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Breaking Flamebreak



Adrian Sullivan · Single-Card Strategies
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I'm very excited to be writing a column for the newly reborn **magicthegathering.com**. The name for this column goes back a long way. Back when **Magic** was born, it didn't take long for people to get excited enough about it to write about it on the Internet. It was during those early days of **Magic** writing that Jeff Franzman first wrote as Canticle, producing a huge [Single-Card Strategies series](#). I'm going to be doing something quite similar to that but, like a lot of things in **Magic**, I'll be doing it my own way. Still, it seems a bit appropriate to take a step back in time with this column, and name it simply and elegantly like Franzman did that first time around.

Frank Kusumoto would change everything in the **Magic** world when he created the first **Magic** strategy website the Dojo. For many of you reading this, you don't remember the time before you could go online and find decklists and strategy a few clicks away. Nowadays, you have a whole bunch of websites to choose from. I've been a paid columnist for nearly all of them (and edited a few as well). Back when Scott Johns started editing Brainburst he asked me to hop aboard there as a columnist. When he got scooped up by Wizards of the Coast I jumped at the chance to be writing for Wizards again. I think that everyone that he has writing for him is going to be giving you something special to chew on. Everyone has something to say, and I'm pleased by the company I'm keeping.

One of the reasons that I think Scott and the **magicthegathering.com** team chose me for this role is my history of looking at cards from a unique perspective. It's that eye for alternate perspectives that has helped me when I make decks for the Pro Tour, PTQs, or Five-Color Magic, and has even made my fellow writer Michael Flores grudgingly [mention me](#) from time to time in his writings. I've done okay as a competitor, but while my decks have done well for people all over the world, I won't kid myself. I'm an idea man. While I've had a few successes (a near miss at Top 8 at PTNY 1999 and a GP Top 8), my play is often the cause for many of my losses. But, at least I've had the opportunity to make some cool decks.

Enough introductions, on to the show...

Some of my favorite cards have been those that reward people for committing heavily to a color. Maybe it is just the lasting effect of having worked with Jamie Wakefield on decks, or maybe it is something else entirely, but I like commitments. Some of my favorite decks have been either Monoblue (with Magpies or pesky **Stasis**) or Monored (with **Violent Eruption** or **Blistering Firecat**, or both!). Usually, once you start packing on the colored requirements to a spell, you get something worth the sacrifice.

With that in mind, **Flamebreak** is the card we'll be looking at this week:






When you evaluate cards, nearly every card has some kind of tangible restriction or real-world drawback to it. It has been a long time since Wizards printed cards like **Black Lotus**. For the most part, when Wizards gives us a card, it has been through a meatgrinder of scrutiny. This means that oftentimes truly powerful cards have some element in their design that holds them back.

With **Flamebreak**, we can first mull over the key ingredients that define it (to better decide how best to abuse it!). In essence, **Flamebreak** is almost exactly like an **Earthquake** for 3. It does cost one less total mana than an **Earthquake**, but its color requirements are much, much greater. In return, you are given the ability to squash all of the regenerators that get hit. Nice.

Flamebreak as Wrath of God

One of the first ways that we can use **Flamebreak** is like a near-**Wrath of God**. While there are certainly creatures that get to dodge **Flamebreak** (like **Ravenous Baloth** or **Birds of Paradise**), on turn 3 this is quite likely to kill nearly everyone on the table. I like that. White is such a boring color to me, so it is great to port a **Wrath of God** over to The Good Guys™. 

Wrath of God has always worked best when you aren't forced to use it as a one-for-one kill card. When you have access to a card that can potentially kill nearly every critter on the table, your goal isn't to just *hurt* the other player, you're trying to wreck them. Red is great at this. If your deck is full of other good burn (**Pyrite Spellbombs**, **Hammer of Bogardan**, or even a simple **Volcanic Hammer**), people will feel obliged to drop a second creature on the table if they want to get through with an attack.

One of the traditional weaknesses of **Wrath of God** has been drawing it against the slowest of control decks. Here, a **Wrath of God** could often be a dead draw – an opponent with almost no creatures can ignore your **Wrath** until they are ready to counter it and defend their finisher. An opponent with no creatures at all never, ever has to worry about it. **Flamebreak** gets around this little situation by actually being a burn spell that can hurt someone. Sure, it hurts you too, but while 3 damage for 3 mana isn't an awesome amount, it is still 3 damage in a deck packing *other* red spells.

Flamebreak is most like a true **Wrath of God** on turn 3. Most of the decks that pack creatures today don't have the ability to put out big fat monsters before turn 4. This means that even cards that might otherwise be hard to deal with like **Troll Ascetic**, a **Slith Bloodletter** with mana open, or a bunch of goblins powered out by **Chrome Mox** and **Goblin Warchief** will all get a quick trip to the dustbin.

The real problem with **Flamebreak** as a **Wrath of God** was pointed out by Zvi Mowshowitz. It hurts you. Most of the time a deck that is using a **Wrath of God** is going to want to keep its life total high. To compensate for this you can design your deck to deal a huge amount of damage to the opponent (to take advantage of the damage-dealing side of **Flamebreak**), have it be a one-way **Wrath of God** to your opponent, or both.

