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Battle of Wits: Deep Freeze (Part 2 of 2)

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Building on a Budget
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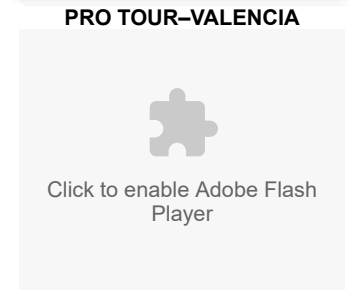


Welcome back to Building on a Budget! Back in July, I started my [Battle of Wits experiment](#). I built a [Battle of Wits](#) deck, with the intent to change the deck up with every new set release. The rules? I couldn't play any rares other than [Battle of Wits](#), and I could only have a maximum of forty uncommons in the deck at any given time.

In [last week's article](#), I put together the newest build of the [Battle of Wits](#) deck, incorporating several [Coldsnap](#) cards into the mix. I chose black and blue as the colors for the deck, because blue is the color of [Battle of Wits](#) and card drawing, and black is the color of tutoring ([Diabolic Tutor](#), [transmute](#) cards). With the addition of [Coldsnap](#), I also changed the way the deck functions – instead of a ton of redundancy and four-ofs, I approached the deck with a silver bullet strategy – that is, I put in a lot of very situational one-of cards (like [Execute](#) and [Slay](#)). My belief is that this strategy would work well in a deck that runs 240+ cards. I'm very unlikely to draw one of these cards in any given hand (when they might be dead), but the massive deck size allows me to have them available as tutor targets.

In short, it's like running [Cunning Wish](#), [Burning Wish](#), [Living Wish](#) and [Golden Wish](#) main deck!

Last time I played my budget [Battle of Wits](#) deck, I brought it to a 6-4 record. With the new focus on silver bullets, I expected it to be much improved. Let's take a look at the game logs, shall we?



Update on Rain Delay

BoW 3.0		
Main Deck 243 cards		
53 Island	4 Dimir House Guard	4 Battle of Wits
53 Swamp	4 Dimir Infiltrator	1 Befoul
4 Frost Marsh	4 Drift of Phantasms	1 Boomerang
110 lands	4 Nekrataal	4 Brainspoil
	1 Nezumi Graverobber	4 Clutch of the Undercity
	3 Ninja of the Deep Hours	4 Compulsive Research
	3 Thieving Magpie	4 Consult the Necrosages
	4 Thought Courier	4 Counsel of the Soratami
	27 creatures	3 Dark Banishing
		1 Death Denied
		4 Diabolic Tutor
		4 Dimir Signet
		1 Eradicate
		1 Execute
		4 Fellwar Stone
		4 Golgari Signet
		1 Hideous Laughter
		4 Ideas Unbound
		4 Izzet Signet
		4 Last Gasp
		1 Mnemonic Nexus
		4 Muddle the Mixture
		1 Nightmare Void
		4 Orzhov Signet
		1 Quash
		4 Rend Flesh
		4 Sift
		1 Slay
		4 Sleight of Hand
		1 Train of Thought
		4 Azorius Signet
		4 Coldsteel Heart
		4 Perilous Research



4 Rakdos Signet
4 Simic Signet

106 other spells

Game 1: Ockadox (B/W Orzhov)

Ockadox drops a first-turn **Plagued Rusalka**, and follows it up with **Teysa, Orzhov Scion**. I have a relatively weak hand with mostly mana acceleration, plus a **Drift of Phantasms**. I drop the Drift to stop the beatings and end up drawing nothing but lands the rest of the game. In retrospect, I should have transmuted the Drift to get **Execute** (to kill Teysa), because either way it would have prevented two damage a turn – but instead, I end up getting run over eventually by **Skeletal Vampire** and a whole bunch of Orzhov creatures.

After the game, Ockadox revealed two **Mortify** he had been holding in his hand. This game would have been an uphill battle, even if I had drawn a way to get **Battle of Wits** onto the table. I made a note to myself to add a second discard outlet (outside of **Nightmare Void**) to the deck as a transmute target.

Record: 0-1

Game 2: Kiddsmoke99 (R/W Boros)

I drop **Coldsteel Heart** turn two, play THREE signets on turn 3, transmute for **Battle of Wits** on turn 4, and cast the enchantment on turn 5 for the win.

Record: 1-1

Just as a side note, you're going to see a lot of "I cast **Battle of Wits** and won." That's the reward you get for playing a deck that's four to five times the size of a regular deck – you get to play with a card that says "cast me and you win."

