



WARRIORWEEK

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Parry, Thrust into the Spotlight

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Morningtime time! Although I believe this is one of the greatest limited formats of all time, I concede some bias, being intimate with so many of these cards as they were created, gestated, and inked into the lovelies you see today. Yet even without that degree of professional pride, I'd be a fan of *Lorwyn-Lorwyn-Lorwyn* and the incipient anyway. The exciting part of triple *Lorwyn* was the sheer breadth of possibility out there. In months and months of online and paper drafting, no one deck has emerged as the "best." While each archetype has its fans, history has shown any tribe can fight against the world and, in the hands of someone skilled, can take down a table. This is a wild format, and people are still integrating all the nuance that evoke and clash and dudes bring to the party. Unfortunately, time's up! There's a new crop of cards coming, replacing the third *Lorwyn* pack with some spicy class goodness. These class cards are on average more powerful than their race counterparts, but by the same token are less prevalent with a single booster to two. Which half of the type line does the modern drafter focus on? It's a thorny puzzle, worthy of future analysis. Over the coming months we'll be broaching the subject from a lot of angles, but beforehand, let's look at some of the decks from our oh-so-recent triple-L status.

Triple *Lorwyn* Deck Breakdown



Blue-Black: If this deck was a tribe at all it was usually Faeries, sometimes with a small Merfolk component. Often a blue-black deck played on a collection of the best cards these colors offered, which was substantial. So many Makeshift *MulldrifTERS*...



Blue-White: By design, these colors usually denote a Merfolk dedication, with your standard Aquitects, *Stonybrook Anglers*, *Judge of Currents*, and a bomby uncommon or two like *Summon the School*, *Cloudgoat Ranger*, or *Drowner of Secrets* to finish the job. If it gets rolling, blue-white is one of the most impenetrable decks out there. The colors can also hit the aggressive note with flying, evasive types leading into sequences of *Plover Knights* and *Sentinels of Glen Elendra*.



Blue-Red: Generally either an Elemental deck (sometimes of the five-color variety), with *Smokebraiders* accelerating into *Aethersnipes* and *Drifters*, or an aggro deck with *Boggart Sprite-Chaser*, changelings and/or general goodness. This style was fairly popular when the format was starting out, but has become more rare lately.



Blue-Green: Another unusual type, this deck has become more common lately as a backup option when the original plan falls through. Despite not being affiliated with any single tribe, blue-green plays well together. The lack of removal hurts of course, but blue tricks like *Whirlpool Whelm* and *Wings of Velis Vel* alongside green's acceleration and beefy guys make the deck a contender. While blue-green rarely achieves the throbbing power of the tribiest tribe decks, those decks are harder to pull of as more people become attuned to the format.

Black-White: So far, black-white has been the worst-case scenario. I said a couple weeks ago (aloud!) that I would go to great strides to avoid black being paired with white. The problems with this combination are many, including strict color requirements, weird curve issues, and terrible tribal synergy. Similarly, the deck has a real



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problem winning, with neither color shoring up the weakness of the other in any meaningful way. Can these colors win? Of course, but it's an uphill fight.



Red-White: The classic Giant configuration, although the color scheme has options. Certainly the giant tribe enjoys the early defense of **Kithkin Greatheart** and **Oblivion Ring** and **Avian Changeling**. The best Giants go quick, but since white is often under-drafted, there's plenty of room for white crust around the giant base. But red-white can also be played hyper-aggressive, with all the cheap two-power two-mana creatures in the format, and whatever burn spells to finish the deal. The most amusing red-white deck I've seen was a near mono-white creation with lots of cheap guys and a splash of red for **Lash Out** and quad **Needle Drop**. These days I'd say **Blades of Velis Vel** play to the deck's strengths a little better.



