

Zombies, Goblins, Clerics, and more... Wizards Tribal Wars Decks

Aaron Forsythe, Content Manager

Saturday, March 08, 2003

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As the caper for Zombie Week, I'm presenting the sixteen Tribal Wars decks that I and my esteemed colleagues used for last weekend's Wizards Invitational. The subject matter is particularly appropriate for this week's theme because a full one-fourth of us chose Zombies as our tribe, making the undead twice as popular as any other race.

For those unfamiliar with the rules of the format:

- Normal 60-card minimum
- The deck must be at least one-third creatures that share a type*
- All Online Extended expansions are legal (*Seventh Edition* and *Invasion* forward, including *Legions*)
- [Engineered Plague](#), [Tsabo's Decree](#), [Endemic Plague](#), [Circle of Solace](#), [Peer Pressure](#), and [Unnatural Selection](#) are banned due to their tribe-wrecking natures
- There are no sideboards



That's it! So let's start with a look at the Zombie decks...

Zombies

B-g Zombies



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Bloodstained Mire	4 Dirge of Dread
4 Llanowar Wastes	4 Living Wish
9 Swamp	_____
4 Tainted Wood	8 other spells

21 lands

- 4 [Caller of the Claw](#)
- 4 [Festering Goblin](#)
- 4 [Gempalm Polluter](#)
- 4 [Nantuko Husk](#)
- 3 [Rotlung Reanimator](#)
- 4 [Shepherd of Rot](#)
- 4 [Withered Wretch](#)
- 4 [Wretched Anurid](#)

31 creatures



Jeff's deck takes its core from what looks to be a popular *Onslaught* block deck, to which he added luxury features like 4 copies of [Living Wish](#) and 8 black-green lands. The key interaction is

between [Nantuko Husk](#) and [Caller of the Claw](#). Ideally, his deck will deal a few early points of damage by attacking, then cycle [Gempalm Polluters](#) and/or activate [Shepherd of Rot](#) in the midgame until the "combo" can be pulled off. [Dirge of Dread](#) allows the Husk to get by opposing defenses, at which point the whole team gets sacrificed, Caller comes down, and all the tokens get sacrificed as well. A cool trick is to also sacrifice the Caller itself before its triggered ability resolves, netting another 2/2 Bear. The deck can do a ton of damage in a really short period of time, especially if the opponent doesn't see it coming.

Even without the "combo kill," the deck can fight with the best of them. [Rotlung Reanimator](#) is one of the format's defining cards, as it makes most trades unfavorable and can allow attacking with reckless abandon in the early game. The deck can also win by just sitting there, either by simply waiting to draw [Dirge of Dread](#), or by killing with Shepherds and Polluters. I saw Jeff win a game against Mike Elliott's Clerics by cycling a Polluter with a massive 25 Zombies in play (thanks to both players' Rotlungs), and all [Master Apothecary](#) could do was watch.

B-r Zombies



Main Deck

60 cards

11 Mountain	2 Feeding Frenzy
12 Swamp	2 Mutilate
2 Unholy Grotto	1 Pyroclasm
_____	1 Shock
25 lands	1 Terminate
	2 Threaten
3 Gempalm Polluter	3 Zombie Infestation
4 Gravedigger	3 Zombify
4 Grotesque Hybrid	_____
4 Nantuko Husk	15 other spells
3 Rotlung Reanimator	
2 Skinthinner	

20 creatures	



Fred is sort of a maverick deckbuilder (you should see what he played in Standard), but he has a gem of a good idea here. [Rotlung Reanimator](#) and mass removal ([Mutilate](#) or [Pyroclasm](#)) can be a devastating combo, although he could have used a few more Zombie Clerics, such as [Withered Wretch](#). The red splash gives him access to cheap removal, which is always a plus in creature fights.

