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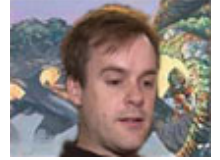
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# Narrowing the Focus



## Auctions, multiplayer and prismatic, oh my!

Chad Ellis · Online and Enjoying It  
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This week we're going to follow what will probably be a pattern going forward. After a couple of articles that take a broad look at a subject, I'll follow up with a more detailed look at some part of it. Having talked about trading last week and the multiplayer casual room before that, this week we're going to look at the player-run "/join auction" room and multiplayer strategy, with Prismatic as an example.

Last week we looked at trading cards on MTGO and the focus was primarily on the "official" trading rooms, e.g. the Message Board (for listing your buy and/or sell prices for as long as you like) and the Marketplace (where players post offers on a rapidly-scrolling page). I mentioned the player-run /join auction, but I began with the main rooms because I think those are the best places to start.

The auction room definitely has its good points as well, particularly for bargain-hunters and players wanting to turn cards into tickets as fast as possible. But before we get into the pros and cons, let's look at room etiquette and how it works.

### The Basics

First, what is probably obvious: if you want to join auction, type "/join auction" in the message bar of any window on MTGO (without the quote marks). That will open the auction room in a new window.



There are two people "on duty" in the auction room at any time. They are the Lister and the Neer (short for auctioneer). If you have cards to sell, you pm the Lister and tell him what you want to auction and whether there's a minimum price. The Lister coordinates with the Neer, who handles the auction in turn. The Lister will say who he is from time to time, and will post in blue. The Neer types IN CAPS and is the only person allowed to do so. Quite a difference from the Message Board, where lots of people seem to have their CAPS LOCK on. :)

The rules of the auction room are fairly simple and informal. No spamming is a big one. You can post an offer to buy or sell on occasion, but this is not the message board. The Lister decides what constitutes spamming and can ban people from the room.

What the auction room offers buyers is price. "You can usually buy something for at least a ticket cheaper than in the other rooms," explains Jimmy Cappucci (LiLmafia2jc). "Most things go for close to the buy price on the Message Board." You can't control what's on offer, and in the recent time I've spent there I've seen everything from singles to foil lots to sets of uncommons, but if you're patient you have a good chance at finding a bargain.

So what's in it for the sellers? Speed. From the time you send your cards to the Lister to when the Neer says, "Sold!" can be a matter of a minute or two. I decided to try it out myself, parting with my only Blinkmoth Nexus. A quick check of the Message Board shows a buy-sell spread of 4-6, so if I were trying to sell the Nexus at a reasonable speed I'd offer it up for 5. How would the auction room compare? Within a minute of sending my pm to the Lister I saw:

```
5:41 Drac0: BLINKMOTH NEXUS for sale, no min
5:41 bc4012: 4
5:41 ToTaL_AnArChY: 4.1
5:41 yi01: buying 3 solem+1 plat angel
5:41 Drac0: SEE NICE 4
5:41 Oren Ishi: 5
5:41 TheSadBlueDoll: 4
5:41 Drac0: I SOLD A FEW FOR 5 EARLIER
5:41 Drac0: NICE 5
5:41 Drac0: ONCE
5:41 bc4012: sold at 5
5:41 bc4012: gg
5:41 Drac0: TWICE
5:41 wilmheath: oren
5:41 Drac0: LAST CALL
5:41 Oren Ishi: tthx
5:41 xerok: gg @ 5
5:41 wilmheath: what u dong?
5:41 Wall0fShad0ws: LOL@gg
5:41 Bouc: Selling nice rares for {2} each or 3 for {5}.
5:41 Drac0: SOLD SEE Chad Ellis
```

That was it. Oren Ishi contacted me, we completed the trade at five tickets and in less than a minute, I'd sold my rare. Now I can draft again!

And drafters like me seem to be the ideal sellers for the auction room. Whether by happenstance or rare drafting, we gradually build up rares we may never even try to turn into constructed decks. Quite often what we want to do is convert them into tickets so we can draft again. One minute to sell a Nexus for the middle of the spread is pretty decent. And the auction room has plenty of buyers who will pick up lots of random rares. Sure, they're going to try to pay as little as possible and "junk rares" don't go for a lot, but it only takes two tickets to buy your way into that next draft.

A few other points of etiquette for the auction room:

Tip the Lister and Neer! These guys volunteer for long stretches and provide an important service. You tip waiters and you should tip them, especially if you've done an auction or bought from one. As someone said when a particular Lister was leaving after several hours work, "Junk rares make great tips." I gave Drac0 (Ricky Man irl) a **Fleeting Image** plus the **Essence Sliver** he needed to complete his *Legions* set, since he was acting as both Lister and Neer for my auction.

Honor your bids! Not doing so is dishonest and will get you banned from auction.