Game 3: Sanhedrin (U/G Allosaurus Rider/Ninja)

Sanhedrin was running a pretty nifty deck revolving around drawing extra cards through creatures (**Carven Caryatid**, **Civic Wayfinder**, **Ninja of the Deep Hours**) and then pitching some of them to cast **Allosaurus Rider**. I have an early **Thought Courier** this game, but I keep drawing into lands. He drops double **Allosaurus Rider**, and the best I can do is transmute **Muddle the Mixture** for a **Boomerang**. This only prolongs the agony for a turn, and I end up getting run over by his elves on dinosaurs.

Record: 1-2

Game 4: A_State_of_Disipation (B/G Natural Affinity/Eradicate)

This game starts slowly, and once again I draw too many lands and signets and not enough spells. He starts going after my signets with **Putrefy**, but I just keep on drawing lands. Once he reaches seven mana, he casts **Natural Affinity** and attempts to **Eradicate** my Swamp.

Now, I have a choice to make. I really don't need any of the rest of the Swamps in my deck, so allowing him to kill that Swamp will potentially give me a free half-a-**Mana Severance**. I still get to keep the other Swamps I have in play already (and there are a lot of them!) On the other hand, if he hits my Swamps and then my Islands, he'll eventually be able to drop more lands than me, and kill me with **Natural Affinity** – plus I'll lose the ability to win with **Battle of Wits**. I decide I don't want to go below 200 cards, and I **Last Gasp** my own Swamp in response to his **Eradicate**, countering it.

A couple of turns down the road, I draw into **Clutch of the Undercity**, and I transmute it into **Diabolic Tutor**. I hold onto the Tutor for a turn, since I don't want to tap out and die to an alpha strike from **Natural Affinity** lands. When I cast **Diabolic Tutor**, I go for **Quash**. My reasoning is that he hasn't shown me a win condition outside of **Natural Affinity**, and so if I get **Natural Affinity** out of his deck, I should be able to take as long as I wanted to win.

Lo and behold, **A_State_of_Disipation** goes to cast **Natural Affinity** again, and this time I'm ready. **Quash** takes out all of his copies of **Natural Affinity**, and he's left with a deck filled with **Eradicates**, **Plague Winds**, mana acceleration, and ways to get **Natural Affinity** back... if it's not removed from the game! His hand includes **Sins of the Past** and **Reclaim**, but without any way left in his deck to win, he wisely concedes.

Record: 2-2

Game 5: Midashand (G/W Aggro)

I transmute **Dimir House Guard** into **Nekrataal**, which I use to kill his early **Yavimaya Enchantress**. He plays **Serra Angel**, which I **Eradicate**. One of the perks of **Eradicate** is that I get to see his hand and deck, and he's only got two ways to kill an enchantment in his deck (a pair of **Naturalize**). He uses the one in his hand to take out one of my Signets, and then casts **Angel of Mercy**.

I transmute for **Boomerang**, **Boomerang** my **Nekrataal**, and recast it, killing his Angel. I then transmute for **Death Denied** and use it to get back **Dimir**



House Guard and Dimir Infiltrator, allowing me to transmute yet again. This time, I get Diabolic Tutor and Muddle the Mixture, cast Tutor to get Battle of Wits, and drop Battle of Wits with two Islands open for Muddle the Mixture, in case he drew his second Naturalize. He hadn't, and I win.

Record: 3-2

One spectator asked, after the game, why I hadn't just transmuted for Diabolic Tutor/Battle of Wits first thing in the game and gone for the win. My response is that there are a ton of green-white decks in the casual room that main-deck enchantment removal (which was the case in this game as well!). I wanted to maneuver into a position where I could safely drop Battle of Wits and win, as opposed to blindly throwing it out against the two colors that can easily handle it.

With five games under my belt, it's time to make some changes. I have eight two-mana transmute cards, but very few interesting two-mana spells to transmute for. I also keep drawing too many lands and signets every game. I decide to take out four signets (I randomly choose Orzhov Signet – it doesn't matter which I take out, because they are ridiculously redundant) and add in Distress (the discard card I mentioned earlier), Grim Harvest (as a recurring creature-return spell, to complement Death Denied), Soratami Cloudskater (as Thought Courier number five), and a second Boomerang.

