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It's been a big weekend for Limited **Magic** with two Grand Prix events taking place at the same time. I'm having to write this before I go to GP Birmingham but hopefully I will have done well there. I'm fairly optimistic but you can never predict how a single event will go. I've been enjoying the *Mirrodin-Mirrodin-Darksteel* drafts on **Magic Online** an awful lot lately. My Limited ranking on there is back up to around 1920 and I've made the final in my last 7 drafts. However my real-life ranking is just shy of 2000 which is only good enough for 2 byes at the Grand Prix. With 8 rounds of Sealed Deck to play just two losses will probably mean I won't make day two. I just have to hope for a decent sealed deck as that's pretty much essential if you want to progress to the drafting section of Grand Prix events.

Speaking of good sealed decks I would be quite happy to open the one I listed for you in last week's column! A number of readers commented along the lines of "This card pool is just ridiculous, it's pointless building it you'd never get anything as good as this!" Well the card pool is indeed very genuine, it was one of the decks that went 8-0 on day one of a Grand Prix event that took place this season. I happen to think you can gain just as much from examining a powerful pool of cards as you can through looking at a weaker one. The same applies through all levels of **Magic** though; just because you won a match 2-0, it doesn't necessarily follow that you played perfectly. Maybe you could've won a turn or two earlier, maybe you gave your opponent an extra turn or two to top-deck that one card that would swing the game around. Just because they didn't top deck this time doesn't mean you shouldn't look at your own play to make sure you don't give someone else that same opportunity. You can learn a lot from analysing successes as well as failures.

Sealed Deck Basics

I'm going to quickly run through the basics of sealed deck for those of you who haven't had the chance to play one before. Those of you who are more experienced might want to skip ahead a paragraph or two.



In any sealed deck event you normally get one tournament pack and two boosters from which you must construct a 40 card deck. Some pre-release events will give you three booster packs instead of two, but two is otherwise the standard.

Once you discount the 30 basic lands from the tournament pack you are left with 75 other cards (45 from the tournament pack, 15 from each of the boosters). You have to build a 40 card deck from this and this typically involves somewhere between 22 and 24 spells (with the rest as land), so you have to play with around a third of the cards you open. The skill is in deciding which cards make the best deck. Once you've selected the spells you can also play any number of basic lands you want, in addition to any non-basic lands you received in your card pool. Any card that doesn't make your deck functions as your sideboard. Although you have to stick to the same deck configuration for the first duel in every match, you can sideboard cards in and out for the second and third duel of each match. As the full remainder of your card pool makes up your sideboard you can even swap entire colours after the first game of each round if you wish.

Sealed deck matches are all about creature combat and as a result you want to play a good number of them. Ten creatures is about the bare minimum but most decks would expect to run between 12

and 16 in the current format. Cards that kill your opponent's creatures are good, as are any cards that greatly enhance your own (the good Equipment cards for example). Cards that draw you extra cards can also be good in limited.

Building The Core

When I'm building a deck from a pool of cards such as this I start off by ridding myself of the completely unplayable cards. I'll set aside cards like Inflammate and Metal Fatigue and simply forget about them. Mediocre cards stay around at this point: cards such as Aether Vial or Assert Authority don't usually get played but they can in the right circumstances. Once I've got rid of the trash I take a look at each colour individually with the aim of identifying the strongest colour and possibly eliminating one or two of the weaker ones.

For reference I'm going to include the card pool again here so you don't have to flick back to last week's article. I've removed the useless cards this time though which is why there aren't 75 cards listed:

Artifact:

1 Steel Wall
1 Myr Retriever
1 Needlebug
1 Frogmite
1 Triskelion
1 Myr Enforcer
1 Bonesplitter
1 Welding Jar
1 Isochron Scepter
1 Loxodon Warhammer
1 Juggernaut
1 Arcbound Bruiser
1 Aether Vial
1 Leonin Bola
1 Skullclamp
1 Vulshok Morningstar
1 Genesis Chamber
1 Whispersilk Cloak
1 Ur-Golem's Eye

Land:

1 Great Furnace
1 Glimmervoid
1 Seat of the Synod

White:

1 Leonin Den-Guard
1 Skyhunter Cub
1 Skyhunter Patrol
1 Blinding Beam
1 Pteron Ghost
1 Pulse of the Fields

Red:

