

Mark Gottlieb  
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**M**agic Memory Week? Why, oh why, did I get that lobotomy? I knew it would come back to haunt me.

That's a joke of course. I didn't have any idea it would come back to haunt me.

Well, let's wring some memories out of this brain of mine.

**Magic** memories are easy to scrounge up. I started playing with Beta, and this game has a knack for creating striking moments in time. The hard part of this week's topic is that this is a deck column, and my decks have always been completely expendable. I don't keep records of decklists. I don't save decks in game-ready form just waiting to be whipped out of the box. I'm much more of a seat-of-the-pants player, I've never had a particularly big physical card collection (though my mental collection is all-encompassing), and I only keep a really cool idea going until it stops amusing me. This is a little different on **Magic Online**, though, since the only key to saving decklists there for the remainder of time is to just not erase them.



Let me take you back to the heady days of 1993. I was a freshman in college, and **Magic: The Gathering** had just shown up in my dorm. The first game I watched may have featured Fireball and Lightning Bolt, but they were no match for the mega-broken Uthden Troll! (It regenerates! It can't die! IT . . . CAN'T . . . DIE!!!) I was immediately hooked. The game system—the combination of strategy and randomness—along with the opportunity for creativity and personalization thanks to the build-your-own-deck breakthrough, was immensely appealing. I had no idea how much a game like this had been missing from my life until it suddenly popped up and I could no longer remember what the world had been like without it. I quickly got some cards and started building an awful deck.

## As Time Goes Bayou

I continued building that awful deck for years. My friends would buy boxes of cards, trade to improve their card pool, and generate a robust collection that they could build many diverse decks out of. I wasn't interested in being a collector, and I didn't have a lot of money to spare on the game, so every booster I bought and every trade I made was with an eye towards improving my one, cherished deck. I started building that deck when I opened Force of Nature and Bayou in my first starter deck, and it always remained green-black. Over the years, the deck evolved from a Timmy special (Craw Giant! Lord of the Pit!) into a Johnnyfied proto-reanimator deck. The deck just naturally went that way after I opened a Hell's Caretaker in a *Chronicles* pack. This was before Reanimate was printed, before Living Death. All I had to work with were Animate Dead, Dance of the Dead, Reincarnation,



and the like. The best ways to drop cards into my graveyard were Millstone and Bazaar of Baghdad. I played in a couple of nonsanctioned college tournaments even though my main arena was my dorm floor's lounge, and I did as well as you'd expect with an 81-card near-highlander green-black abomination. The actual deck has been lost to the sands of time (though I still have all the cards), but I can show you a reasonable recreation. My construction technique was making a painful transition from the "This is a good card" phase to the "This is a good deck" phase, and I had some Neanderthal-like grasp of concepts like "card advantage" and "mana curve," so this deck is very, very primitive. And I loved playing it.

## Mark's Deck

**Main Deck**  
*81 cards*

1 Bayou 4 Bazaar of Baghdad 1 Bottomless Vault 11 Forest 1 Library of Alexandria 2 Mishra's Factory 1 Pendelhaven 1 Strip Mine 10 Swamp 1 Urborg <hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/> 33 lands	1 Ashen Ghoul 1 Carrion Ants 1 Cockatrice 1 Craw Giant 1 Dancing Scimitar 1 Fyndhorn Elder 1 Gaea's Liege 1 Hell's Caretaker 1 Ifh-Biff Efreet 1 Juggernaut 1 Juzam Djinn 1 Khabal Ghoul 1 Kjeldoran Dead 1 Lhurgoyf 1 Llanowar Elves 1 Lord of the Pit 1 Minion of Leshrac 1 Minion of Tevesh Szat 1 Royal Assassin 1 Scaled Wurm 1 Sorceress Queen 1 Tetravus 1 Triskelion 1 Wiitigo 1 Wyluli Wolf <hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/> 25 creatures	2 Animate Dead 1 Berserk 2 Breeding Pit 1 Dance of the Dead 1 Demonic Tutor 1 Desert Twister 1 Drop of Honey 1 Forbidden Lore 1 Icy Manipulator 3 Millstone 1 Oubliette 1 Regrowth 1 Reincarnation 1 Ritual of the Machine 1 Skull Catapult 1 Sol Ring 1 Soul Exchange 1 Tawnos's Coffin 1 Terror <hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/> 23 other spells
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The deck clearly had a strong theme running through it, but I never used multiples of a card when a few different cards would get me the same basic effect in slightly different ways. I got consistency with variety that way. I didn't know it was poor deck construction. In my mind, more cards = more fun. Why settle for monotony?

