

Mark Gottlieb

Thursday, November 06, 2003

Congratulations to all you mad scientist deckbuilders out there. I received over 300 submissions for my acrostic Deck Dare, a number that surprised me because that thing was *hard!* I guess you are pretty smart, after all. (Great. Now I owe Mark Rosewater a coke.)

Just to go over the guidelines: Each submission had to be a theme deck. The deck had to work reasonably well, each card had to fit into the theme, and the theme had to be spelled out by the first letters of the cards in the deck (excepting basic lands).

Neo Pets

The most popular theme choice by far was *The Matrix*, with 18 submissions—fitting, since *Matrix Revolutions* opened yesterday. Acrostics ranged from the simple (THE MATRIX) to the complex (THE MATRIX TRILOGY MOVIES) to the elaborate (WHY DIDN'T I TAKE THE BLUE PILL?) to the bizarre (NEO IS BEING VERY DURABLE running down the *fourth* column of the card names, not the first.) Who knew there was such a crossover between **Magic** players and sci-fi/fantasy action movie fans? The sticking point for most people was the "X." There were a lot of shaky justifications for Xanthic Statue ("The agents usually have deadpan expressions, making them appear as statues... or something"), Xenic Poltergeist, and Xantid Swarm. There were a lot of shaky justifications for those shaky justifications ("Give me a break, 'X' is hard!") that only the best decks managed to avoid.

Some key cards showed up in many different decks.

Mindslaver and Alter Reality were Matrix naturals, as were Treachery (that one's for you, Cypher), Arcanis the Omnipotent (sometimes it was Neo, sometimes Morpheus), Morphling (for when Neo does his "Superman thing"), and Nebuchadnezzar. Some clever unique inclusions were Reality Twist ("The twist is when you find out reality isn't real") and Entrails Feaster (the black cat from the *déjà vu* scene). Nathan Ostrowsky went far afield for his "X"—he used the Portal Three Kingdoms card Xun Yu, Wie Advisor for Niobe, since she lends Morpheus a helping hand. He also used the always-fun Infernal Spawn of Evil for the sentinels ("They're coming!") Overall, my second favorite Matrix deck was submitted by the Arson Parson, who had the thematic audacity to cast Ixidor, Reality Sculptor as MORPHEUS—he unplugs people from their artificial existences and sets them free! Each card choice in that deck was supported by an appropriate quote from one of the films. But to describe the deck I liked the most in terms of theme cohesiveness and deck originality, I think it only fitting that Morpheus—er, I mean Scott Miller—takes over from here.



What is the Matrix?

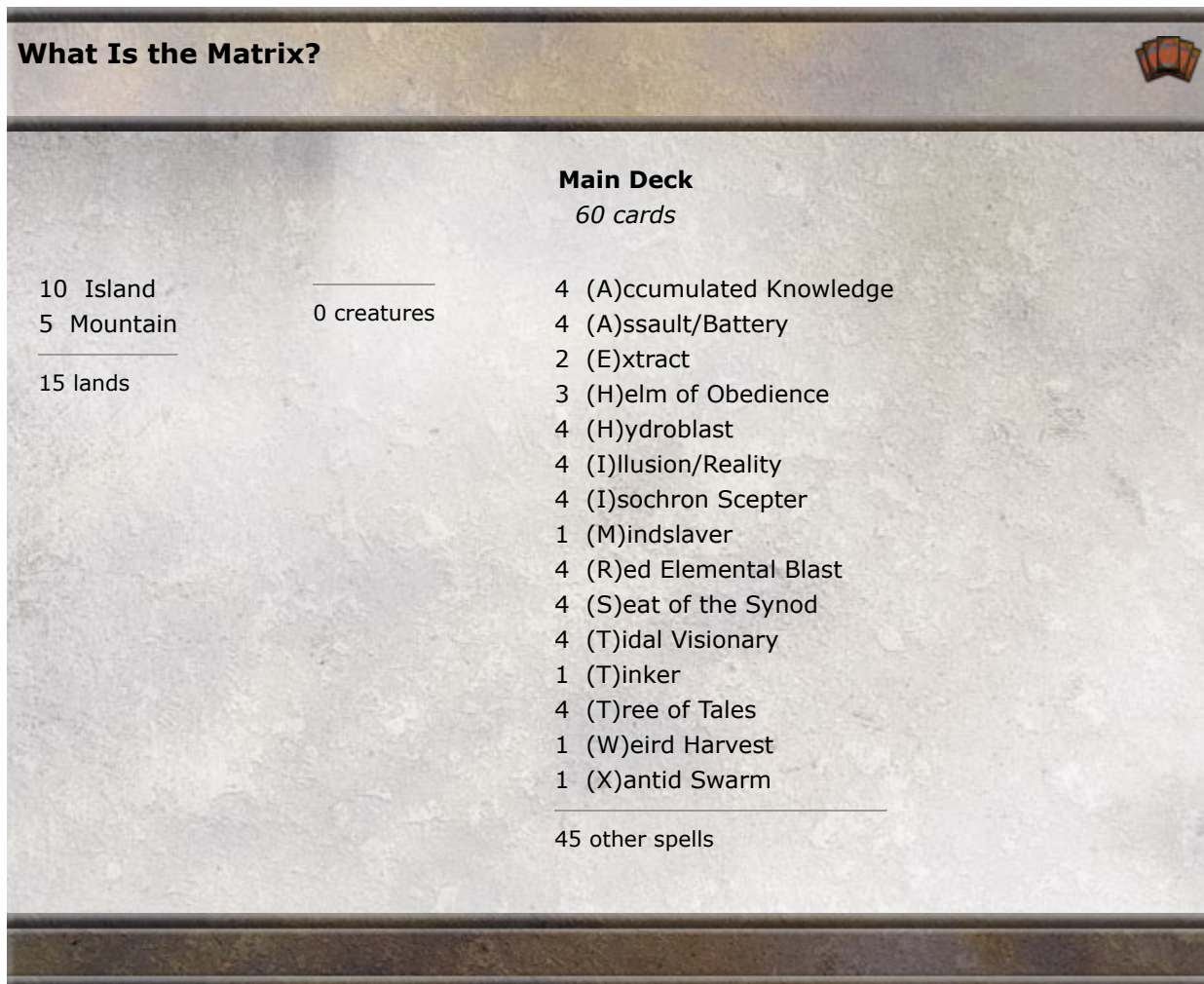
If you had chosen the blue pill, you would wake up in your bed at home, with no knowledge of our meeting.


