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# Tribal Matters

Quentin Martin  
 Limited Information  
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After last week's Prerelease primer, I, alas, did not manage to attend one. In fact, I have yet to even play the set. However, I've made it my mission to talk to as many players who have attended them to make sure that this advice is as accurate as it can be. I've also pored through the spoiler list many, many times. Forgive me if some of these predictions prove a little off with more experience.

Maybe it seems harsh to continually compare *Lorwyn* to *Onslaught*, but it provides a useful perspective point from which to analyse the new cards. Back in *Onslaught* Block, there were many cards, like *Sparks* and *Timberwatch Elf*, which demanded as many of a certain tribe as possible. Cards like *Daunting Defender* and *Shepherd of Rot* made sure that for each colour there were many commons that demanded adherence to the tribal code in order for them to be playable. However, this trend does not continue as powerfully throughout *Lorwyn*.

To start with, most cards that benefit from there being a card of a specific creature type under your control only ask for there to be one of that type. The powerful strength of multiples that *Onslaught* brought us is not present here. In fact, there are only four commons which get better from multiples and only one of them is really comparable to a card of old. Much to Rich Hoan's delight, that is *Silvergill Douser*—*Battlefield Medic's* mutated brother.

What this all means, with regards to the mass effect, is that the power of the tribes this time around have been greatly reduced. Rather it being compulsory for you to have as many of one type as possible, now you just have to have three or four of one type, plus a couple of changelings, to justify playing them. This means that it is much easier to have decks that are essentially non-tribal, with mini-themes operating throughout as cards get played because they are good of themselves and better with the aid of another tribe.

Despite this, there are cards that want you to play as many of a tribe as possible to make them playable in the first place. Alas, almost all of these are uncommons or rares, so you cannot really force a tribe with the hope of picking them up. This is an option, but it might be easier to start with one of these cards and take it from there rather than force. These cards fall into two categories: universal pumpers and cards that are cheaper with aid.

Each tribe has a card that reads "other members of this tribe get +1/+1," and the Giants go one step further and get even bigger with *Sunrise Sovereign*. However, these are all rare except for the Kithkin, Merfolk and Elvish pumpers. This means that once more, you are going to have to open or get passed one of these early to make realistic and effective use of them.

Most of the tribes have a creature that is undercosted for its strength but costs three more mana if you cannot reveal a member of the same tribe (this of course, as with everything else in the set, includes changeling cards). The problem Limited faces with this cycle is that almost all of them are efficient beaters that, in order to be used effectively, demand around seven other cards of the same race to work as intended.

One of the best cycles of cards that promote tribalness are the [spells that cantrip](#) if you control a member of the right tribe. Again, look how powerful changelings become in this aspect as well. Of this cycle, I think *Rootgrapple*, *Peppersmoke*, and *Surge of Thoughtweft* are the good ones. All three can get played without many members of the necessary group but become so much better when you do.

The [Harbingers](#) deserve some attention. You only need a few good targets in your deck to justify playing them, but each Harbinger varies in strength. Not only do you have their individual stats and abilities to take into account, but it is also of critical importance to consider the strength of the cards they fetch and when they fetch them.

*Flamekin Harbinger* is too small and too early to be very playable without an awesome target as often in the early game you want to draw a land to help you out. This is why the *Treefolk Harbinger* is more playable as it gets a *Forest* too; however, I am yet to become his biggest fan as a *Wall of Wood* is nothing to get excited about. *Kithkin Harbinger* suffers because aren't too many Kithkin worth tutoring for, and a 1/3 body is not something the normally aggressive Kithkin decks want. *Merrow Harbinger* is also



A worthy successor to *Battlefield Medic*.



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nothing to get too excited about unless you are playing against a blue mage.

This brings us to the good ones. The **Faerie Harbinger** is a decent flyer in its own right; the only problem is that most Faeries are not really worth fetching (remember though, it is a may effect and not compulsory). The **Boggart Harbinger** may not look too exciting, but he can fetch **Warren Pilferers** or **Tarfire** and the ability to tutor up removal is very strong. The **Elvish Harbinger** is perfectly playable in his own right as both an accelerator and a colour enabler, and **Nath's Elite** is a perfectly curved tutor target. I think my favourite Harbinger belongs to the Giants, though. I like expensive spells and this guy is a 3/4 for five, which is nothing to sniff at, nor anything to write home about. However, he will almost always fetch an on-the-curve fattie. When you have him in your opening grip you know you are not going to run out of gas in the late game, even if all he fetches is the new **Craw Wurm**, **Axegrinder Giant**.

The most important thing that the Harbingers do, though, is fetch changelings. There are [several large men](#) that champion any creature that are all very strong, but the card that seems to follow the word Harbinger in every conversation I've had has been **Nameless Inversion**. This is probably going to be one of the highest picked cards in the set because it is easily splashable if you are not black, and this set has plenty of enablers, and it turns every Harbinger into a removal tutor.

There are two further rare cycles which promote tribes. The first are [the creatures](#) that all have "champion a [race]." These are all very large, undercosted creatures with neat abilities that will almost certainly win the game if they are not dealt with quickly. However, these will just get snapped up by however plays that colour as they are bound to have enough of that creature type, especially taking changelings into account, without having to go heavily tribal to accommodate them.

The other cycle are the [dual lands](#), which come into play tapped unless you reveal a card of a specific creature type from your hand. These require heavier tribal commitment than normal to be very good, but they will get picked up as a colour fixer by anyone in those colours and as a result will almost always fall on-theme anyway.



