



Like the Green-enabled decks, I lumped the majority of Red Decks together as "Aggro" Red. This deck type is the usual... Slith Firewalkers lead the offense, though it may or may not have 8 land destruction cards or Vulshok Sorcerers. The reason I didn't distinguish between Red Decks is that between decks and sideboards, they played the same main categories of cards. Many of the semi-controlling "Ponza" or land destruction decks had Sword of Fire and Ice access to fight the bigger Red Decks after boards. The main distinguishing features of one Red Deck from another were Frostling, Sword of Fire and Ice, Shock or even Lava Spike starting, as opposed to land destruction; the coolest new appearance was the fast, dangerous, but ultimately erratic Adamaro, First to Desire. All of these Red Decks were differentiated primarily against the more unified Kuroda-style or "Flores" Red Decks, which had some customizations (Shatters main, fewer copies of Solemn Simulacrum) but looked essentially like Osyp Lebedowicz's Invitational deck.

Intruder Alarm is a new combination deck designed by Osyp PT Chicago '03  
himself to the tune of exactly one Top 8 and qualification (but probably chosen by the narrowest number of players of any "real" archetype). Osyp told me he would have probably still played the Red Deck, but the Intruder Alarm deck seemed very powerful; Brian David-Marshall has an interview with Osyp about the deck's development that is coming up in The Week That Was tomorrow.

None of the other deck listings demand much explanation, other than the fact that G/R decks were all over the place, from a Kiki-Jiki deck to *Mirrodin* Block "Freshmaker" descendents; the interesting thing about G/R is that none of the decks really looked very similar to one another.

By the time this article goes up, you will probably be able to spy even more Regionals results than I studied to write it. Check out the state of the developing Standard metagame at [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com)'s results page, which currently has the top decks from 30+ regions (with more on the way).

In any case, the story this week is definitely the success of Tooth and Nail. On the numbers, no other deck approaches its volume of Top 8 and qualified players. But what makes Tooth and Nail so special? In the context of Beatdown Week, I think that there is only one answer to this question: Resilience.

Among the Tier One decks, Tooth and Nail has both the most powerful engine and the most powerful proactive plan. Its many Sylvan Scryings and Reap and Sows allow Tooth and Nail to assemble the coveted UrzaTron, leveraging its mana component in a way that other decks can approach with maybe a Blinkmoth Nexus beat or tricky Legendary Land at best. The UrzaTron, 12 cards out of Tooth and Nail's 60 -- and not even its spells -- is more potent than most anything any other deck can muster; the early game green cards just make the mana more consistent. What can Tooth and Nail do with all the mana it gets from these Antiquities reprints? The most important, the namesake of the deck, is of course a nine mana Tooth and Nail with Entwine. This tends to be the death knell, and few decks survive more than a turn or two after Tooth and Nail resolves. Only Red Decks with a lot of smoke left or aggressive decks that have a bunch of evasion creatures still on the table tend to be able to beat double 7/10, Sundering Goblin Legend, or any of the other mischievous board positions that nine mana can buy. In the alternative, 6-10 mana can buy a Mindslaver, and 8 can Entwine a Rude Awakening. Either of these cards can win the game in dramatic fashion, and can be considered ends themselves, or supplements to the powerful core kill.

So Tooth and Nail's plan is all about ramping to that nine mana threshold and resolving its signature win card. The resilience part comes from the deck's ability to do so even in the face of overwhelming pressure.

## Defense of Core Assets



The most typical anti-Tooth and Nail strategy comes from trying to break up its UrzaTron. There is a reason people don't normally play nine mana spells in serious decks, and the Ponza decks and their allies try to remind Tooth and Nail of that. The problem is that it is just as likely for Tooth and Nail to get triple Eternal Witness as it is for the typical Ponza deck to play triple Molten Rain. Land destruction without pressure just Time Walks both players, and Tooth and Nail has the tools to recover from even improbable mana situations because so many of its green cards search up lands.

