

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# Right to Bear Arms

Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar  
House of Cards  
Thursday, May 16, 2002



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

If you decide to build a deck around the *Judgment* sorcery **Grizzly Fate**, I suggest you do the following:

Sit down at your friend's dining room table, shuffling your green-sleeved deck and waiting for him to feed you. When he finally sits down, calmly hand him a folded slip of paper that says the following:

"Avoiding or Surviving an Attack", by Scott McMillion

- Make noise on the trail.
- Keep a clean camp.
- Never look a bear in the eyes.
- If attacked, don't fight, especially if you're alone.
- Play dead and make no noise if a bear begins to bite or maul you.
- Exception to above: if a bear attacks your tent, fight as loudly and as hard as you can. This lets the bear know you are not the easy meal he has mistaken you for.
- Know how to use pepper spray and test the can before setting out for the woods.
- Do not run from a grizzly bear.
- Remember, grizzlies can and do climb trees."

When your friend gives you a quizzical look, shrug and say, "I just thought you should be prepared."

Oh, come on... don't you think that would be funny?

It was clear to me the second I saw **Grizzly Fate** that decks would follow. This card has a lot going for it. Specifically:

- It is one of only two spells with both flashback and threshold (the other is also in *Judgment*). This almost automatically makes the card interesting.
- It makes token creatures, and token creatures are fun.
- It puts anywhere from two to eight 2/2 creatures into play. Eight. For a single card. With four in a deck I am packing potentially 64/64 worth of bear. That's a lot of bear.
- It is an uncommon, and so relatively easy to acquire. More than that, it is in my opinion one of the more intriguing, flavorful, and dynamic uncommons around.
- It fits into a bear theme deck. To be honest, this last point is the most important reason for me.

For those of you new to **Magic** and not up on slang, a "bear" is a 2/2 creature for 2 mana. These creatures are called "bears" because of **Grizzly Bears**, a staple since **Magic's** first Alpha release. Enough actual Creature-Bears have existed to make theme decks, but almost by definition they have thus far been generic and vanilla decks. To make bear theme decks interesting before *Judgment*, you needed to call it a "Pooh" deck and use **Drop of Honey** and **Unyaro Bee Sting** or make the ever-popular "Lions and Tigers and Bears... Oh My!" deck.

Plain old bears, though? They have been just plain and old. I care about these things because a) I like making [theme decks](#), and b) "bear" is such a common slang term in **Magic** that it just screams for a deck built around it.

So for those of you who enjoy creature theme decks, here is a look at bears and how you might take full advantage of the grizzled fate that *Judgment* has handed you.

## THE BEARS OF DOMINARIA

As I mentioned, the good news is that you can actually pack a bear deck with bears. Indeed, several of them are "bears": **Grizzly Bears**, **Balduvian Bears**, **Bear Cub**, and **Forest Bear**. Even better, all of those cards are commons.

Here's a question: Why is a **Bear Cub** the same size as a full-grown bear? And have you seen the art on that thing? It just feels like **Bear Cub** should have been 1/2 for like **Woodland Druid**. Ah, the wonders of continuity in a game with almost six thousand cards in it.



Final Wrap-up  
[Top 8 Video Archives](#)





Here's a question: How does Jay even know these cards exist?

reaching threshold if they stay in theme. Still, **Werebear** at least has some good bear art, some silly bear flavor text, and is actually a bear, so it belongs in a bear theme deck.

Eleven different types of bear. That's the good news. The bad news is that you have one of the least interesting foundations for a deck, like, ever. Those creatures aren't going to keep you playing your theme deck game after game.

## BEARING THE WEIGHT: SUPPORT CARDS

Non-creature cards are the way to spruce up a bear deck. Before talking about the no-brainers to include, let me mention two general approaches you might take with a generic bear theme. These approaches aren't mutually exclusive.

The "Bears Are Mean" approach suggests you should play up how angry and dangerous your bears can become. Cards like **Aggressive Urge**, **Feral Instinct**, **Ferocity**, **Overrun**, **Surge of Strength**, and **Wild Might** turn your sometimes silly 2/2's into raging beasts of white-hot terror. In addition, **Call of the Wild**, **Lure of Prey**, etc., can cause a bear to jump out of the bushes and really surprise an opponent. You can argue that **Primal Rage** has a bear on it, although I personally would rather use **Primal Frenzy** or **Rancor**.

