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IntoTheAether Invites You

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Into the Aether
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Today marks the final day of my *Mirrodin* Block Sealed League journey. As you'll recall from the previous two weeks, I opened a fairly abusive set of initial cards, followed by an absolutely ridiculous pack of *Mirrodin*. The booster pack of *Darksteel* brought me back to a sense of reality, and I ended the third week in eighth place out of two-hundred-fifty-six.

Also as a reminder, here was my eventual decklist from last week:

doctorjay's Other Week 3 Sealed Deck

Main Deck 40 cards		
1 Ancient Den 8 Mountain 6 Plains <hr/> 15 lands	1 Arcbound Worker 1 Iron Myr 1 Gold Myr 1 Leonin Den-Guard 1 Pteron Ghost 1 Krark-Clan Grunt 1 Spikeshot Goblin 1 Skyhunter Cub 1 Slith Ascendant 1 Arcbound Crusher 1 Arcbound Hybrid 1 Drill-Skimmer 1 Frogmite 1 Hematite Golem 1 Megatog <hr/> 15 creatures	1 Bonesplitter 1 Electrostatic Bolt 1 Raise the Alarm 1 Shatter 1 Shrapnel Blast 1 Echoing Ruin 1 Oblivion Stone 1 Grafted Wargear 1 Loxodon Warhammer 1 Sword of Fire and Ice <hr/> 10 other spells

Some folks have written to tell me that, based on my cardpool, red/blue is a better idea than red/white. That may be so, but I tried it out for two games and didn't like it. Color me stubborn, I guess.

In any case, it's comforting to know that as long as I play my five matches for the week I'm pretty much guaranteed a prize from this League experience. The prize structure for Sealed Leagues ranges from nine booster packs of each set (*Mirrodin*, *Darksteel*, *Fifth Dawn*) for first, all the way down to one *Fifth Dawn* booster for places sixty-five through one-hundred-twenty-eight. If you've got *Magic Online* installed, go [here](#) to see the full prize breakdown. The fact that prizes dive so deep into the standings is one of the things I like about League play. Even if I've had a pretty mediocre win-loss percentage, it's nice to get a pat on the back for a month of dedicated games.

In the final week of the League, as you've probably guessed from my first two articles, everyone opens a *Fifth Dawn* booster to add to their now-impressive cardpool. Once again, I'm hanging my hopes on good red, white, equipment, and artifact creature cards. At the very least, I'm hoping for a pack more like the second week than the third. Dang you, *Darksteel*!

Here is what I open:

- Battered Golem
- Sylvok Explorer
- Fleshgrafter
- Cranial Plating
- Loxodon Anchorite
- Krark-Clan Ogre
- Thermal Navigator
- Early Frost
- Baton of Courage
- Abuna's Chant
- Fill with Fright
- Vanquish
- Grinding Station
- Qumulox
- Bringer of the Blue Dawn



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Two early reactions: First, I sure manage to pull a lot of cool rares (my booster packs for the past three weeks have been a foil *Oblivion Stone*, *Darksteel Colossus*, and now *Bringer of the Blue Dawn*). Second, it's getting harder and harder to justify my red/white configuration over red/blue. It's almost as if the blue cards are a sign from the Aether Gods, since the Bringers are my favorite cards from Fifth Dawn and I recently played a deck centered around *Qumulox*. Then again, it's a sign I'm going to ignore. Aether Gods: "Phhh."

My final cardpool is as follows (new cards italicized):

White:

Echoing Calm, Stand Firm, Leonin Den-Guard, Loxodon Mender, Skyhunter Cub, Slith Ascendent, Raise the Alarm, Hallow, Pteron Ghost, *Abuna's Chant*, *Loxodon Anchorite*, *Vanquish*.

Blue:

Condescend, Disarm, Early Frost, Echoing Truth, Lumengrid Sentinel, Lumengrid Warden, Neurok Spy, Sombre Hoverguard, Hoverguard Observer, Vedalken Engineer, *Early Frost*, *Bringer of the Blue Dawn*, *Qumulox*.

Black:

Shattered Dreams, Burden of Greed, Blind Creeper, Disciple of the Vault, Dross Crocodile, Grimclaw Bats, Nim Lasher, Wall of Blood, Wrench Mind, Echoing Decay, Burden of Greed, *Fill with Fright*, *Fleshgrafter*.

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, *Krark-Clan Ogre*.

Green:

Deconstruct, Journey of Discovery, Stand Together, Fangren Hunter, Tangle Asp, Tel-Jilad Wolf, Viridian Acolyte, Viridian Joiner, Groffskithur, Reap and Sow, Echoing Courage, *Sylvok Explorer*.

