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For a change, I'm going to step away from Constructed decks for a week and tell the tale of a casual draft format. It is, in fact, my absolute favorite **Magic** format, filled with unlikely events, bizarre plays, gasps of shock, and peals of laughter. Welcome to the Reject Rare Draft.

## The Beginning

Back when I lived in New York City and our Wednesday columnist Brian David-Marshall owned the mighty game store Neutral Ground New York, Brian and Neutral Ground regular Hogan Long invented the Reject Rare Draft. When it was run by the store, it involved two separate steps. First, Neutral Ground held a raffle for prizes such as a Time Walk or a foil Masticore. You couldn't buy a raffle ticket, though -- the only way to get one was to give the store a rare **Magic** card. Any rare would get you a ticket, but people naturally donated the least-valuable rares they owned. After collecting thousands of these awful cards, the store repackaged them into fifteen-card "boosters" and held the draft. The draft was a completely separate event; anyone could pay the admission fee and enter. Neutral Ground ran its Reject Rare Drafts as tournaments, with prizes awarded to top finishers. I played in as many as possible and loved them. When I moved to Seattle, I brought the Reject Rare Draft with me and refashioned it as a casual event.

I don't raffle anything off, and I don't run the draft as a tournament. Instead, I ask anyone who wants to play to donate forty-five rare cards, which accounts for that person's share of the card pool. I won't take ante cards, and I try to keep foreign cards and duplicates to a minimum. Anything else is fair game. Cards with the highest uncommon rating from sets with no "rares" (like *Fallen Empires*) are accepted. I separate the donated cards into colors, deal them face down into packs, then pick out two random cards from each pack and redeal them. (This last step ensures a little color randomness in each booster.) Players keep what they draft, so they end up with 45 rare cards, which is just what they gave. The beauty of it is that it's a self-sustaining format: Participants can keep those 45 lousy cards until the next draft and just resubmit them.

## The Format

The format, as you might guess, is weird. There's an overabundance of cards that cost too much mana. There are way too many cards with six lines of text on them. But the defining factor of the environment isn't the crazy stuff that makes it in -- it's what's missing. When you remove all the common cards, you lose just about all the utility that makes the game work. Artifact and enchantment removal is practically nonexistent because effects like Disenchant and Shatter are almost always common. Most of the creature removal is gone as well, and what's left is unwieldy. The only mana fixing left come from cards like Clear the Land and New Frontiers. The standard mix of creatures you need to build a solid deck, such as Elvish Warrior and Nantuko Husk, are gone.

## The Card Pool

Most participants in my Reject Rare Drafts give me a pile of forty-five awful, awful cards -- cards like Planar Overlay, Scrapheap, and Animate Wall. Some folks get more creative. Bill Rose, **Magic** lead designer, once gave me forty-five multicolored cards. The last time out, Paul Barclay, **Magic** rules manager, handed in forty-five cards that had errata. This time, he tried to give me forty-five different cards that each had a converted mana cost of 7, but he petered out after forty-one selections and amped up to Draco and Aladdin's Lamp. Since people inside Wizards of the Coast value cards

differently than players on the outside, **Magic** editor Del Laugel and director of **Magic** R&D Randy Buehler handed in a slew of Urza block Limited bombs.

## The Booster Packs

On to the event itself. Seventeen people sat down to draft, including Mike Gills, mass-market programs manager for Organized Play, and Tyler Bielman, R&D director of new business. They were met with some gruesome surprises in their first packs. Paul was probably the unluckiest. His first booster contained Collapsing Borders, Sulfuric Vapors, Clear the Land, Ritual of Subdual, Lurking Skirge, Dwarven Shrine, Formation, Glowrider, Living Lands, Deserted Temple, Flying Carpet, Trade Secrets, Ebonblade Reaper, a second Clear the Land, and Nomad Mythmaker. While the Reaper is attractive because it's a 2/2 for 3 mana, Paul took the cantrip Formation. It didn't make his deck.

Brandon Bozzi, **Magic** creative coordinator, fared better. Besides bombs like Barrin, Master Wizard and Planar Collapse, he saw Archangel; Drifting Djinn; Rock Hydra; Anthroplasm; Lotus Blossom; Mogg Sentry; Infernal Denizen; Hanna, Ship's Navigator; Umbilicus; Gaea's Herald; Morality Shift; Soldevi Golem; and the card he took: Dark Hatchling.

