

# Wise Words: Odyssey

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Thursday, September 27, 2001

This week is one of new beginnings. Having just arrived in England, I went Sunday to observe my first European tournament as a resident of the continent, the London *Odyssey* Prerelease. The differences between North American and English tournaments quickly became obvious to me in the stark contrast of their environments. Most North American tournaments are held in game centers, stores and large halls. Our Prerelease was held in a pub.

Looking around at the teenagers strewn between the more mature, alcohol-consuming adults attending the tournament, I found it interesting they seemed to feel so completely at home with the concept. Finding rental space in England is next to impossible, with rates apparently double those of the rest of the world. As a result, Tournament Organizers here are forced to do what they can. In the end, the bar seemed like a glorified snack bar, a welcome edition to my tournament experience, and the venue worked out just fine.

***The big question, while everyone takes their turn being Jamie Wakefield, is what color to draft with green.***

So, you guys had your fill of *Odyssey* yet? I'm guessing that for more of you readers than not, you spent all weekend, gaming with one set and one set only, and it has people talking. Initial reports suggest that the set is a weak one as far as overall power levels go, but that it should make for some very solid, skill-intensive Limited play. I'm not sure I liked the sealed deck environment that much, but I always prefer more diverse environments with multiple sets, so that isn't too big a deal.



The general problem with stand alone-only sealed formats is that they become a battle of one color against all others. In *Urza's*, if you weren't playing black, you weren't going to win. In *Invasion*, black-blue-red was the order of the day, with white and green very seldom having a chance to succeed in an environment where they needed to open bears, not wait for them to be passed. In *Odyssey*, green is the cheese. None of the other colors were close.

Throughout the Prerelease, I found myself looking up and down the first row of tables, noting that out of 18 players, only two or three weren't playing green. Then those guys would lose, to be replaced by other unfortunate hopefuls not playing forests in their decks, who would ultimately join their brothers in arms on the sidelines, bashed and bruised, as if the beating they'd taken was their ticket home.





Near as I can figure, with the general power of the cards in *Odyssey* being lower than in the past, green's maintaining the status quo has put it ahead. Green's five mana will buy you a 4/4. In the other colors, you get a 3/2. Green seems to have three of the best tempo creatures in the format, with Diligent Farmhand and Werebear providing mana boosts while Wild Mongrel may actually be as good as Brian Kibler wrote it was last week. Throw in the instant creatures, air control in the form of Krosan Archers, the table-dominating Nantuko Disciple and some incredibly beefy uncommons and rares and you have the one color you really wanted to open well last weekend.

The big question, while everyone takes their turn being Jamie Wakefield, is what color to draft with green. Black seems to be the weakest color in the set, with anemic creatures, creature kill with costs or limitations that go higher than you want and a lack of that one power common - Pestilence, Demise, etc. - that has always pushed it over the top in the past, and in a lot of ways seems to mirror green in that its strongest creatures are slow and ground based, its fliers not as good as blue or whites. This

leaves blue, white and red as potential companions to green in the early days of the format.

It's my guess that red is going to be the most used green compliment. The quick kill supports green's beatdown attitude and is plentiful, with Firebolt, Acceptable Losses, Flame Burst and Blazing Salvo all providing a lot of bite to go with their bark. Think about how good the Salvo is in red-green beatdown! Lava Axe cost five mana and was a favorite for the Terry Tsang's of the world, and now it either costs one or kills an important creature. Either way, for one mana, it's a steal.

As good as red-green will be, Early on I think I see myself as a green-blue drafter in this format. As if fighting for green with five or six other drafters won't be excruciating enough, red also comes into the draft format with the most first pick-caliber commons, meaning that it will be a little overdrafted as well. I'd rather lie low, choosing the less popular color with cards that compliment green well, and that seems to be blue.

Green fat has always worked very well with bounce effects and *Odyssey* is no exception. In straight *Odyssey* draft, Aether Burst has the potential for insanity, with four or five in a deck a real possibility if the drafter wants it (i.e. Picks them highly) badly enough. Meanwhile, Repel is the card I've wanted R&D to create ever since I first realized how good Time Ebb would have been as an instant four years ago. Then there's the Looter which enables your threshold to be reached quickly, your run of the mill fliers that get into places your green fatties can't and Syncopate (which I found to be very solid all day) being able to nullify the power of flashback and you have a color that not only compliments green well in its capabilities, but also in that every card I mentioned here only requires one blue mana to cast. Pretty good.





White also seems like a solid compliment to green, providing more in the way of air control and tricks with which to protect your creatures. Embolden is great, probably stronger than Pollen Remedy in that it's reusable and it doesn't cost too much either time. Hallowed Healer is obviously amazing, though its own vulnerability exposes it while protecting your other creatures. Aven Cloudchaser provides playable enchantment kill, while Patrol Hound and Mystic Visionary provide some pretty good beatdown. Too bad that the Pilgrims aren't nearly as capable of crippling red and black as color hosers of the past did.

Now, all this isn't to say that green-based decks are the only draftable ones. Any time green is a force, blue-white's ability to control big creatures becomes a major factor, and this format is no exception. With exceptional damage prevention, the set's best fliers and the ability to get to threshold consistently through blue's cycling or white's stalling, this color combo will eventually become a popular one. This in turn should see black-red develop a following, with tons of effective creature kill with flashback being aided by the fact this set's color hosers are weak

compared to the standard of the past.

