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Casting aside the hallowed, ancient traditions of House of Cards, I have renamed the "Deck Challenge" as the "Deck Dare." Mostly because I will be taunting you throughout the course of this column. For your convenience, I will be highlighting my taunts as such: **Don't feel bad if you're not up to submitting a deck this time; it's probably over your head.**

First things first, though. Prepare to have your mind blown.

Back to the Future

Main Deck
60 cards

15 Island 9 Plains <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 24 lands	3 Callous Oppressor 2 Revered Elder 3 Temporal Adept 4 Thundercloud Elemental 1 Urza's Engine <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 13 creatures	3 Ancestral Knowledge 4 Brainstorm 1 Energy Arc 1 Enlightened Tutor 2 Future Sight 1 Homarid Spawning Bed 1 Kill Switch 3 Opportunity 3 Timesifter 4 Undo <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 23 other spells
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Mind just mildly vibrating? OK, let's check out the deck. It's designed to abuse Timesifter. Future Sight lets you keep an eye on the top of your deck, and Brainstorm, Enlightened Tutor, and Ancestral Knowledge (*especially* Ancestral Knowledge) let you manipulate the top of your deck by stacking your 6- and 7-mana spells there. Should you not have a Timesifter out, those expensive spells provide mondo extra cards and a victory condition in the form of Opportunity and Thundercloud Elemental, respectively. In the meantime, you control the board with Callous Oppressor, Temporal Adept, and Undo.

Mind just pleasantly percolating? Let's go card-by-card in our *Back to the Future* theme deck. Taking basic lands as a given, we have our cast of characters:

- **Temporal Adept:** Marty McFly
- **Enlightened Tutor:** Doc Brown
- **Revered Elder:** one each for George McFly and Lorraine
- **Callous Oppressor:** Biff

Our technology:

- **Timesifter:** The Flux Capacitor
- **Urza's Engine** : The Delorean, external view (or as close as **Magic** art allows)
- **Kill Switch:** The Delorean, internal view (yeah, with some creative license)



And the events of the film:

- **Future Sight:** Duh
- **Brainstorm:** Doc Brown hitting his head and inventing the Flux Capacitor
- **Ancestral Knowledge:** Marty gains far too much knowledge of his ancestors . . . well, his parents at least
- **Opportunity:** The lightning strike is the opportunity to get home; also, the *Urza's Legacy* flavor text is appropriate to Doc Brown
- **Undo:** Marty's siblings, and him, are disappearing from his photo
- **Homarid Spawning Bed:** The "Enchantment Under the Sea" dance (the Spawning Bed is an enchantment . . . under the sea!)
- **Thundercloud Elemental:** The big storm
- **Energy Arc:** The lightning strike itself that arcs down to the time machine

Mind rattling around now? You may think that's a pretty neat theme deck (those of you old enough to remember a movie from 1985, anyway), but I'm only halfway home. The deck works reasonably tightly for a theme deck, and each card fits the theme. But what if I were to present the deck in this manner?

Back to the Future		Main Deck	
		60 cards	
15 Island	_____	3 (A)ncestral Knowledge	
9 Plains	0 creatures	4 (B)rainstorm	
_____		3 (C)allous Oppressor	
24 lands		1 (E)nergy Arc	
		1 (E)nlightened Tutor	
		2 (F)uture Sight	
		1 (H)omarid Spawning Bed	
		1 (K)ill Switch	
		3 (O)ppportunity	
		2 (R)evered Elder	
		3 (T)emporal Adept	
		4 (T)hundercloud Elemental	
		3 (T)imesifter	
		4 (U)ndo	
		1 (U)rza's Engine	

		36 other spells	



Mind blown? If not, take a moment and digest all three levels that this deck works on. Then consider that I'm daring you to do the same thing. **It's OK if you don't bother; I'll never know you weren't up to the task.** For those concerned about my mental health, I want to assure you that I regularly see a psychotherapist. At least that's what it says on the side of his van.

This type of thing is known as an "acrostic." An acrostic is a message spelled out by reading down the first letters of each line of a paragraph, poem, or (now) **Magic** deck. And *that's* the theme of this Deck Dare. It has nothing to do with movies; *Back to the Future* is just what I happened to think of first.

Deck construction was tough. I started with Timesifter, but after that it was wide open. Should the "F" card be Future Sight, Flux, Fade Away, Fowl Play ("Nobody . . . calls me . . . a *chicken!!!*"), or something else? Hapless Researcher was my Doc Brown for a while, but how could I resist including an enchantment from under the sea—especially one that interacts so well with Thundercloud Elemental? Which lightning card should I include? (Arc Lightning? Energy Storm?) How would I justify an "O" card and *two* "U" cards? And—more than anything else—how would the deck hang together and actually *work*? (Ancestral Knowledge was the answer to that. When I saw how well it comboed with Timesifter, the deck started to congeal.)

How about another example? **Not that it'll help . . .**

Artist Credit

Edward P. Beard, Jr.



