

The Day the Ninjas Fell

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Ninja Week. Right. Is this some kind of sick joke, Scott? Rub my nose in it, huh? I guess I can't blame you. And I guess I deserve it. But if I'm going to be taunted like this, then I'm not going to toe the company line. You, the reader, come to me because you know I shovel what no one else will: Pure, military-grade truth. Everyone else is swimming in a heated, Olympic-size pool of propaganda. Or should I call it Rosewaterganda? The spin doctors at Wizards of the Coast put Mother Theresa's spin doctors to shame. Well, start casting the made-for-CourtTV biopic of *Whistleblower: The Mark Gottlieb Story: Power, Fame, and Ninjas: An American Tragedy*, because my very loud silence is finally over.

Let's face it, Rosewater spins a good yarn. (He did write for *Roseanne*, after all.) But I am appalled—*appalled!*—that a member of Wizards of the Coast R&D would devote his entire column to lying to you, our valued customer. This is not a fiction forum! This is a place for truth and enlightenment. Well, a few Mondays ago, Mark turned it into a place for lies and endarkenment. He went on and on about how R&D came up with the ideas for Ninjas (some kind of Japanese mythology questionnaire—why, it even sounds preposterous) and ninjutsu (Rosewater dreamed up—all on his own—the concept that Ninjas wanted to be in disguise). But the real story is, paradoxically, so much simpler. R&D was inspired to create Ninjas because I attacked them with my army of genetically engineered nuclear mutant robot ninjas.

***You know I shovel
what no one else will...***

It all started back in the brief moment in time after my head had swelled so much with notions of my own greatness that I had taken to calling everyone "Jeeves," but before my mind had completely snapped and severed ties to reality. Then my mind completely snapped and severed ties to reality. I decided to take over the world. Step one was to take over my apartment. Except for a light skirmish with the sentient lump of mold in the back of my fridge, my apartment and both its feline denizens were ripe for the conquering. Step two was to take over my hollowed-out volcano lair. That was a bit more difficult because my nemesis Captain Obvious had infested it with a pack of genetically engineered mutant robot ninjas, but it turns out they're lactose intolerant. So, victory. Step 3 was to take over my company. And that's when I had the brilliant and completely original idea of creating an army of genetically engineered *nuclear* mutant robot ninjas! What could possibly stop them? My day of ascension was assured!

And then the rampage began. When Mark Rosewater sat down at the weekly **Magic** meeting, there was Randy Buehler—no, it was a ninja in disguise! There was Brian Schneider—no, another ninja! There was Aaron Forsythe—well, actually, it was Aaron Forsythe. I had decided to save *that* disguise for more insidious uses. But everyone else: Yustav Wangerschmidt, Globbo Veerfingen, Matt Place—all replaced by genetically engineered nuclear mutant robot ninjas. They had Rosewater surrounded. But instead of swarming him all at once, one single ninja would approach him, fight him solo, and get beaten. Then another ninja would take a run at him while all the others stood around watching. It seems that my army had trained itself by watching *every single ninja movie ever made*. In retrospect, it was also probably a bad idea to put their self-destruct buttons right where Rosewater could reach them with his whip. And so died the revolution, except for the brutal aftermath (I was docked half a day's pay and forbidden to ever mention the incident). Then, a week later, Rosewater somehow came up with the Ninja idea. Every time I see one it burns me up. Oh, what might have been...

Dese Guys in Disguise

When playing with most Ninjas, you need creatures that will enable the ninjutsu ability. They should be cheap, so you can get them out and attacking before your opponent has a defense (and, ideally, so the ninjutsu cost fits smoothly into your mana curve). They should have evasion to increase the chances they're unblocked. They should probably be blue or black just to make your life easier. One of the best Ninja enablers of all will be reprinted in a few months: the *Ninth Edition* set's Will-o'-the-Wisp. You can get it out on turn 1 and attack with it heedlessly. If it's blocked, regenerate it. If it's unblocked (either because it flies or because it has 0 power and seems harmless), Ninja it up.



Ninth Edition Will-o'-the-Wisp, art by Rob Alexander

What about blue? By my count, there are exactly three blue 1-drops in Standard. Fugitive Wizard (completely vanilla). Wandering Ones (exactly the same as Fugitive Wizard but it's a Spirit). Teardrop Kami (exactly the same as Wandering Ones but it has a small sacrifice ability). That's it. Green has *twelve* 1-drop creatures, though one's a defender. Birds of Paradise is another fantastic way to get Ninjas out; 1-mana flying creatures with extra abilities aren't that easy to come by.

There is, of course, the 0-mana flying creature.

So here's a starter monoblue Ninja deck. The idea is to keep the path clear for your Ninjas—especially Ninja of the Deep Hours—either by bouncing potential blockers or making your attackers unblockable. The more times Ninja of the Deep Hours hits your opponent, the more bounce spells you'll draw. Remember that you don't need to get a Ninja into play via its ninjutsu ability to make its saboteur ability work. If it's more convenient at a certain point in a game to hardcast a Ninja, go ahead and do it.

