

# Jay brings closure to his deck experiment

## doctorjay Presents . . . The Marksman

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- [Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar Archive](#)

A guy enters a bar. At one table, there's a goblin showing his machine gun to an overmuscled druid . . .

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...

Oh, come on! Someone more creative than me please finish the joke! I can't think of a good punch line, and it's bugging me.

For all those people writing me panicked emails, this article should prove that my writing career for the **Magic** game is not dead yet. For all those people who have no idea who I am or what my first two cryptic sentences mean, please sit down. You and I need to talk.

A few months ago, I decided to let the **MagicTheGathering.com** readers choose the focus of my next **Magic Online** deck. Consider "[A Card for doctorjay](#)" part I of my experiment. Out of one hundred possible centerpiece cards, Kamahl, Fist of Krosa won my attention.

Part II was "[A Deck for doctorjay](#)", in which readers voted on my basic Kamahl strategy and first-draft decklist. Out of seven basic approaches, combining Kamahl with Goblin Sharpshooter and land destruction won out.

THE KAMAHL-GOBLIN SHARPSHOOTER DECK

### Standard-legal Kamahl-Sharpshooter deck

Since then, I have been logging in games in the Casual Constructed room of **Magic Online**. I have also been writing a diary series over at [StarCityGames.com](#), detailing how the deck has been doing and each change in the decklist. If you missed it, here is a synopsis:

- [Diary 1](#) discusses in detail the decisions I made in the first draft and dubs it The Marksman.
- [Diary 2](#) follows my first twenty-five games with the deck and the discovery of both Lava Dart and Starstorm.
- [Diary 3](#) takes me up to game forty-three and adds Seedborn Muse to the mix.
- [Diary 4](#) finishes with my seventy-fifth game and a relatively stable decklist.

Today I want to discuss the changes from my first draft to my current deck. Before I get to it, though, let me remind everyone of my self-imposed limitations:

- The goal here is to create a fun deck that is worthy of the Casual room. You, Spikey Spikersons, get off my back.
- The deck is Standard because Standard is my favorite format. I know this is a contentious subject these days, but it's a little late to change now.
- The Kamahl, Fist of Krosa - Goblin Sharpshooter combo needed to stay the deck's focus no matter what.
- I didn't want to spend through the nose to make a fun deck, which prohibited hard-to-get rares like Birds of Paradise. Here is one area, incidentally, where I failed miserably despite good intentions.

Also remember that this experiment was meant to help show how a deck can change through playing, not to give you a polished deck to copy. By all means, make your own version of The Marksman and kick my butt with it.

Okay, ready? On your Mark (ha!), deck set (ha, ha!) . . . evolve! (hey . . . that wasn't so funny)

The Creatures

**What I started with:**

4 Goblin Sharpshooter  
 4 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa  
 3 Wall of Mulch  
 3 Terravore

**What I ended up with:**

4 Goblin Sharpshooter  
 4 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa  
 3 Terravore  
 2 Seedborn Muse

Let's start with the creatures, as they are the deck's focus and the most stable area from the first to the last draft. As you can see, I kept four copies of Kamahl and the Sharpshooter, largely because these two cards represent the most dominating "trick" the deck can perform: Animate an opponent's land for G with Kamahl, then shoot it with your Goblin. Untap, rinse, and repeat until your opponent concedes. It's a fragile combo, but you would be surprised how often it works out. Four copies of a Legend rarely frustrated me since my first Kamahl often died.

Terravore, too, remained untouched. It is the deck's big, beefy way to end games in a hurry. Even apart from the Kamahl - Sharpshooter duo, 8/8 or bigger Terravores ran willy-nilly across my opponent's skull. As everyone knows, big Lhurgoyfs are cool.

A really good idea that was suggested by many readers is to add four copies of Living Wish and drop a Kamahl, a Sharpshooter, and two Terravores. I didn't do it, but if you're hell-bent on pulling off the combo, it's a viable way to go.

But, lo! There are two creature changes worth mentioning. Wall of Mulch dropped out of the deck fairly early. What I liked about it was that it provided early defense, it never wasted a draw (even

against creatureless decks), and it could untap my Goblin Sharpshooter in a pinch. What I quickly learned to hate about it was that it didn't kill stuff, like, at all. I got overrun by creature swarms that were not intimidated by a pile of mulch.

The second change is that I added Seedborn Muse. It's just as hard to kill as Wall of Mulch, it can kill stuff, it untaps my Sharpshooters, and it makes Kamahl really, really scary. The deck isn't set up for maximum benefit from the Muse{Seedborn Muse}, but I was rarely sorry to draw it.

Why so few creatures? To answer that question, I turn my attention to the noncreature, nonland cards in the deck . . .

The Instants, Sorceries, Artifacts, and Enchantments

Incidentally, is there a better name for these cards? Both "noncreature, nonland" and "instants, sorceries, artifacts, and enchantments" are a little clunky, don't you think? I think of them as noncreature spell cards.

**What I started with:**

- 4 Creeping Mold
- 4 Custody Battle
- 4 Explosive Vegetation
- 1 Mirari
- 3 Price of Glory
- 4 Stone Rain

**What I ended with:**

- 3 Creeping Mold
- 4 Custody Battle
- 4 Explosive Vegetation
- 4 Lava Dart
- 4 Starstorm
- 3 Stone Rain

For the purposes of discussion, I'll put these cards into three piles.

Pile one is the Land Destruction pile. I started out with a lot of land destruction (henceforth "LD") . . . Stone Rain, Creeping Mold, Price of Glory, and I'll add Mirari since it was exclusively meant to Forkmy LD. The emphasis on LD is still present in the final deck but is watered down considerably -- from twelve cards to six. Price of Glory turned out to work horribly with Kamahl and Wall of Mulch, so it was the first card dropped from the deck. Stone Rain and Creeping Mold were good, but not great. Mirari was never bad, but a single card in a deck without significant card-drawing abilities or tutors meant I never saw it as reliable. Anthony has harped on deck consistency in the [Multi-Lab](#), and his arguments are well taken.

