

Understanding today's environment

Your Gauntlet for Regionals 2004

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Monday, April 19, 2004

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Every single Standard format (and many block, Extended, and other formats for that matter) that I can think of, as far back as I've been playing competitively, has been reductively characterized as some Rock, Paper, Scissors three deck metagame or other. This goes back to the months before Black Summer, to the original Rock, Paper, Scissors of G/W ErhnamGeddon, U/W Control, and of course Necropotence. Back in 1995 we took this to be [Necropotence](#) beating U/W with discard and [Disk](#) (no one really understood setting the cards aside properly), U/W countering the [Armageddon](#) of G/W, and G/W forcing its [Whirling Dervishes](#) into [Necropotence](#). Of course eventually the top players figured out that a properly tuned [Necropotence](#) deck actually beat everything, and this particular three deck metagame was invalidated... yet the model has stuck with us.

Last year the big three decks leading into Regionals were U/G Madness, G/R Beatdown, and [Psychatog](#). In 1999 they were [Necropotence](#), Sligh, and [Living Death](#). But anyone who played last year knows that decks like [Astral Slide](#), [Mirari's Wake](#), and Reanimator, though not members of the core big three, came up through the ranks small in numbers... but big on results. Five years ago, players similarly bucked the trend, and found success with Hatred, Ponza, [Tinker](#), and others. Standard for Regionals 2004 is set up to be more of the same.

First of all, your big three appear to be Affinity (specifically Ravager Affinity), Goblins (primarily Goblin Bidding), and what I like to think of as "the white decks." We'll get into the outside decks a little later.

The Resource War in 2004



The defining card of Regionals 2004 is clearly [Skullclamp](#). As players showed up to Pro Tour Kobe many fully expected the event to lead to the card's banning. Why wasn't it? Prior to the actual event, almost anyone you asked would have said that Ravager Affinity with [Skullclamp](#) would totally dominate the tournament. Certainly, as a group, Ravager Affinity was the most represented deck. Yet it was a Big Red deck facing off against the surprising French TwelvePost [Tooth and Nail](#) deck in the finals. Neither build had even one copy of [Skullclamp](#).

So I suppose Standard for the 2004 Championship Season is fated to feel the wrath of this most potent piece of equipment... at least as far as Regionals.

What [Skullclamp](#) does is change the essential dynamic of cards and speed that has guided constructed **Magic** from the beginning of time. In essence, decks that are fast must give up cards and decks that have a lot of card advantage are not fast killers. When we see a break from that pattern, either during the Black Summer or the Combo Winter, there is usually a powerful mechanic such as Free Spells that changes this flow. What [Skullclamp](#) does is create a sharp divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots". Those decks that have [Skullclamp](#) also tend to have a ton of creatures, especially small beatdown creatures. In the past when those creatures were swept up, the beatdown deck would have to have threats in reserve or wither. Today, in enhancing the power of their threats, the beatdown decks also draw additional cards when those threats are removed.

The have-not category is split into essentially two groups. One group seeks to answer the opposing have threats, destroying both creatures *and* [Skullclamp](#), with many adding additional main deck cards like [Damping Matrix](#) and [Culling Scales](#) to fight it specifically. Others have focused on strategies nowhere near the [Skullclamp](#) divide -- essentially ignoring the existence of the most powerful card in the format -- instead generating massive mana for huge threats, or aiming at the opponent's head with burn spells... it doesn't matter how many cards you have in your hand if your life total is zero. The [non-Skullclamp](#) strategies are by nature less reliable than the [Skullclamp](#) strategies. For one thing, these decks require more mana to operate. Imagine how a [Skullclamp](#) deck with a [Skullclamp](#) on the draw, a one drop, and a lone land will analyze his opening seven. Many players, especially drawing, will keep this hand and burn the first few turns finding land with the [Skullclamp](#) and the one drop. Whether or not this is the correct decision is not a question that the non-[Skullclamp](#) deck can even ask. Additionally, the [Skullclamp](#) decks have both cards and speed on their side while the non-

Skullclamp decks have only strategy. For that reason, we have seen 2004 Standard dominated by Skullclamp beatdown decks for the most part. Many of the innovations in this year's deck design revolve around the ability to template an existing Skullclamp beatdown deck to reliably beat other Skullclamp beatdown decks. I don't believe that the non-Skullclamp decks are down and out (remember that "PT Skullclamp" itself was decided by burn spells against green creatures), but in preparing for Regionals 2004 you should place special emphasis on the first two broad categories of decks.



Ravager Affinity

As a testament to the strength of Ravager Affinity, last year's Block Constructed champion Osyp Lebedowicz took essentially his PT deck into a competitive Standard tournament when he didn't make Day Two in Kobe... and won himself a nice steak dinner. He explained the decision thusly: "I decided that since *Mirrodin* Block Affinity is so much more powerful than anything in the current Standard environment, I would just play my PT deck with some slight modifications."

