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Grid Marks

Brian David-Marshall
 Learning Curve
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Regular readers probably realize that I rely on booster drafts as inspiration for most of decks and many of my columns. I was really sweating Artifact Creature Week right down to the wire. Originally I was going to write about the "replica" cycle but I really wanted to build a deck and while the replicas are pretty darned good in Limited, they don't seem destined for Constructed greatness. As my deadline approached I was still without a subject. Once again the act of cracking packs came to the rescue.

Whenever a new set comes out it is fascinating to watch other players evaluate new cards for their draft decks. Often players in the draft will have staggered levels of experience with the new cards. Players who have been drafting for the same amount of time with *Mirrodin* may have collectively arrived at conclusions about the set that a fresh set of eyes can upend. For example, the group that I draft with regularly had decided that *Culling Scales* was interesting but not very good. Toby Wachter, who had not had much opportunity to draft took the card high in a draft the other day. The card decimated his opponent's equipment and wreaked havoc on a white deck and Toby forced everyone to reconsider the card and the order it gets picked in.

There are two cards in particular that draw the attention of fresh drafters. The first is always *Leveler* - a 10/10 for five mana will always give a Magic player pause and force them to weigh the drawback. Losing your library - and consequently the game on the next turn - always means the *Leveler* goes back in the pack as chaff to be measured against *Chimney Imps* and foil lands in the last pass around the table. Just for kicks, I have been dying to try the *Leveler* out with a *Tel-Jilad Stylus*.



With a *Stylus* in play I could just plop a permanent on the bottom of my deck-which is also the top with a *Leveler* in play-and prevent myself from getting decked while a 10/10 flying, hasted untargetable creature finishes my opponent off over two turns. Hey, if I am going to fantasize about unlikely scenarios I might as well have a *Lightning Greaves* and a *Neurok Hoversail* in play as well. It sounds like a fun combo but there is just too much artifact removal in the set to indulge such whimsy. I can't imagine anything more heartbreaking than actually getting set up and having an opponent *Shatter* my *Stylus* and chumping for two turns until I decked myself. I'll take the *Chimney Imp*, thank you very much.

The other card that always draws the question, "Is this any good?" is the *Grid Monitor*. For only four mana, a tremendous 4/6 body is a tempting draft pick but again the drawback is too great. Once the *Grid Monitor* hits play you can no longer play creatures - a real problem in Limited formats. I have seen him attempted in a deck with a pair of *Crystal Shards*. The player could return the *Grid Monitor* to play another creature and then put down the *Monitor*. It didn't work out and I have yet to see this guy make the cut in any other Limited deck.

Even if he is the last man you play out of your hand he is not that good. You are going to offset his low casting cost by holding him until your other creatures have played out and you will still not be able to play any subsequent creatures you draw. It recalled a similar dilemma from when *Steel Golem* was first printed. For one less mana you got a 3/4 creature with the same drawback. Even back in those early days of draft the *Golem* rarely saw play in Limited but it did shine in Constructed. It got me to wondering if the *Grid Monitor* was also going to be a Constructed stand-out.

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RULES



Steel Necro		
by John Chinnock and Gary Wise circa Feb. 98		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Quicksand	4 Agonizing Memories	2 Coercion
1 Stalking stones	4 Diabolic Edict	3 Dread of Night
17 Swamps	4 Drain Life	3 Perish
22 lands	3 Funeral Charm	2 Phyrexian Furnace
	3 Mind Stone	2 Spinning Darkness
2 Evil Eye of Orms-by-Gore	4 Necropotence	3 Touchstone
4 Steel Golem	4 Nevinyrral's Disk	15 sideboard cards
6 creatures	2 Spinning Darkness	
	4 Stupor	
	32 other spells	

The deck stocked up on removal to deal with the aggressive Sligh decks that were running rampant at the time. (Sligh is a nickname for a mono-red deck that features cheap efficient creatures - think **Jackal Pup** - and burn to finish an opponent off.) **Steel Golem** was larger than most removal - it would take a **Fireblast** to kill it - and could hold off the early creature rush, often costing an opponent two cards to deal with it. The Golem would take down a creature in combat and then they would use a burn spell to finish it off. It was like having four more **Stupors**.

Grid Marks		
Steel Necro in Mirrodin?		
Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Stalking Stones	4 Grid Monitor	4 Barter in Blood
19 Swamp	4 creatures	4 Consume Spirit
4 Vault of Whispers		1 Extraplanar Lens
27 lands		4 Necrogen Spellbomb
		4 Oblivion Stone
		4 Promise of Power
		4 Terror
		4 Wrench Mind
		29 other spells

I tried to recreate the deck using only *Mirrodin* cards-getting the jump on *Mirrodin* Block Constructed. There are a number of cards in the block that parallel the powerful cards from blocks past in addition to the **Grid Monitor**. **Wrench Mind** is the new **Stupor** and while nothing will ever match the power of **Necro**, the **Promise of Power** is a compelling card that will certainly see play in a variety of formats. Not only does it allow you to draw cards but it gives you a way to play creatures that gets around the **Grid Monitor**'s drawback-potentially huge, flying creatures.

The absence of the ridiculously over-powered **Necropotence** necessitates the ten additional lands in my mana hungry build. With a **Necro** in play it was very difficult for it's controller to miss land drops. The player would just pay enough life to fill up their hand or even go beyond full and would often have land to burn. With my deck's 'Necro' costing five mana,

Consume Spirit eager for abundant mana and Stalking Stones costing six to activate it can't afford to miss land drops.

Stalking Stones and Promise of Power give you the potential for eight creatures that circumvent the drawback of the Grid Monitor. Grid Monitor's drawback is also offset by the Oblivion Stone and Barter in Blood. With a Monitor in play and another in hand you can pop your Oblivion Stone or cast Barter in Blood and not feel like you are losing anything since the card in hand would have been dead anyway.

The Oblivion Stone is as necessary to this deck as Nevinyrral's Disk was to older Necro decks. With no other way available to black to deal with an artifact or enchantment, Oblivion Stone becomes the deck's primary weapon on that front. If you get to save a creature that is a bonus but with all the artifact removal bouncing around I would be hesitant to tap this to put a fate counter on anything. Besides, your Stalking Stones are going to survive even if they have been animated.

I don't know how good Wrench Mind is going to be but it certainly seems worth a try. Again, with the deck's limited arsenal against artifacts you won't be sad to see them pitch an artifact unless it is one of the new lands. It should certainly be great in concert with Barter in Blood against creature based green decks that will have few artifacts.

Currently, I have four Necrogen Spellbombs in the Funeral Charm slot. Ostensibly, they serve as extra discard or just to 'cycle' through your deck for cards. Like Funeral Charm they serve as instant speed discard so you can keep an empty-handed opponent without cards by sacrificing it during their draw step after they have drawn. In reality, the card is there as a place holder. Like I mentioned in the opening paragraph, this column went right up until deadline and I haven't playtested with it much.

I have played around with Betrayal of Flesh, Serum Tank, additional Extraplanar Lenses, even splashing green for One Dozen Eyes to get around the Grid Monitor's drawback. What would you put in spot in the deck? Remember, the deck is currently only using Mirrodin cards in anticipation of the Mirrodin Black constructed format. If you want to convert it to Standard-not a bad idea considering the upcoming State Championships-it will obviously give you access to a whole slew of other cards. Mind Sludge, Phyrexian Arena, Diabolic Tutor, Infest, and Decree of Pain are just a few of the cards that leap to mind.

Let me know what your builds look like and I might even use them in an upcoming column.

Brian may be reached at brian@fightlikeapes.com.

Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



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