

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Gruul: The Wilding (Part 1)

Ben Bleiweiss
Building on a Budget
Monday, April 10, 2006



Welcome back to Building on a Budget! This week, I'll be delving into my first preconstructed deck – the Gruul Wilding deck from *Guildpact*. Before we get started on tinkering around with Green and Red men, I received a lot of terrific feedback from everybody last week, both about the discard deck and about my writing style. I responded to a lot of the comments in [the feedback forums](#) (post number 99 is mine). I wanted to take a moment to give some explanations before we delve into today's deck building exercise.

There were two main concerns about my last article: The changes I was making to the deck were not explained in enough detail, giving the article a rushed feel, and the cards I choose to use were not budget cards. Let me address both of these points.

First things first: this sort of feedback is invaluable to me. A huge part of Building on a Budget is evolution – but it isn't only about deck evolution. It's also about how you (or I) change our approach to the game and how we value the use of certain cards differently over time – in short, a process of constant change and reevaluation. The evolution of my writing in this column will be the same. Much like the building of decks for this column, I'll be seeing which parts of my writing work, which don't, and changing up my content and style until I move towards a better formatting. This isn't a case of "my style is set in stone, and you better get used to it." In fact, it's the opposite – if I didn't have the willingness and eagerness to improve and change constantly, I shouldn't be writing Building on a Budget to begin with. Accordingly, I've changed up a lot about how I explain my choices and describe my matches this week, so let me know in the forums (or through e-mail) if you liked it more or less than last week.

I also want to emphasize the budget part of Building on a Budget. I should have said this last week, but it was my fault that it was left out: this column focuses primarily on the costs of cards on *Magic Online*. I primarily play using *Magic Online*, and all of the decks you'll see tested here will be built and played on *Magic Online*. When I built the discard deck last week, I personally paid 3 tickets each for *Debtors' Knell* and 2 tickets each for *Nezumi Shortfang*. The total cost of each version of the deck was under 30 tickets. This is my goal and my limit – the deck must cost 30 tickets or less to build on *Magic Online*. I feel that this is a fair number to assign to a budget build, and it's the number that you can keep in mind when you see any deck here. Some will cost 30 tickets, some will cost a lot less than that – but 30 is the absolute high-end limit.

JerichoApo claimed in our forums, that "It seemed like a robot programmed to design decks did the article." I thought this was a great idea – get a robot who I could program to design decks and write my articles for me! I pitched the idea to Scott Johns and Ted Knutson – and while both were enthusiastic about bringing aboard a deck-designin', break-dancin' robot, neither could find space in the budget to buy one for me.

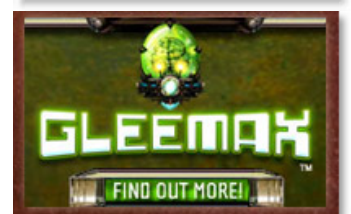
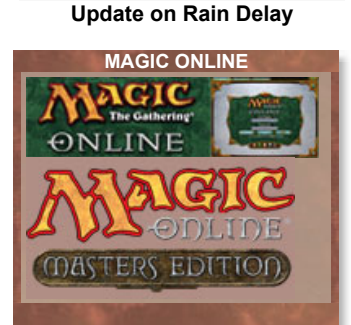
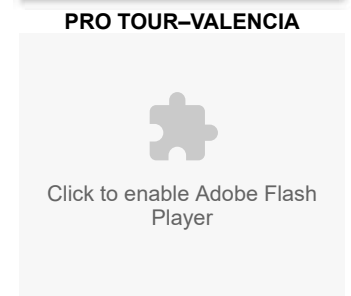
So I built my own, out of scraps of aluminum foil, an old solar-powered pocket calculator, and a stack of *Mindless Automatons*. I named him Boab, after this column. Say hello to the public, Boab!

Boab is not programmed for such petty tasks.

That's great, Boab. You're a real trooper.

Boab is out of power for today. Powering down...

Wasn't that swell? While I take Boab outside to bask in the sun for a quick recharge, you can go ahead and take a look at the Gruul Wilding preconstructed deck, a la carte.