Since you chose the red pill, I will tell you about the Matrix, according to what we have learned.

The human race is imprisoned by a race of machines, who harvest our bodies to use them as batteries. They keep us plugged into a dream world, controlling our minds, controlling our actions. This dream world appears to be identical to our reality, but it is entirely artificial. However, there are some bugs in the system. With training, you can learn what rules can be bent and what rules can be broken. We have programs that let us load just about whatever we want into the Matrix, which we use to fight back against the rule of the machines.

As we were speaking, we used a program to trace your exact location. You are about to be freed from the Matrix.

Welcome to reality.



What Is the Matrix? 

Main Deck
60 cards

10 Island	_____	4 (A)ccumulated Knowledge
5 Mountain	0 creatures	4 (A)ssault/Battery
_____		2 (E)xtract
15 lands		3 (H)elm of Obedience
		4 (H)ydroblast
		4 (I)llusion/Reality
		4 (I)sochron Scepter
		1 (M)indslaver
		4 (R)ed Elemental Blast
		4 (S)eat of the Synod
		4 (T)idal Visionary
		1 (T)inker
		4 (T)ree of Tales
		1 (W)eird Harvest
		1 (X)antid Swarm

		45 other spells

Hydroblast and Red Elemental Blast combo with Illusion and Tidal Visionary to destroy any threat on the board, and the plan works even better when you pop one or more of the combo pieces into an Isochron Scepter. The main route to victory is with Helm of Obedience, which will either mill away your opponent's deck or snag a handy creature. Extract does a little pre-Helm setup work and Tinker will trade an artifact land (most likely) for a Scepter, Helm, or Mindslaver.

Ring-a-Ding-Ding

The second most popular acrostic theme was *The Lord of the Rings*. You folks just love Hugo Weaving! Most of the deck submissions used just that as the acrostic, though some were more specific. Jack Roman made a deck about SAM GAMGEE, while Skip's deck was dedicated to ARAGORN ELESSAR. Omar Dapul's TWO TOWERS deck rightly contained Tower of Fortunes and Tower of

Murmurs, as well as Oblivion Stone subbing for the Palantir. Other representations of the Palantir were Icy Manipulator and Elemental Augury. Various swords popped up (Leonin Scimitar, Sword of Kaldra, Sword of the Ages). Of course, the main characters showed up time and again. Somehow, Gimli was universally Dwarven Berserker. Aragorn, though, varied between Ranger en-Vec, Northern Paladin, Devoted Hero, and Gempalm Strider. Philip Martin thought Frodo and the other three Hobbits were best represented by Tel-Jilad Chosen because "they may be small, but the ring won't corrupt them." Matthew Weir thought the foursome were better suited as Intrepid Heroes. How about Lithatog as Gollum? Oracle en-Vec as Saruman? Oracle en-Vec as Gandalf? Giant Spider for Shelob? In the Eye of Chaos or Eye of Yawgmoth for Sauron? Horrible Hordes for the Uruk-Hai (since, as Lawrence Gann argues, "they both come in horde form")? And, of course, there's the One Ring. The most popular choices for that were Ring of Gix, Ring of Immortals, and the powerful (and restricted, so there could only be *one*) Sol Ring.



