

Getting to Know *Ravnica* Better Search

Scott Wills

Tuesday, October 25, 2005

There are a couple of topics I want to talk about in today's column so I'll apologise in advance that there isn't one true theme. I'm still coming to grips with *Ravnica* and there's much to learn and various useful snippets of information have come up that I want to address before the set arrives online.

The online pre-release for *Ravnica* is coming soon, so if you don't get a chance to play with the set much in real life than you'll no doubt want to get up to speed. One subject I want to touch on today is signalling. I've had several players ask me about signalling in the triple-*Ravnica* draft format, as it's obviously very different from what you get in a normal draft.

Signalling in *Ravnica* Drafts

The first thing I'd recommend is checking out the last signalling article I wrote a few months back as well as my original article on this subject. The last article was focussed heavily on a *Champions-Betrayers-Saviours* draft but a lot of the comments and strategies can be applied to any format.

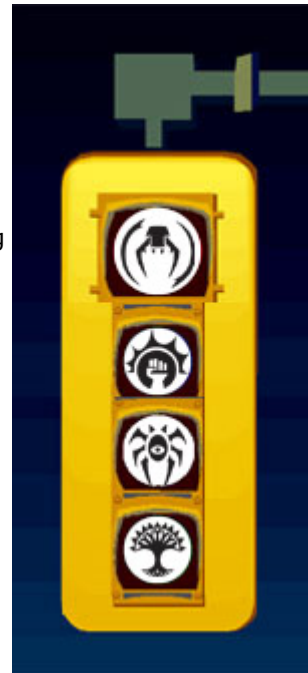
There are a lot of differences between *Champions* block and *Ravnica* in limited. The main one is that several players on a draft table may be drafting more than two colours. I've been in a few *Ravnica* drafts where it seems that everyone is splashing a third colour for one reason or another. This can have a very nasty impact on signalling as a player might easily dip into your main colour combination and take one of the better cards from you.

While there probably is a 'best deck' in this new format I don't think it's yet been established exactly what it is. Some players I've spoken with think the Dimir mill deck is the best out there, others think Boros, and others still think Selesnya. In any format where the best deck hasn't been determined I don't think forcing a particular archetype is a good idea. In other formats where one colour is obviously better than the rest it can make sense to try and force that colour over the others. I don't think that's true here and all the guilds seem capable of winning a draft if you can get the top picks for that deck.

With that in mind, actually reading signals that are being sent your way becomes one of the most important skills. Being able to correctly interpret the signals being sent to you can allow you to move into one of the under-drafted guilds on your table. This then gives you a better selection of cards overall and thus gives you a better chance of winning your draft.

One of the more obvious sources of signals are the multi-coloured guild cards. Cards like Golgari Rotwurm, Shambling Shell, Selesnya Evangel and Skyknight Legionnaire are all very high picks for those guilds. If you start seeing those cards coming to you as 3rd-5th picks in the draft that's probably a very good indication that those guilds are not being heavily drafted.

The guild focus makes drafting this format unique. Quite often in drafts there are only four 'colours' being drafted on a table; Dimir, Boros, Golgari and Selesnya are to *Ravnica* drafts what white, blue, black, red and green are to other formats. This makes quite a large difference in terms of drafting. Before you often had 16 colours being drafted at a table, with each of the eight players drafting two



colours. This meant that some colours would often be under or over-drafted. Now we have a situation where quite often only eight guilds are being drafted, with each player drafting mainly one guild. This means the guilds can be evenly distributed with each guild being drafted by two players. The imbalance occurs when one guild gets drafted by three drafters, and one guild only by a lone drafter. This is a much larger imbalance than in previous draft formats and if you can be the lone drafter of any guild then I think you stand a very strong chance of receiving the best deck on the table.

Paying attention to the guild specific cards thus becomes very important. Many of these cards are strong cards in their own right and picking up which of the guilds isn't being drafted can lead to some good late picks that no-one else wants.

Take the following third pick as an example:





While it's not guaranteed that the Golgari aren't being drafted ahead of you, with this many high picks still in the pack it is very likely indeed. It's possible that Last Gasp and Keening Banshee might've been drafted ahead of this pack but doing so sends some very mixed signals. I think at least one other drafter would've taken the Sunforger in that scenario. It's far more likely that something like Galvanic Arc and Devouring Light have been taken from the pack. In that situation I'd feel like I had received a pretty strong signal to draft Golgari and I'd go ahead and take the Rotwurm.

Here's another example:



Creature — Goblin Warrior

Mountainwalk

Chimney sweeps, explorers of abandoned buildings, spire climbers . . . goblin spelunkers have found countless niches within Ravnica's metropolis.

—Gideon Filly

2/2

DECKMASTER

Creature — Plant Zombie

Remove a creature card in your graveyard from the game: Regenerate Woodwraith Strangler.

