

Scott Wills  
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**W**ell GP Birmingham was a bust unfortunately but that's the way it goes. I had a perfectly decent sealed deck that was a fairly obvious aggressive black-red build. It had a Clockwork Dragon as it's token 'bomb' but to be honest most of the time that sat in my hand being too expensive to cast when I could really have used another medium ranged guy to keep up the pressure. The deck did have a lot of smaller removal spells (2 Barbed Lightnings, an Echoing Decay and a Pyrite Spellbomb) but unfortunately it had nothing that said "Destroy Target Creature" and only one artifact removal. As a result I could deal with the smaller guys my opponents made easily enough but anything that was either big or an artifact bomb I struggled with. An Arc-Slogger, a Memnarch, a Mindslaver and a mana flood later and I was down four games and two matches and I decided to call it quits and get home in time for dinner with the missus.

I don't feel particularly hard done by, them's the breaks really. I think I played decently enough although there were a couple of questionable 5 land opening hands that maybe I should've mulliganed. The 5 land, Grimclaw Bats, Clockwork Dragon hand felt like an okay opener but when the spells I cast that game added up to: 'Turn 2: Grimclaw Bats, Turn 7: Clockwork Dragon, die' it didn't seem quite as good. Still at least it only cost me 100 miles worth of driving rather than a flight and hotel accommodation this time!

Moving on to this week's discussion you may remember that last week I gave you a *Mirrodin-Mirrodin-Darksteel* booster draft pick for you to mull over. Here again is the situation you were in:

This one is straight from a **Magic Online** draft I did last week. As usual it's a *Mirrodin-Mirrodin-Darksteel* 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 Bladeward
- 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 opened the following *Darksteel* pack:





There's a fair amount of choice this week with easily five cards I'd say would definitely make the deck and a couple more on top that might be worth considering.

So what did everyone out there vote for this time around when faced with the above selection?

Results as follows:

Which card fo you draft?		
Panoptic Mirror	2361	24.5%
Specter's Shroud	1700	17.7%
Tangle Spider	904	9.4%
Murderous Spoils	828	8.6%
Loxodon Mystic	778	8.1%
Echoing Courage	739	7.7%
Auriok Glaivemaster	695	7.2%
Darksteel Pendant	365	3.8%
Chittering Rats	333	3.5%
Spire Golem	290	3.0%
Essence Drain	156	1.6%
Goblin Archaeologist	153	1.6%
Ur-Golem's Eye	141	1.5%
Unforge	136	1.4%
Myr Moonvessel	47	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9626</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Interesting reading. The powerful rare gets the nod over the rest of the pack. Hopefully this time it was chosen because those people felt that it's the best card for the deck rather than a simple rare-draft. The Mirror definitively has some nice interactions in this deck but would the Pros make the same choice? Let's find out:

**Victor van den Broek:** My pick here would be Specter's Shroud. The other options would be the Mystic, Spider or Echoing Courage, but with the Den Guard, Cub and Bladewarden, Specter's Shroud is essential for the deck. It's a good card by itself and these guys just become so much better when equipped. The deck lacks equipment as of yet, and that's why Specter's Shroud is the right pick here.

**Sam Gomersall:** The Specter's Shroud is the pick for me. Green is so underdrafted that you will get at least one more Echoing Courage in my opinion and so there's no need to pick that. Specter's Shroud is really good and you need some good Equipment to power up your guys.

**Michael Flores:** Two words: rare draft. This deck is awful and there is no great pick in the pack. What are you supposed to take? The best cards in the pack for your deck typically table (but probably not in this relatively sHallow pack). Perhaps you can break the rare draft with something in the next 14. Otherwise, hope to draw Molder Slug early and often.



*Sam Gomersall, Top 8 GP  
Göteborg '03*

**Terry Tsang:** I think I would go with the Specter's Shroud here. The pack breaks down to a few choices: Shroud, Mystic and Spoils. Spoils is so good that it is easily splashable, but the problem is that your deck has some removal already (2x Arrest) and a lot of colored mana requirement so the Spoils probably isn't needed. The Shroud helps two of your cards tremendously (Den-guard and Cub) and, if you pick up a few more equipment cards, your future Glaivemasters. I am quite the fan of the mystic but your 5 slot is quite full already so I think the choice here is Shroud.

