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I attended Grand Prix Seattle this past weekend. While I was there, I somehow magically came up with an idea for a cra-a-a-azy casual combo deck. Bear with me, because it's pretty far-fetched. It's got Dragon Tyrant as its primary win condition, for crying out loud! The deck features other rarely seen cards like Sandstone Needle and Desperate Ritual. At its heart, it's a Sneak Attack deck (with Through the Breach backup), and Serra Avatar and Blazing Shoal make two different types of turn-1 wins possible.

Of course, I wouldn't try a deck this goofy outside of my living room... or the Top 8 of a 389-person Grand Prix, which is where Tsuyoshi Fujita wound up. That's right: Sandstone Needle is now a Tier 1 Extended card. For that reason (and due to its continued status of being obviously overpowered), I will continue to boycott it in my casual decks. It's just not fair.

Kudos to Tsuyoshi Fujita for continuing his insane brilliance in rogue deck innovation. House of Cards studiously avoids tournament decks, tournament cards, tournament reports, la la la I'm not looking Arcbound Ravager does not exist (oh, hey, it really doesn't exist!)—but "Sneaky Go" warms the cockles of my heart. You heard me.

Deck Challenge of the People

The **Magic** Invitational is coming up, and it's time for you, my loyally brainwashed minions, to participate. Sorry, but if you've read at least 20 of my columns, the subliminal messages have undoubtedly brainwashed you by now. Actually, I rescind my "sorry." I have no reason to be sorry—you brainwashed minions are *happy* to be brainwashed minions! You love it! It's the best thing that's ever happened to you! Now fetch me my ruby-encrusted kittens.

On second thought, belay the ruby-encrusted kittens. Instead, fetch an original, creative deck for the **Magic** Invitational Auction of the People. Each deck this year is based around a word of your choice. Once you choose a word of your choice, you must build an Online Extended deck whose cards (except for basic land) all contain the chosen word of your choice in the name, type line, rules text, and/or flavor text. (The artist credit and copyright information at the bottom of each card doesn't count, smart guy, so don't even try.)

Only full words count. If you choose the word "ogre," for example, Price of **Progress** wouldn't count. It doubly wouldn't count because it's not legal in Online Extended. Plurals and inflected forms count, so Blood Rites (which has "ogres" in its flavor text) would be fine.

The tricky part is choosing a good word and having a large enough card pool to make a creative, interesting deck... that *works*. If you choose the word "creature," you'll have a card pool so unrestricted that I don't think your deck will be in contention for an Auction slot. If you choose the word "rift," you'll wind up with a card pool that's too limited. Specifically, you'd get these:

- Aether Rift
- Earth Rift
- Ion Storm
- Lightning Rift
- Kami of False Hope
- Oyobi, Who Split the Heavens

Not only is that list only six cards long, your Lightning Rift wouldn't do much since none of the other cards cycle, your Ion Storm would be very bored since none of the other cards have counters, and your Oyobi would be pretty lonely with one other Spirit and zero Arcane spells in the deck. (Note that Riftstone Portal and Kitsune Riftwalker would be ineligible because "rift" isn't a separate word on those cards.)

How do you pick a word that stands out from the crowd while leaving you with a large enough card pool to build a deck that stands out from the crowd? How do you handle the tradeoff (a more common word probably means a more robust deck since you'll have more card options available to you—but it increases the chances other people picked your word)? That's what you have to figure out. You only get one shot at submitting a deck, so make it a good one.



Some helpful notes:

- Your deck *must* have at least 24 lands in it. They don't all have to be basic lands, but any nonbasic lands you include must contain your chosen word.
- If you're using Gatherer to search for cards, note that you'll have to choose "Online Extended post BoK" in the "format or set" filter, since *Betrayers of Kamigawa* is not in the regular Online Extended option.
- Also note that Gatherer will find words that contain your word (searching for "rift" turns up "Riftwalker" too), so you'll have to be more clever with your search technique or double-check each card that comes up to make sure it really meets your criteria.
- **Do NOT send your decks to me.** Decks sent to me will be deleted or ignored. Use this link to read the actual submission guidelines, and use this link to submit your deck.
- **The deadline is March 21.**

I know you folks reading this are the cleverest, goofiest deckbuilders on the planet who aren't named Tsuyoshi Fujita, so this should be right up your alley. Have fun with this deck challenge, and good luck!

Succession Success

I'm not going to give any examples or suggestions for Auction of the People decks. Anything I post would essentially be an option taken away from you. So I'm going to talk about some decks that don't all share the same word! It's still a design constraint, but I was somehow able to work around it. First up is my take on a deck sent to me by Travis Martin. He found a 4-card denial lock that, once it's on the table, gives you the ability "♣: Counter target spell." Even better, you don't always have to pay the 3 mana at the time you want to counter a spell. You can pre-pay it and have counterspells in reserve. Even even better, although the first counterspell costs 4 mana, the next three are free before they start to cost 3 mana per.

