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Clash of the Empires

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 House of Cards
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Today I run roughshod over lots of different territory. I'm going to touch on **Magic** in historical perspective, though not as deeply as Ben. I'm going to whisper about multiplayer, which is sure to rankle Anthony. The entire time I'm going to focus on *Fallen Empires*, which will throw us all into a collective tizzy when *Fallen Empires* Week is upon us.

But let's face it: It's Flavor Text Week and I'm writing a deckbuilding column... I was bound to need some help filling space here.

Next to *Unglued*, *Fallen Empires* has arguably the best flavor text of any **Magic** set. *Fallen Empires* pre-dates the **Magic** novels and the very complicated storyline that began with *Captain Gerrard* and the *Weatherlight*. Nowadays, to really understand the story behind **Magic**, you need to read the novels. And even then some of the cards and flavor text feel random. Playing a game with the cards hardly resembles anything like an epic tale from the storyline. In fact, I think most people aren't aware that they *could* be playing out pieces of the story as they play the game.



Not so with *Fallen Empires*. The entire concept behind the set was summed up in a [paragraph](#) by Jess Lebow. I'll be sharing this paragraph throughout the article, but here is the basic premise: Everything is going to hell in a handbasket and people are fighting. Sounds pretty simple, and it is.

What makes *Fallen Empires* great is that the flavor text adds depth and, dare I say, flavor to that simple story. Many commons came in four versions, each with their own piece of the tale. As a result, playing with *Fallen Empires* means playing out the epic battles housed within the flavor text. The ability to act out the struggle within the story using the cards makes for a very tempting night of **Magic**.

LIVE THE BATTLES



the foremost goal, and people have begun to turn on each other in an effort to live on..."

Consider doing the following: Gather up a group of friends - at least five, but as many as thirteen -- and play a round-robin tournament (meaning each person plays each other person once). Have a prize at the end for the people with the best records. In the meantime, you will be enacting the battles of the *Fallen Empires* in a way that I guarantee to be memorable.

To demonstrate what I mean, let me first drop a bit of the official *Fallen Empires* storyline. Here is the context in which the tournament will take place:

"It is a time after the great devastation that ended the Brothers' War. In a southern continent, called Sarpardia, the weather is getting colder. Food sources are dwindling. War between different colored factions is flaring up due to lack of resources. Times are troubling, and no longer can anyone rely on their ancient allies. Survival has become

Each person brings a monocolored deck representing one faction on Sarpardia. The core of each deck will be *Fallen Empires* cards, which sounds daunting except that *Fallen Empires* is a set with essentially *no rares*. As such, the cards aren't terribly difficult to acquire. The rest of the deck consists of cards that make sense thematically given whatever faction the deck represents.

In my sample decks below, I've held to my [dietary tendencies](#), meaning that I haven't used any rares to make the decks. I do, however, suggest a few staple rares that might go into each deck.

Since it is Flavor Text Week, I feel the need to point out that choosing your non-*Fallen Empires* support cards is a thematic decision. If you can help it, don't choose cards with flavor text that includes *Volrath*, *Karn*, or *Kamah!*. Don't choose *Aboshan's Desire*, simply because of its name. Instead, choose support cards with neutral titles and

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flavor text or, better yet, no flavor text at all. Doing so will enhance the feeling that the battles taking place on your dining room table are those from the continent of Sarpadia during the age of *Fallen Empires*.

Here are the possible faction decks from each color, along with some examples of how I might build them...

WHITE:

"...The order created by governmental structures in the cities and towns is being threatened by growing bands of religious zealots..."

There are two factions here, or three if you stretch your imagination. You can play a deck representing the towns and militia of Icatia, or you can play the religious zealots of Farrel. It is also possible to play a faction from followers of Leitbur, although your only *Fallen Empires* cards will be **Order of Leitbur**, **Icatian Priest**, and **Hand of Justice** (which I think can be used for any white faction), meaning you'll have to fill in the rest.

Here is a sample Icatia deck:

Icatia <i>Lite!</i>		
2 Icatian Store	4 Icatian Infantry	1 Icatian Town
1 Ruins of Trokair	4 Icatian Javelineers	4 Warrior's Honor
21 Plains	4 Icatian Priest	3 Floating Shield
	4 Icatian Lieutenant	
	4 Combat Medic	
	4 Enlistment Officer	
	3 Icatian Phalanx	
	1 Hand of Justice	

Of course, feel free to use **Crusade**, forcing your opponents to include enchantment destruction in their decks. In the Farrelites deck, **Wrath of God** is almost a given.

