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Looking Forward to Champs

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Learning Curve
Wednesday, October 15, 2003



My mind is reeling at the deck building possibilities for the upcoming [State and Provincial Championships](#). It will be the first major tournament to include *Mirrodin*. There have barely been any significant tournaments with *Core Set* so it is a doubly complex environment to sort out. The rotation in of *Core Set* complicates matters by taking away a number of staple cards and adding some tantalizing possibilities that have yet to be explored. This year's tournaments should provide a wide array of decks from the well worn to classic updates to completely new designs.

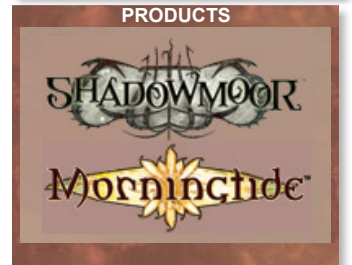
Over the next couple of weeks I am going to look at some of the decks you can expect to see and might even want to consider playing. I have broken them up into three categories. Something Old will look at decks from the past block constructed season and the previous Standard environment. Something New will look at the doors opened by *Mirrodin* and whether there are any new deck types lurking in the new set. Something Borrowed and Something Blue? Will look at old deck archetypes that are again viable thanks to key reprints in *Core Set* and will also look at the possibility of a blue deck without *Counterspell*.

Looking at Past Decks

Generally, the field at States fails to exploit the new set each year. Despite weeks of hype about new decks leading up to the event it is generally the established decks from either the last Standard season or Block Constructed season that thrive. While that may not be the most encouraging statement for the rogue deck builders out there it does mean that there is something of an established metagame, which does allow for you to adequately prepare.

The most dominant decks in Block, Standard and even Extended over the past year were Goblin builds. *Goblin Warchief*, *Goblin Piledriver*, *Goblin Sharpshooter*, the unlikely *Skirk Prospector* and the ridiculous *Siege-Gang Commander* emerged at the top of the standings regardless of format or build. Mana issues for Goblin Bidding may result in it not make the cut to the new Standard although I would not count it out entirely.

Lost in the sea of Wake decks at this past season's World Championships was Sylvain Lauriol's 6-0 performance with a three color Goblin Bidding deck. His manabase only loses two *Shadowblood Ridge* to the inclusion of *Mirrodin* (and the ousting of *Odyssey* block). The *Firebolt* and the *Lava Dart* can be easily replaced by the *Silver Knight* slaying *Pyrite Spellbomb*. The deck loses the most cards in the sideboard but sideboards are constantly changing so that might not be critical.



Goblin Bidding		
Sylvain Lauriol		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Bloodstained Mire	1 Firebolt	3 Cabal Therapy
4 City of Brass	1 Lava Dart	3 Coffin Purge
1 Island	3 Patriarch's Bidding	1 Ensnaring Bridge
8 Mountain	3 Read the Runes	2 Flaring Pain
2 Polluted Delta		1 Read the Runes
2 Shadowblood Ridge	8 other spells	2 Slay
2 Swamp		3 Smother
23 lands		15 sideboard cards

- 3 Gempalm Incinerator
- 4 Goblin Piledriver
- 3 Goblin Sharpshooter
- 4 Goblin Sledder
- 4 Goblin Warchief
- 3 Siege-Gang Commander
- 4 Skirk Prospector
- 4 Sparksmith

29 creatures

Goblins in their purest form finished in second place at Pro Tour Venice and later went on to win Grand Prix London in the hands of Diego Ostrovich. Both tournaments were *Onslaught* Block Constructed but that format is usually a harbinger of things to come in the subsequent Standard environment. Blue-green Madness was a dominant block deck that went on to become a fixture in Standard over the following season. Goblins experienced on-again off-again success throughout the Pro Tour Qualifier season due to pesky *Silver Knights*. As mentioned earlier, the addition of *Pyrite Spellbomb* gives the goblin deck a colorless answer it did not have previously.



