

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Building To Grand Prix DC

Brian David-Marshall
Swimming With Sharks
Wednesday, April 14, 2004



It has taken me a couple of weeks but I am finally returning to the card pool I presented [a few weeks back](#). I combined the cards from my PTQ sealed deck with the card pool Scott Wills was analyzing in his column to create a Team Sealed card pool that would be representative of what you and two pals might get to work with at a Team PTQ or the Team Grand Prix that looms this weekend.

I was going to tackle the card pool myself the following week but in the wake of Grand Prix Columbus I opted to trot out some JSS decklists instead. Scott Johns gave me another week to avoid diving back into the pool when he asked me to be the on-topic columnist for that day of the Hidden Gems theme week. I have to confess I was happy for the distraction. Every time I tried to figure out how I would build the decks for this card pool I felt stymied.

I could not figure out what was so difficult about the process that prolonged my procrastination. After all, I have actually experienced some level of success in this arena. Not only have I won money at a Team Pro Tour and a Team Grand Prix but I rarely miss the finals of a Team PTQ or Grand Prix Trial when I play in one and I have played with a wide variety of teammates. I am reasonably good at this—in fact it might be my strongest suit in the game. With nothing else on my plate this week—and Grand Prix DC coming up on Saturday—I decided to dig my heels in and try to build these decks.



As I hunkered down over the card lists I recognized two things that were making the process more difficult. The first was the act of working from a list as opposed to actually having the cards in front of me. Working from the lists is fine if you are seeking an economically sound method of practicing but it can not replace the complete sensory experience of building three decks from the actual cards. It is not just that it is more difficult to identify the cards by name as opposed to having the visual cues provided by the color of the frames, the artwork, casting costs, and even the power/toughness it is also the tactile experience of handling the cards and the ability to physically move the cards around in piles as you build the three possible decks. I have been known to actually shuffle up a potential build and take a few test draws only to scrap the whole thing and reshuffle the way the colors are assigned between the decks entirely.

More than that I realized that is almost impossible to get an idea of the deck building process by working on the cards alone. It is a team format after all. No matter how strongly you might feel about building the deck one way there are going to be two other opinions that matter and I can guarantee that the three of you will not be on the same exact page. Heck, you might not even be in the same chapter. Sometimes, if you are all reading the same book you can count yourself among the lucky.

Building the decks without the benefit of two teammates who will be playing the decks alongside me in a tournament is certainly a handicap. No matter how even-handed you think you will be with your teammates there is a natural inclination to want all the good cards for your deck and the same is true of your teammates. I think this is actually healthy since you are forced to justify your need for the cards in lively debate. I know that a number of teams claim they build three decks and then decide who will play them after they are built. Even under those circumstances each player ends up adopting a deck—even if it is only in their heads—and will fight for that deck to get the better class of cards. Without that combination of competition and cooperation I found the process less stimulating than I would under real circumstances.

When practicing for the event I am not going to tell you that you should actually go out and buy the cards to practice but I will strongly suggest that you practice with the players you plan to team with for the PTQs. I don't think you can actually arrive at the same decks by yourself that you will end up building by putting all three heads together. By the way if you or any of your teammates play in Sealed Deck tournaments—I know that Friday Night Magic at my local store is Sealed Deck for example—you can put two of them together to create a physical card pool to practice with since you need two *Mirrodon* starters and four *Darksteel* boosters.



For those of you too lazy to click back to the original article here is the card pool I was referring to. It is pretty impressive and has more than its fair share of bombs at all levels of rarity. There are a pair of *Isochron Scepters* but they almost outnumber the reasonable cards you can imprint on them. Fear not though--*Bonesplitters*, *Warhammer*, *Skullclamp*, and *Triskelion* await:

Artifact:

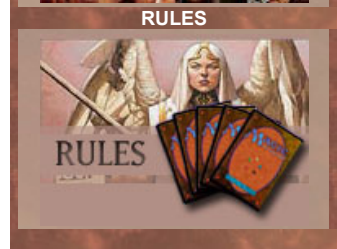
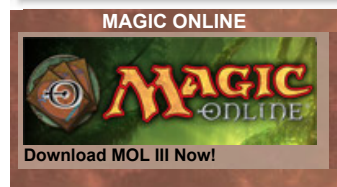
- 1 Aether Spellbomb
- 1 Aether Vial
- 1 Angel's Feather
- 1 Arcbound Bruiser
- 1 Arcbound Hybrid