Ravager Affinity



Main Deck 60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 2 Blinkmoth Nexus | 2 Chromatic Sphere |
| 4 Darksteel Citadel | 4 Shrapnel Blast |
| 2 Glimmervoid | 4 Skullclamp |
| 4 Great Furnace | 3 Tooth of Chiss-Goria |
| 4 Vault of Whispers | 3 Welding Jar |

16 lands

16 other spells

- | | |
|---|--|
| 4 Arcbound Ravager | Sideboard |
| 4 Arcbound Stinger | 3 Drooling Ogre |
| 4 Arcbound Worker | 2 Furnace Dragon |
| 4 Disciple of the Vault | 3 Genesis Chamber |
| 4 Frogmite | 2 Shatter |
| 4 Myr Enforcer | 2 Talisman of Indulgence |
| 4 Ornithopter | 3 Terror |
-

28 creatures

15 sideboard cards



Due in large part to the power of [Skullclamp](#), Affinity has become the accepted best deck of the Standard environment. Statements like Osyp's are commonplace with writers like Ken Krouner saying things along the lines of "Affinity is the single most broken ability they ever made. Let's exploit it, shall we[?]"

With so many choices (as well as the ability to play literally any color combination), builds differ. Blue for [Thoughtcast](#)? Red for [Shrapnel Blast](#)? Roland Bode, a noted deck designer in Germany took a giant step out of the box and went with four main-deck copies of [Naturalize](#). Roland's version seems to ask the question "If Ravager Affinity is the best deck, is the best version of the best deck the version that wins the mirror?"

Ravager Affinity



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 3 Blinkmoth Nexus | 4 Naturalize |
| 2 Darksteel Citadel | 4 Pyrite Spellbomb |
| 3 Glimmervoid | 4 Shrapnel Blast |
| 4 Great Furnace | 4 Skullclamp |
| 3 Tree of Tales | 2 Talisman of Impulse |
| 3 Vault of Whispers | 2 Talisman of Indulgence |
| | 2 Welding Jar |

18 lands

- 4 [Arcbound Ravager](#)
- 4 [Arcbound Worker](#)
- 4 [Disciple of the Vault](#)
- 4 [Frogmite](#)
- 4 [Myr Enforcer](#)

20 creatures

22 other spells

Sideboard

- 4 [Electrostatic Bolt](#)
- 3 [Phyrexian Arena](#)
- 4 [Pyroclasm](#)
- 4 [Stabilizer](#)

15 sideboard cards



For those of you who have not followed the evolution of this archetype closely over the past few months, Ravager Affinity is a much more powerful, proactive, and fast version of Affinity than we saw at States. No one even whispers the word "[Broodstar](#)" any longer. That card was always too clunky, but with [Arcbound Ravager](#) at the two drop spot, there is no longer room in the deck, let alone debate. The superiority of the newer breed is in the closing strength of [Disciple of the Vault](#). Originally a card used by some designers to scare off [Akroma's Vengeance](#), [Disciple of the Vault](#) is now a staple of the "[Fireball](#) turn." Along with [Arcbound Ravager](#)'s ability to create and move around +1/+1 tokens in exchange for sacrificing artifacts, [Disciple of the Vault](#) can reduce a player with a healthy 20 life to a dead man in one big turn.

You will notice that the [Disciple](#) causes loss of life, not damage. This makes traditionally effective anti-beatdown cards like [Worship](#) useless when playing against Ravager Affinity. It is no problem to beat a white mage within an inch of his life total with [Shrapnel Blast](#) (which often does 6 damage in this deck, take note). It is only the last 1 life point that needs to be overcome, and [Disciple of the Vault](#) can do that point with ease.

[Broodstar](#) is accepted as a dinosaur; green has consistently been added to the main. The major break today, with most Affinity players adopting Roland's [Naturalizes](#) (or even moving towards [Oxidizes](#) for even more superiority in the mirror), is [Aether Vial](#). The chief proponent of [Aether Vial](#) on the Internet is Zvi Mowshowitz, who calls it the modern [Sol Ring](#). It seems to speed up Zvi's deck in particular, but

you will notice that this card's presence comes at the cost of other powerful staples, like [Shrapnel Blast](#).