Flamebreak as a One-Way Wrath

Of course, it isn't really a **Wrath of God**. It is only 3 damage. You can plan on what creatures you drop into your deck and make sure they're big. Playing creatures that are big enough or otherwise can dodge the **Flamebreak** can make the card even more potent.

The first way to dodge the **Flamebreak** is to remember that it is an **Earthquake**. Flying is a quick and easy way around the card. Big toughness is another.

Perhaps one of the first ways to include creatures that dodge the intrinsic drawback of **Flamebreak** is to dip into green. **Birds of Paradise** is obviously the first card that gets to dodge **Flamebreak**. Another mana-developer, **Vine Trellis**, also squeaks in there as well. With these as a base you'll be able to go deeper into green for cards like **Ravenous Baloth** or **Silkash Spider**. Spider has the amusing added benefit of punishing those sneaky fliers who get around your **Flamebreak**.

Staying just in red there are other cards that let you dodge depending on what card pool you're working with. For Extended, **Fledgling Dragon** has roundly proved itself as a potentially huge finisher, capable of ending the game in a few short turns. Even when he's small, the Dragon gets to dodge the **Flamebreak** and there's enough other high quality burn available that you'd be able to take full advantage of both of **Flamebreak**'s effects (burn and removal).

Blazing Specter also springs to mind. Tom van de Logt won the World Championships with Black/Red a few years back with a deck that could get card advantage from a huge number of sources. **Blazing Specter** on the table punishes a player for not getting cards out of their hand. With **Flamebreak**, you can punish them for dropping their creatures onto the table, all without losing your Specter. **Flametongue** and **Terminate** can mop up most of the guys that survive.

In Type 2, **Thoughtbound Primoc** gets around the card as well. In an exciting twist of fate, not only does the Primoc get around the card, but it is also a Beast! That suggests trying out a Red/Green Beast deck with the **Birds of Paradise**, **Vine Trellis**, **Ravenous Baloth**, and Primoc for a bit of evasion that can attack! There are certainly plenty of good Beasts that will survive the **Flamebreak**. Another creature that just happens to be a beast and would be worth looking at is **Vulshok War Boar**.



Two Other Methods of Cheating the “Drawback”

Chimeric creatures are another way to get around the **Flamebreak**. Clearly **Chimeric Idol** is the best creature here, but **Chimeric Sphere** and **Chimeric Egg** all do the same thing - They aren't a creature when the **Flamebreak** rolls over them, and then they can come in to attack after the board has been scorched. For the wealthy, **Jade Statue** does the same trick. The new Indestructible mechanic also fits in neatly here, but is pretty expensive. **Darksteel Brute** would probably make the most sense - you can drop him the turn before the **Flamebreak**, while the other guys won't show up until years after you **Flamebreak**.



Maybe you actually want your creatures to die, though. **Mindslicer** and **Flamebreak** would almost be a complete reset of the game. With a little bit of land destruction, you could come out way ahead. With **Rotlung Reanimator**, you can come out of the situation without having lost much at all. The most exciting use of **Flamebreak** to kill your own creatures has to be **Rukh Egg** though. **Rukh Egg** tends to hold off any of the attackers that can kill it because people fear a 4/4 flier. The **Flamebreak** will give you that 4/4 if you don't have one already, and if you do, it won't touch it. Nice.

But triple red?

That triple red is still a problem, no doubts. You do have to find a way to get around it.

The easiest solution is the simplest. Play mono-red. Naturally, I'm a big advocate of this. As a minion of Wakefield, I do believe in the power of one color, though I'm not such a fanatic that I think it is the only way to go. There are other ways, though.

[Birds of Paradise](#), [Talismans](#), [City of Brass](#), [Mirrodin's Core](#), and [Chromatic Sphere](#) are all good ways to up the Red count in decks that aren't mono-red. Another great option is [Chrome Mox](#). [Chrome Mox](#) can help you power out the Red, but since a two-color deck may have more problems casting [Flamebreak](#), it can simply turn your [Flamebreak](#) into a bad [Mox Ruby](#) when you can't cast the [Flamebreak](#) anyway.

The most exciting way to splash into triple Red has to be [Seething Song](#). With [Seething Song](#), you can easily push out a turn 3 [Flamebreak](#). In a deck with Red spells, hopefully you'll figure out something to do with that extra mana. Perhaps one of the simplest things to do after [Seething](#) out a [Flamebreak](#) is to cast another burn spell. Fighting off a big creature like a War Boar or heaven forbid a 5/6 [Greater Harvester](#) can be a frightening thing. But on turn 4 you can just [Seething Song](#) into a [Flamebreak](#) to sweep away the smaller stuff, and then follow up with a [Volcanic Hammer](#) or [Hammer of Bogardan](#) (if you dropped a 4th land) and mop up even the big guys.

Next week...

I hope that you enjoyed looking at [Flamebreak](#) with me. Personally, I find the card really exciting and I'm hoping that I'll be able to plug it into a deck or two that can make it to the big time. I can't wait to fry a couple of [Troll Ascetics](#) with it, that is certain.

Lastly, I have an experiment for this column in keeping with [magicthegathering.com's](#) history – how would you like to have a voice in which card we look at next week?

Pick a card:

- [Eater of Days](#)
- [Pristine Angel](#)
- [Death Cloud](#)
- [Rebuking Ceremony](#)
- [Pulse of the Grid](#)
- [Blinkmoth Nexus](#)



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