Taken a different way, Sakura-Tribe Elder and Sylvan Scrying are the equal and opposite of Stone Rain... but at a cheaper cost. Moreover, Reap and Sow can match Demolish, but kick in a little more when needed, doubling not just as a mana accelerator, but a potent search card.

The most recent innovation in the archetype -- the use of Kodama's Reach -- is also the most important. Without Kodama's Reach, Tooth and Nail would basically always lose to an opportune Sowing Salt, but instead, the deck is able to recover with a flurry of Arcane sorceries to hit its nine anyway.



*One of the best answers to disruption ever printed.*

### Early Game Action



One way that decks try to attack a ponderous opponent that can't do anything proactive until, say, turn five (and even then only on the God draw) is to simply end it before that turn hits. Unfortunately for decks on this plan, Tooth and Nail has among the best defensive early game elements of any deck -- ponderous or no -- in the current Standard. Closely aligned with its anti-Land Destruction suite, Tooth and Nail has two drops that really slow down the beats. Both Sakura-Tribe Elder and the sometimes-present Vine Trellis deter fast attacks, preserving life totals while they accelerate mana.

Some of the most recent Tooth and Nail decks also play Birds of Paradise. Consistently the best Green creature since Alpha, the Birds allow Tooth and Nail to set up turn two Kodama's Reach and legitimate bombs as fast as turn three. In this sense, Tooth and Nail can mimic Medium Green's core strength, while at the same time preserving a superior endgame.

### Invulnerable Endgame

Though most decks don't start either combination, Leonin Abunas + Platinum Angel or Mephidross Vampire + Triskelion give Tooth and Nail the soft lock on victory in any game that they come out. Tooth and Nail itself is generally an end, but either of the above combinations make it very difficult for the opponent to win, as opposed to going for a proactive victory; if the opponent doesn't win, somebody's got to...

In any case, Tooth and Nail can fall back on Oblivion Stone in any game where it lasts long enough to hit 5-8 mana. Any guesses what will hit if Tooth gets another untap?

## Diversified Proactive Suite

Since the removal of Affinity from the metagame, Tooth and Nail has had some extra building room (it no longer has to main deck or even play Oxidize), so how different decks use this space is always interesting to watch. The most persuasive strategy to my mind is the inclusion of Plow Under. Why not just run the best green sorcery that isn't Tooth and Nail itself? Plow Under is particularly strong in a deck with enough mana to naturally loop Eternal Witness, and Tooth and Nail certainly fits that bill. The deck is deceptively capable of going aggressive even without its foremost tool, and you shouldn't be surprised if your quick Arc-Slogger meets an equally quick doom at the hands of a Duplicant. Particularly annoying is the hard-cast Sundering Titan: offense, defense, and disruption in one tasty package. Keeping Tooth and Nail from being a "one trick pony" goes a long way in its ability to resist the opponent's anti-Tooth and Nail measures.



## Proactive Mirror Match Elements

Plow Under is of course great *against* a deck trying to set up the UrzaTron as well. More than that, some Tooth and Nail decks take advantage of their Birds of Paradise and up to eight *Champions of Kamigawa* basic land searchers to run a Swamp and some number of Cranial Extractions. When the opponent doesn't actually *have* any Tooth and Nails in his deck, one side of the mirror typically appears cracked.

## Single Color

More players lose more to manascrew than any other reason... or at least they say they do. Tooth and Nail, unlike many complicated combination decks or even tightly tuned beatdown decks, will almost never get color screwed. With even single green access, Tooth and Nail can set up sufficient mana to win because so many of its spells just get more mana. Lest the deck fall prey to the "all mana draw," Tooth and Nail can lean on Sensei's Divining Top and numerous shufflers to get the Bob Maher look with Sylvan Library. In the "what could go wrong" or "how do you want to lose" categories, Tooth and Nail starts off one check mark ahead of the game.

