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From time to time I get requests from readers asking for specific topics to be covered in this column. The columns on signalling and the team sealed format are examples of this and came about at least in part because I received several requests for such an article.

Today's topic also comes as a result of reader requests and is primarily aimed at the less experienced drafter although I hope everyone will find some useful advice here. The following is a quote from an e-mail I received from Peter Niemeyer that'll explain what I'll be talking about today:

"I'd like to request a type of article. I draft online exclusively, and in between packs 2 and 3 I often look at my playable cards and try to determine what holes there are that I should try to fill in pack 3. Do I have too few creatures? Too few creatures in the 1-3 slot? An inability to deal with fliers? Is this something that successful drafters look at? And if so, how do they make the assessment?"

Peter has the right idea here as this is definitely something successful drafters do all the time. As early as the middle of the first pack they might modify their picks based on what they think their deck is lacking. How do they do this, and what do they look for? That's what I'll be talking about today.

## What To Look For

I've said it often before and it's even more relevant here: the cards you draft should always be dependent upon your previous picks and on what style of deck you are drafting. You should always have in your mind a picture of the deck you are building as you are drafting the cards. You don't need to remember every card you have already picked but you should at least have an idea of how many creatures you have, whether you have removal and what sort of shape your mana curve is in. As you get further through the draft you can start to shape your deck and decide what style of deck it will be.

If you are drafting a more defensive, controlling deck then you will need answers to the common threats in the format. This style of deck values resilient creatures more highly than most. You don't want Nim Shriekers in your black-red control deck normally; something like a Pewter Golem is a much better choice. Similarly creature removal is very important here, as you have to be able to deal with threats that you can't deal with via combat. Likewise artifact removal is also important as there will be cards like Crystal Shard or some pieces of Equipment that will prevent you from playing a control game. Typically you won't need to value combat tricks very highly as you should have generally superior creatures even if they are a little slower. Anything that generates card advantage is a high pick as well.

If you are drafting an aggressive deck then your mana curve becomes a lot more relevant. You need more early creatures so you can establish and maintain tempo. You typically also need a higher creature count for this reason too. Combat tricks can substitute for removal some of the time as you plan to be



*Know your decks's needs.*

attacking and you can use your tricks to take out your opponent's blockers. Anything that makes your creatures hard to deal with is useful; most of the good equipment falls into this category. You also need to have some evasion, as it will usually allow you to force through some extra damage if your ground-based creatures get stalled out.

Once you get into the draft and you realise what sort of deck you are drafting then you can start to modify your picks. If you're drafting green and you have an aggressive deck you might want to take Tel-Jilad Chosen over Tel-Jilad Archers to give you a good early creature that will be capable of attacking past early blockers. If however you think your deck will be defensive then the Archers might be the correct pick in order to give you some defence against flyers.

There will usually be several picks like this throughout a draft. Every time you have a choice of two or more cards that are close in terms of power you should be asking yourself how each of them fit in with the cards you've already drafted. Only by making that assessment will you realise which pick is the correct one.

This might sound like a lot to think about when you have only a handful of seconds to choose between two particular cards but fortunately there are things you can do during the draft to make the decisions a little easier for you.

## **Real Life Drafts**

Drafting in real life is a little different from drafting on *Magic Online*. I'll go through the differences and how you can improve your drafting in both of these mediums.

In a real life booster draft you don't get to continually review your picks throughout the draft. As you draft, each card should be placed face down in a single pile in front of you – this is partly so that your fellow drafters can't see the cards and colours that you are drafting. Typically the only time you'll have to review your previous picks is after each pack has been completely drafted. After you have your 15 *Mirrodin* cards in your draft pile whoever is running the draft should give you a minute or so to review your picks. That period of time is very important and you should utilise it wisely.

