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# The Toshi Challenge



Adrian Sullivan · Single-Card Strategies  
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**T**wo weeks ago I asked everyone if they would like the chance to try out a Reader Challenge on **Toshiro Umezawa**. Overwhelmingly, the answer to this question was "Yes," so it shouldn't be much of a surprise that my inbox was flooded with decks trying to make the most out of Toshi. I suspect that in the end, Toshi will live up to his expectations as a powerful card for constructed, and the great diversity of submissions for the challenge is surely some small proof of that.

What did come as a surprise was the quality of submissions. I'm not sure if it was simply inspiration from a great card or simply the extra week, but after I'd gone through everything twice, I still had almost twenty decks that I had to consider. Each pass through the final twenty, it became harder and harder to cull the lists down, but in the end, I did manage to bring things down to a few final decklists.

One of the really fun things about this particular challenge were several of the truly clever ideas. My favorite example of them all came in the forums – ATOG28's incredibly clever idea to include **Tombstone Stairwell**. If your opponent already has lost creatures to the graveyard, the stairwell can cause mass-triggering of **Toshiro Umezawa** every turn. It was almost painful in the end, and cutting incredibly creative decklists (e.g., the many **The Unspeakable** decklists, especially my very last cut, Rich Tate's version) was really hard, but in the end, just like building a deck, something has to give. Without any further ado, let's get to the lists.



## Honorable Mention: Yet another shameless brute force approach (someone must know I like burn spells...)

Travis Brown's submission is simple and fairly unsophisticated. Alas, it spoke to me deep in some reptilian part of my brain. Travis's short but sweet description of the card won me over in the end:

I burn things to death and their controller at the same time (YAY **Repercussion!**).

He didn't have anything else to say, but really, that is all his deck does. It is Legacy-legal.

### Toshi Deck Wins

Travis Brown  
60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 <b>Badlands</b></li> <li>4 <b>Forbidden Orchard</b></li> <li>4 <b>Swamp</b></li> <li>8 <b>Mountain</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 <b>Toshiro Umezawa</b></li> <li>4 creatures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 <b>Fireblast</b></li> <li>4 <b>Incinerate</b></li> <li>4 <b>Lightning Bolt</b></li> <li>4 <b>Shock</b></li> </ul>
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20 land	4 Magma Jet 4 Scent of Cinder 4 Seal of Fire 4 Sulfuric Vortex 4 Repercussion
	36 other spells

So, the deck does what Travis said it would. It burns creatures and them at the same time. Without the **Repercussion**, you don't get the uber-double duty of Toshiro chaining an opponent to death, but you can still get more than a couple of dirty wins out of killing a critter and having extra burn to immediately hit their face with. That said, the deck could use a little massage.

Two thoughts: Twenty mana is too few and **Scent of Cinder** is a sorcery attempting to do a lot of damage. Put them both together and I find myself thinking "Chrome Mox! Shrapnel Blast!" **Sulfuric Vortex** is a wee bit expensive (and I don't know if I'd consider it necessary), so if you cut that and the Scent, you've got room for 8 more cards. **Seal of Fire** also strikes me as potentially cuttable. Since we're hoping for a short game here, this gives some room for **Varchild's War-Riders**. In the end, I'd do this:

- 4 Scent of Cinder
- 4 Seal of Fire
- 4 Sulfuric Vortex
- +4 Chrome Mox
- +3 Shrapnel Blast
- +4 Varchild's War-Riders
- +1 Land (also, the land mix could include Artifact Lands from *Mirrodin*)



In a deck like this, the games will go pretty quickly, so expect a fast ride. On the other hand, a lot of games can start out like control games, keeping everything dead until you draw a Toshi, at which point your burn starts doing double-duty.

## Third Place: Toshi's Toolbox

Here we have another Legacy-legal deck, this one from Michael Howell.

<b>Toshi's Toolbox</b> Michael Howell 60 cards		
2 Croxis's Catacombs 2 Forbidden Orchard 7 Swamp 7 Mountain 5 Island	4 Goblin Sharpshooter 1 Kamahl, Pit Fighter 4 Toshiro Umezawa	2 Croxis's Charm 4 Gifts Ungiven 2 Shock 2 Magma Jet 3 Lightning Bolt 3 Incinerate 2 Fire/Ice 2 Hanabi Blast 2 Compulsion 2 Diabolic Edict 4 Wayfarer's Bauble
23 land	9 creatures	28 other spells

The decklist is a little rough, and could easily be improved by adding a little money to the deck. Dual Lands, of course, would be the place to begin, and other land changes would improve the deck as well (especially three to four Orchards). After that, I don't see anything at all wrong with running 4 **Lightning Bolt**. Bolt is a great card, and even in a deck that wants to run **Gifts Ungiven**,

I say fit in the fourth card, perhaps by dropping the **Compulsions**. One other minor quibble is the use of **Wayfarer's Bauble**. A few Talismans seem like a better fit here.

