

# The Fall of the House of Cards Search

Mark Gottlieb  
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OK! A fresh, new week! Let's dip into the ol' mailbag and see what comes up!

Dear Mark Gottlieb,

Despite my slight Magic funk, my loss of all hope, and my slight disappointment in Kamigawa, I'm back and, might I say, slightly troubled. [...cutting 249 words of bizarre rambling...] It was a grand idea though. Anyways, I guess it's sort of a roundabout way of saying it, but thank you Mark Gottlieb. Without your witty ideas and genius writing, I'd be a sad, sad, little Magic player.

--Lassy, the Incredibly Incredulous

Erm.

I see.

This is going to be a bit awkward, then.

It is with great disappointment that I must announce that this is my last column. I knew this day would eventually come, but I wasn't expecting it for another couple of years. I was certainly looking forward to writing about *Ravnica* block, since, for the first time, I had a hand in shaping two of its sets... and *Ravnica* is pretty damn comboriffic. But my tyrannical reign as a columnist is over. No more trips into my secret volcano lair. No more Douglas Adams hero-worshipping. No more experimental short fiction framed as the fever dreams of an Icelandic toad herder named Schleppo. (I hadn't gotten to that yet, but it was going to be a regular feature.)

Some of you, no doubt, are experiencing a state of denial right now. This is the part of the column where I make with the funny jokes. That's all this is, right? A funny joke? A poorly conceived, totally unfunny, funny little joke? "That Mark, he's always yankin' our chains!" Nope. You might not believe me until a week from today when I'm not here, but that's the way it is. I have been reassigned within R&D and writing this column is no longer part of my job description. What are my new duties? All I can say is that it's the next step in my plan for world domination, and that Rosewater is still my archenemy.

Of course, the question I expect to get asked the most is "Can't you write it anyway?" Yes, I have the option to write the column as a freelancer; most of the columnists here, after all, are freelancers. Why not do that? I long ago concluded that given the hours I work, the time it takes to write this column, and the freelance gigs I'm already committed to, writing it in my free time would just about kill me. I wouldn't be able to handle it. So yes, this is my parting shot.

## Some Unfinished Business

Of course, I'm not going to write my last column without some bizarre decks. A few weeks ago, I said that *Saviors of Kamigawa* was full of combo cards... except for Pithing Needle, which I had interpreted as pure Spike. Kyle Kloster, Matt Ginsberg, and Dan Robinson begged to differ and wrote in to enlighten me to the Johnny potential of this pesky little card.

Pithing Needle combos quite nicely with many cards that say "Any player may play this ability." Play the Needle naming Glittering Lion, then play the Lion yourself to get a 2W 2/2 undamageable creature. Try Flailing Manticore for a 3R 3/3 flying first-striker. Mercenaries and Jinxed Ring are also ripe possibilities. But the real twin jewels here are Aether Storm and Lethal Vapors. Pithing Needle can preemptively shut off their self-destruct mechanisms, leaving you with a 4-mana blue enchantment that prevents creatures from being played or a 4-mana black enchantment that destroys every creature as soon as it enters play. That should keep the board pretty clear.

Needle Lift

## Legacy Pithing Needle deck

The deck strives to win either via decking or by attacking with man-lands across a (presumably) clear battlefield. The Needle-Vapors or Needle-Storm combo won't win the game on its own, it's disruptable, and (as demonstrated in this very deck) there are ways to attack with creatures anyway. But it should throw enough of a monkey wrench into your opponent's plans to let you take control of the game... or at least be very, very annoying.

## The Ultimate Combo

I've been saving up something special for my last column.

Have you ever imagined that somewhere out there is the perfect combo? You know it's waiting to be found, but you can't quite ever grasp it? It exists. And I know what it is. Showing it to Aaron Forsythe over two years ago is what got me this column in the first place. I've been waiting for the right moment to show it to the world, and there's no better time for me to reveal this unbelievable supersecret foolproof unstoppable 100% game-winning combo than now. This is the last opportunity I'm going to get, so it's very tempting to finally spill the beans. Believe me, it's been agony not telling you all this time, but I didn't want to break **Magic** as we know it. I don't even use it myself; it's so good that it spoils all the fun of playing. I can't believe it slipped through development, and I can't believe errata hasn't been issued to fix it! The only reason the pieces haven't been banned is because I'm the only one who's figured it out. But there's something not quite right about spelling it out. It's like explaining an illusion or giving away the ending to a detective story. And where's the fun in that? Wow. I've surprised even myself here, because I've been looking forward to showing this to you for so long (I even typed it out... just before deleting it), but I'm not going to tell you the ultimate combo.