Know what your cards are worth before you sell, and especially before you bid. A quick "pc Nexus" ("pc" is a request for opinions on the value of the given card) would have told me that several people in the room were buyers at 4, and I might even have heard from the bidder at 5. That can give you an idea of what your cards are going to go for.

Don't "take up too much space". This is a generalization of the no spamming rule, but newcomers in particular should consider behaving like Victorian children -- seen and not heard. You're entering a sub-community of MTGO and until you're family behave like a guest. Even if you see someone else breaking the rules -- and you probably will -- don't break them yourself. If you do, they'll blame me...and no one wants that. :)

## Multiplayer Madness -- Stepping into Prismatic

The strange thing for me in writing this column is that I'm all about strategy. I used to write strategy for *The Dojo*, for *Mindripper*, for *Brainburst*, for *The Sideboard*, and I'm still doing it for *Starcity*. I do community stuff from time to time, but mostly I'm writing about how to draft, how to

build better decks, how to improve play, or "big" strategic concepts like Scarce Resource, Virtual Information or Tempo. So I can't resist writing a bit about strategy for multiplayer.

Multiplayer **Magic** is seen by some as virtually devoid of strategy in the classic sense. When Starcity sponsored the first multiplayer invitational, Randy Beuhler was advised by no less than Richard Garfield himself that a multiplayer game was all politics so it wasn't worth trying to put together a killer deck. Randy heeded his advice and sported a deck full of wacky cards whose theme seemed to be, "Don't kill me, aren't you curious what spell I'll play next?"

There's truth to the view that multiplayer is about politics, but not so much that there aren't important strategic considerations to consider. Here are a few of my rules:

Be a poor target. There are two elements to this. First, don't appear to be doing so well that you draw fire. In a recent six-player Prismatic game, one player managed to draw **Isochron Scepter**, **Shrapnel Blast** and **Nuisance Engine** in his opening hand (or close enough). That's pretty cool, but no one else was excited about the idea of him smashing us for five points of damage over and over. No sooner had he protected his combo with **Hanna**, **Ship's Navigator** then both Hanna and the Scepter were taken out with a kicked **Orim's Thunder**. (To be fair, Hanna couldn't really protect the combo since the Scepter would need a new spell to imprint, but still.) Meanwhile, your faithful author had suffered a double-mulligan and was stuck on one Island, making me unworthy of most people's attacks. I survived for quite some time before conceding to the winner when the only other remaining player had to leave.

The second part of being a poor target is being awkward to attack. Good defensive spells are great in multiplayer, as they virtually ensure that other players will fight amongst each other rather than come after you. **Jungle Barrier** is a great example. It's a cantrip, it's a big body, it doesn't make you look like a threat at all, but it will keep a lot of early plays from bothering you. In a format like Prismatic, **Collective Restraint** is a virtual fortress. Who wants to spend five mana to hit one opponent when they can hit another for free?

Slow and steady card advantage wins the race. Multiplayer games are almost always control games, since you can't beat down effectively on so many opponents. Combo can be viable, but it's pretty dicey. So fill your deck with cards that generate more cards and removal spells that generate advantage. **Dismantling Blow** is a great way to deal with powerful artifacts and enchantments, and **Duplicant** is ideal creature removal, getting rid of their fattie and providing you one of your own. (Getting around recursion isn't a bad idea either.)

Early spells are for not losing. Use your bigger spells to try to win. For the most part your cheap spells should not be threats but rather things that improve your board, card or life position, like mana fixers, defensive creatures or card drawing. A **Disciple of the Vault** isn't going to go the distance like it can in one-on-one Standard, but a **Sleight of Hand** that digs into your deck makes you more likely to reach the mid-game in good standing.

Permission is fine, but use it sparingly. Any time you trade one for one with an opponent the two of you are losing card advantage to all the other players. But it's still fine to be able to break up combos or to protect your win condition. Just be selective. (The ideal multiplayer permission spell is **Arcane Denial**, since you don't lose a card and the person whose spell you counter gets two so they often aren't even angry!)

When someone plays a bomb, be impressed. This helps convince other people to get rid of it or at least makes it seem more justified when you kill it off yourself.

I promised one of my readers I'd make a cool tribal deck (and I have, although I suspect that **Volver.dec** is no match for soldiers or zombies), but my first entry into MTGO multiplayer had to be in Prismatic. 250 card decks, 20 card minimums in each color, what could be better? (For



*Not exactly low profile...*

those not familiar with the Prismatic format, don't miss [the series of articles by Doug Beyer](#) on this site.) Here's what I played:

Prismatic Multiplayer		
Main Deck 250 cards		Sideboard
4 Cephalid Coliseum	4 Allied Strategies	0 sideboard cards
4 City of Brass	4 Buried Alive	
28 Forest	1 Chain of Plasma	
20 Island	4 Chromatic Sphere	
4 Krosan Verge	1 Coalition Victory	
8 Mountain	1 Collective Restraint	
9 Plains	4 Concentrate	
4 Stalking Stones	4 Counterspell	
5 Swamp	1 Crisis's Charm	
<hr/>		
86 land	4 Cunning Wish	
2 Abyssal Horror	4 Decree of Justice	
1 Anarchist	4 Deep Analysis	
1 Benalish Heralds	1 Destructive Flow	
4 Chartooth Cougar	4 Diabolic Tutor	
1 Cromat	3 Dismantling Blow	
2 Crisis, the Purger	3 Explosive Vegetation	
1 Darigaaz, the Igniter	4 Fact or Fiction	
1 Desolation Giant	4 Far Wanderings	
4 Duplicant	4 Gerrard's Wisdom	
4 Eternal Dragon	4 Global Ruin	
2 Genesis	4 Grab the Reins	
1 Gravedigger	1 Haunting Echoes	
4 Jungle Barrier	4 Journey of Discovery	
4 Krosan Tusker	4 Kirtar's Wrath	
1 Lhurgoyf	4 Mindslaver	
1 Memnarch	4 Mirari's Wake	
4 Mystic Snake	4 Oblivion Stone	
1 Plated Slagwurm	1 Overgrown Estate	
4 Rakavolver	3 Syphon Mind	
1 Rith, the Awakener	1 Terminate	
1 Serra Angel	3 Thirst for Knowledge	
4 Solemn Simulacrum	4 Treva's Ruins	
4 Teroh's Faithful	4 Wrath of God	
1 Thornscape Battlemage	<hr/>	
4 Troll Ascetic	104 other spells	
1 Tsabo Tavoc		
1 Visara the Dreadful		
<hr/>		
60 creatures		

I don't pretend that this is the ideal Prismatic decklist. But it has the key elements to it for anyone thinking about building a deck for this wild and crazy format:

Mana smoothers and rampers. With all five colors having to be used, you need to give your mana base a lot of help. *Diligent Farmhand*, *Rampant Growth*, *Harrow*, *Explosive Vegetation*, *Far Wanderings*, etc., are great in this format, and will probably make up the bulk of your green spells. Make sure you've got plenty of lands that produce green mana (I gave myself the rather random handicap of only using basic lands) as well as other ways to get Forests or Green mana. I'm a particular fan of mana fixers that also accelerate you, because your spell curve is typically higher in multiplayer formats, so I'll run *Diligent Farmhand* over *Lay of the Land* any day. *Solemn Simulacrum* was made for this format.



Mana fixing that comes with acceleration is very powerful in Prismatic

Card drawing. I may be a bit overboard on the straight card drawers, but they are key to making sure you've got plenty of action all through the game. Fortunately, like the mana fixers, most of the spells you want here aren't very expensive. **Concentrate**, **Deep Analysis** and **Opportunity** are all cheap to trade for if you don't want to go for **Fact or Fiction**. **Allied Strategies** is a wonderful card in a format where you're going to spend your first turns making sure you've got every type of basic land in play. **Mind's Eye** is also gross, although it tends to draw a lot of fire.

A long-term engine. I went for a fairly straightforward route of **Buried Alive** and **Genesis**. I like this approach because it lets me go for whatever creatures I need at that point in time, as well as being powerful but not the sort of power that makes you the number one target. Sometimes other players will even be glad to see you put **Genesis**, **Viridian Shaman** and a threat card into your graveyard since they know your first item of business will be to Shaman some other player's killer artifact.

Tutoring power. Prismatic is slow enough that **Diabolic Tutor** is rock solid, and either **Burning Wish** or (as in my case) **Cunning Wish** are amazing (since in casual formats you get the card out of your collection, not your sidebar). Tutoring also lets you add to the fun scope of your deck, with one-ofs like **Coalition Victory**.

When it comes to play, this deck just wants to keep playing land in the early game. Despite the bad experience alluded to above, I've generally found that the mana base is adequate, both in total number and in Green and Blue sources (both are important, since it is the mana fixers and card drawers that will often get you your other colors). However, I'm certainly considering replacing those **Chromatic Spheres** with basic lands. During the mid-game (turns five through perhaps ten) you keep your hand full while making sure no one else is getting too dangerous. Having lots of board sweepers helps. **Rakavolver** is a wonderful creature -- not so ridiculous that everyone has to kill it, and the life gain helps make sure you don't "accidentally" get **Fireballed** out. Eventually you can try to take control with **Genesis** or a swarm of Soldier tokens. The nice side effect of the attrition battles such games often come to is that you can often accumulate a **Counterspell** or **Mystic Snake** or two (or else a **Cunning Wish** for **Spelljack!**) in order to make it much harder for your opponents to get the better of you once you push for the win.

Of course, you don't need an army of rares to win. My next Prismatic deck will either be rare-free or (more likely) will have no cards with a price tag above one ticket. Until then!

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