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The Sundering Titan Challenge



Adrian Sullivan · Single-Card Strategies
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Last week I learned an important lesson. I challenged my readers to send me their deck ideas using Sundering Titan. In a way, I almost wonder if I underestimated the amount that people would send in when I sent out my challenge. The few responses I've gotten from my fellow writers about it were amusing. For the most part, everyone else seemed to know what I was in for.

Wow. You guys really rise to a challenge. Even before I wrote about the card, people kept mentioning the Titan as something that they were excited about. Maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised when I found myself poring over some 300 of your decklists. I had said that I was going to put a spotlight on the most exciting decklist, but I'll be honest, there was a lot of really cool stuff going on. It simply wouldn't be fair to nod at just one decklist.

Before I get any further, I do want to thank everyone that wrote in. I wasn't able to get back to everyone, but I did send e-mails out to a few of you. Everyone, keep writing in with your thoughts and ideas. I can't promise that I'll be able to answer any and all e-mails that hit my inbox, but I can say that I'll go over them and take your thoughts and ideas to heart.

Wading into the Decks

Of course, I couldn't just put every deck out there. As every person who has built a deck or two knows, sometimes someone else comes up with the same idea (give or take). That was certainly the case here. There were many different versions of almost every one of the decks that I am going to present here. When it came down to deciding between the versions that people presented, I had a couple of factors I tended to weigh:

- decks that keep their 'eye on the prize' - i.e., they focus on doing something and doing it well
- decks that are a wee bit more innovative than others like them
- lastly and most definitely least, if I got the e-mail sooner, I'll be using that as a tie-breaker, because, well, I need one.

I didn't go with those submissions that didn't include a decklist. For example, quite a few people pointed out some simple uses for cards (like Reality Ripple or Flicker) that would get a Titan in play to trigger a bunch of times. For the most part, however, a lot of these ideas were without a decklist. Since I had already supplied a potential skeleton to build off of for the deck, I had to pass on these ideas and go with those that supplied full decklists.

Here is that skeleton, once again:

- 4 Sundering Titan
- 4 Sylvan Scrying
- 4 Reap and Sow
- 4 Tooth and Nail

- 4 Cloudpost
- 4 Treetop Village
- 1 Pendelhaven
- 4 Tree of Tales
- 4 Havenwood Battleground
- 4 Slippery Karst
- 4 Tranquil Thicket

Of course, it wasn't necessary to use this skeleton, and many of you went in far different directions.

One of the things that really surprised me was the amount of time that some of you put into what you sent me. It is that time, in addition to some of the truly creative things that I looked at, that made me expand last week's article into this week's. So, while much of the writing team wades deep into Sliver week, I'm going to be wading into *your* submissions.

Sliding Titan

By far the most common idea (with nearly 100 people sending in something similar) was using **Astral Slide** with **Sundering Titan**. **Astral Slide** has been a staple card in tournaments for quite some time. People have already been using **Astral Slide** in conjunction with cards like **Solemn Simulacrum** and **Cartographer** to make use of those cards' come into play abilities. If an **Astral Slide** and a **Sundering Titan** are both out, your opponent is in for a pretty terrible time; the **Astral Slide** removes the Titan from the game for a short while, triggering its ability once, and when it returns the ability triggers again. Clearly this is incredibly abusive and a bunch of you wrote in with your versions of this approach.

For me the one that most stands out is this deck by Jared Bouquet:

Sliding Titan		
Jared Bouquet		
60 cards		
4 Secluded Steppe	4 Sundering Titan	2 Talisman of Unity
4 Forgotten Cave	3 Vine Trellis	2 Talisman of Impulse
4 Tranquil Thicket	2 Weathered Wayfarer	4 Astral Slide
4 Shivan Oasis	3 Elvish Aberration	2 Lightning Rift
4 Elfhame Palace		3 Sylvan Scrying
4 Cloudpost	12 creatures	2 Reap and Sow
24 land		3 Lay Waste
		2 Slice and Dice
		2 Renewed Faith
		2 Dingus Egg
		24 other spells

Now, before I go on to the rough patches of this version, I want to talk about what I really like about this deck. The big thing for me is the **Elvish Aberration**. I've had a soft spot in my heart for this guy since he was printed. At first I didn't think too much of him. It didn't take long until I realized he was great in my *Odyssey* Block Black/Green deck. He cycled, and after dropping into the graveyard made my **Oversold Cemetery** that much better, but better still, he could be tapped for a lot of mana. A *lot* of mana. That meant that silly things like **Kamahl, Fist of Krosa/Infest** could work out so much better than they had in all of the previous versions of the deck I had built. Jared goes through much of the same here with this deck.

