

Mike Flores

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Several different kinds of decks have shown themselves to be playable contenders in today's Standard format. Affinity is the clear leader, generally followed by various G/x decks, including *Mirrodin* Block-style U/G and R/G decks, Tooth and Nail, and B/G decks playing a mix of *Mirrodin* Block and *Champions of Kamigawa* threats. White Weenie has emerged, and shown a degree of viability on the back of *Isamaru*, *Hound of Konda* and especially *Samurai of the Pale Curtain*. Mono-black (in both beatdown and control varieties) has shown its ability to fight the bad fight with *Horobi*, *Death's Wail*, a dominating suite of anti-creature cards, and efficient racers. At least three styles of mono-Red Decks have burned and blasted their ways to solid finishes, utilizing the speed of *Slith Firewalker*, many times commingling strategies with the unsportsmanlike *Molten Rain*. *Kiki-Jiki*, *Mirror Breaker* found its way into both a supporting role in *Tooth and Nail* and swimsuit model centerpiece in brand new wacky *Weapon of Choice*. My favorite deck, mono-blue control, won multiple Champs events, and with game against every other deck type, is sure to be a contender for months to come.

Why list so many different decks, especially when we can't really push, shove, and harass every single specific build into a single article? For once, we are going to talk not just about the decks themselves, as they have been built and presented by players thus far, but about what makes them tick, and how to take them out. Standard is currently representing with decks of every color, meaning that while the threats are wide and various... the answers can come out of any mage's bag of tricks.

First things first.

Affinity

Archetype Deck: Mike Clair, New York State Champion 2004

Mike Clair  

Main Deck		Sideboard
<p>60 cards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Blinkmoth Nexus 2 Darksteel Citadel 2 Glimmervoid 4 Great Furnace 4 Seat of the Synod 4 Vault of Whispers <hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>20 lands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Arcbound Ravager 4 Arcbound Worker 2 Atog 4 Disciple of the Vault 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Aether Vial 4 Chromatic Sphere 3 Cranial Plating 4 Electrostatic Bolt 4 Thoughtcast <hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>19 other spells</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Furnace Dragon 2 Moriok Rigger 4 Seething Song 3 Shrapnel Blast 2 Terror <hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>15 sideboard cards</p>

4 Frogmite
3 Myr Enforcer

21 creatures

Clair's deck is a pretty standard *Mirrodin* Block Vial Affinity deck in the flavor of Karsten or Lebedowicz. The only major change is the addition of four Electrostatic Bolts in favor of one random two drop, one Myr Enforcer, and one Cranial Plating main. Clair played the Electrostatic Bolts to good effect with his Regionals version, and echoed that build's sideboard with the Seething Song/Furnace Dragon combination out of the board... a strange choice when everyone else is either packing "the green sideboard" of Oxidize, Viridian Shaman, and sometimes Tree of Tales, or a redundant red sideboard of Electrostatic Bolts, Shatters, and Relic Barriers.

Clearly this version is heavily prepared for other Affinity decks, which is something that you should be prepared for, too, if you have any interest in succeeding in a Standard tournament. The reason we started with Affinity is that you are lucky if you only face this deck one out of every three matches, and if you make Top 8, you will probably be looking at an even higher concentration. The bad news is that Affinity is the fastest aggressive deck, and is easily capable of turn four kills. The good news is that every color has cards that hurt Affinity.

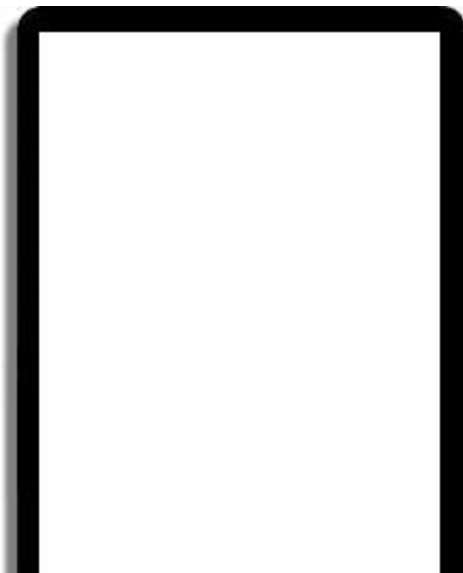


Black:

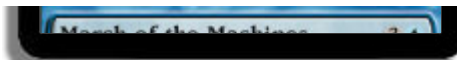
The standout anti-Affinity card has to be Horobi, Death's Wail. While Clair's build has main-deck Electrostatic Bolts to take down Horobi, most other Affinity decks have either Shrapnel Blast or nothing to target the black player's creatures. That means if Horobi hits the board on the black side the Affinity deck has no options except to go for a straight win, and quickly. This is pretty difficult because the fast wins tend to come off of modular tricks with Arcbound Ravager or clean shots to the jaw with Cranial Plating. Nether is a very reliable strategy with Horobi in play.

Blue:

The default answer to the "what do I do about Affinity" question has been March of the Machines. As overpowering as March sometimes is, it is no panacea to the world's artifact problems. Brian Kibler, for instance, used to laugh about how he could get hit with a Death Cloud with March of the Machines already in play and still walk out of a game the winner. March is reliable at exactly one thing: manascrewing the opponent. It is not even a lock at the manascrew, though. Many Affinity players have squeezed out wins with a Glimmervoid and a Blinkmoth Nexus... it is important to remember that a Blinkmoth Nexus works both as a mana source and a beater with March in play. Therefore, March of the Machines should be considered a key piece to the overall anti-Affinity suite, but



should not be expected to beat the deck all by its lonesome. The problems with this card are many: The opponent will probably already have his game in play with Arcbound Ravager and so on if the only resistance you present is the March. March of the Machines sets off many a Disciple of the Vault activation, even when the other guy has no Arcbound Ravager or Atog in play.



Strong, but not always the game-ender some players expect.

Conversely, I consider Annul and Echoing Truth, one- and two-mana response cards, vital to beating Affinity with my blue decks. Annul is one of the only cards that is generally effective against Aether Vial, especially on the first turn. Because Aether Vial erases most of blue's response capability – even when blue can set up a turn four March – Annul is often necessary just to fight Affinity on even footing. Echoing Truth is a powerful strategic card that can be used to break up a lethal attack from any creature, artifact or no, save Blinkmoth Nexus. Because so many Affinity players go “all in” in the hopes of overwhelming the opponent before his defenses are properly set, Echoing Truth is particularly punishing. It generates card advantage by eliminating any value gained by sacrificing artifacts, and has great synergy with March of the Machines, locking an existing threat off the board for the remainder of the game.

Green:



Green is a color rich in artifact hate. With this color it is easy to “go infinite” and pack every available response card from Oxidize on one mana all the way to Molder Slug on five. Oxidize is the best of the anti-Affinity cards, better even than Viridian Shaman, for three reasons. First, it is an instant. Like Echoing Truth, it can be used strategically to break up the opponent's Big Turn. Second, it does not allow for regeneration; this is important in some cases, as Welding Jar is far from uncommon. Third, and most importantly, it costs one mana. It is often important to be able to do more than one thing in a single turn than to generate naked card advantage, even when you have the requisite three mana.

That said, Viridian Shaman is awfully spectacular, and should be considered the #2 choice after Oxidize. Many decks will start Viridian Shaman and not Oxidize, however, because of particular synergies they can create (searching for Elves, bouncing their own creatures, blocking, and so on). If an

Affinity deck sideboards Viridian Shaman, it can typically circumvent the decreased mana consistency of supporting another color with **Magic's** premiere Band-Aid, Aether Vial.

