

Introduction

After United in Stormwind, Fractured in Alterac Valley feels more like what Blizzard has been doing. The set has a lot of power-creep on cards from previous expansions, and those cards just feel... normal. Twilight Flamecaller, for example, was one of the more iconic Mage cards printed, not overly powerful but real strong glue card to get you to the point the big cards could win the game for you. And they printed Bunker Sergeant, a Flamecaller with better stats (2/4 vs. 2/2), as a neutral. And that's just common. Troll Centurion is a better Charged Devilsaur. Knight-Captain is likely a better Waste Warden. Ram Commander is a better Spark Engine. Piggyback Imp is a better Candletaker (which was a better Scarlet Crusader). Abominable Lieutenant is arguably a better Corrupted Blackwing in most cases, and Corrupted Blackwing was so powerful it got pre-emptively banned from Arena. I do this constantly in my review, for class and neutral cards, where I take a look at a card, and I say it's a better X, because it is. There might be slight differences or edge cases where its not better, but for the most part cards that were fine, even good or great Arena cards, are getting power-crept on.

For the set overall, in spite of the power level increasing even more, this is probably the most Arena centric set there has been in terms of mechanics, because it brings together two classics of Arena, going all the way back to Classic Arena and skills you learned there: Honorable Kills and Board Buffs. Honorable Kills (henceforth HKs) have existed since Classic Hearthstone, think Mortal Coil or Bane of Doom. That should give you perspective on how easy this mechanic is to trigger, at least in Arena. But even moreso, classic Arena was about efficient trading, which is what HKs promote. It's about wasting as little damage as possible, and as few resources as possible, to kill cards, and to make choices on when to trade. HKs follow a similar vein, in that they are about being able to make the choice of whether or not to go for the exact kill for the effect (such as, do you trade more of your board to get an HK effect, or do you try to maintain a stronger board but give up the HK effect in the process?) With how varied Arena decks are, it's not that hard for HKs to go off if you have good Arena instinct.

Another staple of this expansion is buffs, something that has been a classic of Arena. There are quite a few of the "Give minions +x for 3 turns" aura cards that people might be sleeping on. Now, these cards are not great on curve, just because they really do require a set-up on board to make use of them, but they are going to be powerful in the mid to late game where you can generate boards where they are useful. These are things you have to consider when trading and playing, in that people can create weird boards that are difficult to deal with via buff cards.

My hopes for the set are that the three big stupid cards are gone (Abominable Liutenant, Bloodseeker, Templar Captain) since those cards can decide games on their own. If so, the set is clearly going to be high power-wise, but I think it will feel a lot more like classic arena, even with bigger swings, than Arena has felt in a long while.

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For reference, you can view the cards on the [Play Hearthstone website](#). The scoring is based off the Heartharena point values. For me, personally, I view anything under 10 as unpickable, 10-50 as things that are bad but might situationally be useful, 50-65 as solid things on curve, 65-80 as more than what you would expect for the mana cost, 80-90 as real good cards, 90-100 as meta/class defining cards, 100+ as card that are too good and make Arena frustrating, and 120+ as cards that can ruin the meta due to their power.

Also, based on history, Hero Cards are not going to be in Arena (even though Jaraxxus is as a Core card), so I did not rate any of those for class cards.

Common

Knight-Captain (86): Flanking Strike was a top tier card at 4. At 5, this is a Waste Warden, 67. So, the question is, how easy is it going to be to get an Honorable Kill? I'm of the mind that, it is easy to do so, but not reliable. Also, with how powerful this effect is, people are going to be wary about leaving minions at 3 health going into T5 if they can. The thing is, you can't put that off for forever, and sooner or later you're going to get a 5 mana Fire Elemental off it. Burrowing Scorpion, for example, goes off reliably on 4 no matter how powerful it is because people can't play around it. Even getting a Waste Warden half the time means the other half the time you're getting something real strong. I'm high on this card, maybe a little too high, but I see this as a new staple of Arena.