Main Deck

60 cards

10 Forest	_____	1 (A)rcades Sabboth
11 Island	0 creatures	4 (A)ven Fogbringer
4 Plains		4 (B)irds of Paradise
_____		2 (D)isappear
25 lands		1 (D)raconian Cylix
		1 (D)usk Imp
		1 (E)lvish Scrapper
		3 (E)xtravagant Spirit
		4 (J)ungle Barrier
		4 (P)low Under
		2 (R)ainbow Crow
		4 (R)aven Familiar

2 (R)eincarnation
2 (W)ings of Aesthir

35 other spells

Can you guess the theme? Why, all the art on these cards is by Edward P. Beard, Jr.! Once I decided to use an artist's name, the most difficult part was finding one capable of supporting the acrostic theme. My grandiose plans for Paolo Parente fell through when I discovered he had never illustrated a card that starts with "P." Similarly, someone's got to give Matt Cavotta an "O" card. Brom proved problematic unless I wanted to use a longer acrostic like "I LOVE ART BY BROM"—which would be perfectly fine, potential deckbuilders, but that's just not the direction I wanted to go.

Mr. Beard's deck came together pretty quickly. There was only one "J" to use, and Jungle Barrier pointed towards a blue-green deck. That was supported by the blue fliers like Extravagant Spirit, Rainbow Crow, Raven Familiar, and Aven Fogbringer. Out of the "P" choices, one of which is the formidable Psychatog, Plow Under suggested a nice stalling synergy with the Fogbringer. Arcades Sabboth is the icing on the cake.

The deck isn't perfect; I kinda ran out of "D" cards. That's why there's an unfortunate Dusk Imp in here. I wasn't willing to dilute the mana base further than the splash of white, so you can only play the Imp if you have a BoP in play. **As if YOU, sucka, could do better.** My biggest question was whether I wanted to use the final "R" on Reincarnation, one of my favorite old spells, or Righteous Fury, a *Portal Second Age* card that works as a semi-Wrath/lifegain spell. In the end, I decided that the double white cost on the Fury was too steep, but it's pretty much a tossup.



The Minnesota Vikings Are 5-0!

But wait, there's more! An acrostic is a very difficult theme to build around. But it's also very versatile—you can adapt a lot of different themes into acrostic form. **If you're up to it.** Be creative with the message that you pick. For example, in my football deck, I chose the acrostic "Touchdown march" over something like "NFL Football" or "Superbowl Sunday" because I liked my football-themed cards that start with "A" and "M" so much that I had to find an acrostic that would accommodate them both.

I'm going to present this deck in exactly the way I want your submissions to come to me. First, the decklist in acrostic order. Your deck must be **exactly** 60 cards and **basic** lands don't have to fit into the acrostic. You can use cards from any set, including *Portal*, *Unglued*, and even *Homelands*.

Touchdown March



Main Deck
60 cards

6 Forest	_____	2 (A)vatar of Hope
9 Mountain	0 creatures	4 (C)entaur Chieftain
9 Plains		2 (C)loudchaser Eagle
_____		2 (D)esolation Giant
24 lands		2 (H)eadlong Rush
		3 (H)ell-Bent Raider
		2 (M)ageta the Lion
		4 (N)oble Panther
		4 (O)pal Titan
		2 (O)utmaneuver
		2 (R)amosian Rally
		4 (T)urf Wound
		1 (U)nerring Sling
		2 (W)ar Dance

		36 other spells

Next, I want to see a **brief** explanation of how the deck works.

March to the goal with this red-white-green deck by using efficient, mighty creatures (Opal Titan, Noble Panther) and combat tricks (Headlong Rush, Ramosian Rally). Blow up the board—except for your own 3/3 guy—whenever necessary (Desolation Giant, Mageta the Lion) and rebuild fast with hasty creatures.

Finally, an **extremely brief** explanation of how each card fits the theme.

- Turf Wound – A wound sustained on turf
- Opal Titan – The Tennessee Titans!
- Unerring Sling – Passing play
- Centaur Chieftain – The Kansas City Chiefs!
- Headlong Rush – Running play
- Desolation Giant – The New Jersey Giants!
- Outmaneuver – What you do to the other team
- War Dance – End zone celebration
- Noble Panther – The Carolina Panthers!
- Mageta the Lion – The Detroit Lions!
- Avatar of Hope – The San Francisco 49ers (it's a 4/9 creature)!
- Ramosian Rally – Go team go! Rah rah rah!
- Cloudchaser Eagle – The Philadelphia Eagles!
- Hell-Bent Raider – The Oakland Raiders!

Get it? Got it? Good. **Of course, only the people smart and clever enough to even attempt this Deck Dare need to pay attention to the submission guidelines.** You think that's you? If so, here's all the info:

- Put "Acrostic" in the subject line of your message.
- One submission per person.
- Exactly 60 cards in the deck.
- Your deck must have a theme. That theme must be spelled out by the initial letters of the cards you include, except for basic lands.
- Each card must fit into your theme. **Tell me how.**

- The deck as a whole must work reasonably. (Think of it this way: It should be competitive vs. the three decks I've listed here today.) **Tell me how.**
- Submissions will be accepted until Halloween.

I call you out. You, the guy who trashes me on the message boards. Or you, the player who's never built a deck before. Or you, the by-now-utterly-confused person who thought you'd take a simple 5-minute break from work. Or you, Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar. All of you. I dare you. Show me your cleverness and creativity. Show me what you've got.

Until next week, have fun with acrostics.

Mark

To submit decks or feedback: Mark may be reached at houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com. Send rules-related **Magic** questions to ask@wizards.com.

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