Ravager Affinity



Main Deck

60 cards

2 Glimmervoid	4 Aether Vial
4 Great Furnace	4 Chromatic Sphere
4 Seat of the Synod	2 Oxidize
4 Tree of Tales	2 Pyrite Spellbomb
4 Vault of Whispers	4 Skullclamp
_____	4 Thoughtcast

18 lands

4 [Arcbound Ravager](#)
4 [Arcbound Worker](#)
4 [Disciple of the Vault](#)
4 [Frogmite](#)
4 [Myr Enforcer](#)
2 [Myr Retriever](#)

22 creatures

20 other spells

Sideboard

2 [Atog](#)
1 [Glimmervoid](#)
2 [Naturalize](#)
2 [Oxidize](#)
2 [Pyrite Spellbomb](#)
2 [Shock](#)
4 [Shrapnel Blast](#)

15 sideboard cards



What all of these decks have in common, despite their differences in color and extremely distinctive individual card choices, is a powerful and fast core. All of them play four copies of [Arcbound Ravager](#). All of them break the Affinity mechanic with [Frogmite](#) and [Myr Enforcer](#). All of them close with [Disciple of the Vault](#).

If you are going to play the Affinity mirror, there are two cards that matter more than any others: [Skullclamp](#) and [Disciple of the Vault](#). [Skullclamp](#) is the engine that draws you into the rest of your action, Disciple is not just your closer, but your insurance policy. Remember, if you have a Disciple and the opponent doesn't, he won't easily be able to try to dominate you with [Arcbound Ravager](#) without killing himself.

Goblin Bidding

It first appeared at the top of the standings at last year's [GP Bangkok](#) and hasn't looked back since. Though champion Tsuyoshi Fujita thought that the loss of [Goblin Matron](#) would cripple his deck in Standard, Goblin Bidding in various incarnations has been a staple of that format, as well as being viable in Onslaught Block, and even a standout in Extended play.

The deck that started it all:

*Tsuyoshi Fujita, GP Bangkok
2003*

Goblin Bidding



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 4 Bloodstained Mire | 4 Firebolt |
| 12 Mountain | 3 Patriarch's Bidding |
| 1 Shadowblood Ridge | _____ |
| 4 Sulfurous Springs | 7 other spells |
| 2 Swamp | |

23 lands

- 1 [Gempalm Incinerator](#)
- 4 [Goblin Matron](#)
- 4 [Goblin Piledriver](#)
- 3 [Goblin Sharpshooter](#)
- 4 [Goblin Sledder](#)
- 4 [Goblin Warchief](#)
- 2 [Siege-Gang Commander](#)
- 4 [Skirk Prospector](#)
- 4 [Sparksmith](#)

30 creatures

Sideboard

- 1 [Coffin Purge](#)
- 2 [Flaring Pain](#)
- 1 [Gempalm Incinerator](#)
- 1 [Patriarch's Bidding](#)
- 1 [Shadowblood Ridge](#)
- 1 [Siege-Gang Commander](#)
- 3 [Smother](#)
- 1 [Stabilizer](#)
- 4 [Sulfuric Vortex](#)

15 sideboard cards



Like a traditional Goblin deck, Goblin Bidding has one of the fastest rush offenses in all of Standard. With [Goblin Piledriver](#), [Goblin Warchief](#), and [Siege-Gang Commander](#), its beatdown can reduce an opponent to zero life in just a few short turns. The difference is that an opponent with powerful sweep defenses is not out of the woods against Goblin Bidding. Where a traditional Goblin deck might have run out of steam, a Goblin Bidding deck is actually strengthened by the opponent's removal: the more Goblins in the graveyard, the bigger the Bidding.



Though there is currently some debate about the place of [Skullclamp](#) in this deck, I believe most Goblin Bidding opponents will be armed with that defining equipment. Those opposed to Skullclamp will say either that it does not fit into the mana development curve of this deck cleanly, and that it does not promote the board advantage necessary to win matches against either another Goblin Bidding deck or Ravager Affinity; they say that the card advantage is there, and will come from Patriarch's Bidding without having to expose a potentially fragile artifact target. Advocates will point out [Skullclamp's](#) backbreaking power against control decks and the fact that not only does it help a Bidding player draw into lands for his expensive bombs... it fuels the eventual game-ending Patriarch's Bidding with more and more Goblins in the graveyard.

This version of Goblin Bidding is the one currently championed by "Little Darwin" Paul Rietzl, a former Your Move Games area player and recent standout in the North American Grand Prix circuit, with Top 8 finishes in both [GP Oakland](#) and [GP Anaheim](#):

Goblin Bidding



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 4 Bloodstained Mire | 3 Patriarch's Bidding |
| 4 City of Brass | 4 Skullclamp |
| 1 Goblin Burrows | _____ |
| 12 Mountain | 7 other spells |
| 3 Swamp | |

24 lands

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 3 Gempalm Incinerator | Sideboard |
| 4 Goblin Piledriver | 3 Echoing Ruin |
| 3 Goblin Sharpshooter | 4 Electrostatic Bolt |
| 4 Goblin Sledder | 1 Gempalm Incinerator |
| 4 Goblin Warchief | 1 Goblin Sharpshooter |
| 4 Siege-Gang Commander | 4 Molten Rain |
| 4 Skirk Prospector | 2 Stone Rain |
| | _____ |
| | 15 sideboard cards |