1 Spikeshot Goblin
1 Goblin Replica
1 Hematite Golem
1 Rustmouth Ogre
1 Fists of the Anvil
1 Detonate
1 Electrostatic Bolt
1 Krark-Clan Stoker
1 Vulshok War Boar
1 Oxidda Golem
2 Barbed Lightning

Green:

1 Brown Ouphe
1 Tel-Jilad Chosen
1 Elf Replica
1 Copperhoof Vorrac
1 Battlegrowth
1 Turn to Dust
1 Tel-Jilad Wolf
1 Tel-Jilad Outrider

Black:

1 Nim Lasher
1 Pewter Golem
1 Skeleton Shard
1 Dross Golem
1 Scavenging Scarab
1 Echoing Decay

Blue:

1 Lumengrid Warden
1 Neurok Familiar
1 Psychic Membrane
1 Wizard Replica
1 Aether Spellbomb
1 Assert Authority
1 Inertia Bubble
1 Override
1 Hoverguard Observer
1 Quicksilver Behemoth

It should be fairly obvious that red immediately jumps out as the best colour. It's got a lot of depth with excellent creature removal, artifact removal and some good creatures. Black and white appear equally strong although there aren't many great cards in either colour. Green and blue feature one or two nice cards each, but once you get beyond that there's a lot of mediocrity. Right off the bat we can see that red should be a main colour with either black or white most likely being paired with it. There's still a possibility of splashing any of the remaining colours though.

Once I've decided what colour or colours are going to form the majority of the deck I then like to chose the cards that will make up the 'core' of the deck. These are the cards that will be played no matter what. Once you've selected these you can then begin to get a better picture of where the deck's strengths are and where it is lacking. For this deck only the red cards would be a certainty. From those and the artifacts I'd choose the following cards to make up the likely core of the deck:

Spikeshot Goblin
 Goblin Replica
 Vulshok War Boar
 Juggernaut
 Hematite Golem
 Rustmouth Ogre
 Oxidda Golem
 Triskelion
 Electrostatic Bolt
 Bonesplitter
 Skullclamp
 Loxodon Warhammer
 Barbed Lightning x 2
 Detonate

It's worth noting that some excellent cards like Vulshok Morningstar and Myr Enforcer don't make the cut yet. I've already got three excellent equipments that come first and I don't know what my artifact count will be yet and thus I don't automatically include these two.

The vast majority of voters in the poll last week also went with red as a base colour which is exactly what I'd expect. I've already listed 15 cards which I think definitely make the deck so that only leaves another eight or so to find. The next decision to make is to decide which, if any, of the remaining colours go in to make up the remainder of the deck. Before I let you know what I'd go with let's have a look at the results from last week:

Which two colours were your main colours?		
White/Red	2704	36.7%
Black/Red	915	12.4%
Blue/Red	681	9.3%
Red/Green	655	8.9%
I built a mono-red deck	652	8.9%
Blue/Black	404	5.5%
White/Green	379	5.1%
White/Blue	337	4.6%
White/Black	263	3.6%
Black/Green	207	2.8%
Blue/Green	163	2.2%
Total	7360	100.0%

That's more than three quarters of you who went with red, with over a third of you going with white-red. When it came to splash colours around half of you didn't splash at all, whilst a quarter splashed for Black. That definitely leaves some combination of heavy red, with some white and/or black cards as being by far the most popular combination.

Deciding on a second colour

To decide which of the remaining colours is the best for this deck you need to look at the various holes the deck has, and see if there's a colour that will reinforce some of the deck's weaknesses.

The first thing to note is that the deck is a little slow. There are no creatures that can come down in the first couple of turns and the Spikeshot and Replica on turn three don't really want to be getting involved in combat right away. We should be looking for some other things to do in the first couple of turns.

There's also a slight lack of creatures at this point. Eight creatures and seven spells is not a great ratio, especially when we have so many good equipment cards. We also want to be increasing the creature ratio a little with any further cards we add.

Finally, this deck is lacking some evasion. It's not that bad here as there's a lot of quality removal so you're probably going to be able to deal with opposing Skyhunter Patrols and Somber Hoverguards, but it would be nice to have something that can take your offence to the air should the ground clog up due to an opposing Mirror Golem or some such.

Looking at black first of all we can see that it has two powerful cards in Echoing Decay and Skeleton Shard. The Skeleton Shard opens up some wonderful possibilities with this deck as it has great interaction with both Triskelion and Goblin Replica. Bringing back a Juggernaut over and over again is pretty unfair too. Pewter Golem is fine but it's a little slow and we already have a number of powerful slow creatures in red. The Scarab and the Lasher are very aggressive creatures and don't really fit the theme of this deck but they'd probably get played regardless.



