

Mark Gottlieb

Thursday, October 30, 2003

---

## Boo.

**H**appy Halloween, everyone! I love this holiday. It's such a refreshing change from all the other sickly sweet sapsfests dotting the calendar. Valentine's Day is about *looove*. Mother's Day is about *looove*. The Christmas spirit of rampant consumerism has been diluted by *looove*. Ick. Halloween is a pure holiday celebrating the most wonderful aspects of the human soul: Taking candy from strangers. Dressing in grotesque costumes. Scaring the ooflotak out of your friends. Scavenging putrid souls for eerie rituals. Wholesome family fun!

I have to deal with a bit of competition on the site this week. Ben already wrote about the creepiest cards. Anthony already wrote about making Halloween theme decks *and* used made-up words. Today, I'll be... making Halloween theme decks using the creepiest cards. Luckily, I'm a lot more snorgwicious than those two jokers, so hang on-and don't get too freaked out.

## The Obligatory Deck

How could I let Halloween go by without making an All Hallow's Eve deck? Seriously, how? Help me out here! No, no, I love the card. As the first mass recursion card, it was revolutionary when it debuted. Visions of reanimated Craw Wurms and Lord of the Pits (dumped into my graveyard via Bazaar of Baghdad) danced in my head. It never happened, though, because it turns out that All Hallow's Eve is not on the high end of the quality spectrum. You play it. Your opponent snickers and takes a turn. You remove a time counter and spend your turn setting up for a big payoff. Your opponent guffaws, takes another turn, and Disenchants your card at the last second. How can Halloween be Disenchanted???

Since today is All Hallow's Eve - Eve, out comes the card again. Why use it over the vastly superior Living Death? Because it's so much cooler! It's from *Legends*! It's misprinted as a "**Sorcery**"! It's got a pumpkin on it, for crying out loud! Living Death is clearly the better choice, but All Hallow's Eve is earns you oodles of style points.

I don't want to just use it, though; I want to take advantage of it. And that's why I'm glad I got a Power Conduit while out trick-or-treating this year. Pull a time counter off your sorc enchantment, and it starts to look a lot better. As usual, once I start using Power Conduit, I don't want to stop at just one card. That's where the satisfyingly Halloweeny Altar of Shadows and Harbinger of Night come in. By pulling off the -1/-1 counters Harbinger of Night puts on itself and transforming them into +1/+1 counters for another of your creatures, you've stabilized two creepy critters with a single Conduit-meaning you've allowed the Harbinger to eternally drain your opponent's creatures.



Letting an All Hallow's Eve go off doesn't do much without a freshly stuffed graveyard. Buried Alive is a creepily reliable way to throw some worm-infested soil onto spooky staples like Spirit of the Night, Visara the Dreadful, Necrosavant, and Carrionette. Twisted Abomination and Scion of Darkness will bury themselves from your hand thanks to cycling. Mind Maggots-with its cringe-inducing art-lets you ditch any super-expensive creatures stuck in your hand *and* powers up the Conduit.

There's one last element to a super All Hallow's Eve: draining your opponent's graveyard. Who said a symmetrical effect should be symmetrical? Consider it the trick in this otherwise treat-filled deck. Withered Wretch is a no-brainer... so I left it out. It's a little too on-the-nose, and it's just not Halloweenical enough. Entrails Feaster, on the other hand, is absolutely perfect for the holiday. It's a black cat-turned-rotting zombie! Possibly the Halloweeniest creature ever. Eater of the Dead, unsurprisingly, also fits into the deck, and Gravestorm gives you wicked art and gives your opponent a wicked tough choice. Now that you've filled your graveyard and emptied your opponent's, Tombstone Stairwell is a horrifying way to reap the rewards. And with all those Zombies running around, I could not resist slipping in one of my all-time favorite gooseflesh-inducing cards: Hecatomb. A deck that tries to make All Hallow's Eve and Hecatomb work? That is scary.

## Hallow Specter




### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Barren Moor	1 Carionette	3 All Hallow's Eve
20 Swamps	1 Doomed Necromancer	1 Altar of Shadows
24 lands	1 Eater of the Dead	4 Buried Alive
	1 Entrails Feaster	2 Gravestorm
	3 Harbinger of Night	1 Hecatomb
	1 Mind Maggots	1 Infernal Genesis
	2 Necrosavant	2 Power Conduit
	1 Phyrexian Gargantua	2 Tombstone Stairwell
	3 Scion of Darkness	16 other spells
	1 Spirit of the Night	
	4 Twisted Abomination	
	1 Visara the Dreadful	
	20 creatures	

## Ghast of Characters

All the cards in that deck (with the exception of Power Conduit) are appropriately Halloween-themed. But that was more of a deck built around a specific card than it was a theme deck. For a brilliant high-concept theme deck, see Anthony's most recent column. For a much more straightforward theme deck built around Halloween's familiar denizens, see what's lurking around the next paragraph.

