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Helping Hands



The reader's role in constructing a column

Mark Gottlieb · House of Cards
Thursday, March 13, 2003

happy Thursday to my loving and adoring fans! (And to the sadistic creeps plotting against me. I know who you are, and I want you to have a happy Thursday anyway. So there.) At the bottom of this column I'll provide some odd decks made with an odd theme. Before that, though, I'm going to flatter you and ask for your help. But even before that, I'm going to go over the mission statement of this column.

I may be the new Darrin, but it's the same old *Bewitched*. House of Cards isn't going to radically change. My job as the butler of the House is to educate and entertain by creating interesting **Magic** deck ideas. Some decks will be based on a cool theme, others on a specific card, and some will come out of left field. But no one, least of all me, expects you to build any of these decks card-for-card and go enter a tournament. My decks are not intended to be tournament caliber. They may or may not even be living room caliber, though that's your call. No, what House of Cards has always sought to provide is not decks, but inspiration. I want to jog your brain into thinking about deckbuilding from an angle you've never considered before. I want you to say, "That's a cool combo, but I can build a *good* deck around it." I want you to pick up on an interesting theme and suggest it for your next casual play session. I want you to say, "I never thought of that for a deck," then build *your* version of it with the cards you own. And then I want you to tell me about it.

IT'S YOUR HOUSE

I'll no doubt have a different style and present different deck ideas than Jay, but overall it's the same column with the same title and the same focus on cool, goofy casual decks. What's more, the most important element remains unchanged: the audience. Yes, you. (Wait for applause.) And in order to do the best job I can, I need your help.



Helpful way to help #1: Send me email

I'm very interested in how you use my deck ideas. I'm sure many of you read House of Cards because staring intently at your monitor and clicking your mouse makes your boss think you're working, and that's fine with me. But I bet some of you are actually inspired by my crazy inventions, and I want to hear from you. Send me an email describing your exploits, good or bad. You built my Accursed Centaur deck, and then lost 20 games in a row? Let me know. You hosted an alliteration theme night (see below) with your friends? Tell me how it went. I want to know how this column influences you, and in return, your experiences and stories will influence me. Some of them might even see print here.

What else can you email me? Ideas, ideas, ideas. You folks are a rampaging horde of creative people with concepts that would never occur to me. Do you have an original idea for a goofy deck? Send it along. Seriously, Aaron expects me to come up with a new concept *every week*. Can you believe the nerve? I'm already burned out, and I've only written one and a half of these dealies. If I use your idea, you'll be given credit here, allowing you to mooch off my glorious fame for a few precious moments.

If you send me an email, please put "HOUSE" in the subject line followed by "STORY" or "IDEA" or whatever's appropriate. I won't mistake it for spam that way. Any deck ideas you'd like to share should be Standard-legal and not be chock full of rares. I can't guarantee that I'll reply to each email (I don't know how much I'll get or how difficult it will be to manage), but I do guarantee that each one will get my attention.

Helpful way to help #2: Meet the challenge

Some of Jay's most popular features were the interactive ones, such as when he threw down the gauntlet to you mad geniuses with a Deck Challenge. As a total idea leech, I plan on continuing the tradition. I'm not dumb enough to stop a good thing, especially when it makes my dear readers so very, very happy. Look for a challenge from me soon.

Helpful way to help #3: Play me online

The decks in this column are rough drafts more valuable for their concepts than their card lists. But I still put time and thought behind them. I want each of my decks to be a well-built, robust deck that's capable of winning. My tool for deck testing and tuning is *Magic Online*, and you can often find me in the Casual Decks room under the name Doctor Wombat. Since I can't playtest a deck without an opponent, I need your help. When playing me, you'll get a sneak peek at what I'm working on for next week. But in order to make this playtesting method not drive me insane, please stick to . . .

The 1 Do and 500 Don'ts of Playing Me on *Magic Online*

- DO sit down with me to play a casual game if I have an open chair.
- Please DON'T use a tuned, tournament-worthy deck against me. You'll crush my wacky concoction, I won't learn anything, and neither of us will have any fun.
- Please DON'T use a deck that will auto-lose to me. I don't want to be mollycoddled (you heard me: mollycoddled). I want a reasonable challenge from a deck on par with the one I'm playing. Look at the decks I mention here for a sense of the power level.
- Please DON'T challenge me. Ever. Please. If I want to play a game, I'll be sitting at an open table in the Casual Decks room. All other times I'll be building or chatting or otherwise occupied.
- Please DON'T randomly start a private chat with me. It's not because I don't want to hear from with you; as I said, email is welcomed. The problem is that if everyone starts a chat even to just say "Hi," I'll never get anything done. The best way to chat with me is to join a game; I'll be happy to talk while playing.