## Mighty MIT

My alma mater is MIT, so it's no surprise that I was introduced to **Magic** in its infancy. The game took early root there. But I never could have expected that MIT would allow me to interact with Richard Garfield . . . without knowing it. One of the main features that drew me to MIT was the existence of the MIT Mystery Hunt, a no-holds-barred puzzle contest so diabolical that it typically takes a team of over 20 crackerjack puzzle solvers, racing at top speed, a full weekend to get through. When I constructed and ran the event in January of 1995, I included as one of the puzzles a cryptolist of **Magic** cards. A cryptolist is a list of items, all of which fit a certain theme, that's been encoded using a simple substitution cipher. (A is Q, B is H, etc.) My **Magic** cryptolist puzzle never stated that it was about **Magic** at all. The game was popular enough that each team was likely to have someone who knew it (or could easily find someone who did), but was also esoteric enough that most people wouldn't easily recognize it. The theme also let me include goofy made-up names alongside real words. In fact, the first item on the list was Cuombajj Witches. I was hoping the double J would throw solvers off. I made sure that I included words with distinctive repeated-letter patterns, like Ball Lightning and Cosmic Horror, so that the puzzle was solvable. But, to my utter delight, it wasn't solvable by Richard. I had no idea that he had traveled out to participate in the event that year until after he had already left Cambridge, but the story I heard at the wrap-up was that he had looked at that puzzle, gotten nowhere, and moved on. Later, when someone on his team asked out loud if anyone knew what the heck "ball lightning" meant, he grabbed it and finished it off. A mere five and a half years later, I wound up working at Wizards of the Coast. Coincidence?

## A 'Wink and a Nod

As I've mentioned before, I've only ever played in two sanctioned Constructed tournaments. I preferred Limited events because they required less prep time. As in no prep time. In one of those Constructed tourneys, I played the WumpusGeddon deck I mentioned last week. In the other, I played the most annoying Standard deck I could possibly build. It focused on two concepts: The Parallax Tide-Ankh of Mishra combo (which I was pleased to have independently discovered before it hit the Internet) and the raw power of Hoodwink. Yes, Hoodwink. The ideal game went like this:

Turn 1: I play an Island.

Turn 1: My opponent plays a land.

Turn 2: I play an Island and Hoodwink my opponent's land.

Whoops, did I just play Time Walk? From there, I would continue to bounce lands with Boomerang and Rescind. Howling Mine kept my hand full of bounce spells, and I didn't care how many cards my opponent drew in return as long as I could keep bouncing that one land over and over. I'd win with the Ankh and/or Iron Maiden. The main drawback of the deck was that although it was very, very good when I went first, it was very, very bad when I went second. It was worth it, though. When the deck worked, my opponent was unable to do anything but make flailing attempts to keep a land or two on the table, and the intense levels of frustration that caused was priceless. This is what the deck looked like:



**Blue LD**



**Main Deck**  
60 cards

24 Islands

2 Temporal Adept

4 Ankh of Mishra

24 lands

2 creatures

4 Boomerang

4 Hoodwink

4 Howling Mine

4 Iron Maiden

2 Mishra's Helix

4 Parallax Tide

4 Rescind

4 Tangle Wire

34 other spells

After *Invasion* rotated into Standard and booted out Urza block, a later incarnation of the deck harnessed the unstoppable Glowing Anemone! It also subbed Viseling for Iron Maiden and *only the blue half* of Stand/Deliver for Rescind. Did I actually win with these decks? That **Magic** memory is conveniently fuzzy. . .

## Last Hurrah

The only notable deck I could find in my collection that I never ripped apart was from, of all events, the *Prophecy* Prerelease. I had just been hired by Wizards of the Coast to be a **Magic** editor, but I hadn't moved out to Washington yet. In those intervening two weeks was the last sanctioned event I would play for years. I had a specific goal: I wanted to do well enough to raise my Limited rating over 1800. That's not a mind-boggling rating, but I had only been playing in sanctioned drafts since *Urza's Legacy* came out. True to my wishes, I opened the most stompariffic sealed deck I've ever built.

## Mark Gottlieb



### Main Deck

40 cards

10 Forest

7 Mountain

17 lands

1 Battle Rampart

1 Cinder Elemental

1 Deepwood Drummer

1 Fault Riders

1 Giant Caterpillar

1 Jolrael, Empress of Beasts

1 Kris Mage

1 Pygmy Razorback

1 Rushwood Herbalist

2 Silt Crawler

1 Silverglade Elemental

1 Snorting Gahr

1 Thresher Beast

1 Two-Headed Dragon

1 Vintara Snapper

1 Wild Jhovall

17 creatures

1 Horn of Ramos

1 Living Terrain

1 Puffer Extract

1 Search for Survivors

1 Spidersilk Armor

1 Thrive

6 other spells

The deck has no instants. It has nearly no removal. It has no subtlety. It just runs you over with fat, fat monsters. And with very large animated lands. Puffer Extract-Rushwood Herbalist is a fine combo, and it's even better with Pygmy Razorback as its target. Remember when it was crazy for a puny 2/1 creature to have trample? Now that extra point of power seems like a luxury. Thank you, Defiant Elf!

The one wacky inclusion is Search for Survivors. It probably shouldn't be there, but it was a Prerelease and I couldn't resist some goofiness. Plus, I set myself up for the sneaky action of a turn-1 Kris Mage, a turn-2 pitch of a giant creature to the Spellshaper, and a turn-3 Search for Survivors play to get that giant creature back. Not that it happened . . . but the important thing is that it could have. The happy ending to this story is that I trounced my opponents to the tune of a 6-0 record until losing in the finals (this was before 4-round flights were the Prerelease norm) and my Limited rating just barely peeked above 1800 to settle at a respectable 1805.

That's all the squeezing my brain can take. Until next week, love the game.

Mark

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