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Furnace of Rath



Adrian Sullivan · Single-Card Strategies
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Mark Rosewater [says](#) that Red is about freedom. Poppycock. Don't believe his lies! For the *real* story on Red, read [this week's feature article](#) by Dan Paskins. Here is a man that knows what Red is about. Red is about burning people in the face. Red is about smashing their things to bits. Red is about being able to be the naughty five-year old with no one there to tell you to pick up your toys. Red is being a kindergartner on a school bus and giving another kid a bloody nose. (I did that once. No, really, I did.)

In tournament **Magic**, I suppose I've managed to acquire some kind of reputation (at least in some circles) as being a big lover of Red. I suppose that there are a lot of reasons for that. I've written about Red decks so many times and had some of my best tournament finishes with Red decks, it only makes sense.

I want to introduce my card for Red week by talking about why a friend of mine first played it. The year was 1998 and it was US Nationals weekend. My team Cabal Rogue had broken Counter-Oath (a blue-green control deck based on abusing **Oath of Druids**) and was going to run it in the Meatgrinders to see if we could qualify people for the main event. Things went quite well for us, and in the first tournament, one of our guys Jim Hustad would eliminate our teammate (and former Junior Pro Tour winner) Aaron Souders in the very last round of the event. Both of them were playing the same Oath deck, and it completely defined the entire US Open that year. So, of course, we didn't play it in the main event.

I think, maybe, that we were so overwhelmed by how much of a splash it made at the US Open, we assumed that it would make a similar splash in the main event. Expecting the worst, we pulled out another deck that had been made to beat the Oath deck, and of course, no one played Counter-Oath (though Team CMU did play White/Green Oath, including then competitor Randy Buehler). The full details of those adventures are online in an old [Dojo report](#) of mine.

The other deck was designed by Dan Bock and was dubbed Disposable Red. The deck was almost all burn spells. The creatures were few, and to avoid **Oath of Druids**, disposable: **Ball Lightning**, **Mogg Fanatic**, and **Orcish Settlers**. Of course, it needed a bit more oomph if it was going to win without a few more attackers. We settled on **Furnace of Rath**. That's some oomph!



Now, I'll tell you the truth, a part of me wanted to go with Nate Heiss's suggestion for my article this week, **Molten Hydra**. But there is just something so cool about **Furnace of Rath**. When Jim Hustad took Disposable Red with him to the Constructed portion of Nationals, a whole bunch of crazy things happened because of that card. I remember seeing him burn a White mage to death even though there were not one but *two* copies of **Warmth** in play. I remember games that ended in a crazy flurry of burn spells. But most of all, I remember this one story about the Little **Ball Lightning** That Could.

Things were looking grim for Jim. His opponent was at sixteen life, and the game was pretty much wrapped up. He had out a **Wall of Blossoms** to block with and a small mitful of cards. All that Jim had going for him was his **Furnace of Rath** and knowledge of the way the rules used to work. Jim dropped a **Ball Lightning**, and his opponent thought a bit, let it resolve, and then blocked with his **Wall of Blossoms**. Sadly, this meant he was dead.

Back in those days, you see, damage was doubled when it was dealt. So, the **Ball Lightning** was going to deal 6 damage to the wall. Better double it. 12 damage (minus 4 toughness) tramples over, so it is going to deal 8 to the player. Better double it. Oops, you're dead.

Things are a little better now, rules-wise. But there are still more than a couple of excellent reasons to play with **Furnace of Rath**, not the least of which is that it's legal in Standard!



Cranking up the temperature

The first thing to think about with **Furnace of Rath** is what it really means for a game. In a sense, **Furnace of Rath** doesn't double the amount of damage everything deals. You're Red. You like to deal damage. A better way to think of it is that **Furnace of Rath** *halves everyone's life total*. It's better to think of it this way because otherwise you might not be thinking of the Furnace itself as a threat, but it is. When you have a lot of damage sources, Furnace is one heck of a worrisome Enchantment.