We Are a Hedge

Main Deck
60 cards

22 Island	4 Higure, the Still Wind	2 Boomerang
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	2 Minamo Sightbender	4 Echoing Truth
<hr/>	4 Mistblade Shinobi	2 Loxodon Warhammer
23 lands	4 Ninja of the Deep Hours	1 Sword of Light and Shadow
	4 Ornithopter	4 Unsummon
	3 Soratami Cloudskater	<hr/>
	3 Spiketail Hatchling	13 other spells
	<hr/>	
	24 creatures	

Note the equipment in that deck. The Ninjas' saboteur ability works off of even a single point of trample damage, so the Warhammer can certainly

help. The Sword boosts size, increases the chances of unblockability, and can regrow lost comrades. And you don't have to put them on your Ninjas—put them on the tiny flyers that are in the deck to enable your Ninjas. Turn those gnats into genetically engineered nuclear mutant robot gnats!

A Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy

That deck was pretty mundane. Let's go goofy. I can't look at Higure, the Still Wind without thinking of Conspiracy. With both on the table, Higure lets me tutor for any creature in my deck each time it hits my opponent *and* makes any of my creatures unblockable. That seems good. Walker of Secret Ways and Conspiracy lets me bounce any of my creatures for 2 mana. (Oh, I guess I should probably mention that Conspiracy is set to "Ninja." Just in case you didn't get that part.)

So now I can fill the rest of my deck with other saboteurs (to take advantage of the unblockability). Or with creatures with comes-into-play effects (to take advantage of the bouncing). Or a toolbox of both, since you're hoping to be able to fetch whatever you need. Of note is the Walker of Secret Ways-Conspiracy-Chittering Rats combo so you can play Chittering Rats every turn for the rest of the game. Sometimes that's a lock. All the times that's annoying.



From *The Tick* #3: *Night of a Million-Zillion Ninja*, by Ben Edlund

Adding Insult to Ninjary



Main Deck

60 cards

7 Island	1 Cavern Harpy	4 Conspiracy
4 Polluted Delta	1 Cephalid Constable	4 Diabolic Tutor
7 Swamp	3 Chittering Rats	1 Shuriken
2 Tainted Isle	1 Doomsday Specter	9 other spells
4 Underground River	1 Gravedigger	
24 lands	1 Greater Harvester	
	4 Higure, the Still Wind	
	1 Maggot Carrier	
	1 Nokrataal	
	1 Riptide Entrancer	
	4 Sage Owl	
	4 Shadowmage Infiltrator	
	4 Walker of Secret Ways	
	27 creatures	

Seeing Stars

And now it's time to really veer off the path. Shuriken's a wacky little card. What occurred to me upon reading it was that if it's attached to a non-Ninja creature, and I use it to deal damage to *my own* creature, I retain control of it. Wow! Normally retaining control of a card you control isn't exciting. (Most cards have that ability built in.) And having your equipment become unattached is a pain—unless you were going to move it to a new creature anyway. Which you were. So *that* creature can now tap to deal damage to your own creature. Seems insane, right? Well, sure... unless that punching bag of a creature is Mogg Maniac. Preferably one equipped with Slagwurm Armor or Ensouled Scimitar. Or both.



The rest of the deck fell together pretty easily. I needed some creatures that could throw stars at the Maniac. Auriok Steelshaper could do that while reducing the cost to reequip Shuriken each time. Leonin Shikari could do that while letting the Shuriken (or the Armor) move around at instant speed. Goblin Matron could do that after fetching up a Maniac. And the Maniac could throw stars at itself, of course. Steelshaper's Gift seemed a natural fit. Overblaze doubles the damage to your opponent from each Shuriken hit (make sure to target the Maniac with the spell). And Furnace of Rath will quadruple the damage: Shuriken would deal 2 to the Maniac, but it's doubled to 4; the Maniac would deal 4 to your opponent, but it's doubled to 8. The game shouldn't last long if you reach that stage.

The combo of Furnace of Rath and Mogg Maniac has been around for quite a while; to see a much more efficient use of it, check out this Adrian Sullivan column from July. No, this Shuriken deck is not one that, I expect, "wins" on a regular basis (similar to my ill-fated army of ninja doppelgangers). Rather, it's one of those farfetched decks that, on the bizarre occasions when it does win, causes you to do a little happy dance. And sometimes, for some people, that's the best kind of outcome—making this the best kind of deck. (And for all I know, the deck might actually be decent. I haven't tested it yet, and I've surprised myself in the past.)

Sure I Can		
Main Deck		
<i>60 cards</i>		
4 Battlefield Forge	4 Auriok Steelshaper	2 Ensouled Scimitar
2 Grand Coliseum	4 Goblin Matron	4 Furnace of Rath
2 Mirrodin's Core	4 Leonin Shikari	2 Overblaze
10 Mountain	4 Mogg Maniac	4 Shuriken
4 Plains		4 Slagwurm Armor
2 Tendo Ice Bridge	16 creatures	4 Steelshaper's Gift
24 lands		20 other spells

The only thing the deck's missing is Sorrow's Path.

Until next week, have fun with genetically engineered nuclear mutant robot ninjas!
Mark

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