I'll go through the process of what I personally do during this review period just to give you an idea of what you should be thinking about. First of all, I look through the cards I've drafted and remove any that are completely unplayable. Any late pick Chimney Imps or Crazy Goblins get put to one side and forgotten about. If I'm not 100% settled on my colours anything that is potentially playable gets kept, no matter whether I think I'll be continuing to draft that colour or not. I might want to change colour later in the draft if I open a bomb not in my colours or I might want to consider splashing so it's always nice to have an idea of which colours you have playables in. Next, I sort the cards into creatures, spells and equipment and finally I sort each of those sections by their casting cost. Once that's done I look through the cards that I have to see what sort of shape my deck is in.

I check over the number of creatures I have to see whether I need to focus on getting more of those in the next pack. I also check over what size the creatures I have are; it's no use having a lot of creatures if they're all Myrs or defensive guys, as you need to have something to win the game with. I see how much removal I have; if I already have a decent amount I might want to take a solid creature over a removal spell in the next few packs. I'll also make a mental note of any Talismans or off-colour mana sources that might support a splash colour in case I open up something powerful in a different colour.

Once I have an idea what my deck is like I'll have a quick think about the main commons in the upcoming set and I'll think about which ones I should be placing a higher value on. If I'm blue with a lot of artifacts I might want to value Vedalken Engineer over Spire Golem for example. If I were black with Mask of Memory and Bonesplitter then I would want to take Grimclaw Bats higher than I might

otherwise. If I've managed to pick up two Leonin Den-Guards and a Skyhunter Cub but am lacking equipment then I might want to value Vulshok Morningstar much higher than normal.

The same process is repeated between packs two and three although by that time you have a much clearer picture as to what you need to round out your deck.

That sounds like quite a lot to squeeze in when you have just a minute but you soon learn how to do it quickly. The most important thing is just to gain a feel for your deck so you know what you're lacking, and what cards you should be keeping an eye out for in the next set.

## Magic Online Drafts

For those of you who draft using *Magic Online* everything works a little differently. When you draft on there all of your previous picks can be displayed whilst you are actually drafting. There's also no review period between packs like you get in real life drafts. This change really helps your drafting as you can continually analyse your deck and modify your picks throughout the draft.

When you run a draft online, make sure you click the 'Picks' button to bring up the window that displays the cards you have already drafted. As the draft continues the number of cards in that window will build up and eventually you should organise them in some fashion so that you have a better idea of how your deck looks.



**Magic Online lets you review and sort your cards as you draft**

One nice trick is to right-click on any worthless cards and select "Hide". This removes it from view so you can concentrate on the cards you will be drafting. Don't remove anything that might be splashable as you might want to change colours later on in the draft if things go badly and you'll want to know what playable cards you might have in that colour.

When I draft I like to sort my cards by type and by casting cost. If you click on "Cost Sort" and then "Type Sort" the software will apply both of those and you'll end up with your creatures, artifacts and spells sorted together by casting cost. This is also very handy for figuring out whether you have enough early or late game cards and allows you adapt your drafting accordingly.

To help you fully understand all of this I'll go through a couple of examples of the thoughts I was having mid-way through some recent drafts I have played in.

## Blue-Red Deck

Both of these drafts are *Mirrodin-Darksteel-Fifth Dawn* booster drafts. This first deck started out with a Crystal Shard first-pick and then followed up with Shrapnel Blast and Mindslaver. It quickly settled into blue red and the following 15 cards were drafted in *Mirrodin*:

### Creatures:

Neurok Familiar  
Lumengrid Sentinel  
Hematite Golem  
Vulshok Berserker

### Spells:

Chromatic Sphere  
Shrapnel Blast  
Crystal Shard  
Dragon Blood  
Regress  
Fabricate  
Mindslaver

### Land:

Ancient Den

Unplayables amounted to a Contaminated Bond, an Omega Myr and a Dross Prowler.

So looking at that selection I noted immediately that I was pretty creature light. Getting some decent creatures in the next two packs had to be a high priority. I noticed that the Sentinel and the Shrapnel Blast would require playing a high number of artifacts to make the most of them. The Arcbound creatures are especially good with Blast and as it's likely that this deck would run more artifact creatures than most I made a note to pick up Arcbound Stinger, Worker and Bruiser a little higher than normal in *Darksteel*.