Of course, Furnace hasn't really done anything to the table.

This is why Furnace is so much an environmental card. For Furnace to be truly great, what you want to do is play it at such a time that you'll be able to take advantage of it. Right now, for example, Standard decks include a lot of attackers. It's not all that fun to drop a **Furnace of Rath** if you're just going to die immediately after it hits the table. In tournament play, **Furnace of Rath** probably belongs in your sideboard right now unless you live in an area where no one does damage for a while. Against a control deck, if you're "halving everyone's life total", are you really scared to lose half your life? Didn't think so. In a casual game, you know more than anyone what kinds of decks that your friends play. Don't be so inclined to pop out the **Furnace of Rath** in games where everyone is very into direct damage and fast attackers. If you do, make sure you've struck some kind of deal first.

But damn the environment, you say. I'm Red. I'm short-sighted and want to have fun blowing things up now!

Well then, here's what you can do.

Use cards that do a lot of damage!

Remember, everyone's at half of their life total. In essence, once you get a Furnace out, all you ever seem to be able to need to do is about 10 damage at the most. Lifegain is always the bane of doming someone in the head with a burn spell, but you really don't care that much when a Furnace is out.

Just because of that story I told earlier, **Ball Lightning** springs immediately to mind. What was always amazing in that old deck was that if you used a **Ball Lightning** and a **Fireblast** with a **Furnace of Rath** out, they'd be dead. Of course, both of those cards are only up to being used if

you play something like 1.5 or another older format, so what can you use that's a bit more modern?

It doesn't take much of a leap to go from **Ball Lightning** to **Blistering Firecat**. At 7 damage, you should only need a much weaker burn spell to keep the pressure on, and there are certainly plenty of cards that do 3 damage. From **Chain of Plasma** to **Volcanic Hammer** to **Hammer of Bogardan** to **Carbonize** to **Barbed Lightning**. I could go on and on here.

Essentially, what you're looking for are cards that can do a lot of damage for only a little mana. Now, one of the keys to realize is that you don't need to worry about the long game. With a **Furnace of Rath** out, you can pretty much be guaranteed that there won't be one. For the most part, I would top out my burn spells at 5 mana. Here are some of the best (and for the record, yes, **Ball Lightning** is a Burn spell):

- **Price of Progress**
- **Blistering Firecat**
- **Ball Lightning**
- **Shrapnel Blast**
- **Beacon of Destruction**
- **Goblin Grenade**
- **Violent Eruption**
- **Sonic Burst**
- **Lightning Bolt**
- **Chain Lightning**



There are a couple of more unusual card choices, of course. **Blood Oath** has the potential to do a ridiculous amount of damage if you are a good guesser or lucky. With threshold and enough mana, **Lightning Surge** can finish off an opponent all by itself if you have a **Furnace** out. Cards like **Scent of Cinder**, **Landslide**, or **Goblin War Strike** can sometimes do a shocking amount of damage without a **Furnace of Rath** out, let alone with one.

I want it now! (But what about the opponent? How do I ignore him?)

Well, what about them?

Another good way to use **Furnace of Rath** is to get it out as quickly as you can. Decks that run **Furnace of Rath** aren't designed for the long game, in general. Usually, they want the game over now. Let that other guy worry about that stuff.

If you can just get out the **Furnace** quickly, sometimes that can take care of all of your problems for you. One of the exciting things about running **Furnace of Rath** is that it becomes incredibly easy to kill creatures. Without a **Furnace of Rath** out, a card like **Mystic Enforcer** can be incredibly difficult to kill with burn. The problem comes in when you can't kill the **Enforcer** before he hits you. For twelve damage.

Speed is one of the best answers. There are two kinds of speed that I'm talking about: getting the **Furnace** out quick, or simply being able to do so much it doesn't matter that they hurt you.