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, Genesis Chamber, Talon of Pain, *Baton of Courage*, *Cranial Plating*, *Grinding Station*.

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, Arcbound Hybrid, Arcbound Worker, Myr Moonvessel, Spire Golem, *Battered Golem*, *Thermal Navigator*.

Land:

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

The good news for my deck as it stands now is that *Cranial Plating* and *Loxodon Anchorite* can easily slip into the deck. After that I'm a bit more mixed in my reaction, though you could make good arguments for *Battered Golem*, *Vanquish*, and *Baton of Courage*. What I decide after some rumination is to include the *Plating*, *Anchorite*, *Vanquish*, and *Golem* by dropping *Raise the Alarm*, *Krark-Clan Grunt*, *Arcbound Hybrid*, and *Bonesplitter*. The right call? Let a Limited expert tell you. I'm mostly basing my decision on what has really helped me in previous League games. The *Loxodon Anchorite* runs a little counter to the aggressive nature of my deck, but it's been so annoying when my opponents use him that I want a try too.

Here's the deck, at least initially:



doctorjay's Early Week 4 Sealed Deck		
Main Deck 40 cards		
1 Ancient Den	1 Arcbound Worker	1 Electrostatic Bolt
8 Mountain	1 Iron Myr	1 Cranial Plating
6 Plains	1 Gold Myr	1 Shatter
15 lands	1 Leonin Den-Guard	1 Shrapnel Blast
	1 Pteron Ghost	1 Echoing Ruin
	1 Battered Golem	1 Oblivion Stone
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	1 Grafted Wargear
	1 Skyhunter Cub	1 Loxodon Warhammer
	1 Slith Ascendant	1 Sword of Fire and Ice
	1 Arcbound Crusher	1 Vanquish
	1 Drill-Skimmer	
	1 Frogmite	10 other spells
	1 Hematite Golem	

1 Loxodon Anchorite
1 Megatog

15 creatures

So how goes my final week's matches? I win the first two easily, both 2-0, with an aggressive rush. Then I run into one of the other top decks in the League and get smashed 0-2. In both games I had a slow start and he had Arc Slogger to wreck my slow start. It was brutal and not very pretty either. I then vindicate myself slightly by beating another of the top decks 2-0, each time getting out to a blazing start with **Arcbound Worker** and equipment. I make a tiny modification to the deck before my final match, dropping **Vanquish** for **Arcbound Hybrid**. More artifacts are good, more creatures are good, and I've loved the modular mechanic in my deck so far.

My last match is dramatic, in that we each win one of the first two games and head for a third. We're at a bit of stalemate when my son, who has been home sick, wakes up prematurely from his nap. I play the remaining rounds with a cranky, snuffling kid in my lap and win the match 2-1. Actually, my son Jonah was a trooper during that final game, and I let him press the buttons every now and again to keep him entertained. Too much information? Probably. Anyway, that puts me at 4-1 for the week, 37 points and 41 tie-breaker points.

But lo! Now I have a big, fun pool of cards with which to tinker. I try this deck, since it seems the most obvious other configuration:

doctorjay's Week 4 Purple Sealed Deck

Main Deck
40 cards

1 Seat of the Synod	1 Iron Myr	1 Electrostatic Bolt
8 Island	1 Silver Myr	1 Cranial Plating
6 Mountain	1 Vedalken Engineer	1 Echoing Ruin
15 lands	1 Lumengrid Sentinel	1 Echoing Truth
	1 Neurok Spy	1 Shatter
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	1 Shrapnel Blast
	1 Arcbound Crusher	1 Oblivion Stone
	1 Drill-Skimmer	1 Grafted Wargear
	1 Frogmite	1 Loxodon Warhammer
	1 Hoverguard Observer	1 Sword of Fire and Ice
	1 Spire Golem	10 other spells
	1 Somber Hoverguard	
	1 Megatog	
	1 Qumulox	
	1 Bringer of the Blue Dawn	
	15 creatures	

