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Wrecking with Rakdos (Part 2 of 3)

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Building on a Budget
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Wizards of the Coast is out of the office for the Labor Day holiday, and will return with new content beginning Tuesday, September 5th. In case you missed it, what follows is the article that ran in this slot last week. But, in addition to being Labor Day, this is also the first day of our official Time Spiral previews! So, Mark Rosewater has a [new preview card](#) for you, and Rei Nakazawa has a [preview card and a storyline sneak peek](#). Enjoy the Time Spiral goodness and we'll see you tomorrow!

- Scott Johns, [magicthegathering.com](#) Producer

Welcome back to Building on a Budget! This article is a continuation of the [Rakdos Bloodsport Theme Deck Evolution](#). The readers voted, and the direction for this evolution will be towards Hellbent. Hellbent you have voted, and Hellbent so it will be!

There are only fourteen cards in **Magic** which have the Hellbent ability: Anthem of Rakdos, Cackling Flames, Demon's Jester, Demonfire, Gobhobblor Rats, Infernal Tutor, Jagged Poppet, Nihilistic Glee, Ragamuffyn, Rakdos Pit Dragon, Slaughterhouse Bouncer, Slithering Shade, Taste for Mayhem, and Twinstrike (although I'll give an honorable mention to Fool's Tome from *Tempest*). The problems with building a Hellbent deck are threefold:

1. In order to enable Hellbent, you need to empty your hand. An empty hand means less options and less ability to respond to your opponent.
2. Many of the Hellbent cards are subpar without Hellbent.
3. Many of the Hellbent cards are subpar *with* Hellbent!

Let's take a look at **Demon's Jester**. Without Hellbent, **Demon's Jester** is a 2/2 flyer with no other abilities. This compares unfavorably to other evasive Black four-drops, such as Dimir House Guard, Gibbering Kami, Infernal Kirin, and Keening Banshee. With Hellbent enabled, **Demon's Jester** is still outclassed in size by Horobi (as a flyer) and by Yukora, Razorjaw Oni, Balduvian Fallen, and is equal to Mindslicer on the ground. **Slithering Shade** is the little Nantuko Shade who couldn't. If you play **Slithering Shade** turn 1, chances are you won't be able to attack with it until turn 4 at the earliest. Why not just play **Chilling Shade**, and get a flyer that starts with one more power?



There are three guilds built towards aggression in *Ravnica* block. They are Boros (Red/White), Gruul (Red/Green) and Rakdos (Red/Black). I'd also throw Selesnya into this mix, because they have many creatures that are at the top of the power/toughness-to-cost ratio (**Watchwolf** and **Loxodon Hierarch** spring to mind). Of these guilds, Rakdos ended up with the weakest creatures. **Gobhobblor Rats** compares unfavorably to **Watchwolf** and to **Scab-Clan Mauler** (it's a lot easier to achieve Bloodthirst early than Hellbent), and there is no Hellbent removal spell as efficient as **Lightning Helix** (even after Hellbent is enabled).

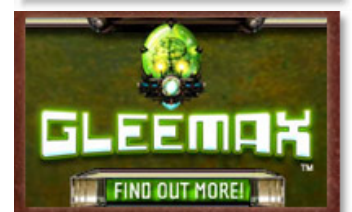
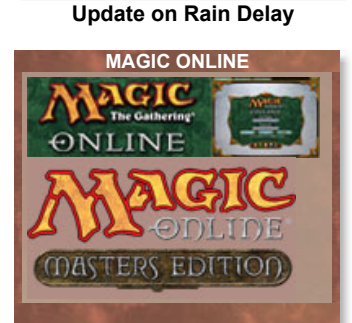
In short, Rakdos got a little shafted compared to the other aggressive guilds.

That isn't to say that Rakdos is unworkable, just that if you try to go pound-for-pound with other decks just by sticking to Hellbent alone, you're going to get smashed. Thankfully, there are a ton of cards which work well with Hellbent interspersed in Standard right now. These include **Rakdos Guildmage** (discard cards while controlling the board), **Seal of Fire** and **Seal of Doom** (**Shock** and **Dark Banishing** in enchantment form), and several creatures with activated abilities (**Lyzolda** springs to mind immediately).

