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## doctorjay Does *Mirrodin*

Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar  
*Into the Aether*  
 Tuesday, August 24, 2004



Welcome to "Into the Aether", my personal exploration of *Magic Online*. Who am I? First and foremost, I'm a **Magic** player who started playing back in *Ice Age*. I've written for a variety of websites, including this one as the first "House of Cards" columnist. Recently I've written (or am writing) [card names and flavor text](#) for *Fifth Dawn*, [Champions of Kamigawa](#), [Betrayers of Kamigawa](#), *9th Edition*, and [Saviors of Kamigawa](#).

Most importantly for you, I'm also someone who has played *Magic Online* since its beta and who is online daily. If it gives any clue as to my *Magic Online* enthusiasm, I've "earned" nearly every avatar available in the game.

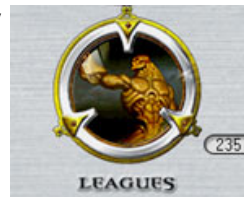
Thanks to this column, I now have full license to try everything and be everywhere, and I plan on using that license with abandon. As anyone who knows me can tell you, I have a... uh... fairly robust passion for deckbuilding, and am an enthusiastic learner. I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to playing so many different kinds of decks in so many different kinds of formats, which is what I'll be doing each and every week.

I'm going to be throwing a lot your way each week. If it gets a little bewildering, let's hope it will be in the "I just lost my lunch on a roller-coaster" kind of way and not the "I'm stuck with no pants in the middle of a foreign country whose language I don't speak" kind of way.

Moving on.

## Sealed in a Metal World

I don't play in many non-Premier Sanctioned Tournaments because, quite frankly, I play *Magic Online* while I'm watching television, or knowing I may need to leave to pick up my son from daycare, or in the wee hours of the morning. On the tournament-casual spectrum, I suppose you could say I'm decidedly on the "casual" end of things. Make me play in a lot of tournaments that can affect my rating, and I will show you a rating that's in the toilet.



Enter online Sealed Leagues. What I love about Leagues is that they are competitive while also being stress-free. They don't affect my Limited Rating, they're cost efficient (meaning that you pay relatively little over the course of the month-long League and can usually win a prize), and there is a high tolerance for people of varied skill level. Chad hit on a lot of these benefits in his own [article on leagues](#), so my article will be hitting a bit more on my experience of actually playing in leagues.

With that in mind, I figure what better way to illustrate *Mirrodin-Darksteel-Fifth Dawn* Sealed League specifically, and how Leagues work generally, than to show you from firsthand experience? Step back, everyone, while I prepare to make [Scott Wills](#) grab his hair in shock and horror.

## The Raw Materials

So I go to the Leagues room and sort the spreadsheet that comes up by Starting Date. A *Mirrodin* Block League has started about three hours before I logged in, with only thirty-eight (out of a maximum of two hundred-fifty-six) signed up. That's my target, so I buy a *Mirrodin* tournament pack, *Darksteel* and *Fifth Dawn* boosters, pay my two Event Tickets entry fee and press Join. For anyone interested, I'm in League #409462.

Here are my cards, handily sorted by color in the deckbuilding window:

### White:

Echoing Calm, Stand Firm, Leonin Den-Guard, Loxodon Mender, Skyhunter Cub, Slith Ascendant.

### Blue:

Condescend, Disarm, Early Frost, Echoing Truth, Lumengrid Sentinel, Lumengrid Warden, Neurok Spy, Sombre Hoverguard.

### Black:

Shattered Dreams, Burden of Greed, Blind Creeper, Disciple of the Vault, Dross Crocodile, Grimclaw Bats, Nim Lasher, Wall of Blood.

### Red:


Echoing Ruin, Molten Rain, Screaming Fury (foil), Shatter, Shrapnel Blast, Krark-Clan Grunt, Megatog, Ogre Leadfoot.




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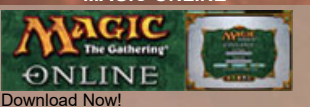
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### Green:

Deconstruct, Journey of Discovery, Stand Together, Fangren Hunter, Tangle Asp, Tel-Jilad Wolf, Viridian Acolyte, Viridian Joiner.