When considering green foils to Affinity, the most important thing to understand is not that you have the keys to destroy however many artifacts you like, but to understand what will beat you anyway. Woe to the player who locks down with two Molder Slugs but loses to three Disciples of the Vault. No matter how good at smashing artifacts green is, it must still be wary of losing a race with Somber Hoverguard.

Red:

Red has several strong cards against Affinity, and not surprisingly, many ways in which to combine those cards strategically for maximum effect.

The red anti-Affinity cards can be separated into three broad groups: the one-for-ones, the sweepers, and Electrostatic Bolt. Electrostatic Bolt is the best of the red anti-Affinity cards by a mile. It is one

mana, an instant, and can answer every main threat in the Affinity deck the turn it comes out. Electrostatic Bolt takes out Affinity's biggest beater (Myr Enforcer), knocks Somber Hoverguard out of the sky, halts Cranial Plating for at least one turn, and can stop both of the big early game threats/combination pieces – Disciple of the Vault and Arcbound Ravager – before the other comes online. In addition, Electrostatic Bolt has play against most of the other decks in the field, taking down opposing Slith Firewalkers, targeting Horobi, Death's Wail, and shorting out Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker.

The one-for-ones include Detonate, Echoing Ruin, and Shatter. All of these cards are comparable in power. Detonate has three main strengths and one glaring weakness. While it can take out a land on turn one, deal potentially massive amounts of damage, and beat Welding Jar, it is still slower at beating any real threat than Echoing Ruin and Shatter. Shatter is an all around playable card; you know how much mana you need to play it and you can play it at instant speed. The tradeoff is that it doesn't do anything exciting beyond those measures. Echoing Ruin is generally better at fighting redundant artifact lands and big Frogmite turns, but significantly weaker than Shatter against an active Arcbound Ravager or Atog due to its comparative strategic speed. The second strike against Echoing Ruin is that when playing it in a deck with artifacts of your own (most often Great Furnace), you have to watch what you aim for.

The main sweepers are of course Granulate and Furnace Dragon. Furnace Dragon is in a class all by itself. The caveats and strategies for playing this card fluctuate based on what kind of deck you are playing yourself. It is, for example, a very different task playing Furnace Dragon in an Affinity deck like Clair's than it is playing it in a mono-red deck like PT Kobe Champion Masashiro Kuroda's. For an Affinity player, it is probably a good idea to make sure the Furnace Dragon hurts the opponent more than it does you. This is something overlooked a surprising amount of the time, believe it or not. A strategically played Furnace Dragon should wipe away the opponent's board and give you the game in four turns. It should not be baited out and shot down with a Shrapnel Blast, leaving the other guy with three more cards in hand than you've got.



For a mono-red deck, the plan should be on life preservation. Use removal to keep your life total high and the board clear of Disciples as you ramp up the artifacts and other mana sources necessary for your bomb. If played to spec, the Furnace Dragon should usually take down an Affinity player, allowing the Red Deck to react with its remaining Mountains while the opponent struggles to rebuild his board. Remember that the Furnace Dragon is indiscriminate in its destruction, and that it is often a good idea to leave some removal back in hand to prevent the opponent from being able to recover.

Granulate is the card played most poorly in this group. While it isn't usually that difficult to identify the correct target for a one-for-one, and Furnace Dragon wins most games it shows up for whether or not it was played correctly, Granulate has neither pedigree. I have seen this card eliminate two Arcbound Workers... or a single Arcbound Worker, all while the Affinity opponent laughed his way to a win. While Granulate is no Shatterstorm, it can be a significant response, but usually only when it is played in concert with one-for-ones. If you look at your opening grip and see this card, know that, for once, it is probably right to start going after the lands. Nothing is more demoralizing to an Affinity player than the hi-lo. You hit his lands, forcing him to play out his hand. Detonate is followed by Echoing Ruin as Affinity has to go for broke... only to waltz into a Granulate for the board. The lesson? Spectacular as it sometimes can be, this card isn't that good by itself.

White:

Once upon a time, white had the best Affinity foil in Akroma's Vengeance, conveniently packaged in the same block as Temple of the False God. This is no longer the case... but that doesn't mean that white is completely without strong anti-Affinity cards.

Pulse of the Fields remains a powerful weapon against the format's best deck. Affinity can deal 20 in 4 without getting its best draw, but often has difficulty dealing 24 against resistance, let alone 28.

Wrath of God remains a fundamentally strong card, even if it is weaker now that the opponents all pack Blinkmoth Nexus, Aether Vial, and Cranial Plating.

But what might be, deceptively, the strongest card against Affinity is Samurai of the Pale Curtain. Likely the main reason that White Weenie decks are viable in Standard at all, the fox with the veil turns off both Arcbound Ravager's modular ability and Disciple of the Vault's lethal triggers while successfully fighting almost every creature in the opposing deck. Is it a bomb like Akroma's Vengeance? No way. No sir. But, like a green creature that we've talked a lot about since the unveiling of *Champions of Kamigawa* – Sakura-Tribe Elder – Samurai of the Pale Curtain's cheap cost allows it to heavily disrupt Affinity's ability to set up its minimum game in the early turns.

You will note that most of the "best" anti-Affinity cards as I have broken them out are solid cards in many matchups. Horobi is an efficient bruiser in every matchup. Echoing Truth, Electrostatic Bolt, and Samurai of the Pale Curtain have play against essentially every opponent; because so many players inexplicably choose to run Sensei's Divining Top, so does Annul.



Green Decks – Tooth and Nail, B/G, and U/G

Tooth and Nail

Archetype Deck: Bryn Kenney, Columbus LCQ Slot Winner

Bryn Kenney		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
10 Forest	3 Oblivion Stone	1 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	2 Reap and Sow	1 Leonin Abunas
4 Urza's Mine	1 Rude Awakening	2 Naturalize
4 Urza's Power Plant	2 Sensei's Divining Top	3 Oxidize
4 Urza's Tower	4 Sylvan Scrying	1 Platinum Angel
	4 Tooth and Nail	3 Plow Under
23 lands		3 Relic Barrier
	16 other spells	1 Rude Awakening
1 Darksteel Colossus		15 sideboard cards
1 Duplicant		

4 Eternal Witness
1 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker
1 Mephidross Vampire
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder
4 Solemn Simulacrum
1 Sundering Titan
1 Triskelion
3 Viridian Shaman

21 creatures

As I mentioned last week, this deck was successful not only in the Columbus LCQ, but in the \$2000 Amateur Challenge, giving it pedigree beyond even a Champs win. Bryn's deck is pretty basic, with the most interesting element being Mephidross Vampire + Triskelion main deck. Being uninteresting is no crime, however, and is usually a case where a deck is consistent... after all, when was the last time we saw successful deviation out of Ravager Affinity?



Black:

Black has the straight up best anti-Tooth and Nail card in all of Standard: Cranial Extraction. I won't go so far as to say that Tooth can't win when the Extraction hits, but it certainly has a hard time not embarrassing itself. Bryn's deck can continue to function after it has lost all its copies of Tooth and Nail, and even win in dramatic fashion with Rude Awakening, but victory is much harder in coming, with the deck's failings increasingly obvious.

For example, the mana base of the Urzatron version of Tooth and Nail is ridiculously inconsistent, with even the *first* green source often hitting play turns too late. When the deck can no longer cheat out its main threats, little things like this become increasing liabilities as the opponent continues to apply pressure.