B-r Zombies



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4 Bloodstained Mire | 3 Cover of Darkness |
| 1 Keldon Necropolis | 2 Firebolt |
| 2 Mountain | 1 Oversold Cemetery |
| 2 Shadowblood Ridge | 4 Terminate |
| 4 Sulfurous Springs | _____ |
| 10 Swamp | 10 other spells |
| 1 Unholy Grotto | |

24 lands

- 2 [Festering Goblin](#)
- 4 [Gempalm Polluter](#)
- 4 [Pyre Zombie](#)
- 4 [Rotlung Reanimator](#)
- 4 [Shivan Zombie](#)
- 2 [Skinthinner](#)

- 2 [Undead Gladiator](#)
- 4 [Withered Wretch](#)

26 creatures



B-r Zombies



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4 Bloodstained Mire | 1 Cover of Darkness |
| 2 Mountain | 2 Deadapult |
| 3 Shadowblood Ridge | 2 Firebolt |
| 3 Sulfurous Springs | 1 Oversold Cemetery |
| 10 Swamp | 4 Terminate |
| 1 Tainted Peak | |
| 2 Unholy Grotto | 10 other spells |

25 lands

- 2 [Festering Goblin](#)
- 2 [Gempalm Polluter](#)
- 1 [Grave Defiler](#)
- 4 [Noxious Ghoul](#)
- 2 [Pyre Zombie](#)

- 4 [Rotlung Reanimator](#)
- 4 [Shivan Zombie](#)
- 2 [Skinthinner](#)
- 4 [Withered Wretch](#)

25 creatures



Ramon asked me to build him a black and/or red deck for this part of the event, perhaps using Zombies, and I obliged; the deck he ended up playing was basically my first pass at it. I emailed him the deck and then went back to work on what I thought was the "new hotness," my Angel deck.



After getting destroyed by [Patron Wizard](#) more than once in the Casual Casual room with the Angels, I switched to the Zombie deck for a change of pace, and much to my surprise, I really liked it. It had a great creature curve and some wonderful cheap removal that was fast enough to reliably knock out [Voidmage Prodigy](#) before El Patrón would come on line. [Terminate](#), for being of a single purpose, turns out to be one of the most versatile cards in Tribal Wars. I didn't like all the [Pyre Zombies](#), [Undead Gladiators](#), and [Gempalm Polluters](#) in the original deck and I ended up taking most of them out for [Corpse Harvester](#)s and a bunch of "utility Zombies." Further playtesting showed the Harvesters to not be worth the trouble, but [Noxious Ghoul](#) was crazy good. I upped the number of Ghouls from 0 to 1 to 2 to 4 in about an hour's worth of games. They can kill just about anything, including [Crimson](#) and [Obsidian Acolytes](#), [Beloved Chaplain](#), [Ward Sliver](#), and as many [Wellwishers](#) as you please. With two on the board, even [Ravenous Baloths](#) will drop like flies. The deck wouldn't have been nearly as good without them.

The last big change came when I was trying to find some better way to break stalemates than [Keldon Necropolis](#). A search revealed [Deadapult](#), and I tried out two copies in place of the often-dead [Cover of Darkness](#). Wow, is [Deadapult](#) insane. "👹: [Shock](#) something" is a nice ability to have, and with Reanimators and graveyard recursion, you never run out of fodder. I'm very pleased with the way my deck turned out, and my 3-0 record with it was just what I needed to recover from the previous day's mishaps.

Goblins

Goblins



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Barbarian Ring	4 Firebolt
14 Mountain	4 Shock
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Volcanic Hammer

22 lands

12 other spells

4 Blistering Firecat
4 Goblin Piledriver
3 Goblin Sharpshooter
4 Goblin Sledder
3 Goblin Taskmaster
4 Raging Goblin
4 Sparksmith

26 creatures



Goblins



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 4 Barbarian Ring | 4 Firebolt |
| 4 Bloodstained Mire | 3 Reckless Charge |
| 9 Mountain | 2 Shock |
| 4 Wooded Foothills | 2 Threaten |
| | 4 Volcanic Hammer |

21 lands

15 other spells

- 4 [Gempalm Incinerator](#)
- 2 [Goblin Goon](#)
- 2 [Goblin Grappler](#)
- 4 [Goblin Piledriver](#)
- 2 [Goblin Sharpshooter](#)
- 2 [Goblin Sledder](#)
- 2 [Raging Goblin](#)
- 2 [Skirk Marauder](#)
- 4 [Sparksmith](#)

24 creatures



Including Rose's win in the Finals over Charlie Catino, these two decks went a combined 6-1, showing that Goblins are a force to be reckoned with in any format. I initially thought the deck would be bad, as Goblins tend to prey on metagames in which a certain portion of the decks are creature-light, and in Tribal Wars everyone should have creatures bigger than yours.