The Aberration here is clearly only able to be cast. Since Jared hasn't included any Forests, you can't ditch an Aberration to go get a land, but that still isn't too bad. 4/5 is a pretty big body. More importantly, though, the Aberration can take you from 6 mana on one turn to 9 or 10 mana on the next turn (depending on whether or not you drop a land). That's a significant jump. In addition, even if he can't find a land when you cycle him, you can still use an **Astral Slide** or **Lightning Rift** if need be.

With **Vine Trellis** and Talismans, you are going to be able to have a fairly reasonable start on getting some mana acceleration. **Sylvan Scrying**, **Reap and Sow**, and **Weathered Wayfarer** are all going to do their part to help you get **Cloudposts** going. All told, that is pretty good. One of the rough spots in this deck is still the mana. Every single land in the deck comes into play tapped. That is a bit rough. Perhaps a **City of Brass** or **Mirrodin's Core** wouldn't be out of place in this deck. In addition, dropping in a Forest or two wouldn't be half bad, even if the Titan might inadvertently destroy it.

Sundering Staff

The next most common idea seemed to be **Proteus Staff**. Here is Aaron Meyers version:

Sundering Staff		
Aaron Meyers 60 cards		
4 Seat of the Synod	4 Sundering Titan	4 Talisman of Progress
4 City of Brass	1 Ornithopter	4 Orim's Chant
4 Coastal Tower		4 Isochron Scepter
4 Ancient Den	5 creatures	4 Enlightened Tutor
4 Mirrodin's Core		4 Fabricate
2 Salt Marsh		4 Echoing Truth
		4 Proteus Staff
22 land		3 Dingus Egg
		2 Skeleton Shard
		33 other spells

The basic idea of this deck is to get out a **Proteus Staff** and an **Ornithopter**. At that point, each of your next four activations of the Staff are going to get you **Sundering Titan**. That is pretty hefty. Many of you sent in your **Proteus Staff** ideas, but the reason I really like this version is that little **Ornithopter**.

As a zero casting cost creature that you can tutor for with both the **Enlightened Tutor** and the **Fabricate**, I think it was very clever of Aaron to think of this guy. Since he is already using old cards like **Enlightened Tutor**, he might have also thought to include **Shield Sphere** instead, but **Ornithopter** is just fine too. Maybe playing an **Antiquities Ornithopter** would make up for it.

One of the other things that is included that is nice is the safety net of **Skeleton Shard**. As another tutor target, the **Skeleton Shard** can come to the rescue to retrieve the **Ornithopter** if you lose it to the graveyard. In addition, **Isochron Scepter** is paired with **Enlightened Tutor**, **Orim's Chant**, and **Echoing Truth** to provide defense and very reliable searching.



One of the things that I think Aaron could have used in his deck was **Raise the Alarm**. Since he is already including **Isochron Scepter**, making some room for **Raise the Alarm** provides both another outlet for **Proteus Staff** to go finding **Sundering Titan** with, as well as being an incredibly powerful combo with **Isochron Scepter**. Dropping a turn 2 Scepter with **Orim's Chant** is incredible in its own right, but a **Raise the Alarm** is nothing to sneeze at either.

Turbo Titan and Titan Reanimator

Both of these decks are completely straightforward, but are great examples of decks that have one job and focus on doing that job well. Matt's version, "Blue Papa Smurf", is a collection of fast mana intended to drop **Sundering Titan** or some other fatty directly into play with brute force, while Dennis Nielson used the very simple Reanimator idea to accomplish the same thing with far less mana, but taking it in two steps (drop the man in the yard, reanimate him).