3 [Sparksmith](#)

29 creatures



Notice how this deck has a deliberate three pronged offense. First of all it has the Goblin rush. The little beaters hit on turn one and don't stop until you stop them or are no longer able to do so. During the initial rush, this deck will likely deploy [Skullclamp](#), both to recover after you've stopped wave one or to continue its offensive theme. Assuming both the beatdown and the [Skullclamp](#) have been weathered, it can always fall back on [Patriarch's Bidding](#). The structure of [Patriarch's Bidding](#) is such that if there is any kind of [Goblin Warchief](#) involved, a lot of damage is likely to come your way immediately; it turns cards like [Akroma's Vengeance](#) into death sentences.

In addition, there are several interactions in this deck that feed one another. The most powerful involves [Skirk Prospector](#), [Siege-Gang Commander](#), and [Goblin Sharpshooter](#), sometimes called "Critical Mass". [Skirk Prospector](#) makes the mana that activates [Siege-Gang Commander](#); when either ability is used, [Goblin Sharpshooter](#) does his thing (ping). In this way, every three Goblins in play is usually worth at least five unblockable damage, meaning that a relatively small [Patriarch's Bidding](#) involving some combination of these Goblins will prove lethal, at least if given time. Though any one of the offenses will win the game, it is the combination of the initial rush, long game [Skullclamp](#) endurance, and [Patriarch's Bidding](#) to close that makes Goblin Bidding perhaps the most difficult deck to address in the current format. Few decks can beat one plan, let alone all three.

In a battle between the two top decks, you will notice that Ravager Affinity tends to ignore the Goblin deck's proactive plan. Ravager Affinity wins by assembling an explosive early game, throwing down fast [Myr Enforcers](#) and sculpting a board where [Arcbound Ravager](#) and [Disciple of the Vault](#) can end the game before [Patriarch's Bidding](#) will be a lethal end. Goblin Bidding will tend to win an interactive

"Bidding plus Warchief turns cards like Akroma's Vengeance into death sentences."

game between these two decks, either restricting Ravager Affinity's board development with its creature removal Goblins or, especially in sideboarded games, by bringing in a ton of artifact and artifact creature removal spells. Goblin Bidding is generally at the advantage in long games where it can assemble Critical Mass and [Patriarch's Bidding](#), but because Ravager Affinity has such a dramatic early game and can pull even other aggressive decks into "[Fireball](#) turn" range quickly, the experts are split as to which deck wins this fight consistently.

As I said earlier, much of the innovation in the current Standard format revolves around tuning a Skullclamp beatdown deck to better address the existing and expected other [Skullclamp](#) beatdown decks. This next deck is a good example of this process. While most Goblin opponents you will face at Regionals will probably be Goblin Bidding, a "new" Goblin build was recently revealed to the public by Dan Paskins. Dan was once a member of one of the most respected deck design squads ever to shape the face of **Magic**. Back in 1999, he and his teammates dominated the Top 8 of the UK championships. At that tournament, Dan finished second (with his original Red Deck Wins) falling in the finals to teammate Mark Wraith (also playing Red Deck Wins). This year, Dan found himself unqualified for his Nationals in the first time in forever and had to play for a slot like everyone else. He did so, and won one, with this excellent list:

Biddingless Goblins



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Chrome Mox
4 Great Furnace	4 Shrapnel Blast
12 Mountain	4 Skullclamp

20 lands

12 other spells

3 Clickslither	Sideboard
4 Goblin Piledriver	2 Electrostatic Bolt
4 Goblin Sharpshooter	2 Furnace Dragon
4 Goblin Sledder	4 Molten Rain
4 Goblin Warchief	4 Shatter
4 Siege-Gang Commander	3 Sparksmith
4 Skirk Prospector	
1 Sparksmith	

15 sideboard cards

28 creatures



For what it is intended to do, this deck is very good. It is faster than other Goblin decks because of [Chrome Mox](#), and makes up for the lost card with Skullclamp. The presence of all the artifacts allows it to run [Shrapnel Blast](#), which takes a turn away from most opponents under pressure. Dan says that the advantage in choosing this deck over Ravager Affinity and Goblin Bidding is that it beats both of those decks and does not give up a lot in terms of relevant other matchups. Straight Goblins has a natural advantage over Goblin Bidding. It doesn't have [City of Brass](#) and [Bloodstained Mire](#) which help the opponent race and it doesn't have [Patriarch's Bidding](#) which can be a dead draw in the mirror match. While the deck is also naturally quite strong against Affinity, you can simply look to Dan's sideboard to see how his deck should be able to totally overwhelm that type of an opponent over three games.

