.

[Sliver Queen](#) it is. No, wait.

Okay, I'm ready: [Pernicious Deed](#)! Dammit, hold on.

L'Abisso! Aw, that doesn't feel right, either. (It does, however, sound like a great foreign film: "*L'Abisso!* Come to me, my darling. Let us cast out the demons of our past and drink this chocolate milk, a metaphor for our enduring love. *Attenzione!* It is the Russian artisan who has been stalking us all this time. No doubt his nihilism consumes him, like a gentle frog swallowing a poisonous snake.")

All right. I gotta get on this. Lemme think lemme think...

Here it is: [Grave Pact](#) *has* to take the grand prize. Any other choice feels like I'm leaving something out. As I said, this card began my **Magic** writing career, and it resides in the oldest deck I have. It's also one of those cards that I like – attention-getting, but capable of helping a multiplayer fanatic hold off the masses. Not the best card, nor the flashiest, nor most collectible, but simply the card that means the most to me because of my own history of the game. My favorite. Yeah, that feels okay. Hey, I guess Aaron really *isn't* insane! This was good for me! Hope you enjoyed it too.

It is inevitable that readers will write in with their own favorites. I'll gladly hear any of you out (and will reply as quickly as I can); but I also invite you to use the message boards, which I do read and which will also give your choice the rapid, full discussion it deserves by other readers.

Anthony may be reached at seriousfun@wizards.com.

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