### Artifacts:

Krark's Thumb, Arcane Spyglass, Bonesplitter, Chimeric Egg, Grafted Wargear, Heartwood Shard, Leonin Scimitar, Lightning Coils, Necrogen Spellbomb, Neurok Stealsuit, Opaline Bracers, Slagwurm Armor, Sparring Collar, Sunbeam Spellbomb, Sword of Fire and Ice, Talisman of Impulse, Talisman of Indulgence, Talisman of Unity, Tanglebloom, Tooth of Chiss-Goria, Vulshok Battlegear, Vulshok Gauntlets, Aether Spellbomb

### Artifact Creatures:

Arcbound Bruiser, Arcbound Crusher, Drill-Skimmer, Dross Golem, Frogmite, Gold Myr, Iron Myr, Leaden Myr, Myr Quadropod, Ornithopter, Solarion, Spinal Parasite.

### Land:

Ancient Den, Seat of the Synod, 7 Mountain, 6 Swamp, 6 Plains, 6 Island, 5 Forest.

As with any Sealed Deck experience, there's a lot going on here. As with few Sealed Deck articles, however, I hope you aren't planning on me giving you any strategic insights into what some of those things are.

No, you see, I'm a casual player even in my Limited excursions. I'm not looking for the "best" card interactions, per se. Sometimes I want to play cards because I haven't had a chance to try them yet, sometimes I want to play a card because it's cool, and sometimes I want to play a card because it's funny. I look for themes, either minor or major, that will give my deck character. I like monocolored and five-color decks best, but can live with two-color decks in the first week or two of a League. Essentially, Sealed League for me is a way to learn new sets and tell me which cards I want to build Constructed decks around. Which is all to say that, as I mentioned, it's nice that the Leagues are low-stress and fun. I like to win prizes, but for me that's not what Sealed Leagues are about.

When I looked at this particular pile of cards, my first reaction was that I wanted desperately for **Krark's Thumb** to be good in my deck. Sadly, there isn't a single coin-flipping card to be had.

My second reaction was that building a deck around **Solarion** sounded cool. But I could only get this far before I got stuck...

Viridian Acolyte  
Gold Myr  
Iron Myr  
Leaden Myr  
Tel-Jilad Asp  
Tel-Jilad Wolf  
Viridian Joiner  
Frogmite  
Arcbound Crusher  
Fangren Hunter  
Solarion  
Talisman of Impulse  
Talisman of Indulgence  
Talisman of Unity  
Deconstruct  
Journey of Discovery  
Opaline Bracers

In the end, I decided to combine two minor themes in the deck: **Megatog/Shrapnel Blast** and **Leonin Den-Guard/Skyhunter Patrol/Slith Ascendant** with lots of equipment. I suppose that **Sword of Fire and Ice** leaning against the wall had a lot to do with my choice, too. Believe it or not, this is my first opportunity to play with a **Darksteel** sword.



doctorjay's Week 1 Sealed Deck (sexy name, eh?)		
<b>Main Deck</b> 40 cards		
1 Ancient Den	1 Ornithopter	1 Bonesplitter
8 Mountain	1 Gold Myr	1 Leonin Scimitar
6 Plains	1 Iron Myr	1 Echoing Ruin

15 lands	1 Leaden Myr	1 Shatter
	1 Leonin Den-Guard	1 Shrapnel Blast
	1 Krark-Clan Grunt	1 Chimeric Egg
	1 Skyhunter Patrol	1 Grafted Wargear
	1 Slith Ascendant	1 Lightning Coils
	1 Arcbound Crusher	1 Sword of Fire and Ice
	1 Drill-Skimmer	
	1 Frogmite	9 other spells
	1 Myr Quadropod	
	1 Arcbound Bruiser	
	1 Loxodon Mender	
	1 Ogre Leadfoot	
	1 Megatog	
	16 creatures	

The beauty about the Sealed Leagues is that I'm not wedded to this decklist. In fact, I can change my whole deck between games if I want, much less between matches. There's no harm in experimenting. In fact it's a good idea to actively experiment because it allows you to get comfortable with all of the card interactions. For me, someone with about as much experience in *Mirrodin* Sealed as I have bobsledding, getting comfortable with card interactions is a good thing.

