

# Drafting *Eighth*: Know Your Plan Search

Paul Sottosanti  
Monday, August 16, 2004

---

Editor's note: Scott Wills is still recovering from his recent injury and will be taking some more time off to get better. For this week, I hope you enjoy this change of pace from R&D member Paul Sottosanti. Scott, we all hope you are feeling better soon.  
- Scott Johns, Content Manager [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com)

---

This is a dream job.

I haven't written much since accepting an internship (and eventually a full-time position) here at Wizards of the Coast, but that's lucky for you all, because it likely would have been pages and pages about how much I love my job. That said, I'll try to spare you as much as possible...this time.

When I got to Wizards, the development of *Fifth Dawn* was just wrapping up so I didn't have much input on the set (or any before it, so don't blame me for Skullclamp!). *Champions of Kamigawa*, however, is a different story, and I'm anticipating the release of that set as much as the rest of you. There's no feeling like holding the results of your work in your hands for the first time, and better yet, seeing people's reactions to it.

The only thing that I miss is the ability to play in tournaments, but it's a fair trade for the knowledge of (and ability to influence) hundreds of upcoming cards. You think Skullclamp was good? You should see some of the cards I've gotten to shuffle up -- for the hour or two before development changed them, anyway.

Living in the future has other benefits as well. Just last week I participated in the first *Ninth Edition* booster draft. It was a 10-man affair and it was a blast, with table talk flying all over the place as people exclaimed with glee at the cards they'd opened. "This guy's back?" they said in amazement. My deck turned out poorly, and I lost about seven games in a row to Brian Schneider and his mono-black concoction with six copies of a certain little beater. I insisted that we keep playing until I won one.

I think he might have mulliganed to five the game I finally pulled one off.

When Scott Johns came to me and asked if I could pinch-hit for this column for a week, it seemed like a perfect time to do an article on drafting the base set. For all of you, that's *Eighth Edition*, so here goes.

## Have a Plan

When I wrote a couple articles on drafting *Seventh Edition* a long time ago, I stressed the importance of drafting your deck with a plan in mind. Perhaps this will always be a quality of the base set, because nothing has changed. My best guess is it's because the base set doesn't have the overarching themes of the blocks, such as the tribal qualities of *Onslaught* block. In that format you were mainly looking for card synergy. If you had enough synergy, you didn't actually need a strict plan, as the sheer power of the draws you got would steamroll the opposition.

In this format, I've drafted a couple of terrible decks but they always had a game plan. I always knew exactly what my deck wanted to do to win the game. I even won a draft with my double-Sizzle concoction because it was so aggressive that an inefficient card like that actually became good. I



would just throw every creature at my opponent until I got him down to a single digit life total and then burn him out from there.

In a different but similar deck, I had so much burn that I decided it was worth it to put a Sudden Impact in the main deck. Imagine my opponent's surprise when I burned him out from 14 life while hiding behind a Rukh Egg (and before you ask, at another point in that draft I did end up torching my own Egg).

So the point is twofold. First, make your card selections based upon not only relative power levels but also upon the way that your deck intends to win the game. A Blue-Black deck can take a tempo route where it plays fast creatures and then clears the way with bounce and removal. Alternatively, it can go for an evasion plan where it plays efficient blockers such as Horned Turtle and then pecks away with Severed Legions and

Wind Drakes. Second, don't completely discount a card just because I call it unplayable, as there certainly might be a deck it fits into. Just be sure you have a good reason for putting it in your deck (like siding in Maggot Carrier because your opponent just defeated you with Worship).

## Prioritizing Cards by Color

Being told which cards are good is no substitute for learning it yourself; so don't take what I say below as the absolute truth, but rather this information as guidelines for the cards that you draft. I'm going to concentrate only on the commons, as they will always make up the bulk of your draft.

### Black

There is quite a bit of depth contained in Black in *Eighth Edition*. Vicious Hunger replaces Corrupt as the secondary removal spell behind Dark Banishing, while Gravedigger retains his place as the top creature. Deepwood Ghoul provides a solid new ground body and Dusk Imp and Severed Legion bring the quick evasion beats. Almost all of the other creatures in the color are playable, as well as both of the discard spells and an age-old enhancer in the form of Unholy Strength.

With Black, your main goal is to cast creatures that can't be easily handled and then use your removal to clear out any answers they might come up with. Severed Legion gives you a way around Green's fat creatures and spiders, while large creatures such as Serpent Warrior and eventually Frozen Shade can bash through any other color's army. There are so many good cards in Black that you're almost guaranteed to have a solid deck. Try pairing Black with Red for an overload of removal, or with Green for even more advantage on the creature front.