Now it's time to take a closer look at each tribe and see which cards promote a heavy tribal nature, much akin to the *Onslaught* days of old.

## Elementals

There's not much that can really be said about these guys. They are mainly in red and spread thinly throughout the other colours and rarities. An Elemental deck will probably be red-blue-X to abuse **MulldrifTERS** and **Æthersnipes**. The card that makes the foundation of this deck is **Smokebraider**. As [BDM correctly pointed out](#), this is very similar to the **Vedalken Engineer** of old but is much narrower as you will probably be the only player on the table drafting Elementals (rather than artifacts). It allows you to accelerate to the higher costing Elementals (of which there are many) whilst also splashing the more powerful Elementals in other colours.

## Elves

The Elvish cards that promote togetherness and probably world peace to boot are nothing to write home to your mom about. **Elvish Branchbender** turns from a rather unexciting land-enhancing **Gray Ogre** into a slightly unexciting one. **Lys Alana Huntmaster** is a **Hill Giant** with a nifty ability that is better than it looks, as you can normally squeeze at least one activation out of it. **Jagged-Scar Archers** is very powerful and only really needs two other Elves to rule the sky. It is also worth noting that **Imperious Perfect** is a bomb that can soon spiral out of control and need not force you into Elves, as it is powerful enough by itself.

## Faeries

As an archetype, these guys are small and annoying and will need to be backed up by some serious removal and tricks to stay ahead. However, they are the archetype I'd like to explore the most as I like this degree of trickery in Limited. **Spellstutter Sprite** has the potential to get out of hand with enough changelings and comrades, especially when combined with **Familiar's Ruse**. I like **Thieving Sprite**. It seems like a better **Ravenous Rats** as it leaves you with a body that can be annoying rather than just another chump blocker. Between the two of them, the tricks, and the Merfolk aid of **Silvergill Douser**, I think they have a lot of potential. Another crucial aspect is that two of blue's staple creatures, **Pestermite** and **Sentinels of Glen Elendra**, are Faeries that will get played by themselves to help promote the archetype.

## Giants

It might be possible to go all-in on Giants using **Stinkdrinker Daredevil** to provide both some needed early defence and acceleration. Being this focused on Giants would mean that **Blind-Spot Giant** becomes a lot better, although he is not that exciting. **Crush Underfoot** becomes an excellent addition to this strategy, although you should be careful that your opponent won't two-for-one you by killing your only Giant in response. All in all, I think that Giants will be more of a sub-theme within red and red-white decks, rather than a common draft strategy. Although it should be noted that **Thundercloud Shaman** is a bit of a bomb with or without comrades.

## Goblins

I'd call them boggarts, but they're Goblins, plain and simple. There aren't too many cards that aren't rare that are going to make you want to draft Goblins. Getting a Goblin back with **Warren Pilferers** makes an already great card even better (especially if you return another Pilferer...), but you are going to pick him highly anyway, regardless of whether you are Goblins or not. **Fodder Launcher** is the biggest attraction to Goblins for me. This card is ridiculous and will probably go quite late, as I suspect Goblins won't be drafted too highly. The game swing this card causes should not be underrated.

### Kithkin

There is almost nothing holding the Kithkin together. **Cenn's Heir** is far too feeble to generate an archetype, and **Wellgabber Apothecary** is similarly overcosted and under-achieving. That's all I really have to say about Kithkin.

### Merfolk

This is the tribe that I've heard spoken about the most. In fact, when I asked what other pros thought the best tribe was, this was the unanimous answer. I think it's because there are two commons that make other Merfolk better, rather than having to resort to uncommons and rares. **Silvergill Douser** is an awesome card and, much like **Saltfield Recluse**, will dominate the combat phase until it gets killed. **Streambed Aquitects** are efficiently costed and with a great effect. They are essentially 3/4 guys on defence whilst your blue flyers swing above. White offers a couple of interesting cards (I refuse to mention **Wellgabber Apothecary** in more than passing). **Summon the School** is a card that I am wary about, but once you get it going, I think it might be good enough to win you the game by itself. **Harpoon Sniper** is a very strong card within the Merfolk archetype and should be snapped up highly (especially as I think that white-blue is a strong archetype with lots of good flyers, enough removal and solid defence).

### Treefolk

**Battlewand Oak** is a powerful card in its own right in a heavy green deck, and I can see it attacking for five often enough to make it worth considering. **Black Poplar Shaman's** regeneration ability is too expensive, but if you have some of the powerful Treefolk rares that you want to protect, then he might be worth considering. **Thorntooth Witch** is the strongest reason for taking a Treefolk over another card purely for tribal reasons, as it is a monster that will dominate the game if you still have some gas left in the tank because you accelerated into it.

Upon reflection, I think that **Lorwyn** is going to be a great Limited environment, where most decks will be full of little combos that make cards slightly better than normal. It is because of all these miscellaneous interactions that changelings are an absolute priority and should be drafted as highly as possible. I am worried that, much like colour screw, games will often be decided when one person's deck comes together whilst the other player draws all the wrong halves. To compensate for this, it might be worth being as focused as possible to both maximise the interactions and minimise the chance of malfunctioning.

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Missed the Prerelease, or just hungry for more? Check out [Lorwyn Release Events](#) October 12-14 to play with **Lorwyn** cards as soon as they go on sale.

*Widely considered one of the world's foremost Limited competitors, Quentin Martin has four Limited Grand Prix Top 8s and a Top 8 at Pro Tour-Prague 2006. Between his **Magic** expertise and a background in philosophy, it's no surprise Quentin is well known for his strategic insight and theories on the game.*



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