Gruul Wilding Precon

Main Deck
60 cards

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| 12 Forest 11 Mountain 1 Skarrg, the Rage Pits 24 lands | 1 Battering Wurm 2 Bloodscale Prowler 1 Borborygmos 2 Bramble Elemental 1 Burning-Tree Bloodscale 2 Dowsing Shaman 2 Dryad Sophisticate 2 Gatherer of Graces 1 Gruul Guildmage 1 Gruul Nodorog | 3 Beastmaster's Magemark 3 Fencer's Magemark 2 Fists of Ironwood 1 Wildsize 1 Wurmweaver Coil 10 other spells |
|---|---|--|

2 Gruul Scrapper
 1 Indentured Oaf
 1 Scab-Clan Mauler
 1 Scorched Rusalka
 2 Skarrgan Skybreaker
 2 Sparkmage Apprentice
 1 Streetbreaker Wurm
 1 Wild Cantor

26 creatures

Okay, I'm back. There are a lot of different ideas present in the Gruul Wilding preconstructed deck. These include an aura-heavy theme (*Gatherer of Graces*, *Bramble Elemental*, *Dowsing Shaman*, and nine Enchant Creatures), Bloodthirst (on seven creatures), and fat creatures (ten creatures with mana cost five or higher). It was unclear to me which of these themes would play out the best, so I jotted down a few questions before I began playing.

1. Is this deck supposed to abuse auras, or is it designed to show off bloodthirst?
2. Why are there so many high-cost drops in this deck, when there is no acceleration and a slight shortage on mana?
3. Would I be able to do well without any significant removal? The only removal spells in the deck were the two *Sparkmage Apprentices* and the two *Skarrgan Skybreakers*.

There's only one way to answer these questions – try out the deck.

Game #1: Grunung (Black/White lifegain)



Grunung opens quickly with an *Orzhov Guildmage* and a *Mourning Thrull*. I drop *Indentured Oaf*, and it promptly feels Mortified. A *Sparkmage Apprentice* with *Fencer's Magemark* stalls his team (killing his flyer and stopping his Guildmage), but *Agent of Masks* plus *Rune-Tail*, *Kitsune Ascendant* put me on a clock.

I get stuck at six mana, holding both *Borborygmus* and *Skarrgan Skybreaker*. Meanwhile, Grunung's dropped a second *Orzhov Guildmage*, and is dropping me three life a turn without attacking (two Guildmage activations plus the Agent). Fortunately, I have a few medium-ish creatures out, and he trades his second Guildmage for my *Bloodscale Prowler*. This allows me to semi-stabilize the board at eight life, as I draw lands number seven and eight, allowing me to

drop *Borborygmus* on one turn, and cast plus activate the Skybreaker to kill his other Guildmage the following turn. Unfortunately, Grunung has *Spirit Link* for *Borborygmus* and *Faith's Fetters* for one of my other creatures, and I eventually die to *Agent of Masks*.

Record: 0-1

I was afraid that the deck was shy on mana given how many high-end drops it had, and this game didn't help allay those fears. In addition, I effectively lost to *Spirit Link*. Even though I could keep swinging with *Borborygmus* to give all my creatures counters, I was nowhere close to being able to deal over twenty damage in a single turn. I'm playing Green – shouldn't I be able to deal with enchantments?

Game #2: Yahzuk (Red Akki LD deck)

We trade early creatures, but unfortunately one of them is *Akki Blizzard-Herder*. It's followed by a pair of *Stone Rains*, and then *Blizzard-Herders* numbers two and three. Even worse, he has *Genju of the Spires* on a Mountain – I've been holding him off with *Sparkmage Apprentice* (he's at three lands), but he casts *Umezawa's Jitte* and passes the turn.

I drop *Gruul Guildmage*, and block both of his Herders (one is equipped with the Jitte). This allows Yahzuk to drop me to no lands on the board, to his Genju-enchanted land. My hand at the time? Three five-drop creatures, and a seven-drop creature. Even if I hadn't lost all my lands this game, a single *Stone Rain* would have stranded me at four mana, crippling my chances to win. As it stands, I sit there at no lands and get beat about the head by the Genju once Yahzuk reaches three mana.

Record: 0-2

Gruul Wilding is in serious need of either more lands, or fewer big guys. Land destruction notwithstanding, I've felt like I might not be able to cast my higher-end spells both games so far. Also, Gruul Wilding has no built-in way to deal with *Umezawa's Jitte*. Not being able to deal with an artifact in Red/Green is just embarrassing. I might as well build a Black deck that can't deal with creatures.

Oh wait, I did that last week.

Game #3: Moppeh (White/Green Wrath/Knell/Untargetable)

Moppeh starts the game with a pair of *Sakura-Tribe Elders*, followed by *Privileged Position* and *Ivory Mask*. Guess I'm not going to mess with anything on his side of the board this game. He uses *Wrath of God* to kill my *Wild Cantor* and *Bloodscale Prowler*, but I'm stuck at three mana. He drops a 0/10 *Traproot Kami*, and I start building up land.