The white cards offer a bit more depth but there's nothing here with the power of Skeleton Shard. The Leonin Den-Guard and the Skyhunter Cub require a good amount of equipment to work at their fullest but fortunately that's exactly what this deck has. The Cub (when equipped), along with the Patrol gives us a couple of very good fliers and that's definitely a big thumbs up. The Pteron Ghost is an okay filler here as we have several powerful artifacts we might want to protect. It also gives us a possible turn two play which we need. Blinding Beam is playable in any deck but here I could see it being useful early to buy some time to get the more powerful cards into play, whilst also being great late game to force through a Warboar, Juggernaut or Ogre attack. You don't need to hit home with those guys very often to win the game. I think the Pulse fits well too. This deck could easily take a fair bit of damage early on in a match before it stabilises and the Pulse can let you recover from that sort of situation.

I think white should make the cut ahead of the black here. Some of the black offers more raw power, but the white better fits our core deck's needs. The addition of four extra creatures helps the deck a lot. It also gives a couple of turn two plays, some evasion, and some excellent synergy with the great equipment in the deck.

At this point I'd expand the decklist as follows:

- Leonin Den-Guard
- Pteron Ghost
- Skyhunter Cub
- Spikeshot Goblin
- Goblin Replica

Vulshok War Boar
Juggernaut
Hematite Golem
Skyhunter Patrol
Rustmouth Ogre
Oxidda Golem
Triskelion
Electrostatic Bolt
Bonesplitter
Skullclamp
Loxodon Warhammer
Pulse of the Fields
Barbed Lightning x 2
Blinding Beam
Detonate

That's 21 cards. I'd be thinking about playing 17 lands in this deck as there are no Myr but at the same time only two cards with a casting cost over 4. That leaves room for just two more spells.

Choosing The Final Cards

We have only 12 creatures still and I'd like to increase that count if possible I think and there are lots of options for doing this. First of all there are several possible splashes – we could splash black for Pewter Golem and Skeleton Shard for example. These two cards make an excellent splash as they can both be played without access to black mana but obviously they're much improved when you do have it. The Quicksilver Behemoth is a reasonable splash although Myr Enforcer would take priority over that here. I think with only 8 artifacts in the above listing both the Enforcer and the Behemoth would be too slow and aren't worth considering. There's nothing amongst the green cards that I'd consider splashing either.

Overall I think splashing a colour would hurt this deck quite a lot. Skyhunter Patrol, Pulse of the Fields, Oxidda Golem and more cards besides all need high amounts of the appropriate lands to make them work. I think you'd weaken all of these cards and the deck as a whole by splashing a third colour.

Assuming we stayed with the straight white-red deck the Wizard Replica still fits quite nicely in this deck. It's cheap and it is extra evasion and we don't have to be playing blue to consider this a worthwhile addition.

With just one slot left there are lots of cards I'd consider:

- Running the Skeleton Shard even without access to black mana. Any game that goes long will be dominated by the Shard and your excellent artifact creatures.
- The Morningstar is another excellent card. The only thing that stops me from automatically including it is that we only have 13 creatures and already there are three excellent pieces of equipment in the deck.
- I don't mind the Krark-Clan Stoker in the deck. Whilst we don't have many artifacts to sacrifice there are a couple of artifact lands we might run, and he's another warm body. His ability to sacrifice artifacts can occasionally be useful to stop spells like Unforge and Murderous Spoils being completely brutal.
- I'm a big fan of the Leonin Bola as well. I'm just not sure there are enough creatures here, and with the good removal already in the deck it may not be necessary.
- I quite like the idea of AEther Vial in this deck. The deck is a bit slow already and the Vial can help out a lot as it would allow us to play out some of our more expensive creatures if we were a little

short of land. With four of our creatures coming in at 4 mana, and then three more at 6 mana, you could easily get multiple uses from it.

- Arcbound Bruiser is a possible inclusion. He's a bit slow for my tastes though and we don't really have enough other artifact creatures to make his Modular ability count every time.

My choice here would be to go with the Vulshok Morningstar. It's one of the most powerful additions and a fourth piece of equipment is fine as it interacts amazingly well with the Den-guard, the Cub and the Spikeshot Goblin.