The "Bears Live in Forests" approach, meanwhile, focuses on a bear's dwelling of choice. **Barbed Foliage**, **Dark Heart of the Wood**, **Deep Wood**, **Dense Foliage**, **Familiar Ground**, **Gift of the Woods**, **Harmony of Nature**, and **Nature's Blessing**... those spells give some texture to your pack of bears. Heck, even **Wall of Wood** makes some sense to include under this approach.

Note that at least two cards fit both approaches: **Might of Oaks** and **Sylvan Might**.

Before **Judgment**, you could find only a few crown jewels of bear-dom. The same critter on **Primal Rage** seems to have made its way to **Insist**. Since theme decks can use a slanted lens when seeing things, I have decided that for the purposes of a bear theme, **Insist** has a bear on it rather than a wolverine or rabid hamster. The great use for **Insist** is as a way to cycle through your deck. Making creatures uncounterable is secondary to having something to do on turn 1 and getting you closer to threshold.

**Bearscape**, which turns your graveyard into bears (and "bears" for that matter) obviously belongs in a bear deck. What is frustrating about **Bearscape** is that it works at cross-purposes to both **Werebear** and **Grizzly Fate**. So whereas it probably sat as the centerpiece of bear decks after **Odyssey**, it now takes a bit of a back seat to **Grizzly Fate**.

There is also **Winter Orb**. Those are definitely bears on the art, albeit bears of the "Pale" variety. **Winter Orb** not only slows down an opponent, it is easy to use in a bear deck that relies on cheap creatures. **Winter Orb** makes the use of **Grizzly Fate** challenging, but since **Grizzly Fate** proves to be the only high-end spell in the deck and we can use **Werebear**, I don't think it is too severe a problem.

Finally, **Grizzly Fate** has arrived and the Theme Gods rejoice. **Grizzly Fate** gives bear decks something just as scary to cast as **Overrun**. And now **Overrun** looks even scarier. Booya.



Two cards, twenty damage.

There are more interesting bears than just "bears." **Striped Bears** are cantrip-creatures. **Golden Bear** is fairly efficient, although it is probably inferior to **Razorclaw Bear**. The real reason to use the former instead of the latter is that **Golden Bear** is common, while **Razorclaw Bear** is a *Portal II* rare. Similarly, I would rather use **Pale Bears** over **River Bear**, but again there is that rare problem. One of my first ever theme decks was a bear deck, and it burned me to no end that I had to trade good cards for **Pale Bears**.

Finally, two bears stand out at high-exceptional. **Spectral Bears** gives you some actual beef for the same price as a normal "bear," so they go right into the deck. **Werebear** is also solid. The real problem with **Werebear** is that bear decks haven't really needed mana acceleration and have a difficult time

Below is the kind of bear deck I would probably take to a theme party/tournament. I've played with the bear theme in various ways in some other decks and even tried my hand at a **Tribes** deck. My deep apologies to Stijn van Dongen for probably murdering the Tribes deckbuilding rules.

Judgment is almost here... get out your cans of pepper spray!

Next Week: The Second House of Cards Deck Challenge!

