

Five reasons you should be playing Mountains. Why Red is Simply the Best Color

Dan Paskins

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Red Week on **[magicthegathering.com](#)** was probably the most highly anticipated theme week ever, which made finding just the right feature article all that much more important. Fortunately there just happened to be a great writer who just happened to love extolling the virtues of the color of fire to any and all who would listen. Dan Paskins is unquestionably one of red's most dedicated proponents, and when you combine that with his unique writing style it's hard to imagine anyone else who could have pulled this off better. As Managing Producer Monty Ashley pointed out, "Whenever I read one of Dan's articles, I want to go out and play red right away!" By the time you're done with this article, you will too.

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Your opponent looks really unhappy and he's just stormed off complaining about how unlucky he was. What happened?'

'Well, he played some cards which I didn't really understand, so I blew them up and attacked with my Goblins. When he finally got 'round to killing off the last of the Goblins, I cast a couple of my burn spells at him, and then he was dead.'

'So the Red Deck Wins again?'

'Yep, guess so.'

Dear readers,

There are times when people do things that really confuse me. Take these theme weeks on this here website. We've been told for ages that Red Week 'will be coming up sometime in the future'. I've just been looking back through past theme weeks. There's been 'colour hoser week', land destruction week, lifegain week and even two separate weeks, one devoted to Squirrels and one devoted to Cephalids (which must have really thrilled all, sorry, both of the people who wanted to spend a week finding out all about the Cephalids). But enough of the complaining, because it's time for Red Week at last! Which means it is about time that you put down those Plains, Forests, Islands and Swamps that

I've seen you tapping, and learn to stop worrying and play the Red Deck. Here, then, are the reasons why Red is the best colour.

I: YOU GET TO SMASH STUFF UP

Red is the colour of chaos and blowing stuff up. Chaos, in **Magic: the Gathering** terms, is fairly rubbish, as anyone who has opened up a booster pack only to discover that they have a card with about eighteen lines of text which mentions flipping a coin as the rare will know. Blowing stuff up, though, is an extremely enjoyable way to spend the time. Lands, creatures, artifacts, opponents, especially the last of these, are all fair game for the Red mage. This is a much healthier attitude than that of any of the other colours. It's not like the Blue mage, who stops the opponent from playing their cards (no fun). When playing Red, you let your opponent go about his business, and then you smash up anything which appears to be relevant and ignore the rest.



Demolish, art by Gary Ruddell

And, yes, I can hear you in the back heckling "what about enchantments? Red's not much good at blowing them up, is it?" I'll deal with you later.

II: WHEN PLAYING RED, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WHAT THE OTHER GUY IS GOING TO DO

A very long time ago, I used to play a blue-white control deck (sorry). It was filled with powerful cards like [Balance](#) and [Counterspell](#), but I always used to feel really scared when playing it, because I always had to think about what my opponent might do next and what I could possibly do to prevent it from crushing me. When I started to play in tournaments, I used to spend the night before the tournament worrying about whether my deck would be able to cope with all the threats that I would face the next day.

One time, though, I decided to try this new kind of deck that I'd read about on the Internet. It had lots of crappy Orcs and Goblins, some burn spells, and lots of Mountains. Every game worked out the same (so much for being the colour of chaos). I'd play some crappy creatures, and they'd play some good creatures, which I would blow up. After a while, they'd be dead because the Goblins had attacked them to death, or they'd be dead because I cast a load of burn spells at them.

***I always had to think
about what my
opponent might do
next...***

You will meet these people who reckon that they've got all the answers and will beat the Red Deck every time. They have [Circle of Protection: Red](#), and [Worship](#), and [Ivory Mask](#) and goodness knows what else, and sometimes they are right and they do manage to beat the Red Deck. But you'd be surprised how often people who rely on these enchantments find that something goes wrong. They'll have their [CoP: Red](#), but not enough mana to prevent all the damage coming their way. They'll draw

Worship, but not have a creature that they can keep in play. They'll play [Chill](#), but not have any way of dealing with the little Goblin that you played on turn one. That is the joy of playing the Red Deck. If your opponent casts something that you can target, you blow it up. If they cast something that you can't target, then you ignore it. It's not like being a blue mage and sitting there with a handful of counterspells thinking, 'should I counter this, or wait for a bigger threat, so that I can make the game even less fun'.