Blue:

Blue has something like two and a half ridiculous response cards to Tooth and Nail, though they function on varying levels of effectiveness depending on the opponent's build. The absolute best card is Temporal Adept, due to its combination of speed and total domination of the game. Any mono-green Tooth and Nail deck usually scoops to turn three Temporal Adept, should never be able to assemble the correct mana to play Tooth and Nail, and should it in fact hit the right mana, should probably not be able to hit the blue player with a threat. Temporal Adept is of course less effective as the game goes on, and not effective at all against the G/r Tooth and Nail decks with Electrostatic Bolt, such as the one Jeff Garza used to win GP New Jersey.

Bribery is awfully strong against Tooth and Nail as well. It is a nice card to play on turn five after a blue mage has screwed up Tooth's early search, and possibly a better card to play on turn six with Annul mana open. Against a naked board, Darksteel Colossus is a nice target, especially as the opponent will not generally be able to beat that card with anything other than his lone Duplicant. Greedy players, or players who have ruined the opponent with a flurry of one-for-one counters into

profitable card drawing, will go for Eternal Witness, returning a Bribery; I'll let your imagination go from there.

Slightly less absurd, and certainly worse overall, is Acquire. Still strong in many of the same ways Bribery is, Acquire has the added bonus of being able to snag a Mindslaver.

Green:

Green has two very good routes to beating Tooth and Nail. Both of them cost 3GG. Obviously Plow Under is a godsend, especially when powered out by some sort of acceleration. Plow Under on five mana is faster than Tooth and Nail, and because of the Tooth deck's erratic mana base, might be faster than a Reap and Sow with no Entwine. Plow Under is far from game over, though. Remember that you still have to beat the other guy after you've slowed down his Urzatron for a turn or two, and that finding the appropriate route is easier said than done.



What is deceptively the best anti-Tooth and Nail card in green – and possibly any color – is Molder Slug. The reason is that Molder Slug can beat Tooth and Nail even after Tooth and Nail has gotten its draw. Decks like Bryn's are harder to beat because of main-deck Mephidross Vampire + Triskelion, as are those who have chosen to run Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker, but for the most part, Tooth and Nail decks have a hard time actually killing a player who controls a Molder Slug. Molder Slug stops Darksteel Colossus, Triskelion, and painful though it may be, Sundering Titan. Unlike Plow Under or even Cranial Extraction, Molder Slug also presents itself as a way to win.

Red:

Red doesn't seem to have any one card that is particularly disgusting against Tooth and Nail, but Red Decks in general seem good against Tooth and Nail decks in general, so it all balances out. Cards that Red Decks just play, like Molten Rain, can be targeted strategically to ruin Tooth and Nail's development. Decks that aren't particularly aggressive, like Kuroda's Kobe deck, can burn Tooth out with ease. While Tooth and Nail has reasonable permanent defense in Oblivion Stone and potentially dominating creature defense in Mephidross Vampire + Triskelion, its only real outs against burn are Leonin Abunas + Platinum Angel or racing with Rude Awakening. The former combination is in Bryn's sideboard, and the latter is far from a consistent play in most decks. Going for the wrong quick kill threats with Tooth and Nail – even Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker + Darksteel Colossus – can be tragic against some builds, such as those with Grab the Reins.

An oblique choice that was made by Florida Champ Michael Strunk was to sideboard Zo-Zu the Punisher. This card, while not overwhelming by itself, is quite effective against green land search in general, including Kodama's Reach and Sakura-Tribe Elder, and not just Tooth and Nail's Reap and Sow. Zo-Zu the Punisher won't win the game alone, but in concert with a lot of burn, he can make decision making, and even playing the green deck's basic game, a mental trial that just ends in getting burned out anyway.

White:

White doesn't actually have a lot of tools against Tooth and Nail. Mono-white decks, or any white deck that doesn't include blue, for instance, is just going to get hit with something like a Mindslaver and have no say in the matter. White's creatures are totally outclassed by those in Tooth and Nail, as well.

In terms of specific response cards, Stasis Cocoon isn't half bad... the only problem is that against a resolved Tooth and Nail, Stasis Cocoon implies a loss of card economy, and doesn't even get rid of the opposing creature in the case of Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker. Reciprocate is surprisingly not awful against certain threats, but using it against giant bombs is obviously painful. Ethereal Haze is actually quite potent against cards like Rude Awakening, and has applications against Atog, Myr Incubator, and similar attacks intending to win the game in a single stroke.

B/G

Archetype Deck: Joshua X. Claytor, Kentucky State Champion 2004



Joshua Claytor		text	
Main Deck	Sideboard		
60 cards			
1 Boseiju, Who Shelters All	4 Barter in Blood	1 Boseiju, Who Shelters All	
12 Forest	3 Death Cloud	1 Death Cloud	
10 Swamp	4 Echoing Decay	4 Naturalize	
23 lands	4 Kodama's Reach	3 Persecute	
	4 Oxidize	2 Rude Awakening	
4 Eternal Witness	4 Plow Under	4 Viridian Shaman	
4 Kokusho, the Evening Star	2 Sylvan Scrying	15 sideboard cards	
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	25 other spells		
12 creatures			

This deck cheats on lands a little much for my liking – only 23 lands in a deck with multiple 5 and 6 mana bombs – but having played against this deck in a tournament, I can say that it hits its threats pretty consistently due to Kodama's Reach and Sakura-Tribe Elder (still the best card to come out of *Champions of Kamigawa*).

Black:

The matchup against any control black deck is going to be a resource war. Consider specifically the topic of Death Cloud. Which deck can profitably resolve the Cloud? Either one deck has to play many more lands than the other in order to leave lands on its side while crippling the opponent's, or one deck has to manipulate non-creature resources such that it has a relevant advantage post-Cloud. Against a deck with Sakura-Tribe Elder, Kodama's Reach, and Plow Under, this is easier said than done. The presence of Oxidize (and potentially Naturalize or even Viridian Shaman) makes

sandbagging with Chrome Mox, Guardian Idol, and so on out of Josh Sandler's deck (see below) similarly problematic.

One route is to dance around the relevant permanent types with cards like Phyrexian Arena, especially as Claytor's build has zero early game pressure. This might allow for a resource sandbag, or at least a post-Death Cloud advantage. I don't know that Persecute would be very effective, as the two colored nature of Claytor's deck might embarrassingly force a one-for-one, and even if the card drew two spells, nobody plays Unnerve in constructed.

From a beatdown standpoint, a black deck is similarly without specific key weapons, just because the B/G deck has cards like Echoing Decay and Barter in Blood.

The best strategy might just be to power out Consume Spirit for five or more life, and then let the two black decks duke it out with Kokusho, the Evening Star and Death Cloud. A five point Consume Spirit implies a ten life advantage, making even a lone hit with a Dragon potentially lethal in combination with a medium mana Death Cloud. Similarly, it puts pressure on Claytor's deck to find its own Kokusho while at the same time making the B/G Death Cloud less attractive.

Alternately, a black player can just try to take out the B/G win conditions. Cranial Extraction for Kokusho, the Evening Star leaves only 2/1 and 1/1 guys for too much mana as the beatdown. For the high on life, a similar strategy can be just trying to kill the Dragons, though that is obviously a painful route that can spell dome come Death Cloud time.

Blue:

On the flip side, the Claytor B/G deck is pretty weak against dedicated blue. With no early game pressure, every key threat can be countered or stolen, and even the Eternal Witnesses can be flummoxed with Hinder. While a blue mage never likes to be on the wrong end of a Plow Under, Boseiju forcing out Death Cloud is less relevant than it might seem... There is no guarantee that the B/G deck will be on top, or will topdeck better than the blue deck afterwards.