Diego Ostrovich

Goblins - Winner GP London

Main Deck 60 cards

- 3 Goblin Burrows
- 22 Mountain

25 lands

- 4 Clickslither
- 4 Gempalm Incinerator
- 4 Goblin Piledriver
- 4 Goblin Sharpshooter
- 4 Goblin Sledder
- 4 Goblin Warchief
- 2 Rorix Bladewing
- 4 Siege-Gang Commander
- 4 Skirk Prospector

34 creatures

- 1 Carbonize
- 1 other spell

Sideboard

- 2 Carbonize
- 2 Goblin Goon
- 4 Stabilizer
- 4 Starstorm
- 3 Sulfuric Vortex

15 sideboard cards

The other dominant deck from last year's Block Constructed format—playing *Psychatog* to Goblin's Blue-Green Madness—was *Astral Slide*. Osyp Lebedowicz won Pro Tour Venice with an *Astral Slide* deck by defeating Tomi Walamies' Goblin deck. Going into Venice, Goblins were the heavy favorite and Osyp's deck accounted for this with two maindeck *Gempalm Incinerators* with another two lurking in the wings for games two and three. With a *Lightning Rift* in play this was potentially three for one card advantage against a goblin deck.



Osyp Lebedowicz		
Astral Slide - Winner Pro Tour Venice		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Forgotten Cave 9 Mountains 10 Plains 4 Secluded Steppe <hr/> 27 lands 2 Daru Sanctifier 4 Exalted Angel 2 Gempalm Incinerator 2 Jareth, Leonine Titan <hr/> 10 creatures	4 Akroma's Blessing 4 Akroma's Vengeance 4 Astral Slide 4 Lightning Rift 3 Renewed Faith 4 Starstorm <hr/> 23 other spells	2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath 4 Avarax 3 Demystify 3 Disciple of Grace 2 Gempalm Incinerator 1 Oblation <hr/> 15 sideboard cards

Later on that season, a three color **Astral Slide** deck would win the Junior Super Series Championships in the hands of Mitch Towner and an almost identical version would take second at US Nationals piloted by Gabe Walls. The deck did not bother with **Gempalm Incinerators** against the goblin deck since it could gain four life every turn with **Teroh's Faithful** - a card no longer available for the upcoming Standard format.

Mitch Towner		
Astral Slide - Winner 2003 Junior Super Series		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
2 Forest 4 Forgotten Cave 2 Grand Coliseum 3 Mountain 3 Nantuko Monastery 4 Plains 4 Secluded Steppe 4 Tranquil Thicket 2 Windswept Heath 2 Wooded Foothills <hr/> 30 lands 4 Exalted Angel 4 Krosan Tusker 2 Teroh's Faithful <hr/> 10 creatures	4 Astral Slide 4 Lightning Rift 4 Renewed Faith 4 Slice and Dice 4 Wrath of God <hr/> 20 other spells	2 Auramancer 4 Boil 2 Cartographer 4 Dwarven Blastminer 2 Ray of Revelation 1 Teroh's Faithful <hr/> 15 sideboard cards

In addition to the loss of **Teroh's Faithful** the deck can no longer play with **Nantuko Monastery**. Sideboard aside, those are the only two cards lost in this deck. The lands can be easily replaced and the Faithful can become goblin hating Incinerators. The reason I have highlighted the three color version of this deck (besides the fact that it took 1st place and 2nd place at JSS and Nationals respectively) is because of the possibility of adding **Viridian Shaman** to either the main deck or sideboard.

Stabilizer is obviously a powerful card against this deck. **Break Asunder** is a nice answer that also cycles but the Shaman provides a renewable source of artifact destruction with **Astral Slide**. **Chrome Mox** is sure to be a staple card at these events and **Mirrodon** will surely provide any number of artifacts to destroy including lands. I don't know if it is maindeck worthy but it will certainly occupy some slots in the sideboard.

There has been a lot of speculation about adding **Solemn Simulacrum** to this deck. Each time the invitational card returns to play from under an **Astral Slide** it will search out another land Is a 2/2 for four mana going to be good enough? It provides valuable mana-fixing that is not green. The deck's mana had to wrestle with the fact that it's mana-fixing was in it's third color. We will no doubt be taking a more in depth look at this fellow in an upcoming column.



Mono-White Control made a name for itself beating up on goblins during the last PTQ season and should only get better with a four mana **Wrath of God** as opposed to the six mana that **Onslaught** Block dictated. **Pyrite Spellbomb** kills **Silver Knight** dead but the deck is not without answers. The **Spellbomb** is an on table trick-you can't help but see it coming. **Dragon Scales** is one way to overcome that as is **Damping Matrix**. The latter also shuts down many of the tricks the goblin deck employs like **Goblin Sharpshooter**, making **Clickslither** trample over **Silver Knight**, and the sacrifice ability of the **Siege-Gang Commander**. Additionally, **Dawn Elemental - Worship** is an almost impossible combo for a goblin deck to overcome.