I thank you in advance for complying with these requests. If chat windows, trade request windows (note: I can't trade cards), and challenge windows pop up all the time, I'll have no choice but to go anonymous with my account and pretty much block everyone -- and I don't want to do that.

ALLITERATIVE ALLURE

Hey, this column has decks too! I know I'm running long, but there can't be a House of Cards without houses of cards. Today's decks spring from a pretty random concept: I built them using ONLY cards with alliterative names (names whose words start with the same sound, like *Crested Craghorn* or *Silent Specter*). Why? Well, I'm a word puzzle aficionado (you'll probably hear more about this in the future; it's my variation on "I used to be a writer for *Roseanne*"), and I've created card names for every *Magic* expansion from *Odyssey* through *Mirrodin* (except for *Scourge*). So I'm drawn to names with distinctive properties. It's also interesting to arbitrarily shorten your card pool and then see what decks you can come up with. You're forced into some unusual choices and compromises, and I love to play with cards that normally never see play.

Building decks from alliterative cards is an aesthetic thing, so you can set up whatever rules sound good to you. Here are the ones I used:

- Sound is important, not letter. **Crystal Quarry** is fine because both words start with a "k" sound, but **Giant Growth** is not.
- Initial vowel sounds are fine. Technically, something like **Aggravated Assault** is assonance, not alliteration (you heard me: assonance), but saying so just makes me sound like a dork. Oops.
- Connector words work. **Beast of Burden** has that ring to it I'm looking for.
- Fused compound words are all right. **Wellwisher** also has that nice ring to it.
- Each deck has to have at least 15 different cards in it.



I went pretty lax on some of the initial vowel sounds because names like **Ascending Aven**, while not starting with the exact same sound, still sound good to me. I also stuck to the Standard card pool. I was a bit surprised to come up with a pretty decent Cleric deck, as well as a red-green Beast deck that takes advantage of double strike, a white-blue Bird deck, and a blue-red combi-ish contraption. This is an example of how to use your cards in a new way, challenge your deckbuilding skills, bust out cards you don't normally use, and engage your imagination. And the ability to easily do all of that is part of what makes **Magic** the best game ever.

<h3>Pearl & Pitch</h3> <p>Standard-legal alliterative deck 60 cards</p>		
8 Plains 10 Swamp 4 Secluded Steppe 2 Starlit Sanctum <hr/> 24 land	4 Benevolent Bodyguard 2 Crypt Creeper 3 Daunting Defender 2 Gangrenous Goliath 3 Hallowed Healer 3 Headhunter 2 Militant Monk 3 Rotlung Reanimator <hr/> 22 creatures	1 Convalescent Care 4 Dirge of Dread 2 Feeding Frenzy 4 Profane Prayers 1 Riptide Replicator 2 Skeletal Scrying <hr/> 14 other spells
<h3>Crimson & Kelly</h3> <p>Standard-legal alliterative deck 60 cards</p>		
11 Forest 11 Mountain 2 Contested Cliffs <hr/> 24 land	2 Barbarian Bully 3 Canopy Crawler 3 Crested Craghorn 1 Krosan Cloudscraper 1 Krosan Colossus 3 Ridgetop Raptor 2 Seeker of Skybreak 3 Seton's Scout 1 Silklash Spider 1 Spellbane Centaur <hr/> 20 creatures	1 Browbeat 1 Canopy Claws 2 Crackling Club 1 Devastating Dreams 4 Erratic Explosion 1 Granite Grip 1 Orcish Oriflamme 2 Serene Sunset 3 Sudden Strength <hr/> 16 other spells

Azure & Alabaster

Standard-legal alliterative deck
60 cards

9 Plains
11 Island
4 Secluded Steppe

24 land

4 Ascending Aven
2 Aven Archer
3 Benevolent Bodyguard
2 Cephalid Scout
1 Chromeshell Crab
3 Cloudreach Cavalry
1 Mistform Mutant
2 Phantom Flock
4 Screaming Seahawk
1 Silver Seraph
2 Tireless Tribe
4 Wingbeat Warrior

29 creatures

3 Airborne Aid
1 Mistform Mask
1 Ray of Revelation
2 Rites of Refusal

7 other spells

Cyan & Scarlet

Standard-legal alliterative deck
60 cards

10 Island
14 Mountain

24 land

3 Balduvian Barbarians
3 Barbarian Bully
2 Cephalid Sage
1 Goblin Goon
3 Goblin Grappler
1 Pygmy Pyrosaur
3 Sparksmith

16 creatures

3 Browbeat
2 Read the Runes
1 Riptide Replicator
1 Rod of Ruin
2 Sonic Seizure
3 Standstill
2 Starstorm
1 Treasure Trove
3 Words of War
2 Words of Wisdom

20 other spells

Until next week, have fun with House of Cards!

--Mark

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