No matter. [Sparksmith](#) and [Goblin Sharpshooter](#) can make mincemeat out of just about anything the opponent plays. Both decks have at least 12 burn spells to boot, and thusly own the early game. Worth's deck packed four [Blistering Firecats](#) for the death blow, whereas Bill had two [Goblin Goons](#) and a handful of [Reckless Charges](#) for big damage. [Threaten](#)--quickly turning into a darling of Standard play--also gave Bill's deck extra punch.

Both decks would probably have benefited from a full corps of [Goblin Grapplers](#); cheap provoke is a great ability in creature fights. In any event, if you want to build a really good Tribal deck, it has to be able to handle little red men.

Wizards

U-b-w Wizards



Main Deck

60 cards

4	Adarkar Wastes	2	Absorb
3	Flooded Strand	4	Counterspell
7	Island	3	Cunning Wish
1	Plains	4	Opposition

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2 Polluted Delta | 3 Static Orb |
| 1 Swamp | |
| 4 Underground River | 16 other spells |

22 lands

- 4 [Hapless Researcher](#)
- 4 [Meddling Mage](#)
- 4 [Patron Wizard](#)
- 4 [Shadowmage Infiltrator](#)
- 3 [Stormscape Apprentice](#)
- 3 [Voidmage Prodigy](#)

22 creatures



In my limited testing, Wizard decks were either feast or famine. Sometimes they'd get the [Hapless Researcher/Voidmage Prodigy/Patron Wizard](#) draw and lock you out of the game on turn three. Other times they'd play a bunch of awful creatures and get run over. But Charlie plugged most of the deck's holes with the dreaded [Opposition/Static Orb](#) combo.

Now, even if the opponent gets creatures down, [Opposition](#) can keep them tied up until the Orb completes the lock. With very few decks playing artifact or enchantment removal, such a lock can be difficult--if not impossible--to break. Six permission spells (and three Wishes) take care of things [Meddling Mage](#), the Prodigy, and the Patron can't handle, and [Shadowmage Infiltrator](#) keeps the cards flowing. Budde, Pikula, Finkel... that's a lot of Magic Invitationalist cards! As the finals against Rose proved, the biggest hole in the deck now is a weakness to Goblins. Cheap burn can prevent the lock from coming down, and an active [Sparksmith](#) is doom for the little Wizards. But no deck is perfect.

Even though the deck is very good, Charlie will be the first to say that it isn't all that fun. Locking up the game is generally frowned upon in casual formats, so if you play this online, be prepared for some derisive remarks.

Beasts

4cBeasts



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Brushland | 4 Earthquake |
| 4 City of Brass | 4 Living Wish |
| 3 Contested Cliffs | 2 Starstorm |
| 4 Forest | |
| 2 Karplusan Forest | 10 other spells |
| 1 Mountain | |
| 1 Plains | |
| 1 Swamp | |
| 2 Windswept Heath | |
| 3 Wooded Foothills | |

22 lands

- | |
|--------------------------------------|
| 4 Anurid Brushhopper |
| 4 Birds of Paradise |
| 2 Canopy Crawler |
| 4 Krosan Tusker |
| 4 Llanowar Elves |
| 2 Phantom Nishoba |
| 4 Ravenous Baloth |
| 4 Spiritmonger |

28 creatures



In this format, Beast decks generally start out with [Krosan Tusker](#), [Ravenous Baloth](#), and [Contested Cliffs](#). Then, if the player owns [Anurid Brushhopper](#)s and/or [Phantom Nishobas](#), white is added. Randy takes it a step farther, adding a fourth color to his mana base for perhaps the best Beast of all, [Spiritmonger](#).