Then this deck, because I want to try and get all three of my big fatties into play:

doctorjay's Week 4 Fattie Sealed Deck

Main Deck
39 cards

1 Seat of the Synod	1 Gold Myr	1 Cranial Plating
8 Forest	1 Iron Myr	1 Baton of Courage
2 Island	1 Silver Myr	1 Oblivion Stone
2 Mountain	1 Sylvok Explorer	1 Loxodon Warhammer
1 Plains	1 Tangle Asp	1 Sword of Fire and Ice
1 Swamp	1 Vedalken Engineer	1 Deconstruct
15 lands	1 Neurok Spy	1 Journey of Discovery
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	1 Opaline Bracers
	1 Viridian Joiner	1 Reap and Sow
	1 Arcbound Crusher	9 other spells
	1 Fangren Hunter	
	1 Somber Hoverguard	
	1 Solarion	
	1 Bringer of the Blue Dawn	
	1 Darksteel Colossus	
	15 creatures	

Then this deck, because poor black is getting ignored:

doctorjay's Week 4 Evil Deck

Main Deck
40 cards

8 Mountain	1 Disciple of the Vault	1 Electrostatic Bolt
7 Swamp	1 Iron Myr	1 Cranial Plating
15 lands	1 Leaden Myr	1 Echoing Decay
	1 Grimclaw Bats	1 Echoing Ruin
	1 Battered Golem	1 Shatter
	1 Fleshgrafter	1 Shrapnel Blast
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	1 Grafted Wargear
	1 Arcbound Crusher	1 Loxodon Warhammer
	1 Arcbound Hybrid	1 Oblivion Stone
	1 Drill-Skimmer	1 Sword of Fire and Ice
	1 Frogmite	10 other spells
	1 Hematite Golem	
	1 Dross Golem	
	1 Pewter Golem	
	1 Megatog	
15 creatures		

And finally this deck, to signal the end of the Olympics or something:

doctorjay's Week 4 U.S.A. Deck		
Main Deck		
40 cards		
1 Ancient Den	1 Gold Myr	1 Electrostatic Bolt
1 Seat of the Synod	1 Iron Myr	1 Cranial Plating
5 Island	1 Silver Myr	1 Echoing Ruin
4 Plains	1 Leonin Den-Guard	1 Shatter
4 Mountain	1 Pteron Ghost	1 Oblivion Stone
15 lands	1 Lumengrid Sentinel	1 Grafted Wargear
	1 Neurok Spy	1 Loxodon Warhammer
	1 Skyhunter Cub	1 Sword of Fire and Ice
	1 Spikeshot Goblin	8 other spells
	1 Slith Ascendant	
	1 Arcbound Crusher	
	1 Drill-Skimmer	
	1 Loxodon Anchorite	
	1 Hoverguard Observer	
	1 Spire Golem	
	1 Qumulox	
	1 Bringer of the Blue Dawn	
17 creatures		

All of these decks meet with varying levels of success, though I'm not sure I like any of them better than the red/white deck I played during my "official" matches. As you can tell, though, I love tie-breaker games!

If you want, check out League #409462 tomorrow to see where I end up placing. By the time I'm submitting this article, Argvian has a shot at going an impressive 20-0 in his matches, while others like DougTice and the governor are already assured of finishing at the top of the standings. Congrats to all who played in the League and had fun. I'll be seeing you all again for Kamigawa Sealed League, I'm sure.

Back to a world of Constructed...

Get Ready for Prismatic

In [last week's poll](#), I asked you to pick a *Fifth Dawn* rare to include in my Prismatic deck. Here are the results:

Pick a Fifth Dawn rare. Jay will build his deck with four copies of the rare. Promise.		
Door to Nothingness	1009	9.4%
Cosmic Larva	483	4.5%
Vedalken Orrery	445	4.1%
Possessed Portal	440	4.1%
Raksha Golden Cub	407	3.8%
Eon Hub	375	3.5%
Blinkmoth Infusion	348	3.2%
Desecration Elemental	321	3.0%
Crucible of Worlds	296	2.7%
Razormane Masticore	283	2.6%
Helm of Kaldra	274	2.5%