***Knowing your deck's plan for winning games is crucial.***



### Top Commons:

1. Dark Banishing
2. Vicious Hunger
3. Gravedigger
4. Dusk Imp
5. Deepwood Ghoul

*Honorable Mention:* Looming Shade, Serpent Warrior, Severed Legion, Giant Cockroach

*Playable:* Spineless Thug, Ravenous Rats, Unholy Strength, Drudge Skeletons, Scathe Zombies, Coercion, Mind Rot, Nausea, Raise Dead

*Unplayable:* Maggot Carrier, Plague Beetle, Bog Imp, Fear

### White

The best thing about White in *Eighth Edition* is that the Circles of Protection have finally moved to uncommon. This freed up five common slots for cards that could go in the main deck, so White is definitely deeper than it used to be. Unfortunately, it's still the color of life gain (Sacred Nectar), toughness pumping (Solidarity), fogs (Holy Day), and one-mana 1/1s. Cards like Honor Guard, Tundra Wolves, and Suntail Hawk are almost good enough but in most decks they simply don't pull their weight. On the other hand, the additions of Master Decoy, Diving Griffin, and Aven Flock give the color strength it never had before.

Most White decks simply want to hold the ground with cards such as Standing Troops, Master Decoy and Pacifism while the fliers do their work. The trio of Angelic Page, Crossbow Infantry, and Samite Healer are still available to rule the combat phase. None of the damage prevention is particularly great, but there's nothing wrong with playing a copy or two of Redeem or Healing Salve. The traditional partner of White is Blue, as the two combine to create potent control decks that seem to have answers to everything as well as a plethora of flying creatures for offense. That is still true here, although any color combination can be made to work.



### Top Commons:

1. Pacifism
2. Master Decoy
3. Diving Griffin
4. Aven Flock
5. Angelic Page

*Honorable Mention:* Razorfoot Griffin, Aven Cloudchaser, Glory Seeker, Standing Troops

*Playable:* Crossbow Infantry, Samite Healer, Venerable Monk, Holy Strength, Redeem, Healing Salve, Demystify

*Unplayable:* Honor Guard, Tundra Wolves, Suntail Hawk, Holy Day, Solidarity, Sacred Nectar

### Blue

With a full nine cards that I would consider largely unplayable, Blue certainly got the shaft in *Eighth Edition*. While Aven Fisher is a first pick (card advantage in the form of an efficient creature is very strong for the base set), it quickly goes downhill. Dehydration is expensive, but still creature removal. All of the counterspells and bounce spells are fine, but unfortunately there are a whole bunch of one power creatures that have negligible abilities. Merchant of Secrets is the closest to being playable and even then the 1/1 body doesn't provide enough of an effect on the game.

With Blue you can either take a control route, using countermagic and fliers, or a tempo route, using the bounce spells and the countermagic to clear the way for whatever creatures you have. The control deck wants cards such as Horned Turtle, while the tempo deck wants Coral Eel. You will almost definitely need another color to provide the meat of your deck, so draft with the intent of shoring up that other color's weakness or playing to its strengths.

**Top Commons:**

1. Aven Fisher
2. Wind Drake
3. Remove Soul
4. Dehydration
5. Mana Leak

*Honorable Mention:* Unsummon, Inspiration, Coastal Hornclaw, Boomerang

*Playable:* Sea Monster, Sage Owl, Horned Turtle, Coral Eel

*Unplayable:* Sneaky Homonculus, Storm Crow, Merchant of Secrets, Fugitive Wizard, Flight, Catalog, Flash Counter, Twiddle, Index



**Red**

Red is a little shallow, though the power level of the cards stays fairly high. Shock Troops follows the tradition of creatures with built-in card advantage nabbing the top slot, while Shock and Volcanic Hammer follow close behind. I gave Shock the nod due to its instant speed, slightly cheaper cost, and the fact that most of the important common creatures in the set have 2 toughness. Anaba Shaman provides a source of recurring damage and Canyon Wildcat, Hill Giant, and Balduvian Barbarians make up the core of a respectable army.

You should look to be aggressive when drafting Red, as the ideal deck will come out fast and get in as much early damage as possible, backed by burn that can either finish off an unsuspecting opponent or clear his creatures out of the way. If you don't get enough burn, consider playing a Panic Attack as a finisher. Or you can pair Red with a controlling color like White and use it mainly to torch problem creatures while your fliers do their work.



**Top Commons:**

1. Shock Troops
2. Shock
3. Volcanic Hammer
4. Canyon Wildcat
5. Anaba Shaman

*Honorable Mention:* Hill Giant, Balduvian Barbarians, Goblin Raider, Lightning Elemental

*Playable:* Lava Axe, Sabretooth Tiger, Panic Attack, Goblin Chariot, Ridgeline Rager

*Unplayable:* Sizzle, Tremor, Cinder Wall, Raging Goblin, Orcish Spy, Reflexes, Shatter, Stone Rain

**Green**

Here is the other color that can rival Black in terms of the depth of its commons. Again, only four cards are unplayable, and even Monstrous Growth is a borderline playable card that sometimes functions as Cruel Edict and sometimes as Lava Axe. Nantuko Disciple is a huge addition to the color, as once it's active you will simply control almost every single combat phase. Horned Troll is a nice little efficient regenerator, with fatty backup coming from Spined Wurm, Craw Wurm, and Moss Monster. Both Giant Spider and Canopy Spider exist as air defense, so as long as you draft a number of those you shouldn't lose to too many flying-based decks. Finally, there's quite a bit of playable mana acceleration, with Vine Trellis receiving the nod as the best of the lot.



