

Mark Gottlieb
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Let me let you in on a little secret: I am *not* ready for *Darksteel*. I have a file with half a dozen bizarre *Mirrodin*-based decks that I never got to write about before the best-of weeks at the end of the year. After coming back from break, *Darksteel* previews hijacked my brain for three weeks. And now the full set is out, and there's no going back. Well, there may be a little going back. A dip in the pool of the forgotten, a frolic in the meadow of memory, a moonwalk down the path of What Was... whoa, slipped into poetry mode for a sec. Where was I?

Found Dreams

Ah yes. As I threatened, I'm going to dust off a deck from two months ago. Oh, what a different place the world was then. Type 1 had never been horror-stricken by Trinisphere. Standard had never been horror-stricken by Skullclamp. I had never been horror-stricken by Uncle Walter's Christmas fruitcake, otherwise known as Aunt Sally. I was in my Pentavus phase. Pentavus inflamed my senses and invigorated my mind! It did everything: It was a catalyst for repeated comes-into-play effects. It was a catalyst for repeated leaves-play effects. It was a 5/5 fattie. It spawned armies of flying weenies. It would let you block incoming creatures indefinitely (pop out a token, block, sacrifice the token). It was a floor cleaner *and* a dessert topping. I couldn't stop finding uses for it. One of my favorite decks paired it with Dross Harvester. The Harvester seems like a Suicide Black tool. But if you look closer, you can see that it's actually an engine.



Imagine having a Pentavus, a Dross Harvester, and a Leonin Elder in play. You pay 7, move a counter off Pentavus, create a Pentavite (or, in my parlance, a "dude"), and gain 1 life. You then pay 1, sac the dude, restore Pentavus to its intact 5/5 form, and gain 2 life. 2 mana = 3 life. You need to do this quite a lot to overcome the Harvester's harvesting of 4 of your life each turn, but you clearly have at least 7 mana available or Pentavus wouldn't be on the table. What's the end result of this? You're not futzing around with counters/tokens for your health, are you? Well, actually, you are—and as your life total keeps going up, up, up, a fine plan is to cap things off with a Test of Endurance. Life-gain your way to victory!

At this point, various other parts of the deck adamantly suggested themselves. A combo deck wants Tutors and card-drawing (at this point, Phyrexxian Arenas). A lifegain deck wants Renewed Faith and Death Grasp. If Pentavus isn't around, the Bottle Gnomes/Skeleton Shard combo provides some nice redundancy, and keeps the comes-into-play and leaves-play triggers happy. And wherever you find sustainable leaves-play effects in a black deck, you'll also find one of my favorite cards, Grave Pact. That's a pretty tidy package that does some unexpected things. Playing with Dross Harvester is walking a tightrope, and it certainly acts differently than a conventional deck. (I scoff at your boringness, Mr. Affinity Deck!)



But then there's *Darksteel*. It's my job to promote the new set, show off how cool the new cards are, and get you all to buy boxes and boxes and boxes of it. (Psst, hey you: Buy some *Darksteel*.) So I better find a way to improve the deck with *Darksteel*, right? Right, because I found a way. It's fourth from the end of the alphabetical spoiler, so I was nervous there for a while, but Well of Lost Dreams seems like a very nice fit. It replaces the Arenas, which ate away at the life total the deck strives to increase—and the Arenas only let you draw one extra card a turn anyway. What's up with that? Cycle a Renewed Faith with the Well in play, and you've got a **3** uncounterable instant (yes, I'm ignoring Stifle) that says, "Gain 2 life and draw 3 cards." Sounds like a good deal to me. The Well is friends with the Elder, with the Harvester, and especially with the Gnomes. (Which is actually pretty strange—when's the last time a Well ever showed up to your birthday party, or took care of your cats while you were away? Puzzling, puzzling.)

Stay Healthy, Stay Smart



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Ancient Den	4 Bottle Gnomes	3 Death Grasp
4 Caves of Koilos	3 Dross Harvester	2 Diabolic Tutor
12 Swamp	3 Leonin Elder	2 Grave Pact
3 Tainted Field	4 Pentavus	4 Renewed Faith
4 Temple of the False God	14 creatures	2 Skeleton Shard
27 lands		3 Test of Endurance
		3 Well of Lost Dreams
		19 other spells

Sometimes I Get Overcharged

That's when you see sparks. (If you got that reference, and you're a single woman in your 20s, call me up and we'll get married.) *Mirrodin* introduced a theme of charge counters that power up certain artifacts. Before that set, charge counters had mainly been seen on mana-producing artifacts like Red Mana Battery, Blue Mana Battery, or, I don't know, Green Mana Battery. But *Mirrodin* made charge counters into a thing, and *Darksteel* expanded on the topic. When Brian David-Marshall previewed Darksteel Reactor, the card was dissed. "Twenty counters?!" the naysayers gasped. "That'll take twenty turns! Pass." The savvy deckbuilders mentioned Power Conduit (which just keeps getting better and better as the block continues), but stopped there—because there was nothing else to



mention. No one had seen Coretapper. No one had seen Dismantle. (Odd fact: If you target your Darksteel Reactor with Dismantle, it'll just double the number of charge counters on it...) As it turns out, winning via the Reactor strategy isn't completely nuts. But I'm not going to build that deck. If I did, this column would have a theme of alternate win conditions (yes, the third deck has one too). But since this is a themeless week, we can't have that!