The final thought is to the lands. I'd definitely include the Great Furnace as it might be useful to sacrifice to the Warboar. I think I'd also include the Seat of the Synod for the same reason and because it gives us a chance at using the Wizard Replica's ability. Another reason for including the Seat is that I've found in the past that playing off-colour artifact lands can occasionally confuse people! On more than one occasion I've had an off-colour artifact land targeted by an opponent's Shatter simply because they believed they would stop me casting spells of that colour. Little did they know I didn't even have any! Glimmervoid does not make the cut here as there just aren't enough artifacts in the deck to rely on it.


My final decklist would look like this:

Limited Information 

Main Deck
40 cards

1 Great Furnace	1 Goblin Replica	2 Barbed Lightning
7 Mountain	1 Hematite Golem	1 Blinding Beam
8 Plains	1 Juggernaut	1 Bonesplitter
1 Seat of the Synod	1 Leonin Den-Guard	1 Detonate
<hr/>	1 Oxidda Golem	1 Electrostatic Bolt
17 lands	1 Pteron Ghost	1 Loxodon Warhammer
	1 Rustmouth Ogre	1 Pulse of the Fields
	1 Skyhunter Cub	1 Skullclamp
	1 Skyhunter Patrol	1 Vulshok Morningstar
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	<hr/>
	1 Triskelion	10 other spells
	1 Vulshok War Boar	
	1 Wizard Replica	
	<hr/>	
	13 creatures	

Getting the Pros to talk about Sealed Deck is tricky as most of them rarely play it. I managed to get a fellow Brit Sam Gomersall to give me his build though and his comments and listing are as follows:

Limited Information 

Main Deck

40 cards

9 Mountain

8 Plains

17 lands

1 Arcbound Bruiser

1 Goblin Replica

1 Hematite Golem

1 Juggernaut

1 Leonin Den-Guard

1 Myr Retriever

1 Oxidda Golem

1 Pteron Ghost

1 Rustmouth Ogre

1 Skyhunter Cub

1 Skyhunter Patrol

1 Spikeshot Goblin

1 Triskelion

13 creatures

2 Barbed Lightning

1 Blinding Beam

1 Bonesplitter

1 Detonate

1 Electrostatic Bolt

1 Loxodon Warhammer

1 Pulse of the Fields

1 Skullclamp

1 Vulshok Morningstar

10 other spells

The most notable cards that did not make the deck are the Myr Enforcer, Frogmite and Skeleton Shard. There are only just over ten artifacts in this deck, which makes the Affinity cards significantly worse than they could be. The Myr Enforcer was the last card I cut very begrudgingly, but with so few artifacts and each artifact being a target for your opponent's removal spells it feels like you might be casting him for 6 mana which is too much. The Skeleton Shard almost made the cut with 2 Swamps as well due to the synergy with Triskelion and Goblin Replica, this would remain a sideboard plan for matches that seem to be slow. I think the Retriever and Ghost are very important to protect your ridiculous equips that can win the game single-handedly.

He went white-red as well and pretty much all the Pros who gave an opinion on this one went with the same thing. Sam and I disagreed on two cards – he played Myr Retriever and Arcbound Bruiser where I played Vulshok Warboar and Wizard Replica. Not a huge difference there, more a matter of personal preference I think. I'm not sure which of those choices is actually the best.

So is this the best build? I think it is, but without playing the deck a lot it's not possible to tell for sure. I can tell you that the person who went 8-0 at a Grand Prix with this deck ignored white completely and instead built a two colour black-red deck. Maybe black-red is better or maybe the card pool is just so powerful both builds are easily capable of going 8-0.

There are still more alternative builds you can go with. I considered a three colour Affinity build for a long time when I looked at this pool. I think the following listing has an awful lot going for it:

Three-Colour Affinity



Main Deck

40 cards

1 Glimmervoid	1 Frogmite	1 AEther Spellbomb
1 Great Furnace	1 Goblin Replica	1 AEther Vial
4 Island	1 Hoverguard Observer	2 Barbed Lightning
6 Mountain	1 Juggernaut	1 Bonesplitter
1 Seat of the Synod	1 Myr Enforcer	1 Detonate
3 Swamp	1 Myr Retriever	1 Echoing Decay
<hr/>	1 Nim Lasher	1 Electrostatic Bolt
16 lands	1 Pewter Golem	1 Loxodon Warhammer
	1 Quicksilver Behemoth	1 Skeleton Shard
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	1 Skullclamp
	1 Triskelion	1 Welding Jar
	1 Wizard Replica	<hr/>
		12 other spells
	<hr/>	
	12 creatures	

With 17 artifacts total this build absolutely maximises the power of the Affinity cards and the Skeleton Shard. I think the card pool here is just as powerful as the white-red one but the mana base is terribly shaky and I could easily see a round possibly being lost simply due to mana issues.

