

Viridian Longbow on the Rise Search

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Let's get the most important thing out of the way first: I **love** Limited formats. Whether it's Booster draft, Sealed Deck, Rochester draft or even a heads-up Solomon draft, Limited **Magic** is what it's all about for me. I like the fact that you have to exercise your deck-building skills and your playing skills at the same time. I like the fact that every event you play brings a different pool of cards, and that every opponent within that event will have a different deck. Most of all, I like the fact that you have to actually interact with your opponent's deck. There are no turn 3 kills, and there's no sitting around for 10 minutes waiting to see if your opponent's combo deck successfully 'goes off'.

With that in mind, let me welcome you to my new Limited Information column here at the new-and-improved **magicthegathering.com**.

I think I'd better start with a brief introduction as whilst there will be some people out there who know who I am, I'll wager there's a much larger majority who are thinking "Who on earth is this guy, and why should I read his column?"

First I'll deal with the "Who on earth is this guy..." part. I'm English (and proud of it), I've been playing **Magic** for around 8 years, I'm just barely on the right side of 30 years old, and I'm lucky enough to have been asked by Scott Johns to write a weekly column all about Limited **Magic**.

As to why you should read this column, well, if you like Limited formats too, I promise there'll be something here that will interest you. Whilst I'm usually extremely reticent about my own abilities, I am experienced when it comes to Limited formats. My ranking has been hovering around the 2000 mark for a year or so. My best Pro-Tour finish is a respectable 21st. I've also got a sole Grand Prix top 8 – a 4th place finish at GP Gothenburg a couple of years back. I do believe I know a bit about Limited Magic (and presumably Scott Johns thinks so as well, otherwise I doubt very much that I'd be here), so who knows, you might even learn the odd thing along the way.



vs. Dirk Baberowski, Grand Prix Copenhagen 2002

As you might have guessed this column is going to be exclusively about Limited formats. I don't have a good Constructed mind, so I'm not going to try to pretend that I do. However, within the Limited arena as far as I'm concerned pretty much anything goes. I expect to bring you a number of draft pick experiments, much like Joe Crosby did when he wrote his series for *Sideboard Online*. I hope to be able to cover some Sealed Deck builds that'll give you some good preparation for the upcoming San Diego PTQ Season. I'll also cover anything else that I think is interesting, or that I think makes for a potential learning situation. If there's something you'd like to see that you don't think anyone's covered before then please do let me know, I'll definitely be watching my email for suggestions.

Now that we've got all of that out of the way, I'm going to go over a hotly debated issue that had been mentioned to me by a few of the English players since their return from Pro-Tour Amsterdam.

The Question of Viridian Longbow

The crux of this situation can be expressed in this simple quote from one of the English guys who played in PT Amsterdam:

“What’s up with Viridian Longbow? I thought that card was a fairly late pick, but it was getting picked way early, sometimes even as a first-pick!”



Viridian Longbow has been something of a sleeper card. When *Mirrodin* first came out, it was never really considered to be a top common. Bonesplitter, Leonin Scimitar, Vulshok Gauntlets were all initially rated above it, and you could often pick a Longbow up in a draft as a 5th-9th pick. So what happened to make this card rise up the ranks to the place it occupies today?

First of all, you need to consider the speed of the format. *Mirrodin* is a little slower than previous Limited formats, and that gives the Longbow more time to have a significant impact on the game. It took a while for people to adjust to that.

Secondly, you need to consider the creatures involved. *Onslaught* block had a lot of medium to large sized creatures, and the addition of Morph meant you could be facing down a big threat like a Venomspout Brackus very quickly. *Mirrodin*'s creatures are much smaller in comparison. Sure you have the occasional Fangren Hunter, but in general *Mirrodin*'s creatures aren't that large, which obviously means the Longbow is more threatening than we might otherwise have expected it to be. In addition, *Mirrodin* decks tend to run fewer creatures than their *Onslaught* counter-parts which means that taking out one or two threats with the Longbow is likely to stall your opponent's attack as they struggle to find replacement creatures to maintain their momentum. The longer they struggle, the more potent the Longbow gets.

The final point that needs to be realised is that there are very few sources of card advantage within *Mirrodin* block. *Onslaught* block had it in spades with the Morph ability often being the cause of incorrect blocking decisions and Cycling cards like Gempalm Avenger, Krosan Tusker and Solar Blast providing useful cantrip effects. *Mirrodin* has very little to compete with this as almost everything in the set trades cards on a 1-for-1 basis. As a result of this sources of card advantage become a lot more relevant, again increasing the importance of the Longbow slightly.