Other than the powerhouse regenerator, Buehler's deck is pretty straightforward. Play huge guys, use mass removal ([Earthquake](#) or [Starstorm](#)) for the opponents' miniscule nuisances, and use the Cliffs to clean up. And with access to all five colors and a jam-packed collection, [Living Wish](#) was the ultimate silver bullet tutor.

4cCycling Beasts



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Forest	4 Astral Slide
3 Forgotten Cave	4 Lightning Rift
1 Island	1 Living Wish
3 Mountain	4 Slice and Dice
3 Plains	
3 Secluded Steppe	13 other spells
4 Tranquil Thicket	
3 Windswept Heath	
3 Wooded Foothills	

27 lands

- 4 [Anurid Brushhopper](#)
- 4 [Barkhide Mauler](#)
- 4 [Krosan Tusker](#)
- 4 [Primoc Escapee](#)
- 4 [Ravenous Baloth](#)

20 creatures



Quill did a nice job of coming up with an oddball deck within the rules with his cycling Beasts number. There are only eight "real" Beasts--four Baloths and four Brushhoppers--in the deck; the other 12 are part of his stock of 26 cycling cards, which he used to enable both [Astral Slide](#) and [Lightning Rift](#). He was forced to add blue for the [Primoc Escapees](#) because both [Hundroog](#) and [Macetail Hystrodon](#) proved too cumbersome with their cycling costs of 3. Both Rift and Slide are real headaches for creature decks in general, and it was no different in Tribal Wars.

Clerics

W-B Clerics



Main Deck 60 cards

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 4 Barren Moor | 3 Death Wish |
| 4 Caves of Koilos | 3 Worship |

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 4 City of Brass | 4 Wrath of God |
| 8 Plains | |
| 2 Secluded Steppe | 10 other spells |
| 1 Starlit Sanctum | |
| 3 Swamp | |

26 lands

- 1 [Beacon of Destiny](#)
- 4 [Beloved Chaplain](#)
- 2 [Cabal Archon](#)
- 4 [Dark Supplicant](#)
- 4 [Master Apothecary](#)
- 1 [Planar Guide](#)
- 4 [Rotlung Reanimator](#)
- 1 [Scion of Darkness](#)
- 3 [Weathered Wayfarer](#)

24 creatures



Elliott's Cleric deck does what all good Cleric decks should -- combine the awesome power of [Master Apothecary](#) and [Rotlung Reanimator](#), all for the low, low cost of an unstable mana base. The main punch is the Rotlung/[Wrath of God](#) combo, from which most decks cannot recover, although [Cabal Archon](#), [Scion of Darkness](#), and even [Beloved Chaplain](#) can win games on their own. And between [Worship](#) and [Master Apothecary](#), killing Elliott was often a pipe dream. The presence of [Death Wish](#) in Elliott's deck emphasizes just how powerful that cycle of cards is in casual play. Clerics will be a main player in Tribal Wars for a long, long time.

B-U Combo Clerics



Main Deck

60 cards

8 Island	4 Artificial Evolution
4 Polluted Delta	1 Crown of Suspicion
10 Swamp	1 Dead Ringers
-----	4 Deep Analysis
22 lands	4 Diabolic Tutor

4 Boneknitter	14 other spells
4 Cabal Archon	
4 Nantuko Husk	
4 Rotlung Reanimator	
4 Vile Deacon	
4 Withered Wretch	

24 creatures	



The fact that Doyle's deck contains the minimum number of Clerics, as well as four [Deep Analysis](#) and four [Diabolic Tutor](#), hints at its sinister nature. It is, at its heart, a combo deck, using [Artificial Evolution](#), [Rotlung Reanimator](#), another Cleric, and either [Nantuko Husk](#) or [Cabal Archon](#) for the kill. By using the Evolution to change all instances of "Zombie" to "Cleric" on the Reanimator, John could create a loop in which a dying Cleric would produce a 2/2 Cleric token, which would also create a 2/2 Cleric token when it died, etc., etc., etc. As cool as it sounds, it was quite difficult to pull off.