RED:

"...Dwarves are defending their mountain homes from whole armies of orcs and goblins..."

The text says it all: Dwarves, Orcs, or Goblins. Goblins give you the widest choice of supporting cards, but recent sets have recently given the Dwarf deck quite a boost:

Dwarves of the Crimson Peaks <i>Lite!</i>		
2 Dwarven Ruins	4 Bloodfire Dwarf	4 Dwarven Catapult
1 Dwarven Hold	4 Dwarven Armorer	4 Volcanic Hammer
19 Mountain	4 Dwarven Berserker	4 Giant Strength
	4 Dwarven Soldier	2 Blood Lust
	4 Dwarven Lieutenant	
	4 Dwarven Recruiter	

The key to nailing down the theme is to get the editions of **Giant Strength** and **Blood Lust** that show Dwarves in their artwork.

There are several rare Dwarf cards, too, like **Dwarven Armory** and **Dwarven Thaumaturgist**. Something like **Brawl** would be fun too.

GREEN:

"...In the forest, the forces of nature feed off of death, growing fungus everywhere..."

The easiest faction decks to make are Elves and Thallids. You can also make a deck for the clerics of Thelon. I like the Thallid cards so much it's hard not to go in that direction:

Thallid Uprising <i>Lite!</i>		
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24 Forest

4 Thallid
4 Spore Flower
4 Thallid Devourer
4 Thorn Thallid
4 Feral Thallid

4 Fungal Bloom
4 Night Soil
4 Spore Cloud
4 Creeping Mold

Of course, [Parallel Evolution](#) would sure make this deck scary. Thematically appropriate cards like [Fungus Elemental](#) would be great too.

BLUE:

"...Under the seas, merfolk have come under attack from a previously unheard of race-upright crustacean warriors called Homarids..."

Interestingly, both blue and black only provide two factions. In blue, these are Merfolk and Homarids. Here is a sample Merfolk deck:

Vodalialia *Lite!*

2 Svyelunite Temple
20 Island

4 Svyelunite Priest
4 Vodalial Soldiers
4 River Merfolk
4 Vodalial Mage
4 Vodalial Knights
4 Seasinger
4 Tidal Courier
3 Vodalial War Machine

4 Merseine
2 Gush
1 Rushing River

It feels weird to not include [Lord of Atlantis](#) even if Atlantis doesn't exist in Sarpadia. If your house rules allow rares, I would consider including him.

BLACK:

"...And in the swamps, an order of dark magic users finds that their experiments into breeding slaves has backfired, and they are being overrun by the little beasts they have created..."

Black has two factions: Thrulls and those followers of Tourach, the Ebon Hand. If you are only using one deck per color, it's actually appropriate to use both in the same deck, since the Ebon Hand created Thrulls before they rebelled.

The Thrull Rebellion *Lite!*

2 Ebon Stronghold
21 Swamp

4 Blood Pet
4 Basal Thrull
4 Armor Thrull
4 Mindstab Thrull
4 Necrite
3 Thrull Champion
1 Derelor
1 Ebon Praetor

4 Thrull Retainer
4 Soul Exchange
3 Breeding Pit
1 Tourach's Gate

[Diabolic Intent](#) seems to work here, as do things like [Wave of Terror](#) and [Forbidden Ritual](#).

FROM BATTLES TO WARS

Another idea, of course, would be to forgo the individual skirmishes represented by a tournament, and instead stage all-out wars by playing multiplayer games. With five people, you can each choose one faction from one color and play a game of [Rainbow Magic](#). But really any multiplayer format can apply here. I mean, you can conceivably have thirteen people at the table! Ask Anthony... he'll know what to do.

Whether you choose individual duels or multiplayer, it's important to keep the decks balanced in terms of power level. Don't let Spike the PT Wannabe ruin your evening. And don't let the Ebon Hand player rationalize using **Engineered Plague**. It's more fun if any faction has a chance at dominating Sarpadia at any given time. After all, no faction is supposed to be dominant, thus the idea behind *Fallen Empires*. Or, to put the final touches on the storyline:

"...It is a time of great troubles, and the great cultures of the past are rapidly collapsing in on themselves."

Have fun with it. Let the flavor text be your guide. It's up to you and your friends to decide who, in the end, lives happily ever after. Oh, and who gets squashed like a bug.

Next week: Lighten up!

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