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The Forgotten Ancient Challenge



Adrian Sullivan · Single-Card Strategies
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Two weeks ago, I sent out my [second Single Card Strategies challenge](#) to all of the readers. The [first challenge](#) was a smashing success, and hundreds upon hundreds of submissions got sent in. This time around instead of [Sundering Titan](#), everyone would try their hand at [Forgotten Ancient](#).

Sadly, there were some setbacks on my end this time around. I was being hit by around 3 to 4 Megabytes of spam a day, and it was only recently that I was able to devise a way around that huge problem. As a result, a huge amount of mail bounced back to their original senders, and though my editor Scott Johns was kind enough to try to let people know that there were problems with the e-mail, there was still a much smaller volume collected after I took care of the spam problem. I'm hoping that the measures I've taken are going to avoid this problem in the future, hopefully time will prove me right.

Why a Forgotten Ancient Challenge?

One of the reasons that I wanted to run a [Forgotten Ancient](#) Challenge is that the Ancient is one of those cards that can be explored in many ways. Cards that give people a lot of options are far more interesting to me. If you give someone, say, an [Exalted Angel](#) Challenge, you're pretty likely to just have a bunch of decks that incidentally have [Exalted Angels](#) in them.

This brings me to my other reason. In my own work with the card for constructed tournaments, I kept putting the Ancients into certain kinds of decks, but never really making a deck that would be able to really make use of the Ancient as either a centerpiece or at least a major player in the deck. One of the advantages of giving out the challenge is to see what people would come up with on their own for this challenging issue.

I looked far and wide for my favorite Forgotten Ancients deck list that I had built, but could not find it anywhere. Alas. I suppose one of the problems with writing decks on all kinds of loose pieces of paper and notebooks is that eventually you have so much of that paper lying around that you throw out something you wish you had kept. My own deck was basically an elf deck that ran [Wirewood Channeler](#) and [Pemmin's Aura](#) to power out infinite mana. The deck would use [Rush of Knowledge](#) for card drawing, and eventually drop a Kamahl to kill you on the turn the deck got infinite mana. [Forgotten Ancient](#) was just there to help keep the little elves alive in the mean time.



The Challenge Winners!

Despite the spam problems, I still received around 200 submissions. I selected the following submissions because of the way that they approached making the most out of the Ancients

3rd Place – Elves and the Ancient

It's ironic that one of the decks I like the most is the one that I'd make the most cosmetic changes to. Christian Moeller-Holst of Denmark sent in a Recycle deck with a bunch of really interesting things going on. One problem, he used **Concordant Crossroads** and **Urza's Bauble** (the challenge was for Extended-legal decks). With everything else looking really good, I changed things over to **Mass Hysteria** and **Skullclamp** so that he would have a legal submission for the challenge.

| Christian Moeller-Holst – Denmark | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 60 cards | | |
| 18 Forest | 4 Birds of Paradise | 4 Recycle |
| 4 Yavimaya Coast | 4 Llanowar Elves | 4 Mass Hysteria |
| | 4 Priest of Titania | 3 Mana Severance |
| 22 land | 4 Quirion Elves | 4 Skullclamp |
| | 3 Forgotten Ancient | 4 Intruder Alarm |
| | 19 creatures | 19 other spells |

This deck is one big engine. A huge portion of the deck is dedicated to just mana. 16 mana creatures is quite a bit, and the deck hopes to make use of them through **Recycle**. **Recycle** should send the deck into drawing a bunch of cards, and with **Mana Severance**, most of those cards should hopefully be other engine cards. **Skullclamp** assists here, turning any of the extraneous creatures into a couple of more cards, should there be any need for it.

Mass Hysteria and **Intruder Alarm** are two of those important engine cards that keep things going. **Mass Hysteria** effectively makes nearly all of your mana creatures free, and **Intruder Alarm** can make each of the subsequent creatures drawn into potential mana acceleration. If you get both **Intruder Alarm** and **Mass Hysteria** out, you will probably be able to cast nearly any spell that you draw.



A **Recycle** on the table should be able to churn out a huge Ancient in no time flat. One of the things that the deck really does want is to be able to make use of it. Sure, it can attack, but what if it gets blocked? **Trample** would be a really nice answer here.