"Nothing could be more natural than roots sucking nourishment from the dead."

—Savra

2/2

Benevolent Ancestor

Defender (This creature can't attack.)

⊗: Prevent the next 1 damage that would be dealt to target creature or player this turn.

Although the door is flimsy and the lock pathetically small, Josturi's family never fears the night outside.

—Nick Percival

0/4

Vedalken Entrancer

⚡, ⊗: Target player puts the top two cards of his or her library into his or her graveyard.

Their denial reaches far into your future.

—Dan Scott

1/4

Caregiver

⊗, Sacrifice a creature: Prevent the next 1 damage that would be dealt to target creature or player this turn.

"The guilds each believe its way is right, but their ways only bring blood to Ravnica's streets and tears to Ravnica's families."

—William Simpson

1/1

Drake Familiar

Flying

When Drake Familiar comes into play, sacrifice it unless you return an enchantment in play to its owner's hand.

"Falconry? A fine sport I suppose, if you're attracted to the frailty of birds."

—Trivaz, Izzet mage

—Darrell Riche

2/1

Thoughtpicker Witch

⚡, Sacrifice a creature: Look at the top two cards of target opponent's library, then remove one of them from the game.

"Once the brew gets the brains nice and pickled, they're a lot easier to pick through."

—Neil Vinters

1/1

Compulsive Research

Sorcery

Target player draws three cards. Then that player discards two cards unless he or she discards a land card.

"Four parts molten bronze, yes . . . one part frozen mercury, yes, yes . . . but then what?"

—Michael Sutfin

MAGIC The Gathering

DECKMASTER

MAGIC The Gathering

DECKMASTER

Dimir Machinations

Sorcery

Look at the top three cards of target player's library. Remove any number of those cards from the game, then put the rest back in any order.

Transmute 1⚡⚡⚡ (1⚡⚡⚡, Discard this card: Search your library for a card with the same converted mana cost as this card, reveal it, and put it into your hand. Then shuffle your library. Play only as a sorcery.)



Once again in this example I think you have a very clear signal to draft a milling Dimir deck. In that deck the most powerful common you can get is Vedalken Entrancer and to get one fourth pick is a very strong signal. It is entirely possible that two, or even three of the players to your right are drafting black here, but you should still go for Dimir regardless. If that does turn out to be the case then no good black cards will get passed on in pack one and you can hopefully snag a couple of the black removal spells you need as that colour gets passed to you first in pack two. Once again though, it's more likely that a variety of colours were chosen ahead of you simply because the packs rarely tend to be so heavily balanced in one colour's favour.

Now the one skill that is most relevant when it comes to signalling early in a draft format is that of card evaluation. You may think that Conclave Equenaut is a better pick than Faith's Fetters, but early in the draft I don't think the majority of drafters would agree with you. While passing a pack with an Equenaut in isn't a great signal to send, passing Faith's Fetters is worse in my opinion. There are no white commons I'd take over that early in a draft and getting passed one with a common missing would be interpreted by me as a strong signal that a white card hadn't been drafted.

Luckily there aren't many tough first picks in the various colours. Galvanic Arc is the best red common, Last Gasp the best black for example. In blue it's a little trickier – it could be Vedalken Entrancer or Snapping Drake depending on your Dimir preference. I would take the Entrancer in that situation every time but I know other players who prefer the evasive Dimir decks to the milling ones. In green the choice is a little closer but I personally would go with Bramble Elemental early in a draft and only put Scatter the Seeds or Siege Wurm ahead of that once I was sure that I was going to be drafting Selesnya. You might personally take Civic Wayfinder as your highest pick if you're looking to force a multi-colour archetype. However, if you take it over Bramble Elemental then don't be surprised if the drafter on your left interprets that as a signal to green.

Knowing what is generally considered to be the best cards in the set is one of the most important things in any format. Not only does this mean you'll know what are the best cards to pick for your deck, but you'll also stand a better chance of interpreting signals that get sent to you.

Drafting Outside the Box

I mentioned in my last column about the possibility of drafting outside of the guild structure. There is a considerable risk here as you do miss out on some good picks, but I've been trying this out a little more lately and it's been working a reasonable amount of the time.

Most of the time this happens I have finished up splashing for one or two cards that are allied to a single guild. The addition of the guild lands and Signets has meant that this is quite easy.

Blue-White

The example that I touched on last week was blue-white, and I think this combination is perfectly draftable in the right situation. You only need to look at the commons to see what the average blue-white deck looks for:

Flyers: Snapping Drake, Conclave Equenaut, Screeching Griffin, Tattered Drake.