## The Cards

Some cards seem like they were made for Reject Rare Drafts. Matthew Stevens, art director for *Sideboard* magazine, made great use of Teferi's Realm as enchantment control. He also won a game by playing Ebonblade Reaper face up on turn 3 and beating down with it for three turns before a blocker could come out.

Elvish Piper let Bill "Quill" McQuillan, RPG managing editor, get out a 16/16 Serra Avatar on turn 5. *Sideboard* editor Kate Schneider also played the Piper, which let her get Barrin and Dakmor Lancer into play even though she didn't have any swamps or islands -- and then the recursive creature kill began.

Defense of the Heart was always crazy in Limited, but in a format with as many gigantic creatures as this one, it's flat-out broken. Randy used Defense of the Heart to fetch Arcades Sabboth and Molimo, Maro-Sorcerer and put them into play right before hard-casting Draco.

The card whose stock probably rises the most in this format is Decimate, which transforms from completely unplayable to MVP. Unlike in other formats, Reject Rare Drafters are nearly guaranteed to have artifacts and enchantments to target. When playing Microsoft developer Matt Ruhlen, software test engineer Amanda O'Connor Decimated a 5/5 flying Djinn artifact creature token spawned from a Bottle of Suleiman, a Bog Elemental, one of Matt's two islands, and because she needed an enchantment to target, her own Web.

## The Decks

It's long been known in R&D that Bill Rose has a deal with the devil that allows him to play five-color decks with no mana fixing and always get the lands he needs. I saw it time and time again during the days of *Invasion* block playtesting, and he taps into the same infernal skill in Reject Rare Draft. Bill's deck was designed to stall, stall, gain some life, and stall until he got out Legacy Weapon, removed all your permanents from the game, and decked you. When I played against him, I got stuck at seven lands while the 8-mana Avatar of Woe was trapped in my hand and he had out a Planeswalker's Mirth.

Oops. Even though I dealt 29 damage to Bill, by the time I lost the game, I had no cards in my library, no cards in play, and 30 cards in the removed-from-game zone.

That wasn't Bill's most epic win, though. Against Aaron Forsythe, some guy who does some job, Bill refused to lose multiple times. Outnumbered 6 creatures to 0 and at only 10 life, Bill played Whirlpool

Warrior to recycle his full hand of cards. He found the Desolation Giant he needed to clear the board.

With some time on his hands, he used Delusions of Mediocrity (which is nearly unremovable in the format) and Planeswalker's Mirth to go up above 40 life. When Aaron appeared to turn the tide again by building up creatures and playing the permanent-killing Tornado, Bill managed to play and activate Legacy Weapon in one turn to remove Tornado from the game. Bill wasn't out of the woods yet because Aaron's creature advantage let him keep attacking. After a 20-damage assault, Bill was down to 3 life. *That's when he played Transcendence*. Even though Aaron dealt 60 total damage to Bill and Bill dealt 0 damage to Aaron, Aaron ran out of cards and Bill won. Deal with the devil indeed.

Bill Rose

### **Reject Rare Draft**

What about my deck? It was solid: good mana curve, good creatures, good removal. I had no way to deal with enchantments, though, and lacked any of the intricate tricks I usually shoot for. Here's what I wound up with.

Mark Gottlieb

### **Reject Rare Draft**

Dan Myers, *Magic Online* Web dude, went with Goblins. Sort of. He kind of had a Sligh-ish build with three Ruby Leeches. And he had some land destruction. Take a look.

Dan Myers

### **Reject Rare Draft**

There's a lot of synergy in the deck. Tectonic Instability powers up Well of Discovery, Pallimud, and (I guess) the Flailing Manticores. Goblin King and Goblin Pyromancer both supercharge the tokens created by Goblin Trenches, and Planar Birth let him get the lands back that he sacrificed to make those tokens. Plus, for the first time ever, I saw Goblin Bomb blow someone up. Me.

### **The Plays**

You see, I had been laughing at Dan's Goblin Bomb. That thing never works. It especially wasn't going to work this time because I had an active Master Healer. During my copious taunting of Dan, I said that I hoped he got all five fuse counters on the Bomb. How funny would it be if he managed the extraordinarily unlikely task of getting the Bomb active, then still couldn't kill me with it? I must've thought it was real funny, because I was laughing a lot. And while I was laughing, I guessed "heads" five times in a row while Dan flipped "tails" five times in a row, and the Bomb went active. Just like I wanted. I was at 18, so Master Healer would still protect me. And then Dan did the unthinkable. He topdecked, of all things, Shrieking Mogg. When it came into play, it tapped all creatures -- including my Healer. I tapped the Healer in response to prevent 4 damage, but it was futile because Dan blew up the Bomb in response to that. So there you have it: Thanks to SHRIEKING MOGG, I lost a game to GOBLIN BOMB. See why this is my favorite format?

