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It's rare these days that my limited column gets to participate in the theme weeks, as the themes tend to be more appropriate to constructed or casual **Magic**. However, this week is Beatdown Week and if there's one thing that players like to do in draft as much as any other format it's beat down.



The recipe for a good beatdown deck is pretty simple. You want a whole bunch of solid, aggressive creatures, some removal spells and maybe one or two mid-to-late game finishers. Mana curve in this deck style of deck is very important, and I'll get to the reasons why shortly, but that's something you can focus on during a draft. Throughout the draft you should be aiming to pick up a good spread of creatures but your early picks will most likely be the removal spells that everyone wants. It doesn't matter whether your deck is beatdown, control or a mid-range deck: you're going to need those removal spells. However, there are numerous creatures that function well in beatdown decks that no-one else wants and you can usually grab a few of these with your later picks.

Why it Works

Of all the types of decks you can draft, it's often the beatdown decks that perform the best. It's much easier to draft a beatdown deck than a control deck simply because beatdown decks tend to have much more resiliency and duplication of their key cards. They need removal and aggressive creatures but they're not too fussy about which ones they get. A Ronin Houndmaster might be the preferred three-drop but you can still hit with a Villainous Ogre or a Shinka Gatekeeper and they'll probably do the job in a lot of cases.

Similarly your removal spell could be a Yamabushi's Flame or a Spiralling Embers or a Befoul but they'll all usually take out any early blockers your opponent makes.

Control decks are very different though. They need to establish control so they need to draw the relevant defensive cards that allow them to do that. They also need to win the game so they need creatures that can attack – typically flyers – as well. If they draw all their defensive cards they give the beatdown decks enough time to establish a board advantage and perhaps use one of their finishers to end the game. If they draw all of their flyers then they'll often lose simply because their creatures are weaker and more fragile.

There's a very old quote that I believe is attributed to old-school **Magic** player Dave Price:

*"People like control because they think it shows that they're good **Magic** players. Active decks, on the other hand, produce threats, and control decks must have the right answer to the right threat. If not, they're in trouble. While there are wrong answers, there are no wrong threats."*

This is, in essence, why beatdown decks are present and successful in every draft format that's ever existed. Any control deck needs to draw a very precise balance of answers to your threats as well as ways to actually win the game when they've done that in case they lose the control they've worked so hard to establish. A good beatdown deck on the other hand consists of nothing but solid threats and cards that remove blockers that answer those threats. This means there are a much wider variety of cards the beatdown deck can draw, as it normally has no requirement to draw specific answers to questions posed by opposing decks.

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The mid-range decks that also exist in a lot of formats tend to just try and ride their superior card quality to victory. This can sometimes work but often the beatdown decks will be able to steal victory from the slower mid-range decks before these decks can establish themselves.

Mana Curve

I did previously mention the importance of mana curve when you're drafting beatdown and that is the one element you really do need to focus on during a draft. If you're drafting beatdown you need to establish early threats. You need to put pressure on your opponent and force them onto the back foot immediately. In most formats this means having a lot of decent threats at the two and three mana level so you can drop a decent creature on turns two and three with some degree of consistency.

A typical beatdown deck in this current format will probably have around sixteen creatures and will have a mana curve that looks something like this:

- 4-6 creatures that cost two mana.
- 4-6 creatures that cost three mana.
- 3-4 creatures that cost four mana.
- 1-2 creatures that cost five mana.



There's some room for variation there, and you might even want to see a few one-drops depending on the style of your deck. That's basically what you should be aiming for though. A mana curve like that gives you a good chance of dropping creatures every turn from the second turn onwards. Note that you probably won't play any creature costs more than five mana, unless it's something really powerful like a Dragon or something similar. This is because the beatdown deck doesn't ever want to sit with dead cards in its hand and expensive cards can often do that when you

don't draw the lands you need to cast them.

You want to keep the mana curve low so you can continue to deploy threats even if you stall on three or four lands. The best beatdown decks I've drafted in this format have won matches even when they've never hit their fourth land.