## Grant of Permission

One of the reasons that nine mana sorceries haven't caught on in the past is the presence of efficient counters in an environment. Well, the current Standard doesn't have Counterspell, and the good people polled by [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) said they would rather have Rewind than Dismiss. But even with Hinder in the format, Tooth and Nail can force through its big card: Sylvan Scrying, meet Boseiju, Who Shelters All.

Potential Speed:

T1: Urza's Power Plant (1)

T2: Forest, Sakura-Tribe Elder (1) [sacrifice Sakura-Tribe Elder for Forest] (1)

T3: Urza's Mine (2), Reap and Sow for Urza's Tower (7)

T4: Untap. Any questions?

## Sideboard

Possibly the most potent weapon in Tooth and Nail's arsenal is its sideboard. Many players come after the deck with bullets like Sowing Salt and Cranial Extraction, trying to keep the opponent off of Tooth and Nail itself... But Tooth and Nail is ready for that strategy with the Man Plan. Almost every qualifying Tooth and Nail deck has a full compliment of Troll Ascetics and some additional Molder Slugs and Iwamori of the Open Fists in the side. Just as capable of getting an aggressive creature draw as Medium Green, Tooth and Nail can shrug off the bullets and go on the offensive while the opponent stares at the ineffectual sideboard cards in his hand that incentivized him to keep.



More clever than just the Man Plan, the presence of Circle of Protection: Red in Tooth and Nail's sideboard shows a great awareness of the metagame and the deck's own weaknesses. Tooth and Nail is weakest against the various Red Decks, particularly Aggro Ponza, but also reasonably vulnerable to the Kuroda-style Burn decks (remember the finals of PT Kobe?). Circle of Protection: Red can surprise the Red Deck in such a way that if it doesn't have an answer... it just isn't going to win. Red isn't exactly known for its enchantment hate, and if nothing else, Circle of Protection: Red can buy a lot of time. Given enough time, Tooth and Nail will hit nine mana, and we all know what happens then.

Finally, Tooth and Nail has access to essentially any kind of "answer" card that a long game board control deck of the Tinker school might want. US Regionals showcased decks with Naturalize, Wear Away, and even Rending Vines. Just as it can bullet with Cranial Extraction or Boil, if it really wants to, Tooth and Nail can kill Arc-Sloggers with Terror if it so chooses.

## Inevitability

Because it has the strongest endgame of any deck in the current Standard, both from mana production and raw power criteria, Tooth and Nail is favored to win any long game where reach isn't the primary point of strategic importance: if it lasts, using any of the above methods, it usually wins. Tooth and Nail can simply pay enough mana to resolve its spells, riding the back of its absurdly powerful threats and answers to victory going long.

## Summary

When figuring out how to approach the constructed portion of US Nationals, the tournament that makes Regionals worth attending, my friend Josh Ravitz had an interesting observation:

Ravitz, PT New Orleans '03

"You look at Tooth and Nail as 'the deck to beat.' I just see it as the best deck."

Despite the fact that everyone saw it coming, Tooth and Nail took all kinds of names this past weekend, and it did so without any legitimate "broken" card. Sure, Sakura-Tribe Elder is probably the defining card of the current format, and Eternal Witness gives Arc-Slogger a run for its money as the best creature overall, but who can really complain about a deck that needs a four card combination and nine available mana to dominate? Sure, it has solid mana acceleration, but so does everyone else; it's not like Tooth has Dark Ritual. When was the last time anyone complained about a nine mana sorcery? Tooth and Nail itself costs twice as much and draws and places half the cards that Replenish did. Tooth and Nail doesn't untap five or seven lands, sacrifice two Mountains to steal the game from a better player, and its three mana graveyard manipulator isn't exactly Yawgmoth's Will.

Congratulations Tooth and Nail! You are the most powerful and successful *fair* deck of any summer Championship season.

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