No high-falutin' nineteenth-century poetry for me. When it's time for a Halloween theme deck, give me a werewolf, a ghost, a vampire, a bat, a skeleton, a mummy, a witch, a zombie, a poltergeist, an imp, a ghoul, a specter, a phantom, and a monster. Check that - I meant a Phantom Monster. Some literary references sneak in; it's just so hard to leave Headless Horseman and Frankenstein's Monster out of a Halloween deck. It's even harder to put Banshee *into* the deck, but it would not be denied. Luckily, a  0/1 creature has two great uses here: It's the perfect card to discard to your Spellshapers, Vampire, or Looter, and it's fantastic for removing from your graveyard to feed Barrow Ghoul, Rotting Giant, or Frank.

Looter, you ask? Of course! The Trickster Mage is the tricker, and the Merfolk Looters are the treaters. They have an Ancient Craving for candy, but when they encounter the Scare Tactics of a Dread Reaper under a Bad Moon, you'll be able to hear their Endless Scream forever..

The deck is a weenie deck with some graveyard tricks. It leans on the Mischievous Poltergeists, which are difficult to exorcise, as well as the swarm of other little black flying nasties. Pump them up with Bad Moons and the +X/+0 effects in the deck. The deck has lots of ways to feed your graveyard since being able to support an early Barrow Ghoul can be a big advantage. If you can kick the Oversold Cemetery into gear, so much the better.

## Halloween Party



### Main Deck

60 cards

3 Island	1 Banshee	3 Ancient Craving
3 Polluted Delta	2 Barrow Ghoul	3 Bad Moon
13 Swamp	2 Cackling Witch	1 Endless Scream
4 Tainted Isle	1 Cyclopean Mummy	1 Oversold Cemetery
23 lands	1 Doomsday Specter	1 Scare Tactics
	1 Dread Reaper	9 other spells
	1 Frankenstein's Monster	
	1 Ghost Ship	
	1 Haunting Apparition	
	1 Headless Horseman	
	2 Merfolk Looter	
	4 Mischievous Poltergeist	
	1 Phantom Monster	
	1 Putrid Imp	
	1 Restless Dead	
	1 Rotting Giant	
	2 Skyshroud Vampire	
	1 Treacherous Werewolf	

1 Trickster Mage

2 Vampire Bats

---

28 creatures

## Frightfest

Ever since Alpha, one of the elements that set **Magic** apart from other games is its phenomenal artwork. New settings, fantastical creatures, heroic characters - each card is a flavor capsule whisked in from a realm beyond imagination. And that realm has some freaky stuff lurking in its corners. Not to mention the sick minds that created it. This next deck is a nigh-Singleton deck (you'll see why) built solely out of the creepiest, eepiest, utterly gheepiest images ever committed to cardboard. The deck hangs together decently (not surprisingly, it's got some removal, some discard, some graveyard tricks, and some mean ol' creatures), but the point of playing it is just to show off the art. Really look at each piece when it comes up, then try not to have nightmares later that night.

**Ashen Ghoul** - Is it ickier if that's its own blood or someone else's?

**Bloodcurdler** - Freaks me out no end. Can you believe this came in for a *blue* card (Pulsating Illusion)?

**Boneshard Slasher** - Don't let it sit in your beanbag chair.

**Cackling Fiend** - There's a fine line between insanity and raving insanity.

**Carnophage** - Dude, where's my skin?

**Carrionette** - Gerrard hadn't dusted for cobwebs in ages.

**Childhood Horror** - Adulthood too.

**Chime of Night** - What're *you* smiling at?

**Coffin Puppets** - Not my kind of puppet show.

**Contagion** - The thing that always got me about this piece is that the cat-the haunted, death-possessed cat-seems scared too.

**Corpse Dance** - Nice that it keeps an active social life.

**Cosmic Horror** - What the Flargg is this thing?!?!

**Dance of the Dead** - One of my favorite art pieces. Go Grim Reaper go!

**Dread Wight** - And this is a *good* hair day.

**Dungeon Shade** - Its face is in mid-melt.

**Grim Feast** - It's not that he's eating a severed arm. It's how casually he's doing it.



**Juzam Djinn** - My all-time favorite art piece, this is the stuff nightmares are made of.

**Lake of the Dead** - Everyone out of the pool.

**Lhurgoyf** - I still remember the visceral reaction I had when I figured out the monster's tube-like maw was slurping down a whole frozen corpse.