The thing that made the deck stand out in my mind was the use of **Hanabi Blast**. Michael's e-mail details it well:

**Hanabi Blast** seems like an incredible deal with Teshiro out. You can play it from your graveyard, then part of **Hanabi Blast's** resolution puts it back into your hand, therefore the 'remove it from the game' clause becomes null and void. If you've got no other cards in your hand, you drop it back into the graveyard and can cast again if you just killed a creature with it

To quote Rune Horvik, "It goes to the yard, as it is a 'different card' now. When it changes zones, the game loses track of it, and even if *you* know it's the same card, the game doesn't." (For the more technically minded, see rule 217.1c.) Boom! Along the same lines, Buyback spells and Pulses do the same thing. With that in mind, I would find room to include 1 **Pulse of the Forge** and 1 **Slaughter**. Together, these have a fun interaction - lose 4 life to kill a creature with **Slaughter**, trigger Toshi, recast the Pulse from the yard and make them take 4, most likely keeping the Pulse in hand because of the life loss from **Slaughter's** buyback cost.



**Crosis's Charm** and the **Kamahl, Pit Fighter** do seem like a bit of fun on the part of the deckbuilder. With the [instant count now at 922](#), I'm sure you can find a relevant instant or two for the people you expect to be playing against...

## Finalist: Toshi-Control

Straight from the message boards and right back to my inbox came in Vaebn's submission. He honed the initial list he [posted a few weeks ago](#), and I'm guessing that his testing paid off: his tighter build just looks really solid. His initial comments on any deck are spot-on.

Toshiro is great and all, but the deck needs to survive on its own in case he isn't drawn. The deck is a UB control deck that capitalizes on the power of cheap instants. With powerful card advantage, board control and permission, it can hold off an explosive aggro start while also being capable of sizeable card advantage against control decks

Well said, Vaebn. Here is his deck (legal for Standard):

Toshi-Control		
Vaebn		
Main Deck		Sideboard
58 cards		
4 Forbidden Orchard	3 Night of Souls' Betrayal	3 Cranial Extraction
4 Salt Marsh	4 Lose Hope	1 Keiga, the Tide Star
7 Island	4 Reach Through Mists	4 Persecute
7 Swamp	3 Echoing Truth	4 Hinder
22 land	3 Thirst for Knowledge	3 Jushi Apprentice
2 Kokusho, the Evening Star	3 Rend Flesh	
4 Toshiro Umezawa	3 Gifts Ungiven	15 sideboard cards
	4 Mana Leak	
	3 Annul	

6 creatures

30 other spells

Again, let's see what he has to say about it:

When Toshiro enters play, the deck capitalizes on a degenerate game state -- there are lots of cheap instants to play around with. **Lose Hope** is fantastic, allowing you to trigger Toshiro without **Night of Souls' Betrayal** in play AND letting you Scry. **Reach Through Mists** effectively cycles in the early game, then lets you draw cards for free in the late game. **Gifts Ungiven** is insane -- your opponent gets to choose which two cards you get to cast once, and which two cards you get to cast twice.

One of the things I really like about the deck are the multitude of really useful answers to a ton of cards. There are little subtle tricks the deck can run. For example, the Night/Toshi combo can make for exciting double **Mana Leaks** (cast Leak, let it resolve, tap the Orchard to recast the Leak). **Lose Hope**, **Echoing Truth**, and **Rend Flesh** really give a lot of quick answers to various threats on the table, while **Thirst for Knowledge** and **Gifts Ungiven** keep feeding the deck.

If I were to suggest any change, it would be to find a way to include **Echoing Decay**. Decay is a great card to mix with **Forbidden Orchard** -- if you've simply fallen behind on the Spirits that the Orchard gives the opponent, a single Decay not only kills them all, but it also triggers Toshi many, many times. Quite a few of the decks submitted for the Challenge included this idea, and it seems like a solid suggestion, but I imagine that the specific cards you would want to drop vary greatly depending on what you expect to be playing against. He has one final note about his sidebar that I find very interesting:

Note the lack of **March of the Machines** -- further testing may prove me wrong, but currently, Affinity's inability to deal with Toshiro and the massive, quick card advantage provided by reusable, cheap instants (all of which either draw cards, counter spells or kill creatures) has made it an okay match without March.

Once more, great work Vaebn.