With all this information in tow, when you're drafting *Odyssey*, I think it's important that you come to a decision at some point in the first two packs as to whether yours is a threshold deck or not and draft accordingly. Blue being the best of the threshold colors, any time you draft it you should probably look for threshold cards a little harder, with the Looters you'll hopefully get eventually helping to exploit them. Likewise, if you're drafting black, which includes a lot of cards that require you remove cards from your graveyard to be effective, I'd suggest an increase of value on flashback and a decrease on the value of threshold abilities. Of course, if you draft blue-black, you'll have to figure out which aspect of your deck is winning out.

The following is a collection of the commons I expect to see become the most important over the months ahead. This isn't to say they're the best, but that they're high picks that, more than others, will affect the format and the way it shapes itself:

**Cephalid Looter** - In a set whose cards are weaker than the norm, the Looter's ability makes it a powerhouse, getting you to your strong cards faster, activating threshold quickly and providing you with a substantial enough body to make a potential difference. The Looter rivals most four-cost fliers in this set as far as power goes.

**Chainflinger** - Once the Flinger gets going, it's dominant, and in a format where you'll often have time to develop thanks to generally slower creatures, it'll get going. How high a pick this is will often depend on what your co-color is, with a partnership with blue possibly making it red's best common, combining with that color's threshold ability and Psionic Gift particularly well.



**Diligent Farmhand** - I love this little dork. Turn 1, Farmhand, turn two attack and sac seems pretty good to me, but if you need it to, it can stick around longer, absorbing some damage or stopping a 2/1 from attacking in the first place. That it boosts Muscle Burst is a great bonus in that Giant Growths are good again now that the Flagbearers are gone, and while you should generally be drafting two colors, if you need to splash a third, this is the best way to do it. That's a lot of good for a one mana spell.

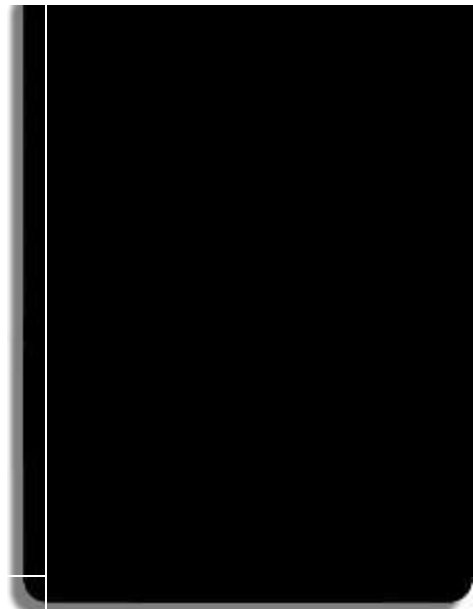
**Elephant Ambush** - The other colors find their creature bases weakened and green gets this? There's little bounce in the format, meaning that the token aspect isn't a huge worry, and the flashback, while high does eventually factor in, making this instant speed creature nuts.

**Firebolt** - Cheap kill is good, but cheap recursive kill is better. Firebolt is the best of the common red kill spells (though I do love the Salvo), hitting quickly and effectively, then giving you card advantage later on. I've had a few situations where I've had Firebolt in hand while looking at four three-toughness creatures, but that should be much of an issue in this format.

**Gravedigger** - It's pretty hard to reach threshold when you keep moving creatures out of your graveyard, but Gravedigger makes it worth it. Getting you back the best creature in your graveyard and throwing in a 2/2 body in the bargain, the 'Digger becomes especially sick when combined with Morgue Theft, with the two combining with Anarchist to as a recursive combo and a number of other creatures to be pretty sick.

**Hallowed Healer** - White's best common, the Healer seems to dominate any and all manner of board situations from the moment it enters play, with summoning sickness not putting your opponent's fears of being dominated at ease. The Healer stops most of the set's burn spells and is obviously a force in creature combat. Expect a 1st - 3rd pick rating when I start the Odyssey Limited analysis next week.

**Morbid Hunger** - I originally worried that the Hunger may be a little too expensive, but initial results suggest that I was far from right.



**Repel** - Man I love this card. I've always been a huge fan of those cards that put permanents on top of their owner's libraries, but there's never been one that could target opposing permanents at instant speed. I wasn't kidding when I said earlier that I'd been waiting four years for this card: I got one in the Prerelease and wrecked people with it all day. You can do the same until September 2002.

**Shelter** - What a great trick! At two mana, Shelter can cycle you through your slow starts, but once you get going, it's card advantage waiting to happen all for one low, affordable price. Whether you're countering a kill spell or protecting one of your creatures after damage is on the stack, if you can successfully cast a couple of these, your chances of losing won't be too good.

Just as an afterthought here, I've just found out that my rat deck, Jeff Donais is Going to Love This, was selected for the Invitational Auction, proving my deckbuilding skills impeccable. Here's the decklist:

8 Black Lotus  
32 Plague Rat  
20 Swamps

Only took me 8-9 hours of fine-tuning to get it down to science. See? Anyone can build decks... just a matter of effort...

Seriously though, just to explain, I submitted the deck in the hopes Jeff would get a kick out of the listing. I organized his first tournament in Windsor more than half a decade ago and he showed up with a 250 card monoblack deck with four Demonic Tutors, four Mind Twists and more Plague Rats than most people see in their playing days. Who knew this little inside joke would be aired to the public?

That's it for this week. Next Wise Words will come to you straight from Cape Town, South Africa. Maybe I'll be able to convince Kai Budde to assist me... should be fun. Have a good week.