The Red deck loses the sheer game winning power of [Patriarch's Bidding](#), but still has good finishers. Because it can put pressure on a white opponent so much faster with [Chrome Mox](#) draws (turn 1 Piledriver, turn 2 Warchief is surprisingly common), it can force the opponent's hand but keep [Clickslither](#) or [Siege-Gang Commander](#) in reserve to finish him. [Shrapnel Blast](#) is itself a game winner.

As I said, straight Goblins will likely be less popular than Goblin Bidding at Regionals, but it is still a deck to watch out for. In my opinion, it is also a good deck to play, and Dan's deck is currently my own backup deck this year.

The White Decks

You have probably read about the white decks here on [magicthegathering.com](#). My [last article](#) for the site was about the [Weathered Wayfarer](#) Mono-White deck, and Gabe Walls, one of the finest players ever to play a [Lightning Rift](#), told you [his opinions](#) on his signature deck, Astral Slide.

The changes in the white decks do not come from great cards that they can now suddenly use. Instead,



these proud defensive decks are forced to fight against [Skullclamp](#) rather than focusing on their own proactive strategies; the changes in the environment are external and the white decks have to react to them.

Mono-White Control



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Cloudpost	4 Akroma's Vengeance
7 Plains	4 Decree of Justice
3 Secluded Steppe	2 Gilded Light
4 Urza's Mine	4 Mindslaver
4 Urza's Power Plant	4 Renewed Faith
4 Urza's Tower	4 Wrath of God

26 lands

22 other spells

4 Eternal Dragon
4 Exalted Angel
4 Weathered Wayfarer

12 creatures



This is a version of Mono-White proposed by [magicthegathering.com](#)'s own [Nate Heiss](#). It differs from the version that I posted primarily in the fact that it runs so many Urza's lands rather

than [Temple of the False God](#) and more Plains. Nate's version also runs four [Exalted Angels](#) main, which seems right for this kind of deck.

My main problem with his build is that he has very few white sources for a one color deck. He can obviously generate an absurd amount of mana with his colorless lands in the late game, but I think that he has a less consistent fourth turn [Wrath of God](#). A fast Wrath is absolutely essential when taking on one of this format's tuned beatdown decks. A missed [Wrath of God](#) will mean that an Affinity opponent will have less life to finish with his [Fireball](#) finish and that a Goblin opponent will not even have to use [Patriarch's Bidding](#) to assemble Critical Mass.

Though he did not post a sideboard, Nate mentioned that he wanted to run [Damping Matrix](#) in games two and three against [Skullclamp](#) decks. [Damping Matrix](#) slows down everything from [Arcbound Ravager](#) to [Goblin Sharpshooter](#), but also prevents the white deck from being able to use its own Mindslavers and [Weathered Wayfarers](#). Additionally, [Pulse of the Fields](#) is probably white's biggest addition from *Darksteel*. As powerful as Affinity is, as good as it is as knocking an opponent from 20 to 0, that deck's last turns usually look pretty desperate. They involve sacrificing a lot of permanents and pushing every available attacker to the center in order to get the +1/+1 tokens onto whichever creature goes unblocked. Affinity is not great at dealing, say, 40 damage, and a card like [Pulse of the Fields](#) takes a lot of wind out of the Ravager's sails.

Goblin Bidding, on the other hand, can deal 40 damage without blinking. However, it requires a lot more setup to achieve this than Affinity does for its measly 20

damage. The main thing to watch out for when playing white against Bidding is that as good as you are at slowing down the initial rush, given time, the opposing deck will set up a lethal [Patriarch's Bidding](#). You cannot just knock the Goblins down. You have to finish them or they will rise from the grave, generate a huge amount of mana, power up the Sharpshooter, and eventually deal more damage than you have life. While Goblins was a favorable match-up prior to *Darksteel*, in addition to the initial rush and the Bidding plans, a white player also has to contend with [Skullclamp](#). [Skullclamp](#) will not only fatten up the graveyard but ensure that the Goblin player draws into his key spells, especially Patriarch's Bidding.