Green-White: Kinda elvish, kinda kith, this deck is all about raw aggression. The tribal necessities are real; **Elvish Branchbender** asks for buddies as do the cheap reveal guys, but a lack of a particular tribe's enhancements does not sink the deck. Rather, the deck is made or lost on its quantity of two-drops and finishing spells. **Kithkin Daggerdare** is excellent here (especially with **Triclopean Sight**), along with the changeling creatures, **Fistful of Force**, etc. It's not my favorite deck to pick up simply because it's so one-dimensional, but a good green-white deck is definitely tier one.



Green-Black: Although sometimes Treefolk, green-black usually falls into the Elf camp, and a fine camp it is. Green has an amazing depth in this format, and Elves in particular have a high amount of quality "count-me-s" like **Lys Alana Huntmaster**, **Jagged-Scar Archers**, and **Branchbender** that the other decks don't want. Adding just a little of the black Elf stuff like **Lys Alana Scarblade**, **Eyeblight's Ending**, and **Nameless Inversion** brings a welcome dimension of flexibility. Black-green is quite strong when it comes together, but unlike some of the other combinations, it does well even when the packs dry up. A black-green deck full of second-stringers is still quite good.



Black-Red: This is a surprisingly flexible color combination. These are nominally the Goblin colors, but a dedicated Goblin deck doesn't function too well. Barring some of the power cards (**Mad Auntie**, **Boggart Mob**, multiple **Fodder Launch**), the Goblin deck can have trouble winning a game or getting through some early defense. Which is not to say there hasn't been some strength around **Facevaulter** / **Mudbutton Torchrunner** interactions. But usually black-red is a hybrid deck, sometimes with **Faeries** and sometimes with **Elementals**. **Caterwauling Boggart** is supreme in the latter, while **Sprite Chaser** into **Thieving Sprite** is popular with the former. It's usually not the most powerful deck at the table, but black-red is another great fallback deck when the original plan doesn't pan out.



And of course, there's green-red. Like so many others, I initially dismissed this combination simply because it didn't have a unifying tribe, and more generally, every time I tried it was a mess of clunky, overpriced spells. But a few weeks into the format, I had heard rumors of the Handservant deck, almost always green-red. People with some experience swore by its power, but compared to the sick Elf, Merfolk, or and even Kithkin decks I was picking up, I couldn't see how green-red could be noticeably stronger. This was accurate at the time, as many drafters simply didn't have the wherewithal to grab the appropriate cards in the respective decks, leaving the goods for those in the know. Green decks in particular had remarkable success as the top players flocked to blue. This trend was a major reason why the Handservant deck was coming together for drafters pushing into new fields.

When **Lorwyn** came out, blue and black were noted as the two strongest colors, and consequently, **Faeries** were thought the strongest tribe. Blue in particular was lauded as the sorcerer's supreme, and woe to anyone who was running red or green. This naturally led to a shortage of those two colors being drafted, which is already a strong recipe for success. In particular, since blue was drafted so heavily and so frequently paired with black or white, the green-red player downsteam had some free "first picks." Roughly speaking, the goal of the signaling game is to get as many of these first picks as possible. For example, if I'm red-black and the person on my right is blue-black, my only chance at primo black is what I open; literally my first pick. Otherwise, the juicy black doesn't get passed, it gets picked up by the black drafter that opened it. Of course I still get at least two shots at red cards, and of course it's awful if you're drafting the *exact* same colors as the person to your right.



This is why red-green was such a coup. If the trend was to draft blue, and blue was paired with black or white, you were locking in multiple shots at first picks. And in classic signaling fashion you were passing the good blue / black / white cards to the person on your left, most likely someone who wanted them anyway. An oasis of red and green in the ocean of blue. But it still wasn't enough without some kind plan in mind. Red-green didn't have the chops to take down a draft with some type of cohesion.

But as you'd expect from a deck named Handservant, someone figured out a way. The strength of the deck isn't **Elvish Handservant** maximization per se; it's the strong mana curve with a potential busted opening. The true power of this deck is that Handservant is an excellent turn one with a second-turn red or green changeling after. It took a while to figure out, but that's the heart of the deck and it plays well indeed.