Stall: Drift of Phantasms, Benevolent Ancestor, Nightguard Patrol

Removal: Faith's Fetters, Stasis Cell



And there's plenty of filler there too. Veteran Armourer makes your defenders very hard to break through, and Tidewater Minion can trade with Bramble Elementals or Rotwurms or give you double utility from your Benevolent Ancestors. A recent blue-white deck I had splashed for Lightning Helix, Skyknight Legionnaire and a Thundersong Trumpeter. In that deck the Tidewater Minion combined with the Trumpeter to hold off two guys each turn.

Cards like Veldalken Dismissal and Peel from Reality can help buy the time your flyers need and many of the hybrid cards like Centaur Safeguard or Selesnya Guildmage are still very playable even though you only have one way of casting or activating them.

You have all the different options for a splash colour here too. Boros lands and Signets can allow you to splash red easily, Dimir black and Selesnya Green. You can splash any of the other three colours without impacting your mana base at all if you get the right cards to do so. This gives you a lot of options if you open a powerful card like Glare of Subdual or Flame Fusillade.

Red-Blue

This is another colour combination that has been rising in popularity over the past week or so. Rather than an overall synergy there are a couple of specific common combinations here that make the deck very powerful.

The first is Drake Familiar and Galvanic Arc. There's not too much to explain here but an Arc taking out a couple of guys gives you a very big advantage. A lot of blue-red decks also feature creatures like Ordrun Commando, Greater Forgeling or Indentured Oaf. These creatures make Flight of Fancy very playable all of a sudden as a lot of decks in this format are vulnerable to flyers. A fifth turn Greater Forgeling followed by a sixth turn Flight of Fancy + pump is a big surprise to most opponents and it's highly unlikely they'll have a flyer big enough to stand in the way. When Flight of Fancy is also in the deck that gives you yet more targets for the Drake Familiar.

Another great card in this archetype is Mark of Eviction. This allows you to get your Drake Familiars out cheaply and you can also cast Galvanic Arc on one of your opponent's men to kill a second, and then cast Mark of Eviction on the same guy and bounce their guy and your Galvanic Arc back to your hand every turn. A couple of turns of that and the game will soon be decided in your favour.

The other two-card combination is Viashino Fangtail and Tidewater Minion. A lot of the creatures in this format are vulnerable to a two-damage ping and if you can get these cards working together you'll likely get a huge advantage in a short space of time.



This is another deck that likes Drift of Phantasms a lot as that can transmute into Galvanic Arc to get your Drake Familiars earning their money. The transmute mechanic also comes in useful in other places too. Dizzy Spell transmutes into your Mark of Eviction if you get one, and you can often use the Dimir cards to splash black and transmute Perplex into a Galvanic Arc too.

This deck will often splash black as many of that colour's efficient removal spells only require one black to cast. You also gain access to the regeneration of Tattered Drake and the added evasion of Dimir House Guard if you need it.

You can of course also splash white here instead of black. This gives access to Faith's Fetters, which is sometimes a reasonable target for your Drake Familiars. If you can get hold of it you also get Auratouched Mage, which is obviously excellent in this deck. If you have time the Mage can fetch

out your Mark of Eviction on one turn, then return itself and fetch out the Galvanic Arc the next, which sets things up for the rest of the game.

Other Possibilities

There are other decks that could potentially work but that I simply haven't had time to test out thoroughly yet. There's a lot of removal in black and that might be combinable with the removal in red to form an aggressive black-red deck. I think this colour combination is perhaps lacking the quality early drops it would need to be successful but I haven't really had time to check this out fully yet.

Another popular choice from recent formats is red-green. I think this one has a better chance than black-red, simply because green has a greater depth to it. There's not much better than casting a Galvanic Arc on your own Bramble Elemental and I think you might see this cropping up from time to time as well. Green easily affords the splashing of another colour so it's likely that instead of seeing Golgari decks splashing for an Arc you might just see a green-red deck splashing for a couple of Golgari cards instead. Truth be told, these decks may not be too distinguishable from the decks we have now. They certainly wouldn't be as unique as blue-white and red-blue are compared to the current guild-specific archetypes.



There are still two other combinations out there – blue-green and black-white – but I don't hold out much hope for those. Blue-green was popular in the full Champions block so some players may try and make that work again. Flight of Fancy on a Bramble Elemental might be nice as might Drake Familiar and Fists of Ironwood. Green does currently have only Greater Mossdog as it's four-drop so perhaps Snapping Drake will fit in there. Certainly this deck could splash black very easily with all the Dimir and Golgari mana fixers out there.

Time will tell on these combinations but I think it's certainly true that not all drafts will feature the full compliment of guild-focused drafters over the coming months. It'll be interesting to see how the format settles down, and especially whether or not the non-guild draft decks can compete with the guild focussed decks. It's an exciting time!

© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

