

# How to win the fight every time

## SCS: Custody Battle

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First, I want to ask you all for a favor. If you have any pro players in your area who played at [Pro Tour - Houston](#) and got wrecked by [Cabal Therapy](#), please point out to them that they should be reading Single Card Strategy. We all knew the power of [Therapy](#) months ago! Now, on to the article . . .



*Onslaught* brings us another interesting gem of a card in [Custody Battle](#). This card follows the recent theme of giving red a very cheap effect that an opponent can negate by sacrificing a resource. The beauty of [Custody Battle](#), though, is it doesn't go away. Sure, your opponent can sacrifice a land to keep a creature, but can he or she afford to do that turn after turn?



**BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE**

When trying to come up with ways to maximize [Custody Battle](#)'s potential, my initial thoughts leaped to land-destruction decks. Typically, land-destruction decks roll over and die when played against fast creature decks (while you're busy hammering away at your opponent's lands, that turn-two [Wild Mongrel](#) is tearing into your life total). With [Custody Battle](#), you suddenly have a very cheap way to neutralize that early threat (either that or you get an extra [Stone Rain](#) every turn -- that works too). A [Custody Battle](#) followed by an [Armageddon](#) will pretty much neutralize that creature immediately. [Avalanche Riders](#) works great with the Battle: It hits a land when it comes into play and blocks the enchanted creature if your opponent decides to sacrifice yet another land to keep it. You can make things even more unpleasant for your opponent by dropping [Propaganda](#). Go ahead and take a minute to laugh your evil laugh, I'll wait. [War Tax](#) is more mana intensive but potentially stronger in combination with [Custody Battle](#).

Another sticky situation you can set up for your opponent is to cast [Custody Battle](#) when you have something out, such as an [Icy Manipulator](#), [Whipcorder](#), [Nomad Decoy](#), or [Puppeteer](#), that can tap one of his or her creatures. Does your opponent sacrifice a land to keep a creature only to have you tap it down, or does your opponent hand it over to you while you tap another creature? Similarly, regenerating blockers like [Boneknitter](#), [Drudge Skeletons](#), [Wall of Bone](#), or those with protection from creatures like [Beloved Chaplain](#) can make the decision difficult.

The trick to red's "punisher" cards is to make either choice quite unpleasant for your opponent -- and there are plenty of ways to do that with [Custody Battle](#).

## HOT POTATO

Another interesting twist is to play [Custody Battle](#) in a deck with creatures that have tough upkeep costs and even tougher consequences if you can't pay them. You play the creature and can even pay the upkeep, but if the time is ripe, cast [Custody Battle](#) on your own creature and "donate" it to your opponent during your next upkeep. If your opponent doesn't have any black mana sources, he isn't going to be happy with suddenly having control of [Demonic Hordes](#), especially because its drawback will still happen on his upkeep even if he gives it back to you. [Primordial Ooze](#) also seems particularly nasty -- you let it grow and then give it to your opponent when he or she isn't able to pay its upkeep. Other cards that could make good donations -- especially if you have a way to get rid of [Custody Battle](#) after your opponent gains control of the creature! -- include [Mishra's War Machine](#), [Phantasmal Sphere](#), [Infernal Denizen](#), [Kookus](#), and [Minion of Leshrac](#).

## GETTING GREEDY

## Things to remember about Custody Battle

- Custody Battle gives the ability to the creature, so "your upkeep" means the upkeep of the creature's current controller and "you" also refers to that player.
- The ability granted by Custody Battle goes on the stack at the beginning of a player's upkeep if that player controls the creature. That means if you gain control of your opponent's creature, you have to sacrifice a land each turn to keep it.
- Each time the creature switches sides, it has summoning sickness.
- If Custody Battle is removed from the creature, the creature stays where it is. It does not automatically revert back to its original owner.



When getting rid of [Custody Battle](#), there's actually an interesting twist that lets you greedily take creatures. When you gain control of your opponent's creature, you have control of it permanently -- or until someone else takes it away from you. Typically, you'll only lose the creature due to [Custody Battle](#) itself, but what if you have a [Crown of the Ages](#) out? When you gain control of your opponent's creature, use the Crown to move [Custody Battle](#) to one of your opponent's other creatures. [Enchantment Alteration](#) and [Aura Graft](#) do the same thing as a one-shot spell. You can do practically the same thing (bouncing [Custody Battle](#) back to your hand to cast on another creature) with [Boomerang](#), [Capsize](#), or [Tradewind Rider](#).

## YOU GOT IT . . . NOW WHATCHA GONNA DO?

Okay, so your fiendish plan worked, and you have control of your opponent's best creature. How do you hold onto it without wrecking your mana base? [Groundskeeper](#) can make sure you get back your sacrificed land each turn, and you can combine it with a [Skyshroud Ranger](#) or [Firebrand Ranger](#) to make sure you don't get locked at a static number of lands. [Harvest Wurm](#) and [Cartographer](#) can help, too.

