



Experiencing *Lorwyn* Limited

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Limited Information
 Tuesday, October 23, 2007



With experience under my belt, it's time to delve deeper into *Lorwyn*. I managed to get several drafts done in *Valencia*, as well as watching many more and hovering over the shoulders of some of the best players in the world to see what I could glean. Tribes, unsurprisingly, play a large part. Decks seem to fall into two main categories, with a few exceptions already beginning to appear.

Tribal Archetypes

Going all-in certainly pays off for a lot of tribes. Merfolk and Faeries seem to be the two that gain the most from commitment. For Merfolk, being all-in means your *Streambed Aquitects* are virtual *Kabuto Moths*, your *Judge of Currents* (a card I completely underrated when I reviewed the archetype a few weeks ago) becomes a powerhouse that tends to send you streaking into the lead, and the overhyped *Summon the School* means there are always enough Merfolk to go around. I say overhyped because, whilst the card certainly is good, it is far better in Sealed than Draft, where a horde of Merfolk are often not enough to win the game unless combined with the mighty *Drowner of Secrets*.

Faeries are tricky little blighters, the cornerstones of their decks being *Dreamspoiler Witches* and *Spellstutter Sprite*. The former becomes a veritable machine gun when combined with *Peppersmoke* and the rest of the instants that fill up a Faerie deck. The Sprite is one of the best cards in the deck as once the deck gets going, maybe with the help of an *Amoeboid Changeling*, it counters almost everything and becomes a hard lock when combined with *Glen Elendra Pranksters*. *Thieving Sprite* ensures that things don't get out of control and helps to up the Faerie count for the Spellstutterer. *Pestermite* keeps the tempo safely under your control whilst you control the game with incidental removal, discard and counterspells. *Nectar Faerie* surprised me slightly by coming in off the bench a lot to slow down the beats of Elves, Faeries, and changelings the game over.



On the other hand, Kithkin tended to group together not because of any tribal necessity, but because they were fast at ending games. *Kithkin Greatheart* is a very powerful card that I expect to see snapped up quickly as it is always possible to have a Giant or changeling around to make him a monster—although I have seen several blowouts where the Giant has died mid-combat, dragging the Kithkin down with it. As amazing as *Plover Knights* are, I am beginning to think that *Kinsbaile Balloonist* might be better. The energetic Balloonist is a very hard card to race against without removal and is incredibly powerful in the late game when he drags fatties up with him.

Treefolk seem a weak tribe to cobble together, with the only real card of worth being *Battlewand Oak*. I had *Timber Protector* and a couple of *Treefolk Harbingers* to go with a *Thorntooth Witch*, and it was still difficult to eke out victories. If you go down the Treefolk route, it is best to be armed with some *Fertile Grounds* to both speed you along and play the white and black cards needed to give the archetype a better chance.

Mark Herberholz seems to be one of the few people finding success with Goblins, although that might be because every time I see one of his decks it's full of boggarts. The cheap aggressive strategy seems to work best for him. *Facevaulter* is one of the building blocks of this approach, allowing you to beat through most defences and provide some nifty two for ones with *Mudbutton Torchrunners* and *Hornet Harassers*. *Tar Pitcher* seems to crop up an awful lot as it works its way round late to the Goblin drafter and provides a lot of removal in a format relatively lacking in it. Combine the Pitcher with the obviously phenomenal *Warren Pilferers*, *Boggart Birth Rite* (only really worth playing if you have multiple *Tarfires*, *Nameless Inversions*, and *Pilferers*) and *Footbottom Feasts* and you will have the backbone of the archetype. Just in case any of you were wondering, *Wort, Boggart Auntie* is a beating; an easy first pick and a card you pick no Goblin over.

Paul Cheon taught me the benefits of going all in on Elves. *Lys Alana Huntmaster* is unsurprisingly one of the best cards in the archetype, providing both beats and additional Elves to push the tribal theme over the edge. *Lys Alana Scarblade* is one of the surprise cards that is much more powerful than it looks, turning every fresh Elf into a removal spell and making *Footbottom Feast* and *Elvish Harbinger* even stronger. *Jagged-Scar Archers* are more than an air force deterrent; these guys become massive and often become the forefront of the Elven offence whilst the token Elves form the overlap. *Elvish Promenade* can be picked up very late, and when you are exclusively Elves, it can become the critical mass that makes the deck stupid. Cards like *Elvish Branchbender* also gain in power from being barely playable to pretty nifty when the archetype truly comes together.

I saw few effectively themed Giant decks. They were more decks with enough Giants so that their *Greathearts* were good. However, a couple of them, almost all starting with a first-picked *Thundercloud Shaman*, really looked

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good. They tended to be full of **Fire-Belly Changelings** to ensure that you could run as many **Blind-Spot Giants** as possible. These decks looked very powerful but there seems little reason to go this way unless you crack open the Shaman in the first place.