Of course surrounding that core is a bevy of Giant or Elf cards. **Blind-Spot Giant** is phenomenal in the archetype, as Blind-Spot loves a Giant already in play when he comes down, besides the quick boost to any

Handservants in play. The discipline to the deck comes from picking up the changeling cards like **Woodland Changeling** or **Blades of Velis Vel** over the theoretically stronger stuff like **Battlewand Oak**, and figuring out which side of the type line your deck will fall. Sometime you have an Elf-style Handservant deck, sometimes you go more Giantous. Changeling cards are the key, but after those dry up it's nice to have a direction to go. Here are two examples of recent Handservant decks, each with their appropriate direction:



Green-Red Giantish Handservant Deck		
Main Deck 40 cards		
8 Forest	1 Axegrinder Giant	1 Blades of Velis Vel
8 Mountain	2 Blind-Spot Giant	2 Fertile Ground
16 lands	1 Changeling Berserker	1 Nameless Inversion
	2 Elvish Handservant	1 Springleaf Drum
	2 Fire-Belly Changeling	2 Tarfire
	1 Hearthcage Giant	7 other spells
	1 Leaf Gilder	
	1 Lowland Oaf	
	1 Nath's Elite	
	2 Stinkrinker Daredevil	
	1 Thundercloud Shaman	
	2 Wren's Run Vanquisher	
	17 creatures	

Green-Red Elfcentric Handservant Deck		
Main Deck 40 cards		
9 Forest	1 Elvish Branchbender	2 Blades of Velis Vel
8 Mountain	3 Elvish Handservant	1 Gilt-Leaf Ambush
17 lands	2 Fire-Belly Changeling	1 Lash Out
	1 Glarewielder	4 other spells
	1 Immaculate Magistrate	
	1 Jagged-Scar Archers	
	2 Leaf Gilder	
	2 Lowland Oaf	
	2 Lys Alana Huntmaster	
	1 Mudbutton Torchrunner	
	1 Tar Pitcher	
	2 Woodland Changeling	
	19 creatures	

If you're wondering, that Elf-Handservant deck was incredible. Even to this day Handservant goes late in packs. I still see them fifteenth! At the very least you have a sideboard. While they're surprisingly bad against Giant decks, being too fragile against decks that kick out guys on turns four and beyond, they're super sauce against opposing changeling decks. How many Amoeboid Changelings have been stuck in hand against a first-turn Handservant?

Adding *Morningtide*

Sadly, decks like the ones above are a thing of the past, or at least about to be overhauled. Does *Morningtide* add any replacements to a pack's loss of two-drop changelings, **Elvish Handservant**, and cheap red removal? Not precisely, no. But take a look at this:



Handservant fans, you were drafting a Warrior deck and you didn't even know it! The deck is due for some changes with the addition of the second set, but it certainly remains very powerful. Let's look at some of the interesting additions from *Morningtide*, both beneficial and less so.

War-Spike Changeling and **Game-Trail Changeling**: There's no way around it, the loss of **Fire-Belly** and **Woodland Changelings** hurt. Unfortunately these two, while excellent, don't fill the void. **War-Spike Changeling** in particular is one of my favorite utility commons in the set, but red-green is precisely the wrong fit for him. Four mana is a crowded spot in most Handservant decks, and arguably **Lys Alana Huntmaster** or even **Lowland Oaf** play a stronger role. **Game-Trail** is worse still. It's still got great stats as a changeling, but unless it's played off one of the (admittedly many) mana helpers in the sets, it just comes at too high a price. It's not so much that either of these cards are *bad*, far from it. They simply don't enhance what the deck is trying to do, which is particularly early hits. It's not a challenge to get good green and red cards at four- to five-mana zone, the challenge and the strength of the deck is getting the opponent weak enough for the pricey spells to wrap it up.

Brighthearth Banneret: This little fellow does play a happy role in the deck however. One of the advantages to red-green in this format is the prevalence of accelerants over both colors. **Fertile Ground**, **Leaf Gilder**, **Stinkdrinker Daredevil**, **Bosk Banneret**; there are a lot of ways to get your creatures cheaper. The late-game reinforce ability is not inconsequential, especially with **Bramblewood Paragon** (below).

