

# Deep Packs Make Tough Picks Search

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I'd like to begin with a big thank you to all the people who took the trouble to e-mail me about last week's column. Your comments are much appreciated, I'm only sorry that I don't have time to reply to everybody.

In today's column I'm going to cover the results from last week's draft poll. The booster in question was the first of a *Mirrodin-Mirrodin-Darksteel* booster draft and all you had to do was select the card you favoured from a booster that gave numerous options. Here for reference are the possible choices:



Here are the cards you all voted for:

Which card do you draft?		
Terror	2524	16.1%
Myr Enforcer	2497	15.9%
Skyhunter Patrol	2288	14.6%
Tel-Jilad Chosen	2107	13.5%
Rustmouth Ogre	1349	8.6%
Somber Hoverguard	987	6.3%
Taj-Nar Swordsmith	841	5.4%

Tower of Murmurs	813	5.2%
Talisman of Progress	764	4.9%
Nim Shrieker	482	3.1%
Iron Myr	348	2.2%
Vulshok Berserker	232	1.5%
Wurmskin Forger	179	1.1%
Cobalt Golem	161	1.0%
Titanium Golem	87	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15659</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Terror takes the top spot although it practically shares it with Myr Enforcer. Skyhunter Patrol runs a fairly close third place with Tel-Jilad Chosen right behind it, with Rustmouth Ogre also getting a decent share of the votes. Those results are very interesting to me as they are not as I would have predicted. So the question is, do I agree with you? Also, do the professionals agree with you? This article will answer those questions, and hopefully go some way to explaining any differences of opinion along the way.

Back to the booster in question. It's obviously pretty decent, there are a lot of playable cards but only a few of these are actually worth considering as a first-pick. I'll get to the specifics of what the best cards are shortly but first I'm going to spend a few moments eliminating the worst.

The Tower of Murmurs is the first to go. If you are going to play a Tower then this is the one I like as it will end a lot of limited games in two activations and will almost certainly win you the game if you activate it three times. Having said that, you really don't want to play ANY of the Towers in your draft decks. Cards that do nothing until you hit 8 mana and are vulnerable to artifact removal in the mean-time just aren't worth the price.

The Talisman and the Myr are nice to have but you should be able to pick up mana acceleration later. You don't want to waste a valuable early pick on these at this stage if you have other choices (and you do in this pack).

The Cobalt Golem is the next one to get removed from consideration. It's an average filler card and thus not something worth considering at this stage. If you wanted to go blue the Sombre Hoverguard would be a much better choice.



Speaking of mediocre Golems, Titanium Golem goes next. It's expensive for what it is and it's only just barely playable if you have white mana. If you do want a white card there are better alternatives. Which brings us to...

The Taj-Nar Swordsmith also goes. He's not as good as the Skyhunter Patrol, especially when you don't even know if you'll be getting any good equipment. If you want a white pick you should take the Patrol instead.

The Wurmskin Forger is definitely a worse pick than the Tel-Jilad Chosen here. Getting big, very expensive creatures for your green deck isn't normally a problem. Getting cheap, efficient, aggressive ones typically is. As such you'd always want the Chosen over the Forger this early in a draft.

Finally we wave good-bye to the Vulshok Berserker. Berserk he may be but he's just not as threatening as the Rustmouth Ogre. It'd be the Ogre that would get the nod if we wanted to force red.

So that leaves us with:

Rustmouth Ogre  
Nim Shrieker  
Skyhunter Patrol  
Myr Enforcer  
Somber Hoverguard  
Tel-Jilad Chosen  
Terror



Your first pick should definitely be one of these seven cards - but which one? Before I give you my own opinion, some of the professional **Magic** players took a shot at this one with some mixed results. Here are some of their thoughts:

**Kai Budde:** Right now I haven't done enough *Darksteel* drafts and I don't really know which colors got better or worse. The only thing I do know is that white got weakened. With that in mind, my pick here is Myr Enforcer. The card is great in any deck and doesn't put me in a color, which is always nice early on in a draft. In a *Mirrodin* only draft, Skyhunter Patrol would've been my choice as I liked white a lot in that format. In a few weeks I might pick the Patrol again but as I don't really know what really happened to white and the other colors, so I think the Enforcer is a solid choice.

**Victor Van Den Broek:** In general, I think in MMM booster draft the first picks were always debatable. There were some rules as to what cards were better than others, but unlike before I feel that the power level of each of the good commons is so close together that more often than not you'd make a pick based on your color preferences. I haven't drafted enough with *Darksteel* yet to assume otherwise, so I'd make this pick based on my color/archetype preferences. I prefer drafting a lot of removal, combined with Affinity. For this booster, there are three candidates - Myr Enforcer, Somber Hoverguard and Terror. Most of the removal I draft (Bolt, Terror, Shatter) are higher on my pick order than creatures, but Myr Enforcer is an exception to that rule. It's just so good to have a 4/4 for 4, even though it is a bit vulnerable. In all, Myr Enforcer would be my pick here.