Two other cards in his deck are worth mentioning. [Crown of Suspicion](#) can take down a whole tribe in one fell swoop, especially those like Wizards or Elves with smaller creatures. And [Dead Ringers](#)--a card that was incredibly unreliable in the *Invasion* block limited format--should have no trouble finding two identically-colored targets in Tribal Wars.

The Rest

B-R Legends Reanimator



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Bloodstained Mire	3 Buried Alive
2 Mountain	4 Burning Wish
3 Sulfurous Springs	3 Insidious Dreams
11 Swamp	3 Patriarch's Bidding
4 Urborg Volcano	3 Sickening Dreams

24 lands

16 other spells

- 1 [Akroma, Angel of Wrath](#)
- 1 [Arcanis the Omnipotent](#)
- 4 [Balthor the Defiled](#)
- 1 [Balthor the Stout](#)
- 3 [Braids, Cabal Minion](#)
- 1 [Cabal Patriarch](#)
- 1 [Chainer, Dementia Master](#)
- 1 [Crosis, the Purger](#)
- 1 [Jeska, Warrior Adept](#)
- 1 [Kamahl, Pit Fighter](#)
- 1 [Molimo, Maro-Sorcerer](#)
- 1 [Reya Dawnbringer](#)
- 1 [Rorix Bladewing](#)
- 1 [Tahngarth, Talruum Hero](#)
- 1 [Visara the Dreadful](#)

20 creatures



Mark chose his deck from a pile of submissions solicited for in one of his columns, and he chose a good one. Black-red reanimator is a popular deck in the Online Standard environment, and even though this one can't fit [Anger](#) or [Doomed Necromancer](#), it can still get out some beef in a hurry. I know--I was on the wrong end of a turn-5 Patriarch's Bidding for [Kamahl](#), [Visara](#), and [Rorix](#). [Sickening Dreams](#) plays a wonderful role in the deck, killing all the enemy's early plays while dumping huge Legends in the bin. But [Patriarch's Bidding](#) can be little weird in this format because you will almost always be bringing the entirety of the opposing casualties back with your Legends. Normally that isn't a problem because your guys are so much better, but it is possible to get swarmed later in the game.

Because red and black have so many decent Legends, it is often possible to win just by playing the creatures. If anyone other than Mark played the deck, I'd say that [Tsabo Tavoc](#) should have replaced [Molimo](#) for playability's sake, but Mark needed to have a Maro in the deck.

W-u Soldiers



Main Deck

60 cards

1 Akroma's Vengeance	1 Dismantling Blow
2 Daru Encampment	1 Divine Sacrament
4 Flooded Strand	3 Exclude
7 Island	2 Mobilization
11 Plains	2 Opposition
_____	3 Shared Triumph
25 lands	1 Worship
	1 Wrath of God

- 1 [Benalish Heralds](#)
- 3 [Catapult Squad](#)
- 1 [Commander Eesha](#)
- 3 [Deftblade Elite](#)
- 1 [Enlistment Officer](#)
- 1 [Gempalm Avenger](#)
- 1 [Gustcloak Savior](#)
- 1 [Lieutenant Kirtar](#)
- 3 [Longbow Archer](#)
- 1 [Reborn Hero](#)
- 3 [Sunstrike Legionnaire](#)
- 2 [Whipcorder](#)

14 other spells

21 creatures



Richard's self-built Soldier deck may not be perfectly tuned, but it worked well, and it is very telling about the creator's approach to the game: he prefers utility and variation in play as opposed to streamlined "min-maxed" monstrosities.

The array of Soldiers he chose each pose different problems for different decks, and the support cards all can be equally problematic. I'm sure people were blindsided by [Wrath of God](#), [Opposition](#), or [Worship](#) seemingly out of left field.

U-W Birds



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4 Adarkar Wastes | 2 Akroma's Vengeance |
| 4 Coastal Tower | 4 Counterspell |
| 4 Flooded Strand | 4 Exclude |
| 6 Island | 4 Repulse |
| 2 Plains | 2 Wrath of God |
| 4 Seaside Haven | |

24 lands

- | |
|--|
| 4 Aven Smokeweaver |
| 4 Commander Eesha |
| 4 Keeper of the Nine Gales |
| 4 Thieving Magpie |
| 4 Treetop Sentinel |

20 creatures



Like Richard, Alan tried to metagame the format by including [Exclude](#) in his deck, and went a step further with four copies of [Repulse](#). Twelve Birds with some sort of protection, as well as four [Thieving Magpies](#), provide the bulk of the offense.