The turning point in the game comes when I drop **Bramble Elemental**, and proceed to enchant it multiple times. This allows me to develop a horde of 1/1 creatures, which swarm past his wall and drop him to zero.

Record: 1-2

I need more lands in this deck, period. **Bramble Elemental** plus auras equals fun!

Game #4: KenadaMODO (Mono-White Urzatron)

I get early beats, in the form of a second turn **Gruul Guildmage**, and third-turn, bloodthirsted **Bloodscale Prowler**. He casts **Gift of Estates** to grab three Plains, and then casts **Weathered Wayfarer**. I swing in for eight (thanks to my Guildmage) and pass the turn with four lands to his four lands. KenadaMODO passes the turn, I swing in for another six, sac a land at the end of the turn, and kill him on my sixth turn.

Record: 2-2

This was the first time I drew **Gruul Guildmage** in an early-game situation, and he performed admirably. In fact, the deck flat-out beat down when I got a real curve.

Game #5: Spear411 (Red/Blue Counterburn)

I drop **Dryad Sophisticate**, and it gets killed. This leaves me with no plays before the sixth turn! On that turn, I play **Gruul Nodorog**, and follow it with **Borborygmog**. He drops Ryusei, and I drop **Fencer's Magemark** on **Borborygmog**, allowing the cyclops to swing in through his Ryusei.

Unfortunately, Spear411 was holding **Dream Leash**, and turned **Borborygmog** traitor. I drop him to three and cast a **Bramble Elemental** plus a **Bloodscale Prowler** – and he responds the next turn by casting **Flame Fusillade**, killing all of my creatures with his permanents – including the **Dream Leash**! Talk about adding insult to injury.

Even though I play a bunch more guys to the table, Spear411 hits me with **Lava Axe**, and I'm reduced to chumping **Borborygmog** to stay alive. The traitorous legend proves to be my undoing shortly thereafter.

Record: 2-3

It's time to make some changes. I am going to keep this deck Standard-legal from start to finish, so my changes are going to come from *9th Edition*, the *Kamigawa* block, and the *Ravnica* block. The most needed change is an increase in the land count, and a decrease in a high-mana guys count. I take out the pair of **Skarrgan Skybreakers** for a Forest and a Mountain. I also swap **Battering Wurm** and **Indentured Oaf** in favor of a pair of **Tin-Street Hooligans** – I figure that it can't hurt to have a couple of more threats in the deck, and ones that double as artifact removal.

I also change up the three **Beastmaster's Magemarks** for three **Moldervine Cloaks**. The Cloaks are almost strictly better than the Magemarks, cost the same amount to play, and can come back from the graveyard. I'm still not sure how the aura theme of the deck will play out, so I want to keep the enchant creature count constant.



| Gruul Build 2 | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 13 Forest | 2 Bloodscale Prowler | 3 Fencer's Magemark |
| 12 Mountain | 1 Borborygmog | 2 Fists of Ironwood |
| 1 Skarrg, the Rage Pits | 2 Bramble Elemental | 3 Moldervine Cloak |
| 26 lands | 1 Burning-Tree Bloodscale | 1 Wildsize |
| | 2 Dowsing Shaman | 1 Wurmweaver Coil |
| | 2 Dryad Sophisticate | 10 other spells |
| | 2 Gatherer of Graces | |
| | 1 Gruul Guildmage | |
| | 1 Gruul Nodorog | |
| | 2 Gruul Scrapper | |
| | 1 Scab-Clan Mauler | |
| | 1 Scorched Rusalka | |
| | 2 Sparkmage Apprentice | |
| | 1 Streetbreaker Wurm | |
| | 2 Tin Street Hooligan | |
| | 1 Wild Cantor | |
| | 24 creatures | |

Game #6: Gregoun (Cloudstone Curio deck)

Gregoun drops a first turn **Soul Warden**, and it ends up gaining him over twenty life during the course of the game. Even still, I make a game of things with my superior creatures – his guys are **Absolver Thrull** and **Highway Robbers**, and my guys are **Bramble Elementals** and **Gruul**

Nodorogs. Unfortunately for me, he gets down **Cloudstone Curio** and begins to recur **Nekrataal** every turn, and I used one of my two **Tin-Street Hooligans** to kill a **Ronin Warclub** early in the game. I lose as he repeatedly swaps **Highway Robbers** and **Nekrataal**.

