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I read a lot of **Magic** message boards, both those on our site and on independent strategy sites, rumor sites, humor sites, you name it.

It always amuses me when someone posts, usually in a thread discussing the merits of a card like Eight-and-a-Half-Tails, that, "Wizards doesn't understand that White Weenie won't be good until they reprint Armageddon and Swords to Plowshares. Why do they even bother?"

I've been playing **Magic** for over 10 years and working here for almost four, and I understand a few things (as do my coworkers). One is that White Weenie doesn't necessarily need overpowered cards from the beginning of time to be good—no beatdown deck does. Two, our printing lots of decent small white creatures does not imply that we want White Weenie to be a top-level deck. I'll cover both of these points. And if you see someone on boards somewhere make a similar statement to the one above, direct them to this article!



What Makes Beatdown Good?

For the sake of keeping it simple, I'm going to define "beatdown" as essentially a "weenie" deck full of creatures that cost between one and four mana.

Two things in an environment can make a beatdown deck good. One is if the creatures are so good and have so much synergy between them that they can overpower opponents all by themselves. The second is if there is a powerful disruptor or powerful finisher available. Oftentimes the best beatdown decks show up when both ingredients are available.

Here's a cursory rundown of some of the more well-known beatdown decks and which ingredients comprised them:

Old School White Weenie: The creatures themselves (White Knight, Savannah Lions) aren't all that impressive. Instead, it was the disruption available to this deck—namely Swords to Plowshares and Armageddon—that made it good.

Mirage-Tempest White Weenie: Emphyrial Armor was a big part of this deck, and it is for all intents and purposes "a good creature." Its purpose is just to deal attack damage; it is essentially a three-mana hasty Maro. On top of that, the rest of the creatures had some very nice synergy. Soltari Priest was essentially unblockable and unkillable, and the various en-Kor creatures from *Stronghold* leached onto its protection from red, making a wall of creatures that were all but immune to damage. This deck had a powerful finisher as well—Cursed Scroll.

Ice Age-Mirage Stompy (Senor StOmPy): While the creatures were good (Rogue Elephant and Quirion Ranger are top-notch), it was the disruption that made the deck so devastating—Winter Orb. The Orb barely affected the green deck at all—most of its spell are only a mana or two—but it made opponents' lives miserable. *Urza's-Magsues* Stompy decks used a similar formula, with Tangle Wire in the place of Winter Orb.

Extended Hatred: The deck is called "Hatred," which should clue you in on what was good about it. Hatred is one of the most brutal finishers of all time—don't expect to see that card coming back again! The creatures themselves were quite amazing as well (Phyrexian Negator, Carnophage), and

the wild-card ingredient of Dark Ritual's fast mana made this deck truly terrifying.

Masques-Invasion

Fires: This deck breaks the mold by playing more expensive creatures, but make no mistake—it is pure beatdown. It was almost all monsters plus the devastating enchantment Fires of Yavimaya, with just a tad bit of disruption in the form of Rishadan Port.

Onslaught Goblins:

This deck is the purest example of the

creatures themselves being amazing. Each Goblin fed off of its brethren to create an ultra-fast ultra-resilient beatdown machine. Goblin Warchief and Goblin Piledriver were the cards at the center of the action.



What Does R&D Try to Accomplish?

Here's the point that applies to most beatdown decks, and White Weenie in the current environment specifically: We are going to make creatures that fit the "color pie" for each color in every block, all the time, with no other agenda.

White gets good weenies, usually meaning 2/2's for two mana with some positive ability. Because in general the only other color that gets 2/2 for two with a benefit is green (and it gets them less often), most of white's small creatures look like they were meant to be tournament-playable. They look to be above the curve because *that's a big part of what defines the color*—white gets one- and two-mana creatures that are generally better than the other colors'. We aren't trying to necessarily force White Weenie into tier-one tournament status, we're just enforcing the color pie and giving it what it's supposed to get and will always get for the foreseeable future. Obviously we'd like people to make a deck using small white creatures at the casual level and have some success with it—again, that's a big part of what white's supposed to do. Similarly, we want them to have some amount of success with red burn decks and blue counter and card drawing decks at that level, even if those decks aren't tourney viable at the time.

Of course, we do sometimes engineer groups of cards to make good beatdown decks—the best example is *Onslaught*-era Goblins. There was a conscious effort to make a lot of solid playable Goblin cards so that a deck good enough to fight through Mirari's Wake, Psychatog, and Astral Slide decks would emerge. It worked, but in general we try not to be so heavy-handed.