With a couple of excellent artifacts in the deck already I also made a note to pick up some Vedalken Engineers when possible to help power them up. Indeed, this is the sort of deck in which I would draft Engineer over Spire Golem initially. The Engineer would be even more important as I hadn't been able to draft any Myrs and so the mana acceleration would be very welcome. I already had a Regress so getting an Echoing Truth wasn't required as they basically do the same thing. No artifact removal had been available in *Mirrodin* so Echoing Ruin would have to be a high pick. I made a decision to take Ruin over Barbed Lightning in this deck, as it isn't particularly aggressive and the Shrapnel Blast and Crystal Shard can help deal with bigger creatures.

That's a pretty fair summation of what I was thinking going into *Darksteel*.

## Base Green Deck

This second deck is a perfect example of how a draft doesn't always go according to plan. I first picked a Solar Tide then didn't see a single other white card. Green was being passed with Fangren Hunter and Deconstruct coming my way and so those were scooped up. I didn't have a second colour going into *Darksteel* although I'd picked a Silver Myr and a Chromatic Sphere so a three-colour deck looked possible.

In *Darksteel* I first-picked a Fireball and that focused me on drafting a multi-coloured green deck. Darksteel Ingot immediately became highly sought after and I picked one early - around 5th pick I

think - so I wouldn't miss out. A Spectre's Shroud and a Purge gave me some nice uncommons and a Stand Together and a Tangle Spider came around as I'd cut green pretty heavily in pack one.

After *Darksteel* was complete I had the following cards:

**Creatures:**

- Silver Myr
- Tel-Jilad Chosen
- Alpha Myr
- Neurok Prodigy
- Elf Replica
- Cobalt Golem
- Drill Skimmer
- Fangren Hunter
- Tangle Spider

**Spells:**

- Fireball
- Echoing Truth
- Echoing Courage
- Spectre's Shroud
- Purge
- Darksteel Ingot
- Deconstruct
- Stand Together
- Solar Tide

A pretty fair selection there although there were a lot of unplayable cards along with those listed above. I realised that some of the creatures I had were pretty dodgy although they could all be played. Fireball, Deconstruct, Purge and Solar Tide made a nice collection of spells although combining them all in the same deck would make the mana-base more than a little shaky.

With a Silver Myr to help with the Blue cards and Darksteel Ingot and Chromatic Sphere to help out with the rest I figured I could play all of those spells with a bit more mana fixing and so that was something I focussed on picking up in *Fifth Dawn*.

I had some fliers and a good range of early and late game creatures so there wasn't any particular focus needed there. I just felt that it would be important to get good creatures over spells or combat tricks because there was already a good selection of those here.



*Know your options, and how to take advantage of them.*

Going into the *Fifth Dawn* pack my focus was on trying to pick up quality Sunburst cards, mana fixing primarily in the shape of Sylvok Explorer, and a couple more nice meaty creatures. Sylvok Explorer and Skyreach Manta were my two primary targets and I aimed to take both of those over any of the other commons. In some aggressive decks I could envisage taking Ferocious Charge or Baton of Courage over the Explorer but here the mana that the Explorer gives was much more important.

Dawn's Reflection was also a card that I definitely wanted to pick up if I couldn't get hold of Explorers as that card would allow me to cast all the spells in the deck. I noticed that I didn't have much going on in the four mana slot anyway so it would fit in with the mana curve of the deck.

That's pretty much everything I thought about prior to opening the *Fifth Dawn* pack in that draft.

Being aware of what you need at any given time and setting yourself target cards to pick up from a particular set can aid you greatly in drafting the best deck possible. Utilising the review periods in a draft to examine your deck makes it much easier to make those tough picks correctly. I hope those two examples give you a rough idea of what you should be thinking about between the packs of each draft.