This deck evolution is going to work differently than my past two. Instead of evolving my deck over the course of two weeks, I'm going to evolve the deck in one direction this week, and another direction in my next article. This means that I start with the theme deck anew in two weeks.

What are the directions? This week will be aggressive Hellbent, centered on getting cards out of my hand as fast as possible to take advantage of the more aggressive Hellbent cards. Next week will be control Hellbent, focused on taking complete control of the board and milking the most out of higher-cost Hellbent cards that can end the game quickly (such as **Rakdos Pit Dragon** and **Twinstrike**).

Even though I dogged on **Gobhobblor Rats** and **Demon's Jester** above, they are still decent cards when they get going. They may not be the best in the environment, but that doesn't make them bad cards – it just makes them not number one. There are quite a few decks that can't deal with a 3/2 regenerator or a 4/3 flyer on turn 4, plus



any deck centered around fast beats is sure to be able to take out at least half their opponents. A lot of decks you face just won't be able to set up a defense in time to stop you.

In retooling the Rakdos Bloodsport deck for an aggro-Hellbent build, I needed to take out some of the slower and/or inefficient spells, and replace them with more aggressive cards. Here's how the deck started:

Rakdos Bloodsport		
		
Main Deck 60 cards		
11 Mountain 12 Swamp 1 Rix Maadi, Dungeon Palace 24 lands	2 Sadistic Augermage 2 Scorched Rusalka 2 Torpid Moloch 2 Demon's Jester 2 Drekvac 3 Gohhbobbler Rats 1 Lyzolda, the Blood Witch 2 Ragamuffyn 1 Rakdos Guildmage 1 Rakdos Ickspitter 1 Slaughterhouse Bouncer 2 Slithering Shade 21 creatures	1 Douse in Gloom 3 Seal of Fire 2 Cackling Flames 2 Ignorant Bliss 1 Nihilistic Glee 2 Rakdos Signet 2 Taste for Mayhem 1 Twinstrike 1 Wrecking Ball 15 other spells

and here's how my first rebuild looked:

Wrecking with Rakdos – Hellbent 1		
		
Main Deck 60 cards		
11 Mountain 12 Swamp 1 Rix Maadi, Dungeon Palace 24 lands	4 Scorched Rusalka 3 Demon's Jester 4 Drekvac 4 Gohhbobbler Rats 4 Jagged Poppet 3 Lyzolda, the Blood Witch 4 Rakdos Guildmage 26 creatures	4 Seal of Doom 4 Seal of Fire 2 Cackling Flames 10 other spells

Out: 2 Slithering Shade, 2 Ragamuffyn, 2 Sadistic Augermage, 1 Slaughterhouse Bouncer, 2 Torpid Moloch, 1 Rakdos Ickspitter, 1 Douse in Gloom, 1 Nihilistic Glee, 2 Taste for Mayhem, 2 Ignorant Bliss, Wrecking Ball, Twinstrike, 2 Rakdos Signet

In: 2 Drekvac, 4 Jagged Poppet, 1 Gohhbobbler Rats, 3 Rakdos Guildmage, 1 Demon's Jester, 2 Scorched Rusalka, 2 Lyzolda, 1 Seal of Fire, 4 Seal of Doom

Explanations: Without Hellbent, Ragamuffyn is a Gray Ogre, and Slaughterhouse Bouncer is, upon research, literally the worst five-drop 3/3 creature in **Magic's** history. Torpid Moloch might be able to attack once a game, Taste for Mayhem is just asking to be hit by a two-for-one, Rakdos Inkspitter doesn't fit the Hellbent theme, Sadistic Augermage is too fragile for its effect, and Nihilistic Glee is Greed with limitations. I also wanted to push the Seals, so I took out Douse in Gloom, Wrecking Ball and Twinstrike – no point having my hand clogged up with removal when I can play my removal immediately!

In the place of the removed cards, I built a fairly standard Hellbent suite. Jagged Poppet seems like the Hellbent card with the most potential – a 3/4 for three that can remove your opponent's entire hand in one shot. Gohhbobbler Rats and Demon's Jester are the other Hellbent creatures which seem the most efficient. In they go! In addition, I added three more Rakdos Guildmage (arguably the best Guildmage in the block), a couple of Scorched Rusalka (early beats plus an activated ability on the board), Drekvac (which worked really well in testing last time around) and a couple of Lyzolda (which can sacrifice creatures on the board to push through damage.)

