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It's been an interesting week on the limited front. We've had another limited GP over in Hong Kong. I like following coverage of events like that as much as everyone else and there were some interesting articles that covered sealed deck builds and drafts. I encourage you to check it out if you haven't already.

As I write this everyone is still waiting for *Darksteel* to arrive on **Magic Online**. Hopefully by the time this article is up there will be some sort of resolution. Drafting *Invasion-Planeshift-Apocalypse* with multi-coloured cards is a nice change of pace but I'm looking forward to getting some more practice with *Darksteel*. Most of my drafting is done online these days due to commitments at home, but we have a Grand Prix of our own coming up in England soon (GP Birmingham on March 27th & 28th) so I'd like to get some more *Darksteel* practice in before then.

In the mean time we'll just have to keep ourselves amused with the results from last week's draft pick. As you may remember this one was a little more complex:

I believe I forgot to mention that the draft was a *Mirrodin-Mirrodin-Darksteel* draft but I think everyone assumed that was the case as that's what I've been covering lately in these articles. Your first booster was pretty mediocre. No uncommons or rares of note and the best card was clearly Electrostatic Bolt that you took. The best cards you passed were Somber Hoverguard, Arrest and Tel-Jilad Archers.

As your second pick you chose Spikeshot Goblin from the selection of:

Grim Reminder, Rustmouth Ogre, Lightning Greaves, Razor Barrier, Spikeshot Goblin, Thoughtcast, Leonin Scimitar, Tel-Jilad Chosen, Sunbeam Spellbomb, Override, Blinding Beam, Seething Song, Frogmite, Seething Song, Chimney Imp.

It was your third pick that the poll was regarding. You had a choice of:

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

So you had Electrostatic Bolt and Spikeshot Goblin already. You also had some additional information in the cards that were passed to you and the cards you passed on to the person on your left. What was the most popular choice?

What card do you draft?		
Skyhunter Patrol	3793	29.0%
Irradiate	1697	13.0%
Frogmite	1481	11.3%
Ornithopter	1298	9.9%
Slagwurm Armor	1255	9.6%
Great Furnace	1101	8.4%

Wurmskin Forger	750	5.7%
Moriok Scavenger	586	4.5%
Scale of Chiss-Goria	367	2.8%
Quicksilver Fountain	299	2.3%
Vorrac Battlehorns	290	2.2%
Neurok Familiar	91	0.7%
Heartwood Shard	50	0.4%
Total	13058	100.0%

That's one of the clearest results yet, with nearly a third of you going with the Skyhunter Patrol. It's definitely the card I expected would top the list. I'll let you know whether I agree with that pick in a minute, but first let's get some Pro feedback on what they chose in the above situation:

Terry Tsang: I would take Irradiate. The player behind you is most likely white after being passed Arrest and Blinding Beam so taking the Patrol is less desirable. Black-red is a fine archetype with black getting much better in *Darksteel*. You have passed no black cards of value so your 2nd pack should be decent and the Irradiate, while not the best indicator of no black drafter, is a decent indicator.

Ken Krouner: I don't really think there is a choice here. I had to re-read the pack 6 or 7 times to make sure I wasn't missing something. Skyhunter Patrol is by far the best card in the pack, and is one of the top commons in an under-drafted color that goes well with Red. Frogmite is the next best card and it is simply not as good. The odds of the person on your left second picking the Arrest are fairly slim and I think both Somber Hoverguard and Tel-Jilad Archers are better than Arrest. You should be quite comfortable slamming the best card in the pack by far, the Patrol, into your draft pile.

Krouner, Top 8 Worlds 2002

Jeroen Remie: My usual preferences when starting red (or black) is to go red/black. I like the colors together and I know how to draft a winning deck with that combination. The best cards in this pack for that deck are Great Furnace, Moriok Scavenger and Irradiate. Although I like artifact lands, this one is kind of early to pick, so that leaves the two black cards. Irradiate is a good card, but you need to have a deck that works with it. You need Myrs, you need artifact lands. I draft Myrs higher than everything, so I would probably take the Irradiate here. It's actually pretty close with the scavenger since he works great in the kind of decks I like to draft, but just not here...

As for the Patrol, well, I just don't like the white decks in the format with *Darksteel*. Therefore, after passing the Arrest and the Beam, I would just not pick this card here. It is obviously by far the best card in the pack, but I like drafting decks, not stacks of cards. I don't think I can see the WR deck working, especially not when the second round of boosters will probably give you zip, so I chose the black/red deck, since that is what you passed the least. It helps that I also think that RB is the best deck, and that I feel like I can make that work 90% of the time.