Vedalken Shackles	270	2.5%
Spectral Shift	264	2.4%
Beacon of Tomorrows	263	2.4%
All Suns Dawn	257	2.4%
Ion Storm	251	2.3%
Doubling Cube	249	2.3%
Solarion	242	2.2%
Tornado Elemental	242	2.2%
Mephidross Vampire	219	2.0%
Staff of Domination	211	2.0%
Summoner's Egg	198	1.8%
Reversal of Fortune	191	1.8%
Mycosynth Golem	191	1.8%
Fist of Suns	188	1.7%
Suncrusher	177	1.6%
Endless Whispers	177	1.6%
Silent Arbiter	163	1.5%
Beacon of Immortality	147	1.4%
Beacon of Creation	136	1.3%
Auriok Champion	126	1.2%
Rude Awakening	123	1.1%
Bringer of the Black Dawn	119	1.1%
Acquire	118	1.1%
Beacon of Unrest	115	1.1%
Plunge into Darkness	114	1.1%
Clearwater Goblet	109	1.0%
Artificer's Intuition	103	1.0%
Bringer of the Red Dawn	102	0.9%
Rite of Passage	93	0.9%
Joiner Adept	92	0.9%
Bringer of the White Dawn	83	0.8%
Bringer of the Green Dawn	73	0.7%
Engineered Explosives	70	0.6%
Summoning Station	68	0.6%
Magma Giant	64	0.6%
Retaliate	62	0.6%
Salvaging Station	62	0.6%
Beacon of Destruction	60	0.6%
Roar of Reclamation	58	0.5%
Hoverguard Sweepers	53	0.5%
Granulate	53	0.5%
Moriok Rigger	51	0.5%
Bringer of the Blue Dawn	50	0.5%
Auriok Windwalker	49	0.5%
Total	10787	100.0%

It looks like **Door to Nothingness** gets the clear nod in my deck. I will be making a 250-card, five-color Door to Nothingness deck.

Part of me, I must admit, is slightly disappointed. I mean, Door to Nothingness is cool, but it's just so *obvious* in a deck forced to dip into all five colors. You picked it, though, and that means the idea of winning with **Door to Nothingness** makes you smile. As a result, next week expect me to really push the Door idea, and to do so without a **Fabricate** or **Diabolic Tutor** in sight. You have been warned.

In the meantime there are two things you can do to prepare yourself for next week. First, read any and all of [Doug Beyer's articles](#) on Prismatic. They're good and good for you. Second, brainstorm how *you* would make a Prismatic Door to Nothingness deck for this format and post your ideas on the Message Boards.

For example, here's an early question to tackle: If I really want to win with the Door, how many creatures do I use? None, cutting myself off from Prismatic powerhouses like **Bringer of the Black Dawn**, **Eternal Witness**, and **Krosan Tusker**, but ensuring that I won't "accidentally" win via creature damage? A hand-selected few of the obviously good creatures, exposing those creatures to whatever creature elimination my opponents use? A pack of Walls, which can't attack but can help me survive to Door-induced victory? A pack of defensive-minded Clerics? Chime in, because in my early thinking the creature-count is a place where many potential deck ideas diverge. My mind is already flooded with ideas.

Hey Bucko! What Happened to Emperor?

[Last week](#) I said I was going to write a two-part series on Online Emperor, the first part focused on "flanker" decks and the second focused on "emperor" decks. However, two things conspired to delay my discussion of Online Emperor and eventually change it altogether.

First, I had a lot less computer time than usual last week. I traveled cross-country to a friend's wedding for part of the week and, as I mentioned earlier, my son stayed home from preschool sick for the other part. Like a moron, I also spilled water on my laptop. Right now my laptop is fixed, my son better, and I have no more travel until the holidays, but last week was a brutal, chaotic morass for **Magic**-playing in general and article-writing in particular.

Second, a lot of people seem to truly dislike Online Emperor as it is currently played. There's a bunch of folks who like it--and these people like it a lot--but the majority of posts on the Message Boards and e-mail I received expressed strong negative feelings for an Emperor format in which all spells have a one-player range (called 1-1-1 online... more on this later) with its current "unspoken" banned list. What particularly caught my eye was the high number of new players who wrote to say that Online Emperor was a format they would definitely never try. Contrast this with Sealed Leagues, where new players expressed a lot of excitement to jump right in and get started once I had described my own experience.

The gripes about Online Extended, at least with the 1-1-1 format that dominates the Multiplayer room, seem to be (in no particular order):

- It's stagnant, since a small pool of cards are used by almost all players while a large pool of cards are actively kept out of the format by its participants. Moreover, there seems to not only be a "preferred" way to build decks, but a fairly "required" way.
- It's expensive, since this small pool of cards is predominantly rare, and rare-heavy decks are the only ones that thrive.
- It's unfriendly to newcomers, since the subculture of players actively boots out people who don't play by their rules.
- It's random, since games are most often decided by which emperor can "go off" combo-style to enable a single flanker to win in one fatal attack. Extremists go so far as to say that whichever team casts **New Frontiers** first wins.

Proponents of the 1-1-1 Online Emperor format say that it speaks to the power gamer in us. What happens in each game is crazy, but in a good kind of way. It's a skill-intensive format that requires an enormous amount of teamwork to play correctly. It's comforting, they say, to have clearly prescribed rules and predictability in what you'll face. They argue that deck diversity does exist and that you can make a "budget" flanker deck using, for example, **Elves** or **Beasts**.

