

Mark Gottlieb

Thursday, June 19, 2003

Two weeks ago, I started to post the submissions to the Rock & Roll Deck Challenge that impressed, amused, and intrigued me. The first batch of decks contained one representative from each of the four most popular bands, as well as an example of a deck built around the lyrics to a song. This week I'm posting my favorite six decks from among all the rest of the submissions. I wanted to do a nice round top 10, but I couldn't bear to cut any of the following decks. Each one is clever and creative, and each was built with passion. Enough with the warm-up act . . . on with the show!

AC/DC

AC/DC was a popular deckbuilding choice with four submissions. The band itself embodies the spirit of aggressive destruction, so it's no wonder that all four AC/DC decks contained Goblins. Three different people decided that "Shoot to Thrill" was the anthem of Goblin Sharpshooter. While Benjamin J. Hurst concocted a lethal black-red Goblin deck, I chose to profile Tyler Poole's submission. Read his description, and I think you'll understand why.

Tyler writes: "This is my deck based on the band AC/DC. It's black and red, with some Goblins for creatures, some burn, some land destruction, and some black removal, and frankly . . . it's horrid. But it's fun to play with and that's all that really matters. I also only used cards which I own, and am certain that more appropriate cards could be matched with the songs, but I wanted to be able to play with it."

"Ruff Stuff"



Main Deck 60 cards

13 Mountain

7 Swamp

1 Volrath's Stronghold
("Highway to Hell")

21 lands

1 Crovax the Cursed ("Love
Hungry Man")

2 Duskwalker ("Night
Prowler")

1 Goblin Turncoat ("Dirty
Deeds Done Dirty Cheap")

4 Goblin War Buggy ("Ride
On")

2 Highway Robber ("What Do
You Do For Money Honey")

1 Seismic Mage ("Rocker")

1 Shrieking Mogg ("Squealer")

12 creatures

1 Backlash ("Problem Child")

3 Blood Lust ("If You Want
Blood (You've Got It)")

1 Chime of Night ("Hells
Bells")

1 Incendiary ("T.N.T.")

1 Inferno ("Get It Hot")

4 Kindle ("Shot Down in
Flames")

2 Lightning Bolt
("Thunderstruck")

3 Shock ("High Voltage")

2 Shriek of Dread ("Rock and
Roll Ain't Noise Pollution")

2 Sinister Strength ("Back in
Black")

1 Sphere of Resistance ("Big
Balls")

4 Stone Rain ("Let There Be Rock")
2 Tremor ("You Shook Me All Night Long")

27 other spells

I admire Tyler's spirit. Why go to the trouble of making a deck based on your favorite band if you can't play with it? It's just too bad he doesn't have any Badlands to go along with the AC/DC song "Badlands."

Smash Mouth

This one struck me out of the blue. Frankly, I've never given Smash Mouth a lot of credit. I liked "Walking on the Sun," but I thought it was kind of a novelty hit and they'd disappear. They didn't. But still, the band doesn't have a lot of songs under its belt, and they're not exactly on par with titans like Pink Floyd and Metallica, so I was expecting this deck to disappear as well. Wrong again. Never rely on your prejudices and preconceptions. To my surprise, this was one of the very first decks I moved over to the "Good Ones" file, and I like surprises.

"Defeat You"



Main Deck 60 cards

8 Island	4 Squee, Goblin Nabob ("Can't Get Enough of You Baby")	4 Brainstorm ("Sister Psychic")
5 Mountain	4 True Believer ("I'm a Believer")	4 Celestial Dawn ("Then the Morning Comes")
11 Plains	8 creatures	4 Counterspell ("Sorry")
24 lands		4 Disenchant ("Disenchanted")
		4 Fanning the Flames ("Burn Cycle")
		4 Solitary Confinement ("Solitude")
		4 Unsummon ("Out of Sight")
		<hr/> 28 other spells

Brilliant song title for Squee. For you screaming Monkees fans out there, "I'm a Believer" was covered by Smash Mouth for the *Shrek* soundtrack. (And it's not like the Monkees wrote it either; Neil Diamond did.) Chris notes that you want to use the *Mercadian Masques* Brainstorm so the art matches its song title. This deck is content to set up a Solitary Confinement-Squee lock, disrupt only what it needs to, and repeatedly deploy Fanning the Flames with buyback as its win condition.

Rush

Before picking cards to match songs, my man Redland Jack spent some time figuring out what color a Rush deck would be. He went for the big picture before working on the details. He writes: "Rush has been called the 'thinking man's band'—a title I'm guessing was devised by Rush fans. :) For this reason, I figured blue was a good color. Also, they stress individualism in many of their songs, so black had to be the second color." Nice. Redland Jack also included at least one song from each of Rush's 17 studio albums (if you include the title of the deck itself.)