The same cards that aid blue against Tooth and Nail are relevant here. Bribery for Kokusho will draw either an immediate response or will end the game, and many players will have no Echoing Decay for Temporal Adept post-board.

Green:

What green cards are good really implies another question: what is the green deck's other color? A straight green deck is at a huge disadvantage against B/G. If Claytor's deck wants to beat Tooth and Nail, all it has to do is sideboard Cranial Extraction, and any other sort of deck, based on pure beatdown, Beacon of Creation, or Rude Awakening-driven horde attacks all have to contend with Echoing Decay and superior control cards, not to mention just racing fifth turn Kokusho.

Like against black, a green deck can enter a resource war, trying to make Death Cloud less profitable with Plow Under, or just pre-empting the B/G bombs with this sort of mana denial. Various G/R or U/G decks will fight B/G with totally different cards, possibly driven by green spells, but likely not winning with green itself. The most annoying anti-Death Cloud spell has to be Kodama's Reach, but in this case, as Claytor has that card himself, it is significantly less powerful than it would be against, say, mono-black Death Cloud.



Red:

Red has a lot of different ways to beat a deck like B/G, none of them outstanding, but most of them serviceable. One of the things that really struck me as odd in testing for Champs was how much a deck with a Molten Rain could put a deck with Sakura-Tribe Elder and potentially Kodama's Reach off its game. The math doesn't seem to make sense, until you consider the strict mana requirements of some of the upper bombs of a deck like Claytor's. If the Red Deck has a quick Slith Firewalker, one Molten Rain on a Swamp might be all it needs to force through a win if B/G doesn't have the Echoing Decay immediately in hand.


B/G is profoundly better against the best red cards than, say, U/G is, but it is still fairly vulnerable to burn. Grab the Reins on Kokusho is of course a bloodbath, but that shouldn't come up very often.

White:

Poor white. Someday we will hit the match-ups where it has good cards again. I promise. White based control will have to rely on its blue cards to beat B/G, and even then, it has a much harder time than straight blue. White Weenie is totally outclassed by Barter in Blood, Death Cloud, and Echoing Decay. Actually most of the cards in the B/G deck do a number on most of the cards in a White Weenie deck, and it just gets worse when the Persecutes come in.

U/G

Archetype Deck: Steve Hagy, Columbus \$2000 Amateur Challenge Runner-up

Steven Hagy			
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
10 Forest	3 Condescend	2 Bribery	
12 Island	4 Echoing Truth	3 Last Word	
22 lands	4 Mana Leak	4 Oxidize	
	2 Rude Awakening	2 Tel-Jilad Justice	
	3 Thirst for Knowledge	4 Troll Ascetic	
4 Eternal Witness	4 Vedalken Shackles	15 sideboard cards	
2 Meloku the Clouded Mirror	20 other spells		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder			
4 Solemn Simulacrum			
4 Viridian Shaman			
18 creatures			

Steven played exactly the same main deck as Matt Scott's Columbus LCQ deck, which we have seen previously. The only difference is Last Word in the sideboard in place of Hinder and one Tel-Jilad Justice. I actually like Last Word better because in the mirror match you can counter your opponent's Rude Awakening or other game-ending spell, and it's really just over. Last Word is kind of a lame

cover spell, though, because (on top of being an extra mana) the opponent can just let the Last Word resolve, then counter your original spell again.

Black:

Creature kill is actually pretty good against this version of U/G because the creatures are all pretty easy to kill, and none of them is a very efficient beater for its cost... but only if you aim at the right creatures. For example, it's probably not a great idea to spend a lot of creature kill on Solemn Simulacrum (unless they've got two and you've got Echoing Decay... and even then it's not that hot). But the fact is that U/G might just run out. Clearly the best creature to hit is Island, after the opponent has Entwined Rude Awakening, and the correct elimination spell to cast is Echoing Decay. If you haven't already lost, you probably won't lose a game where the above sequence occurs.



Things are complicated by Meloku, who is exceptional in a deck like this one. He is fairly robust and fights black sweepers really well. Meloku really takes the wind out of Barter in Blood's sails and, going long, probably outlasts Echoing Decay.

Blue:

Blue will have trouble against a deck like this one because it is essentially playing against itself... but with twice as much mana. Straight blue tends to rely on artifacts for both offense and its permanent defense, and U/G has tons of ways to kill artifacts. Counters are of decreasing value against a deck with counters of its own and more lands in play.

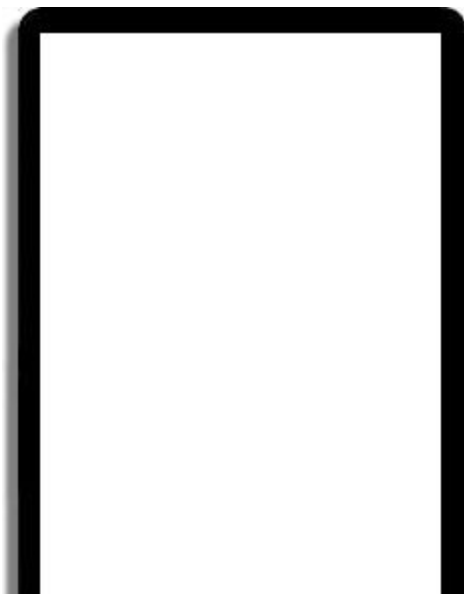
A combination of cards is necessary to beat U/G from the blue perspective. Temporal Adept by itself should be good for a win, but not if the opponent immediately responds with Troll Ascetic. In that case, blue has to find a large blocker while managing the U/G deck's board. Vedalken Shackles is pretty annoying but probably not game over for either side.

U/W is at a huge disadvantage as its white cards are awful in the matchup while the green cards are fantastic.

Green:

Molder Slug is actually pretty good against this deck just because it keeps U/G from being able to generate any lasting advantage with Vedalken Shackles. At the same time, Molder Slug is a decent sized body, capable of fighting every creature. It's also the kind of card a green deck wouldn't mind having after sideboard, whereas Oxidize, Viridian Shaman, and so on have a tendency to suck if the opponent sided out Shackles, or just didn't draw it.

A green deck's victory path is probably going to require not getting beaten by Meloku, because racing the Clouded Mirror can be next to impossible. With just five lands in play, a U/G deck can imply a three turn clock from 20 life, and should probably have enough in reserve to strategically chump.



Another green deck can of course seek to overwhelm the U/G deck with Beacon of Creation or Rude Awakening. Mana Leak is awful against green decks, even if you yourself are green, and Condescend is pretty inconsistent as well. As we mentioned before, Last Word shines in the mirror.

As with many other match-ups, better than you might have expected...

Red:

Besides obvious cards like Choke and Boil, which are actually of varying effectiveness depending on the opponent's draw, the best card against U/G is Arc-Slogger. Saving Vedalken Shackles, Arc-Slogger is really difficult to contain once it is in play, and its ability can't be countered with Mana Leak or Condescend.

Out of the sideboard, a good strategy is to attack the mana with conventional weapons like Stone Rain and Molten Rain. Either you will draw counters or should win outright. Timing Boil for U/G's frequent early-game tap-outs is a powerful tactic. Remember that Boil not only destroys lands, but restricts U/G's ability to contain Arc-Slogger with Vedalken Shackles.

White:

White's response cards are arguably worse against U/G than they are against Tooth and Nail. Ethereal Haze is relevant against U/G's primary plan of winning with a big Rude Awakening but White has little recourse against Meloku in the long term. Just think about Meloku against a deck playing with Suntail Hawks and try to figure out how white can win over many turns.