III: WHENEVER THE RED DECK WINS, IT IS ALWAYS THE TRIUMPH OF THE UNDERDOG



There's an old joke. A green mage, a blue mage and a red mage are all sitting around, debating whether [Goblin Cadets](#) is a good card. The green mage says, 'It is terrible, because you lose control of it when your opponent has a blocker'. The blue mage says, 'It is useful in the correct metagame, because 43.5% of the expected field are unlikely to have creatures to block it.' The Red mage looks confused. 'It is obviously good, because it attacks for 2. What is "blocking"?'

One thing to remember when playing the Red Deck is that your opponent's cards will seem more powerful. You will have a [Goblin Sledder](#), which is a Goblin on a, erm, sled, whereas your opponent will have the ability to call down the [Wrath of God](#), or the ability to construct an 11/11 indestructible monster, or the ability to summon a 4/4 creature for 0 mana. It's always been like this for the Red Deck.

When I started playing the Red Deck, I'd find that all my opponents had all these powerful uncommon and rare cards. I'd play an [Ironclaw Orc](#), and they'd play a [White Knight](#) and look really pleased with themselves, so I'd [Lightning Bolt](#) the Knight and attack them. Then they'd have an [Ernham Djinn](#) (which was felt to be a really powerful card at the time, that's how long ago this was), so I'd tap my [Orcish Artillery](#) and finish the Djinn off with an [Incinerate](#). And attack with the [Ironclaw Orcs](#) again. Eventually, they would get sick of this and cast [Swords to Plowshares](#) on the [Ironclaw Orcs](#), so I'd snigger and cast some more [Ironclaw Orcs](#).

If your opponent casts something that you can target, you blow it up. If they cast

something that you can't target, then you ignore it.

Now, [Ironclaw Orcs](#) are objectively a bad version of [Grizzly Bears](#), and yet in the Red Deck they were star players. How can you not like a deck that managed to remain one of the best decks in Standard while featuring such top-notch tech as [Firebrand Ranger](#), [Goblin Patrol](#), [Lightning Blast](#) and [Volcanic Hammer](#), and today relies upon Goblins with the ability of the [Blood Pet](#) and [Goblins which have sleds](#)?

IV: THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS OF MAKING A RED DECK

Throughout this article, I've written about the 'Red Deck' as if there was only one viable kind of mono-red deck. This is, of course, not the case. The best version of the mono-red deck in Extended is very different from the best version of the mono-red deck in Standard, which in turn is very different from the best version of the mono-red deck in *Mirrodin* Block Constructed.

I have, of course, prepared for this article by playtesting extensively all three different kinds of deck, and they are all lots of fun, and require different strategies, though based around the common theme of blowing stuff up and hitting people. So whatever your preferences, there's no need to turn to any other colour, Red has it all!

The most controlling version is that currently on display in the 'Big Red' *Mirrodin* Block Constructed deck. This kind of Red deck has about 8 creatures, 4 [Arc-Sloggers](#) and 4 smaller creatures, and the rest of the spells involve destroying lands, creatures and artifacts. Because of the special nature of *Mirrodin* Block, artifact destruction spells often serve for destroying (artifact) lands as well, and often creatures too. It is interesting to note, though, that the Big Red deck which Masoshiro Kuroda used to win \$30,000 in [Kobe](#) had only [Detonate](#) as main deck artifact destruction. While more expensive than [Shatter](#) or [Echoing Ruin](#) most of the time, [Detonate](#) fits the theme of also hurting opponents, avoiding the disappointing situation of being stuck with a hand full of spells which kill artifacts against a deck with few or none.