## Next Week

It's back to a *Fifth Dawn* draft pick next week. Once again it's a *Mirrodin-Darksteel-Fifth Dawn* booster draft and this time around you're drafting a fairly aggressive white-blue deck. Your picks going into *Fifth Dawn* are as follows:

### Creatures:

Auriok Transfixer  
Leonin Den-Guard  
Leonin Shikari  
Alpha Myr  
Gold Myr  
Neurok Prodigy  
Neurok Spy  
Slith Ascendant  
Arcbound Hybrid  
Hoverguard Observer  
Loxodon Mystic

### Spells:

Sunbeam Spellbomb  
Echoing Truth  
Domineer  
Blinding Beam  
Leonin Scimitar  
Thunderstaff

### Lands:

Darksteel Citadel

The *Fifth Dawn* pack you open contains the following cards:



**Etched Oracle** 4



Artifact Creature

Sunburst (This comes into play with a +1/+1 counter on it for each color of mana used to pay its cost.)

1, Remove four +1/+1 counters from Etched Oracle: Target player draws three cards.

0/0

**Loxodon Anchorite** 2 3



Creature — Elephant Cleric

☉: Prevent the next 2 damage that would be dealt to target creature or player this turn.

The loxodon ascribe religious superiority to those born albino, believing them to be spiritually pure.

2/3

**Tel-Jilad Lifebreather** 4



Creature — Troll Shaman

☉, ☉, Sacrifice a Forest: Regenerate target creature.

"The Tangle loans you life. Spend it well."

3/2

**Trinket Mage** 2 4



Creature — Human Wizard

When Trinket Mage comes into play, you may search your library for an artifact card with converted mana cost 1 or less, reveal that card, and put it into your hand. If you do, shuffle your library.

2/2

**Razorgrass Screen** 1



Artifact Creature — Wall

(Walls can't attack.)

Razorgrass Screen blocks each turn if able.

Hand-stitched, and marked by the blood of the Auriok.

2/1

**Vulshok Sorcerer** 1 2 2



Creature — Human Shaman

Haste

☉: Vulshok Sorcerer deals 1 damage to target creature or player.

Vulshok sorcerers train by leaping into electrified storm clouds. Dead or alive, they come back down with smiles on their faces.

1/1

**Battered Golem** 3



Artifact Creature — Golem

Battered Golem doesn't untap during your untap step.

Whenever an artifact comes into play, you may untap Battered Golem.

A dent marks every year of service, and it has as much rust as glory.

3/2

**Thought Courier** 1 4



Creature — Human Wizard

☉: Draw a card, then discard a card from your hand.

It is telling of the vedalkens' culture that they trust human couriers more than their own comrades.

1/1

**Cranial Plating** 2



Artifact — Equipment

Equipped creature gets +1/+0 for each artifact you control.

☉☉: Attach Cranial Plating to target creature you control.

Equip 1 (1: Attach to target creature you control. Equip only as a sorcery.)

**Skyreach Manta** 5



Artifact Creature

Sunburst (This comes into play with a +1/+1 counter on it for each color of mana used to pay its cost.)

**Stand Firm** 3



Instant

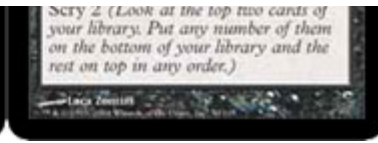
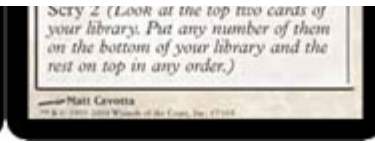
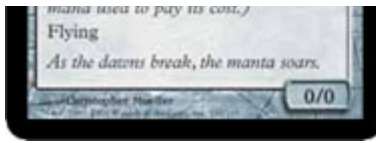
Target creature gets +1/+1 until end of turn.

**Fill with Fright** 3 3



Sorcery

Target player discards two cards from his or her hand.



### What do you draft?

- Magma Giant
- Tel-Jilad Justice
- Steelshaper's Gift
- Etched Oracle
- Loxodon Anchorite
- Tel-Jilad Lifebreather
- Trinket Mage
- Razorgrass Screen
- Vulshok Sorcerer
- Battered Golem
- Thought Courier
- Cranial Plating
- Skyreach Manta
- Stand Firm
- Fill with Fright

Submit

That's all for this week. See you all for the results of the above poll next week.

Scott.

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