White beatdown has to have a redundant evasion draw early game and hit very hard. White is outclassed by green in terms of mana and creature quality, and has no peer to Rude Awakening or Meloku.

One strategy that works against green decks in general and is not restricted to any of the above three archetypes, or the next two, is Grim Reminder out of B/G. Because the green decks of all different colors play so many cards in common, Grim Reminder can be a good way to deal a lot of damage. In addition to being a "Ball Lightning", Grim Reminder is free card drawing. Just one or two hits with this card can help push an already synergistic deck over the top in a match.

G/R decks: Freshmaker and Kiki-Jiki

Freshmaker

Archetype Deck: David Weitz, Top 8 Ohio State Championships 2004

David Weitz		 	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
61 cards			
12 Forest	4 Electrostatic Bolt	3 Cranial Extraction	
8 Mountain	4 Kodama's Reach	3 Grab the Reins	
1 Swamp	4 Magma Jet	3 Granulate	
21 lands	3 Plow Under	3 Naturalize	
	3 Rude Awakening	3 Rend Flesh	
		15 sideboard cards	

18 other spells

4 Birds of Paradise
4 Eternal Witness
3 Hearth Kami
3 Kumano, Master Yamabushi
3 Sakura-Tribe Elder
2 Solemn Simulacrum
3 Viridian Shaman

22 creatures

The Freshmaker decks never really look good on paper. David's Not so Freshmaker is not only 61 cards but plays a lot of 3-ofs. It seems strange to have only 3 Sakura-Tribe Elders but also room for 2 Solemn Simulacrums. Ditto on the 3 and 3 split on Hearth Kami and Viridian Shaman. That said, Freshmaker has all kinds of weapons that function in all kinds of matchups... Kodama's Reach against Death Cloud, Plow Under against Tooth and Nail, Hearth Kami, Viridian Shaman, and Electrostatic Bolt against Affinity, Rude Awakening against decks with life totals.

Black:

David's deck is mana light (21 lands) and also plays cards that cost 8. It has no real card drawing, and most of its card advantage is based on relative land positions. Black can therefore disrupt Freshmaker's development with discard for great effect. Distress for Kodama's Reach, for example, can really hurt Freshmaker's early game, while Chittering Rats and Ravenous Rats can legitimately trade with a lot of Freshmaker's creatures.

Blue:

The various blue control decks are quite good against Freshmaker, whether or not they use particular specialized cards to win. Dave's version really only has 3 Hearth Kami for pressure (though they are quite annoying). This version with only Kumano and the very expensive Rude Awakening for real late-game closers is particularly susceptible to decks with a lot of permission.

Green:

Again, the question is: what color is paired with green? A straight green deck is typically going to be at a disadvantage against this one. Tooth and Nail, for instance, fails against both the main-deck Plow Unders and the sideboarded Cranial Extractions with typically no permission to protect itself.

When both decks are fighting to get enough mana for a Rude Awakening, only certain cards are relevant at all. Freshmaker's Viridian Shamans are pretty pathetic, for instance, and Kumano loses a fight straight up with Arc-Slogger. It is not difficult to build another G/R deck that will succeed against this version, or to tune a U/G or even B/G deck for the same purpose; Weitz, for example, lost in his Ohio Top 8 to another G/R deck with Arc-Slogger main.



Red:

There are no magic bullets for Red Decks against Freshmaker, but red nevertheless has a lot of play here. Freshmaker's creatures are very easy to contain with even a single Arc-Slogger, and any deck with a lot of burn can race. If it comes down to a fair fight, Red is typically going to win, but Freshmaker has Rude Awakening. With Rude Awakening, it can win out of nowhere, totally behind on both cards and life. Red is therefore tasked with keeping Freshmaker off of eight, either depleting its resources or winning the game outright before Rude Awakening can end it for the other team.



White:

I don't like either white control or beatdown against Freshmaker. White's creatures are for the most part outclassed by green's, and white's unique natural advantages are for the most part contained by the synergies between green and red. Consider for example a very good creature against Red Decks, Auriok Champion. It doesn't really win a fight against Sakura-Tribe Elder, let alone something bigger. If the opponent isn't playing very well, cards like Pulse of the Fields can give him big problems, but ultimately, he can play for either total board control with Kumano, or Rude Awakening, or both. White is not usually going to be able to contain a huge Rude Awakening with either Pulse of the Fields or Auriok Champion, but can give Freshmaker fits with Ethereal Haze.

From the control side of things, Wrath of God is surprisingly blah against Freshmaker because all of its guys do dumb things to make up any loss of card advantage. On the other hand, a deck like Alex Nastestsky's can play very aggressively in the early game with Suntail Hawks, Lantern Kamis, and pump, but it will have to do a lot of damage quickly or fall against Kumano or just plain-old spot removal.

Kiki-Jiki

Archetype Deck: Adam Kugler, Wisconsin State Champion 2004

Adam Kugler		 	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
2 City of Brass	4 Commune with Nature	1 Duplicant	
11 Forest	4 Magma Jet	3 Electrostatic Bolt	
1 Island	2 Sensei's Divining Top	4 Intruder Alarm	
7 Mountain	10 other spells	1 Pain Kami	
1 Pinecrest Ridge		3 Plow Under	
22 lands		1 Rootrunner	
		1 Viridian Shaman	
		1 Viridian Zealot	
		15 sideboard cards	
4 Birds of Paradise			
2 Duplicant			
4 Eternal Witness			
4 Hearth Kami			
4 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker			
3 Rootrunner			
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder			
3 Viridian Shaman			

28 creatures

Literally the best thing about Kugler's Champs winning deck is the fact that he plays four copies of Hearth Kami. Hearth Kami is far and away the best card in this deck, better than Viridian Shaman against Affinity for its speed, vastly better against blue control, and just more efficient against every other deck. I actually find it criminal that most people don't play four copies.

Black:

The Kiki-Jiki decks get smashed by Death Cloud. The problem with them is that even when they get going, even if they get Eternal Witness going for a couple of turns, they don't generate enough cards in hand to run with a big Cloud. Most of the Death Cloud decks, both B/G and mono-black, can reliably out-mana Kiki-Jiki with its 22 lands and 4 Sakura-Tribe Elders only, and erase almost any advantage the Kiki-Jiki deck was able to generate. Soulshift is mildly annoying, and the Rootrunners, embarrassingly enough, are relevant in the sense that they can help keep a Death Cloud deck off of a profitable mana position. That said, if the Death Cloud deck simply prevents the opponent from locking him with Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker + Rootrunner, he shouldn't have any huge problems winning the game.



Blue:

The jury is still out as to who is advantaged in this matchup. Jon Becker with mono-blue and Brian Kowal with Kiki-Jiki actually Intentionally Drew in the Columbus LCQ, playtested the matchup, and both felt that their side could or should have won. The difference between a deck with 3 Hearth Kami and 4 is going to be significant for the blue deck on turn two, as the Kiki-Jiki deck has no other legitimate clocks, with most of its threats pretty clunky.

In sideboarded games, Bribery will shine. Kiki-Jiki will have to side dedicated hate to fight back... I don't see any other way that it will be able to handle counter depth combined with its own Eternal Witnesses every turn.

Green:

According to the Wisconsin cadre, Rootrunner beats other green decks, especially Tooth and Nail, going very long. This probably shouldn't be much of a factor for many decks, though, as U/G can counter Kiki-Jiki just long enough, and Freshmaker can bolt either Kiki-Jiki himself or his target while setting up mana acceleration into a big Rude Awakening. Kiki-Jiki doesn't have anything on the order of a Rude Awakening, while all the other green decks do.