## Week 1

My deck made, I shuffle up and wait for an opponent. The Leagues have a "blind lottery" system of matching whereby I signal to the system that I want to play a game and then someone else from the League who does likewise gets selected as my opponent. You never get paired against the same opponent twice in the same week, which is a nice failsafe if someone is your League nemesis or has a particularly ridiculous deck.

Each week, the Leagues expect you to play at least five matches to stay in the hunt for prizes. You get two points for every match win, one point for every loss. After those first five matches, your match results start getting logged as tie-breaker points. You earn two tie-breaker points for a win, and you *lose* a tie-breaker point for a loss.

Tie-breaker points, as the name denotes, basically count for ranking people who have the same number of points. So a person can have eight "real" points (say, 3-2 in the first five matches) and ten "tie-breaker" points, ranking them ahead of someone else with eight points and only seven tie-breaker points. It's an interesting system, because it rewards people who rabidly want to play over and over (and over) again, though it also clearly tiers people based on record. Generally speaking, where I drop in the standings is on tie-breakers, since I usually have time for ten games a week if I'm doing other stuff online like making Constructed decks.

This isn't meant to be an exhaustive strategy article, obviously, but it is worth noting what the heck happened. I'll give a snapshot of each match along with high-level reasons why I won or lost. Again, treat this as a window into what can happen in the Sealed Leagues.

I win my first match against a 5-color opponent 2-0, though I'm a little land-shy both games. **Leonin Den-Guard** swinging a **Bonesplitter** wins me Game 1 and **Ornithopter** with **Grafted Wargear** wins me Game 2. I also win my second match 2-0, mostly thanks to **Sword of Ice and Fire** strapped to fliers. In the first game I'm able to scream "MEGATOG HUNGRY!!!!" as he tramples through as a 17/18 Sword-wielding monstrosity. I love **Megatog**.

It's in my third match, in which I win 2-1, that it sort of dawns on me how aggressive my deck is and how little it needs land. I realize this because I win with three land on the table the first game and four land on the table the third game. **Megatog** eats all the happy Myr who summoned him and again burps his way to victory. As someone who cares deeply about mana ratios, I'm disturbed by what *Mirrodin* Block has done to decks' mana requirements. I'm playing *fifteen* land for goodness' sake! Every deck I've played so far is at least four colors! Everyone who plays *Mirrodin* Limited has already come to grips with these realities, but for me they are a long way from the *8th Edition* Leagues I usually play, in which two-color decks with at least seventeen land are the rule.

Anyway, between games two and three I decide I need to lower the mana curve a bit. I drop **Loxodon Mender** for **Stand Firm**. Scry is one of those mechanics Sealed League lets me try out.

Then, something unfortunate happens.

In my fourth match, my opponent begins our first game with the question: "Playing for points?" I say yes, and he offers to concede if I give him one ticket (roughly equivalent to a dollar). Apparently he has already played his five matches for the week and is just casually cruising games looking for an easy profit.

Okay, listen: This just isn't cool. I know Sealed Leagues are low-key, and I know that people see this as a win-win situation, since it costs my opponent nothing but tie-breaker points to concede and I get to start a robust 4-0. But this behavior is clearly against the **Magic Online** Code of Conduct:



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13. Do not attempt to artificially alter the outcome of a **Magic Online** league, sanctioned event, or game. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Bribing or offering any compensation in order to change the outcome.
- Stalling, spamming, harassing, or behaving in any other unsportsmanlike manner that affects the game.

\*\*\*

Trading a ticket for a win might be a nice situation for me and my opponent, but it's unfair to the rest of the people in the League. Don't collude, folks, even in the fun Sealed Leagues. Play your games and let the best players and best decks rise to the top.