What insanity is this? It's a thing of beauty: A 4-block combo that uses a *Mirrodin* card (Spawning Pit) to sacrifice an *Apocalypse* card (Mystic Snake) so an *Odyssey* card (Verdant Succession) puts a new Mystic Snake into play from your deck, which automatically counters a spell—and then a *Champions of Kamigawa* card (Reito Lantern) restocks the sacrificed Mystic Snake into your library so you always have more of them for Verdant Succession to find. After playing all of these spells the first time, the only thing you need mana for is Reito Lantern, and then only when the first four counterspells aren't enough. (They're not.)



The deck also features the ubiquitous Sakura-Tribe Elder. The Elder plus Verdant Succession means you can set off a chain reaction, zipping through all 4 Elders and fetching 4 basic lands, to shorten your deck by 8 cards. If you also have Reito Lantern, you can recycle an Elder into your deck before you sacrifice your last one to sustain the loop and, over the course of a few turns, fetch out *all* your lands.


Travis's original deck featured Temporal Spring. Bounce is a good idea here—while you're setting up your combo, your opponent will probably be playing dangerous permanents. You may need to get rid of them, if only temporarily, to buy yourself some time. Later on, once your Mystic Snake lock is active, bounce works as a de facto counterspell because whatever permanents you remove from the table will never make it back into play again. I'd rather have instant-speed spells that can bounce multiple permanents, however, so as a personal choice I swapped out the Springs for Echoing Truths

and added Rushing Rivers as well. I also added some cards that would help me find my combo pieces in Serum Visions and Fabricate.

Verdant Snakes		
		
Main Deck 60 cards		
10 Forest	4 Eternal Witness	4 Echoing Truth
10 Island	4 Mystic Snake	2 Fabricate
4 Yavimaya Coast	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	4 Reito Lantern
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24 lands	12 creatures	2 Rushing River
		4 Serum Visions
		4 Spawning Pit
		4 Verdant Succession
		<hr/>
		24 other spells

Goblin-Eating Bears

Moving on to a different tribe, Brad Wojceshonek decided to get tricky with Goblins. Brad apparently misses Skullclamp, because he built a deck in which you ax your own 1/1 creatures so that you can draw more cards. Skullclamp doesn't really compare, I guess—it didn't generate mana too.

Brad's deck is filled with 1-mana Goblins, including the mighty Skirk Prospector. The Prospector lets you sacrifice any Goblin in your deck for , which lets you play any Goblin in your deck. OK, not fantastic so far. Here's where it gets interesting: The deck also has Fecundity (hey—you draw a card each time a Goblin dies!) and Glimpse of Nature (hey—you draw a card each time you play a Goblin!) Once you start going off, you set up a loop in which you keep playing and sacrificing Goblins. Each iteration nets you two cards (or more, if you've played multiple Fecundities or Glimpses), which

almost certainly includes more Goblins to sustain the craziness. Ideally, you'll go through your entire library and be left with a hand full of all the non-Goblin cards in your deck. At this point, play your Chrome Moxes (imprinting leftover cards), play Mass Hysteria, and play Caller of the Claw to create a bazillion hasty Bear tokens (one per Goblin you sacrificed that turn). Swing in with your surprise Bears for the win while your opponent wonders what happened to the Goblin deck you were playing.



The deck can make itself very, very easy to play if you get the right pieces early and your Goblins are smoothly distributed. But a number of games have tricky considerations. When is it right to play a second Glimpse of Nature so that you draw 3 cards per loop iteration rather than 2? That practically guarantees you'll keep turning up Goblins so you don't sputter out, but it also means fewer sacrifices before your library runs out, which means fewer Bears. It's practically always right to play a second Glimpse, but the third Glimpse isn't as clear. Does your opponent have blockers? Has she gained life? You may need all the Bears you can get. Note that while Fecundity's card draw is optional, Glimpse of Nature's is mandatory. Be sure there are enough cards left in your deck to satisfy your Glimpse of Natures when you play Caller of the Claw or you'll deck yourself and lose. (Only the Caller triggers the Glimpse draw, not the Bear tokens.)

Sometimes you don't have too many combo pieces, you have too few. When is it right to start sacrificing your Goblins to start the cycle when you have Fecundity out but you haven't seen a Glimpse of Nature? Maybe you'll draw into it and maybe you won't. Can you wait or not? Starting the loop prematurely might completely backfire, or it might work partway: You'll wind up with a handful of Bear tokens and leave yourself in good position—but you won't pull off an insta-victory, and one Pyroclasm ends the game. Since when did Goblins require thinking?

Note that this deck is legal in both Tribal Wars and Online Extended.