My first two thoughts on what you can do to make this work out are **Kamahl, Fist of Krosa** and **Stampede Driver**. Both of these cards are able to make the Ancient into a killing machine. In general, I think I would lean towards the **Stampede Driver**; he's cheaper, for one, and can do the job even if you don't have the equivalent of infinite mana. **Kamahl**, on the other hand, is great when you have effectively infinite mana, but won't help you much at all before you have at least a ton of it. Even a simple **Predator's Strike** could do the trick.

Another thing that the deck could probably use is a bit more mana fixing. Sure, it has **Birds of Paradise** and **Quirion Elf**, but maybe a few extra pain lands to get out the **Mass Hysteria** might be helpful.

Overall, I think the reason that I like this deck is that it has a ton of creatures to pump up with the **Forgotten Ancient** even if it doesn't begin going off, but it does have the capability of just drawing through the whole deck, which is pretty neat if you ask me.

2nd Place - Ancient Affinity

Chad from Australia came up with a deck that really hit another spot in my heart. My friend Adam has been doing a great job working with Affinity decks ever since **Mirrodin** came out, and one of the cards that I had flirted with in the sideboard of Affinity was **Forgotten Ancient**. It just seemed so perfect to me. Even before the crazy card-drawing that was made possible by **Skullclamp**, Affinity decks would be capable of casting a ton of cards very quickly. The Ancient was exciting because suddenly you would always be the one with the bigger creatures, and it seemed to make it possible to have another way to break the game open.



Chad D'cruze

60 cards

4 Glimmervoid
4 Seat of the Synod
4 Tree of Tales

12 land

4 Ornithopter
4 Vedalken Archmage
4 Forgotten Ancient
4 Frogmite
4 Myr Enforcer
4 Triskelion

24 creatures

4 Tooth of Chiss-Goria
4 Predator's Strike
4 Thoughtcast
4 Spellbook
4 Welding Jar
4 Darksteel Citadel

24 other spells



The deck doesn't run that much mana, but it runs so much stuff that is free. With **Ornithopter**, **Spellbook**, and **Welding Jar** being *actually* free, and the Affinity spells (**Tooth**, **Frogmite**, **Enforcer**) being *effectively* free, getting a card like **Vedalken Archmage** on the table should make it so that you can explode all over the place on the table.

With that as a card draw mechanism (and **Thoughtcast** to help out), it won't be too hard to get to the Ancient. Even without the Archmage for card drawing, if you can save a few of the artifacts in your hand before you drop an Ancient, it should become Big/Big in no time flat.

Once the Ancient is out, if you aren't just running rampant off of the back of Affinity, the Ancient can easily be used to power up an **Ornithopter** or a **Triskelion**. On the **Ornithopter**, it's always just nice having a flyer powered up, whereas the Trike gets to turn itself into a high-powered machine gun.

Two of the first things that I know that I would want to toss in here are probably pretty obvious. **Arcbound Ravager** was born to live in Ancient Affinity. If you don't have the money to pop this guy into the deck, so be it, but he really does do a bunch for it. The Arcbound mechanic combos incredibly well with the counter-giving that an Ancient is capable of. In addition, since the deck is already packed full of artifact creatures, the Arcbound should be more than capable of making each of your creatures into a threat.

The other card that I feel really wants to be here is **Blinkmoth Nexus**. One of the big reasons that the Nexus wants to be in the deck is just to provide a little more land. Another is to give the deck another flier capable of having counters put on it. A **Blinkmoth Nexus** can dodge cards like **Wrath of God** and **Akroma's Vengeance**. On your upkeep, just make the Nexus into a creature and toss a bunch of counters on it from the Ancient. If things do happen to get blown up by **Wraths** or other cards, you still have a big Blinky to run in the sky at them.

Predator's Strike does a good job of making the Ancient or any pumped up creature into a killer, but 4 seems like overkill. In a similar vein, 4 **Triskelion** might be a few too many. That's a good place to start in trying to find places to make cuts for other card choices.