I'll be honest, in the moment, I am paralyzed with how to respond. I should have refused and reported my opponent to an Adept. Instead, I say something like "Nah, I'm trying to get a feel for my deck." He says okay, we play, and I win 2-0 because of Leonin Den-Guard with two pieces of equipment the first game and a key **Shatter** on his **Empyrial Plate** the second game.



In my last "official" match, I beat an 1800+ rated player 2-1, although he's clearly making better play decisions than me (I don't know what time it is for him, but it's pushing 1AM for me). Once again, flying weenies with equipment take game one. In the second game I basically use up all of my resources early and thus can't respond to **Skyhunter Patrol** swinging a **Leonin Scimitar** at my face (his **Soul Nova** on my twice-equipped Den-Guard doesn't help either). In the third game both **Arcbound Crusher** and **Megatog** get huge and overrun his forces after I **Shrapnel Blast** his **Loxodon Mystic**. There are no victory screams for **Megatog** this time around, just a weary pat on the back for a job well done.

So I start out 5-0. Luckily, I've learned not to get too excited (or, on the flip-side, frustrated) about the first two weeks of Sealed League. Each League is four weeks long, and a five-match stretch can send you spiraling up or down the standings pretty dramatically. After my fifth match there are over eighty people signed up for my League (over twice as many as when I started), with several other people sporting ten points. Within days of the League starting, we'll be assuredly at the maximum number of players. There's a lot of **Magic** to be played yet.

The rest of the week is playing for tie-breaker points. The great thing about tie-breaker games is that here is where you can radically experiment with deck concepts. Not only can I try to flesh out my **Solarion** idea in tie-breakers, but I can also try and make a blue-green bounce deck focused on **Arcbound Crusher**. My goal is to use as many different color combinations in my deck as possible during my "extra" games each week. If I really know how each color stands on its own and with its peers, then I can make better decisions when I start adding cards later on.

When the dust settles at the end of the first week I have twelve tie-breaker points to go along with my ten points and am sitting eighth out of two-fifty-six. Just to give you an idea about League voraciousness, the leader has ten points and a whopping *seventy-four* tie-breaker points!

## Week 2

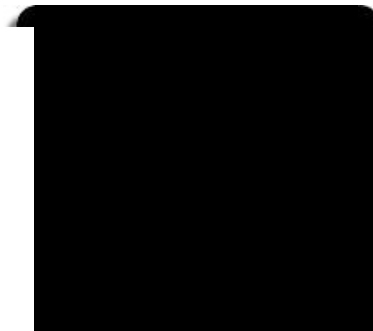
Now things get interesting. Each week in a Sealed League, you add one Booster Pack worth of cards to your deck. In *Mirrodin* Block, for example, you add a pack of *Mirrodin* in Week 2, *Darksteel* in Week 3, and *Fifth Dawn* in Week 4. In the second week, that means I have a *Mirrodin* pack I need to buy and add to my total card pool. This is why I say that Sealed Leagues are cost-efficient; You can get an enormous amount of games under your belt for the total cost of one Tournament Pack and five Boosters, spread out over a month.

As I said, don't get fooled by the 5-0 first-week record. Now is when decks that weren't possible take shape for everyone in the League. Strong strategies can get stronger or not be helped at all. People who were 2-3 the first week might go undefeated the rest of the way because their boosters gave them just what their deck needed each week to strengthen their best strategy.

Based on my success in the first week, my hope is to nab good cards that are red, white, quick artifact creatures or equipment. Let me tell you: A **Spikeshot Goblin** would be a beautiful thing for my deck. I've also liked the green I've played in tie-breaker games, so a killer green card wouldn't be terrible.

Here is what I open:

Alpha Myr  
Electrostatic Bolt  
Silver Myr  
Hematite Golem  
Spikeshot Goblin  
Pewter Golem  
Raise the Alarm  
Steel Wall  
Incite War  
Groffskithur  
Wrench Mind  
Loxodon Warhammer  
Slith Firewalker



Golem-Skin Gauntlets  
Oblivion Stone (foil)

Pause a moment and take in the full enormity of how utterly fantastic that pack is for my deck.