I have to believe that Comer could have tuned this a little better had he known he'd be playing in the event for longer than a day, but the core of the deck hints at interesting possibilities.

G-W Cats



Main Deck

60 cards

4	Brushland	2	Armadillo Cloak
2	Caves of Koilos	2	Living Wish
7	Forest	4	Shared Triumph
1	Llanowar Wastes	3	Wrath of God
7	Plains		
4	Windswept Heath		

11 other spells

25 lands

4	Fleetfoot Panther
1	Jareth, Leonine Titan
4	Krosan Vorine
4	Noble Panther
3	Penumbra Bobcat
4	Phantom Tiger
4	Spectral Lynx

24 creatures



Before seeing Del's decklist, I had no idea how many good Cats there were, nor how many of them were white and/or green. Most of her creatures are very hard to deal with in straight combat, and [Shared Triumph](#) and [Armadillo Cloak](#) only make things worse. [Krosan Vorine](#) with [Armadillo Cloak](#) on it is a wonder to behold.

The deck can also sandbag it for [Wrath of God](#) quite well; [Noble Panther](#)'s first strike and [Spectral Lynx](#)'s regeneration can force opponents to over commit. Plus, [Penumbra Bobcat](#) can play the [Rotlung Reanimator](#) role by replacing itself when the Wrath hits.

G-W Spirits



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Brushland	4 Elephant Guide
10 Forest	2 Living Wish
4 Plains	4 Shared Triumph
4 Windswept Heath	_____
_____	10 other spells
22 lands	

4 Birds of Paradise
4 Llanowar Elves
3 Phantom Centaur
3 Phantom Flock
4 Phantom Nantuko
4 Phantom Nomad
4 Phantom Tiger
2 Seedborn Muse

28 creatures



Tyler's deck had one goal in mind: abuse *Judgment's* Phantom mechanic. His cadre of creatures is hard enough to kill via damage to begin with, and [Shared Triumph](#) makes it impossible. [Elephant Guide](#) can also make any one Phantom invincible, and [Seedborn Muse](#)--also a Spirit--insures that the spectral crew can play "O" and "D" simultaneously.

The "eight-pack" of mana accelerators gives Tyler's deck the ability to deploy the troops at breakneck speed, and the ubiquitous [Living Wish](#) fills in any gaps.

Here are the records for the Tribal Wars portion of the Wizards Invitational. You can watch replays of all the matches on *Magic Online* if you so desire. (Download the client [here](#) if you don't already have it.)

Aaron Forsythe	Zombies	3-0
Charlie Catino	Wizards	3-0
Worth Wollpert	Goblins	3-0
Bill Rose	Goblins	2-1
Jeff Donais	Zombies	2-1
Mark Rosewater	Legends	2-1
Mike Elliott	Clerics	2-1
Richard Garfield	Soldiers	2-1
Tyler Bielman	Spirits	2-1
Alan Comer	Birds	1-2
Bill McQuillan	Beasts	1-2
Randy Buehler	Beasts	1-2
Del Laugel	Cats	0-3
Fred Royal	Zombies	0-3
John Doyle	Clerics	0-3
Ramon Arjona	Zombies	0-3

Tribal Wars is a fun and exciting format, and hopefully you can use this information as a starting point for your own great Tribal decks, either online or in "real life." None of us made an Elf deck or a Sliver deck, for example--there has to be good versions of those decks out there somewhere! And I'm sure there are great Dragon or Cephalid decks to be made! Or Illusions, or Dwarves, or... you get the picture!

*: The original rules as set forth by R&D called for "20 creatures that share a type," but 20 Wizards proved easy to hide in a 245-card [Battle of Wits](#) deck.

Send questions and comments to editor@wizards.com.