White:

- 1 Auriok Transfixer
- 2 Blinding Beam
- 1 Echoing Calm
- 1 Hallow
- 1 Leonin Den-Guard

Blue:

- 1 Assert Authority
- 1 Domineer
- 1 Fatespinner
- 1 Hoverguard Observer
- 1 Inertia Bubble



1 Arcbound Lancer
 1 Arcbound Stinger
 2 Bonesplitter
 1 Chromatic Sphere
 1 Clockwork Beetle
 1 Clockwork Condor
 1 Cobalt Golem
 1 Damping Matrix
 3 Darksteel Pendant
 1 Dross Golem
 2 Elf Replica
 1 Farsight Mask
 1 Frogmite
 1 Galvanic Key
 1 Genesis Chamber
 1 Goblin Replica
 1 Hematite Golem
 1 Iron Myr
 2 Isochron Scepter
 1 Juggernaut
 2 Leonin Bola
 1 Loxodon Warhammer
 1 Myr Adapter
 1 Myr Enforcer
 2 Myr Landshaper
 2 Myr Retriever
 1 Needlebug
 3 Oxidda Golem
 1 Pewter Golem
 1 Serum Tank
 1 Skeleton Shard
 1 Skullclamp
 1 Spincrusher
 1 Steel Wall
 1 Thought Prison
 1 Titanium Golem
 1 Trinisphere
 1 Triskelion
 1 Ur-Golem's Eye
 1 Viridian Longbow
 1 Voltaic Construct
 1 Vorrac Battlehorns
 1 Vulshok Battlegear
 1 Vulshok Morningstar
 2 Welding Jar
 1 Whispersilk Cloak
 1 Wizard Replica
 1 Yotian Soldier

1 Leonin Elder
 1 Leonin Shikari
 1 Luminous Angel
 1 Metal Fatigue
 1 Pteron Ghost
 1 Pulse of the Fields
 1 Purge
 1 Skyhunter Cub
 2 Skyhunter Patrol

Black:

1 AEther Snap
 1 Chimney Imp
 1 Chittering Rats
 1 Consume Spirit
 1 Contaminated Bond
 1 Echoing Decay
 1 Grimclaw Bats
 1 Nim Lasher
 1 Nim Shambler
 1 Relic Bane
 1 Scavenging Scarab
 1 Wail of the Nim

Red:

2 Barbed Lightning
 1 Detonate
 2 Drooling Ogre
 1 Echoing Ruin
 1 Electrostatic Bolt
 1 Fireball
 2 Fists of the Anvil
 1 Incite War
 2 Inflame
 2 Krark-Clan Stoker
 2 Rustmouth Ogre
 2 Seething Song
 1 Shatter
 1 Spikeshot Goblin
 1 Unforge
 1 Vulshok Berserker
 1 Vulshok War Boar

2 Lumengrid Warden
 1 Machinate
 2 Magnetic Flux
 2 Neurok Familiar
 1 Neurok Prodigy
 1 Override
 1 Psychic Membrane
 1 Quicksilver Behemoth
 1 Somber Hoverguard

Land:

1 Ancient Den
 2 Great Furnace
 1 Glimmervoid
 2 Seat of the Synod

Green:

1 Battlegrowth
 1 Brown Ouphe
 1 Copperhoof Vorrac
 1 Journey of Discovery
 1 Tangle Spider
 2 Tel-Jilad Chosen
 2 Tel-Jilad Outrider
 1 Tel-Jilad Wolf
 1 Turn to Dust

The first thing I do whenever I am puzzling out a card pool is to identify the cards that are going to work well together. **Skullclamp** and a pair of **Myr Retrievers** fall under this heading. **Skeleton Shard** is quickly put in this grouping of cards along with **Triskelion**, **Goblin Replica**, and the Arcbound gang. You can see a deck starting to take shape around those cards. **Nim Shambler** and the often-unexciting **Krark-Clan Stokers** also seem to fit very nicely into this deck for their ability to sacrifice modular men on demand in order to jump-start your Trike.