Kuroda Masashiro



Main Deck *60 cards*

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4 Blinkmoth Nexus | 4 Barbed Lightning |
| 4 Darksteel Citadel | 4 Damping Matrix |
| 16 Mountain | 4 Detonate |
| <hr/> | |
| 24 lands | 4 Electrostatic Bolt |
| | 4 Fireball |
| | 4 Pulse of the Forge |
| 4 Arc Slogger | 4 Shrapnel Blast |

4 [Solemn Simulacrum](#)

8 creatures

28 other spells

Sideboard

4 [Echoing Ruin](#)

3 [Furnace Dragon](#)

4 [Molten Rain](#)

2 [Talisman of Impulse](#)

2 [Talisman of Indulgence](#)

15 sideboard cards



The other extreme is the Goblin deck, which draws upon the powerful Goblins from the *Onslaught* Block. This deck has no more than about 8 spells, and the rest of the non-land cards are creatures, although Goblins like [Gempalm Incinerator](#) and [Goblin Sharpshooter](#) duplicate the function of spells which blow stuff up.

The middle way between these two is the kind of Red Deck that is often found in Extended, which has about 20 lands, 20 spells and 20 creatures. In this sort of deck, the aim is to play a creature like a [Jackal Pup](#) or a [Slith Firewalker](#) on the first or second turn, and attack with it while using burn spells and cards like [Wasteland](#) and [Tangle Wire](#) to impede the opponent's ability to deal with the creature, the plan being that by the time your opponent has dealt with the little creatures, a couple of burn spells or a creature like a [Blistering Firecat](#) will be able to finish them off.

Which kind of Red Deck to play is a decision that is up to you; each has different strengths and weaknesses and is particularly good against different kinds of decks. But I can't think of another colour which has three different kinds of decks, all of which have enjoyed such success.

On a slightly different note, my final reason for playing the Red Deck is that...

V: IT IS A GOOD WAY OF PROTESTING ABOUT THE WAY THAT WIZARDS OF THE COAST TREATS THEIR GOBLIN STAFF

One thing which most of the columnists who work for Wizards of the Coast won't acknowledge is that the whole company would collapse without the slave labour of the Goblins who they force to work for them. But sometimes the Goblins get sick of their treatment and strike back. Because they have access to the whole of R&D, they have the ability to cause a lot of mischief. Sadly, they aren't very bright, so they don't make much use of this opportunity, although apparently they are responsible for the invention of the 'bands with others' mechanic. The same year that I and many others discovered the Red Deck, however, they finally got organised, got unionised, and took over Wizards R&D.

First, they designed a card called [Fireblast](#). It is hard to convey quite how powerful of a card [Fireblast](#) was. With [Fireblast](#) in your deck, your opponent's life total shrunk by four every time you laid two Mountains. It's not even like you had to spend any mana to cast it. As a result, the Orcs and Goblins didn't even have to do enough attacking to deal 20 points of damage, 16 or even 12 would be quite enough for [Fireblast](#) to finish the opponent off.

Then later that year they designed a set called *Tempest*, which was filled with ridiculous Red cards, topped off by the [Cursed Scroll](#). In an attempt to cover up the fact that their R&D department had been taken over by Goblins, Wizards claimed that [Cursed Scroll](#) had been designed 'to add more of the strategy of bluffing to the game, particularly for people with counterspell decks.' I reflected on this whenever I activated my [Cursed Scroll](#) with two cards in hand and asked them to guess which was the [Fireblast](#). Amazingly, whichever card they guessed turned out to be the [Fireblast](#). What an amazing bluffer I was!