**Jake Smith:** For me the Ogre is too demanding a first pick - I prefer taking him when I already have red. This is in part because of the double casting cost, and in part because of the fact that I prefer to start taking red burn spells, then fill in with guys afterwards. Skyhunter Patrol, however, is a creature I would happily start a colour for. White has many of the best creatures in *Mirrodin*, and apart from Arrest and Beam, creatures are the reason for playing the colour. I don't like taking Terror first pick, because black decks

are only really good when the cards just fall in your lap. The Enforcer, like the Hoverguard, clearly makes you lean towards Affinity, but without committing to a colour.

So for me it comes down to Enforcer, Hoverguard, or Patrol. The next question is what card might I table from this pack? The most likely cards to come back around to me are the Talisman and Myr. Swordsmiths rarely table, however good the pack, simply because someone always goes white with equips from the start. This means that no clear pick is coming for the Patrol, whereas the Hoverguard and Enforcer look odds on to get a Myr or Talisman round, and possibly a Shrieker. Generally it's better to take a non-colour spell first, as it gives you more options in the next pack, when it's more clear what's going on, so I would take the Enforcer. I would hope to get the Shrieker round, and would expect to at least be picking up a Talisman or Myr.

**Olivier Ruel:** I'm really not sure about this one. I would take Hoverguard or Skyhunter Patrol. Terror is strong too, particularly since the black got stronger in *Darksteel*, but many removal spells came with the last expansion, so, since I can get them more easily later on I usually pick the creature over the removal when it's close. If I took Hoverguard I would try and cut the blue in case my neighbour picks the Enforcer, and in the same way if I picked the Patrol I would cut the white in case my neighbour picked the Swordsmith, or, more likely, if he thinks the best color to associate with blue is white. I think I would take the Hoverguard but it's really close.

**Terry Tsang:** I think I would take Skyhunter Patrol in this pack. The pack is dominated by non-white cards and the strength of white is above average. Skyhunter Patrol is one of the top three white commons and is in a color that is deep. There are not any other high white picks in that pack, so it should allow you to have an excellent second pack [when the drafting direction reverses]. There are also not a lot of green cards and white-green is one of the top color combinations in the format. The addition of *Darksteel* adds to the strength of white, there is some decent equipment, and some more efficient creatures. The strength of white increased with *Darksteel* which makes the Patrol a relatively easy pick here.

**Ken Krouner:** From this pack I think the easy pick is Myr Enforcer. The Enforcer is my favourite first pick common as it is non-committal and extremely powerful in a deck type that is very draftable. Affinity is one of the most powerful decks out there and can easily be drafted even if the person next to you is drafting it. Add to this the fact that there are two cards in the pack more powerful than the next best Affinity card in the pack (Somber Hoverguard), the Enforcer is really a no-brainer.

**Adrian Sullivan:** I would be torn between the Myr Enforcer and the Chosen. I love the Chosen. He's efficient, and as *Darksteel* hits, there is a greater abundance of good artifact men. Plus, I love green.

But green can get fought over. With the Myr Enforcer, you've just got a solid, large body, without having to even get into an Affinity archetype. If you do run towards Affinity, he can be even more potent. He's very powerful in both Blue-based affinity and Nim-based



Black. With that Nim Shrieker in the pack, it is a possibility (albeit a low one) that you'll see that it come back to you.

Outside of the archetype, a 5 mana Enforcer is common, with 4 mana being not uncommon. Comparing that with the other creatures in the set, that is just very respectable. While I didn't get into the Chosen as much, the Enforcer would win, by a nose. If I knew that my neighbours didn't like green, or especially liked Affinity, I would go the other way.

**Nate Heiss:** I think the pick here is between Skyhunter Patrol, Somber Hoverguard, Myr Enforcer, and Terror. I say the pick is Skyhunter Patrol. Both Somber Hoverguard and Myr Enforcer convey an Affinity archetype - in a booster draft it is very possible that these will be the next 2 cards taken and you don't want to be involved in that fight. White is a very powerful color to draft, lots of pros realized this in Amsterdam, taking cards like Blinding Beam absurdly high. Also, I think the Patrol is underrated in general.

**Mike Turian:** The four cards that are worth considering would be Skyhunter Patrol, Myr Enforcer, Terror, and Somber Hoverguard. They are all very close cards in terms of quality but I think that Skyhunter Patrol is the best of the four. The Patrol is very hard to kill which is valuable in a format with so much equipment. The Patrol has evasion which is also very important and lastly he is in a good color that is usually under-drafted.