The affinity deck seems pretty easy to build with a sampling of the various affinity guys—**Somber Hoverguard**, **Quicksilver Behemoth**, **Myr Enforcer**, and **Frogmite**. The deck will probably get the card pool's lone Myr—lone mana accelerant of any kind, actually—and has plenty of artifact land with a pair of Seats and Furnaces. **Serum Tank** is a nice fit here and there is an assortment of red removal to complement the **Domineer** and army of fliers that includes a **Hoverguard Observer**, **Neurok Prodigy**, and a pair of **Neurok Familiars**.

In the message boards for the original article two different people suggested mono-red decks. It is very easy to take one good color and throw it all in one deck but if you look at the creatures they are not terribly exciting once you get past the **Spikeshot Goblin**. My inclination was that the red would get split up across two decks for the abundant removal in the color. With a **Purge**, **Auriok Transfixer** and a pair of **Blinding Beams** it seemed like the equipment heavy white deck would be able to get by without red's help. But the thought of leaving the **Spikeshot Goblin** apart from a deck that was going to feature so much power enhancing equipment seemed like a crime.

The green is most notable for how unnotable it is and that gives you three remaining colors to pair with the red removal in its various forms. The **Goblin Replica** is certainly going in the base black deck; **Shatter**, **Fireball** and possibly the **Rustmouth Ogres** round out the red in this deck. My reasoning behind putting the **Fireball** here is that



you want to be digging toward something with your **Skullclamp** and **Fireball** should put this deck over the top. Also, the double **Myr Retriever** leads me to inch the **Loxodon Warhammer** toward this deck.

Team Sealed

Deck A - Black-Red Recursion

Main Deck
 40 cards

7 Mountain 10 Swamp <hr/> 17 lands	1 Arcbound Bruiser 1 Arcbound Hybrid 1 Arcbound Stinger 1 Chittering Rats 1 Clockwork Condor 1 Goblin Replica 1 Grimclaw Bats 2 Krark-Clan Stoker 2 Myr Retriever 1 Needlebug 1 Nim Shambler 1 Pewter Golem 1 Rustmouth Ogre 1 Triskelion <hr/> 16 creatures	1 Consume Spirit 1 Echoing Decay 1 Fireball 1 Loxodon Warhammer 1 Shatter 1 Skeleton Shard 1 Skullclamp <hr/> 7 other spells
--	--	---

This deck illustrated the struggle I have building from a list. I completely overlooked the **Pewter Golem** until I actually did one last pass over the card lists and he only made the list on that last pass. To be fair I have had that happen with the actual cards in front of me as well but it happens more often this way. I decided to put **Fireball** and **Consume Spirit** in this deck to give the **Skullclamp** shenanigans a reasonable payoff. I would probably put at least one of the Scepters in the sideboard of this deck as it has the bulk of the good instants with **Shatter** and **Echoing Decay**.

Clockwork Condor is the deck's lone flier but with **Skeleton Shard** it keeps coming back for more. It also interacts nicely with the modular guys in this deck. **Arcbound Lancer** was one of the last cuts from this list when I found the **Pewter Golem** hiding in my unplayables. **Needlebug** is here because of **Skeleton Shard** as well. I like the idea that you can eat him with a Stoker and bring him back and play him at instant speed. I know the double Stokers are an odd choice but I like their interaction with the Shard, **Skullclamp**, and **Fireball**.