Astral Slide



New breath for white-based control



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4 Forgotten Cave | 2 Akroma's Vengeance |
| 8 Mountain | 3 Astral Slide |
| 9 Plains | 4 Damping Matrix |

4 [Secluded Steppe](#)
2 [Temple of the False God](#)

27 lands

3 [Eternal Dragon](#)
3 [Exalted Angel](#)

6 creatures

4 [Lightning Rift](#)
3 [Renewed Faith](#)
2 [Slice and Dice](#)
4 [Spark Spray](#)
2 [Starstorm](#)
3 [Wrath of God](#)

27 other spells

Sideboard

3 [Echoing Ruin](#)
1 [Obliterate](#)
2 [Pulse of the Fields](#)
2 [Scrabbling Claws](#)
4 [Shatter](#)
1 [Temple of the False God](#)
2 [Weathered Wayfarer](#)

15 sideboard cards



[Astral Slide](#) differs from Mono-White Control in that it has a more focused primary plan. No matter what opponent it is facing, [Astral Slide](#) can run the [Lightning Rift](#) strategy. Turn-2 Rift will kill another control player or keep away a Goblin rush with equal ability. I've always liked this archetype because it has a lot of lands. It is rarely mana-screwed. Because it can cycle so many lands away, it is not mana flooded very often either. Gabe's version also runs [Damping Matrix](#) main to slow down [Skullclamp](#). This is a good example of a white deck being forced to modify its list to accomodate [Skullclamp](#), rather than being purely able to choose the best available cards for its strategy.

Traditionally, one of the strengths of the [Astral Slide](#) deck would be a combination of [Astral Slide](#), morph, and a 1 mana cyler in the first four turns. This could allow for a block and a flipped [Exalted Angel](#) ready to attack on turn five. Now, for the first time ever, players in some cases are cutting all the [Exalted Angels](#) from their [Astral Slide](#) decks. Why? They need more room for anti-[Skullclamp](#) beatdown decks. Even Gabe's article, which touts the importance of Dragon wars against other white decks cuts not only an [Exalted Angel](#) but one of its chief long game cycling cards to make room for [Damping Matrix](#).

The Other Decks

While you should primarily prepare for the above three broad groups of decks, remember that there never was any true three deck metagame and that 2004 Regionals won't be one either. Just as Turbo-[Stasis](#) rose up to bite [Necropotence](#) players from behind in 1996, you can be sure that this year there will be decks that don't quite conform.

Tooth and Nail

Probably the biggest story of [PT Kobe](#) was the emergence of this archetype. Largely unexpected by the field, this deck proved both powerful and fun to watch. Gabriel Nassif continued his long run of excellent constructed finishes with a 2nd place in Kobe:

Tooth and Nail



Main Deck

60 cards

1 Blinkmoth Nexus	2 Mindslaver
4 Cloudpost	4 Oblivion Stone
16 Forest	4 Oxidize
3 Stalking Stones	4 Reap and Sow
_____	4 Sylvan Scrying
24 lands	2 Talisman of Unity
	4 Tooth and Nail

1 Darksteel Colossus	24 other spells
1 Duplicant	
1 Leonin Abunas	Sideboard
1 Platinum Angel	4 Chalice of the Void
4 Solemn Simulacrum	1 Duplicant
4 Viridian Shaman	1 Mindslaver
_____	1 Platinum Angel
12 creatures	4 Pulse of the Tangle
	4 Tel-Jilad Chosen

15 sideboard cards



[Tooth and Nail](#)'s main plan is to use its early game to find [Cloudposts](#). To do so, it has [Sylvan Scrying](#) and [Reap and Sow](#) functioning in much the same way that [Weathered Wayfarer](#) does in Mono-White Control. The difference here is that when Nassif's deck has mana, it casts a [Tooth and Nail](#) with Entwine to essentially end the game. Against some decks, [Leonin Abunas](#) and [Platinum Angel](#) will lock in a win. With the Abunas out, the [Platinum Angel](#) is impossible to target and hard to remove. Because she can fly, the Angel can buy a win in five turns, no matter how low your life goes. [Darksteel Colossus](#) can represent a faster win, and one that is resilient against cards like [Akroma's Vengeance](#) and [Wrath of God](#). One of my own favorite plays is to use [Tooth and Nail](#) to grab one or more [Viridian Shamans](#), but use the Entwine to deploy expensive creatures I've already drawn. In this way, I'm saving mana on the bombs, and will be able to follow up with two Shamans the next turn to make certain I don't lose the initiative. In Standard, the [Tooth and Nail](#) deck gains even more possibilities.



Known on the Pro Tour as the kid who added [Deep Analysis](#) to U/G, Antonino DeRosa recently proposed this Standard version of [Tooth and Nail](#):

Burning Tooth and Nail



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Cloudpost	4 Fireball
7 Forest	2 Oxidize
2 Mountain	4 Reap and Sow
1 Stalking Stones	4 Sylvan Scrying
4 Temple of the False God	4 Tooth and Nail

- 1 [Tranquil Thicket](#)
- 4 [Wooded Foothills](#)

18 other spells

23 lands

- 1 [Clockwork Dragon](#)
- 1 [Darksteel Colossus](#)
- 1 [Duplicant](#)
- 1 [Leonin Abunas](#)
- 1 [Molder Slug](#)
- 1 [Platinum Angel](#)
- 2 [Ravenous Baloth](#)
- 4 [Solemn Simulacrum](#)
- 4 [Vine Trellis](#)
- 3 [Viridian Shaman](#)

