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With *9th Edition* now live on **Magic Online** and the release events completed it's time to take a look at the set with limited formats in mind. I'm sure you all had a chance to read Matt Vienneau's feature article on the set a couple of weeks back but I can't really consider myself the Limited column on the site without giving my own input as well. Also, I'll probably be doing at least one *Ninth Edition* complete draft walkthrough, so it's important to have this article so you know where I'm coming from.

The draft queues are up on **Magic Online** and there are plenty of leagues available too if sealed deck play is your thing. Most of my comments will be about the format in general and you can apply them to both sealed and draft equally.

## How 9th Works

If you've never played Limited with a core set before the first thing you'll notice about playing with *9th Edition* is how basic it feels compared to the other big expansions. This is obviously intentional on Wizards' part as it is supposed to be the set that introduces various game concepts to new players. However, if you're an experienced player you will need to adjust your thinking in several areas.

From my experience so far there seems to be very few games won through tempo. In other Limited formats you could often draft a deck that had weaker cards, but that won because you were able to deploy a lot of quick creatures, deal some early damage, and then win through swarming, or some sort of finisher. This is much harder to achieve with *9th Edition* as there are very few cards that allow a fast deck to finish a game once it gets to a point where they're no longer able to deal damage through creatures. There's only really Panic Attack available amongst the commons and while that is a card that will warrant inclusion in some decks it isn't something you probably want to play in multiples.

So if tempo doesn't win, what does?

## Card advantage

I mentioned this in a more general sense as a route to victory in last week's article and the comments made there apply here even more so. There are very few cards in this format that allow you to trade your cards for opposing cards on anything beyond a one-for-one basis. Red has a few – Pyroclasm and Flame Wave notably – but there's really nothing you can rely on amongst the commons. Creatures will frequently trade off on a one-for-one basis, while you exchange your Shocks, Pacifisms and Dark Banishings for creatures that cause you significant problems. This happens often enough that games can be decided simply by one player drawing more lands than the other and the extra spells being enough to win it for him.



There are two initial implications this has. First of all, I would rarely run eighteen lands in this format. While the difference between seventeen and eighteen isn't a lot, I think you would want to squeeze every spell you could into your deck. Also, while there is typically nothing you can do about a mana-flood, you will often have time to draw out of a mana screw and still get back into the game. Secondly, I agree with Matt when he said he would normally choose to draw first when drafting with this set. The extra card you gain through drawing is important in this format, and more important than the tempo gained by playing first. There are some aggressive decks where this won't always be true, but the majority of the time it is.

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With the *9th Edition* formats being a lot slower than their expansion counterparts you also have lots of time to take advantage of any additional cards you are able to draw, which is another reason why card advantage is more important here.

In this format drawing extra cards is much better than making your opponent discard them. While Ravenous Rats and Mind Rot are acceptable inclusions they often just give an opponent something to do with that excess land they've been holding. I'd much rather be casting that Counsel of the Soratami instead.

The bit hits from the commons that help you out in this area are:

- Gravedigger – This nearly always 'draws' a good card, as you can cherry pick from its fallen comrades.
- Aven Fisher – When this does trade it will often trade for something that cost one or even two mana less than itself. You're happy to pay that for the extra card it generates.
- Counsel of the Soratami – Nice and simple two-for-one.
- Sift – This is basically a three-for-one given the choice you have when discarding.
- Kavu Climber – A fine man, although you'd much rather be paying four mana for it than five.

Anaba Shaman and Wood Elves can also provide you with some card advantage if the circumstances are right.

Although Sift does have a lot of competition in the four-mana slot, I personally tend to prefer it to Counsel of the Soratami. Paying only one extra mana to draw another card seems like a much better deal to me, as you can almost always discard an extra land you don't need when you play Sift.

All of those commons listed are excellent picks for their respective colours and should be taken highly in drafts and always played in sealed deck.

Once you get amongst the uncommons, things improve dramatically in this area. There are a lot of excellent cards that can really swing the game around here. Here's a short list of the best cards in this area from the uncommons:

- Nekrataal – a 2/1 First-Striker is fine in this format and with the Dark Banishing attached this is one of the best black cards. Any time an opponent Gravediggers this you're probably going to lose.
- Phyrexian Gargantua – It trades with a similarly costed Craw Wurm but gives you an additional two cards while doing so.
- Thieving Magpie – Drawing two cards a turn is a sure-fire way to win any game.
- Thought Courier – This really lets you cycle through your deck quickly. While it might not look like it provides card advantage it trades in all of your extra lands for spells and lets you draw into your best spells a lot sooner.

