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Monday, September 20, 2004

This week's Limited Information will be discussing the draft pick that I previewed last week. As you all read this you may well have just spent the weekend at a *Champions of Kamigawa* pre-release. Hopefully I will have done the same as I'm in exactly the same situation as the rest of you – I don't get access to the set in advance just because I happen to write an occasional article for Wizards (much to my disappointment I might add!). As a result I won't be talking about *Champions* until I've seen the set and had a chance to play with the cards myself. This article will still be the last *Mirrodin* block draft pick I cover as *Champions* takes over from that block very soon but I just wanted to let you all know where we stood with regard to the introduction of the new set. If you have any suggestions as to the sort of article(s) you'd like to see covering the limited side of *Champions of Kamigawa* then please let me know via the message boards or the e-mail link at the bottom of this article.

Anyway, back to this week's topic. The situation was that you were opening up your *Fifth Dawn* booster in a *Mirrodin-Darksteel-Fifth Dawn* booster draft. Throughout *Mirrodin* and *Darksteel* you'd managed to accumulate the following playable cards:

Alpha Myr
Copper Myr
Vedalken Engineer
Arcbound Ravager
Arcbound Stinger
Neurok Familiar
Grimclaw Bats
Neurok Spy
Neurok Transmuter
Leonin Battlemage
Moriok Scavenger
Clockwork Condor
Dross Golem
Somber Hoverguard
Tree of Tales
Annul
AEther Vial
Pyrite Spellbomb
Leonin Scimitar
Irradiate
Darksteel Ingot
Dismantle
Consume Spirit

Upon opening your *Fifth Dawn* pack you found yourself with the following cards to select your first pick from:





Creature — Human Rogue

Whenever an artifact is put into a graveyard from play, you may put a +1/+1 counter on Moriok Rigger.

The Moriok scavenge for weapons, for armor, for food—and ultimately for their souls.

Wayne England

2/2



Instant

Destroy target artifact.

Scri 2 (Look at the top two cards of your library. Put any number of them on the bottom of your library and the rest on top in any order.)

Alex Chaitkin



Instant

Destroy target blocking creature.

"All beings have an inner light. Let me show you yours."

—Ushanti, leomin seer

Carl Critchlow



Artifact

☉, Sacrifice an artifact: Target player puts the top three cards of his or her library into his or her graveyard.

Whenever an artifact comes into play, you may untap Grinding Station.

Gregory Slayton



Creature — Human Warrior

Discard an artifact card from your hand: Fleshgrafter gets +2/+2 until end of turn.

Necrogen enflames certain emotional centers in the Moriok's brains: hate, aggression, and especially greed.

Jim Murray

2/2



Artifact Creature

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

Flying

As the dawns break, the manta soars.

Christopher Hunter

0/0



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.

Mark A. Nelson

2/2



Artifact — Equipment

Equipped creature has first strike.

☉☉: Attach Sparring Collar to target creature you control.

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

Christopher Hunter



Artifact Creature

When Anodet Lurker is put into a graveyard from play, you gain 3 life.

These machines build fearsome visages out of scrap metal to scare off predators who would otherwise be eager to consume them.

Jeff Easley

3/3



Creature — Troll Shaman

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

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

John Schone

3/2



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.

Mark Jones

1/1



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.)

Adam Beck



Which card should you draft?

Well there's quite a selection there for you. There are at least seven cards that would easily make the cut into your main deck and there are several powerful cards that would definitely be worthy of a first pick. The question is which one is the one to go for?

Thinning the field

Before discussing the more powerful cards it's worth eliminating the weaker ones first. At this point in time you should all have plenty of experience of the power level of the various cards in this set so I won't dwell too long here.

Sparring Collar, Tel-Jilad Lifebreather and Vicious Betrayal are more-or-less unplayable in every circumstance. Their effects are either too weak or they are drastically over-costed for a limited format. Whatever the reason, you certainly wouldn't play any of these in this deck.

Anodet Lurker is a card that can sometimes make the cut if you are really short on creatures but you want to avoid paying five mana for a 3/3 creature unless the ability is really good. The possibility of gaining three life should the Lurker die is not a great ability unfortunately and the Lurker isn't a high pick as a result. There's a lot of power in this pack so there's no need to select the Lurker.

Vanquish is a situational removal spell but again it's one that can make the cut into your deck if you're short on quality cards. The reason it's not highly valued is simply because it doesn't deal with creatures that are attacking you. If you're taking repeated hits from a Neurok Spy or Skyhunter Patrol then Vanquish isn't going to help you get out of that situation. It's decent but not that powerful and it shouldn't be picked here as a result.