The Winner! – Ancient Alluren

Aluren is one of those cards that has already been widely explored by a ton of people. The most effective versions of the Aluren deck were the recent combo decks that have been making problems in Extended. Thomas Butler's submission makes use of a number of the factors that are good in an Ancient deck. He has card-drawing, he has cards that stall out the game, and he has a few fliers to drop counters on for the win. Here is his deck:

Thomas Butler

60 cards

4 Yavimaya Coast

4 Birds of Paradise

4 Rancor

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 2 City of Brass | 4 Forgotten Ancient | 2 Future Sight |
| 9 Forest | 3 Cavern Harpy | 4 Deep Analysis |
| 8 Island | 4 Raven Familiar | 4 Accumulated Knowledge |
| | 3 Spike Feeder | 3 Aluren |
| 23 land | 18 creatures | 2 Capsize |
| | | 19 other spells |

One of the first things to look at with this deck is that he has included a pretty strong assortment of card drawing in the deck. With **Deep Analysis** and **Accumulated Knowledge**, he is likely to get into a bunch of cards; if he gets to the **Future Sight**, he can probably slam through his deck to the main combo.

With **Aluren** out, a **Cavern Harpy** can bounce itself back to your hand an infinite number of times. Add in the **Forgotten Ancient** and you have an infinite/infinite creature. This combo is pretty compelling. Even with an infinite/infinite creature, there still might be the problem of actually being blocked constantly. In addition to the fliers, Thomas has added in **Rancor** to give trample to whatever might be your attacker of choice. In this deck, I'm willing to bet it is likely to be an Ancient.



And with the ability to put out infinite spells via the **Aluren**, you can really make *all* of your creatures into huge monsters on the turn after you get the combo going. Make your Ancient +300,000/+300,000 and on the following turns spread those counters around to all of your creatures to make every single one of them able to attack for the kill.

In the event that you aren't able to get the combo fully going, you still have other fun things that the deck does as well. Stealing it directly from the Extended deck, **Raven Familiar/Cavern Harpy** is a potent library manipulation engine capable of getting you to your missing pieces. Thomas also threw in buyback (in the form of **Capsize**). A single **Forgotten Ancient** and a **Capsize** become *very* problematic for an opponent. Each **Capsize** with buyback that is cast can potentially make the Ancient get +2/+2 (assuming that the other player recasts the spell). In this way, it's damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't for your opponent. The simple **Spike Feeder/Ancient** combo is another nice one.

One of the things that I think might be really worthwhile in this deck is a **Spike Weaver**. The deck is already looking to keep the game stalled out, and the inclusion of 2 or 3 Weavers might be just the thing to keep from being overwhelmed by attackers. The **Future Sights** are incredibly powerful, but they can still stall pretty easily on lands, plus the deck already has plenty of card draw. In addition, the deck probably doesn't need 4 **Rancor** to get going, only 2 or 3 should do the trick. **Spike Weaver/Forgotten Ancient** is so incredibly potent because you can pretty much expect that the Weaver will never run out of gas if you don't want it to. Everything that your opponent does to try to kill you and everything that you do to stay alive can translate into a fog. The more I think about the need for a Weaver in the deck, the more it makes sense to me. Here is a deck that can suddenly have an infinitely big, trampling Ancient. Being able to stay alive until that point seems especially nice.

Final Thoughts

Certainly this deck could be made without Mr. Babycakes in the mix, but I really like how each of these decks can make him so big! One of the things that made me consider the card in the first place was watching it played in the casual [5-color format](#). Current 5-color World Champion Jim Hustad was playing his deck against a local kid when suddenly the game went all haywire. All that had happened is that the kid had dropped a **Forgotten Ancient**. One of the big features of the format is the awesomely powerful **Contract from Below**, and everyone is capable of drawing and playing a lot of cards. It didn't take more than a turn or two before the Ancient (and his friend the **Birds of Paradise**) were so big that Jim was in big trouble. He got out of it (on the back of 2 **Treachery**), but it really did etch in my head that Mr. Babycakes was capable of being really mean.

With all of that said, I'm curious about something mostly different. In a few short weeks, many of you will be attempting to qualify for U.S. Nationals by competing in a [Regionals](#) event near you.

Will you be playing at Regionals?

Yes

No

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See you all next week!

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