The other three cards are all solid choices but I think they don't measure up to the Patrol. Somber Hoverguard's casting cost with Affinity is just as limiting as the Patrol's double white casting cost and the Hoverguard's stats aren't as good either. Myr Enforcer has the same casting cost issue and the additional problems that it doesn't fly and is an Artifact. Every player at the table will have multiple answers in their deck to a Myr Enforcer because it is an artifact. Terror just isn't as powerful in a format with all artifact creatures. It is still powerful removal but not powerful enough.



So despite a pack with so many playable cards, it's only really Skyhunter Patrol and Myr Enforcer that get much consideration from the Pros. While weighing the choices most of them more-or-less narrow the choice down to one of four cards - the Patrol, the Enforcer, Terror and the Hoverguard. The Enforcer edges it by 5 votes to 3 over the Patrol in the end.

Going back to the short-list of seven that I had previously, it's worth considering why three of those cards were almost unanimously dismissed in the above comments.

First of all, Tel-Jihad Chosen. Adrian is the only one who mentioned this little guy and whilst I do agree with Adrian's comments on him, I don't think the Chosen quite makes it up into the top tier of green picks. What do I mean by that? Well, if you're drafting green there are a few cards you really want in your deck. Fangren Hunter is one of those, as is Tel-Jilad Archer and Deconstruct. The Chosen meanwhile is just another "good" card you could have. Skyhunter Patrol and Myr Enforcer on the other hand are definitely in the top tier of their respective decks. If you're white you definitely want Patrols in your deck and if you're Affinity you want as many Myr Enforcers as you can get your hands on! Both those cards are definitely first-pick worthy, whereas the Chosen doesn't quite make it.

Nim Shrieker comes next. Like it or not, all of the Nims are basically Affinity cards at heart. You need at least three or four artifacts in play before you can consider the Shrieker's four mana outlay reasonable. Ideally you'd want five or more before you could really call him a good deal. If you accept the fact that the Shrieker is basically an Affinity card then you also must accept that there are two more Affinity cards in the booster, both of which are superior to this one.



Finally we come to Rustmouth Ogre. What's not to like about this guy? He's big, he's not over-costed by any means, and he has an excellent ability for this block. All of those things are true, but he still doesn't quite make it into the big leagues when compared to the other picks. Unfortunately for me, it's a little difficult to explain why this is the case. I'm going to have to use a very technical term here, so pay attention: the problem with the Ogre is that he's "clunky".

The jump from five mana to six is quite a substantial one. You'd almost always expect to reach four mana early in a limited match and five mana shouldn't be too far behind that. Six mana tends to come not quite so close behind five however. I could give you all sorts of math as to why that's the case and maybe in another article I will, but for now you'll just have to take my word for it. You can spend entire games not getting to six mana and if you do have to wait a few turns to get there the Ogre might just be too little, too late.

*Good, but not quite good enough...*

On top of his casting cost, he's also lacking any form of evasion. He has to be attacking and more importantly he actually has to get through to your opponent before you finally get the ability you invested your mana in. If he had only one or two of those problems it wouldn't be so bad. I'd like him a lot more if he was a five mana 4/3 creature. I'd love him if he had Haste. If he had Trample then we'd be talking marriage, ogrelings, the whole shebang (and probably some sort of bitter divorce where I got the West Wing DVDs whilst he kept the cave but I digress). As it is, all of his minor flaws combine into a card that is good, and sometimes very good, but just not consistently good enough to warrant picking it over the other cards we have on offer here.

That brings us to the final four choices: Terror, Somber Hoverguard, Skyhunter Patrol and Myr Enforcer. Terror and the Somber Hoverguard always got a mention from the Pro players, but they didn't get the votes. I'm forced to agree with them.

Terror is an excellent spell to have in your deck, but in my experience it isn't something that I'd often want to splash for. That option is there, and sometimes you'd take it, but there aren't as many Terror targets as there are for something like Shatter or Electrostatic Bolt. One of the things *Darksteel* has added to the mix is a healthy number of excellent artifact creatures. All of the Affinity-for-Land Golems are playable, with some of them being very high picks, and there are plenty of playable Arcbound creatures too. In general the coloured creatures aren't as good and there's little in the set that's as dangerous as a Spikeshot Goblin, a Fangren Hunter or a Skyhunter Cub can be. As a result, Terror's value has dropped just a little.

The Hoverguard I just don't rate as high as the Enforcer. They're both vulnerable to spells the other is not – Shatter and Deconstruct kill the Enforcer, Pyrite Spellbomb and Terror kill the Hoverguard – but it's typically the Enforcer that has a greater impact on the game. An under-costed 4/4 is just better than an under-costed 3/2 flyer primarily because 3/2 flyers just aren't that expensive anyway. As I mentioned in my last article the average size of creatures in this block is smaller than in previous blocks, and an early 4/4 really has a real potential to dominate games. The other small bonus is that picking the Enforcer means you have absolutely no colour commitments.