"A Farewell to Kings"



Main Deck 60 cards

1 Deserted Temple ("The Temples of Syrinx [Part II of '2112']")	1 Boneknitter ("Roll the Bones")	1 Breakthrough ("Discovery [Part III of '2112']")
1 Grand Coliseum ("Grand Designs")	2 Callous Oppressor ("Freewill")	2 Cabal Therapy ("Panacea [Part IV of 'The Fountain of Lamneth']")
10 Island	1 Crafty Pathmage ("Finding My Way")	2 Chamber of Manipulation ("Take a Friend")
4 Polluted Delta ("Red Tide")	1 Doomed Necromancer ("The Necromancer")	2 Concentrate ("Something for Nothing")
8 Swamp	1 Headhunter ("I Think I'm Going Bald")	1 Counterspell ("Leave That Thing Alone")
24 lands	3 Nantuko Husk ("The Weapon [Part II of 'Fear']")	2 Cover of Darkness ("Into the Darkness [Part I of 'The Necromancer']")
	1 Riptide Entrancer ("The Enemy Within [Part I of 'Fear']")	2 Diabolic Tutor ("Where's My Thing?")
	1 Sage Owl ("Fly by Night")	1 Dirge of Dread ("Witch Hunt [Part III of 'Fear']")
	1 Shadowmage Infiltrator ("Under the Shadow [Part II of 'The Necromancer']")	1 Dispersing Orb ("The Sphere: A Kind of Dream [Part V of 'Cygnus X-1, Book II: Hemispheres']")
	12 creatures	1 Future Sight ("Oracle: The Dream [Part V of '2112']")
		3 Innocent Blood ("Out of the Cradle")
		2 Meekstone ("Overture [Part I of '2112']")
		1 Memory Lapse ("Resist")
		1 Shade's Form ("Ghost of a Chance")
		2 Standstill ("Time Stand Still")
		24 other spells

Crazy Canadian prog-rock bands. While "The Fountain of Lamneth," "The Necromancer," "Cygnus X-1, Book II: Hemispheres," and "2112" are each long, epic songs with individually titled movements, "Fear" is a grander concept piece whose parts are separate songs on separate albums. Connecting "Overture" to Meekstone might seem like a disconnect unless you know that the opening piece to the futuristic dystopian saga "2112" ends with the sounds of an explosion and the song's only lyric: "And the meek shall inherit the earth."

Ironically, this Rush deck is about as far from being a rush deck as possible. It wants to lock down your opponent's creatures—except for the ones you steal. Those can either be sacrificed or used offensively. Chamber of Manipulation combos well with Nantuko Husk, and even better with Dispersing Orb. The deck's other road to victory comes by way of small creatures with various means of evasion.

Bruce Springsteen

I was sold on Jeff's deck as soon as I saw the red, white, and blue Lightning Angel paired up with "Born in the USA." He figured lots of people would make that connection, but he sold himself short—he was the only one to do it. Even better, the rest of the deck did not disappoint. It's got solid ground creatures for defense, then explodes with Lightning Angel, Exalted Angel, and Blistering Firecat. In Jeff's words, the deck "fits with the Boss and his music style—half mellow and relaxing, half fire and brimstone."

"Pink Cadillac"		
Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Flooded Strand ("Lost in the Flood")	4 Blistering Firecat ("I'm on Fire")	4 Akroma's Blessing ("Cover Me")
4 Grand Coliseum ("Tougher Than the Rest")	4 Exalted Angel ("Brilliant Disguise")	2 Sigil of the New Dawn ("The Rising")
1 Island	4 Glory ("Glory Days")	3 Testament of Faith ("Leap of Faith")
7 Mountain	3 Hallowed Healer ("Human Touch")	9 other spells
8 Plains	4 Lightning Angel ("Born in the USA")	
24 lands	4 Lightning Elemental ("Thunder Road")	
	4 Phantom Nomad ("The Ghost of Tom Joad")	
	27 creatures	

"Tougher Than the Rest" refers to the pit fighters who make it to the Grand Coliseum, and Exalted Angel's face-down shell provides a "Brilliant Disguise." Jeff certainly has his creatures' backs: he provides damage prevention, protection, and even resurrection. The Blistering Firecat/Sigil of the New Dawn combo is fantastic.

Talking Heads

I can't describe this deck better than its author. Nathaniel?

"Here's a deck inspired by everybody's favorite new-wave/art/punk/funk/Afro-Brazilian/performance group, the Talking Heads. The Heads have a very wide variety of sounds, and could lend themselves to any colors. One of the most pervasive themes in their music, however, is that of nature. I started playing when *Invasion* came out, and I've got a definite soft spot for Harrow and three-or-more color decks. Song titles like 'Pull Up the Roots,' '(Nothing but) Flowers,' and 'Wild Wild Life' pointed towards a land-themed deck, and the rest just sort of fell together."