Game 1: jcseven5 (U/W/G Control)

I drop Scorched Rusalka, then Drekvac. Drekvac gets bounced to my hand, I get stuck with two Drekvac in my hand. The only other cards in my hand are creatures and Seal of Doom, and I don't want to lose Seal of Doom to Drekvac. Thankfully, my other creatures are Rakdos Guildmage and Jagged Poppet, and they go all the way, backed by multiple Seals.

Record: 1-0



Game 2: Blujay_87 (Mono-White Samurai)

This ends up being a long game, in which he stalls the board with Konda, Takeno and multiple Quicksands, but I am slowly working away at his life total with Rakdos Guildmage and Lyzolda. I generate a 2/1 haste creature to chump block his 8/8 Vigilance guy, and chip away at his life total two points at a time. After many turns of this, I draw Seal of Doom, play it...and try to kill Konda.

Bad Ben.
Konda is indestructible!
Sigh.

Despite this glaring play mistake, I get up to eight mana, and start discarding two cards a turn to give his samurai -4/-4. After a couple of turns of this, I am able to finally come in and finish off Blujay_87.

Record: 2-0

Game 3: Shnins (B/W Hand in Hand)

Shnins is playing a Pro-Tour level deck centered around efficient Black and White beaters – Isamaru, Hand of Honor, and the such. I get a couple of Jagged Poppets onto the board, and remove his protection from Black guy with Seal of Fire. He builds with Descendant of Kiyomaro and another Hand of Honor, and, in a truly uninspired move, I swing in with both of my Poppets.

Memo to myself: If you're a defending player, you can block one attacker with multiple creatures. One of my Poppets dies a horrible death against Isamaru and Descendant of Kiyomaro, while the other one bounces off of Hand of Honor. I end up discarding five cards, losing my entire board position, and leaving him with a virtually intact board.

Yeah, I don't win this one.

Record: 2-1

Game 4: RTHS42 (G/W Control)

I get down turn 1 Scorched Rusalka, 3 and 4 Jagged Poppet, then turn 5 Demon's Jester. RTHS42 casts Faith's Fetters on my Demon's Jester... and I forget to sacrifice it to Scorched Rusalka in response. He gains an unnecessary four life, and I kick myself for playing some of the worst Magic in my life. Despite my glaring play mistake, 3/4 creatures for three mana are still quite large, and my Poppets win the game.

Record: 3-1

The bad news is that I've made potentially game-losing play mistakes in three of my four matches. The good news is that the deck is winning despite my horrid play, meaning that it has potential. So far, I've had serious difficulties enabling Hellbent. I figured out why Drekvac was so good my first time around and so bad this time around – I don't have bad cards in my deck anymore that are easy choices to discard, so I never want to play it!

My deck is clogged with high-cost creatures and spells, and I can't unload my hand before the game is over (one way or another). In addition, my guys are sort of fragile. Here's how I fixed things:



Wrecking with Rakdos – Hellbent 2		
Main Deck 60 cards		
11 Mountain	4 Scorched Rusalka	3 Hanabi Blast
12 Swamp	4 Gobhobler Rats	3 Manriki-Gusari
1 Rix Maadi, Dungeon Palace	4 Jagged Poppet	4 Seal of Doom
24 lands	3 Lyzolda, the Blood Witch	4 Seal of Fire
	3 Rakdos Augermage	
	4 Rakdos Guildmage	14 other spells
	22 creatures	

Out: 2 Cackling Flames, 4 Drekvac, 3 Demon's Jester
In: 3 Rakdos Augermage (2 tix each), 3 Manriki-Gusari, 3 Hanabi Blast

Explanations: Cackling Flames just costs too much mana to cast in an aggro deck. Demon's Jester is the slowest creature left in the deck, and he's just been a 2/2 flyer so far.


I was surprised to find that Rakdos Augermage was selling for 2 tickets each! I expected the invitational-winning card to be cost prohibitive, but most dealers in the Magic Online dealer room were selling them at two for three tickets. I added a few to the deck. In addition, I decided to try out Hanabi Blast (repeatable removal that enables Hellbent) and Manriki-Gusari (though this could have been Vulshok Morningstar, I didn't want to auto-lose to Umezawa's Jitte).