Out: 4 Orzhov Signet

In: 1 Distress, 1 Grim Harvest, 1 Soratami Cloudskater, 1 Boomerang



BoW 4.0		Main Deck 243 cards	
53 Island	4 Dimir House Guard	4 Battle of Wits	
53 Swamp	4 Dimir Infiltrator	1 Befoul	
4 Frost Marsh	4 Drift of Phantasms	2 Boomerang	
110 lands	4 Nekkartaal	4 Brainspoil	
	1 Nezumi Graverobber	4 Clutch of the Undercity	
	3 Ninja of the Deep Hours	4 Compulsive Research	
	1 Soratami Cloudskater	4 Consult the Necrosages	
	3 Thieving Magpie	4 Counsel of the Soratami	
	4 Thought Courier	3 Dark Banishing	
	28 creatures	1 Death Denied	
		4 Diabolic Tutor	
		4 Dimir Signet	
		1 Distress	
		1 Eradicate	
		1 Execute	
		4 Fellwar Stone	
		4 Golgari Signet	
		1 Hideous Laughter	
		4 Ideas Unbound	
		4 Izzet Signet	
		4 Last Gasp	
		1 Mnemonic Nexus	
		4 Muddle the Mixture	
		1 Nightmare Void	
		1 Quash	
		4 Rend Flesh	
		4 Sift	
		1 Slay	
		4 Sleight of Hand	
		1 Train of Thought	
		4 Azorius Signet	
		4 Coldsteel Heart	
		1 Grim Harvest	
		4 Perilous Research	
		4 Rakdos Signet	
		4 Simic Signet	
		105 other spells	

Game 6: HC Hunter (G/W Juniper Order Ranger/Doubling Season)

The silver-bullet strategy really shines this game, as I have an answer to his every question. He gets Juniper Order Ranger, and I Dark Banish it. He drops Llanowar Elves plus Civic Wayfinder, and I transmute for and cast Hideous Laughter. He gets a second Ranger and throws Moldervine Cloak on it, and I tutor for Boomerang. He recasts the Ranger and attacks, and I block with my Thought Courier and Last Gasp his Ranger before damage, killing it. He drops Doubling Season and Selesnya Guildmage, and I Clutch of the Undercity his enchantment,

Rend Flesh his Guildmage, and drop Thieving Magpie to the board. I draw Battle of Wits with 203 cards left in my deck and win, though he was at 7 life from my Magpie and a Nekrataal when I dropped the enchantment.

Record: 4-2

Game 7: Luckzack (Four Color Draft Leftovers)

Luckzack tells me that this deck is just a highlander deck cobbled together from his drafts, but it's an extremely fun-looking deck. Every card in the deck has a function or provides card advantage. He ruins my hand with Nightmare Void, casts Sift twice (thanks to Izzet Chronarch), plays Golgari Rotworm, and runs me over. Even though the deck isn't completely cohesive, it has as much utility as this Battle of Wits deck. Maybe I'll explore the concept of a highlander utility deck in the future...

Record: 4-3

Game 8: Miltstar (W/G Aggro)

He gets the über-curve with turn 1 Savannah Lions, turn 2 Watchwolf, turn 3 Scion of the Wild, and turn 4 Emperor Crocodile. Grim, right? On the play, I get turn 2 Signet, turn 3 Thieving Magpie (he attacks his Lions into it), turn 4 Rend Flesh (on Watchwolf), and turn 5 transmute Dimir Infiltrator into Boomerang, Boomerang Scion (killing his Crocodile and drawing a concession).

Record: 5-3



Game 9: Blage (G/W Beats)

He gets Selesnya Guildmage, double Llanowar Elves, Vitu-Ghazi and Savannah Lions. I 'Taal an early Elf, but he casts Bathe in Light on the attack (after I block) to kill my guy. I then draw about 12 lands (my card-drawing spells have affinity for lands) and don't get anything going until the turn before I die.

Record: 5-4

Game 10: Defenestratuall (G/W Scion of Wild)

I get turn 2 Signet, turn 3 Ninja of the Deep Hours, turn 4 Battle of Wits (in opening hand), and win. Sometimes Battle of Wits just plays like this, and you take the easy victory.

Record: 6-4

Game 11: Aeosphere (B/U Snow)

He gets Dimir Guildmage and Scrying Sheets. I get a Signet and then Transmute on turn 3 for Battle of Wits. This forces him to hold back his mana (he only has one Island), because he needs to keep Battle of Wits from hitting the table. This allows me to drop Ninja of the Deep Hours onto the board and then transmute for Last Gasp to kill his Guildmage. He taps out to cast Ribbons of Night, and I Muddle the Mixture it and drop Battle of Wits. He Reveals Battle of Wits. I recast it, transmute for a second Muddle, and win.