Mike Turian: I can't imagine taking any card out of this pack other than Skyhunter Patrol. The white cards that you passed may have been taken by the player to your left but you shouldn't worry about that too much. If you pass him the Patrol you are hurting your own chances to win the draft because you are giving up the best card in the pack. The Patrol is much better than Irradiate and Frogmite and therefore is the correct pick. There is no guarantee that the player on your left is drafting white in any case. If his

first pick was a Green card then he probably took the Archers, if it was Blue he probably took the Hoverguard. The next pack offered Blinding Beam but Lightning Greaves is better even if you are playing White. The chance that there is a two spot gap in White drafters plus the sheer power of Skyhunter Patrol make Patrol the easy and correct choice.

Olivier Ruel: I would actually have taken the Hoverguard over the Bolt in first pick, then Spikeshot and eventually Frogmite. However in this situation, with two red cards being picked and Affinity cards being passed to your neighbour I would just take the best card in the pack: Skyhunter Patrol. I don't like drafting white a lot, but the Patrol is really way better than all that was passed.

Victor Van Den Broek: Ok I first thought of this situation when I didn't know what cards were missing. In that case I would notice the Blinding Beam and Skyhunter Patrol that our right neighbour passed to us very nicely. That would send a signal that he's not drafting white. However, white is rather deep in *Mirrodon* so this wouldn't be certain. Also our left neighbour saw Arrest and Somber Hoverguard, and then Blinding Beam with Lightning Greaves. This leads me to believe the left drafter is going to be white or Affinity. If we pass him another good white card, he's most likely going to shift into that color if he wasn't already. I like to couple black with red and would probably take the Irradiate here, going for an artifact heavy, removal heavy RB deck - which is my favorite by far. Skyhunter Patrol wouldn't be wrong, but WR doesn't come across as a very synergetic deck for me. Couple that with the risk of being cut off next booster and I would pick Irradiate.

Nicolai Herzog: I guess the question is whether the guy you're passing to is white by now. And whether you should care any. Skyhunter Patrol is by far the best card in pack 3. And the guy you're passing to might very well have taken Hoverguard over Greaves, maybe going for Affinity. In any case I'd take the patrol.

Adrian Sullivan: I would quickly take that Irradiate. In MMD, you will be able to take a number of other artifacts. Pretty much the choices here leave your other options to chase after either Frogmite (leaving your color options open) or the Skyhunter. You've already passed a Blinding Beam and an Arrest onwards. Passing the Skyhunter should help make a White drafter to your left. There was also a Slagwurm Armor in a previous pack. Irradiate starts your journey into Black, where the easy to get Nim's will be greatly helped by the Slagwurm likely to come back to you. Also, just getting more Elimination is great. In a Red/Black deck it isn't surprising to be able to kill almost everything that hits the table. There has not been much in the way of exciting Black you've passed on, so really you're only concerned with people's Black opens on your left making them want to get in your way.

So, this is a pure archetype choice. The Irradiate is a good way to get yourself set up for an elim-heavy R/B, and if need be you have the possibility of getting late Nim. You do have to trust that you'll get sufficient artifacts to make Nim worthwhile, but generally there are plenty of good Artifacts to want to take. Even a Nim Replica becomes good in this deck, as it has a nice power, and you could be well set up for ample elimination to keep getting him through.

Pro opinion is a little more mixed than usual this week. A dead even 4-4 split between the Patrol and the Irradiate. The Pro players raised several interesting points there. There's an almost universal agreement that the Patrol is the best card but it was selected as the card to pick only half the time.

Several of the Pros expressed a desire to avoid White due to its lack of quality in *Darksteel* which is one reason, and another is the preference for black-red decks that was expressed a couple of times.

I'll go through some of those points in a bit more detail shortly but let's start off by eliminating the cards that really aren't worth considering.

Eliminating the chaff

Quicksilver Fountain really doesn't have an impact on the game. It doesn't disrupt your opponent sufficiently to be considered playable in limited.

I could theoretically envision a deck that I might one day want to play Ornithopter in – it would have to be very heavy Affinity and probably have an awful lot of Arcbound guys – but even in that situation I wouldn't be spending my early picks on things like the Ornithopter.

