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Before we get to the meat of today's sandwich (so to speak) I've got a couple of things to cover that are left over from last week's article.

First of all, thanks to everyone who took the time to express their opinion regarding my question about the length of my articles. The vast majority simply said "Long articles are fine as long as you have relevant points you want to cover". So you will get a mixture of short and long articles and you can expect me to continue to try to cover the draft picks as thoroughly as possible.

A lot of people also e-mailed me to let me know why they picked the Angel over the other cards. The most common answer was, quite simply, because they wanted it for their collection or because it is worth a tidy sum. I have to say that hadn't occurred to me at all but once it was pointed out it was obvious.

I know that budgets can be tight sometimes. I may or may not have drafted an occasional Chrome Mox over some other card that was better for my deck in the past... However, as far as these articles go I want you to all do me a favour: pretend you're millionaires! Pretend that the monetary value of the cards I present is irrelevant. Pretend like you have a hundred copies of every card and the only thing that matters to you is drafting the best deck you can, regardless of any monetary value of the cards. That way I can get a clearer indication of what people would do from a strategic viewpoint and that will help me make the articles more relevant to you.



Over the last few weeks I've had a number of e-mails from readers that basically ask, "How do you draft?" Not the technical side of how it works but the whole concept of being good at it. What is it that differentiates the good drafters from the bad? What do the better drafters do differently than everyone else?

Unfortunately these are very difficult questions to answer. It is my hope that today's article will hopefully cover one or two ideas that will go some way toward answering those questions. There's far too much I could say on that topic to cover in a single article – indeed I'd struggle to do it in half a dozen articles – but I'll come back to this topic again in future weeks.

Approaching a Draft

In terms of how you actually go about picking the cards for your deck there are several ways you can approach a draft. Most players sit down and basically take the best cards that come their way. There's a little bit more to it than that obviously - once you get settled into colours you stick to them, sometimes you swap colours if a particularly powerful card comes your way and you're in a position to utilise it, etc – but that's basically what happens.

Another approach is to have an idea as to what deck you'd like to draft before you sit down. You might have a preference for drafting blue-white decks and you'll lean towards those colours when

drafting (if given the chance) because you know them the best or you think they suit your style of play the best.

Other people like to force particular colours or draft archetypes almost exclusively, even in the face of competition for the colours in question. Yes they might be forced away from their plan if they get an amazing card in another colour or if they get nothing in one of their preferred colours but in general they'll stick to their plan no matter what.

All of those approaches are valid and all have their advantages and their drawbacks. Last week I polled the readers to find out what they did. Here are the results:

How do you approach a booster draft?		
I have a set plan and I stick to that plan almost all the time.	308	3.6%
I try to draft particular colours but if they don't come I'll swap to something else.	2108	24.8%
I'm completely flexible. I'll draft any combination of colours depending on the cards I get passed.	4809	56.5%
I've never played in a booster draft and/or I don't really know what they are.	1290	15.1%
Total	8515	100.0%

Over half of you try to be completely flexible when you sit down. That's fine, that's how most people approach drafting I think. That approach does make it a little difficult if you don't have a lot of time to devote to learning about the draft format though. You have to know something about all the colour combinations as you could end up drafting any of them.

I'm afraid there are no quotes from the Pros this week. Pretty much everyone was off playing in Japan at Pro-Tour Kobe and as a result they weren't reachable for comment. This is more of a discussion article anyway so hopefully you won't miss them too much.

Drafting The Best Card

It's comparatively easy to learn which cards are good and which are bad. Many **Magic** websites host articles within which authors list the notable commons and the order in which they should be drafted (at least in their opinion). You can read these and learn that you should be taking Electrostatic Bolt over Pyrite Spellbomb. The difficulty lies in progressing beyond simply taking the best card, and instead taking the best card *for your deck*. Sometimes the best card for your deck isn't the best card overall strictly in terms of power. There are times when that Raise the Alarm is better than the Skyhunter Cub. There are times when you should be taking Leaden Myr over Terror. You can only really learn this through experience though. There are too many variables for anyone to tell you when card A is the correct pick and when you should actually be taking the inferior card B.

But even just being aware of this can be a big step forward. What I'm talking about here is basically learning to draft a particular *archetype* rather than simply assuming the best card in your colours is always the best card for your deck. Being able to recognise when that Leaden Myr is more important to the stability and acceleration of your black-blue Affinity deck than an additional one-for-one removal spell is one of the things that the better players around the world excel at. If there is an area of play that most players can improve upon it's this one.

Of course there is a level of drafting that goes further than this. Most magic players new to drafting should start out simply trying to pick the "best" card. With practice you should progress to picking the best card *for your deck*. Beyond that you need to take into account many other variables to be able to pick the absolute best card *for your situation*.

To illustrate this I'm going to briefly recount a situation that happened a couple of years ago at Pro-Tour San Diego, January 2002. Some of you might remember it from one of Gary Wise's old columns but it's relevant to the discussion here.