Record: 7-4

I'm still drawing way too many lands, so I decide I should just gut out a whole lot of them. I take out three Islands, three Swamps and four Fellwar Stones, and add in Crystal Seer and Petals of Insight (as five-drop transmute targets, in case I can't just get Battle of Wits and win), Exile Into Darkness and Ribbons of Night (more transmute targets – one to gain life, and one to recur against weenie decks), Gravedigger (creature recurrence at the four-drop transmute slot) and Treasure Trove (if I have so many lands, this might be good). Note that I took out the Fellwar Stones instead of Signets to keep below 40 uncommons. Also note that I took out ten cards but only added back in six. This leaves me with fewer lands, but also slightly fewer cards in the deck as well. Still, given how many lands I've drawn each game above (and the absolute lack of mulligans – I only ended up having to mulligan in a single game during this entire article), I don't see the removal of ten mana sources being a big deal. This still leaves me with 104 lands and 28 2-drop mana accelerants (Signets and Coldsteel Heart).

In: 1 Crystal Seer, 1 Exile Into Darkness, 1 Gravedigger, 1 Petals of Insight, 1 Ribbons of Night, 1 Treasure Trove
Out: 3 Island, 3 Swamp, 4 Fellwar Stone



BoW 5.0		Main Deck 239 cards		f.dec	
50	Island	1	Crystal Seer	4	Battle of Wits

50 Swamp	4 Dimir House Guard	1 Befoul
4 Frost Marsh	4 Dimir Infiltrator	2 Boomerang
104 lands	4 Drift of Phantasms	4 Brainspoil
	1 Gravedigger	4 Clutch of the Undercity
	4 Nekrataal	4 Compulsive Research
	1 Nezumi Graverobber	4 Consult the Necrosages
	3 Ninja of the Deep Hours	4 Counsel of the Soratami
	1 Soratami Cloudskater	3 Dark Banishing
	3 Thieving Magpie	1 Death Denied
	4 Thought Courier	4 Diabolic Tutor
		4 Dimir Signet
	30 creatures	1 Distress
		1 Eradicate
		1 Execute
		1 Exile into Darkness
		4 Golgari Signet
		1 Hideous Laughter
		4 Ideas Unbound
		4 Izzet Signet
		4 Last Gasp
		1 Mnemonic Nexus
		4 Muddle the Mixture
		1 Nightmare Void
		1 Petals of Insight
		1 Quash
		4 Rend Flesh
		1 Ribbons of Night
		4 Sift
		1 Slay
		4 Sleight of Hand
		1 Train of Thought
		1 Treasure Trove
		4 Azorius Signet
		4 Coldsteel Heart
		1 Grim Harvest
		4 Perilous Research
		4 Rakdos Signet
		4 Simic Signet
		105 other spells

Game 12: Uhl (R/G/W beats)

He gets **Giant Solifuge** and aims burn at my head. He **Mana Leaks** my first **Battle of Wits**, but I get down **Drift of Phantasms** to buy some time. He drops **Seal of Fire**, attacks with **Giant Solifuge**, and then uses **Seal of Fire** to finish off my defender after damage. This ends up costing him the game (if he had used the Seal before damage, he would have trampled over for one), and I end up transmuting for and dropping **Battle of Wits** at 5 life and ending the game at one.

Record: 8-4

Game 13: Resqueda (U/G Simic)

I cast turn 3 **Counsel of the Soratami**, turn 4 **Ninja of the Deep Hours**, turn 5 **Battle of Wits**, and win.

Record: 9-4

Game 14: Maniac187 (G/W Aggro)

Me: Island

Him: Forest, **Llanowar Elves**

Me: Swamp, **Golgari Signet**

Him: **Silhana Ledgewalker**

Me: Island, **Eradicate**, **Llanowar Elves** (He's holding **Nikko-Onna** in hand, with no other enchantment removal in deck. If he doesn't draw two lands, one of which produces White mana, I win.)

Him: No land drop

Me: **Battle of Wits**, win.

Record: 10-4

Game 15: one_warrior (Simic)

I end up one mana behind where I need to be the entire game, even though I don't miss a land drop at all. He plays **Trygon Predator**, **Assault Zeppelin**, **Patagia Viper** and **Aquastrand Spider**, and I keep falling behind one mana to transmute plus cast the spell I'm transmuting for. His Predator keeps any signets from hitting the board, and I lose this game wishing I had access to **Needle Storm** to kill all his flyers at once.

Record: 10-5

Game 16: SirNexx (U/B Reanimator)

He gets **Drowned Rusalka** and **Vexing Sphinx**. I kill the Sphinx immediately with **Rend Flesh**. He sacrifices Rusalka to discard **Simic Sky Swallow** and transmutes **Clutch of the Undercity** for **Zombify**. I transmute **Brainspoil** for **Battle of Wits**, drop it, and win.