Now my total card pool looks like this (new cards are italicized):

**White:**

Echoing Calm, Stand Firm, Leonin Den-Guard, Loxodon Mender, Skyhunter Cub, Slith Ascendant, *Raise the Alarm*.

**Blue:**

Condescend, Disarm, Early Frost, Echoing Truth, Lumengrid Sentinel, Lumengrid Warden, Neurok Spy, Somber Hoverguard.

**Black:**

Shattered Dreams, Burden of Greed, Blind Creeper, Disciple of the Vault, Dross Crocodile, Grimclaw Bats, Nim Lasher, Wall of Blood, *Wrench Mind*.

**Red:**

Echoing Ruin, Molten Rain, Screaming Fury (foil), Shatter, Shrapnel Blast, Krark-Clan Grunt, Megatog, Ogre Leadfoot, *Electrostatic Bolt*, *Spikeshot Goblin*, *Incite War*, *Slith Firewalker*.

**Green:**

Deconstruct, Journey of Discovery, Stand Together, Fangren Hunter, Tangle Asp, Tel-Jilad Wolf, Viridian Acolyte, Viridian Joiner, *Groffskithur*.

**Artifacts:**

Krark's Thumb, Arcane Spyglass, Bonesplitter, Chimeric Egg, Grafted Wargear, Heartwood Shard, Leonin Scimitar, Lightning Coils, Necrogen Spellbomb, Neurok Stealthsuit, Opaline Bracers, Slagwurm Armor, Sparring Collar, Sunbeam Spellbomb, Sword of Fire and Ice, Talisman of Impulse, Talisman of Indulgence, Talisman of Unity, Tanglebloom, Tooth of Chiss-Goria, Vulshok Battlegear, Vulshok Gauntlets, Aether Spellbomb, *Loxodon Warhammer*, *Golem-Skin Gauntlets*, *Oblivion Stone*.

**Artifact Creatures:**

Arcbound Bruiser, Arcbound Crusher, Drill-Skimmer, Dross Golem, Frogmite, Gold Myr, Iron Myr, Leaden Myr, Myr Quadropod, Ornithopter, Solarion, Spinal Parasite, *Alpha Myr*, *Silver Myr*, *Hematite Golem*, *Pewter Golem*, *Steel Wall*.

**Land:**

Ancient Den, Seat of the Synod, 7 Mountain, 6 Swamp, 6 Plains, 6 Island, 5 Forest.

I couldn't be happier about my *Mirrodin* pack. In white, *Raise the Alarm* is solid and can easily replace *Stand Firm*. In red, the less-than-stellar *Ogre Leadfoot* and *Krark-Clan Grunt* step aside for the very-stellar *Slith Firewalker* and *Spikeshot Goblin* (which now becomes the feature card in the deck). *Hematite Golem* trumps *Quadropod*. The slowness of *Chimeric Egg* and *Lightning Coils* can be replaced by *Electrostatic Bolt* and the ridiculous *Loxodon Warhammer*. Finally, I drop *Arcbound Bruiser* for *Oblivion Stone*. I hem and haw about whether to drop *Leaden Myr* (my one off-color Myr) for *Alpha Myr* since clearly my deck is going to win off pure aggression, but decide that fifteen land and two mana-Myr is too delicate for me to feel comfortable.

In any case, my new decklist looks like this:



doctorjay's Week 2 Sealed Deck (still sexy)		
Main Deck 40 cards		
1 Ancient Den	1 Ornithopter	1 Bonesplitter
8 Mountain	1 Gold Myr	1 Electrostatic Bolt
6 Plains	1 Iron Myr	1 Leonin Scimitar
15 lands	1 Leaden Myr	1 Echoing Ruin
	1 Leonin Den-Guard	1 Raise the Alarm
	1 Slith Firewalker	1 Shatter
	1 Skyhunter Patrol	1 Shrapnel Blast
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	1 Grafted Wargear