The other slight advantage you can gain through having a low mana curve is that you sometimes get to cheat a little on the land count. It's rare you'll need to run 18 lands in a beatdown deck with a low mana curve, and sometimes you can even get away with 16 if your mana curve tops out at four mana and consists primarily of two and three mana spells. A lower land count means a very slight chance of drawing an extra spell against an opponent who is running a higher land count. It's a very small advantage, but any advantage is welcome.

Here's an example of a particularly nice red-black beatdown deck I got to draft recently. It shows off the exact sort of mana curve I'm talking about and also illustrates my next point very well too:



Main Deck

40 cards

9 Mountain	1 Akki Underling	1 Barrel Down Sokenzan
8 Swamp	1 Frostling	1 Befoul
-----	1 Gibbering Kami	1 Genju of the Spires
17 lands	1 Goblin Cohort	1 Horobi's Whisper
	1 Hearth Kami	1 Kagemaro's Clutch
	1 Infernal Kirin	1 Rend Flesh
	1 Kami of Fire's Roar	1 Torrent of Stone
	1 Nezumi Cutthroat	-----
	1 Ronin Houndmaster	7 other spells
	1 Scourge of Numai	
	1 Shinen of Fury's Fire	
	1 Shinka Gatekeeper	
	1 Skullsnatcher	
	1 Sokenzan Spellblade	
	1 Takenuma Bleeder	
	1 Villainous Ogre	

	16 creatures	

Efficiency

The main thing you want to focus on when looking at the costs of your creatures and your spells is efficiency. By that, I'm mostly referring to the mana costs of your spells and creatures. I've stated that you want a low mana curve already, but there are still certain other things you need to focus on when deciding which creatures and spells to draft and which ones will make your deck.

When I talk about efficiency I'm not talking about the overall 'quality' of the creature, but rather how quickly it can win you games, and how much damage it can deal for its mana cost. In the above deck there are lots of creatures that you wouldn't necessarily class as high quality, but they are nonetheless very efficient at beating down. Goblin Cohort, Shinen of Fury's Fire, Shinka Gatekeeper, and Villainous Ogre are all pretty mediocre creatures. But they do one thing well – and that's deal more damage than the average creature at the same casting cost.

The Shinen does this through haste, the rest of them by having a higher power than other creatures of that cost. Most of these creatures have significant drawbacks but those aren't what are important – it's the number on the front end that you need to focus on. That's why this deck worked so well: all of its creatures (with the exception of the Frostling) hit for two damage each turn, and most of them for more than that. Three of the five three-drops hit for three damage each turn too. This deck doesn't need to attack too many times to win.

This deck also illustrates well the idea of duplication and redundancy. It doesn't really matter what two-drop you have, or what three-drop you have they're all going to do

There are lots of

around the same amount of damage. Compare this to a control deck though, and it might draw its Soratami Rainshaper as the three drop-facing your Ronin Houndmaster when it really wanted the River Kaijin that turn instead.

There's efficiency in the spells here, too. Almost all of the spells can deal with the vast majority of creatures facing them. When you spend three or four mana to deal with a creature that cost an opponent five mana, you've clearly gained an advantage there. Hopefully you can use that extra mana to cast another small creature or deal some extra damage with a Wicked Akuba or pump up your Sokenzan Spellblade etc.

The concept of efficiency is also closely related to that of tempo. Almost all beatdown decks are tempo-related. They don't try to win card advantage wars and they certainly don't try to win games on the basis of card quality either. I dealt with tempo quite recently so I won't reiterate everything I said then, but I'd encourage you to go back and check out "Tempo and You" as that article covers a lot of information that's relevant here too.

Beatdown Across the Colours

The example I gave above is a red-black deck, and these are often the colours that are talked about when drafting aggressive, beatdown decks, simply because they tend to have the most aggressive creatures. However, it is quite possible to draft beatdown decks in other colours too.



In green you tend to find that a lot of the colour's best early plays in limited are mana accelerators. This is the same in this format with Sakura-Tribe Elder, Orochi Sustainer and Kodama's Reach all being popular early picks. Decks with these cards can't really be considered beatdown though; these are more like the mid-range decks I discussed earlier. These decks can beatdown very well with the help of their mana accelerators sometimes. If the second turn Orochi Sustainer leads into a third turn Order of the Sacred Bell and fourth turn Frost Ogre then you'll almost certainly be outclassing anything your opponent can play on those turns.