**Patrick Sullivan:** My pick out of this pack is Specter's Shroud. Besides being, in my opinion, a card of close power level to Murderous Spoils, the fact that so much of your deck is composed of creatures that are excellent with equipment (Den-Guard, Cub, Tel-Jilad Exile) while this deck currently has none would make me put equipment at a higher priority. Although both the Mystic and Courage are fine cards (the Courage moreso given One Dozen Eyes and Raise the Alarm) the opportunity to get those cards later on in the draft is generally there. Even though your deck contains a Molder Slug, one card is not enough to deter me from drafting an excellent piece of equipment for a deck so desperate for it.

**Anton Jonsson:** I would pick the best card in the pack: Specter's Shroud. The Shroud works well with the Den-Guard, Cub, Raise the Alarm and even the Bladewarden. Also there is a good chance that you will pick up a Pteron Ghost or two later in the pack and those are excellent recipients of a turn three Shroud. I'd be surprised if any of the pros answer differently.

So it's an almost universal agreement on the Shroud being the correct pick this time out. Indeed the reader's vote – Panoptic Mirror – doesn't get a mention as a seriously playable card in this situation. I think the Mirror is better than the Pros give it credit for but before I tell you my choice I'll go through the rest of the cards in the pack. I'm going to eliminate the cards that I don't believe should ever be picked from this selection before moving on to the playable stuff.

## **Cutting out the Junk**

First to go is the Myr Moonvessel. It's possibly on the edge of barely playable in a hyper Affinity + Modular deck. In all other circumstances 1/1s with a drawback shouldn't be what you're first-picking in your drafts.

Next to get the chop is the Goblin Archaeologist. He's a respectable little guy and I often play him but you could hardly call him reliable. I've seen him be insane once or twice; I remember one situation at a recent PTQ where a turn two Archaeologist faced off against an opener of:

Turn 1: Swamp, Bonesplitter Turn 2: Seat of the Synod, Frogmite

The player with the Archaeologist untapped, made his third Mountain and three coin flips later the little Goblin was bravely attacking for one into a board consisting solely of a lone Swamp. Unsurprisingly, the Affinity player did not win that game.

Obviously, situations like that are incredibly rare. The Goblin is playable but not great and certainly not something you'd want to splash for so he wouldn't make the cut here.



*"Sometimes nuts" doesn't cut it here*

I'm getting rid of both Spire Golem and Chittering Rats next. I've said a fair bit about the Rats over the last few weeks and the Golem is just as powerful if you're the blue player instead of the black one. However both these cards clearly require a major colour commitment to their respective colours and you don't have that here. Whilst you can cast Spire Golem without any Islands, even if you drafted it, splashed it, and drew one of your Islands I don't think a 2/4 flier for five mana is something to get excited about.

Unforge is a nice sideboard card for red, and you'd probably be happy to pick one up later on in the draft as a possible splashable board card. However, it's not the best choice from this booster as there are plenty of cards that would definitely make the cut into your main deck here.

I'd pass the Ur-Golem's Eye in this pack too. The cards you have so far aren't terribly mana intensive and as a result the Eye probably won't be needed in this deck. I don't mind the Eye in some decks – I've played it in blue-red Affinity where I had a Grab the Reins and a Fireball for example – but it's usually the sort of card that gets passed around the table so there'd be no need to pick it up here even if you did want it.

I'm cutting the Darksteel Pendant here as well. Whilst there's a lot of disagreement over whether this card is playable at all, there's no disagreement on the fact that it isn't a first pick card. If you were a huge fan of the Pendant there's still no need to pick one up this early, as it too is the sort of card that should easily make it round the table.

The last card to I'd dismiss at this stage is the Essence Drain. This is obviously a very playable card, and obviously something that could be splashed but in this pack there's also Murderous Spoils and that card is simply a better card to splash than the Essence Drain. The Spoils costs one more mana but the ability to kill tough creatures at instant speed combined with the fact that it can serve as an answer to some Equipment makes the Spoils the better choice. If you were considering taking an off-colour card (and a black one at that) the Spoils would be the one to go for.

So that leaves the following selection for consideration:

Panoptic Mirror  
Specter's Shroud  
Murderous Spoils  
Loxodon Mystic  
Echoing Courage  
Tangle Spider  
Auriok Glaivemaster

## The Final Choices

All the above cards would probably be playable in this deck. The Mirror and the Glaivemaster might need one or two extra cards to help them out but with a full pack still to go there's every opportunity of getting them.