Game 5: Landmark (U/G Simic Sky Swallower)

I get stuck at Mountain/Mountain/Swamp with so many three-drops in my hand that it's stupid. To add insult to injury, two of them are **Rakdos Augermage**. I'm not getting Hellbent fast enough, and the point of the deck is to get Hellbent quickly. It takes Landmark until turn 9 to get down **Simic Sky Swallower**, and in that time I am unable to break through a wall of **Sakura-Tribe Elder** and **Coiling Oracles**.

Record: 3-2

I am quickly realizing that taking out **Rakdos Signets** from the original deck was a mistake. An aggressive Hellbent deck can't afford to play a ton of lands, yet it has fairly color-intensive needs. I don't have a lot of two drops in the deck, but I have a plethora of three-drops. I decide to take out **Lyzolda**, as I want to try out **Rakdos Augermage**, and I'm extremely happy with **Jagged Poppet** so far.

Wrecking with Rakdos – Hellbent 3		
		
Main Deck 60 cards		
11 Mountain	4 Scorched Rusalka	3 Hanabi Blast
12 Swamp	4 Gohhobler Rats	3 Manriki-Gusari
23 lands	4 Jagged Poppet	4 Seal of Doom
	3 Rakdos Augermage	4 Seal of Fire
	4 Rakdos Guildmage	4 Rakdos Signet
	19 creatures	18 other spells

Out: Rix Maadi, 3 Lyzolda
In: 4x **Rakdos Signet**

Game 6: Netlinimp (W/B Control)

I get **Seal of Fire**, **Scorched Rusalka**, and two quick **Gohhobler Rats**. He casts **Shrieking Grotosque**, which allows me to drop my hand the following turn via **Rakdos Augermage** and my last land. I hit him for seven, and he casts **Faith's Fetters** on my Augermage. For the second time in this article, I forget to sacrifice my creature to my **Scorched Rusalka**! He returns the favor by trying to **Mortify** my hellbent-enabled Rats the next turn (you can regenerate from **Mortify**), and my Hellbent beaters come in for the win.

Record: 4-2

Game 7: Spark2033 (B/W Teysa/Skeletal Vampire)

Once again, my hand is filled with a ton of three-cost spells and creatures, and I can't get them out of my hand fast enough to get **Jagged Poppet** online with Hellbent. Spark2033 drops **Teysa** and **Skeletal Vampire**, and I am unable to break through his wall of flyers.

Record: 4-3

I need to speed it up even more. **Jagged Poppet** is no good if he can't be three times the creature that **Abyssal Specter** ever was, and **Gohhobler Rats** are just **Grizzly Bears** with a dream.



Wrecking with Rakdos – Hellbent 4		
		
Main Deck 60 cards		
11 Mountain	4 Scorched Rusalka	3 Manriki-Gusari
12 Swamp	4 Wild Cantor	3 Seal of Doom
23 lands	4 Gohhobler Rats	4 Seal of Fire
	4 Jagged Poppet	4 Rakdos Signet
	3 Rakdos Augermage	14 other spells
	4 Rakdos Guildmage	
	23 creatures	

Out: 1 Seal of Doom, 3 Hanabi Blast
In: 4 Wild Cantor

Explanations: I'd been eyeing **Wild Cantor** for a while, as it is the one Red/Green spell in the environment which can reliably jump me from one to three mana (both Black and Red – **Desperate Ritual** isn't going to cast **Jagged Poppet**!) by turn 2. Green has it good – **Boreal Druid**, **Llanowar Elves**, **Elves of Deep Shadow** and **Birds of Paradise** can all serve this purpose. Red/Black? Hardly!

Game 8: Joe718 (B/W Control)

This time around, I get turn 1 **Seal of Fire**, turn 2 **Rakdos Guildmage** (killed with **Mortify** the next turn), turn 3 **Rakdos Augermage**, turn 4 **Jagged Poppet** plus a second **Seal of Fire**, turn 5 Poppet #2, enable Hellbent, attack for his hand, and win the game on turn 6.