Heartwood Shard and Vorrac Battlehorns also get dismissed from consideration at this point, as they don't really help make your creatures any better. You only want to play artifacts and equipment that grant abilities like +2/+2, evasion or untargetability. Just giving something trample isn't enough to warrant a card slot.

That leaves the following cards:

Scale of Chiss Gorja, Moriok Scavenger, Great Furnace, Skyhunter Patrol, Wurmskin Forger, Irradiate, Slagwurm Armor, Frogmite, Neurok Familiar.

They are all playable although they're very different in terms of how powerful they are.

Both Scale of Chiss-Gorja and Frogmite shine in Affinity decks and you don't yet know if you'll be playing a deck like that. If you were thinking of trying to draft Affinity then Frogmite is definitely the better pick so you should pick the Frogmite over the Scale if that's the sort of deck you wanted to try for.

Great Furnace is basically the only card left that's 'on' colour. Having a few artifact lands in your deck is usually a good thing if you're playing Red as they can fuel your Atogs, Krark-Clan Grunts and sometimes your Krark-Clan Stokers. However it's too early to consider taking it here, especially when there are plenty of playable spells and you're still in a position to choose a second colour.

Wurmskin Forger is a fairly mediocre card. Whilst it does have good interaction with the Spikeshot Goblin you've already drafted, the Forger is very expensive for what it gives. There are better cards in this booster.

Neurok Familiar is similar in power level to the Forger. You don't mind having it as one of the filler cards for your deck but it's not something you'd want to be picking early in the draft. It's quite playable in a deck that's heavy in artifacts but you don't even know whether your deck will turn out like that yet.

Three of the remaining cards all basically belong to the same archetype. Moriok Scavenger, Irradiate and Slagwurm Armor all become playable in what is often known as the Nim-deck. This sort of deck plays a fair amount of black and often relies on Nim Lashers, Nim Shriekers and Nim Shamblers to make up a good part of its creature base. The deck plays a lot of artifacts to boost up the power of its creatures and this in turn improves the support cards like Irradiate and Moriok Scavenger. I don't consider Slagwurm Armor to be playable in most decks but in the Nim deck it's solid as it can turn a vulnerable 6/1 Nim Lasher into very threatening 6/7!

Of these three cards I think you have to put Irradiate ahead of the other two. First of all it's removal, which every deck needs. You only need a couple of artifacts in play to be able to rid yourself of a troublesome Neurok Spy or opposing Pewter Golem. The Scavenger is perfectly playable but you really need a good number of artifact creatures in your deck to run him and we don't know if we'll be doing that yet. The Irradiate works with any artifacts so even if we just get some artifact lands and equipment later on it will still most likely be playable. The Irradiate should be picked ahead of the Scavenger and the Armor here.

The final card is Skyhunter Patrol. This is definitely the best overall card in the booster. It's one of the top cards in its colour and is a card I'm very happy to get passed if I'm drafting white. Taking it here is a big colour commitment though. If you wound up drafting a colour other than white there is no way you'd be able to splash for this and include it in your deck.

So from the pack I think there are only really three cards to consider in my opinion:



I've already said that the Patrol is the better card, and we're still free to draft any colour we want as our second colour so is there any reason why you shouldn't just snap up the Patrol?

Picking a second colour

If you look at the cards that've been drafted so far I think the Frogmite has to be rated below both the Irradiate and the Patrol. It is a nice card to have in an Affinity deck but there are zero indicators that you'll be able to draft that deck here. You've already passed both Somber Hoverguard and Lightning Greaves and whichever player snapped those up will most likely draft Affinity meaning you're not going to get good Affinity picks in the second booster.

We can also see from the above packs that you've passed a good number of decent white cards on to the person on your left. In pack one the playables were Arrest, Somber Hoverguard and Tel-Jilad Archers, and in pack two you passed Blinding Beam, Rustmouth Ogre and Lightning Greaves as the best remaining cards.

The three cards from the first pack are all very close together in terms of power. From my personal perspective the Arrest just edges it, as it is excellent removal for the sorts of creatures that cause White decks problems. However it's perfectly possible that the player on your right picked an excellent card in one of the other colours and chose his second card based on that. The one thing you can be sure of though is that he didn't draft any black cards from that pack, as there simply weren't any.