Sideboard

- 4 [Damping Matrix](#)
- 4 [Mindslaver](#)
- 2 [Oxidize](#)
- 4 [Pyroclasm](#)
- 1 [Viridian Shaman](#)

15 sideboard cards

19 creatures



Though I am guessing most Standard [Tooth and Nail](#) variants will have white as their secondary color (as Nassif did), in some cases touching for Wrath of God, Antonino's list is actually more intriguing to me. If you have all that mana, why not just Fireball the opponent? Notice how in Standard, Temple of the False God really strengthens the core of the deck. Temple makes assembling a huge amount of mana less dependent on Sylvan Scrying and Reap and Sow and is especially synergistic with Solemn Simulacrum.

Cemetery Cloud

In theory, Cemetery Cloud offers the best of both blocks. From Mirrodin Block, it brings artifact hate, Skullclamp, and Death Cloud (arguably the most powerful available effect, despite its huge cost). From Onslaught Block, it brings Oversold Cemetery and Ravenous Baloth, neither of which proved the backbone of a tier one deck to this point, but cards that are the beneficiaries of some new friends. The theory is that with Ravenous Baloth

and other green creatures to soak up damage and provide life, the deck will have time to set up a devastating Death Cloud. The interactions between specific cards, especially Wirewood Herald and Skullclamp, will make for a superior board position upon the resolution of Death Cloud.



This is Brian Kibler's version of the deck:

Cemetery Cloud



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 3 City of Brass | 4 Death Cloud |
| 12 Forest | 3 Oversold Cemetery |
| 8 Swamp | 4 Skullclamp |

23 lands

11 other spells

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 4 Bane of the Living | Sideboard |
| 4 Birds of Paradise | 4 Infest |
| 1 Elvish Aberration | 4 Oxidize |
| 4 Ravenous Baloth | 1 Viridian Shaman |
| 4 Twisted Abomination | 2 Viridian Zealot |
| 3 Viridian Shaman | 4 Withered Wretch |
| 2 Viridian Zealot | |
| 4 Wirewood Herald | |

15 sideboard cards

26 creatures



I like this version much more than the one without [Wirewood Herald](#) and all the landcycling creatures from *Scourge*. What actually came up a number of times with the other version was that the Cemetery Cloud deck would have [Oversold Cemetery](#) in play... but could not trigger it because it did not have enough creatures in the graveyard. [Wirewood Herald](#) and the landcyclers both help to fill the graveyard for [Oversold Cemetery](#) while at the same time smoothing out the early game, providing blockers and land drops.

That being said, Cemetery Cloud is probably my least favorite of the current archetypes. I am suspicious regarding the consistent performance of a deck with only 8 Swamps and 11 black primary mana sources overall that needs to ramp up to ☠☠☠ in order to set up its game. The mana constraints are very tight in this deck, with full sets of both 🌳🌳 and ☠☠ "bears" and necessary drops for both colors in its early game. That is not to say that some players will not find success with Cemetery Cloud or that you shouldn't prepare for it... just that I don't see it as an appealing deck to actually play.

Nevertheless [Death Cloud](#) really is an exceptionally powerful spell when it resolves. Especially in a deck like this one, if conditions have been properly set up in smashing the opponent's [Skullclamps](#), you can potentially resolve a [Death Cloud](#) that leaves the opponent with no cards. Not just cards in hand... no Magical cards. No hand, no creatures, no permanents at all. At the same time, your [Oversold Cemetery](#) can bring back your landcyclers, allowing you to get Ravenous Baloth or other creatures back online post haste. When this deck wins, it wins very big.

Against Goblins, Cemetery Cloud can set up recurring [Ravenous Baloth](#) and [Bane of the Living](#). Against Affinity, it can [Skullclamp](#) its own [Wirewood Herald](#)s into [Ancestral Recall](#)s attached to [Demonic Tutors](#) for [Viridian Shaman](#)... over and over again. While it does not have a real plan for control, there are no real counterspell decks in the current environment, meaning that it can simply resolve [Death Cloud](#) after setting up the field of battle to its liking. The deck's only real disadvantage is its mana

***When this deck wins,
it wins very big.***

base, but that barrier is a huge one. Because Cemetery Cloud's overall power level is extraordinarily high, expect it to lure in more than one brave player.

U/W

You may not have noticed but all the decks listed from the top of this article have had something in common. They aren't blue. Well, that's not entirely true... The third Affinity listing touched for [Thoughtcast](#). But I think the lesson is clear. The Powers That Be decided to get rid of [Counterspell](#) and the effect has been dramatic. This is a Standard where you can fearlessly play a nine mana sorcery and assume it will resolve. Again... that's not entirely true.