The last card that I don't consider playable is Grinding Station but unfortunately this is a card that I often see being played in Limited formats. The milling effect it gives would be nice **IF** you didn't have to sacrifice an artifact to get it. One thing to realise is that milling cards from an opponent's library doesn't do anything unless you manage to mill *all* of them. It doesn't matter whether your opponent beats you with 20 cards left in their library or with just one card left, it still counts as a victory all the same. A lot of people think that they are denying an opponent spells by milling them into the graveyard but this isn't really true. Your opponent's spells are randomly distributed through-out their deck and if your opponent's best spells are in the bottom half of their deck then all your milling does is increase the chances they'll be able to draw them!

Most limited matches take around ten turns or so. With the initial seven cards they draw and an extra card drawn every turn that still means they've only drawn seventeen cards and on average will have a library containing more than 20 cards at the end of the game. For Grinding Station to win you the

game you'll have to sacrifice seven artifacts to it and that just isn't something you'll be in a position to do in the vast majority of limited games. Grinding Station wasn't designed as a limited card and it's something you should normally be leaving in your sideboard should you happen to pick it up in a draft.

Good but not needed

There are several cards in this pack that are good, but that just aren't useful in this deck for various reasons.



Stasis Cocoon is the first example. It definitely has a lot more going for it that Vanquish does but it's not necessarily a card

you might want to consider splashing for. This deck may well have a white splash as there's a Darksteel Ingot already and the Leonin Battlemage would make a good addition. Despite that there's a much better alternative in the Tel-Jilad Justice present in the pack. It deals with artifacts too but it's obviously a better card due to the Instant speed and the Scry ability. On top of this green is much easier to splash as there is a Copper Myr as well as a Tree of Tales that could be fetched by any Trinket Mages you may get passed. Stasis Cocoon is removed from consideration solely because Tel-Jilad Justice is the better choice.

Vulshok Sorcerer has to be dropped simply due to its casting cost. It's an excellent card and although this deck may splash red for Dismantle it still won't be able to generate the double-red mana needed to cast the Sorcerer with any sort of consistency. The Sorcerer is an excellent card, but not for this deck.

Fleshgrafter and Pentad Prism can be lumped together as they're both very playable and would both be fine additions to this deck but unfortunately they just don't have the power of some of the other cards in this pack. If you were lucky you might get one of these two when the pack comes back around to you but for a first pick these two should be passed up in favour of the more powerful cards in the pack.

The main contenders

That leaves the following five cards to choose from.

Moriok Rigger
Tel-Jilad Justice
Skyreach Manta
Trinket Mage
Cranial Plating

All of these cards are powerful and all of them would be fine first picks for this deck. Some of them outshine the others though so it's time to find out which those are and why.

Trinket Mage is probably the least powerful of this selection for this particular deck. Trinket Mage is an excellent card and you'll almost always have something that it will fetch but its power is obviously dependant upon the targets you have for it. In this deck there are four candidates right now: AEther Vial, Pyrite Spellbomb, Leonin Scimitar and Tree of Tales. AEther Vial may well not make the cut in the deck and if you didn't end up splashing red then the Spellbomb might not make it in either. Unfortunately neither Tree of Tales nor Leonin Scimitar are particularly exciting and certainly not up to the power level of the best targets like Leonin Bola and Viridian Longbow. Trinket Mage would be nice here if you went a Sunburst route as it can fetch an off-colour land but you don't yet know whether you'll be relying on multiple Sunburst cards. If there were more green cards that warranted splashing then the Trinket Mage would be more heavily favoured also but in this deck the possible splashes are more likely to be red and/or white.



The second card to get cut here would be the Skyreach Manta. The mana base for this deck supports the Manta fairly well as there's a Copper Myr, the Tree of Tales, a Vedalken Engineer and a Darksteel Ingot that can all provide sources of off-colour mana. Four sources are enough to believe that the Manta would be a 3/3 fairly regularly but that's by no means guaranteed. In addition to that the chances of it being any larger than a 3/3 are fairly slim unless you can pick up a Pentad Prism or two later on. That's a distinct possibility of course but again, you have no assurances that you'll get a Prism passed to you as they're typically drafted fairly highly (I would go so far as to say they're slightly over-valued right now but that's a topic for another column). Under the worst circumstances you might not be able to get the Manta any larger than a 2/2 in this deck and the other cards that are still to be discussed are at least as powerful as the Manta and are not as reliant on the rest of your *Fifth Dawn* packs coughing up the appropriate support cards that the Manta really needs.