There were a whole mess of other crazy plays. Check out this insanity:

### **Planeswalker's Fury**

vs. Draco

Del was playing Randy, who was at 10 life. Without anything better to do, Del activated her Planeswalker's Fury. Even though Randy had six cards in hand (including four lands), Del found his

Draco and popped him in the head for 16. Ouch.

## **Alaborn Veteran**

### **& Intrepid Hero**

Randy had plenty of glory of his own. He used his Alaborn Veteran to give his opponent's creatures +2/+2 so he could off them with Intrepid Hero.

## **Legerdemain**

### **vs. Wormfang Manta**

Randy also used Legerdemain to steal a Wormfang Manta from Jessica Kristine, editor of *Duelmasters* and the *Star Wars* TCG. Jessica lost a turn when the Manta came into play, and Randy gained that turn when the Manta died!

## **Exhaustion**

### **vs. Herald of Serra**

Exhaustion as creature removal? I played the 2WW Herald of Serra while I had 7 lands in play. Matt Ruhlen played Exhaustion to prevent me from untapping. I couldn't pay the Herald's echo, so away it went.

## **Kormus Bell**

### **& Slate of Ancestry**

Magic designer Brian Tinsman made the most of his Kormus Bell. He used his 1/1 swamp creatures to draw five cards a turn with Slate of Ancestry, as well as to feed his Fallen Angel.

## **March of Souls**

### **& Plaguebearer**

Brian also had some fun with March of Souls (one of the best removal spells in the format since Wrath of God isn't likely to turn up). After playing it to convert his opponent's four creatures into 1/1 Spirit tokens, Brian played Apprentice Necromancer. The next turn, the Necromancer reanimated Plaguebearer, which killed off all the opposing tokens for a total of BBBB. As Brian commented, "HA HA!"

## **Attunement**

### **& Death or Glory**

Paul's deck had one trick. He used Attunement to drop lots of creatures into his graveyard, then reanimated a bunch of them with Death or Glory. Playing against Kate, he got out Hypnox, Brood Sliver, Andradite Leech, Catapult Master, Blind Seer, *and* Extravagant Spirit with a single Death or Glory. Kate promptly played Plague Wind to put them all right back into the graveyard.

## **Search for Survivors**

### **& Quill's brain**

Quill is one tricky dickens. In one of his games, he intentionally missed his first land drop and discarded Archangel. On turn 4, he played Search for Survivors while just that one card was in his graveyard.

## **Avatar of Fury**

& Avatar of Fury

Brandon managed to play two Avatars of Fury on the same turn . . . twice!

## Mana Clash

& tails

Brandon also managed to draw a game he was about to lose with that mighty damage-dealing card Mana Clash. It's a good thing he was playing two of them because the first one did no damage. The second one dealt 10 to each player, leaving Brandon at -9 and his opponent at exactly 0.

## Harsh Mercy

vs. Natural Emergence

Amanda won her fair share of games with the powerhouse Natural Emergence. She had three other enchantments that she could bounce back to her hand, including Sulfuric Vapors, which had absolutely no other purpose in her deck. Of course, she also lost her share of games thanks to Natural Emergence. When Randy got out Storm Spirit, he was able to pick off Amanda's lands one by one. Even faster was Aaron's Harsh Mercy. Harsh Mercy proved to be great removal all night, and it's even better against animated lands (which have no creature type and are therefore unsavable). When Amanda played more lands later, Aaron got rid of them with Time Bomb.

## Vitalizing Wind

& Thorn Elemental & Butcher Orgg

Matt Ruhlen was so pleased that he used Extract to remove the Vitalizing Wind from Amanda's library that he never suspected she had a second one that was already in her hand. She played it, giving her creatures +7/+7, while she had Thorn Elemental and Butcher Orgg on the table. 27 to the dome, blockers be damned.

And finally, one of the most unusual actions of all time: When Brian played Harsh Mercy, Brandon chose creature type "El-Hajjaj." I know a lot of **Magic** games get played around the world every day, but I'm pretty sure that had never happened before. Again, see why I love Reject Rare Draft?

Remember: **Magic** is an extraordinarily versatile game that provides as much fun as you're willing to wring out of it. I certainly got my fair share that day. Until next week, enjoy your favorite formats.

Mark

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