Chameleon Colossus / **Taurean Mauler**: Congratulations, wrap it up. These two are the pinnacle of red-green drafting, and their power is off the charts. In both cases they're tough to kill, trigger everything, and put the opponent on a particularly short clock. In an ideal world you get these passed to you once in a while, especially if your neighbors are on a blue trip. I wouldn't think to rank between the two, but the only cards I'd consider over them are **Titan's Revenge** and possibly the vicious **Spitebellows**.

Shard Volley: In the latest draft, I sacked my lone swamp with **Shard Volley** to block an incoming **Bog-Strider Ash**. That story isn't relevant to anything, but nice play me!

Obsidian Battle-Axe / **Bramblewood Paragon**: These are the top uncommons you're hoping to pick up, and the decision between the two is interesting. Playing a creature on turn two is better than playing a blank on turn three, but who looks best with your fourth-turn creature? A card like **Ambassador Oak**, which is fairly weak in Handservant builds, loves both but probably wants the Axe a little more to turn the token into a monster. On the other hand, that loss of **Lorwyn** puts two-drops at a premium. Reinforce also gives the Paragon an edge in surprise trample damage. I'd lean towards the Paragon, but this is all theoretical. Anyone want to chime in on which they've appreciated more in a Warrior deck?

As for the more "obvious" cases like **Winnower Patrol** or **Lunk Errant**, it's merely a factor of what kind of deck you're drafting at the time. The obligation to focus on a Giant or Elf theme is weakened with the Warrior crossover, but it's still nice to know what direction you're headed and what holes need filling going into the third pack. The **Elvish Handservant** was the perfect response to the conditions of the times. Will a new archetype emerge with *Morningtide* in the mix? Almost certainly. It's an exciting new world out there!



Bonus Section

My first LLM draft happened many months ago, with cards barely recognizable today. However my first LLM draft with cards *I was allowed to take home* was just a few days ago as of this writing. Here was this author's first stab at the new format:



Mono-Red *Lorwyn-Lorwyn-Morningtide* Draft



Main Deck 40 cards

16 Mountain

16 lands

1 Blind-Spot Giant
1 Borderland Behemoth
1 Brighthearth Banneret
1 Caterwauling Boggart
1 Faultgrinder
1 Flamekin Brawler
1 Giant Harbinger
1 Lunk Errant
1 Nova Chaser
1 Pyroclast Consul
1 Seething Pathblazer
1 Smokebraider
1 Soulbright Flamekin
1 Stinkdrinker Daredevil
3 Sunflare Shaman
1 Taurean Mauler

18 creatures

1 Blades of Velis Vel
1 Crush Underfoot
1 Giant's Ire
1 Kindled Fury
1 Shard Volley
1 Tarfire

6 other spells

Pretty cool, eh? Pack 1, pick 1 was [Ghostly Changeling](#), and pack 2, pick 1 was [Fodder Launch](#) with a taste of black in between, but that dried up real quick. The red, clearly, was coming in by the truckload. The generous second-pick [Taurean Mauler](#) was very welcome, and was responsible for many a win. The only time I sided in those two black cards and a [Moonglove Winnower](#) was against a mono-green (!) deck with *six* [Elvish Warriors](#) (!!). It was a tight match, although [Caterwauling Boggart](#) was enough for the win in three. The only real trouble the deck came across was a vicious green-black-white [Treefolk](#) / Shaman deck. I was so excited with the turn-three [Nova Chaser](#)... only to see my opponent place out [Doran, the Siege Tower](#). Ouch. His [Reach of Branches](#) and [Bosk Banneret](#) didn't help either. Although I lost that round, I'm happy to report I did live the dream once: [Borderland Behemoth](#) and [Blades of Velis Vel](#). Oh yeah, this is a fun format. Thanks for reading.



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