Instead, I'm more intrigued by Aether Vial. This is no Mercadian Lift, folks. No winch counters here. There's an all-uncommon core of a charge counter deck that can lead you in a few different directions. Start with the aforementioned Vial, Coretapper, Conduit, and Dismantle. Add in Serum Tank, Thirst for Knowledge, and possibly Sun Droplet, and the charge counters will dance at your fingertips. You can craft a Lite deck (no rares) that pops creatures into play. You can head straight for 11 and go all Darksteel Colossus all the time.

You can fool around with Riptide Replicator. I'm personally amused by a smorgasbord of creatures of varying mana costs, from 2 through 11, that can be Vial'd into play. Dial the Vial up and down depending on what you need, and remember that the best way for a Conduit to siphon off a charge counter is to add a +1/+1 counter to an Arcbound creature.

Vial Fiends

Main Deck
60 cards

3 Blinkmoth Nexus	1 Arcbound Bruiser	4 Aether Vial
4 Great Furnace	2 Arcbound Crusher	3 Dismantle
4 Island	1 Arcbound Overseer	4 Power Conduit
4 Mirrodin's Core	2 Arcbound Ravager	4 Serum Tank
4 Mountain	1 Bosh, Iron Golem	4 Thirst for Knowledge
4 Seat of the Synod	1 Broodstar	<hr/>
<hr/>	4 Coretapper	19 other spells
23 lands	1 Darksteel Colossus	
	1 Darksteel Gargoyle	
	1 Pentavus	
	1 Reiver Demon	
	2 Triskelion	
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	18 creatures	

And yes, it would be just fine to drop a Darksteel Reactor right into that deck.

Hive Mind

I saved my favorite combo for last. I should just start looking at *Fifth Dawn* now, because I'm not going to top this one no matter how much I leaf through the *Darksteel* spoiler. Take a gander at this

wacky little number:



It doesn't seem like much. Six mana for a 50-50 shot at a creature? Nine mana for a 75% chance to have a 2/2 flier? There are better ways to get one! It's quite a decent Limited card because it strongly deters your opponent from attacking if you have Wirefly potential, and it is a repeatable creature source. But it seemingly has no place in Constructed, especially since that last clause keeps the Wireflies in check, and thus stunts your fun. Unless... Unless... Unless... all... your... opponent's... creatures...*were Wireflies!!!*

This is *not* what the card was designed to do. This is a clear violation of flavor, intent, and all sense of fair play. This is nigh unto a crime against nature (which is what got me talkin' all high-falutin' with the "nigh" and the "unto" and all)! Wirefly Hive says "destroy all Wireflies" because it doesn't want you to keep building a squadron until you have five or six or eighty-seven Wireflies in play. It doesn't include that clause to act as a selective Wrath of God.

But that's what *we're* going to use it for.

Pair it with Imagecrafter and it can pick off creatures—if you lose the flip. (That's what makes this whole endeavor feel *really* dirty: to work properly, you have to *lose* the flip!) Pair it with Standardize and you have a 3♠♠ shot at a Wrath, dependent on the coin flip. But I'm just building up to the good one... and here it is: **Pair Wirefly Hive with Unnatural Selection and you've twisted the game into a grotesque shadow of its former self.** That's a Wirefly, that's a Wirefly, that's a Wirefly... destroy all Wireflies! Blue enchantment + token producer = selective mass coin-flip-dependent creature destruction! Ye gods! Oh Richard Garfield, why have you forsaken us?

The fun doesn't end there. Toss in March of the Machines, and you can use the Selection-Hive engine to blow up artifacts as well! Goblin Pyromancer is a guaranteed one-shot version of the Hive's ability, so it seems like a fine addition for purposes of redundancy (and lunacy). The deck is clearly asking for Krark's Thumb, so in it goes. And now that the Thumb is in, since the deck is already Online Extended in format and I have alternate victory conditions on the brain, I might as well make it a Chance Encounter deck. It doesn't have to be. You could go simple beatdown. The game gets relatively easy when you can knock out

every creature (and, with more difficulty, artifact) your opponent plays. But the deck layout below would look pretty dumb with only Hive, Thumb, and Selection in there, so here's a whole 60 cards:



"Unnatural" is putting it lightly...

Thumb Your Nose

Main Deck
60 cards

<p>6 Island</p> <p>4 Mirrodin's Core</p> <p>14 Mountain</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>2 Goblin Archaeologist</p> <p>2 Goblin Pyromancer</p> <p>4 Skittish Valesk</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>8 creatures</p>	<p>4 Chance Encounter</p> <p>4 Fiery Gambit</p> <p>4 Krark's Thumb</p> <p>2 March of the Machines</p> <p>4 Squee's Revenge</p> <p>2 Standardize</p> <p>4 Unnatural Selection</p> <p>4 Wirefly Hive</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>28 other spells</p>
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And remember: When you lose the Wirefly Hive flip, it will *always* destroy Mistform Ultimus.

Until next week, have fun breaking the rules.

Mark

Mark may be reached at houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com. Send rules-related **Magic** questions to ask@wizards.com.