What's clear is that the people who currently play Online Emperor are nuts about it and that the people who don't play Online Emperor seem to, on the whole, think Emperor players are nuts. It's also clear to me that the "boo hiss" population is a lot bigger than the "woo hoo" population when it comes to the format.

Although I think the criticism has merit, I actually don't mind 1-1-1 Emperor. I can see the power-gamer appeal and think it will be fun for me every now and again to jump in with the big dogs and try to keep up. I've gotten some awfully nice e-mail from 1-1-1 enthusiasts giving me tips for play, and those tips will undoubtedly make it into an article at some point. During the game I documented last week, I was actually impressed and amazed with what the opposing emperor was able to pull off when killing me. Which is all to say that as an Emperor variant, 1-1-1 is interesting to me if for no other reason because it is so different than the **Magic** I know.

The only thing that really bothers me is the fact that 1-1-1 is the only game in town.

Online Emperor actually allows you a ridiculous number of options when starting a game. The "1-1-1" that people talk about stands for a) the range that players can use to target spells or abilities on the stack, b) maximum spell range, and c) the range of global effects. All of these are *variables*. **Magic Online** begs you to mess around with different configurations and try them out. People can play 1/1/1, 1/1/3, 3/1/3, 2/2/3, 3/2/3, 2/2/2, and 3/3/3, each of which offers its own unique challenges. You can also play with a Block or Standard cardpool if you want. Sometime long ago, it seems, 1-1-1 Extended became not only the preferred way of playing Emperor but also the only tolerated way.

Well that's no fun.

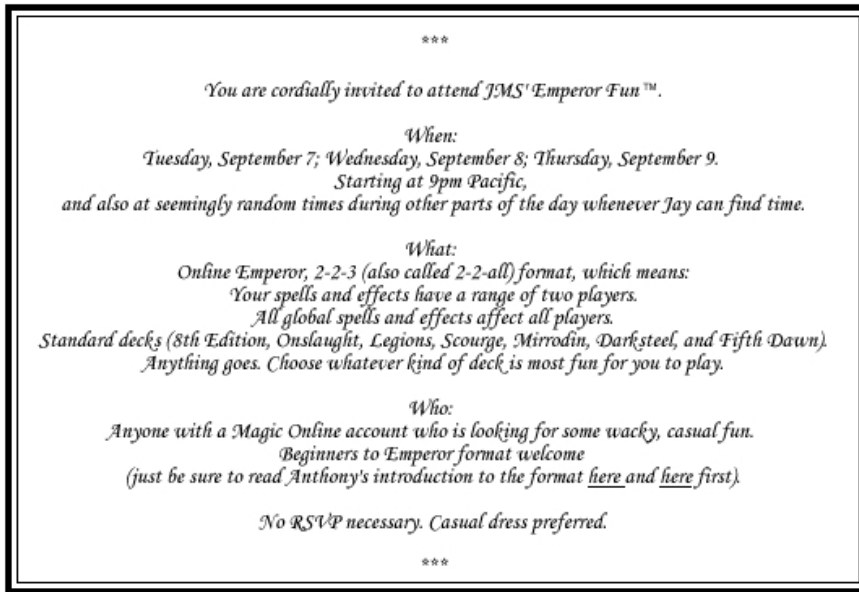
Come One. Come All. Play Emperor.

The reason it's so easy to keep Online Emperor locked into 1-1-1 using an Extended cardpool is because you need six people to agree to try something different. For most people that's a serious hurdle to overcome, but I



have the luxury of this little weekly column thingy. I get access to all of you fine readers who have **Magic Online** accounts and who, hopefully, share some of my enthusiasm for experimentation. So let's experiment!

I want you to pretend for a moment that you just received this e-mail in your inbox:



Don't like the 2-2-3 or Standard cardpool? No problem! Show up and advertise your own variant of Emperor for others to join. I may even try out your variant if I'm having a hard time populating my own. Whatever the case, the hope is for me to find enough non-1-1-1 games to write about next week. Come and join me. Let's stuff the Multiplayer room with Emperor wackiness, if only for a few days.

For those people who've written to ask if I'll be running Deck Challenges as I did during my House of Cards days, consider this Challenge #1. Design a bizarre emperor, flanker, or just basic multiplayer deck and have at it. Let's see what you all can do to impress me with your depraved minds. This time, though, don't e-mail me your decklist; Show up and play!

Here's hoping for a fun week,

-j



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