Record: 11-5

Game 17: Cardboard Junkie (G/B/U fatties)

He gets **Llanowar Elves** plus two **Sakura-Tribe Elder**. I cast turn 2 **Ideas Unbound**, discard **Clutch of the Undercity** and two **Dimir House Guard**, and then cast **Nekrataal** to kill his Elves on turn 4. He drops **Arashi, the Sky Asunder**, and I transmute **Drift of Phantasms** for **Slay** and kill it. He drops a second Arashi and **Golgari Guildmage**, and before I can contemplate my next move, I randomly draw **Battle of Wits**, drop it, and win.

Record: 12-5

Another instance of randomly having an "I win" card in the deck. This made for a really anti-climatic finish, but it's not like I'm going to hold back the **Battle of Wits** to see how the rest of the game goes. I built the deck to win with **Battle of Wits**, and if I just happen to draw it unaided, more the power.

Game 18: Noelynot (B/R)

I get turn 2 **Coldsteel Heart**, turn 3 **Signet** plus **Consult the Necrosages**, turn 4 **Battle of Wits**, and win the game. His only play to this point was **Royal Assassin**.

Record: 13-5

Game 19: Penn3x (U/B Mill)

If there's one deck that is really not going to beat **Battle of Wits**, it's this one. It's kind of hard to mill a 239 card deck, but Penn3x gave it his best shot. He casts **Glimpse the Unthinkable**, **Dimir Cutpurse** and **Vedalken Entrancer**. I drop **Nekrataal** on turn 3 to stop his Cutpurse, and then **Eradicate** **Vedalken Entrancer** on turn 4. He's stuck at four lands but has **Keiga**, **Dimir Guildmage**, and **Glimpse the Unthinkable** number two in hand.

He drops the Guildmage, and I transmute for **Nezumi Graverobber** – the more he mills me, the more creatures I'll get! Well, that's the plan, until he hardcasts **Leyline of the Void**. Still, I get to return a **Dimir House Guard** he got with the first Glimpse, and then I transmute for **Distress** to knock Keiga out of his hand (plus reanimate it). He mills me below 200 cards, but I draw **Diabolic Tutor** and transmute cards, continue killing/reanimating his guys, and eventually overwhelm him with creatures for the win.

Record: 14-5

Game 20: Roojchan (G/W Aggro)

He drops **Llanowar Elves**, then **Watchwolf**, and then **Faith's Fetters** on my turn 3 **Thieving Magpie**. I Dark Banish his Watchwolf, and he drops **Juniper Order Ranger**. I transmute for **Execute**, **Execute** the ranger, draw into **Battle of Wits**, and win.

Record: 15-5

All in all, **Battle of Wits** is still an extremely fun deck to play, and adding in the silver bullet strategy was a huge boon to the deck. I ended up with a 75% win percentage (as opposed to 60% last time), so it's definitely a viable deck for the casual room. There will be big changes to the deck with **Time Spiral**, since the entire **Kamigawa** block will no longer be Standard legal.

Rotating Out:

- 1 **Death Denied**
- 1 **Distress**
- 1 **Eradicate**
- 1 **Exile Into Darkness**
- 1 **Hideous Laughter**
- 4 **Ideas Unbound**
- 1 **Nezumi Graverobber**
- 3 **Ninja of the Deep Hours**
- 1 **Petals of Insight**
- 1 **Quash**
- 4 **Rend Flesh**
- 1 **Soratami Cloudskater**
- 1 **Distress**

I've taken a look over **Time Spiral**, and here are some of the cards that you might see coming to a **Battle of Wits** deck near you a couple of months down the road:

- Careful Consideration**
- Chromatic Star**
- Chronatog Totem**
- Faceless Butcher** (a common in *Torment*)



Faceless Devourer
 Fathom Seer
 Looter il-Kor
 Mystical Teachings
 Phthisis
 Phyrexian Totem
 Psychotic Episode
 Riftwing Cloudskate
 Sage of Epityr
 Sudden Death
 Tendrils of Corruption
 Terramorphic Expanse
 Think Twice
 Twisted Abomination (common in *Scourge*)
 Willbender (uncommon in *Legions*)
 Wipe Away
 Withered Wretch (uncommon in *Legions*)

Here's the poll results from last week:

Did you like the Blue Snow Aggro column last week?		
Yes! I like seeing winning budget decks, regardless of win condition!	4748	70.5%
Neither. It was just another Building on a Budget column to me.	1580	23.5%
No! I hate Counterspells, regardless of what deck they're played in.	404	6.0%
Total	6732	100.0%

And here's a new poll for this week. See you in 7 days!

Highlander utility deck – yay or nay?

Yay!
 Nay!
 Neigh! I'm a horse!

*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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