My second favorite deck here was a creative departure. Curry McKnight chose to look at things from Sauron's point of view! This evil, evil deck controlled resources using Elemental Augury, Ring of Gix, and Greed (Sauron's motivating force), along with the nice combo of Orcish Squatters (orcs!) plus either Invisibility (what happens when you wear the Ring) or Dauthi Trapper (Gollum, by art and ability). Finally a huge beater, like Reiver Demon (the Balrog) or Lord of Tresserhorn (Sauron), would show up and smash in.

My favorite LotR deck, from Gary Cyr, is reasonably straightforward—which is one of the reasons I like it. It has some characters, some story events, and some very nice deck synergy.

Lord of the Rings		Main Deck	
		58 cards	
12 Forest	_____	1 (D)warven Berserker	
10 Mountain	0 creatures	1 (E)lvish Ranger	
_____		4 (F)alling Timber	
22 lands		4 (G)oblin War Drums	
		1 (H)idden Spider	
		3 (I)ronclaw Orcs	
		2 (L)eonin Scimitar	
		4 (N)atural Emergence	
		4 (O)nslaught	
		4 (O)rgg	
		4 (R)edwood Treefolk	
		1 (R)ofellos, Llanowar Emissary	
		1 (S)ol Ring	
		2 (T)el-Jilad Archers	

		36 other spells	

Card explanations:

Leonin Scimitar: Anduril and Glamdring

Onslaught: The battle for Helms Deep

Redwood Treefolk: The ents

Dwarven Berserker: Gimli

Orgg: The cave troll in the Mines of Moria

Falling Timber: Saruman's orcs cutting down the trees around Isengard

Tel-Jilad Archers: Legolas and Haldir

Hidden Spider: Shelob

Elvish Ranger: Aragorn

Rofellos, Llanowar Emissary: Elrond

Ironclaw Orcs: The Uruk-Hai orcs

Natural Emergence: The ents go to war

Goblin War Drums: Drums heard before the fight in the Mines of Moria

Sol Ring: The One Ring

No, not all of the characters are in there. But it really gets a sense of the action. Plus, I like how it plays. It's a two-color deck that takes great advantage of *Onslaught* to march its weenies through. *Onslaught* combos well with *Goblin War Drums* and *very* well with *Orgg*. The enchantment also provides four of the nine ways to meet the requirements of getting *Natural Emergence* in play, and we all know that when the Ents finally decide to join the fray, the fray won't last much longer.

Me Me Me

Some jokesters thought that the best way to see their names on the Wizards of the Coast website would be to make me the subject of their acrostic! Frankly, I'm shocked... at how smart they are. Note that the tactic can easily go astray. Robert Phillips's MARK ROSEWATER acrostic was somehow less interesting to me. The less said about the MATT GOTTLIEB DECKS acrostic (yes, someone sent this in), the better. StarCity Games writer Scott Johns created a Deck Dare submission based on the mental anguish of creating a Deck Dare submission; playing his TAUNTING CHALLENGE deck would ideally end with Haunting Echoes and a concession! Garrett Taylor's GARRETT VS. MARK deck told the tale of a quite imaginative epic throwdown; how I got Ken Krouner and Jeroen Remie on my team even though I've never met them is unclear.

Shown here is Goat Lord's deck all about me. The deck made me laugh (and is correct on all counts), so up on the Internet it goes.



Mark Gottlieb



Main Deck
60 cards

11 Forest	0 creatures	2 (A)ntagonism	
11 Mountain		4 (B)arbarian Lunatic	
<hr/>		4 (E)nrage	
22 lands		1 (G)oblin Psychopath	
		3 (I)ncite War	
		4 (K)eeper of the Beasts	
		4 (L)ightning Coils	
		4 (M)ages' Contest	
		1 (O)verabundance	
		3 (R)edwood Treefolk	
		4 (T)aunting Elf	
		4 (T)emporary Insanity	
		<hr/>	
		38 other spells	

The idea is get down some Coils and build up your counters through flinging Barbarians, chumping Beasts, and trading with your opponent's creatures. Taunting Elf and Incite War help to clear the way for when your Coils go off, and Overabundance and Antagonism help bring your opponent within range of one very Enraged creature. Mages' Contest either puts a stop to opposing threats before they happen, or brings them closer to being dead.

Goat Lord's card-by-card explanations:

Mages' Contest: What is this Deck Dare but a contest between all the mages of the Internet?

Antagonism: As seen in bold and highlighted in green.

Redwood Treefolk: Your first House of Cards article was on March 6th; this is a 3/6 creature.

Keeper of the Beasts: You're the keeper of the House of Cards, a house which contains beasts for sure.