I don't have much yet to add to my assessment Elementals. All their decks seem focused on **Smokebraider**. **Ceaseless Searblades** deserves more lip service than it currently receives, especially if combined with an **Amoeboid Changeling**. Most decks are base red-blue with splashes, but I've seen several red-black decks with a Goblin overlap.

Rogue Strategies

These are my impressions about what happens when you devote yourself to an archetype, but especially with Kithkin and with the high-cost Treefolk and Giants it is often more in your interests to be a hybrid deck. These decks use changelings to glue the various themes together and smooth out the draws when you are without the relevant piece. Some of the tribes do not work too well in this aspect and sometimes you do not get an option as the draft upstream is choppy and you have to squeeze together your deck as best you can.

For now, this seems to be the most taxing element of drafting *Lorwyn*—what to do when the signals are not clear and you have to constantly evaluate each card with regards to the slim synergy it has with what you have already drafted and what you expect to see in the future. This is even harder in real life than it will soon be on **Magic Online**, as you cannot review what you have already picked so you have to keep a kind of running count on each archetype you've drafted so far and weigh each according to their worth.

A few of the rogue strategies that I've seen develop so far have included five-colour green run off of **Fertile Grounds** which is pretty self explanatory and what I'll dub "mono-changeling." The versions of this deck tend to be based on either **Woodland Changeling** or **Fire-Belly Changeling** or both—normally the red one as it arrives later than the others, but I've seen many **Skeletal Changelings** featured in there as well, and I've drafted the deck with **Amoeboid Changelings** (fast becoming one of my favourite cards as it is incredibly tricky—increasing your synergies and foiling theirs—combined with an adorably cute picture).

The Mono-Changeling strategy hinges on playing as many synergetic cards as possible. Cards like Boggart Spirit-Chaser are great here, but one of the best uses of the archetype so far has been Josh Ravitz's Lord deck where he spent the start of the draft picking every lord he could get his hand on and then every changeling and card that had a tribal benefit. The idea of this deck is basically an evolution of the no-theme deck, but it's morphed into an all-theme deck.

Best Common?

Whilst waiting for the Valencia flooding to subside (it was an awesome storm), I had enough time to do several drafts, but also to ask around as to others experience with the set and, in particular, what they thought the best common is. I'm talking about the card where if the three uncommons and rare are tripe that you slam blind first, pick first pack. In the last block, it started off as **Lightning Axe** and probably finished as **Errant Ephemeron**, the change mostly to do with colour bias.

It's still too early for this pick to be definitive, but peoples' opinions are very divided. In a vacuum, most players agree that **Mulldrifter** is the best card. However, **Magic** is never a vacuum and we are in the midst of a tribal set. From a quick survey of what I can remember from the PT and what dredging through those friends online right now, there are three contenders. Of note, before I go into the three cards named, it is definitely worth pointing out that not a single pro opted for **Oblivion Ring**. It's up there, but no one thinks it has what it takes.

Brian David-Marshall, Terry Soh, Geoffrey Siron, and myself all still opted for **Mulldrifter**. I love the card and I find that the format, although fast in some cases (read: Kithkin), tends to be reasonably slow as board positions either get stalled by Merfolk or clogged up with creatures. **Mulldrifter** is enough to put a threat on the board and draw you further ahead. If that's not enough, there's that guilty feeling you get when you target it with **Warren Pilferers** or **Footbottom Feast** and the fact that you can accelerate it out with **Smokebraider** to do all sorts of sick things.

Next into the breach is **Nameless Inversion**. The **Last Gasp** of the set has a little more juice to it and that's because it works with all of the tribal triggers, giving you an Elf with **Lys Alana Huntmaster** and making something smaller with **Dreamspoiler Witches**; it gets returned with **Wort**, **Boggart Auntie** for the soft lock and can be tutored for by all of the Harbingers. This is just the tip of the iceberg and is the main reason PT Champs Mark Herberholz, Antoine Ruel, and Julien Nuijten opted for it.

Update: Gabriel Nassif, fresh off his unfortunate 0-5 start to the **Invitational**, has found time to let me know he's also voting for **Nameless Inversion**. When four winners back something, it's probably the right thing to do. Time will tell if they are right this time.

The last card was picked by the best two Limited players currently walking the planet—Master Rich Hoan and now-probably-better padawan Kenji. Backing them up is another of the best Limited players, Johan Sadeghpour, who hasn't made it into the spotlights much recently but should never be discounted, if only for his sharp wit and fashion sense. Their card of choice is the dominating **Silvergill Douser**. **Battlefield Medic** has never looked so



good as it does in a format almost exclusively filled with creatures. Each colour has so few spells that this guy has a tendency to hang around for a lot longer than he should do and combat is as one sided as a hippo on a seesaw.