Kugler's version can just win quickly with Intruder Alarm, though, and Intruder Alarm is much faster than Rude Awakening.

It seems therefore that the player facing the Kiki-Jiki deck has to contain the combos and just play his basic game otherwise, because the Kiki-Jiki player can't win a fair fight. From the other side of the

table, the Kiki-Jiki player has to sculpt his game to force through a dirty game, because, again, he can't win a fair one.

Red:

As with many of the green matchups, Arc-Slogger is very good. In the case of the Kiki-Jiki deck, it has no very good way to contain Arc-Slogger, whereas most of its main permanents roll over and die to it. An interesting tactic is to play Arc-Slogger *in* the Kiki-Jiki deck. This gives one player twice the five mana red goodness as well as a way to break the Mirror Breaker, literally.

Another card that is quite spicy is Pyroclasm. It kills a certain Legendary Goblin Shaman dead; it kills most of his entourage. It costs two mana. Even when Kiki-Jiki gets its best draw, the opponent typically has several turns to live, so cards like Pyroclasm can actually be viable responses even after the worst has happened.



White:

Just as Pyroclasm is good, Wrath of God has a lot of play. Make no mistake, the Kiki-Jiki deck is probably sandbagging an Eternal Witness, but the card will still have a relevant effect on most games. It should be very good for clearing the board in anticipation of a finisher, for instance, but don't expect white control by itself to beat a deck with so many utility creatures.

White Weenie

Archetype Decks:

Radford Ellenburg, Alabama State Champion 2004

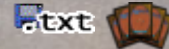
Radford Ellenburg		TEXT	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
3 City of Brass	4 Electrostatic Bolt	2 Auriok Champion	
1 Eiganjo Castle	4 Glorious Anthem	4 Guerrilla Tactics	
3 Mountain	3 Otherworldly Journey	3 Karma	
12 Plains	2 Raise the Alarm	1 Mountain	
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep		2 Sacred Ground	
	13 other spells	3 Shatter	
20 lands		15 sideboard cards	
1 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails			
3 Hearth Kami			
2 Isamaru, Hound of Konda			
3 Kami of Ancient Law			
4 Lantern Kami			

4 Leonin Skyhunter
 1 Masako the Humorless
 1 Nagao, Bound by Honor
 4 Samurai of the Pale Curtain
 4 Savannah Lions

27 creatures

Alex Nastetsky, Top 2 Maryland State Championships 2004

Alex Nastetsky



Main Deck

60 cards

3 Blinkmoth Nexus
 1 Eiganjo Castle
 16 Plains

20 lands

4 Auriok Champion
 3 Isamaru, Hound of Konda
 4 Lantern Kami
 4 Leonin Skyhunter
 4 Samurai of the Pale Curtain
 4 Suntail Hawk

23 creatures

4 Bonesplitter
 2 Chrome Mox
 4 Glorious Anthem
 4 Raise the Alarm
 3 Roar of the Kha

17 other spells

Sideboard

3 Arrest
 3 Ethereal Haze
 4 Otherworldly Journey
 4 Purge
 1 Roar of the Kha

15 sideboard cards

These decks obviously show significant differences from one another, but playing against them should actually be pretty similar. Despite his inclusion of red, Ellenburg's Jank deck doesn't have a significant burn component, and despite touching a second color, the Jank deck still plays many of the same creatures as Nestetsky's mono-White Weenie.

Black:

Horobi, Death's Wail is fantastic against Nastetsky's deck, but only very good against Ellenburg's. Ellenburg has Electrostatic Bolt, Eight-and-a-Half-Tails, and twice the Legendary Lands as the Maryland Finalist. As a 4/4 flyer, Horobi can contain Lantern Kami, Suntail Hawk, and Leonin Skyhunter with ease.

In addition, any sort of mass creature kill is probably also good against these decks, and gains additional strategic strength when combined with discard, hitting the White Weenie deck both high and low. If the White Weenie player under-commits to the board, especially Nastetsky's deck will fall

prey to Persecute. Barter in Blood is probably very effective in general, though I would hold off on reckless Death Clouds just because of the presence of Otherworldly Journey.

That said, black gets a nasty surprise from Karma... In a long game against Ellenburg, it may be necessary to play a card like Oblivion Stone just not to lose automatically.

Blue:

Both White Weenie versions have serious problems with Vedalken Shackles. Over the long game, Meloku is probably also tough to crack. However, in the early game, both decks have significant threats that they can play on just 1-2 mana that the blue deck cannot answer the way it can an Affinity creature. In a world without Disenchant, this matchup can go either way with blue lacking any real bullet beyond Vedalken Shackles but White Weenie lacking any real finisher.



Serious trouble...



Green:

Green's creatures outclass white's in terms of pure size and efficiency. While the cheap flyers can't be easily stopped, most everything else can. Strangely, one of the key cards to winning may be Naturalize. Glorious Anthem is one of the few relevant enchantments in Standard, and both listed White Weenie decks use it to boost the size of their creatures; in this case, Naturalize removes white's ability to put its creatures on even footing.

The greater issue for white is a lack of reach. The small flyers and other aggressive creatures, such as Savannah Lions or Isamaru, Hound of Konda, are good at beating an opponent up, but neither White Weenie build has a legitimate way to end the game. I am actually surprised at the absence of a card like Shrapnel Blast in Ellenburg's deck... it seems like he would be able to do the first 10 damage really easily with his Lantern Kamis and Leonin Skyhunters, but that beating the opponent before he gets off a huge Tooth and Nail or Rude Awakening is more the problem.

Red:

Pyroclasm probably performs better against these white decks than against any other sort of deck we will look at today. Even with a single Glorious Anthem down, Pyroclasm is effective against many key creatures. It is useful not just in a Red Deck but also out of the Affinity sideboard. Because many of Affinity's creatures are bigger than x/2 and because removing Samurai of the Pale Curtain is so key, Pyroclasm may grow into an Affinity sideboard staple if White Weenie increases in popularity.

Flashfires is, in its way, even better. While Flashfires does not address the key threats presented by the White Weenie decks, it can cripple the deck's ability to maintain mid-game pressure while a Red Deck starts to take control of the board. That said, White Weenie probably isn't common enough to warrant this card.



White:

Once again, Wrath of God shows its strength, this time in white on white violence. Wrath of God may be at its best against decks like Ellenburg's and Nastetsky's because it is raw card advantage without much of a downside. These decks don't follow up with Aether Vial, and they can't punish a control player with an instant win after he foolishly taps mana on his own turn.

In the beatdown mirror, it seems Ellenburg's has the edge over Nastetsky's due to just having more creatures, as well as four Electrostatic Bolts. I am a little wary of only 20 lands in a deck with a four drop, but one Nagao is unlikely to totally screw Ellenburg's consistency. I am not sure how either deck, at present, can really generate an advantage over another White Weenie deck... Like in Limited, defensive use of Otherworldly Journey can proxy a creature while increasing power in play. Oddly enough, either deck can probably sandbag the other beyond the capability to win with Pulse of the Fields and anything to follow up (probably Wrath of God). The disadvantage, of course, is the fact that sideboard space is at a premium, other White Weenie decks don't really demand a lot of slots, and neither deck really has the mana to fight this kind of battle under pressure.