I think the white-red deck is powerful and stable and when you're building your deck to play a high number of rounds at a Grand Prix or Pro-Tour Qualifier I think that's what you should be aiming for.

Next Week

We're back to a draft situation next week. This one is straight from a **Magic Online** draft I did last week. As usual it's a *Mirrodin-Mirrodin-Darktseel* booster draft only this time round you've found yourself in the more unusual combination of green-white after the first two packs. Your playable cards from *Mirrodin* consist of:

Auriok Transfixer
 Auriok Bladewarden
 Leonin Den-Guard
 Tel-Jilad Chosen
 Viridian Joiner
 Elf Replica
 Skyhunter Cub
 Cathodion
 Tel-Jilad Exile
 Fangren Hunter
 Molder Slug
 One Dozen Eyes
 Wurmskin Forger
 Awe Strike
 Battlegrowth
 Turn to Dust
 Raise the Alarm
 Granite Shard
 Arrest x 2
 Farsight Mask
 Myr Incubator

You open the following *Darksteel* pack:

Panoptic Mirror 5



Artifact

Imprint — *X*, ϵ : You may remove an instant or sorcery card with converted mana cost *X* in your hand from the game. (That card is imprinted on this artifact.)

At the beginning of your upkeep, you may copy an imprinted instant or sorcery card and play the copy without paying its mana cost.

—Adam Austin

Goblin Archaeologist 1



Creature — Goblin Artificer

ϵ , ϵ : Flip a coin. If you win the flip, destroy target artifact and untap Goblin Archaeologist. If you lose the flip, sacrifice Goblin Archaeologist.

Always easily impressed, Durg was about to be blown away.

—Jon Becker

1/2

Specter's Shroud 2



Artifact — Equipment

Equipped creature gets +1/+0.

Whenever equipped creature deals combat damage to a player, that player discards a card from his or her hand.

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.)

—Greg Hildebrandt

Murderous Spoils 3



Instant

Destroy target nonblack creature. It can't be regenerated. You gain control of all Equipment that was attached to it. (This effect doesn't end at end of turn.)

Scavengers are always the first to pay their respects.

—Adam Rex

Essence Drain 4



Sorcery

Essence Drain deals 3 damage to target creature or player and you gain 3 life.

Mephidross claims all life within it. What cannot be twisted is absorbed.

—Steve Sotzullo

Spire Golem 6



Artifact Creature — Golem

Affinity for Islands (This spell costs 1 less to play for each Island you control.)

Flying

The longer it soars above the shimmering swirls of the Quicksilver Sea, the more it adapts their unpredictability.

—Daren Butler

2/4

Loxodon Mystic 3



Creature — Elephant Cleric

ϵ , ϵ : Tap target creature.

As the nim storm across the plains, a lone priest stands in their path. At his silent gesture, the battle line breaks, and the tide turns.

—Edward P. Beard, Jr.

3/3

Echoing Courage 1



Instant

Target creature and all other creatures with the same name as that creature get +2/+2 until end of turn.

A single seed unleashes a flurry of growth.

—Greg Staples

Ur-Golem's Eye 4



Artifact

ϵ : Add 2 to your mana pool.

It still stares accusingly at Memnarch, though millennia have passed since he separated the eye from its body.

—Heather Mahood

Myr Moonvessel 1



Artifact Creature — Myr

Tangle Spider 4



Creature — Spider

Chittering Rats 1



Creature — Rat



Which do you draft?

Which card do you draft?

- Panoptic Mirror
- Goblin Archaeologist
- Specter's Shroud
- Murderous Spoils
- Essence Drain
- Spire Golem
- Loxodon Mystic
- Echoing Courage
- Ur-Golem's Eye
- Myr Moonvessel
- Tangle Spider
- Chittering Rats
- Darksteel Pendant
- Auriok Glaivemaster
- Unforge

That's it for this week's Limited Information, see you all next week.

- Scott Wills
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