The problem these decks have is when they don't get that draw though. When their opening hand contains just the bigger guys then their draw becomes pretty average and they make themselves vulnerable to mana-screw. The flipside is when they draw the Sustainer and the Reach but few, or even no, significant threats to take advantage of that mana acceleration. This is why green decks don't often function as beatdown

Great for mid-range decks, but not focused enough for true beatdown. decks: most of their better picks tend to be mana accelerators or cards that enable easy colour splashing for an overall advantage in card quality.

It doesn't always have to be this way of course. If you can lead out with Child of Thorns, Orochi Ranger, Gnarled Mass and Order of the Sacred Bell in the first four turns of the game you've got a beatdown draw that will out-class almost any other deck.

Blue and white tend to naturally lean towards being the controlling colours, but it is possible too for them to become beatdown decks if the cards that make this possible actually show up. It is a lot

creatures that you wouldn't necessarily class as high quality, but they are nonetheless very efficient at beating down.

harder here simply because the cards that support a beatdown deck are generally few and far between and sometimes you just have to draft that 1/4 guy in these colours.

If you want to draft blue and white beatdown decks then you'll normally be looking at white for quality early drops such as Kami of Ancient Law or Kitsune Loreweaver, and at blue for the efficient flyers like Moonbow Illusionist and Soratami Mirror-Guard. The blue-white decks tend to be even more focused on tempo though, simply because blue has a lot of bounce spells but very few actual removal spells.

That's fine in some circumstances. If your mana curve starts out with Kitsune Loreweaver, Soratami Rainshaper, Soratami-Mirror-Guard and a Consuming Vortex followed by another creature on turn five, the fact that you never permanently got rid of the creature that was bounced won't actually matter as the game will hopefully be over before the creature can come back down and impact the game. In blue-white beatdown decks bounce spells like Vortex, Phantom Wings and even Eye of Nowhere can function as pseudo-removal spells simply because they get rid of the opposing creature for a long enough time that the game is over before it ever matters that there's some lost card advantage there.

The other thing you gain here is that white often has numerous quality combat tricks that can save or enhance your creatures in combat for a very low mana price. When you're the aggressor in a match you can often take out opposing blockers for far less mana than it cost your opponent to cast them. Attacking your Kitsune Loreweaver and Waxmane Baku into a freshly cast Gnarled Mass leaves your opponent in a very difficult position when you're able to back it up with a Hundred-Talon Strike for example. At times like that you can often kill a blocker for just one mana and have enough leftover to deploy another threat at the same time. This is the sort of play that beatdown decks thrive on and if you can pull this off it usually isn't too hard to establish an overwhelming board advantage.

Don't expect to draft a blue-white beatdown deck very often but if the cards are coming your way it can often be a superior choice to a blue-white control deck. Here's an example of what a great blue-white beatdown deck would look like:

Limited Information

Main Deck

40 cards

9 Island	1 Descendant of Kiyomaro	1 Blessed Breath
8 Plains	1 Kami of Ancient Law	1 Cage of Hands
17 lands	1 Kitsune Blademaster	1 Consuming Vortex
	2 Kitsune Loreweaver	1 Hundred-Talon Strike
	1 Moonbow Illusionist	1 Indomitable Will
	1 Moonwing Moth	1 Phantom Wings
	1 Mothrider Samurai	1 Plow Through Reito
	1 Nagao, Bound by Honor	
	1 Samurai of the Pale Curtain	7 other spells
	1 Shimmering Glasskite	
	1 Shinen of Flight's Wings	
	1 Soratami Mirror-Guard	
	1 Soratami Rainshaper	
	1 Teller of Tales	
	1 Waxmane Baku	

16 creatures

I hope this article has given you some pointers on what makes a good beatdown deck and why you might want to consider focusing on getting one during your next draft. *Saviors* release events (including drafts) come to **Magic Online** in just two days time so there'll be every opportunity over the coming months to practice your own skills at being the beatdown.

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