-j

<h3>Grizzly Fate</h3> <p>Bear theme deck</p> <p><b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards</p> <table><tr><td>4 Hickory Woodlot 16 Forest 20 lands</td><td>4 Balduvian Bears 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Spectral Bears 4 Werebear 4 Striped Bears 20 creatures</td><td>4 Insist 4 Rancor 3 Winter Orb 3 Wild Might 3 Grizzly Fate 2 Bearscape 1 Might of Oaks 20 other spells</td></tr></table>	4 Hickory Woodlot 16 Forest 20 lands	4 Balduvian Bears 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Spectral Bears 4 Werebear 4 Striped Bears 20 creatures	4 Insist 4 Rancor 3 Winter Orb 3 Wild Might 3 Grizzly Fate 2 Bearscape 1 Might of Oaks 20 other spells
4 Hickory Woodlot 16 Forest 20 lands	4 Balduvian Bears 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Spectral Bears 4 Werebear 4 Striped Bears 20 creatures	4 Insist 4 Rancor 3 Winter Orb 3 Wild Might 3 Grizzly Fate 2 Bearscape 1 Might of Oaks 20 other spells	
<h3>Bear Necessities <i>Lite!</i></h3> <p>Bear theme deck</p> <p><b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards</p> <table><tr><td>3 Havenwood Battleground 3 Slippery Karst 15 Forest 21 lands</td><td>4 Balduvian Bears 4 Forest Bear 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Spectral Bears 4 Werebear 4 Striped Bears 24 creatures</td><td>4 Rancor 4 Aggressive Urge 4 Grizzly Fate 3 Overrun 15 other spells</td></tr></table>	3 Havenwood Battleground 3 Slippery Karst 15 Forest 21 lands	4 Balduvian Bears 4 Forest Bear 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Spectral Bears 4 Werebear 4 Striped Bears 24 creatures	4 Rancor 4 Aggressive Urge 4 Grizzly Fate 3 Overrun 15 other spells
3 Havenwood Battleground 3 Slippery Karst 15 Forest 21 lands	4 Balduvian Bears 4 Forest Bear 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Spectral Bears 4 Werebear 4 Striped Bears 24 creatures	4 Rancor 4 Aggressive Urge 4 Grizzly Fate 3 Overrun 15 other spells	
<h3>Bearing Arms <i>Lite!</i></h3> <p>Bear flavor-text theme deck</p> <p><b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards</p> <table><tr><td>3 Grasslands 10 Forest 10 Plains 23 lands</td><td>4 Shield Mate 4 Angelic Page 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Werebear 4 Longbow Archer 4 Spectral Bears 4 Thelonite Druid 4 River Bear 32 creatures</td><td>4 Grizzly Fate 1 Blinding Light 5 other spells</td></tr></table>	3 Grasslands 10 Forest 10 Plains 23 lands	4 Shield Mate 4 Angelic Page 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Werebear 4 Longbow Archer 4 Spectral Bears 4 Thelonite Druid 4 River Bear 32 creatures	4 Grizzly Fate 1 Blinding Light 5 other spells
3 Grasslands 10 Forest 10 Plains 23 lands	4 Shield Mate 4 Angelic Page 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Werebear 4 Longbow Archer 4 Spectral Bears 4 Thelonite Druid 4 River Bear 32 creatures	4 Grizzly Fate 1 Blinding Light 5 other spells	
<h3>A Bear's Life</h3> <p>"Bear" theme deck (with Earnest Fellowship!)</p> <p><b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards</p> <table><tr><td>4 City of Brass 4 Gemstone Mine 4 Reflecting Pool 4 Timberland Ruins 3 Undiscovered Paradise 2 Rith's Grove 1 Dromar's Cavern 22 lands</td><td>4 Gaea's Skyfolk 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Llanowar Dead 4 Llanowar Knight 4 Nomadic Elf 4 Wild Mongrel 4 Yavimaya Barbarian 28 creatures</td><td>4 Earnest Fellowship 4 Grizzly Fate 2 Crop Rotation 10 other spells</td></tr></table>	4 City of Brass 4 Gemstone Mine 4 Reflecting Pool 4 Timberland Ruins 3 Undiscovered Paradise 2 Rith's Grove 1 Dromar's Cavern 22 lands	4 Gaea's Skyfolk 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Llanowar Dead 4 Llanowar Knight 4 Nomadic Elf 4 Wild Mongrel 4 Yavimaya Barbarian 28 creatures	4 Earnest Fellowship 4 Grizzly Fate 2 Crop Rotation 10 other spells
4 City of Brass 4 Gemstone Mine 4 Reflecting Pool 4 Timberland Ruins 3 Undiscovered Paradise 2 Rith's Grove 1 Dromar's Cavern 22 lands	4 Gaea's Skyfolk 4 Grizzly Bears 4 Llanowar Dead 4 Llanowar Knight 4 Nomadic Elf 4 Wild Mongrel 4 Yavimaya Barbarian 28 creatures	4 Earnest Fellowship 4 Grizzly Fate 2 Crop Rotation 10 other spells	
<h3>The Bear Tribe</h3> <p>Bear Tribes deck</p> <p><b>Main Deck</b> 90 cards</p>			

33 Forest	4 Balduvian Bears	4 Grizzly Fate
1 Gaea's Cradle	4 Grizzly Bears	3 Bearscape
	4 Werebear	1 Sol Ring
34 lands	4 Golden Bear	1 Insist
	4 Striped Bears	1 Rancor
	4 Razorclaw Bear	1 Hurricane
	1 Spectral Bears	1 Defense Grid
	1 Pale Bears	1 Pit Trap
	1 River Bear	1 Winter Orb
		1 Constant Mists
	27 creatures	1 Bind
		1 Tangle
		1 Caltrops
		1 Blanchwood Armor
		1 Squall
		1 Tranquility
		1 Stampede
		1 Serrated Arrows
		1 Hush
		1 Might of Oaks
		1 Storm Seeker
		1 Creeping Mold
		1 Bounty of the Hunt
		1 Overrun
		29 other spells

Jay may be reached at [houseofcards@wizards.com](mailto:houseofcards@wizards.com).



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