Derek Starleaf		
Mono-White Control - Top 8 Grand Prix Detroit		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
18 Plains	4 Akroma's Vengeance	1 Foothill Guide
4 Secluded Steppe	3 Decree of Justice	3 Pacifism
4 Temple of the False God	3 Dragon Scales	4 White Knight
26 lands	4 Renewed Faith	3 Wing Shards
	14 other spells	4 Wipe Clean
		15 sideboard cards
2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath		
4 Dawn Elemental		
4 Eternal Dragon		
3 Exalted Angel		
3 Foothill Guide		
4 Silver Knight		
20 creatures		

Derek's deck listed above may not have won the event like the other decks we have looked at but it was a popular choice throughout the PTQ season and qualified a number of players for the upcoming Pro Tour in New Orleans. Bob Maher went on to win that Grand Prix with a Red-White 'slideless slide' deck called **Bad Form**. The deck did not go onto to accomplish much else during the PTQ season and it's success was chalked up to the fact that Bob Maher Jr. is an exceptional player and was either able to understand the deck on a deeper level than anyone else or be good enough to win with an **Astral Slide** deck that had no Astral Slides.

Bob Maher		
Red-White Control- Winner Grand Prix Detroit		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
4 Forgotten Cave	4 Akroma's Vengeance	2 Decree of Annihilation
8 Mountain	3 Decree of Justice	1 Decree of Justice
11 Plains	4 Lightning Rift	2 Oblation
4 Secluded Steppe	3 Renewed Faith	4 Shock
27 lands	2 Starstorm	2 Temple of the False God
	4 Wing Shards	4 Wipe Clean
	22 other spells	15 sideboard cards
3 Akroma, Angel of Wrath		
4 Eternal Dragon		
4 Silver Knight		
11 creatures		

Playtesting New Decks

There were a handful of other decks that made some noise like **Zombie Bidding** and a Blue-White control deck that utilized the unwieldy counter magic of the block. I will be taking a look at the latter deck in the third

installment of this series. Next week I will try to look into my crystal ball and look at some of the new decks that might be viable for these upcoming tournaments.

To get started, here are some rough updates for a few of the decks we looked at in this article. These are not the builds I would be taking to States but rather a starting point for playtesting.

Goblin Bidding

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Bloodstained Mire	3 Patriarch's Bidding	3 Execute
4 City of Brass	2 Pyrite Spellbomb	2 Pyrite Spellbomb
2 Island	3 Read the Runes	3 Slay
8 Mountain	8 other spells	2 Smother
2 Polluted Delta		2 Stabilizer
3 Swamp		3 Sulfuric Vortex
23 lands		15 sideboard cards
3 Gempalm Incinerator		
4 Goblin Piledriver		
3 Goblin Sharpshooter		
4 Goblin Sledder		
4 Goblin Warchief		
3 Siege-Gang Commander		
4 Skirk Prospector		
4 Sparksmith		
29 creatures		

Three-color Slide

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
2 Forest	4 Astral Slide	2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath
4 Forgotten Cave	4 Lightning Rift	3 Decree of Annihilation
4 Mountain	4 Renewed Faith	2 Gempalm Incinerator
5 Plains	4 Slice and Dice	4 Viridian Shaman
4 Secluded Steppe	4 Wrath of God	4 Wipe Clean
4 Tranquil Thicket	20 other spells	15 sideboard cards
3 Windswept Heath		
3 Wooded Foothills		
29 lands		
4 Exalted Angel		
2 Gempalm Incinerator		
2 Krosan Tusker		
3 Solemn Simulacrum		
11 creatures		

Mono-White Control

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
18 Plains	3 Decree of Justice	4 Damping Matrix
4 Secluded Steppe	3 Dragon Scales	3 Karma
4 Temple of the False God	4 Renewed Faith	4 Wing Shards
26 lands	3 Worship	4 Wipe Clean
	4 Wrath of God	15 sideboard cards
	17 other spells	
2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath		
4 Dawn Elemental		
4 Eternal Dragon		
3 Exalted Angel		
4 Silver Knight		
17 creatures		

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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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