You're just going to have to think of it yourselves.

## The Scottish Play

David, while severely bored, made a deck based on the Witches' cauldron scene in Macbeth.

ACT IV

SCENE I. A cavern. In the middle, a boiling cauldron.

*Thunder. Enter the three Witches*

### First Witch

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd. (Waiting in the Weeds)

### Second Witch

Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

### Third Witch

Harpier cries 'Tis time, 'tis time.

### First Witch

Round about the cauldron go;  
In the poison'd entrails throw. (Marsh Viper)  
Toad, that under cold stone (Frog Tongue)  
Days and nights has thirty-one  
Swelter'd venom sleeping got, (Venomous Fangs)  
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot. (Emerald Charm)

### ALL

Double, double toil and trouble; (Doubling Cube)  
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble. (Bubble Matrix)

### Second Witch

Fillet of a fenny snake, (Serpent Generator)  
In the cauldron boil and bake;  
Eye of newt and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat and tongue of dog, (Watchdog)  
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting, (Viridian Longbow)  
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing,  
For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

### ALL

Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Cool stuff. That Shakespeare sure knows what he's doing; I hope he catches on. (Hey Scott—if he's available, maybe he can take over for me. I don't know if he plays **Magic**, though.) David's deck clearly isn't the only one that can be built out of this passage, but it's the first one I've ever seen and I just love the concept. Here's the resulting deck:

Toil and Trouble

### Legacy Macbeth theme deck

I adjusted a couple of his numbers to up the land count (Doubling Cube doesn't do much if you only draw 4 lands all game). The deck churns out tokens. If it can win by attacking with 1/1 creatures, it will. If it can win with poison, it will. But the real plan is to clog up the battlefield with invulnerable weenies (thanks to Bubble Matrix) that also defend against flyers (thanks to Frog Tongue) and ping away for the win (thanks to Viridian Longbow). But the victory condition isn't really the point. Victory isn't the point. The point is brazen creativity. Oddball imagination. Unique self-expression. I'd say the juxtaposition of **Magic** and Shakespeare in general, and the way David pulled off this deck in specific, counts as all of those things. The success of the deck isn't its winning percentage—it's its very existence.

The point is brazen creativity. Oddball imagination. Unique self-expression. That's what all my columns have been about: The exhilaration of ideas. The joy of creativity. It exists in my writing, it exists in my decks, and I want it to exist for all of you as well. The medium here happens to be **Magic** decks, but it doesn't need to be. It can be whatever form of expression works for you. Keep those minds churning. Create.

### We Must Be in a Maple Forest Because It's Getting Pretty Sappy

I sincerely thank all of my contributors over the past two years. If I had to write this column without your help and your input, it wouldn't be half as interesting as it's been. When I post a deck submitted

by a reader, I've always made sure to name that person, so credits and acknowledgements are spread throughout the past 115 columns. But the decks I post are only a fraction of the ones I receive, and they share my Inbox with emails containing ideas, suggestions, criticisms, rants, professions of love, erroneous complaints about errors, and (most importantly, of course) bombos. Thank you to everyone who's sent me an email—I replied to relatively few, but I read every single one of them.

I'd also like to thank Aaron Forsythe, Scott Johns, Jen Page, and the rest of the Online Media staff for pretty much letting me get away with whatever the hell I want and supporting my columns with awesome graphics.

And finally, I thank you the readers. I had no idea I had so much to say, and I had no idea so many people would be interested in hearing it.

Parting is Such Sweet Yada Yada

A final theme deck. Or, rather, a “final” theme deck. This deck started as a Last Laugh-Final Punishment deck—a theme-based combo that just might win the game explosively. It expanded outward into a near-Highlander deck (the Last Laughs and Tombstone Stairwells are too important to limit to a single copy). There are lots of little combos running around in here, most of which center on Last Laugh—fitting, since it's the heart of the deck. For example, I love the idea of players fighting over Endbringer's Revel to return their *opponents'* creatures so fewer enemy Tombspawn Zombie tokens will be created. There are plenty of ways to sacrifice creatures or otherwise pop them into the graveyard to get either of the two key enchantments going (Do or Die will kick-start Last Laugh for sure), as well as other ways to take advantage of such morbid events. But mostly it's about the card names.

One Last Deck

## Legacy theme deck

Well, would you look at that—a deck that likes Sorrow's Path! I guess my work really is done here.

Have fun,  
Mark

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