

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Big Draft Box, Big Box Draft

Ben Bleiweiss
 Uncommon Knowledge
 Wednesday, August 14, 2002



Okay, so I tapped my *Gargantuan Gorilla* to deal 7 damage to "Tree Chucka" (*Heartwood Giant*). Then I attacked with my *Fungal Shambler* and drew a card. But my opponent discarded *Guerilla Tactics* to off my Gorilla!



Alliances? *Tempest*? *Apocalypse*? What are all these sets doing together in one game? Are these two players playing with the world's worst Extended decks? Have they put together theme decks for a big multiplayer game? The answer to both is "no." These cards have been drafted out of the "Big Draft Box."

Perhaps we should start at the beginning.

The "Jank Box"

In the beginning, there was *Urza's Saga*. It was fall 1998, and two young **Magic** players had bought a booster display of this newest expansion with the sole purpose of learning how to booster draft the new set. These two players were Eric Lewandowski--also known as Spambob, the creator of Netdraft, and one of my best friends--and me. The two of us ran through four boxes of Saga in two days, doing one-on-one draft after one-on-one draft until we were sick of the set. In order to alleviate the tedium of playing with the same cards again, Eric pulled out an 800-count card box filled with his extra commons and uncommons from the *Ice Age*, *Revised*, and *Chronicles* sets. But these weren't just any old commons and uncommons. These were the ones that were just plain bad. We each built three random fifteen-card packs and started to booster draft.

We had a ton of fun drafting out of the Jank Box, with cards like *Ironroot Treefolk* and *Prodigal Sorcerer* winning games as often as *Enchantment Alteration* and *Holy Strength*. Over the months, when we tired of playtesting Block Constructed or Standard, we'd break out the trusty Jank Box and play a couple of booster drafts. But too often we'd end up with massive creature stalemates, which ended only in decking or with twenty turns of "Tim" damage. It was time for a change.

One of a Kind

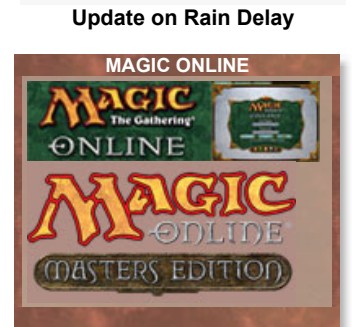
Enter Spring 1999. I began a project so monumental that it would take two and a half years to complete. The dream was to put together a massive draft box containing one of each card in **Magic**. I set down some ground rules from the beginning.

1. There would be only one copy of each card, to be determined by card name. This meant that even though *Stone Rain* had been reprinted in several sets, there would be only one *Stone Rain* in the entire draft box.
2. All cards would be in English. This way, people could play with each card without needing a translator.
3. No proxies. No sleeves. Just shuffle up and play.
4. Only cards that were printed for tournament-legal releases would be in the box. That meant no *Portal* (unless a card was later rotated into a regular set) or *Unglued* cards.
5. Ante cards and manual dexterity cards (*Falling Star* and *Chaos Orb*) would not join the box. To this day, they still sit in sleeves outside the box.



Ben's box contains one of every tournament-legal card, and he updates it every time a new set is released.

I started by raiding the old Jank Box and by moving cards from my Constructed decks to the new Big Draft Box. Slowly but surely, the new 5,000-count box began to fill as hundreds of cards from dozens of expansions flowed into my hands through trades. Without spending any money on card singles, I'd come within 250 cards of completing my dream. Now came the hard part.



Type 1 on a Budget

Some people say that Type 1 isn't expensive. Maybe so. But some of the *cards* sure are. Over the course of a year, I collected the Power Nine for the box--and they didn't come cheaply. I won my **Black Lotus** on eBay, paid for with birthday money. Several high-profile dealers across the country started seeking bad-condition Type 1 cards to sell to me, as they knew the cards I needed to complete my box. Players would donate cards here and there, and by the end of 2001, I needed only five cards to finish the box: **Ancestral Recall**, **Nether Void**, **The Tabernacle at Pendrell Vale**, **Giant Badger**, and **Knights of Thorn**. They finally joined the Big Draft Box at 2002 Pro Tour - San Diego--and the project was complete.

