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Over the years, **Magic** has spawned quite a number of memorable fictional characters. Gerrard Capashen. Memnarch. Osyp Lebedowicz. Through their trials and travails, we forge a deeper connection to the game and the underlying fantasy. Who among us could not suppress a wistful smirk when Ertai offered up a delightful quip denigrating a bumbling foe? Or when Glissa served up a witty wisecrack at the expense of a hapless enemy? Or when Jaya Ballard offered up a witty jibe denigrating a hapless foe? Yes, as the characters grew and changed, we grew and changed with them.

Today, thanks to a flash of inspired insight resulting in the most original idea I've ever had, I'm going to create some decks based on some of the most popular personalities in **Magic**. I can't believe no one has ever thought of this before!

Wizard of the Coast

First up is Teferi. What do I consider fair game for a Teferi deck? Clearly, anything with "Teferi" in the title—and there are plenty of those. Interestingly, a large number of them (Teferi's Honor Guard, Teferi's Response, Teferi's Realm, etc.) didn't make it into my final deck. These cards are the most Tefeririffic, and if you want to up the Teferiversity of your deck you can certainly sprinkle in single copies of some of them. The next class of cards to consider are those with Teferi-centric flavor text. This includes cards with Teferi quotes on them (Telepathy) all the way down to cards that just mention him in some way (Tranquil Domain). Finally are cards with Teferi in the art. I probably didn't catch all of them, but they include Slow Motion and Temporal Distortion. The only non-Teferious cards that I would include are basic lands.



Slow Motion, art by Todd Lockwood

The total card pool I could pull together included 33 monuments to the life of this fire-prone, island-ruining, time-experimenting ex-mischievous student. A Teferi deck could skew heavily toward phasing effects (did I mention island-ruining and time-experimenting?), but I chose a more controllish path.

Teferi Ride



Main Deck

61 cards

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 23 Island | 4 Disruptive Student | 2 Confiscate (Urza's Saga) |
| 1 Teferi's Isle | 4 Rainbow Efreet | 3 Disrupt (Invasion) |
| 24 lands | 2 Teferi's Drake | 1 Excavation |
| | 1 Teferi's Imp | 4 Exclude |

11 creatures

2 Hermetic Study

4 Impulse

2 Spite/Malice

2 Teferi's Curse

3 Vanishing

3 Wash Out

26 other spells

Some countermagic. Some creature control in the form of bounce, phasing, and even theft. Some very annoying creatures. And even a little bit of card filtration and direct damage.

Of course, context is important here. This is a theme deck, and is therefore most suited to be played against other theme decks. Sure, it wins 70% of the time against Goblins (105% post-sideboarding), but that's not really the point. Teferi's deck wants to battle other character-driven decks or, failing that, other decks built with similarly limiting thematic constraints like a deck whose card names are all in iambic pentameter. Ooh, that's a good one. I'll have to come back to that one later. Like in 2009.

Politically Correct Pun Using the Word "Gaea"

The most fertile area for character-driven decks is the Weatherlight saga. *Weatherlight*, the entire *Tempest* block, *Mercadian Masques*, *Nemesis*, and the whole *Invasion* block are overrun with the exploits of the skyship's crew and enemies. Toss in appearances in the Urza block and Core Sets and it's certainly within your reach to make decks shaped around Gerrard, Volrath, Yawgmoth, or any of a number of other characters. Venture outside that story, however, and it gets more difficult. Kamahl was around for six sets, but didn't wind up on too many cards overall. I think he was the most prolific post-*Apocalypse* character (if I'm wrong, correct me on the message boards), so it only gets trickier from there.



I went a different direction, and chose an entity that is more of a god than a character. Mixed into the hodge-podge mish-mosh of fantasy elements that comprised Alpha was Gaea, the Greek earth goddess and mother of the Titans. In this setting, she isn't Greek and is seemingly unrelated to Sundering Titan and Gorilla Titan, but she is one of the most pervasive real-world fantasy (yup, that's an oxymoron) elements in **Magic**.

As a god, Gaea never appears in card art, so for this deck I had to stick to cards that contain references in either the name or flavor text. Luckily, there are plenty, and even more luckily, they're synergistic. Sort of. One group of Gaea cards (Gaea's Might, Gaea's Balance, and Pulse of Llanowar) encourages 5-color decks. Another group (Gaea's Liege, Gaea's Bounty, Gaea's Touch, the *Seventh Edition* Blanchwood Armor, and even Child of Gaea) strongly encourages monogreen play. I went with the latter plan. Gaea's Liege was one of my favorite creatures ten years ago, so I had to go the

mega-Forest route. Either the mana acceleration or the Elvish Pipers should let me get out my giant creatures relatively quickly—and even the small creatures, when suited up with the Armor or Gaea's Embrace, become giants in their own right.



Main Deck

60 cards

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 23 Forest | 4 Child of Gaea | 4 Blanchwood Armor (Seventh Edition) |
| 1 Gaea's Cradle | 2 Elvish Piper | 1 Gaea's Blessing |
| _____ | 1 Gaea's Avenger | 4 Gaea's Bounty |
| 24 lands | 4 Gaea's Herald | 2 Gaea's Embrace |
| | 3 Gaea's Liege | 2 Gaea's Touch |
| | 2 Gang of Elk (Urza's Legacy) | 1 Rofellos's Gift |
| | 2 Kavu Chameleon | 2 Tangle |
| | _____ | 2 Whirlwind |
| | 18 creatures | _____ |
| | | 18 other spells |

A Man. A Plan. A Science Fair Project.