All of these reasons demonstrate why the Longbow's popularity has only been increasing since *Mirrodin's* release. Tie these in with the fact that one of the format's most drafted archetypes – Affinity – practically rolls over and dies to the card, and you do have a high draft pick on your hands.

Now obviously there are decks that the Longbow does not excel in. Green-Red decks typically take longer to get rolling than the other colours do, and as a result the Longbow comes online later here. These decks are generally favoured in the late game anyway, and they have less need for the Longbow as the late game is when it shines at its brightest.

White is the colour you really want to have alongside your Longbows due in no small part to the presence of one innocuous little common: Raise the Alarm. For those of you who have played these cards together, you'll probably understand what I'm talking about. For those who haven't let me enlighten you using an opening hand I had recently in a **Magic Online** draft:



This hand is about as good as an opening hand gets. I was going first and led off with a land and the Longbow. My opponent played his land and was done. In my second turn I just laid a Plains and did not make the Den-Guard. This put my opponent in a tricky position. I was clearly representing Raise the Alarm so if he made a Myr or other one toughness creature he'd be vulnerable to the possibility of getting it gunned down on my next turn if I did in fact have the Raise. It's a win-win situation for me, as I didn't really mind if my opponent held back his board development on the off chance that I had one particular card. I was going to be casting the Raise and attacking him next turn anyway, whether he made something or not.

Now in the above example I could have led with the Den-Guard on turn two. By doing so I could equip it on my third turn, attack, and still be able to ping for an extra point of damage. However, choosing this route means my opponent then knows not to make his Myr and he knows he has to deal with the Bow or Den-Guard before making a threat. Leading with the Den-Guard also means I don't get the possibility for a double ping until turn 5, as opposed to being able to shoot twice on turn 4 by leading with the Raise. Leading with the Raise meant one less damage, but it opened up much better strategic possibilities.

Back to the game: Sure enough, my opponent did make a Myr on his second turn. I cast the Raise at the end of his turn, untapped, equipped one Soldier and killed the Myr and attacked with the other.

Already I was up a card, and my opponent was in a very bad position. Unless he did something to disrupt my board position, I could kill any 2 toughness creature he cared to make by simply pinging it for one with the first Soldier, and then moving the Longbow to the other Soldier and pinging his guy again. And yet if he did nothing the Soldiers continued to attack and I could develop

my board further with the Den-Guard and the Patrol. This is basically what happened, and I won the game quickly.

So just how high should you be picking the Longbow in your drafts? As I've said, there are decks it's okay in, and decks it excels in. Assuming you want a Longbow for your deck, what cards should you be ignoring in favour of it? For another opinion on that question I sought out Germany's Dirk Baberowski to explain where he'd pick it:

Me: "Hi Dirk, I was wondering if you could tell me your opinion of Viridian Longbow. How high do you rate it after PT Amsterdam?"

Dirk: "Very high. I remember when I got to the Pro-Tour I was chatting with Gerard Fabiano and he asked me if I thought Longbow was better than Bonesplitter. All I thought was '[expletive deleted]! Somebody else knows!'"

Me: "So say you were drafting an average Blue-White deck. Would you take it over Somber Hoverguard? Skyhunter Patrol? Arrest?"

Dirk: "I have picked it over every common at one point or other. If it's pack 3 in an MMM draft and it looks like it's my last shot, I could see taking it over any of those."

Now Dirk isn't saying he'd take it over those cards I mentioned every time. However, he's not the only Pro I talked to who said they could potentially see themselves wanting it over those cards at least some of the time. That's quite surprising even for me, and as far as I'm concerned that's high praise indeed for a card that was often ignored at pre-release time.

That's all I have to say on the Longbow for now. Hopefully it's given you a bit of insight into why people's opinion of the card has risen so highly in recent months.

Which brings us to next week's column. You've just sat down for a *Mirrodin-Mirrodin-Darksteel* booster draft and are presented with the following selection for your first pick of the draft:



Good for you, bad for them



Which card do you draft?

- Tower of Murmurs
- Taj-Nar Swordsmith
- Talsiman of Progress
- Rustmouth Ogre
- Nim Shrieker
- Skyhunter Patrol
- Myr Enforcer
- Iron Myr
- Somber Hoverguard
- Tel-Jilad Chosen
- Titanium Golem
- Vulshok Berserker
- Cobalt Golem
- Terror
- Wurmskin Forger

Submit

I'll be covering the various possibilities in that draft pick next week.

Until then, thanks for reading.

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