Record: 5-3

That, as they say, is all she wrote.

Game 9: Major Domo (Rakdos)

You might remember Major Domo from my Sasaya Deck Doctoring. After apologizing to Major Domo in person for taking Sasaya out of the final article (please read the forums of last week's article – I wrote a 3,500 word post about the Sasaya deck there, and many of you may have missed it!), we settle down for a best two-out-of-three mirror match. In the first game, we both get **Rakdos Augermage**. I get down **Jagged Poppet**, and he plays **Lyzolda**. We go back and forth for a while, until he draws **Rakdos Guildmage** to break the stalemate. I can't get **Seal of Fire**, and his Augermage is keeping me from being able to play a Guildmage of my own. He controls the board with Guildmage plus **Lyzolda**, and I lose.

Record: 5-4

Game 10: Major Domo (Rakdos)

I power out a turn 2 **Jagged Poppet** with **Wild Cantor**, and follow it with **Gobhobler Rats** and a pair of **Seal of Fire**. Major Domo can't keep up, and I run him over.

Record: 6-4

Game 11: Major Domo (Rakdos)

This is pretty much a repeat of the above game. He does manage to **Twinstrike** a couple of my guys off of the board, but he is already under seven life, and I have more creatures to play to the board.

Record: 7-4

Game 12: Det. Shaft (U/R Control)

I get down turn 2 **Rakdos Signet**, and follow it with both **Jagged Poppet** and **Seal of Fire** on turn 3. He bounces my Poppet on the attack, and I drop it back down on turn 4, along with a **Wild Cantor**. He bounces it again, and I cast both the Poppet and **Rakdos Augermage** on turn 5, thanks to the Signet. He can't deal with **Jagged Poppet** before I get **Hellbent**, and I rip his hand apart. Go Poppet!

Record: 8-4

Jagged Poppet was the most recommended creature for this deck on the boards of the last Rakdos article I wrote. I'm glad to report that it lives up to the hype!

Game 13: Daddyruss69 (Mono-U Halcyon Glaze)

I get a draw of **Gobhobler Rats** and triple **Rakdos Guildmage**. They are joined by one of each Seal, and Daddyruss69 can't block with his **Halcyon Glaze**. He bounces a couple of my guys, but inevitability is on my side.

Record: 9-4

Game 14: Spark2033 (B/W Vampires/Teysa again)

Remember when I played Spark2033 earlier? This time, my deck is much faster. I drop a first turn **Wild Cantor**, and am able to use it to cast **Rakdos Signet** on turn 2, despite my lack of a second land. Thankfully, I draw lands the next couple of turns, and quickly drop multiple **Gobhobler Rats** and **Rakdos Guildmages** to the board. He gets down **Teysa** and **Ghost Council of Orzhova**, but I get down to one card in hand, and they are unable to handle my Rats with the threat of the Guildmage looming behind.

Record: 10-4

I'm pretty happy with how the deck is working now, but I want to experiment and see just how crazy I can get with **Hellbent**. I take out the **Rakdos Augermages**, **Seals of Doom**, and a couple of basic lands, and add in **Leyline of Lightnings**, **Mishra's Baubles** and **Terrarions**. The idea is to be able to drop 3-4 cards on turn 1, and have my entire hand clear by turn 3.

This idea does not pan out very well. **Leyline of Lightning** might as well be a mulligan, because my curve is so tight, I can't ever activate it. I start getting hurt by not having enough spells that do things (like **Seal of Doom**) and having too many cards that just sit there and do nothing (**Mishra's Bauble** and **Terrarion**).

I'm pretty happy with how the aggressive-Hellbent build of Rakdos went. **Jagged Poppet** was the MVP of the deck, and the other cards around him definitely complemented the theme of getting cards out of my hand as quickly as possible, without giving up board position. There are other cards I'd like to have tried out in the deck (**Frenzied Goblin** for **Scorched Rusalka**, or **Mindslicer/Nantuko Husk** to have instant **Hellbent**), but those will have to wait for someone else to try.



I'm off next week for Labor Day, but join me in two weeks when I dust off those **Twinstrikes** and **Rakdos Pit Dragons**, and take this deck to the other end of the Hellbent spectrum!

*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.*



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