**Lingering Death** - Oozing, smoking orifices. Bet it's even worse *inside* his head.

**Living Wall** - Wall of Bone, Wall of Blood, Wall of Corpses, and Wall of Putrid Flesh all have grosser names. But you can't top this gelatinous tower of flesh and organs for retch factor.

**Lord of the Pit** - The original badass. Do *not* get in his way.

**Mind Extraction** - Watch where you stick those fingers, Crovax.

**Mind Rot** - The top of this guy's skull has an unpleasant indentation, and a sickly goo of mushed brains is oozing out his nose. One of the few cards that makes me nauseous.

**Mindstab Thrull** - The arm bone's connected to the arm bone; the arm bone's connected to the arm bone...

**Mutilate** - Creepiest art ever. I can't look at this picture for more than 15 seconds without needing to look away.

**Necrite** - Not for the faint-of-tongue.

**Nefashu** - Get this thing an anatomy textbook, stat!

**Skinthinner** - Put it back in its morph! It's not finished yet!

**Spined Fluke** - And you thought a regular fluke in your intestine was painful.

**Tainted Specter** - The happier a specter is, the unhappier you are.

**Takklemaggot** - Pals with the Fluke, I suppose.

**Terror** - The physical embodiment of a scream of agony, this card helped rope me into Magic back in the days of Beta.



**Terror** - A very worthy successor. This is so freaky that I made the deck non-Highlander just to include it.

**Treacherous Vampire** - Look at the reach on this guy! Stay away from it on the basketball court.

**Vampiric Spirit** - It's got a torso for a head!

## Galling Gallery

**Main Deck**  
*59 cards*

6 Forest	1 Ashen Ghoul	1 Chime of Night
1 Lake of the Dead	1 Bloodcurdler	1 Contagion
18 Swamp	1 Boneshard Slasher	1 Corpse Dance
<hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/>	1 Cackling Fiend	1 Dance of the Dead
25 lands	1 Carnophage	1 Grim Feast
	1 Carrionette	1 Lingering Death
	1 Childhood Horror	1 Mind Extraction
	1 Coffin Puppets	1 Mind Rot
	1 Cosmic Horror	1 Mutilate
	1 Dread Wight	1 Terror
	1 Dungeon Shade	<hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/>
	1 Juzam Djinn	10 other spells
	1 Lhurgoyf	
	1 Living Wall	
	1 Lord of the Pit	
	1 Mindstab Thrull	
	1 Necrite	
	1 Nefashu	
	1 Skint thinner	
	1 Spined Fluke	
	1 Tainted Specter	
	1 Takklemaggot	
	1 Treacherous Vampire	
	1 Vampiric Spirit	
	<hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/>	
	24 creatures	