## FINDERS KEEPERS

I'll end this column with the one card that seems to be a perfect complement to [Custody Battle:Orcish Squatters](#). Steal your opponent's blocker with the Battle and then swing in with the Squatters to steal his or her land to feed the [Custody Battle](#). Red never felt so blue! I just have to design a deck around it.

### Orcish Custody



### Main Deck

*60 cards*

|                                    |                                     |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 14 <a href="#">Island</a>          | 4 <a href="#">Boomerang</a>         |
| 10 <a href="#">Mountain</a>        | 2 <a href="#">Crown of the Ages</a> |
| _____                              | 4 <a href="#">Custody Battle</a>    |
| 24 lands                           | 4 <a href="#">Force Spike</a>       |
|                                    | 4 <a href="#">Hoodwink</a>          |
| 4 <a href="#">Orcish Settlers</a>  | 4 <a href="#">Memory Lapse</a>      |
| 4 <a href="#">Orcish Squatters</a> | 4 <a href="#">Propaganda</a>        |
| 2 <a href="#">Primordial Ooze</a>  | _____                               |
| _____                              | 26 other spells                     |
| 10 creatures                       |                                     |



The only rares are the Squatters and the Crowns, neither of which are very expensive or hard to find. Obviously, [Shivan Reefs](#) or [Tropical Islands](#) would help smooth your mana if you had any to add to the deck. Have fun!



## FROM THE MAILBAG (er, Inbox rather)

While I received a few emails regarding my [Charms article](#), I'm *still* getting feedback from the [article](#) on [Artificial Evolution](#). I guess you all love that card as much as I do! A few of you wrote in with combos that I alluded to at the end of the article, such as evolving [Rotlung Reanimator](#) to switch Zombie to Cleric so that whenever you have a Cleric die, you get a Cleric token. Mix with a [Nantuko Husk](#) for an arbitrarily large number of +2/+2 boosts, or mix with [Ashnod's Altar](#) or [Phyrexian Altar](#) for an arbitrarily large amount of mana. Robby Manginsay, Alvin Jumaquio, Rommel Manlapaz, and

Joseph Alanigue from the Philippines wrote in with the [Words of Wilding](#) combo with [Wirewood Savage](#), letting you generate a ton of Beast or Bear tokens (depending on the target of your Evolution) each turn.

Others sent in some other great combos with [Artificial Evolution](#) that I'd like to share:

[Thrull Champion](#) (from Jack) -- also really good with [Imagecrafter](#) and [Trickery Charm](#).



[Goblin Pyromancer](#) (from John Gapinski) -- boost your Goblins with its comes-into-play effect then use [Artificial Evolution](#) to destroy whatever creatures your opponent has left that you want out of the way.


[Didgeridoo](#) (from Richard) -- maybe slipping Minotaurs out for three mana isn't impressive, but use [Artificial Evolution](#) on the 'doo to make it say Legend or a Dragon and watch your opponent start to sweat!

[Tunnel](#), [Goblin Digging Team](#), and [Goblin Masons](#) (from Nick Milne) -- each of these combines with [Artificial Evolution](#) to kill just about any creature you want.

Also, several people thought there was a problem with my [Tombstone Stairwell](#) example. I wrote: "You can do similar timing tricks so you can permanently keep your Tombspawn Zombie tokens when [Tombstone Stairwell](#) leaves play."

If you read the Stairwell literally, [Artificial Evolution](#) can't work . . . but check out the Oracle wording of the card and you can work it:

"Cumulative upkeep  

At the beginning of each upkeep, if [Tombstone Stairwell](#) is in play, each player puts into play a 2/2 black Tombspawn Zombie creature token with haste for each creature card in his or her graveyard. *(They may attack and  the turn they come into play.)*

At end of turn or when [Tombstone Stairwell](#) leaves play, destroy all Tombspawn Zombie tokens put into play with it. They can't be regenerated."

Before the end of the turn, change either Tombspawn or Zombie to Elf and your tokens have a new lease on life. The next batch will be "Tombspawn Elf" tokens that will die at the end of turn, but you'll have a residual supply of Tombspawn Zombies to work with for a while.

And finally, a few people were still confused about changing Walls to Elves (or some other creature that can attack) and the reminder text changing but not inhibiting your creature. Reminder text is just reminding us of the rules, so even if you change the word *Wall* in the reminder text to *Elf*, Walls still can't attack (like it says in the rules), and there's nothing in the rules that says Elves can't attack. The bottom line is *you can't hack the rules*.

Okay, so I actually have one more thing -- a couple people didn't know what I was referring to with section "'K.11 -- Creature Type' from the Comprehensive Rules." That's understandable because there's no such section in the Comp. Rules. "K.11 -- Creature Type" is the title of the section about creature types in the rulings summary compiled by Stephen D'Angelo at [crystalkeep.com](http://crystalkeep.com). You can get more information about the **Magic** rules by clicking on "Rules" in the upper left of this Web page. (The Comp. Rules sections that deal with creature types include rule 212, "Card Type," rule 214, "Creatures," and rule 216 "Tokens.")

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