- Confiscate – You deal with their best permanent and then have it come to play on your team. Great two-for-one card advantage.
- Treasure Trove – The slowest of the bunch but will win games if you can make the time it needs to work.
- Tidings – One of the best uncommons for blue, a simple three-card boost (you lost one in casting the Tidings) for only five mana.
- Orcish Artillery – One of the most unfair cards in the format, it allows you to kill off multiple opposing creatures at very little cost. This can single-handedly beat a lot of non-green decks.
- Flame Wave – If you can actually cast it, it will usually win the game for you.
- Pyroclasm – The majority of creatures played in the first few turns will have two toughness or less. You can sit back for a couple of turns and usually get two or three of your opponent's guys with this.
- Ballista Squad – In the late game when you have a lot of mana open this will kill almost anything that decides to get involved in combat, and if your opponent's creatures aren't attacking or blocking then you're obviously winning.



You may notice that green and white are represented by far fewer cards in that list than the other colours. These two colours are a little weaker as a result of that, although Green makes up a lot of that advantage simply by having all of its creatures be better than the other colours.

## Evasion



The other main way to win is by having creatures your opponent can't block. Blue is obviously king here with Wind Drake, Aven Fisher and Aven Windreader all on its side. Don't underestimate white though as it also has three solid common flyers in Pegasus Charger, Aven Cloudchaser and Aven Flock. There are others too like Bog Imp, Suntail Hawk and Skyhunter Prowler but in general it's the guys with two or more power that you want.

Black also actually does okay in this area with both Foul Imp and Razortooth Rats on its side. The Rats particularly are unblockable against a lot of the popular decks although do be wary of any Bottle Gnomes or Dancing Scimitars.

Quite often a lot of games will get locked up on the ground as some Elvish Warriors and Kavu Climbers stare across at some Foot Soldiers and Horned Turtles. In this sort of situation if you're the guy with the unblockable creature then your

opponent will need to draw something special pretty quick before they find themselves looking at zero life points.

As a result, all of the good evasive creatures are very high picks in their respective colours. Aven Windreader is almost certainly the best blue common, and I'd put Wind Drake and Aven Fisher in the top five as well.

In white I'd take Master Decoy and Pacifism over the flyers but those are the only two commons that would get drafted ahead of any of the flyers.

In black you have the two solid removal spells to take first – Enfeeblement and Dark Banishing – but beyond that it's a very close call between Gravedigger and Razortooth Rats. I think I'd go with the Rats first and look for card advantage elsewhere.

Amongst the uncommons blue again is king with Air Elemental, Azure Drake and Thieving Magpie all being excellent picks. Don't under-estimate the power of the landwalkers though; many a game has been decided on the back of a Bog Wraith, Anaconda or River Bear in this format. While those guys obviously won't be unblockable all the time, when they are they hit a lot harder than their similarly costed flying equivalents.

## Having the best toys

The last way that a lot of *9th Edition* games get decided is simply by who has the best toys, and by that I mean the best and/or biggest creatures.

The first point to make here regards having the 'best toys'. When you play this format you will start to notice that there are a lot of uncommons and rares that are much, much more powerful than their common counterparts.

This is true for a lot of sets but in *9th Edition* it becomes very apparent as the games more often come down to the individual cards as opposed to other things like tempo.

There's also much less removal in this set that in previous Core Sets and that is noticeable when you play the game. Red has no Lightning Blast or Pyrotechics now so when that Blinding Angel or Sengir Vampire hits play you there are a lot fewer answers to it in the set as a whole.



Unfortunately there often isn't too much you can do about this, other than hope to open great cards, but what it does do is really drive home the importance of being able to draft removal. This means picking cards like Pacifism and Dark Banishing ahead of most everything else of course, but it also means paying attention when you are drafting and being in the right colours so you won't have these first-picks cut-off from you later in the draft.

The other perfectly viable option is to splash for these cards. While I will still want to stick to two colours when I can, splashing for cards like Dark Banishing, Pacifism and Volcanic Hammer is still perfectly viable. This is an area where green is better as it still has Rampant Growth amongst its commons.

The second point to make concerns having the 'biggest toys', and it's here that green finally gets to shine. Scaled Wurm is the daddy of the commons but it's actually playable despite its eight-mana cost. If you're drafting green you'll often have a couple of mana accelerators that let you get your Scaled Wurm out faster than normal.