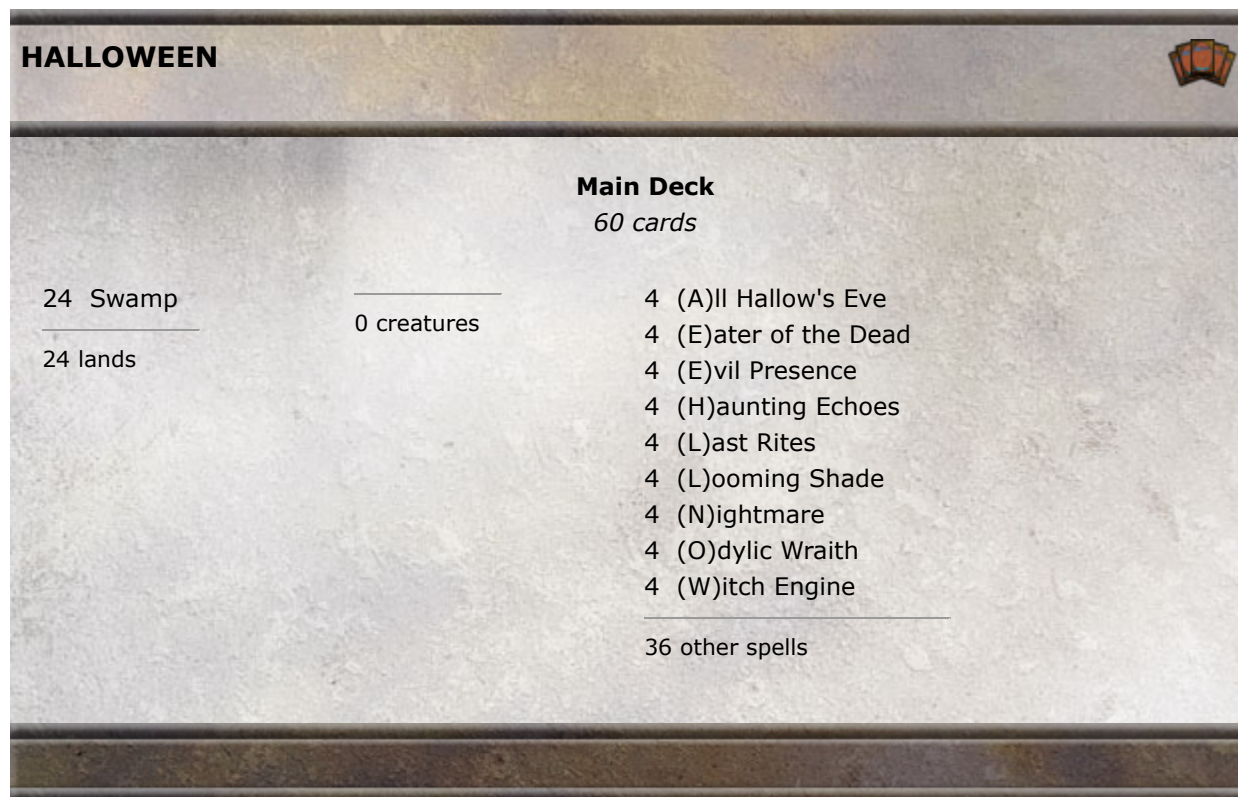
I know you have differing opinions. I know you're all like "Shaah, Nafashu? What-ever," or "How could you leave off Massacre? Have you even *played* **Magic** before?" Your comments are valid. But please don't send them to me. I'm sure there are cards I missed, but I'm not going to update and correct my Halloween decks in mid-November. If you want your shout-outs to be heard, post them on the message boards!

## Dare to Compare

Finally, I thought I'd share some early Deck Dare results. Given the time of year, many folks based their Deck Dare submissions on the theme (and acrostic) of HALLOWEEN. Six people, in fact, used

that acrostic exactly: Ryan Heffernan, Eric Cook, Drakenul, Brad, Kmgm11, and the succinctly-named D. Bharlion went with HAPPY HALLOWEEN, KIDS; and Michael Johnson (no, a different one) tried FUN CANDY STICK. I decided that Sam's THIS IS HALLOWEEN deck based on The Nightmare Before Christmas belonged in the Film category, not the Halloween category. Chris Dembrosky sent in a HALLOWEENIES deck that's surprisingly similar to what you'd get if you squished together today's top two decks. Unfortunately, he sent it in this Tuesday, after I had written that part of the article. Faster next time, Chris! You could have saved me a lot of work!

I liked all of the Halloween decks, so, rather than single one of them out, I decided to play Dr. Frankenstein myself and doctor them into the ultimate Halloween acrostic deck! Mwa-ha-ha-ha!



**HALLOWEEN**

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

24 Swamp	_____	4 (A)ll Hallow's Eve
24 lands	0 creatures	4 (E)ater of the Dead
		4 (E)vil Presence
		4 (H)aunting Echoes
		4 (L)ast Rites
		4 (L)ooming Shade
		4 (N)ightmare
		4 (O)dylic Wraith
		4 (W)itch Engine
		_____
		36 other spells

Just about all of them used All Hallow's Eve for the "A," but they diverged after that. I liked the idea that Haunting Echoes would clear out your opponent's graveyard to make All Hallow's Eve one-sided. Eater of the Dead, besides being a sizable creature, accomplishes the same thing. The macabre Last Rites is the best way to fill your graveyard with fat creatures while disrupting your opponent. The evil Evil Presence, while normally subpar, guarantees that your swampwalking Odylic Wraith and Witch Engine get through. And as long as you've got 24 Swamps, why not take advantage of them with the looming Looming Shade and the incredibly appropriate Nightmare. Good job, everyone; pumpkins all around!

Until next week, have fun on Halloween!

Mark

---

Mark may be reached at [houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com](mailto:houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com). Send rules-related **Magic** questions to [ask@wizards.com](mailto:ask@wizards.com).