Frankenstein's Draft

While the box was being built, my local group of friends would draft from the growing collection. We'd bring the Big Draft Box to Qualifier tournaments, Prereleases, and eventually to Pro Tour events. Everywhere it went, it drew crowds who saw people drafting packs containing **Shelkin Brownie**, **Tidal Flats**, **Baron Sengir**, **Despondency**, and **False Orders**! Inevitably, we'd be asked the same questions over and over.

Q: What are you guys doing?

A: We're playing Big Box Draft. I have this box that has nearly one of every card in **Magic**, and we make up random fifteen-card booster packs. Then, we hold a draft and play matches with the cards.

Q: Isn't that random? Where's the strategy?

A: You'd be surprised at how much strategy goes into the draft. You still have to know how to read signals and be able to recognize which cards work well together. Plus, since the five colors have the same basic themes from set to set, you can get a good idea of what you'll see from draft to draft.

Q: Do you have a **Black Lotus** in that box?

A: Yup, I have one of everything in that box. And we shuffle them, too!

Is It Fun?

Okay, you might ask why this topic is even relevant to my column, which deals with **Magic** history. In fact, it's the reason I'm *into Magic* history! The Big Draft Box keeps me on top of the cards. Each time I play, I get exposed to **Magic** cards from throughout ages, which keeps them fresh in my mind. Remember the [column](#) in which I wrote about all the **Magic** cycles? Aaron subtitled that column "Ben makes little piles" because I literally took the Big Draft Box apart and separated out each cycle, card by card (give or take a **Faerie Conclave**, which was nowhere to be found; it's since been replaced).

Where else in **Magic** can you get to play in a booster draft in which your first pick might be a choice between **Predator**, **Flagship** and **Masticore** (it's happened twice)? Which do you first pick if you open a pack with these cards: **Serra Angel**, **Shivan Dragon**, **Shivan Hellkite**, **Warrior Angel**, **Avatar of Woe**, or **Verdant Force**? If you could see any **Magic** card when you open your pack, which would it be? Some have said **Ancestral Recall**, **Dregs of Sorrow**, **Morphling**, or **Library of Alexandria**.



Which of these would you pick first in a draft? (Hint: not Pale Moon.)

A Few of My Favorite Things

Here are a few favorite decks that have been drafted out of the Big Draft Box:

- A deck with seven Walls, **Thawing Glaciers**, **Rain of Filth**, **Fireball**, and **Disintegrate**.
- A deck that slapped down a turn-one **Black Lotus - Blazing Specter** salvo.
- A deck that **Mana Drained** an opponent's **Hunting Drake**, and then played **Palinchron** and **Air Elemental** the following turn--all while stuck on four lands.
- A deck that played **Ritual of Subdual**; **Rofellos**, **Llanowar Emissary**; **Verdant Bloom**; **Wild Growth**; **Priest of Titania**; several **Elves**; and **Scroll Rack**. Said deck locked down people nearly infinitely.
- A deck with twenty lands and twenty completely bomb spells, including **Mahamoti Djinn**, **Jokulhaups**, **Catastrophe**, **Morphling**, **Armageddon**, **Fault Line**, and **Tornado**.
- The **Phyrexian Infiltrator - Tradewind Rider - Time Elemental** deck.
- The **Noetic Scales - Hypnotic Specter - Mindwarper - Curiosity** deck.
- The time that Aaron Forsythe locked down my deck that was so much better than his with **Rising Waters** and **The Tabernacle at Pendrell Vale**. [*And Ring of Gix... --Aaron*]

I bring the Big Draft Box with me to most Pro Tour events and Grand Prix tournaments I attend, so if you see a group of six to eight players drafting from a 5,000-count box laying down **Invoke Prejudice** to stop **Uncle Istvan**

from coming into play, stop on by and say hello. It's worth it to witness at least once the madness that is the Big Draft Box.

Or, if you're *really* ambitious, start working on a Big Box of your own. It might take a lot of effort to put together, but it's some of the best fun you'll ever have with **Magic**. And that's what it's all about.

Next week: APC

Ben may be reached at bleiweiss1@cox.net.

*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by StarCityGames.com, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Ben Bleiweiss](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