As the LD pile shrunk, the Defensive pile of cards grew. I started out with only Custody Battle to go along with Wall of Mulch (yes, I know Custody Battle is LD, but I still think of it as defense). I added

1) Lava Dart, which can kill quick creatures and helps out Terravore, and 2) Starstorm, which is the board-sweeping-creature-killer my deck desperately needed.

The reason for the shift is that I often lost games against fast, aggressive decks. Those Kamahls, Creeping Molds, Terravores, and Explosive Vegetations sure *looked* good in my opening hand, but I was dead before I could use them. Instead, a fistful of Lava Darts, Custody Battles, and Starstorms -- maybe with some LD to slow down an opponent -- would usually bring me to victory because I had plenty of time to draw Kamahl once I could be sure of seeing the midgame. There's an important lesson here for decks trying to pull off a cool trick: Survive first, or you'll never get the chance to be tricky later.

I'll call the final pile the Mana Acceleration pile. It started with Explosive Vegetation and that's how it ended. Truthfully, the next card I would like to fit into the deck is Krosan Tusker, but I don't see room for it. A lot of people might argue for Llanowar Elves and Birds of Paradise, but killing my own creatures with Starstorm bothers me. If you think Rampant Growth or Far Wanderings fits, I would argue that the deck needs more threats, not fewer. In enhancing the defensive pile of cards, my hope was that the deck could busy itself with survival before turn 4 and then proceed with exploding vegetables and big effects.

The Land

**What I started with:**

11 Forest  
4 Karplusan Forest  
11 Mountain

**What I ended with:**

8 Forest  
4 Karplusan Forest  
9 Mountain  
4 Wooded Foothills

If you read my diaries, you'll know that I fought the inclusion of Wooded Foothills tooth and nail. But I really was getting mana-flooded a lot, and they really do help Terravore grow. I dropped a forest because, as I said earlier, the red cards help me early in the game and the green ones help me late in the game. Thus my Explosive Vegetation usually searched for two forests. The early-game focus on red and midgame shift to green still strikes me as odd. It was one of the funkier mana situations I've had in a deck, but it seemed to work despite its weirdness.

For those of you keeping score at home, here is the deck as it stands now:

The Marksman v.2.1

**Standard-legal Kamahl-Sharpshooter deck**

It really is a fun deck to play. I can find only three consistent problems. First, I still cringe a little playing a dedicated LD deck -- even one using Custody Battle and the deck's quirky combo -- in a Casual room antagonistic to LD. Second, the deck can still fall to an aggressive creature rush really quickly unless I concentrate on keeping a defensive opening hand (my hard-learned lesson, then, is to always keep a defensive opening hand). Finally, one card that gives the deck major headaches is Mirari's Wake. I have decided I can live with these three limitations, though. As I said, it's fun to play.

For those people looking for a less expensive way to build the deck, try starting your own deck evolution with something like:

LIGHTLY ARMED

### **Standard-legal Kamahl LD deck**

And for those people less concerned with Standard or finding a lot of rares, here is another way to start your tinkering:

THE MUSKETEER

### **Casual Kamahl LD deck**

I'm not saying either of these options will be more or less successful than my version of the deck, but I realize that tastes vary. Consider these educated musings to get you started.

### **Where Do I Go from Here?**

You would think that after seventy-five games, three months, and seven articles that I would be sick of Kamahl, Fist of Krosa. You would be wrong. I actually feel quite a kinship with the big brute. He's grown on me, you might say. I am overrun with feelings, you might say. I hold a legendary . . . okay, I'll stop.

Where I need a change is the focus on Goblin Sharpshooter. The combo with Kamahl is incredibly fun to pull off, but it involves a *lot* of pointing and clicking. During my playtesting, Travis Bohn wrote to me to share his version of the deck. I actually like his approach a lot. He dropped Goblin Sharpshooter because of its 1 toughness and added Slice and Dice and Chainflinger. Even his Wirewood Elf has a respectable toughness. If I kept the land-destruction focus of the deck, I would follow Travis's lead:

KAMAHL'S VERY OWN DECK by Travis Bohn

### **Standard-legal Kamahl LD deck**

But the truth is that I'm one of those people who hates to lose to LD, so I'm a bit squeamish playing it. I'm tickled that I made a deck with Custody Battle and Terravore, but I am definitely out of my comfort zone. Instead, as I think about taking the deck in new directions, without fetters, I latch on to one of my favorite *other* card duos -- Kamahl and Seedborn Muse.

Here is one approach that keeps rolling through my mind. It uses the rares I acquired in developing The Marksman, but otherwise veers wildly. My basic premise here is that it would be cool to throw a bunch of creatures in one deck. I am so bloody clever I even scare myself.

Of course, I'm back to a first-draft decklist again:

BIG BRUISER

### **Standard Kamahl - Muse deck**

Anyway, if you sit down to play me in the Casual Constructed room, don't be surprised if I still claim Kamahl, Fist of Krosa as my patron saint. Luckily, though, you won't have to wade through 475,398 words about my exploits with this new deck (by the way, please send any vision-related medical bills to Aaron Forsythe, care of Wizards of the Coast).

Thank you to everyone who stuck with me on this very interesting ride. I appreciate the fun tools you provided me with and your constant feedback. You have given my limited online collection focus. I hope we all learned something along the way, too.

I'll undoubtedly be back sometime soon with an article about something fascinating, but until then . . .

Have fun, innovate, and be nice to each other.

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