And then there's the king: Urza. I considered making that Volrath deck or that Yawgmoth deck, but how could I ignore Urza? The biggest personality the game has ever seen, Urza's name appeared as early as Alpha and his story became epic all the way back in *Antiquities*—yet he was last seen as recently as *Apocalypse*. By my count, 122 different cards feature Urza in the name, flavor text, or art—and that doesn't include *Unglued*. I'm sure I'm missing some. A few of the art pieces surprised me—for example, did you know that the tiny figure perched on a steep rock outcrop in the background of Scent of Brine is Urza? It is, according to its art description. Most of the Urza art in my list was compiled by searching for "Urza" in the art description field of Multiverse, but I know that's not a foolproof method. That search turned up Rancor (that's Urza behind Multani) but not Blind Seer.

With 122 Urzaic cards to choose from, there are a few different directions I could take. Of course, the natural first choice is to focus on what Urza does best: Land manipulation. Wait, land manipulation? Yes, both Rivalry and Acidic Soil appear on my list, and each of them punishes my opponent for having more lands than I do. How to take advantage of that? Assembling the Urzatron means I don't need that many lands to produce all the mana I need. Strip Mining one of my own lands means I decrease my land count by two. Trench Wurm can eat Urzatron pieces, and Rain of Filth can wash away any of my lands that I want. Meanwhile, I can play defense with my red and black cards. Wait, defense with red and black cards? Yes, both Mourning and Despondency act as neutralizers, while Shower of Sparks, Urza's Rage, and Void remove threats. Defensive artifact creatures like Wall of Junk, the original Yotian Soldier, and Clay Statue keep me safe while Rivalry eats away at my opponent's life total.





Main Deck

60 cards

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 8 Mountain | 3 Clay Statue | 4 Acidic Soil |
| 1 Strip Mine | 1 Mantis Engine | 1 Despondency |
| 6 Swamp | 3 Trench Wurm | 1 Mourning |
| ----- | 1 Urza's Avenger | 2 Rain of Filth |
| 15 lands | 4 Wall of Junk | 4 Rivalry |
| | 2 Yotian Soldier (Antiquities) | 2 Shower of Sparks |
| | ----- | 2 Thran Dynamo |
| | 14 creatures | 3 Urza's Mine |
| | | 3 Urza's Power Plant |
| | | 4 Urza's Rage |
| | | 3 Urza's Tower |
| | | 2 Void |
| | | ----- |
| | | 31 other spells |

Urza is a conflicted individual. The old, *Antiquities*-era Urza was all about artifacts. The newer, *Invasion*-model Urza was all about color: Urza's Filter. Coalition Victory. Pledge of Loyalty. Power Armor. Spirit of Resistance. And the one card that actually depicted Urza himself, Blind Seer. Blind Seer makes a lot of other Urza-oriented cards tick. It works well with Coalition Victory and the two white enchantments mentioned above, as well as with Gainsay, Absolute Grace, and Teferi's Moat (an Urza-Teferi crossover!). Kavu Chameleon (an Urza-Gaea crossover) also fits into the color-changing plan.



Blind Seer, art by Dave Dorman

There are also some ways to pop some giant creatures into play for free buried within this card pool. Attunement and/or Jalum Tome can stock your graveyard with fatties so a Death or Glory can pull them out. If you'd rather fetch the creatures right from your library, Defense of the Heart can pull that off. The largest creatures to fetch include Multani, Maro-Sorcerer; Callous Giant; Kavu Chameleon; Urza's Avenger; and Blizzard Elemental. Multani is especially good when backed up by card-drawing like Thieving Magpie, Opportunity, Stroke of Genius, Urza's Blueprints, and (in a roundabout way) Temporal Aperture. Any of these strategies can fuel an entire deck, but I'm going to unwisely smash them all together just to show them off.



Main Deck

60 cards

| | | |
|------------|--|------------------------------|
| 5 Forest | 4 Blind Seer | 1 Absolute Grace |
| 9 Island | 1 Blizzard Elemental | 1 Attunement |
| 3 Mountain | 1 Callous Giant | 2 Coalition Victory |
| 4 Plains | 2 Kavu Chameleon | 1 Death Grasp |
| 3 Swamp | 2 Multani, Maro-Sorcerer | 1 Death or Glory |
| ----- | 1 Sustainer of the Realm (Urza's Legacy) | 2 Defense of the Heart |
| 24 lands | 4 Thieving Magpie (Urza's Destiny) | 3 Jalum Tome (Sixth Edition) |
| | 1 Trench Wurm | 1 Pledge of Loyalty |
| | ----- | 1 Spirit of Resistance |
| | 16 creatures | 1 Stroke of Genius |
| | | 1 Teferi's Moat |
| | | 3 Temporal Aperture |
| | | 1 Urza's Blueprints |
| | | 1 Void |
| | | ----- |
| | | 20 other spells |

I know that character-based theme decks have been a staple of casual **Magic** for years, so I expect that plenty of you have decks like this you'd like to display. You can send them to me; if I get enough interesting ones, I'll do a follow-up column. Or you can cut out the middle man and post them on the message boards. That way you can show off your deck-building genius directly! (Trust me, it's fun.)

Until next week, have fun with characters.

Mark

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