William 'Baby Huey' Jensen was in a triple Odyssey Rochester draft with a few other Pro-Tour heavyweights such as Brian Kibler and Gary Wise himself. Huey was drafting a blue-white deck and along with Gary was one of only two white drafters on the table. The first set of boosters had been opened and the second set was underway.

Huey opened his pack and was faced with a choice of two excellent cards: Wayward Angel and Mystic Zealot.



The more experienced you are with this format, the more likely you will agree that Wayward Angel is definitely the better card. Some people think it might be by a small amount, others might think it's by a lot, but the Angel is absolutely the better card of the two. Despite that, Huey went ahead and picked the Mystic Zealot.

Why? Well, there was one major reason. As I mentioned, after the first set of packs there were only two white drafters on the table. Gary Wise was the other and he was sitting five seats around the table to Huey's right. In the 20 seconds Huey had to think about that pick he realised that if he took the Angel it was very likely that one of the other drafters on the table near him would pick the Zealot. They would be able to splash it in their deck due to the fact it only had a single white mana in its casting cost. If instead he passed the Angel, he realised it was a lot less likely to be taken as a splash colour. He realised that if he passed the Zealot, the person who drafted it would then be taking more white cards away from him in subsequent boosters.

Huey took the Zealot, and the four players between him and Gary all passed up on the Angel as they realised they couldn't fit it into their deck. Gary got the Angel fifth pick and he and Huey remained the only two white drafters on the table.

The Angel was clearly the better card. It was also the better card for Huey's deck. However, in that particular situation, Huey realised that the Zealot was the pick that kept White open and thus improved his picks for the rest of the draft.

Obviously that was an extreme example; I think less than one **Magic** player in a thousand would have made that pick. I only want to use it to illustrate the fact that there is so much more to drafting

than just the comparative power levels of the cards you are selecting.

I'm going to return to the discussion about drafting archetypes for a bit longer. If you have an infinite number of drafts in which to practice all the possible colour combinations then you would be able to learn when card B is preferable to card A in every circumstance. However, that really isn't feasible. The drafters who try to stick to particular colours usually do so because they believe they are better able to make those tough decisions in the colour combinations they have the most experience with.

If any of you play constructed I would imagine you probably play a deck for more than one tournament before discarding it. You do this because as you gain experience with the deck you learn how to play it better. You probably also change some of the cards in the deck as you tune it over time. The advantage that the people who try to stick to a particular draft archetype gain is similar.

If you only have a limited time to spend on improving your game, it actually makes a little bit of sense to try and devote that time to a specific colour combination. This is part of the reason why a lot of people do prefer to try and draft a specific colour or combination of colours. Those people might be a little weaker when it comes to drafting colours they're not used to but that will be balanced by the large advantage they gain when they are able to get the colours they prefer.

Forcing Specific Colours

The last method I mentioned above involves forcing a particular colour or combination of colours no matter what. Only 3.6% of you said that's what you normally do and that's fine. Sometimes however it can be the best way to approach a draft.

It only really makes sense to take this approach when there is a "best deck" that you should try to draft, but when that is true it is often the correct thing to do to try and force that deck at all costs. If one particular archetype in a draft format is so much stronger than the others, it can make sense to try and draft that at all costs. Another possibility along this line of thought is forcing your way into a colour that you expect to be underdrafted and which you feel confident in.

This can also work if you consistently draft in the same group of players. Once those players know that you draft a particular colour no matter what, it's in their best interests to draft different colours when sitting next to you, otherwise they would end up with you taking cards that they wanted. Zvi Mowshowitz and magicthegathering.com editor Scott Johns took this approach in a Pro-Tour once. It was Pro-Tour Nice and the format was *Odyssey-Odyssey-Torment* booster draft. They didn't have time to learn the whole format but felt that white was under-drafted in that particular format because most other players thought it was weak. They focused on learning how to draft that colour well and at the Pro-Tour wore T-Shirts that clearly indicated intention to force that colour all the time (A white shirt with a picture of Teroh's Faithful and a big circle around the white casting cost with "Hint Hint" written over it). The final results were mediocre but both players began 3-1 in drafts where they were unopposed when it came to drafting White. This is an extreme example, but it still illustrates that sometimes having people know you'll force a particular colour no matter what can give you better access to that color.

Another time I know for a fact that forcing was the most effective strategy was during the *Legions* pre-releases on **Magic Online**. During the three-day pre-release period they had triple *Legions* drafts up and running. By far the best option in these drafts was to take green-white. The power of the white Amplify creatures combined with Provoke, Timberwatch Elf and Patron of the Wild was just insane in a format that only had creatures (*Legions* was the set that was 100% creature cards remember - there were no spells or artifacts) and thus very little targeted removal. In that format green-white was just so far ahead of the other colours that forcing it in every draft was absolutely the correct thing to do.