Turbo Titan - Blue Papa Smurf		
Matt 60 cards		
4 Tree of Tales	2 Plated Slagwurm	4 Chimeric Staff
4 Forest	2 Living Hive	4 Thran Dynamo
4 Cloudpost	4 Metalworker	4 Grim Monolith
4 Urza's Mine	4 Sundering Titan	4 Moss Diamond

4 Urza's Tower	12 creatures	4 Voltaic Key
4 Urza's Power Plant		4 Crop Rotation
24 land		24 other spells

Matt's deck is all about mana. **Grim Monolith**, **Metalworker**, and **Voltaic Key** can get some exciting mana going fast, and **Crop Rotation** can help make **Cloudposts** or the Urza's land cycle kick in so much sooner. Just in case he doesn't get a Titan in his hand, a few other beefy guys will hopefully do the trick. One really great card choice in here is the **Chimeric Staff**, which is likely to turn into a very big guy with all of the mana that this deck can produce.

Titan Reanimator		
Dennis Nielson		
60 cards		
17 Swamp	4 Nicol Bolas	4 Cabal Therapy
1 Strip Mine	2 Plated Slagwurm	4 Exhume
2 Wasteland	4 Sundering Titan	2 Corpse Dance
2 Cabal Coffers	4 Greater Harvester	2 Last Rites
22 land	14 creatures	4 Buried Alive
		4 Shallow Grave
		4 Dark Ritual
		24 other spells

This deck is pretty classic. Using **Cabal Therapy**, **Last Rites**, and **Buried Alive** to get some creatures in the grave, it pops them back out with a whole variety of things. 4 **Exhume** do the job the easiest, but **Corpse Dance** and **Shallow Grave** are able to get things going a bit faster. **Shallow Grave** can be especially exciting, with Dennis pointed out that the deck can do crazy things like cast a **Dark Ritual** to cast a **Cabal Therapy** on yourself (naming, say, **Nicol Bolas**) and then using **Shallow Grave** to empty the entire hand of your opponent on turn 1!

Sundering Titan fits the bill here as a great reanimation target. I know that in the 5-color games that we play here in Madison, local player Adam Kugler quickly inserted 4 **Sundering Titans** into his Reanimation deck to great effect. This deck is much like the previous deck, where it has a backup plan in case it can't get to the Titan. One card that seems like it would be an incredibly good fit here is **Entomb**, making it far easier to get the combo going.

Type 1: Sundering TnT

I'm not going to claim to be a Type 1 player, but I know that you are out there. Of all of the Type 1 decks that I received, this one struck me as being the best conceived. Avi Flamholz only uses 1 **Sundering Titan** in his deck, but it's certain to see play because of the centerpiece of the deck: **Survival of the Fittest**. The TnT archetype is already a big deck in Type 1 circles, and looking at this deck I can see why:

Type 1: Sundering TnT		
Avi Flamholz		
60 cards		
4 Mishra's Workshop	1 Triskelion	4 Survival of the Fittest
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Goblin Welder	4 Trinisphere
1 Windswept Heath	4 Juggernaut	3 Blood Moon
3 Forest	4 Su-Chi	1 Mana Crypt
3 Mountain	2 Solemn Simulacrum	1 Mana Vault
4 Taiga	1 Platinum Angel	1 Sol Ring
19 land	1 Anger	1 Mox Jet
	1 Duplicant	1 Mox Ruby
	1 Squee, Goblin Nabob	1 Mox Emerald
		1 Mox Sapphire

1 Goblin Replica	1 Mox Pearl
1 Sundering Titan	1 Black Lotus
21 creatures	20 other spells

So, fine, I probably wouldn't be able to afford this deck after a year or three of writing **Magic** articles. I'm not even sure where I would get the cards. That doesn't mean I can't really like the deck though.