Goblin Psychopath: This challenge is a clear sign that you are losing your mind.

Overabundance: Despite your best efforts, I'm sure you'll receive an overabundance of decks.

Temporary Insanity: Maybe your insanity will pass.

Taunting Elf: You made a point to taunt your readers.

Lightning Coils: You previewed it.

Incite War: Your goading might not incite war, but it will surely incite something.

Enrage: Or maybe it will just make people mad.

Barbarian Lunatic: Seriously, you're crazy.

Social Darwinism

Let's continue on the topic of brilliant historical figures. Some decks used the names of monumental brainiacs who aren't me. Colleagues like SIGMUND FREUD, philosopher THEODOR W. ADORNO, and this next egghead showed up to play.

CHARLES DARWIN		
<hr/>		
Main Deck		
<i>60 cards</i>		
9 Forest	<hr/>	2 (A)rtificial Evolution

9 Island	0 creatures	3 (A)valanche Riders
3 Mountain		3 (C)atalog
3 Swamp		3 (D)eranged Hermit
<hr/>		3 (E)xtinction
24 lands		3 (H)apless Researcher
		1 (I)ridescent Drake
		3 (L)ifeline
		3 (N)atural Selection
		2 (R)elearn
		3 (R)iptide Biologist
		3 (S)urvival of the Fittest
		4 (W)onder
		<hr/>
		36 other spells

Once you have a Lifeline in play, your Deranged Hermits, Avalanche Riders, and Hapless Researchers lead to recursive squirrel-making, land-breaking, card-searching fun. Catalog, Natural Selection, and Survival of the Fittest help find your combo pieces. Wonder is a great discard for both Catalog and Survival of the Fittest, and it evolves your squirrels into *flying* squirrels. Extinction, especially paired with Artificial Evolution, keeps your opponent's creature population in check. Show everyone who's the dominant species!

Card explanations:

Catalog: Darwin catalogued what he saw and learned.

Hapless Researcher: Darwin was a researcher.

Artificial Evolution: Hey, it's evolution.

Riptide Biologist: Darwin was a biologist.

Lifeline: And biology is the study of life.

Extinction: The death of a species, opposite of Darwin's book "The Origin of Species."

Survival of the Fittest: One of Darwin's landmark theories.

Deranged Hermit: Darwin himself. He researched alone and was surrounded by animals.

Avalanche Riders: This card was created by Darwin... Kastle. (What?)

Relearn: Darwin's theories caused people to relearn animal relationships.

Wonder: Darwin's theories made people wonder about our monkey/ape ancestors.

Iridescent Drake: Reference to Darwin's book "The Descent of Man."

Natural Selection: Another of Darwin's theories.

Self-Reference Desk

I received many deck submissions whose acrostic described the deck itself. For example, Chris Dembrosky's White Weenie deck spelled out WHITE WEENIES, while Rick Hindman's SUICIDE BLACK deck pretty much says it all. Here are some quick takes on other decks of the same ilk.

CAPSIZE CONTROL 

Main Deck
60 cards

24 Island

0 creatures

2 (A)rcane Laboratory
3 (C)apsize
4 (C)ounterspell
2 (E)rtai, Wizard Adept
3 (I)mpulse
4 (L)egacy's Allure
1 (N)ull Brooch
3 (O)bsessive Search
3 (O)phidian
2 (P)ropaganda
1 (R)ewind
2 (S)apphire Medallion
3 (T)radewind Rider
3 (Z)uran Spellcaster

24 lands

36 other spells

SHARPSHOOTERS



Main Deck

60 cards

11 Island

14 Mountain

25 lands

0 creatures

2 (A)naba Shaman
4 (E)mbermage Goblin
4 (H)ammer of Bogardan
4 (H)eat Ray
2 (O)pportunist
1 (O)rcish Artillery
4 (P)rodigal Sorcerer
2 (R)azorfin Hunter
2 (R)ootwater Hunter
4 (S)hivan Hellkite
2 (S)tinging Barrier
2 (S)uq'Ata Firewalker
2 (T)hornwind Faeries

35 other spells

CONTROL MAGIC



Main Deck

60 cards

16 Island
9 Mountain
25 lands

0 creatures

3 (A)bduction
3 (C)onfiscate
4 (C)ontrol Magic
2 (G)rab the Reins
2 (I)nsurrection
4 (L)egacy's Allure
2 (M)indslaver
4 (N)ull Brooch
1 (O)ld Man of the Sea
4 (O)vertaker
2 (R)ay of Command
4 (T)reachery

35 other spells

That's plenty for this week, but I'm not done digging through my mailbag. There are plenty of other very worthy Deck Dare submissions that I'll get to soon enough.

Until next week, have fun with Hugo Weaving.
Mark

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

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