Following the release of the *Tempest* set, Wizards of the Coast managed to regain control of R&D from the Goblins and get back to designing cards that were good in decks other than the Red Deck. After the squashing of their rebellion after *Tempest*, the Goblins had been keeping quiet and doing their duty of bringing Randy Buehler more and more different kinds of counterspells to develop and other such fun duties. On hearing that the *Onslaught* Block was going to be developed, though, they got very angry. You see, originally, the tribes in *Onslaught* were going to be Elves, Wizards, Soldiers, Clerics and...Dwarves. Now the Goblins had had to put up with a lot over the years, but the idea of having to spend a year designing different kinds of Dwarves was too much. Once again they rebelled, kidnapped Randy Buehler and the rest of the R&D team, and set about re-designing the *Onslaught* set. Having learned their lesson from *Tempest*, they decided that they were going to design the other two expansion sets as well, to avoid a repeat of the problems that arose from letting humans design *Stronghold* and *Exodus*.



Goblin Artisans, art by Julie Baroh



The Goblins had a wonderful time. They pretended that the Wizards tribe was going to be really good,

and messed up Kai Budde's Invitational card because he had been rude about them. They 'tested' the Elf deck day and night, to see who could win the prize for killing the greatest number of Elves. They completely gutted the entire colour Blue, and called it 'redesigning the colour pie'. They kept up the good work of R&D over several years by making the White weenie cards terrible. And they designed an awful lot of extremely powerful Red cards. Just in time, Randy and the team escaped, and managed to create [Silver Knight](#) in a vain attempt to stop the Goblins from being totally dominant. Of course, the powers that be at Wizards won't admit that the *Onslaught* block was designed by some Goblins. And they certainly won't let me tell you about [CENSORED], [CENSORED] and [DEFINITELY CENSORED]. But as any rational observer can see, Goblins have had a major impact on the creation of **Magic** sets, much more so than the supposedly more intelligent races like the Elves. And the more people that choose to go around summoning them, the fewer Goblin rights abuses Mark Rosewater will be able to get away with.

THREE RED DECKS TO GET YOU GOING, AND MY FAVOURITE RED DECK

Right, then. Hopefully, I've persuaded you that this week and every week, the deck that you ought to play should contain Mountains and Red spells. Here are some examples, for three different constructed formats: Standard, *Mirrodin* Block Constructed and Extended:

The *Mirrodin* Block Constructed deck that I have chosen was played by Daniel Krutil to a 22nd place finish at [Grand Prix: Zurich](#). I think it gives a good idea of one direction the deck can take, not to mention the sheer amount of artifact hate that is possible:

Big Red - Daniel Krutil



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Darksteel Citadel	3 Electrostatic Bolt
4 Great Furnace	3 Fireball
15 Mountain	3 Flamebreak
_____	4 Pyrite Spellbomb
23 lands	4 Seething Song
	4 Shatter
4 Arc-Slogger	2 Talisman of Impulse
4 Furnace Dragon	2 Talisman of Indulgence
4 Solemn Simulacrum	_____
_____	25 other spells
12 creatures	

Sideboard

4 Detonate
2 Echoing Ruin
1 Flamebreak

- 3 [Molten Rain](#)
- 3 [Shrapnel Blast](#)
- 2 [Shunt](#)

15 sideboard cards



The Standard deck is my latest test version, built with the rise of the Blue-Red control decks and the Blue-White decks in mind:

Mono-Red Goblins



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 3 Blinkmoth Nexus | 3 Chrome Mox |
| 4 Great Furnace | 3 Magma Jet |
| 15 Mountain | 3 Shrapnel Blast |

