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There will be a couple of different topics in today's column as there are a couple of areas I want to cover. I have a couple of *Ravnica* cards to show you that any fan of Limited will want to see. (One has already been previewed in print, the other is new.) I also want to give everyone a little prerelease advice as I've had many requests for that from players who have emailed me in the last couple of weeks.

To start with I want to spend a little time talking about Auras, or more specifically Auras that enchant creatures. In last week's sealed deck pool I initially listed Unholy Strength in the 'unplayable' section, to the consternation of many players.

This is one of the problems when it comes to communicating complicated **Magic** concepts in a short number of words. The 'unplayable' title for that group of cards should probably have read '*cards that I would initially dismiss as too weak but that I would later reconsider should the deck warrant it*'. Unfortunately that title just isn't viable and unfortunately in an already lengthy article on an entire pool I don't usually have room for 500 words on one specific card.

However this topic does neatly tie into today's preview cards (more on those later) so I feel there's time to cover it today.

The Problem with Unholy Strength

I hope that initially most of you are aware of the inherent drawbacks in Enchant Creature cards (I know they're Auras, but that term also includes a lot of other cards like Enchant Lands and so on) that you play on your own guys. Quite simply, if you play an Enchant Creature on your own guy, then your opponent eliminates that guy with one card, they've taken out two of your cards for just one of their own. When you only get to draw one card a turn getting "two-for-one'd" effectively costs you a turn's worth of card drawing.

There are certain Enchant Creature Auras that do get around this drawback in various ways, either by making up the lost card when the creature dies or by coming back repeatedly. Rancor is the most famous, but there are others like Squee's Embrace, Elephant Guide and Dragon Scales. These are obviously a lot better than alternatives like Unholy Strength but there are still times when the Unholy Strength will be playable.

In *9th Edition* the borderline Enchant Creature Auras are basically Unholy Strength, Holy Strength and Regeneration. Web, Flight, Reflexes etc aren't worth the card investment while Treetop Bracers and Blanchwood Armor offer more powerful effects and are definitely playable. Thus the only three cards I'm really discussing with respect to *9th Edition* are the two Strengths and Regeneration, although these comments will also apply in general to other sets as well.

When initially building or drafting a deck I wouldn't want to plan to include any of these cards, *if I had the choice*. That is why I would initially put them in the 'unplayable' pile if I had them. Yes, Unholy Strength can double the damage from your Razortooth Rats but so can playing another Razortooth Rats! The second option is obviously the better one as it'll take two Shocks to kill both Razortooth Rats but only one Shock to take out Rats + Unholy Strength. But, sometimes you just don't have the options you'd like, and when you don't only then should you look to other cards to fill those holes.

There are always a lot of cards in every set that are capable of killing, or at least temporarily dealing with a single creature. By playing any of the above three Enchant Creature Auras you are giving your opponent an opportunity for an advantage where they might not otherwise have one. Let's say you drop that Unholy Strength on your Wind Drake. From that point on any Dehydration, Time Ebb, Volcanic Hammer or Pacifism becomes instant card advantage for your opponent. Those are all common cards that everyone is going to play if they have them in their colours, and there are many more solutions amongst the uncommons and rares as well.

In general I'd prefer not to give my opponents those sorts of opportunities, but there are times when that is unavoidable, or when the effect the card generates is actually more useful than it might be in general. If your opponent shows you mostly Shocks and Giant Spiders then "Unholy Strength + Wind Drake" might actually be better than two Wind Drakes. If you're green-on-green then Regeneration on a Kavu Climber might really shut down an opponent's attacking options. In situations like this it's worth thinking about whether these cards might be useful after sideboarding even if they haven't made your main deck.

Finally, you also get card pools like the one I discussed last week. You will get situations where there simply aren't enough "playable" cards in the colours you need to play, and you actually need the power boost of a card like Unholy Strength to be able to win. Unholy Strength (and to a lesser extent Holy Strength too) is very much a tempo card. On the right creature it basically functions as an unblockable 2/1 haste guy for just one black mana, which is obviously very good in certain decks when it works out.

Regeneration is another kettle of fish altogether though as that doesn't help deal more damage and is only really useful when you have a creature that would otherwise die that you want to be saving. Sure you can slap it on a Craw Wurm sometimes but that still might not help you win the race against a Pegasus Charger.

Unholy Strength is clearly the best of the three, but I still wouldn't want it in my deck in the majority of situations. If you have a deck that is weak and that needs to win quickly, or a deck that has lots of smaller evasion creatures that need a power boost, then by all means include Unholy Strength if needed. It still shouldn't automatically make it into any deck you play simply because it has a lot of inherent disadvantages for a relatively small gain.

Auras in Ravnica

I mentioned earlier the various Enchant Creature Auras that have built-in effects that counteract their inherent card disadvantage. *Ravnica* has plenty to offer in this regard and the Wizards developers are really pushing some of the Auras for limited play. [Click here](#) to see today's preview cards that demonstrate this:

Now just ignoring the creature abilities these cards grant, the actual CIP ("comes into play") effects of these two cards are both solid for limited. Three damage for three mana, or two cards for four is comparable to what you would expect in limited play. The red CIP ability is the better of the two, but this is balanced by Flight of Fancy giving a much better ability to the creature it's attached to.