Scaled Wurm isn't the only big guy around though. Green has the biggest two drop in Elvish Warrior, the best three-drops in Trained Armodon and Rootwalla and can then still follow up with Order of the Sacred Bell, Spined Wurm and Craw Wurm. If you've ever been playing against a green deck when



they've curved out with Elvish Warrior, Rootwalla and Order of the Sacred Bell on the play you'll know it's a draw that is very hard to keep up with.

The other advantage green has here is with the solid accelerators it has to get these guys out faster. Llanowar Elves is one of the best green commons, perhaps only second to Giant Growth, simply because it gives you the chance for second turn Armodons and a third turn Order of the Sacred Bell. There are lots of different fat guys you can draft but only one first turn mana accelerator and the Elves should be drafted very highly because of that.

### How the colors stack up

You may have noticed that blue featured a lot in my discussions up there. It has the best source of card advantage and the best evasion as well, and both of those are key to

winning 9th Edition drafts. I'd rate blue as the best colour for this reason.

Blue isn't very deep though, as it does have a number of commons that really are totally unplayable – 'Hi' to Sea's Claim and Index – but that's true for most colours. If blue is over-drafted than you probably won't see a lot of it so it's important to realise when that's happening and try not to force it.

When drafting blue there are a lot of powerful uncommons that you can open, more so than in some of the other colours, so ideally you can get a number of picks from the uncommons too.

The second best colour for me is black. It has two very good removal spells – as does Red but I'll get to that shortly – but it also has some great creatures too. It has evasion and a few sources of card advantage too. The two removal spells are the top picks here, with Gravedigger and Razortooth Rats following quite closely behind. It can be quite an aggressive colour too, with Serpent Warrior, Giant Cockroach and Hollow Dogs all having high power for their casting costs so it can be worth steering your draft in that direction if you're in black.

Black also rewards a higher colour commitment. Both Enfeeblement and Foul Imp want double-black mana early and Looming Shade is a fine card if you're running enough Swamps. There's also the potential for Consume Spirit from the uncommons, which further requires a lot of Swamps in your deck.

Green and white seem fairly comparable to me, as what one colour lacks in one area the other lacks in a different area. I'd put green slightly ahead of white though due to the fact that it has a greater depth amongst its commons.

Giant Growth is the best common in green, simply because it does so much for such a little cost. You'll frequently be able to cast this to kill a blocker and still have mana to deploy another creature in the same turn. It also is one of a very few number of cards that punishes double-blocking, which is something that is frequently done to take care of green creatures. There'll be times when your Spined Wurm gets blocked by a Venerable Monk and some Foot Soldiers and being able to take both of those





out and keep your Wurm alive for the low price of just one green mana and a card is why Giant Growth is the best card in green decks.

As I mentioned earlier, I'd put Llanowar Elves second, simply because it's irreplaceable. There's nothing else in the commons that does the same thing whereas there's a large supply of reasonably-costed fat creatures and so less of a need to focus on those early in the draft.

After that it gets a bit close to call. You probably want to draft your first Giant Spider quite highly, to have some defence against flyers, and I personally like Trained Armodon and Rootwalla simply because they come down early and hit hard. Rootwalla is practically impossible to block early on and you can often find the two mana you need to pump him up when they don't block.

White does ok in the evasion stakes, but really lacks any sort of card advantage. Too many of its creatures are 1/1s and while that might work in constructed White Weenie it doesn't bode well for Limited decks.

White can still function well as a backup colour as many of its creatures fulfil a nice support role, but it has very few creatures with which it can win the game. You'll often see it paired with blue in that traditional combination as then you have plenty of creatures to win the game with in the air while allowing white to slow things down on the ground.

Finally we come to red. Red has two of the cheapest removal spells in the set with both Shock and Volcanic Hammer, but Lightning Blast has now departed which weakens the colour significantly.

The creatures here are weak, much like white, but they lack the utility of white's men. While white has Crossbow Infantry, Samite Healer and Glory Seeker, red has to make do with Goblin Brigand, Goblin Piker and Goblin Raider. Throw in a few more 1/1s along with the 1/2 three-mana flyer and you won't be relying on red for your creatures in most decks.

There are some decent guys here though, again with aggressive tendencies. Goblin Chariot is fine and Lightning Elemental can be a nice surprise against an opponent who wasn't expecting it. Probably the best creature though is Anaba Shaman, who is the one source of card advantage you have amongst the red commons. Sometimes he doesn't do very much but against the right opponent he can take out a Pegasus Charger and Razortooth Rats, as well as allowing your weaker men to finish off your opponent's better creatures in combat.



That's all for now, but hopefully I'll be talking more about 9th Edition over the coming weeks as well as getting a draft walk-through or two in before *Ravnica* finally hits.