The image shows a screenshot of a Magic: The Gathering deck list. At the top left, the title "UH-OH" is written in a stylized font. At the top right, there is a small icon of a hand holding three cards. The main title of the deck is "Main Deck" with a subtitle "60 cards". The deck list is organized into three columns. The first column lists lands: 2 City Of Brass ("Cities"), 11 Forest, 7 Plains, 3 Swamp ("Swamp"), 4 Windswept Heath ("The Big Country"), and 27 lands. The second column lists creatures: 2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath ("Thank You for Sending Me an Angel"), 4 Cartographer ("Artists Only"), 4 Diligent Farmhand ("Found a Job"), 2 Molimo, Maro-Sorcerer ("Big Daddy"), and 12 creatures. The third column lists spells: 4 Constant Mists ("Seen and Not Seen"), 3 Death Grasp ("Psycho Killer"), 3 Explosive Vegetation ("Wild Wild Life"), 4 Harrow ("Pull Up the Roots"), 3 Overgrown Estate ("(Nothing but) Flowers"), 4 Planar Birth ("Born Under Punches"), and 21 other spells.


This deck bides its time, hiding behind Constant Mists or the life gain of Overgrown Estate as it builds up land. Every so often, a Planar Birth gets back all the land sacrificed to the Mists, Estate, and Harrow. Remember to sac all your lands to the Estate while Planar Birth is on the stack unless there's some danger of a counterspell. When you have enough land, out come the face-smashers and huge Death Grasps. (Nathaniel notes that the expression on Urza's face in the art is absolutely perfect for "Psycho Killer," and the map-drawing *Odyssey Cartographer* is the one that connects to "Artists Only.")

Nathaniel's final comments were echoed by a number of other participants, and it was great to read: "Mark Rosewater definitely has a point about rules fostering creativity. I'm generally not very creative with deck ideas, but the constraints of this contest pointed me towards the most original (decent) deck I've made yet. Plus, it was an excuse to mix two of my biggest interests, music and Magic. Hope all of your upcoming Deck Challenges are as much fun as this was." I hope so too!

Radiohead

I'm going to close with my favorite band. Radiohead delights me, moves me, baffles me, awes me, and forces me to expand my musical limits as I struggle to keep up with their transcendent works of art. And they sound good too. Still, I wondered why Aramis chose a primarily artifact deck with a splash of black. Luckily, Aramis writes, "I chose a primarily artifact deck with a splash of black because the band has a running motif in its lyrics about the dehumanizing effect of society on the individual, and their music is often mournful and melancholy." I can't argue with that.

"OK Computer"



Main Deck
60 cards

24 Swamp	3 Dancing Scimitar ("Knives Out")	3 Angel's Trumpet ("Pyramid Song")
24 lands	2 Karn, Silver Golem ("Paranoid Android")	3 Bubble Matrix ("Airbag")
9 creatures	4 Wall of Souls ("Karma Police")	3 Crumbling Sanctuary ("Subterranean Homesick Alien")
		3 General's Regalia ("Bishop's Robes")
		3 Haunting Echoes ("How to Disappear Completely")
		3 Kormus Bell ("Morning Bell")
		3 Morality Shift ("Pull/Pulk Revolving Doors")
		3 Null Brooch ("No Surprises")
		3 Whetstone ("Like Spinning Plates")
		27 other spells

There's not enough room to reprint the detailed explanations Aramis gave for each card-song connection. But here are some notes on the less obvious ones: "Karma Police" is about a protective unit, "Pyramid Song" mentions a "black-eyed angel," Crumbling Sanctuary's song keys off the art, and Karn's song just cracks Aramis up. Hey, me too.

Here's Aramis's description of the deck:

"I got this idea from my boyfriend actually, who told me on separate occasions that Radiohead and milling bore him to tears. Naturally, I decided to combine the two. The Scimitars and Walls are there to fend off any early offending forces while you mill with the Whetstone. To keep you from milling yourself you have the Shifts. Karn is there in case you want to try for a robotic beatdown. The Regalia is for sending direct damage aimed at you in a more deserving direction via Wall of Souls. If you want to speed up the milling, drop a Bubble Matrix, Kormus Bell, Crumbling Sanctuary and top off with the Angel's Trumpet netting you a nigh unkillable horde of untapped attacking wetlands that send cards flying into the graveyard (or across the table, depending on your opponent's frustration level at this point)!"

How can you not love that?

While I felt that the above decks were the cream of the crop, I was very impressed with all of the decks I received. Narrowing them down to these few was a painfully difficult task. I sincerely thank everyone who built a band-based theme deck, and I hope everyone who played along at home had fun.

Until next week, hail to the thief.

Mark

Mark may be reached at houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com. Send rules-related Magic questions to ask@wizards.com.

© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