So for me the choice of Enforcer or Patrol is what we're left with. I'll say right off the bat I don't think either of those choices is really incorrect. My two favourite decks to draft are Affinity and the white Equipment-based deck. Both of these picks are excellent for those.

My first instinct was to go with the Patrol. White is very deep and you can usually survive being next to someone else who's drafting it without too much grief. I was concerned about the high number of Affinity type cards in the booster, and I was worried that the Hoverguard could easily go second over the Patrol if the person to my left had opened an Affinity card themselves. Having someone sucking up a pack's worth of Enforcers and Hoverguards can hurt you quite badly.

However, as I've been writing this column and thinking about the issue more I've come to the conclusion that my first instincts were wrong. I'm now pretty sure that the Enforcer just edges it over the Patrol.

First of all, Terry Tsang stated that "The addition of *Darksteel* adds to the strength of white, there is some decent equipment, and some more efficient creatures.". I know where he's coming from but I don't think it works out that way. I've been drafting *Darksteel* a fair bit now and I find white to be underwhelming there. I agree with Kai when he says he believes it to be weakened. You have *Hallow*, *Echoing Calm*, *Metal Fatigue* and *Ritual of Restoration* all taking up valuable common slots. I wouldn't want to play any of those cards in my deck if I could avoid it. In addition to that *Pteron Ghost*, *Auriok Glaivemaster* and *Loxodon Mystic* are all playable, but none of those cards excite me very much. The equipment that the White decks need is there but I don't think you'll find many *Vulshok Morningstars* or *Skullclamps* getting passed to you.

On the other hand Affinity gets some excellent additions. As I mentioned previously, the Affinity-for-Land Golems are mostly very solid and there are a lot of other nice artifact creatures in the set. You lose some artifact lands but *Darksteel Citadel* helps out there. Affinity definitely takes less of a hit than White in my opinion.

Jake Smith and Adrian Sullivan also made interesting comments about the potential for a useful 9th pick to come from that booster should you lean towards Affinity. I think you'll almost certainly get the Myr or the Talisman as a 9th pick from the pack but the possibility of the *Nim Shrieker* tabling and coming back to you is there as well. It's a slim possibility but I've seen stranger things happen. Obviously Myr and Talismans are useful in any deck but they're almost essential for Affinity and having the knowledge that you should get one late makes the Enforcer a safer choice.

Overall I think the Enforcer and the Patrol are basically even in terms of quality. The fact that White has been weakened a little in *Darksteel* and the fact that you'll most likely get something else useful out of the pack if you draft Affinity leans me in favour of the Enforcer. That's the card that I believe is the best pick from this booster.

I'm going to move on to the topic of next week's article now. I've got two polls that I hope you'll all take part in this week. They are a little different from last week's though.

The situation is this: You've already completed your triple *Mirrodin* booster draft and you've wound up with a UW Affinity deck. Your deck-list is as follows:

<b>UW Affinity</b>			
			
<b>Main Deck</b>			
<i>40 cards</i>			
2 Ancient Den	1 Auriok Transfixer	1 Aether Spellbomb	
7 Island	1 Cathodion	1 Arrest	
6 Plains	1 Fatespinner	1 Bonesplitter	
1 Tree of Tales	1 Frogmite	1 Chromatic Sphere	
<hr/>			
16 lands	1 Iron Myr	1 Leonin Scimitar	
	1 Leonin Den-Guard	1 Leonin Sun Standard	
	1 Leonin Elder	1 Sun Droplet	
	2 Myr Enforcer	1 Sunbeam Spellbomb	
	1 Skyhunter Patrol	2 Thoughtcast	
	1 Soldier Replica	<hr/>	
	1 Somber Hoverguard	10 other spells	
	1 Vedalken Archmage		
	1 Wizard Replica		
	<hr/>		
	14 creatures		

You sit down for game one of your first match. Whether you are playing first or whether you are playing second (i.e. drawing first) is covered in the poll. You find yourself presented with the following opening hand:

Leonin Elder, Chromatic Sphere, Aether Spellbomb, Frogmite, Thoughtcast, Wizard Replica, Ancient Den.



**Do you take a mulligan?**

- Yes, I mulligan whether playing first or second.
- I mulligan it playing first, but keep it playing second.
- I keep it when playing first, but mulligan it playing second.
- No, I keep it whether playing first or second.

Submit

Now, same situation only this is your opening hand:

Plains, Plains, Plains, Plains, Leonin Elder, Island, Wizard Replica.



**Do you take a mulligan?**

- Yes, I mulligan whether playing first or second.
- I mulligan it playing first, but keep it playing second.
- I keep it when playing first, but mulligan it playing second.
- No, I keep it whether playing first or second.

Submit

That's all for this week. Next week I'll be covering the results of those two polls and going through what I believe your choices are in those situations.

Thanks for reading,

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