Blue Control

Kris Goding, 1st Place, Queensland Champs 2004

Kris Goding		 	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
3 Blinkmoth Nexus	3 Annul	1 Annul	
18 Island	3 Condescend	3 Bribery	
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	3 Echoing Truth	3 Jushi Apprentice	
3 Stalking Stones	4 Hinder	3 Last Word	
	4 Mana Leak	4 March of the Machines	
25 lands	2 Oblivion Stone	1 Relic Barrier	
	3 Relic Barrier		15 sideboard cards
3 Keiga, the Tide Star	4 Thirst for Knowledge		
2 Meloku the Clouded Mirror	4 Vedalken Shackles		
5 creatures	30 other spells		

Goding's build cheats a lot by playing 3 copies of many cards in order to fit margin-for-error responses like Oblivion Stone and more heavy hitters. I actually think that his deck needs at least one more land, and his current mana configuration hurts him against both another blue control deck and against Affinity. Because he has only 3 Relic Barriers, Blinkmoth Nexus becomes that much more

important at blocking the opponent's Nexus, so starting down one takes away a valuable basic resource.

Black:

Black can beat mono-blue two different ways. One of them is with Nantuko Shade. Nantuko Shade is of course no longer available, but he remains with us in spirit. Any of the viable black two drops will do a number on this deck, which has to fight back with Vedalken Shackles. Playing first, getting a two drop down is pretty much guaranteed, and that creature should be able to do a lot with very little. How impressive is it to have Nezumi Shortfang or Nezumi Cutthroat on defense?

The second route black can take at beating blue is of course disruption. With no Inspirations, Goding's deck has no good way to consistently increase his hand size; he is limited to Thirst for Knowledge + Relic Barrier to fight hand destruction, meaning that even 1-for-1 cards like Distress will be effective.

The biggest mistake a black player can make would be to allow the blue deck to untap with Meloku out. At that point, only Nezumi Cutthroat will be relevant. Hand destruction? Who cares? Barter in Blood? Be my guest. You should be able to see what the Clouded Mirror does to a black mage.

Blue:

I don't see another blue control deck as having to do much in particular to beat this version of blue control. Just having 1-2 more lands and a full compliment of Blinkmoth Nexus and Stalking Stones should win it. There is an old adage that the blue mirror is not won, but lost, by the player who plays the first non-instant spell, and that usually ends up being the guy who has fewer lands in his deck. Overall, Stalking Stones is the most important card. While any Stalking Stones response can be easily contained with Annul or some other counter, Stalking Stones itself can't be countered, can't be destroyed with Oblivion Stone, and fights with relative quickness through the Red Zone. Keiga and Meloku are pretty bad in the mirror because they cost so much mana. These Legendary Creatures are just going to eat a Condescend while the opponent has enough mana left over to play his card drawing.

Green:

If you expect a lot of blue control, Choke is of course a good card to side in, but I don't believe that there is generally enough mono-blue to warrant that hateful sideboard option. The cards that green typically runs to fight Affinity are actually quite good against mono-blue. Mono-blue wins with lands as artifact creatures, and green is really good at smashing artifacts. The challenge for green is to get a clock down and kill blue or, failing that, to bleed out enough counters that Rude Awakening will be good. As we have said earlier, this strategy makes cards like Hearth Kami gold in the G/R decks; Troll Ascetic out of the U/G sideboard is also a strong threat. The green decks cannot really rely on 2/x creatures for 3 and 4/x creatures for 5 to do their damage... those kinds of threats just don't breach dedicated control very well.

Just remember that blue doesn't *just* win with man lands, and that green will need a way to race Keiga or Meloku in many games. Strategically, the blue deck might not be able to maintain or even establish total control, but that doesn't mean that it won't have a plan to win. The fat flyers in blue are like Somber Hoverguard... but a lot bigger.



Red:

Boil is probably under-played in certain archetypes. I don't really see how a deck is willing to play Stone Rain and Molten Rain in a format with Aether Vial but won't side in Boil. Boil, unlike Choke, slides under the opponent's Thirst for Knowledge very nicely.

Again, Hearth Kami is the best of Red Deck threats. Dave Price would have played Firebrand Ranger or Rage Weaver against blue mages and consistently killed them... Hearth Kami is the same, but with a very relevant ability against a deck full of faux artifact creatures that seeks to win long game with Vedalken Shackles control.

A card that has been criminally overlooked *against* both black and Red Decks is Crucible of Worlds. If we assume that one of the key plays black can make against blue control is to drop a turn two Nezumi Shortfang, isn't tapping out for Crucible of Worlds a ridiculously effective play the next turn? With so much land destruction in so many Red Decks, Crucible is a free source of card advantage – both virtual and Yawgmoth style – freeing up permission and taking the sting out of even tremendous plays like turn four Boil.



White:

Mono-blue has almost no defense against a deck playing Lantern Kami and Suntail Hawk in the early game. If White makes its land drops going first, it can probably punch through more than half of blue's life total with cheap flyers before Goding's deck can marshall one of its two Oblivion Stones (and most decks have *zero* main!). The control cards are of course worthless, Vedalken Shackles can be tricky, but just having a critical mass of cheap threats will go a long way against a deck focused on countering threats rather than answering them once they are already in play.

That said, the lack of finishing punch we talked about earlier will really hurt the White Weenie decks should Meloku come down. Meloku can single-handedly answer every 1/1 flyer the White Weenie deck can present without spending a card. With no finishing burn on the other side of the table, the blue mage can sit comfortably on 1 life for as long as he wishes as his flyers control the skies.



Black Control

Thomas Wood, Ohio State Champion 2004

Thomas Wood		f.txt 	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Chrome Mox	1 Chittering Rats	
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	2 Consume Spirit	4 Cranial Extraction	
17 Swamp	3 Death Cloud	2 Dark Banishing	
	3 Distress	1 Distress	

22 lands	2 Lose Hope	3 Hideous Laughter
	4 Phyrexian Arena	4 Relic Barrier
3 Chittering Rats	3 Rend Flesh	15 sideboard cards
3 Horobi, Death's Wail	3 Wayfarer's Bauble	
4 Kokusho, the Evening Star	24 other spells	
4 Solemn Simulacrum		
14 creatures		

Josh Sandler, Top 2 New York State Championships 2004

Josh Sandler		 
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Barter in Blood	3 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
20 Swamp	3 Chrome Mox	3 Cranial Extraction
24 lands	3 Consume Spirit	2 Echoing Decay
	3 Death Cloud	3 Horobi, Death's Wail
3 Kokusho, the Evening Star	4 Distress	4 Relic Barrier
4 Solemn Simulacrum	4 Guardian Idol	15 sideboard cards
7 creatures	2 Persecute	
	3 Phyrexian Arena	
	3 Sensei's Divining Top	
	29 other spells	

These two black control decks share a lot of cards, but have very different specific interactions. Josh Sandler's we have looked at before; Thomas Wood's won one of the largest US State Championships. Were they to play head to head, I'd give the edge to Sandler because he has not just more, but a *lot* more mana, as well as more relevant, "hard to hit" sources in Guardian Idol, but Wood's deck seems better against most conventional opposition. He can slow down G/R with Chittering Rats and has Horobi main against Affinity.

Black:

The absolute nuts in this matchup has to be Persecute. These decks can drop Persecute on turn three with Chrome Mox or Guardian Idol, and such a play – especially on the play – will generate a tremendous advantage in the mirror. I hated Sandler's main-deck Persecutes at States, but if a player expects mono-black, all I can say is to sideboard one or two more.