## The Winner: Three-color Toshi

Once again, Denmark's Christian Moeller-Holst is back with a decklist worth taking note of. Christian's decklist is *almost* Extended legal (a point he noted in his e-mail), and it uses **Burning Sands** and **Dingus Staff** (the not-Extended legal card) to punish the opponent for losing their creatures. Here is his decklist and a bit of his commentary to start things off:

Sands of Toshi		
60 cards		
4 <b>Forbidden Orchard</b>	4 <b>Varchild's War-Riders</b>	4 <b>Terror</b>
4 <b>City of Brass</b>	4 <b>Goblin Sharpshooter</b>	4 <b>Rend Flesh</b>
3 <b>Island</b>	3 <b>Toshiro Umezawa</b>	4 <b>Magma Jet</b>
6 <b>Swamp</b>		3 <b>Fact or Fiction</b>
7 <b>Mountain</b>	11 creatures	3 <b>Gifts Ungiven</b>
24 land		2 <b>Noxious Field</b>
		3 <b>Dingus Staff</b>
		2 <b>Burning Sands</b>
		25 other spells

The most important card in the deck is probably **Varchild's War-Riders**. You want to put creatures into play with it and afterwards kill them all with preferably **Goblin Sharpshooter**, but **Noxious Field** is in there as well to help out. Should you not draw the War-Riders, the **Forbidden Orchard** should be able to help you. When killing all those tokens each turn you should be able to "go off", triggering Toshiro a bazillion times. You will then be able to kill the rest of your opponent's creatures with all the nice instant removal, triggering Toshi even more times and once you start getting stuff like **Gifts Ungiven** and **Fact or Fiction**, you'll get even more instants to kill more creatures etc., etc., etc.. Now your opponent probably won't kill

herself, you'll have to do that for her. I'll suggest playing a **Burning Sands** and just wait for opponent to concede - but if you prefer actually doing something, you could just kill her with a **Dingus Staff**. You might consider replacing the **Dingus Staff** with something else as it is the only card preventing it from being Extended-legal, I'd probably recommend using **Shriveling Rot** - you can just play it when your opponent has 11 tokens, before you start pinging with the Sharpshooter. Another way you can win is by playing **Brand**, and stealing all of the tokens you've given them.

Nice, nice work. Christian also mentioned a weakness in the mana of the deck in his e-mail. Clearly the easiest way to fix this is to use the various pain lands legal in Extended as well as *Onslaught's* search lands.

I completely agree with his idea to make the deck Extended legal by dropping the Staff. This gives us a few more slots. Also, **Noxious Field** seems like it is specifically made to recover from an Orchard or War-Riders gone out of control. Again, **Echoing Decay** should come to the rescue here, and it doubles as an excellent way to make better use of **Gifts Ungiven**.

Since a card like Gifts is available in the deck, running the 1 **Shriveling Rot** does seem completely fine, as does 1 **Brand**. Since it does include Gifts, I do like the idea of running a few more one-ofs he didn't mention. For example, I really like the idea of a single **Final Fortune** in the deck for when the deck is basically at that threshold of "you're dead in a turn, mwuahahaha" that it can easily get to. Reducing the **Terrors** and **Rend Fleshes** in the deck, you can fit in **Diabolic Edict**, **Vampiric Tutor**, **Fire/Ice**, and any other card that you end up liking. Season to taste!

Congratulations, Christian!

## Wrapping Up

All told, I'm really excited about this card, and fully expect to see it have a massive impact on nearly every constructed format. Yes, it is vulnerable as a 2/2 creature, but that hasn't stopped other 2/2s from being important. I bet you can name several without hardly a pause.

I hope you enjoyed this week's challenge. Before I go, I have a fun thought exercise for everyone. This Sunday, I will be playing in the [5-color Invitational](#), and one of the formats for the event is the "Three-Card Deck" event. The basic rules of this format are simple:

- choose any three cards legal in 5-color
- there is no draw phase
- you play two games against your opponent, one with you going first, one with them going first. If you get more wins than your opponent, you win the match.
- nothing is restricted and the only banned cards are cards that make a player draw cards, discard cards, or counter a spell (thus, **Balance**, **Pyknite**, **Foil**, **Blackmail**, and **Seizan** would all be banned, but you could play 2 **Black Lotus**).

The format is incredibly fun, and I'm very much looking forward to it. There are a ton of great decks out there already, and I have one in mind for the format, but if I use your deck, I will mention it here next week. Here are some sample 3-Card Decks:

- **Black Lotus/Black Lotus/Visara the Dreadful**
- **Plains/Isamaru, Hound of Konda/Swords to Plowshares**
- **Black Lotus/Show and Tell/Darksteel Colossus**

If I manage to win, some version of my 5-color invitational card will see (unofficial) "print" as a homemade card to be given as prizes for future 5-color qualifiers for 5-color Worlds. Here is my current version.

Yllus, Musechaser

GU, 2/3 Legendary Wizard

At the beginning of your upkeep, remove a counter from a permanent you control or Yllus Phases out.

Whenever you play a spell, if it shares a name with a card in play or in any graveyard, put a creativity counter on Yllus.

Remove a creativity counter from Yllus: Counter a spell if it shares a name with a card in play or in any graveyard.

Wish me luck at the Invitational this weekend!

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