So let's assume the good creatures will always be in an environment—white will get good two-drops, red and black will get a handful of aggressive creatures with drawbacks, green will get mana acceleration and good mid-range beaters, simply because that's what those colors have and always will get. Let's also assume that R&D isn't trying to consciously create a monster synergy deck like Goblins. When can a good beatdown deck emerge?

One way is for a deck to get critical mass of very good creatures more or less by chance. Red-green beatdown in Invasion block was like this—it got Thornscape Familiar, Raging Kavu, Kavu Titan, Skizzik, Blurred Mongoose, and several other creatures that were just plain better than what other

decks could throw together. There was no overt connection between any of the cards—no planned archetype—players just found the right mix of good attackers and a winning deck was born.



Another way is for a good finisher or disruptor to enter the environment. Pulse of the Forge is a good finisher; Zo-Zu the Punisher and Molten Rain are good disruptors. Arc-Slogger is both. It's no wonder that Slith Firewalker has been a superstar beater lately. In *Kamigawa*-block White Weenie, Hokori, Dust Drinker plays the disruptor role. It will be interesting to see if a card like Charge Across the Araba can fill the finisher role.

The last thing that can make beatdown decks arise in an environment is the faltering of beatdown's nemesis, the "control" deck. If there are very good control cards in an environment—think Moment's Peace or Mutilate—beatdown has a tough hill to climb. If the control cards in a particular set or block are a little less effective, beatdown creatures rise to the top.

In closing, I want readers to walk away understanding that beatdown's presence in any given metagame is not an exact science on our end. We make cards, and generally leave it up to you to combine them into decks. Sure we playtest, but a true environment is born of thousands of players in thousands of practice games and tournament matches, not it a block of cubicles here in Washington. Maybe the pieces for a good beatdown deck are available for you right now!

Moving On, R&D's Regionals Decks

A few of us went to Regionals in Seattle last weekend to hang out and get some gunslinging in. We built some rogue-ish Standard decks to see if we could beat what the majority of the field was running. We actually had some decent results!

My deck was a blue and white tempo cog deck with lots of card-advantage creatures. It has game against red for sure, but it needs one of its Mana Leaks in hand to survive Tooth and Nail. Being able to Trinket Mage up Pithing Needle is awesome!

Ninja Cogs

Main Deck
60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 City of Brass 1 Cloudcrest Lake 1 Eiganjo Castle 12 Island 1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge 1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds 5 Plains 1 Tendo Ice Bridge <hr style="width: 100%;"/> <p>23 lands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Auriok Salvagers 3 Isamaru, Hound of Konda 1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror 4 Ninja of the Deep Hours 2 Spiketail Hatchling 4 Thieving Magpie 4 Trinket Mage <hr style="width: 100%;"/> <p>20 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 AEther Spellbomb 1 Chrome Mox 1 Engineered Explosives 4 Mana Leak 1 Pithing Needle 1 Scrabbling Claws 1 Sensei's Divining Top 1 Sunbeam Spellbomb 4 Umezawa's Jitte 2 Wayfarer's Bauble <hr style="width: 100%;"/> <p>17 other spells</p>
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Brian Schneider played a Gifts Ungiven-Trash for Treasure deck based on the flavor text of Johnny, Combo Player. The "big kill" uses Krark-Clan Ironworks, two Myr Retrievers, Genesis Chamber, and Blasting Station. Of course, it can simply recurse Mindslaver or some other big artifact multiple times and win that way, too. It's hard to play, but can often "go off" before Tooth and Nail resolves.

Trashy Gifts

Main Deck
60 cards

8 Island 8 Mountain 4 Tendo Ice Bridge <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 20 lands	1 Arcbound Reclaimer 1 Duplicant 4 Myr Retriever 1 Platinum Angel <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 7 creatures	1 Blasting Station 1 Chromatic Sphere 4 Chrome Mox 1 Engineered Explosives 1 Fabricate 1 Genesis Chamber 4 Gifts Ungiven 4 Krark-Clan Ironworks 1 Mindslaver 4 Serum Visions 4 Talisman of Dominance 4 Thirst for Knowledge 3 Trash for Treasure <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 33 other spells
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Last Week's Poll:

If you had a Hall of Fame vote, would you vote for Mike Long?		
No	4768	76.4%
Yes	1474	23.6%
Total	6242	100.0%

What can I say? Hardly surprising. The man's reputation precedes him.

This Week's Poll:

Do you sleeve your decks when you are playing at home or with friends?

Yes, always or almost always.

Sometimes.

Never.