The Greaves is actually at its best in a White deck I think. A second turn Greaves followed by a third turn Skyhunter Cub is very, very difficult to beat unless you have artifact removal right there. I could

still see Blinding Beam being picked over the Greaves though – the Beam is more essential than the Greaves and there isn't another card that can do the same job. It's even possible that the person on your left takes the Rustmough Ogre here if they opened a good Red card and want to stay in colour. Once again though, the one thing you can be sure of is that they won't be taking a black card as there are no playable ones in the second pack either.

Worst-case scenario for you here has the player on your left having first-picked a red card, then the Arrest, and then the Ogre. Taking the Patrol here could potentially put you into red-white next to another red-white drafter, which is horrible. Regardless of whether the guy on your immediate left is white, I think it's certain that white will be drafted close to you as good white cards have been passed.

A number of the Pros touched on white's weakness in *Darksteel*. If white did get cut on your left you'd be left with weak picks for your second *Mirrodin* booster as well as having to try and grab some playables from the weak white cards in *Darksteel*. Black has gained a lot in *Darksteel* and whilst a third pick Irradiate isn't a huge signal that black is being under-drafted it's a reasonable one. The fact that you've cut off the black cards very well so far also means you can expect to get good black cards in the second *Mirrodin* pack as none of your neighbours should realistically be in that colour.

Positionally you are in great shape to be a black drafter, whereas taking white looks to be a risky proposition. The only question left is whether the advantage of being black is great enough to warrant taking a lesser card like Irradiate over the superior Skyhunter Patrol. That is where the Pros disagree, and that is why we have a split on which card to take.

The last point that I find very relevant is the difference between the two deck types. My personal opinion is that black-red is a stronger archetype than white-red now that *Darksteel* has been added to the mix.

Red's main strength is in its spells. Cards like Electrostatic Bolt, Shatter, Fireball, Grab the Reins, Barbed Lightning, etc... These are the best red has to offer. In general its creatures are fairly mediocre – Spikeshot Goblin notwithstanding. White's strengths lie in the combination of its smaller creatures and their synergy with the Equipment cards. That sounds fine until you pair the two together. Red wants to have a good number of spells in the deck as those are the best red cards, whilst the white element often needs 3-4 equipment cards to 'activate' the white creatures consistently. The problem with this combination is that once you've got the red spells and the equipment you actually run short of space for the creatures. It's fine for a red-black deck to run a creature count of 12-14 but a white deck that relies on equipment wants more than that. Your equipment obviously improves when you have a higher number of creatures in your deck, but red doesn't *have* many good creatures and the result is that the two colours are almost fighting against each other rather than working in synergy.

I'm not saying it's impossible to draft a good white-red deck - there are ways you can draft this combination to get it to work - it just doesn't come together as naturally as other combinations. Blue's strength for example is usually in its evasive creatures. This works very well with white as both these colours want to play good creatures and the creatures in both colours interact well with equipment.

Black-red is a combination that I believe is much more synergistic when compared to the white-red. Both of those colours have only a few quality creatures but their spells more than make up for that. You typically run less creatures in black-red so even though the average black or red creature is weaker, you run less of them so this evens out. In addition, in the block we have here many of the red cards (such as Shrapnel Blast, Atog, Krark-Clan Grunt) and a lot of the black cards (Nim Shrieker, Irradiate) rely heavily on a high number of artifacts. The synergy between black and red comes much more naturally and as a colour combination it is preferable to red-white in my opinion.

And the winner is...

The Patrol is the better card. There's no way I can say taking it is incorrect. I certainly don't disagree with the Pros or the 3793 readers who voted for it. I think it is a risky pick however. One of the two drafters to your immediate left is almost certainly white which means there's a good chance you'll get white cut off during the next booster. The best red cards are splashable and so frequently get drafted early by non-red players so your pickings might be very slim in the next pack. Given that white is weak in *Darksteel*, you can't expect much help there either.

The Irradiate is the safer pick for me. Black has been cut quite well already so it's unlikely that there's another black drafter near you on your left. You should get decent black cards in the second *Mirrodin* pack. Black is also very strong in *Darksteel* so even if there is another Black drafter on your right you should get some good picks.

I personally much prefer the black-red to white red. On top of that the more I draft with *Darksteel* the less I like being a white drafter when that pack gets opened. As a result my personal choice from this pack would be the Irradiate. I certainly don't expect everyone to agree with me on this one but hopefully I've given you enough reasons that you can see why I, along with 1697 readers and half of the Pros, would go with that.

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