1 Slith Ascendant	1 Loxodon Warhammer
1 Arcbound Crusher	1 Oblivion Stone
1 Drill-Skimmer	1 Sword of Fire and Ice
1 Frogmite	
1 Hematite Golem	11 other spells
1 Megatog	
14 creatures	

I should say that it's unusual to have so many cards from a booster pack be relevant to the way you've set up your Week 1 strategy. Usually what happens is that you switch your secondary color, for example, or bend the deck to fit in a rare bomb. This time around, though, I asked the Magic-al gods for **Spikeshot Goblin** and the Magic-al gods saw fit to give me that and a huge bag of chips. Criminey! My rare is even foil! I feel almost dirty.

Predictably, the matches roll along nicely. I win 2-0, 2-0, 2-1, 2-0, then lose my fifth match 0-2. In my second match, my 1800+ ranked opponent tells me that I have the best second-week deck he has ever seen. He then congratulates me on winning the League and says that if I don't, I suck.

So what happened in the last match if my deck is so good? In the first game, I think bad luck just slapped me on the rump. I mulliganed to five, keeping a land-heavy hand and then proceeded to draw only two non-land cards before dying. In the second game, I got him to ten life before his **Auriok Transfixer** and **Loxodon Mystic** lock down my offense while his fliers pick me apart. No worries. It happens. I'm still sitting at nineteen points as I wade into tie-breaker games, which will put me in the top ten or so in the standings.

## Pause. Reflect. Play Standard.

Tomorrow begins Week 3 of my League. If you have advice, either on aspects of Sealed Play I didn't discuss or on cards I should try from my pool, speak up on the Message Boards and I'll see what I can do.

I also wanted to mention that I'm still cruising the Casual Constructed room, playing Standard. When *Fifth Dawn* first hit **Magic Online**, I bought two copies of the [Nuts and Bolts](#) preconstructed decks. Each week, I played the deck and slowly swapped cards out for other cards until I had a stable, fun decklist. You can read about the full process over at StarCity's website, in which I document the changes in a daily blog. I let you know now because it's something I'll probably do again within this column when *Champions of Kamigawa* hits **Magic Online** around November 1st.



If you find me over the next week in Standard games, you can bet this is what I'll be packing:

Cog Elemental		
Standard-legal deck		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
5 Plains	4 Leonin Elder	4 AEther Spellbomb
3 Island	4 Leonin Squire	4 Chromatic Sphere
4 Ancient Den	4 Trinket Mage	2 Thirst for Knowledge
4 Seat of the Synod	4 Auriok Salvagers	2 Salvaging Station
2 Glimmervoid	2 Bringer of the White Dawn	1 Avarice Totem
2 Grand Coliseum		1 Conjuror's Bauble
2 Great Furnace	18 creatures	1 Pyrite Spellbomb
1 Mirrodin's Core		1 Scrabbling Claws
23 lands		1 Sunbeam Spellbomb
		1 Tel-Jilad Stylus
		1 Engineered Explosives
		19 other spells

Don't forget to register your vote in today's handy-dandy poll. As I said, next week I'll continue with a look into the third week of Sealed League, as well as dive into another of **Magic Online**'s formats. Which will you choose? I can't wait to find out and get started!

Excitedly yours,

-j

Find me online:

**doctorjay**<--my MTGO name when playing Leagues or Premier Events

**IntoTheAether**<--my MTGO name when playing any non-prize format

What's the next format you want Jay to play?

"Casual" *Mirrodin* Block

"Casual" Online Extended

- "Casual" Standard
- Emperor
- Multiplayer 3-6
- Open format
- Prismatic
- Singleton
- Teams 2 vs 2
- Teams 3 vs 3
- Tribal Wars
- Three-Headed Giant
- Two-Headed Giant

\* In the eleventh hour, Scott Johns and I were still without a name for the column. We brainstormed. We enlisted help (including from someone who, it's rumored, used to write for Roseanne). We came up with a lot of truly awful names. Just be thankful that cooler heads prevailed to prevent names like "JayEmEss Tome," "Kicks with Tix" and "Logging Play" from seeing print.



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