Record: 2-4

It probably couldn't hurt to go up to four **Hooligans** in my next revision – either that, or get some **Naturalizes** in the deck. Even though **Naturalize** can't attack or block, it's a ridiculously versatile staple for Green.

Game #7: Taz13 (Bloodbond March/Dredge)

Taz13 is running a really interesting **Bloodbond March/Dredge** deck. He doesn't seem to be running enough lands though, and gets stuck at four mana against my creature swarm – his only answer is a **Stinkweed Imp**, while I begin dropping early guys, **Fists of Ironwood**, and **Moldervine Cloaks**. He finally gets his board set up – **Bloodbond March** plus **Stinkweed Imp** plus two Imps in the graveyard – but I have him at one life with more than three creatures on the board.

Record: 3-4

After the game, Taz13 and I talk a bit about his deck, and I make a couple of recommendations – **Sakura-Tribe Elder** (which works really well with **Bloodbond March**) and **Life from the Loam** (which would recur his dredged lands, helping his mana issues).

A special note to Taz13: I did some looking around the **Magic Online** in-game trading posts, and **Life from the Loam** can be found for only two tickets right now!

Game #8: Elcheapo (Natural Affinity/Nantuko Husk)

I drop some early creatures, and make them huge with **Moldervine Cloak**. Elcheapo casts some land-search spells (**Farseek** and **Kodama's Reach**), but takes a lot of quick damage. On the turn I would swing in for lethal damage, Elcheapo casts **Natural Affinity**, and uses his excess lands to block and kill most of my creatures.

I'm far from done – I bring back **Moldervine Cloak**, drop two more guys, and put a Cloak on one of them. He responds with a **Nantuko Husk**, and then casts **Natural Affinity** number two on my attack to wipe out my team again (plus save his Husk by sacrificing the lands he used to block after combat damage was on the stack).

I play a non-bloodthirsted **Scab-Clan Mauler**, and he attacks with his Husk and drops a second Husk. With Elcheapo at three life, I enact my plan – Elcheapo thought I would bring back my **Moldervine Cloak** to enchant my Mauler, making it a 4/4 trampler. What he didn't expect was secret weapon number two – **Wurmweaver Coil**! My now 7/7 Mauler swings in past his Husk for the win.

Hurray trample!

Record: 4-4

I've fought my way back to a neutral record, and I like the changes I've made to the deck so far. However, I don't like the enchantment theme for the deck – **Gatherer of Graces** is pretty middling, and **Fencer's Magemark** doesn't make a huge difference in the game. On the other hand, **Wurmweaver Coil** won me the game handily, plus **Moldervine Cloaks** made even my smallest creatures into big threats.

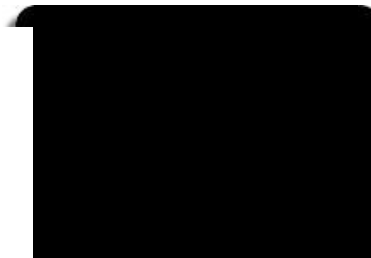
In addition, there is one ability that I've loved so far in this deck – trample. It serves two purposes for the Gruul – getting damage through against blockers, and enabling bloodthirst. There aren't a lot of cards that have to do with trample in this preconstructed deck, but it's by far been the most important (and devastating) ability I've used over the course of my matches. I want this Gruul deck to do a whole bunch of trampling, so it's time to make a lot of changes.

I haven't drawn the sole **Skarrg, the Rage Pits** yet, but I want that to change. I can easily swap out three basic lands for the Pits, so out go two Forests and a Mountain. **Fists of Ironwood** have also been a lot of fun to play with, plus they give trample – two of them can come in for the two **Fencer's Magemark**. I also trade out the last **Magemark** in the deck for a fourth **Moldervine Cloak**.

Okay, those are the easy changes for me to make – I'm just trading lands for other lands, and enchantments for other enchantments. It's time to take a long, hard look at the creature base of the deck.

One-Drops: **Scorched Rusalka** and **Wild Cantor**. **Scorched Rusalka** serves as a good bloodthirst enabler, so I keep him in the deck for the time being. **Wild Cantor** seems expendable – it never really impressed me when I drew it, so it can come out. (One creature slot open.)

Two-Drops: Two **Dryad Sophisticate**, two **Gatherer of Graces**, two **Sparkmage Apprentice**, two **Tin-Street Hooligan**, one **Gruul Guildmage**, one **Scab-Clan Mauler**. I'm moving away from a heavy enchantment theme, so the **Gatherer of Graces** are the next cards that I cut. I want to keep in the **Hooligans**, because I want to be able to deal with artifacts. I also want to keep the **Gruul Guildmage** and the Mauler, since the former proved useful the time I drew him, and the latter is probably the best meshing of bloodthirst and trample available in Standard. The **Sparkmage Apprentices** haven't really been that impressive yet, and I want to try to



get more Maulers in the deck, so the Apprentices get the boot as well. (Five creature slots open.)