Clash, Ahhhhhhhh, Saviour of the Universe?

Bad adaptations aside, just how good is clash? The jury is still out on this one. My first reaction was one of pure pessimism as I failed to win clash after clash after clash, even in a sixteen-land Treefolk deck. Then I started looking at it from an impartial viewpoint. Clash only gets won a little more often than one in four as draws do not count and you never win if you hit a land. This means that you should look at a clash card more for its normal effect rather than for its bonus. When viewed from this angle, they become a lot fairer as most of the effects for winning a clash are not *that* great. I mean, most are just +1/+1, but the problem that I have about it still is that the result of the game can hinge on whether it is won or loss, and I hate coin flip cards as they just increase the random factor of the game.

For now, the fact that I've seen so many games hinge on whether clash is won or not gives me a pessimistic outlook of the ability. Missing on a game-winning **Lash Out** hurts, but the biggest clash swing has to be on **Gilt-Leaf Ambush**. Sometimes this has an absolutely massive effect on the game whichever result happens. However, the more I begin to think that you should expect to lose and play the cards as such, the more I think the ability will gain in my eyes.

For example, I am a massive fan of all of the early clash cards, like **Adder-Staff Bogart**. Early clash cards, just like their late game counterparts but more effectively so, act as scry cards. They let you keep dodgy opening hands safe in the knowledge that you are more likely to make that ever-crucial land drop. If you win the clash, then not only are you happy, but you can also put the card on the bottom to improve the chances of you digging out of the screw.

The flip-side of clash cards is that they let your opponent scry too. I like every card that makes the game more complex and gives players more options, so in this respect I like clash. It gives my opponent the opportunity to make a mistake by keeping a card when he shouldn't or similarly shipping one to the bottom. However, I will often put my opponents in the position where only their bomb rare or removal will get them out of a situation, and if my cards help them dig towards it, then this somehow still increases the random factor (for philosophical reasons I find it incredibly hard to refer to it as luck, and when I ever do, it is simply a slip-up). I know I am saying that clash both increases and decreases game randomness, but for now I am not sure which direction it pulls the strongest in. I love it because it scrys and I hate it because it randomly swings games. Let's hope that with more clashing, I come to like it.

Planeswalkers

As it's Planeswalker Week, I feel I should say something about them in Limited. Unfortunately, I've not really seen them do too much yet. They are also rare, so their impact on Limited is, well, limited. They all seem to come into play and have a minor effect for the best and then die. Be it putting a **Beast** into play or discarding a card or being a small **Blaze**, they tend to have that effect and then force the opponent to waste a crucial blocker and then prevent a bit of life to the player as they die.

Don't get me wrong, almost all their "ultimate" effects are devastating and I don't think I've seen a game loss when they've resolved. The one that I've seen activated the most, and my personal favourite, is **Jace Beleren**. Despite having one of the highest activation costs, it decks the opponent reasonably often. However, the reason for this has been because the player is already winning the game normally thanks to a **Silvergill Douser**. I don't want you guys to get the wrong idea; they are all phenomenally powerful cards that will demand immediate action on behalf of the opponent, but do not be disappointed if you can't use their big ability too often.

How to play them correctly? This is the tricky thing. You have to evaluate how likely they are to survive to get to their big finish. If it's likely (ie. you are already winning), then get greedy. If you think that you do not have much time left, or their chances just of surviving through the turn are low, then milk them for all they are worth as soon as possible.

Ajani Goldmane is almost exclusively best used taking off loyalty and pumping your creatures as fast as possible, which works well with the fast Kithkin white decks produce. **Liliana Vess**, unless you have another bomb in your deck worth tutoring for, is best played as greedily as possible, which I like because you maximise the chance of the ultimate prize. Both **Chandra Nalaar** and **Garruk Wildspeaker** have great abilities. Removing counters works to great effect in Limited and they are both close enough to their trigger fingers so that going for it doesn't seem too greedy, and if you ever get there, both of them will end the game. They're the strongest as far as forty-card decks are concerned as they have less of the "win more" factor and more of the "hey, my bomb just won me the game" factor.

The best way to play planeswalkers is probably to wait for your opponent to expend the last few cards in their hand so that when you cast one, they are far less likely to have an answer to them. You will also have to wait a little for the board to be safe for them to stick their necks out; otherwise they work as expensive Fogs.

I've just found out that due to regulation changes put in force as a result of "terrorist" activities, the process needed to renew a UK passport has gotten more complicated, meaning that unless a miracle of government



efficiency occurs, I will be missing GP–Krakow, so for now, I shall just wait with bated breath for *Lorwyn* to come out online.

Til next week,

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*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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