Bunker Sergeant (85): Twilight Flamecaller was a 2/2 that did the same thing (except for 1 minion) and was a premium Mage card for a long time, and still a low 80s card in the current powertier. So honestly, the stats don't matter that much, only a few points. But, Mage already had pings, so I'd argue Flamecaller was less relevant to them than to other classes, so overall I'd say this gets even more points for those classes that don't have a reliable ping.

Troll Centurion (83): AKA, Fuck Yo' Mo'arg Forgefiend. This is going to be the Argent Commander/Azure Drake interaction this expansion. Its a better Charged Devilsaur, already a good card, and there are some targets that do have 8 health.

Frantic Hippogryph (77): This is in the same set as Knight-Captain. I think ultimately a pretty good card. If you're using this on a small card, you're getting something similar to a Bomb Lobber or Waste Warden style effect, and you get to clear off something else small if it hits. I think people are going to try to avoid setting their health to 3 because of a lot of HK mechanics that trigger at 3, so I'm not sure how much this'll go off. If it goes off, it'll be good.

Ram Commander (75): Spark Engine was about Yeti levels for a 2/1 with a 1/1 rush. This is a 2/2 with 2 1/1 rushes. Arguably better than Wandmaker? You know what you're getting and you can do even more with buffs and such.

Piggyback Imp (75): Better than Divine Rager/Cursed Disciple because it becomes a lot harder to deal 2 pings of damage at 3 mana.

Blood Guard (70): Is this better than Nesting Roc? I want to say the taunt is better, but it's unlikely the 4/7 will die, so you can load up on minions the turn after to trade this into something to buff them up. I'm going with about Nesting Roc levels of power. There is a, not even that much an, edge case with Mad Bomber like effects that deal damage 1 at a time. There's a few of them in AV among the classes, so maybe a bonus point for those situations where it screws things up.

Tower Sergeant (67): Not that hard for the effect to go off, we've seen it with other cards, but not reliable either. Better than a Yeti, worse than a Travelling Merchant or a Roc.

Herald of Lokholar (65 Mage/53 Shaman/48 else): Warrior and Hunter do have Freeze spells, but there's like 1 relevant one for them, not enough to really factor in. Shamans have a few really good ones in AV that they'll want to draft, but that's still 2-3, and most of their Wild frost spells are irrelevant, so only a little bit of a bonus to them. Mage has a lot of Frost stuff, I'm not sure enough for this to be a 3/5 draw a card reliably, but close.

Ice Revenant (Mage 65/Shaman 63/61 else): See Herald of Lokholar, but Shaman gets some more points for having cheap frost spells. It's a lot harder to cast a frost spell than it is to draw one though.

Sneaky Scout (65): Better than Gilblin Stalker, the HK effect is a nice bonus but nothing too special. A nice card overall.

Direwolf Commander (62): Annoying effect at times, don't see it making it good or great.

Corporal (61): On-curve with a real powerful effect. Seedcloud Buckler or Imprisoned Celestial were both real powerful cards for this same effect. Now, this won't always, or even often, get the HK effect, but the threat will keep this as a good card.

Gnome Private (53): A worse Warbot, fine if you need a 1 drop for the early game.

Icehoof Protector (50): A bigger Voodoo Hexxer.

Stormpike Quartermaster (48): There are things like Kobold Taskmaster which synergize with this, and at 2 mana its easy to combo this, but the random buffs mean you really can't target it, and you aren't going to have that many spells to begin with. I'd rather have a regular 2-drop over this, but in the right deck it might work.

Reflecto Engineer (46): I have no idea how this effect is going to be. I want to say you can't really manipulate it so its neutral at best, but I don't see any reason to take this card.

Humongous Owl (40): 8 damage face is a lot, and 8 damage to a minion is a lot. It's garbage, but if I'm left with, say, this vs. a War Golem, the Owl would get the pick, so it's not that bad.