The Glaivemaster is the weakest of those with our current deck. He's fine if you have 3-4 cheap equipment cards to beef him up but at the moment this deck has none what-so-ever and as a result you shouldn't be picking him highly. There's absolutely no guarantee you'll be getting any further equipment, especially as the two best common equipment - Vulshok Morningstar and Leonin Bola - both get drafted fairly high.

I do quite like the Tangle Spider. I've frequently been able to use him to ambush incoming creatures and he gives you an answer to the bane of all green decks – flyers. This deck is lacking any Tel-Jilad Archers and has little in the way of defence against flyers right now.

There's a long history in **Magic** of expensive effects that take out attacking creatures. We've had Second Thoughts in the past and we've had Soul Nova in *Mirrodin* more recently. The Spider shares a lot with these cards in that it's often quite easy to suspect an opponent has it, however the Spider is much better than the first two cards in my opinion. When faced with the suspicion of a trick like that your opponent can simply not attack, or perhaps attack with a weaker creature rather than risk one of his best. With Second Thoughts or Soul Nova you had to either hold them back and then keep your mana open again in subsequent turns or just use the card up on whatever your opponent was



attacking with at the time. With the Spider though, if your opponent decides to hold back then you can simply cast the Spider anyway and they're still then in a position where they have to deal with it. Despite all that, this deck has a fair amount of top end already with Hunter, Slug, Eyes and Forger and it doesn't really want another expensive creature. The Spider isn't a very high pick and as a result in this situation I think I'd pass the Spider here and hope to pick one up later on.

If there's any deck where Echoing Courage is going to be good it's this one. Normally it's a simple combat trick giving a respectable +2/+2 for only 2 mana. However in this deck we've got a couple of cards that make the Courage better than normal. The most obvious is the One Dozen Eyes. Put five 1/1 Insects into play and the Courage suddenly gives you an army of 3/3s for a turn. The same trick works with Raise the Alarm as well. There's also a slim possibility that Myr Incubator might get played in the deck if a lot more artifacts are picked up in *Darksteel*. The Incubator produces Myr tokens and these are affected by the Courage in the same way. It's very unlikely the Incubator would make the deck though, and although the interactions with the Eyes and the Raise are nice I don't think they're enough to push the Courage above some of the other cards in this pack.

The Loxodon Mystic was mentioned by several of the Pros as one of the better cards in the pack and I do agree with them. Initially I wasn't a fan of the Mystic – the general consensus in the Magic world is that your expensive cards want to be big threats, not utility creatures. Why pay five mana for an ability that usually comes on a creature that costs two? However it turns out that in this equipment-filled world the ability to tap a creature in the combat step is just very, very useful and the Mystic definitely ranks more highly than I first thought. He's especially nice in the sort of deck we have here as there isn't a lot of creature removal available to us. Once again though, as good as he is, I don't think he's the best card in this particular pack.



Murderous Spoils is the only off-colour card that got a mention anywhere and that just shows how good this card is. Yes it costs a lot of mana but, like its predecessor Betrayal of Flesh, it's very solid removal and has the potential to provide some significant card advantage as well. It can basically give you 3-for-1 in a lot of circumstances as you kill an opponent's creature, effectively 'kill' one of their equipment cards and gain an extra piece of equipment for yourself. This sort of advantage can't be overlooked and that's why it was given due consideration by the Pros. The only issue with it is that it is off-colour and the deck you have here does have quite heavy colour commitments. Although there are not too many cards with double-coloured mana costs, all of your early creatures require coloured mana of one sort or another and there are very few artifacts for you to fall back on should you find yourself short on one of your two colours. You also need to consider what your next few picks might be. The best 'white' card in the set is Razor Golem and you'll be hoping to pick up one or two of those from the next few packs. Tangle Golems too will be quite playable and taking the Spoils now with a view to splashing could potentially hurt those future picks. I think in this situation it's best to stay on colour as there are plenty of other solid picks to choose from.

So it's down to either the reader's choice or the Pro's choice! Lets deal with the reader's choice first.

## Panoptic Mirror vs. Specter's Shroud

When it's working the Panoptic Mirror is extremely powerful. It's very similar to Isochron Sceptre but although it's a little slower it's by far the better card in limited. The ability to copy both instants and sorceries of any cost gives it a much wider range of possible effects. There aren't that many decks that can't support the Mirror really. The other advantage to the Mirror is that it will never result in a loss of card advantage. Sometimes you need or want to play a Sceptre early on in the game when you don't have the mana to activate it straight away. If it gets destroyed right away you lose the Sceptre and the card you Imprinted.