Glimpse of Hell r4dec

Main Deck

60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Forest 4 Karplusan Forest 7 Mountain 4 Wooded Foothills <hr style="width: 80%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>19 lands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Caller of the Claw 4 Goblin Cohort 4 Goblin Grappler 4 Goblin Sledder 2 Goblin Taskmaster 2 Krark-Clan Shaman 4 Raging Goblin 4 Skirk Prospector <hr style="width: 80%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>27 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Chrome Mox 4 Fecundity 4 Glimpse of Nature 2 Mass Hysteria <hr style="width: 80%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>14 other spells</p>
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Name That Toon

Snakes? Check. Goblins? Check. I guess Ninjas are up next. Joe, who didn't tell me his last name and thus misses out on this opportunity for fame because none of his friends will believe that this is him ("Yeah, sure, Joe. Since absolutely no one else on earth is named Joe, this really cool deck must have been sent in by *you*.") noticed, as many others have, that since the introduction of Ninja as a creature type in *Betrayers of Kamigawa*, Mistform Ultimus is a Mutant Ninja Turtle. Unlike everyone else, though, Joe decided to do something about it. Now if he would only do something about his supersarcastic friends. They sound like jerks.



Joe's deck started to form was when he opened a foil Shuriken and started looking around for a 3-toughness Ninja to make the "Shuriken trick" work. This isn't actually necessary; to get maximum use out of Shuriken, you need a Ninja *or* a 3-toughness creature, but not both. For those not in the know, here's the trick: You have Creature A, Creature B, and Shuriken (equipped to Creature A). One of those creatures has at least 3 toughness. You play Shuriken's equip ability to attach it to Creature B. *While that's on the stack*, you tap Creature A to have it deal 2 damage to your opponent's creature. Shuriken falls off Creature A and your opponent gains control of it. Then the equip ability resolves and Shuriken becomes attached to your Creature B. Even though your opponent controls the Shuriken, it's giving Creature B the damage-dealing ability, and your opponent can't move it because the equip ability must be played at sorcery speed. So now you tap Creature B to deal 2 damage to one of your own creatures (the one with 3 toughness). Shuriken falls off and

you regain control of it since your creature was damaged. Your opponent never gets his mitts on it. Or... you can just equip it to a Ninja. Anyway, the 3-toughness Ninja Joe found was Mistform Ultimus, and the deck idea was planted.

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle deck must come to be.

This is where I start writing about stuff I know absolutely nothing about. I know my Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. I do not know my Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (I'm pretty sure I made the right choice there.) I saw some episodes of the cartoon back in the day, so my knowledge base isn't zero, and I have Joe's detailed email to guide me, but forgive me if I get some details wrong here.

The next thing Joe needed was a Rat for Master Splinter. There are Rat Ninjas—but they're all pretty evil; none are very Splinter-like. Why not just use Splinter? Warped Researcher came in under the Mutant theme, and Consumptive Goo filled the Ooze (which apparently has some sort of secret) slot.

Joe, having admittedly watched the cartoon way, way too much in the '80s, now needed to find Bebop, Rocksteady, Shredder, and Krang to fill out the bad guy ranks. One's a warthog: Giant Warthog. One's a rhinoceros: Charging Rhino. One's a man covered in metal who's also a ninja. Hmm. What worked for Splinter will work here, so in came Bone Shredder. Krang is a tentacled brain inside a robotic suit: Power Armor for the suit (lucky us the sketchy, sketchy mana base is three colors) and Callous Oppressor for the tentacles (and the name fits Krang).

April is the one human of the group, and the one woman, and she's a reporter, so Azami, Lady of Scrolls seems appropriate. The four turtles mean four Ultimuses. Of the other specific characters in the show, only the Rat King rated inclusion in the deck (Ink-Eyes). The Foot Soldiers pop up all the time though, so in keeping with their ubiquity and anonymity, they'll be played in the deck by... a

bunch of random Ninjas. Vintara Snapper represents the pre-evolved turtles, and General's Kabuto was inserted for no other reason than a cheap reference to the third movie. While I get the rest of the deck this surprised me—I had no idea they made a third movie.

In Joe's own words: "Oh, no, this deck will not be effective by any means. But is that really the point?"

Heroes in a Half-Shell

Main Deck
60 cards

2 City of Brass	1 Azami, Lady of Scrolls	1 General's Kabuto
4 Forest	1 Bone Shredder	1 Power Armor
4 Island	1 Callous Oppressor	1 Sewers of Estark
2 Llanowar Wastes	1 Charging Rhino	4 Shuriken
4 Mirrodin's Core	1 Consumptive Goo	1 Splinter
1 School of the Unseen	1 Giant Warthog	<hr/>
4 Swamp	1 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni	8 other spells
2 Underground River	4 Mistform Ultimus	
2 Yavimaya Coast	4 Ninja of the Deep Hours	
<hr/>	4 Skullsnatcher	
25 lands	3 Throat Slitter	
	4 Vintara Snapper	
	1 Warped Researcher	
	<hr/>	
	27 creatures	

Until next week, cowabunga, dude!

Mark

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