The strategy in Green these days is simple. Survive the early game and crush everything in your path in the middle-to-late game. No other color can stand up to the sheer power of Green's creatures, so the early game is where much of the danger is. Canopy Spider and Grizzly Bears can shore up this weakness by providing two-mana bodies, while Trained Armodon is the perfect creature to summon for three. A Giant Spider at four will ensure that you survive to the late game where Spined Wurm and friends can come out to play. Pairing Green with a removal color is a good idea so that you can take out problematic creatures like Severed Legion and Angelic Page. Adding Blue and taking the tempo route also tends to work well.

### Top Commons:

1. Nantuko Disciple
2. Spined Wurm
3. Giant Growth
4. Giant Spider
5. Horned Troll


*Honorable Mention:* Craw Wurm, Rushwood Dryad, Trained Armodon, Vine Trellis, Moss Monster, Rampant Growth, Fertile Ground

*Playable:* Giant Badger, Lone Wolf, Wood Elves, Canopy Spider, Grizzly Bears, Naturalize

*Unplayable:* Monstrous Growth, Norwood Ranger, Elvish Pioneer, Regeneration

### Deck Examples

The mana in the deck below wasn't particularly good, but I felt that Two-Headed Dragon was such a ridiculous bomb that it warranted playing four red sources (plus the Rampant Growth). The Vine Trellises kept me alive until the late game and helped to accelerate out creatures like Moss Monster, as well as giving me double green to cast Trained Armodons. Pyrotechnics and Shock Troops were also splashed to ensure that I almost never ran out of removal.

Deck 1: Green-Black-Red 		
<b>Main Deck</b> 40 cards		
8 Forest	1 Abyssal Specter	1 Coercion
3 Mountain	1 Bog Wraith	1 Dark Banishing
	1 Canopy Spider	1 Naturalize

1 Shivan Oasis	1 Deepwood Ghoul	1 Pyrotechnics
5 Swamp	1 Giant Spider	1 Raise Dead
<hr/>	1 Gravedigger	1 Rampant Growth
17 lands	1 Grizzly Bears	<hr/>
	1 Horned Troll	6 other spells
	1 Moss Monster	
	1 Nantuko Disciple	
	1 Rushwood Dryad	
	1 Shock Troops	
	2 Trained Armodon	
	1 Two-Headed Dragon	
	2 Vine Trellis	
	<hr/>	
	17 creatures	

This was probably the best deck I've drafted yet. There's a full complement of burn spells, as well as a Dark Banishing for anything too large to kill with fire. The creatures are your typical aggressive Red fare, with three two-drops and one each of my favorite Red men, Ogre Taskmaster and Hulking Cyclops. Blocking is definitely overrated.

I had a number of black cards, such as Serpent Warriors, in the sideboard that would allow me to diversify my deck against White opponents who might be playing Sanctimony, or even worse, Circle of Protection: Red. On the other hand, I also had a Flashfires, so it would be a fair fight.

## Deck 2: Red-Black



### Main Deck

40 cards

13 Mountain	2 Canyon Wildcat	1 Blaze
4 Swamp	1 Goblin Chariot	1 Dark Banishing
<hr/>	1 Goblin Raider	1 Guerrilla Tactics
17 lands	1 Hill Giant	2 Lava Axe
	1 Hulking Cyclops	1 Lightning Blast
	2 Lightning Elemental	1 Shock
	1 Ogre Taskmaster	1 Sudden Impact
	1 Orcish Artillery	1 Volcanic Hammer
	1 Rukh Egg	<hr/>
	2 Sabretooth Tiger	9 other spells
	1 Shock Troops	
	<hr/>	
	14 creatures	

This deck was a little slow to get started (note the lack of two mana creatures), but once it did it was unstoppable. Still, it generally either played Fertile Ground on turn two or cast Remove Soul on the opponent's first creature, so I wasn't sitting around doing nothing. Once I made it to the midgame,

my creatures were just too big, especially when backed by the rest of the Remove Souls. This deck could have maybe used an Unsummon or two, but other than that it's a nice example of Green and Blue working together.

## Deck 3: Green-Blue



### Main Deck

40 cards

9 Forest	1 Air Elemental	1 Blanchwood Armor
8 Island	2 Aven Fisher	1 Dehydration
-----	1 Coastal Hornclaw	1 Fertile Ground
17 lands	1 Coral Eel	1 Giant Growth
	1 Craw Wurm	1 Living Terrain
	2 Horned Troll	3 Remove Soul
	1 Moss Monster	-----
	1 Nantuko Disciple	8 other spells
	1 Spined Wurm	
	1 Spitting Spider	
	1 Trained Armodon	
	1 Wall of Air	
	1 Wind Drake	
	-----	
	15 creatures	

## Conclusion

It's good to be writing again. I doubt I'll ever be able to take on a weekly column here on the site, but I enjoy stepping in from time to time. Someday soon I hope to write a Feature Article on the evolution of the Land Game; that is, how to play **Magic** when you've got nothing in front of you but a pile of basic land. (Yes, I'm really fiddling around with such a thing!)

See you then!

---

© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