22 lands

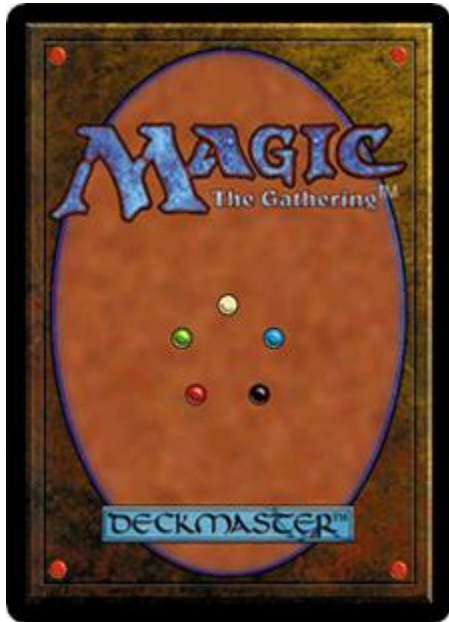
9 other spells

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 4 Clickslither | Sideboard |
| 4 Goblin Piledriver | 4 Detonate |
| 4 Goblin Sharpshooter | 4 Molten Rain |
| 4 Goblin Sledder | 4 Shatter |
| | 3 Sparksmith |

- 4 [Goblin Warchief](#)
- 4 [Siege-Gang Commander](#)
- 4 [Skirk Prospector](#)
- 1 [Sparksmith](#)

15 sideboard cards

29 creatures



Extended is a format that hasn't had a serious tournament for a while, so it is hard to predict exactly how to build the Red Deck, but here's a go:

Red Deck Wins



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 4 Great Furnace | 4 Chrome Mox |
| 6 Mountain | 4 Firebolt |
| 4 Rishadan Port | 4 Pillage |
| 4 Wasteland | 4 Seal of Fire |
| 2 Wooded Foothills | 4 Shrapnel Blast |
| | 4 Tangle Wire |

20 lands

24 other spells

- 4 [Blistering Firecat](#)

- 4 [Grim Lavamancer](#)
- 4 [Jackal Pup](#)
- 4 [Slith Firewalker](#)

16 creatures



If Extended ends up the way that I think it might, then the sideboard might be:

- 4 [Skullclamp](#)
- 4 [Detonate](#)
- 4 [Rack and Ruin](#)
- 3 [Shatter](#)

And last of all, I thought I'd leave you with my favourite Red Deck of all. I had a lot to choose from - the original Sligh deck, the Deadguy Red deck which dominated the world for a couple of years, and various versions of the Red Deck Wins which won national championships and Grand Prix events. My very favourite Red deck of all, though, was the one that I played during the *Odyssey* Block Constructed season. It's still lots of fun for a casual game, and can't be expensive to assemble.

The reason why I chose this deck is because at the time no one imagined that a mono-Red deck could possibly be successful, as Red was notoriously weak, and there were some extremely powerful black, green and blue cards about (this was the age when [Psychatoqs](#), [Nantuko Shades](#) and [Wild Mongrels](#) stalked the land). I played this deck in three PTQs, making the final twice. It's quite fun playing the Red Deck when, as at the moment, you have access to [Siege-Gang Commander](#), [Goblin Warchief](#) and the rest of the gang. In some ways, though, it is even more fun when your opponent has the overpowered deck, and you manage to defeat him with a deck with eight Dwarves in it. Here it is, in all its glory:

Red Deck Wins - Odyssey Block





Main Deck

60 cards

2 [Barbarian Ring](#)

20 [Mountain](#)

22 lands

4 [Dwarven Bloodboiler](#)

4 [Grim Lavamancer](#)

3 [Hell-Bent Raider](#)

3 [Jeska, Warrior Adept](#)

4 [Mad Dog](#)

4 [Spark Mage](#)

22 creatures

3 [Burning Wish](#)

4 [Fiery Temper](#)

3 [Reckless Charge](#)

2 [Sonic Seizure](#)

4 [Violent Eruption](#)

16 other spells

Sideboard

1 [Demolish](#)

1 [Firebolt](#)

1 [Firecat Blitz](#)

3 [Flaming Gambit](#)

3 [Flaring Pain](#)

1 [Flash of Defiance](#)

2 [Lava Dart](#)

1 [Lightning Surge](#)

1 [Mountain](#)

1 [Reckless Charge](#)

15 sideboard cards



I hope you enjoyed this article. Any comments are welcome in the message board for this article or by email (links to which are just a bit lower down).

'Til next time, may your [Goblin Cadets](#) remain unblocked!
Take care,

Dan Paskins