The Mirror works very differently. You simply put the Mirror into play and you don't Imprint anything right away. When you want to use it (usually this is your next upkeep but not always) you simply wait for it's ability to trigger at the beginning of your upkeep and then you can respond to that by activating it's ability to Imprint something. Even if your opponent has instant speed artifact removal and responds by Shattering the Mirror you still won't lose



the extra card. Due to the fact that the Mirror says, "...you *may* remove an instant or sorcery card..." you can in fact choose not to Imprint anything. If you do so the Mirror will get Shattered and you get to keep the card you would've Imprinted in your hand.

Obviously when the Mirror is up and running the free spells it gives every turn should give you an easy victory. I've had a Mirror with One Dozen Eyes Imprinted, one with Blinding Beam, one with Creeping Mold and I did see someone Imprint Grab the Reins once! All of those cards are ridiculous when you can cast them for free. The Creeping Mold was nice as once my opponent's artifacts were gone I could then start on his lands. In the case of the Eyes, the Beam and the Grab it should be noted that you can pay the optional Entwine cost when you play the Mirror copy, so those cards are insane when Imprinted on the Mirror.

Going back to the decklist however, let's see what possibilities there are here. One Dozen Eyes and Raise the Alarm are the best targets. Battlegrowth might make the cut in this deck but a single +1/+1 counter every turn isn't anything to shout about. What might we get in Darksteel to improve on this? A lucky Oxidize or Stand Together might turn up in the next booster or two. We might possibly get a Purge too but outside of those only Echoing Courage is really worthwhile in the common slots. Reap and Sow would be an okay target but that involves actually playing Reap and Sow in the first place which isn't something you want to be doing.

As powerful as Panoptic Mirror is there are only two worthwhile spells in this deck to use it with. On top of that there's very little chance of being able to draft anything else to go with it throughout the rest of *Darksteel*.



Moving on to the last card in the booster, the Pro's choice: Specter's Shroud. This little card is still under-rated by many players I think. It's obviously comparable to Mask of Memory in terms of costs but it's clearly not as powerful as that card. Making your opponent's choose and discard a card is typically not as powerful as drawing an extra one yourself. The additional card selection the Mask gives you pushes it way over the top of the Shroud. However, it is still very easy to get card advantage from the Shroud. Due to its cheap cost to both play and equip it's very easy to play it and equip a suitable guy before your attack when you know your opponent isn't in a position to block. Later on in the game it can force your opponent to commit all of their resources to the board lest they lose them to the Shroud. Playing against an opponent who has no cunning tricks up their sleeve is a very nice feeling.

The extra point of power bestowed by the Shroud is also significant. In the deck above there are already nice interactions with the Bladewarden and Joiner simply due to that. On top of that we have both Leonin Den-Guard and Skyhunter Cub who both really need some equipment to warrant their inclusion in this deck. There aren't many chances at equipment left once you get to *Darksteel* and extra weight has to be given to the Shroud in this situation because of that.

In general I think that Panoptic Mirror and Specter's Shroud are very close in terms of power. I've played plenty of matches with both of them now and both have had huge impacts on a duel. In this deck though I think there is a much greater need for the Shroud than the Mirror. There are few suitable targets for the Mirror in this deck but plenty of cards that are crying out for a good piece of equipment like the Shroud. If you take the Mirror then you're basically abandoning the Den-Guard

and the Cub as you're very unlikely to get more than a couple of pieces of equipment at this stage and if you got none at all the Cub and Den-Guard would pretty much become unplayable.

The Pros have got it spot on this week I think. The Shroud is the right pick from this booster.

One final note before I depart. I disagree wholeheartedly with Mike Flores' comment that this deck is awful. Green-white is a perfectly draftable combination right now for many reasons and this is a fine example of such a deck. For the record the above pick was in a 1700 room draft on **Magic Online** and I picked the Shroud at the time. I received a second pick Shroud, and managed to pick up a Razor Golem, a Tangle Spider, an Echoing Courage, and a Loxodon Mystic as my remaining playable cards from *Darksteel*. That's a decent amount of playables but clearly nothing out of the ordinary. The deck won the draft with relative ease, losing a single game in the process. Oh, and I only drew the Molder Slug once!

That's it for this week, no poll I'm afraid (boo! hiss!) as next week's topic doesn't really give me the opportunity for one.

Thanks for reading,

- Scott Wills  
limitedinformation@yahoo.com

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