Tel-Jilad Justice is another card that is very powerful in this format. The power of the Scry ability should not be overlooked as it's the addition of that ability to this card that makes it a lot better than its red cousin, Shatter. The Scry ability is often equivalent to drawing a card as you're able to remove an un-needed land-draw from the top of your deck, getting you closer to your next spell. The Justice is definitely splashable too and especially so in this deck as you have several cards that support the splash. Copper Myr and Darksteel Ingot both help out and you'll probably play the Tree of Tales regardless due to its synergy with the Ravager, the Hoverguard and the Irradiate. That's three sources, which is easily sufficient for a single splashed card.

Despite that you already have two other powerful splash cards in Dismantle and Leonin Battlemage. Although those two aren't supported as well as the Justice could be you may wish to splash a third colour to help out any Sunburst cards you pick up later in the draft. Taking the Justice here basically means you'll be forced to discount those two cards as this isn't really a deck that would easily support two splash colours. On top of that there are two cards that are on colour and that hold just as much power as the Justice does in this particular deck. Moriok Rigger and Cranial Plating are both excellent in this deck and arguably stand a much better chance of influencing the outcome of a game than Tel-Jilad Justice does. Taking either of

those two cards leaves your colour options open whilst still giving you an exceptional card for your deck. It's for that reason that my preference would be to take one of those two cards over the Justice.

Before I get down to my reasoning on the final two cards I'm going to take a second to include a few opinions from some other experienced players.

Kai Budde: For me it comes down to Moriok Rigger, Skyreach Manta and Cranial Plating. Trinket Mage and Tel-Jilad Justice are both options. The Justice obviously becomes a lot better if you manage to pick up another Trinket Mage later on, due to the Tree of Tales. Both Leonin Battlemage and Dismantle are superior cards to Justice though and while five colours are possible, I'd rather not go that way. Trinket Mage is just mediocre in this deck with only one really good target so that eliminates that. The Manta seems powerful as I would probably end up running one Mountain and one Plains for the Battlemage and Dismantle. Cranial Plating is overrated in my opinion. A lot of the time it's just a better version of Bonesplitter and I hate that card in non-white decks. Having access to black mana obviously makes the Plating much better, but still I don't think it's as good as the other two cards.

My pick would be Moriok Rigger. The Manta could potentially be a 2/2 and it still costs five to cast. I haven't played a lot with the Rigger, but whenever I've seen it in play, it was amazing. The deck already has one Spellbomb and the Ravager to go with it and maybe other baubles will join the team, which all improve the power of the Rigger.

Ken Krouner: This is the toughest limited information yet. The cards it breaks down to are Moriok Rigger, Cranial Plating, Skyreach Manta, Tel-Jilad Justice, and Trinket Mage. These are the best cards that could conceivably make the cut in this pack.

I am going to eliminate the Mage right away since the targets we have so far aren't that appealing. It may be nice to search up the Tree of Tales, but more than likely he will be a Grey Ogre.

Manta and Justice put us firmly into multi-color. This strategy is solid, but we have an opportunity to draft a great aggressive deck by taking the Rigger or the Plating.

I think the Plating wins here in a VERY close call. You have a lot of evasion and a lot of Artifacts so despite the synergy Rigger has with the deck I am going to give the nod to Cranial Plating.

Jeroen Remie: I'd pick the Cranial Plating. Your deck has a lot of evasion guys, but not a lot of power at all. Plating fits perfectly into that kind of deck as it can give your creatures some serious additional power. The deck also needs a bunch more artifacts to get its theme off the ground (Hoverguard, Familiar, etc) and that helps. The other cards you could consider: Manta: You don't want to make the extra commitment to be assured of an extra fat body. It's ok as a 3/3, but not of the same value as the Plating.

The Rigger is a very good creature, but your deck doesn't have enough artifacts just yet, and is often only really good on early turns, whereas Plating is also good later in the game. Justice and Cocoon don't warrant the extra colour troubles for me and aren't really considered. The Plating is the pick for me.

Victor Van Den Broek: Since you're mostly blue/black, and have some evasion creatures already, I'd pick Cranial Plating here. It's aggressive, fits in with the deck so far, and hardly ever a dead draw. Other options would be Moriok Rigger, Manta and the

Trinket Mage. Out of these, I'd be most tempted towards the Manta, as you have an Engineer, Copper Myr, Tree of Tales and an Ingot to power it up. However, I think the speed boost that Plating gives is a better fit for this deck.

Plating edges it three to one amongst these Pros but I can't say I disagree with any of their sentiments. I agree with Ken in that this one is a VERY close call. It's interesting to see the differing opinions the players have of the Plating. All three acknowledge the power of the Rigger but opinions differ much more when it comes to the Plating.

Kai states that he believes the Plating to be over-rated and I think there may be some truth in that. A card like Cranial Plating often gets over-valued when it makes a big impact in constructed formats as players who are primarily constructed players witness how ridiculous it can be in decks like Affinity and they tend to have a slightly higher opinion of the card as a result.