Gangster (30): Snipe, except you know it, but you can't ignore it. Ultimately, we know Snipe, we know this will be generally a bad card.

Legionaire (15): Too slow for the effect. When you make Arena Fanatic look good, you dun fucked up.

Rare

Snowblind Harpy (67 Mage/65 Shaman/62 else): See Herald. Mage/Shaman get points for actually having frost spells they want to draft

Kobold Taskmaster (60): A better banana buffoon, which was pickable to begin with. The health buffs for 1 mana will be annoying on the right cards.

Stormpike Marshall (58): Mildly annoying if you're pushing face and they drop this for 1. Mildly. Better than a Stegaddon, but the impact isn't all that great even if it does get off for one in the late game.

Frostwolf Warmaster (45): You can coin this out on T3 to get a 3 mana 3/3! So, by the time you have enough cards to discount this, the 1 or 0 mana 3/3 likely won't be as impactful.

Irondeep Trogg (30 Paladin/20 Priest/Druid//10 else): Maybe you can do something silly with it with Paladin/Priest/Druid and buffs, so I give them some extra points, but it should end up being garbage for everyone else.

Epic

Abominable Lieutenant (110): You remember how Dragnaros got pre-emptively banned from Arena? This has a better effect (can't be blocked by Divine Shield) with in most cases better stats (if you hit anything mid-sizes or more) at less mana. Its only worse against a board of small minions where it can't grow all that much. I fully expect it to get pre-emptively banned, if not banned within a couple of weeks.

Spammy Arcanist (72): Defile requires a lot of set-up, even with its impact. There's a reason it performs as an above average card, but not a great card. Putting Defile on a stick does not make it better, it just makes it harder to manipulate to set up a defile. Now, 5 mana 3/4 deal 1 to everything is still fine, above average by itself, and it will annoy the piss out of people not expecting it, but I don't predict it performing at an elite level.

Popsicooler (55): 3/3 on curve is meh, the effect in the early game is similarly meh. This gets better as the game goes on, but that your opponent generally will control what gets frozen limits its power. Not bad by any means, but there are plenty of better 3-drops.

Grimtotem Bounty Hunter (51): As much as people want to complain about legendaries being everywhere, they aren't prevalent enough for this effect to be reliable. And even if it is reliable, much of the value in Legendaries is in their battlecry rather than their stats, so even if you hit this you're not in a great spot. BGH does its job of countering a big minion, this doesn't do the job of countering what Legs do.

Frozen Mammoth (10 Mage/3 else): Even in Mage which has a lot of access to Fire spells, this will be average at best because you likely won't be unfreezing it the turn it gets played. And that's if you have a Fire Spell, and want to play it the next turn. Unpickable tier even if I like the flavor.

Legendary

Ivus, the Forest Lord (98): The RNG on this is going to be super annoying. Like, if you play him on T7, you are extremely likely to get a Siamat (7/7 Rush/DS/Taunt) but if you miss the rush, for example, a 9/9 DS/Taunt might be useful but could easily be hard removed. Like, the card is going to be great no matter what, but missing out on a keyword you really need in the mid to late game due to RNG is going to be massively frustrating. This also isn't worth it really until T5 when it can be a quasi-Zilliax.

Lokholar the Ice Lord (84): Its base form is a worse Darkmoon Rabbit in most cases you'd want to use it. Getting it off at 5 is game-changing and will trigger a lot of people when it happens. People won't play around the effect either. Not strong enough all the time to be as good as other top tier legendaries, but one you will be happy to pick.

Korrak the Bloodrager (63): So this is Arena, and it's not all that hard to HK in Arena. I could see this being a thing in constructed where your decks are hyper-tuned and you don't have that ability to manipulate health, but in Arena this is not as difficult. So, I could see this being useful, but I don't see this being amazing.

Vanndar Stormpike (40): Will not be in arena most likely, will suck if he is.

Drek'Thar (40): Will not be in arena most likely, will suck if he is.