One of the things that this deck will do is get a Mountain in play and use **Survival of the Fittest** to drop an **Anger** into the yard. At that point, any 100 dollar artifact in play (and the cheaper ones too) can become incredibly dangerous. By using **Survival of the Fittest** to drop a **Sundering Titan** in the graveyard and find a **Goblin Welder**, the Welder will come into play and immediately be able to use his ability, changing that 100 dollar bill into a **Sundering Titan**. In Type 1, this is going to be devastating to a large number of decks (pretty much any of them that like to run dual lands). If any controlling deck gets hit by this it should basically be game over, with them very likely stuck in a spot where they'll have to rely on their artifacts to cast any spells at all.


Taking that into consideration, the deck has the ability to drop **Trinisphere**. Even the most artifact-laden deck might have problems recovering from a **Sundering Titan** if **Trinisphere** makes everything more expensive. This deck has a lot of exciting stuff going on, even if Type 1 aficionados are likely to be able to point out a ton of things that could be done to improve it. I don't have to play Type 1 to think this deck is neat.

About the only thing that I don't like about this deck is the **Blood Moon**. Since **Blood Moon** will turn everyone's dual lands into Mountains, it does seem like this makes the **Sundering Titan** worse against the very thing he should be best at whacking: all those expensive dual lands. Maybe those **Blood Moons** could change into some of those cards that you Type 1 players can suggest in the forums.

And Finally, the Winner of the Challenge

It's not all that surprising to me that the person that wrote me a nearly 4 page e-mail about their deck also had the one that I liked the most. It's not that this person just wrote a lot, it's that he clearly put a great deal of time into considering the card and what he could do to break it. Jörg Nierhoff's submission also uses **Goblin Welder** and combines it with a lot of other things as well.

The Winner		
Jörg Nierhoff 60 cards		
4 Seat of the Synod	4 Reef Shaman	4 Gamble
4 Great Furnace	4 Goblin Welder	4 Trash for Treasure
4 Shivan Reef	2 Trickster Mage	4 Careful Study
4 City of Brass	4 Sundering Titan	4 Tolarian Winds
2 Glimmervoid	14 creatures	4 Lightning Greaves
2 Blinkmoth Nexus		2 Sneak Attack
20 land		4 Chrome Mox
		26 other spells

 One of the first things that this deck does that I like is that it runs a sizable amount of cards to improve its hand quality. **Careful Study**, **Tolarian Winds**, and **Gamble** all help you find a card that you're looking for. They also have the great potential to drop a **Sundering Titan** into the grave. Combine that with **Goblin Welder** and the weaker but equally useful **Trash for Treasure**, and you have a lot of ways to get the Titan into play from your graveyard.

Jörg points out that the big problem with decks like this is that **Goblin Welder** tends to be pretty easy to kill, and he uses **Lightning Greaves** to help get around this problem. Another fine bonus of the Greaves is that once you drop a **Sundering Titan** into play, if you want to, you can drop the Greaves onto it briefly to start attacking before you bring it back onto your Welder to protect it.

It was very important to Jörg to make this deck legal for Extended tournament play. One of the things that is good about imposing restrictions on yourself is that it often forces you to be more

creative in problem solving. To fill in some of the space in the deck, he included **Sneak Attack** as another powerful Extended legal card that can also get the Titan into play, and was well within the mana requirements for the deck.

Reef Shaman and **Trickster Mage** are some really fun cards to include. Many of you wrote in with decklists that included cards like **Reef Shaman** or **Sea Snidd** to 'give' your opponent an extra basic land for the **Sundering Titan** to kill. **Trickster Mage** is an interesting idea, giving you the ability to discard a Titan to make a Welder or Shaman work twice, or in a pinch to hold down a guy for a turn. Jörg also points out that it can keep a blocker out of the way of the Titan, who really doesn't need to hit the opponent many times.

One Final Note

Thanks to everyone for contributing to the Sundering Titan Challenge. I hope that you had a good time looking at a few of the decks that were sent in by other readers. I know that I think that the Challenge was a great success, and I'll consider doing it again, but I'm curious to see what everyone thinks.

Poll

How often should there be challenges in the future?

- Often, I really liked seeing other peoples ideas
- Occasionally, I might like seeing this happen again, but not very often
- Never, I just want to see you look at a new card every week

I'll see you next week!

- Adrian Sullivan
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