Chrome Mox is a great card to use with **Furnace of Rath**. Not only can you use it after the **furnace** is out to inflict a whopping 10 damage from a **Shrapnel Blast**, but it speeds you up a full turn in getting out the **Furnace**. On the other hand, if you are in dire shape and a **Furnace** won't help, you can always turn your **Furnace** into a mana source by imprinting it on the **Mox**.

Seething Song is another great example. On turn 3, you can drop a **Furnace** and potentially burn something, but I'm actually far more interested in a **Seething Song** on turn 4 (or earlier with a **Chrome Mox**) when you might have 6 mana. Spend 4 mana on **Furnace of Rath**, and spend 2

mana on **Final Fortune**. Sure you only get one more turn to kill them, but in the right deck, that might not be that hard.

I'm a Red player, I suppose. I want it all, and I want it now. Normally, this is the spot where I keep going on with the article and I should *close* the article with a sample decklist, but I can't keep this one bottled in. You're going to have to deal with a decklist *now* instead.



Seething Disposable Burn, a Type 1.5 deck		
60 cards		
4 Mishra's Factory	3 Ball Lightning	3 Furnace of Rath
10 Mountain	4 Blistering Firecat	3 Pyrite Spellbomb
4 Great Furnace	4 Mogg Fanatic	3 Seething Song
18 land	11 creatures	4 Price of Progress
		4 Fireblast
		4 Shrapnel Blast
		4 Lightning Bolt
		2 Final Fortune
		4 Chrome Mox
		31 other spells

Here's a deck that can kill them with that extra turn, and in so many ways! Just looking at this deck gives me a grin!

Dropping a hot potato

Of course, you're not going to be able to ignore the opponent every time. Sometimes there are going to be some scary creatures. There are certainly times when the game isn't going your way. As I've already said, **Furnace of Rath** does make it easier to kill the bigger creatures, but if you don't have time, it's going to smack you in the face at double damage first.

If you do have time, cards like **Threaten** and **Backlash** can punish them for having such a big creature. That's always nice. **Backlash** is especially nice since it can eat away one of the attack phases of their creature and hurt them at the same time.

Other options include having a healthy dose of sweep effects available or just discarding the **Furnace of Rath** for some effect. **Firestorm** does both of these quite nicely, clearing the board, and getting rid of the potentially useless Furnace. **Starstorm** is a great option if you think the Furnace might later become useful. **Stormbind**, **Cave-In** and **Devastating Dreams** can turn your unattractive **Furnace of Rath** into a more potent effect as well.



Being sneaky *and* short-sighted

Here are a few sneaky ideas to run with before I turn things back to everyone reading:

- **Soul Echo** or **Worship**: Don't die to double damage (at least not right away!) If killing you becomes more complicated, they might not be able to do it.
- **Sneak Attack**: If you drop an **Academy Rector** into play so he dies at the end of *their* turn, then you can get a **Furnace of Rath**. Then, when you drop the **Darksteel Colossus** in your hand, it's going to be lights out! **Academy Rector** does double duty here, helping set up the combo in the first place if you don't have the **Sneak Attack** yet.
- **Erratic Explosion**: All you need to do is 10. There are plenty of 10-cost spells!
- **Shriveling Rot**: Make players take damage when their critters die. Don't play any yourself.

I know that there are a ton of other ways to go with this card, and I'm sure that you can think of a few of them yourself. That's why I'm going to use Red Week for a new Challenge. [Send me your Furnace of Rath deck](#), and I'll go through the best few of them so that you can show everyone what you're made of! As always with a Challenge, there are a few rules to help me whittle things down a bit out of the hundreds of lists I see. Here are some factors I take into account when deciding which decks to give extra attention to:

- decks that focus on doing something and doing it well
- decks that find some creative way to be more innovative than similar decks
- lastly and most definitely least, a speedy submission wins in a tie break.

Make sure that you include your name, and tell me a little bit about your deck if you really want a shot at winning this one.

Enjoy the rest of Red Week!



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