Team Sealed

Deck B - Blue-Red Affinity

Main Deck
 40 cards

1 Glimmervoid 2 Great Furnace 6 Island 5 Mountain 2 Seat of the Synod <hr/> 16 lands	1 Cobalt Golem 1 Domineer 1 Frogmite 1 Hoverguard Observer 1 Iron Myr 1 Juggernaut 1 Myr Enforcer 2 Neurok Familiar 1 Neurok Prodigy 1 Quicksilver Behemoth 1 Somber Hoverguard 1 Vulshok Berserker 1 Vulshok War Boar 1 Wizard Replica <hr/> 15 creatures	1 AEther Spellbomb 2 Barbed Lightning 1 Chromatic Sphere 1 Echoing Ruin 1 Electrostatic Bolt 1 Serum Tank 2 Welding Jar <hr/> 9 other spells
---	--	---

I waffled over the **Welding Jars** but ultimately decided to include them to protect **Myr Enforcer** and **Juggernaut**. My idea behind this deck is to get out an early flier or Enforcer and then control the tempo of the game with seven of your ten spells—the Jars are almost like one for one removal the helps your affinity in the early game. Should the game go long the **Serum Tank** will give you enough gas to overwhelm your opponent.

I am not sure about **Glimmervoid** and I would consider playing an off-color artifact land in its place—especially with the pair of **Neurok Familiars**. The creature mix could also be varied some. The **Vulshok Berserker** could certainly go elsewhere to make room for the **Vulshok Battlegear** or even a three drop artifact creature like an **Elf Replica** if you were so inclined.

Team Sealed

Deck C -White-Red Equipment

Main Deck

Main Deck		
40 cards		
8 Mountain	1 Auriok Transfixer	2 Blinding Beam
9 Plains	1 Leonin Den-Guard	2 Bonesplitter
17 lands	1 Leonin Shikari	1 Detonate
	1 Luminous Angel	2 Leonin Bola
	3 Oxidda Golem	1 Purge
	1 Pteron Ghost	1 Viridian Longbow
	1 Skyhunter Cub	1 Vulshok Morningstar
	2 Skyhunter Patrol	
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	
	1 Yotian Soldier	
	13 creatures	10 other spells

Pulse of the Fields is a card I just could not fit in the third deck without playing sixteen lands—something I am loathe to do without any “cycling” or mana acceleration. I also could not fit in the **Voltaic Construct**—a card Bob Maher told me I should always be playing in a Sealed Deck format if I have **Viridian Longbow**. I would like to fit another creature in this deck and could see moving a piece of equipment into the sideboard.

I know that **Leonin Bola** and **Longbow** are very trendy cards right now but I could see it being one if those two making way for another critter. With **Leonin Shikari** both cards get even better when you can tap multiple creatures at your opponent’s end of turn or activate your **Longbow** multiple times.



Without the influence of my teammates this is how I would be inclined to build the decks. There are notable cards in each build sitting on the sidelines. I was not able to find a home for the **Vulshok Battlegear** or for the **Fatespinner**. I find the **Battlegear** is way too slow and I have never had much success with **Fatespinner** but friends Josh Ravitz and Tony Tsai always seem to crush and demoralize their opponents when they play it. If I were building with teammates those would both be cards that would be individual calls once the frames of the decks were settled.

I did discuss the card pool with my teammate from the last team Pro Tour, Mike Flores. Predictably we clashed over how the decks should be built. We did agree that it was difficult to build without the actual cards in front of us to fight over but Mike wanted to build the mono-red

deck that I mentioned earlier. His inclination for the decks was to build a black-red very similar to the one I built, mono-red that abuses the affinity of the triple **Oxidda Golem**, and a blue-white affinity-ish equipment deck.

The reason I was so set on splitting up the red was to make sure that I had removal available for each deck. I will concede that there is a decent blue-white deck with **Domineer**, **Purge**, **Transfixer**, double **Blinding Beam**, and **Viridian Longbow** holding down the fort. That would allow for the red to stand alone with some extra removal going to the black recursion deck. Of course our third teammate might have a completely different perspective or even find a way to work the green into a deck.

That is what is so great about this format. If this was the actual tournament deck that Mike, X, and I received we would arrive at some consensus about the best builds after a spirited debate. Which for a pair of loudmouths like Mike and I is good times indeed.

I hope you will post your builds and comments about my builds in the forums. I will be in Washington, DC this weekend covering the Grand Prix. I hope to see you all there arguing with your good friends and having a blast.

Brian may be reached at brian@fightlikeapes.com.

Brian David-Marshall has been involved in Magic since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Brian David-Marshall](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#)

© 1995-2008 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