Galvanic Arc will definitely be a first-pick quality card just as Volcanic Hammer and Yamabushi's Flame have been before it. Red often has aggressive, low-toughness creatures – like Lightning Elemental or Frost Ogre in recent sets – that would greatly benefit from the addition of first strike and I expect that theme to continue in *Ravnica*. So you have a card that will have two useful abilities for a very low price.

Flight of Fancy has a much smaller effect for a slightly higher cost. However, giving something flying is often very useful and there may well be certain archetypes that want that ability. The main problem with simple cards like Flight is not that the ability isn't wanted; it's just that it isn't worth a card on its own. Now we can easily get around that. Flight of Fancy replaces itself and draws an extra card into the bargain too.

Both of these cards do have their drawbacks too though, and if you want to make the best use of them in the prereleases you'll need to be aware of these. Both can obviously only be played at Sorcery speed to start with. That means you won't be able to use them in response to other effects like you might have done with Yamabushi's Flame.

The main drawback though is simply that the targeted creature must still be in play when Galvanic Arc or Flight of Fancy resolves. That means if you cast Galvanic Arc on a creature of yours, and that creature gets killed or bounced in response, then the Galvanic Arc will never come into play and you won't get its effect. So you'll have to be very wary when you cast this, and preferably do it when your opponent is tapped out, or at least close to it. Getting an early knowledge of the common, instant speed removal spells will be important so you can determine when your opponent can respond, and with what.

There are ways you can get around this though, especially in the case of Galvanic Arc. If you suspect your opponent is sitting on a removal spell then just cast Galvanic Arc on the creature that you want to kill! Sure, you lose the advantage of first-strike on one of your own men, but at least your opponent won't then be able to counter its effect, as they'll have to kill their own guy to do so. Even doing this you need to be wary though. If they have a Blessed Breath type card they can counter the Galvanic Arc by giving their creature protection from red. Also, if they have a Giant Growth or

Mending Hands type card they might be able to save their guy from the damage and still keep the Arc in play. If that happens you end up giving the creature you wanted to kill first strike too!

When evaluating these cards for inclusion in any limited deck you should also keep in mind any effects that might allow you to re-use any Auras you have. While such effects aren't common they do exist, and if you're able to reuse your Galvanic Arc once or twice in a game I'm sure you'll be able to kill off the vast majority of common creatures with it.

Now if there's a blue and a red CIP Aura, there are probably green, white and black ones too (I haven't seen the entire set, only the cards being previewed by the various columnists). These two cards here are definitely playable so keep an eye open for their counterparts as they may have equally good abilities.

I'm confident that Galvanic Arc will be killing countless creatures at the pre-release and if you see it in your card pool it's a great reason to consider red as one of the colours you choose to play.

Ravnica at the Prereleases

With the prereleases coming up this weekend I've had several requests from players asking for a quick primer on "How to succeed at a pre-release." I've written such articles before and there's a lot of general advice in an older column I wrote prior to the *Saviors* pre-release. I don't want to repeat the whole thing again so I'd recommend giving the first half of that article a read if you have time.

In short:

- Be informed. Read up on the preview cards and the new abilities the set will include. Cards on this site have showcased Dredge, Convoke, Transmute, and Radiance, so make sure you're aware of those abilities and give some thought to how they might affect your deck construction and play. The more information you have, the better chance you have.
- Know the commons. While this is hard in a big set, make sure to look through friends' decks and pick out the powerful combat tricks and removal spells so you can learn what cards you might have to play around.
- Read the cards. You'll need to know what your cards do to be able to evaluate them. Make note of whether a card is an instant or sorcery. Make sure you know whether it can target only your opponent's creatures or your own creatures too. If you're unsure as to how a card works ask a judge, that's what they are there for.



As if you needed another reason to show up!

If the pre-release will be one of your first real-life tournament then I'd also recommend reviewing my sealed deck 'Back to Basics' article as that has a lot of information in it that will be useful to those of you who are stepping into the tournament arena for the first time. And, of course, you should also read this week's feature article by Brian David-Marshall.

Ravnica draft will be fairly unique I think. Mark Rosewater has already explained how there are going to be four multi-colour Guilds in this set. This will greatly affect how drafts play out. Drafting colours outside of these combinations may be difficult, as the gold cards typically have a higher power level than similarly costed mono-colour cards. You may find yourself lacking draft picks if you're trying to force a colour combination that isn't represented.



This may also impact the potential for three-colour decks. *Invasion* before it had a lot of mana-fixing, and we may well see this return in *Ravnica* too. If we do then three-colour decks may be preferred. If they do then you will likely see three-colour combinations that involve drafting two of the Guilds that share a colour.

The colour combinations represented in *Ravnica* are blue-black (Dimir), green-white (Selesnya), black-green (Golgari) and red-white (Boros), and you'll want to keep those combinations in mind when considering drafting three colours. For example, it will probably be very good to draft blue-black-green as you'd get to draft cards from both the Dimir and Golgari guilds. But a three-colour combination like blue-green-red will probably be completely unplayable simply because you don't get any guild cards in that combination. If you do end up drafting three colours make sure you have two guilds represented so you get the best of two worlds.

All that said, the main thing about prereleases is to enjoy them. Experience the new cards and have fun discovering the new set. Winning is usually more fun than losing though, so it certainly won't hurt to give yourself that extra edge.