How does this impact our current format? In this format quite a few players believe that Affinity is the best draft deck available. Whilst this is usually a black-blue deck it includes blue the vast majority of the time. I have seen some black-red Affinity type decks but they're not common. I personally also believe that Affinity is the best deck and I end up playing that archetype in around 50% of the drafts I play in right now. Whilst I don't go to the extent of forcing it all the time, I'm certainly more likely to draft it than the players who are flexible and I do try to force it in most circumstances.

The other thing that I believe fits into the "I have a set plan..." camp is that of specifically *avoiding* certain colours. I personally don't like green at all in the current draft format. It's slow and I think it's just a weaker colour compared to the others. As a result I'll often take a more mediocre common in another colour over something like a Fangren Hunter or a Deconstruct early in a draft. I basically operate under the assumption that not everyone dislikes green as much as I do and if I pass these powerful commons to the person next to me they'll be more likely to draft Green and not one of my colours. Once again this isn't something I do all the time. If I get a booster where Fangren Hunter is by far the best card then I'll probably take it. Overall it's just a personal preference but it definitely influences the cards that I draft.

Which Approach Should You Take?

That question is not a question I can answer. I'm not necessarily recommending you should all follow the same approach as me. I'm just trying to give you a few examples of the different ways in which people approach booster drafts and how and when those different approaches might be valid.

Being flexible gives you more options within the draft but generally means you don't have a lot of knowledge or experience with any particular colour combination. On the other hand, focusing your energies on learning about one particular draft archetype can backfire when you're not able to draft it.

All of the approaches have their benefits and drawbacks (and those often differ by player) but it's up to you to decide which one works best for you.

Next Week

Next week's article will be covering a draft situation again. This week's poll will cover that, but first you'll need to read up on the situation you're in before you make your choice, as this one is a little more complex.

Your first booster was pretty mediocre. No uncommons or rares of note and the best card was clearly the Electrostatic Bolt that you took. The best cards you passed were Somber Hoverguard, Arrest and Tel-Jihad Archers.

You got passed the following 14 cards to pick your second card from. It had an uncommon that was taken by the player on your right:



loses 6 life. Then shuffle the revealed card back into your library.

Return Grim Reminder from your graveyard to your hand. Play this ability only during your upkeep.

Wayne English

may destroy target artifact that player controls.

It has an iron stomach. Literally.

British Society

5/4

Equip 0 (0: Attach to target creature you control. Equip only as a sorcery. This card comes into play unattached and stays in play if the creature leaves play.)

Gregory Jarvis

Razor Barrier

Instant

Target permanent you control gains protection from artifacts or from the color of your choice until end of turn.

"We protect our homelands. Why should they not protect us?"

Ben Spencer

Spikeshot Goblin

Creature — Goblin Shaman

Spikeshot Goblin deals damage equal to its power to target creature or player.

The path of a goblin shaman is a journey through a thousand ways of hurting people.

Mark Peters

1/2

Thoughtcast

Sorcery

Affinity for artifacts (This spell costs 1 less to play for each artifact you control.)

Draw two cards.

Vedalken eyes don't see the beauty in things. They see only what those things can teach.

Greg Whitehead

Leonin Scimitar

Artifact — Equipment

Equipped creature gets +1/+1.

Equip 1 (1: Attach to target creature you control. Equip only as a sorcery. This card comes into play unattached and stays in play if the creature leaves play.)

Doug Chaffee

Tel-Jilad Chosen

Creature — Elf Warrior

Protection from artifacts

"It is my honor to keep safe Tel-Jilad's secrets, not to know them."

Matthew D. Wilton

2/1

Sunbeam Spellbomb

Artifact

Sacrifice Sunbeam Spellbomb: You gain 5 life.

1, Sacrifice Sunbeam Spellbomb: Draw a card.

"Cure that which was never ill."

—Spellbomb inscription

Jim Nelson

Override

Instant

Counter target spell unless its controller pays 1 for each artifact you control.

"The Knowledge Pool has all the answers—especially 'No.'"

Hugh Jennings

Blinding Beam

Instant

Choose one — Tap two target creatures; or creatures don't untap during target player's next untap step.

Entwine 1 (Choose both if you pay the entwine cost.)

Doug Chaffee

Seething Song

Instant

Add 5 to your mana pool.

Vidhok mana rituals echo the day when the red sun burst through Mirrodin's surface to take its place in the heavens.

MacGina Pileggi

Frogmite

Chimney Imp



Spikeshot Goblin is the best card in that booster and it's the same colour as your first pick so you chose that from the above booster and passed the remaining 13 cards.

The 13 cards you received from the guy on your right to draft your third card from were:





So you have Spikeshot Goblin and Electrostatic Bolt already and you've got the above 13 cards to make your third pick from. What do you choose?

Which card do you draft?

- Quicksilver Fountain
- Heartwood Shard
- Ornithopter
- Scale of Chiss-Goria
- Moriok Scavenger
- Great Furnace
- Skyhunter Patrol
- Wurmskin Forger
- Irradiate
- Slagwurm Armor
- Frogmite
- Neurok Familiar
- Vorrac Battlehorns

Submit

I'll be going over that pick next week.

Thanks for reading,

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