That's the Pro's opinions but did you guys go along with that? The results from the poll last week shaped up as follows:

Which card should you draft?		
Cranial Plating	5072	44.0%
Moriok Rigger	2855	24.8%
Tel-Jilad Justice	857	7.4%
Vulshok Sorcerer	547	4.7%
Pentad Prism	501	4.3%
Trinket Mage	415	3.6%
Skyreach Manta	375	3.3%
Grinding Station	253	2.2%
Vanquish	149	1.3%
Stasis Cocoon	134	1.2%
Fleshgrafter	121	1.0%
Vicious Betrayal	77	0.7%
Tel-Jilad Lifebreather	75	0.7%
Anodet Lurker	61	0.5%
Sparring Collar	38	0.3%
Total	11530	100.0%

Very similar to the Pro opinion with Rigger and Plating very far ahead of the rest. It's nice to see both of those getting such a high number of votes. I remember when this set was first released, and many polls had the votes spread out over a much greater number of the cards. No doubt everyone is getting more experienced with the set now and that definitely shows in the results to this poll.



So it's clear that the pick here comes down to Plating vs Rigger. There's no arguing that the Plating can provide an awful lot of power for its cost but that's only really useful when you can use that to hurt your opponent. In a deck without much evasion or in a deck that is even slightly defensive the power of the Plating will be reduced quite significantly.

In the deck you have here though I wouldn't anticipate that being a problem. This deck is quite aggressive with plenty of early drops and it a lot of evasion. Arcbound Stinger, Neurok Familiar, Grimclaw Bats, Neurok Spy, Clockwork Condor, Dross Golem and Somber Hoverguard will all probably make the cut to the main deck and they're all capable of coming out early. This deck is also looking like it will have a good number of artifacts amongst its spells, which further enhances the Plating. The final icing on the cake is the access to black mana that this deck will undoubtedly have. That's a very small addition but not one that should be over-looked. I've played several games with Cranial Plating where the final damage I needed to kill an opponent was only achieved due to having a creature overlap and thus being able to move the Plating to the unblocked creature after blockers had been declared.

Basically, Cranial Plating is a powerful card and this is just the sort of deck that suits it. A white deck with Glaivemasters and Cubs might be preferable but there's no doubt that the Plating shines here.

The only remaining alternative to Cranial Plating is the final choice: Moriok Rigger. Like the Plating this is another card that has been making an impact in the constructed scene as it often finds its home in the sideboards of block-constructed Affinity decks. There's no doubt that it's a truly powerful card, as it can easily grow to a very large size if not dealt with quickly. This deck also has an Arcbound Ravager and a Spellbomb as Kai mentioned and there's a good chance that you'll be able to pick some Wayfarer's or Conjuror's Baubles in the remaining Fifth Dawn packs. You can also use your Transmuter to turn any soon-to-be-dead creatures into artifacts once you know they'll be heading to a graveyard.

One of the things that the Rigger has going against it is that it isn't an artifact itself. This deck has a fairly heavy artifact theme with the Engineer, Ravager, Hoverguard, Irradiate and Familiar all working better with a higher number of artifacts in the deck. If we examine the cards that will definitely make the cut you can see that there's not as many as you might like:

- Copper Myr
- Vedalken Engineer
- Arcbound Ravager
- Arcbound Stinger
- Grimclaw Bats
- Neurok Spy
- Neurok Transmuter
- Moriok Scavenger
- Dross Golem

Somber Hoverguard
Tree of Tales
Leonin Scimitar
Irradiate
Darksteel Ingot

Those are the cards that will certainly make the main deck in my opinion although there are others that are almost guaranteed to make it in too. There are only seven artifacts there and you could really use a few more cheap artifacts to make up the numbers and enhance the power of your existing cards. Quite often when you are drafting an aggressive blue-black deck your best picks in *Fifth Dawn* turn out to be coloured cards. Blind Creeper and Trinket Mage are amongst the best commons you can get and you're not always able to take advantage of the many Sunburst cards which take up the common artifact slots. Cranial Plating is by far the best common artifact you can get for this deck and although the Rigger does have some combos with the remainder of the deck it's the Plating that works best here.

This pick is very, very close. I wouldn't argue heavily against anyone who chose Moriok Rigger here but even in a pick this close I think there's almost always a 'best pick' and for me that has to be Cranial Plating. I think in this deck it will always be as good as a Bonesplitter and frequently it will be much, much better. There's a lot of evasion in this deck and the Plating gives those creature a great power boost.

It's a tight call, but Cranial Plating is my choice for the right pick in this situation.

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