Blue:

If the blue deck can drop Vedalken Shackles all it really has to do is counter Death Cloud (and make sure that the black deck doesn't force through Death Cloud, of course). Everything else is pretty irrelevant. The Black deck has to win with creatures, and Vedalken Shackles takes creatures (while Death Cloud reduces the effectiveness of Vedalken Shackles). The black deck's threats are fairly expensive and/or clunky, meaning that, unless it somehow gets murdered with discard, the blue deck should be able to bury the black deck with card advantage. Yeah, that said, blue should probably Annul the Arena. Just in case.



Green:

I don't think that Spreading Algae is very good. I've tried to break it in every relevant format since 1999, and it just doesn't work out. The current green decks are pretty notoriously weak against disruption + Death Cloud, with the best of the crop being a B/G deck optimized for Death Cloud itself. That said, Kodama's Reach is one of the best anti-Death Cloud cards because it allows a green mage to make Death Cloud look unattractive from the other side of the table. It is faster than Solemn Simulacrum and doesn't get Oxidized. The math probably makes Sakura-Tribe Elder look pretty swell as well, which should tell you that getting a mana advantage is something that will typically stave off the Cloud.

Red:

Two words: Shrapnel Blast.



We saw Guerrilla Tactics in Ellenburg's sideboard, above, but nothing makes Death Cloud look terrible like Shrapnel Blast. It takes out Horobi, it kills a careless Cloud player, it gives you something to do with that Solemn Simulacrum or Great Furnace that was going to the bin anyway.

White:

Karma. Black can't win without Swamps in play. Black can't remove Karma. Either they rip it out of your hand or they die.

Red

Archetype Deck: Michael Strunk, Florida State Champion 2004

Michael Strunk		 	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
18 Mountain	3 Chrome Mox	4 Detonate	
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep	2 Demolish	3 Hearth Kami	
19 lands	4 Electrostatic Bolt	1 Pulse of the Forge	
	4 Molten Rain	4 Shatter	
	2 Pulse of the Forge	3 Zo-Zu the Punisher	
		15 sideboard cards	

4 Arc-Slogger	4 Seething Song
3 Kumano, Master Yamabushi	3 Shock
4 Slith Firewalker	4 Stone Rain
4 Solemn Simulacrum	
	26 other spells

15 creatures

I kind of hate Strunk's deck because of its absurdly low land count and seven – count them *seven* – five drop threats, but that is just because I am old school. Strunk has a lot of play, can open on first turn Slith Firewalker and Seethe out Kumano or Arc-Slogger reliably in the first three turns of the game, which is terrible for green. All that janky land destruction will ruin more than one opponent's day. Seriously. Ruin.

Black:

Black has to watch out for burn and fast damage out of red, and while Strunk has Slith Firewalker and Seething Song, I don't know that it has the kind of burn overload that traditionally plagues **Magic's** most suicidal color. If a black deck can get off Persecute before it starts getting nailed with the three mana land destruction, the game should easily go the way of the dark side, but if even one Stone Rain hits, black will be delayed by a turn, and will get delayed again the next turn, until either its mana is spent or the Red Deck no longer has enough cards in hand that Persecute is a profitable bomb.



Beating this deck on the ground is actually pretty easy, and black can borrow a few cards from itself in *Mirrodin* Block. Terror takes out any of the Red Deck's dangerous creatures, and does so at a mana cost that is not onerous in the face of redundant mana denial. There is nothing like seeing the opponent Seethe out a big bomb... and then slapping your 2 mana Beta Terror (or textless promotional Terror) right on top.

Blue:

I would Annul the Chrome Mox if I could. Strunk's deck has precious little land, and taking out the Chrome Mox on turn one doesn't just stop first turn Slith Firewalker beats, it can potentially manascrew the other guy. On that note, Echoing Truth is also quite powerful. Always good against expensive cards in a deck full of card drawing and permission, Echoing Truth is doubly punishing against Seething Song and Chrome Mox mana.

In a fair fight, blue should generally be ahead just playing its basic game; Condescend is equally good at saving a land in the short term and digging for the next land or relevant permission spell. The fight is increasingly less fair when the Red Deck starts missing land drops, which is what always happens when I play against these Red Decks with few lands. Standard operation says that blue should one-for-one any relevant spell and then bury the Red Deck with card drawing as soon as it becomes available.

Against the threats themselves, both Bribery and Vedalken Shackles are excellent. There is nothing like staring down a 4/4 Slith Firewalker with the Red Deck's own Slogger, I have found.

The downside, of course, occurs when the Red Decks get wise and start siding Boil, which they probably won't.

Green:

I actually thought about siding Giant Growth against Arc-Slogger. Like, you test a lot and find that Arc-Slogger keeps pummeling your green decks. You put Molder Slug in front of Arc-Slogger for the thirteenth time, and know that he'll either ignore it or kill it depending on how much burn he is holding. Now what happens when you block and play Giant Growth? Does the Red Deck respond with three Arc-Slogger activations, burning half his library? Does he spend a ton of burn from his grip? Does he let his Slogger die? You are doing jumping jacks and running around the room if he lets his Slogger die!

Clearly the best card green has got is Rude Awakening, and green moreover has all kinds of card advantage against the Red Deck's one-for-ones, from Sakura-Tribe Elder to Kodama's Reach to redundant Solemn Simulacrum... but if all the Red Deck has to do is keep green off of 8 mana while it hammers in with Arc-Slogger, those cards end up surprisingly ineffective (which is why I thought up Giant Growth in the first place). Most of the time if green *doesn't* get Rude Awakening, the Red Deck will just burn it out, and certain decks, like Tooth and Nail, are inherently vulnerable to the Red Deck's baseline land destruction anyway.

Red:



As we mentioned way back in Havoc in Harrisburg, Shunt can be a key card in the Red Deck mirror. Pure card advantage, especially against another deck packing permanent removal and land destruction, Shunt also goes a very long way in long game burn wars.

For that reason, Beacon of Destruction is similarly effective. Dealing Fireball class damage at instant speed, Beacon of Destruction is very strong going long while at the same time removing key creatures like the ever-mentioned Arc-Slogger.

Failing either of these specific remedies, one Red Deck will many times just bury the other one because it went first and got a heavy land destruction draw. In a fair fight, the deck with more land will usually come out on top, but the presence of Chrome Mox and Slith Firewalker in decks with a lot of land kill makes most fights neither fair nor long.

White:

Sacred Ground is of course the best card against a deck with 10+ dedicated land destruction slots. It's generally faster than the first Stone Rain and counters all the rest. Stopping half the Red Deck's action doesn't necessarily do the job, but white actually has tools to deal with creatures and damage



as well. Pulse of the Forge? Meet Pulse of the Fields. Careful math can have either player winning a Pulse fight, so... be careful.

The White Weenie decks actually have a lot of play against this kind of Red Deck. We saw Sacred Ground in Ellenburg's Alabama Champion, and a single Glorious Anthem puts many of the creatures outside easy burn range. I have no idea how the Red Deck as it is today is supposed to fight an Auriok Champion with a battle-axe.

That said, we can borrow a card from last year's summer championship season, a card that served some of the Pro Tour's best: Culling Scales. Not particularly synergistic with either Chrome Mox or Slith Firewalker, Culling Scales erases Sacred Ground and takes any number of Lantern Kamis, Bonesplitters, and even Glorious Anthems along with it. While not a perfect match to the Florida Champion, Culling Scales should be on your short list for sideboard consideration if you are thinking of going with a land destruction Red Deck.

Well, that sure was a long article going over many of the cards and strategies effective against all five colors and many of the viable decks in today's Standard. No article, no matter how long, can cover all the ground or all the viable deck types, but I hope this one was helpful to you. If you've got more ideas, the forums are open!

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