U/W Control



Main Deck 60 cards

4 Cloudpost	3 Akroma's Vengeance
2 Coastal Tower	4 Damping Matrix
4 Flooded Strand	4 Decree of Justice
6 Island	4 Mana Leak
8 Plains	2 Pulse of the Fields
2 Temple of the False God	2 Renewed Faith
_____	2 Rewind
26 lands	2 Stifle
	4 Thirst for Knowledge
3 Eternal Dragon	4 Wrath of God
_____	_____
3 creatures	31 other spells

Sideboard

4 Circle of Protection: Red
3 Exalted Angel
2 Mind's Eye
2 Mindslaver
3 Purge

1 [Stifle](#)

15 sideboard cards



This deck won Germany's Hessen Regionals in the hands of Jens Döppes. I would have grouped it in with the white decks above, but I don't believe your average white player is going to be U/W. In fact, if random Type II tournaments on *Magic Online* are to be believed, you are much more likely to face [Tooth and Nail](#) than any deck with Islands.

This implementation seems a little odd to me. Döppes's deck trades the Wayfarer engine for some counterspells. Most of them aren't very good, but given the right threats, they probably get the job done. On one hand, the mana flow is going to be a lot less consistent than it would be for a Mono-White deck; on the other, this deck can say "No." Consider how powerful that word is. There are a surprising number of games where another white deck has total control of the board, but then loses to a "Fireball turn", whether a [Patriarch's Bidding](#) or an [Arcbound Ravager](#) and [Disciple of the Vault](#). As poor as [Mana Leak](#) might be in comparison to [Counterspell](#), it can potentially stop these turns. [Stifle](#) is going to have some players pulling their teeth out in frustration, and [Rewind](#), in particular, seems very synergistic with the [Cloudpost](#) and [Temple of the False God](#).

Döppes's deck seems like it would have a serviceable match-up against Affinity with Akroma's Vengeance and the life gain, and a very good match-up against other white decks. The counters seem just good enough to stop the expensive sorceries of the rogue decks. My intuition says that this deck is weakest against Goblins... and Döppes's has a heavy sideboard for them. The deck looks a bit odd, but I can definitely see how it could work, and even dominate, given the right opponents.

The one card I really don't get is [Thirst for Knowledge](#). Many States-era U/W decks ran [Thirst for Knowledge](#) in combination with [Oblivion Stone](#), [Ancient Den](#), and [Seat of the Synod](#), but this deck has only [Damping Matrix](#) to pitch. If I were to change this deck, it would be to remove the Thirsts to round out the fours on [Eternal Dragon](#), [Renewed Faith](#), and [Akroma's Vengeance](#). [Eternal Dragon](#) is the best possible card against another white deck. [Akroma's Vengeance](#) -- especially with the help of [Cloudpost](#) and [Temple of the False God](#) -- is going to be your best friend against Affinity,

and [Renewed Faith](#) serves multiple functions against Goblins, not the least of which is an early game flow of lands and spells. Because all these cards cycle (and most of them do so at a lower cost than [Thirst for Knowledge](#)), I don't think that the deck will lose very much velocity (in fact, the early game will probably be better). The main drawback, of course, is that the deck will have to rely solely on [Eternal Dragon](#) for long game card drawing and will not be able to dig quite as deep quite as quickly for pinpoint threat removal, with or without card advantage.



The last deck that you might have to worry about is Big Red. It was the deck that won the Block Pro Tour and, historically, we have seen decks like [Tinker](#), [Rebels](#), and [Astral Slide](#) graduate from Block to Standard for Regionals. I'm not actually sure what a Big Red deck for Standard will look like... You will see decks that play multiple [Furnace Dragons](#) against a projected Affinity metagame all the way to decks that look like mirror sideboarded *Onslaught* Block Goblin decks, trading in their little beaters for [Rorix Bladewing](#) and [Starstorm](#). The main disincentive to this type of deck for Regionals, despite its pedigree as a PT winner, is the fact that the Goblin decks do much the same thing with their rush and burn, and do so on a lower curve, using [Skullclamp](#) along the way.

The decks for the upcoming Regionals 2004 are a diverse and varied group with specific individual areas of excellence. Though many have cards in common, from [Skullclamp](#) to [Goblin Warchief](#), each of the distinct decks plays a particular game that is anything but identical to another deck that seems similar in build and plan. The challenge in overcoming such a diverse group of [Skullclamp](#) enabled beatdown decks, defensive board control decks, and eccentric designs with incredible and expensive sorceries is a daunting one. When you decide on your weapon of choice for this year's tournament, be sure that you are ready to answer the questions posed by these decks... or choose one of them.