Three-Drops: Two **Bloodscale Prowler**, one **Wildsize**. **Wildsize** has been pretty decent so far, so it stays. **Bloodscale Prowler**, even when bloodthirsted, can be blocked by every decent two-drop in Standard. I'm sure there are better creatures I can work into the deck than him. (Seven creature slots open.)

Four-Drops: Two **Gruul Scrapper**, one **Burning-Tree Bloodscale**. All three of these creatures are gone. The Scrapper doesn't fit the theme of Bloodthirst or trample, and the Bloodscale is only a 3/3 for four mana – if I wanted my opponent to stop blocking, I'd add in **Frenzied Goblin** and pay one mana for the ability, instead of three. (Ten creature slots open.)

Five-Drops: Two **Dowsing Shaman**, two **Bramble Elemental**, one **Streetbreaker Wurm**. The Shamans are also a casualty of the move away from the enchantment theme, especially given that **Moldervine Cloak** can recur itself thanks to dredge. On the other hand, I still have enough enchantments to make **Bramble Elemental** useful – and I've liked him so far. **Streetbreaker Wurm** gets the boot as well - he's a vanilla creature that isn't very exciting. 6/4 for five is a good cost-to-stat ratio, but I want my creatures to be able to do something, and the Wurm doesn't do anything except turn sideways and attack. (Thirteen creature slots open.)

Six-Drops: One **Gruul Nodorog**, one **Wurmweaver Coil**. The Coil stays. It's like **Might of Oaks**, except every turn. The Nodorog goes – it's an inefficient creature that would be better served in this deck as a trampling or bloodthirst creature. (Fourteen creature slots open.)

Seven-Drop: One **Borborygm**. The big guy stays. It's his guild after all – I'm not about to argue with a crazed Cyclops from the wrong side of the tracks!

All right, I've got fourteen slots open now – time to get a-inking. I want to up most of my creatures that are left to four-ofs. This includes adding three more **Gruul Guildmage**, three **Scab-Clan Mauler**, and two **Bramble Elemental**. This leaves six more slots open.

I want to try out multiple cards, so I added in two each of three different cards. The first was **Ghor-Clan Savage**. I expect the Savage to be a 5/6 for five almost every game, with **Skarrg, the Rage Pits** contributing to the trampling Savage cause.



Do not argue with this man, er... cyclops.

My next choice is **Skarrgan Firebird**. I found multiple people who were selling the Firebird for a single ticket, so adding two to the deck is a cheap experiment. My deck doesn't have any evasion except for the Sophisticates and trample, so adding in a potentially huge, recurring flyer seems like a boon to the Gruul cause.

My last choice is another rare, a pair of **Gruul War Plows**. I noticed that a lot of the removal my opponents used were at sorcery speed – either comes-into-play creatures, **Volcanic Hammers**, or **Wrath of God**. **Gruul War Plow** gives me a way to dodge these types of spells, adds a huge 4/4 creature to my deck, and allows every single one of my creatures to trample.



| Retool the Gruul | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| deck | | |
| Main Deck | | |
| 60 cards | | |
| 11 Forest | 1 Borborygm | 4 Fists of Ironwood |
| 11 Mountain | 4 Bramble Elemental | 2 Gruul War Plow |
| 4 Skarrg, the Rage Pits | 2 Dryad Sophisticate | 4 Moldervine Cloak |
| 26 lands | 2 Ghor-Clan Savage | 1 Wildsize |
| | 4 Gruul Guildmage | 1 Wurmweaver Coil |
| | 4 Scab-Clan Mauler | 12 other spells |
| | 1 Scorched Rusalka | |
| | 2 Skarrgan Firebird | |
| | 2 Tin Street Hooligan | |
| | 22 creatures | |

I didn't particularly like the name "Retool the Gruul", but I did like the deck. How did it do and what changes did I make? Find out next week in part two of Gruul: The Wilding. And by all means, bombard my inbox and the forums with a better suggestion for a deck name that encapsulates the feeling of a hard-hitting, trampling, bloodthirsting horde of creatures smashing down the red zone.

Or I'll send Boab to pay you a visit... just as soon as his batteries recharge.

Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by StarCityGames.com, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Ben Bleiweiss](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

