

A strategy crash course in the Sealed Deck version of Two-Headed Giant, just in time for this weekend's worldwide events! **Don't Get Left Behind – Two Heads Are More Fun Than One**

Matthew Vienneau

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Over my many years as a Pro Tour (and now a Pro Tour Qualifier) player, there have been numerous times where I would have gladly given one of my nuts (in the druidic sense of course) to have a close friend watching over my play. Said friend would be able to provide such nuggets of wisdom as "don't accidentally mana burn yourself to death" (PT Chicago 1999 at 5-0) and "don't cycle that card, it can stop his combo from going off" (PT Chicago 1999, the next round) and a particular favourite from the Grand Prix Detroit top 8 – "Don't forget to play a land". These little tidbits of information would have earned me thousands more in prize money (and not just in Canadian dollars!) and no doubt locked in a third vote to go to Japan this December for the [Hall of Fame induction ceremony](#). But alas, **Magic** is an individual game and you live and die (again and again) on your own mistakes.



It was never comfortable admitting it, but deep down, poor Necropotence always hoped its day would come.

Until now.

As of October 1st, Wizards has begun sanctioning a new Two-Headed Giant team format for both constructed and sealed. You and a friend each play your own deck in the same game and are able to openly discuss strategy and tactics as well as the weather and latest hockey scores (as long as you do

it in a timely manner). To make it an even more communal experience, both players share the same phases – your upkeep phase is her upkeep phase, both players draw during the draw phase, and everybody attacks and blocks together (any of your team's creatures can block any of theirs). Even life totals are added together and shared so your team starts with 40 life – finally a format where Necropotence is playable!

But enough dated references from a faded has-been, let's get our hands dirty with details. The full scoop on Two-Headed Giant can be found in section 606 of the [Comprehensive Rules](#), but only seven people in the world have read them through without losing their sanity and odds are you're not going to be the eighth. Instead I'd suggest quickly flipping through the recently posted [Two-Headed Giant FAQ](#) and then lay out the fatty snacks and frothy beverages and start challenging your friends. Unfortunately not all of you have friends...who are available on a moment's notice. For those unlucky souls I've thrown together a few thousand words of early advice on how you and your buddy can kick butt in Two-Headed Giant sealed deck with *Ravnica*. Why sealed and not constructed? Remember what I was saying a few paragraphs ago about making mistakes? Asking me about constructed **Magic** would be a mistake. Sealed on the other hand...well, have I mentioned how I've made the top 8 of [every Sealed Pro Tour ever held](#)? A lot of people view sealed deck as luck-based and I think they're wrong, and so does my 15-2-1 record in the Sealed portion of four *Invasion* Grand Prix (27-2-1 counting byes!). You don't remember *Invasion*? Well, it was a lot like *Ravnica* with big honkin' dragons and a lot more kill spells. Ask your gray-bearded friends who can't play anymore due to a job, wife and kids, they'll quickly put you to sleep telling you how great it was and how good they used to be. That aside, while sometimes you'll open triple Grayscale Gharial and wonder what deity you annoyed in a previous life, there's a lot of room for skill in building and playing sealed decks. Most people are just too busy complaining about their "luck" to realize it. And once you add in the two-headed giant part, there's even less luck.

If you go into a Two-Headed Giant tournament thinking it's just like regular sealed deck then you're going to get owned. Your usually reliable Screeching Griffin will have been pecking away for half a dozen turns and your opponents won't look the least bit scared. Meanwhile, you've never been so frightened of an Ivy Dancer and you can't seem to get rid of that pesky 1/4 reject from the Blue Man Group that seems to be milling through your buddy's library so quickly.



The differences between two heads and one head can be summed up quite easily: Everything is Bigger. The creatures, the spells, the length of the games and the board complexity.

Let's start with the length of the games. In individual sealed matches a lot of games are over quickly due to mana screw or a fast draw that comes out cleanly. But in Two-Headed this almost never happens. If one of your opponents is having mana troubles, the other one can generally hold the fort with their creatures until they draw out of it. Even if you get a fantastic opening draw of first turn Boros Recruit, second turn Sell-Sword Brute and third turn Skynight Legionnaire, and somehow neither opponent has early kill or a blocker (and that's very unlikely), you've still only knocked your opponent to 27 by turn four. That's not the same as knocking an opponent to 7 in a normal game, it's more like beating them down to 14. And that's your optimal situation. It's awfully difficult to burn your opponents out from 27!

With 40 life, the creatures have to be bigger to really have an impact. In solo play an unblocked 2/2 creature is a viable threat and a 3-power creature generally represents a five or six turn clock. But in Two-Headed that same 2/2 will have to hit you twenty times before you're dead. It has become functionally equivalent to a 1/2 creature. Exactly how many 1/2 vanilla creatures do most of us play? If you answered more than 0, you're reading the wrong article (I know someone in the back is yelling, "Norwood Ranger is an early beating!" and security is already on their way). Even our trusty friend the Hill Giant/Greater Mossdog is going to be panting and wheezing after thirteen turns of attacking, especially through two sets of blockers.

So what's the answer? Expensive and powerful spells. Since we know our games won't be decided in the first few turns, and cheap creatures aren't going to be that helpful anyway, there's no need to waste valuable deck slots on small aggressive attackers. Does this mean every creature should cost at least six and have a power of 4? Definitely not. But it does mean you want to minimize the number of dubious or vanilla creatures you play and not worry as much about your early mana curve. Nine-mana spells aren't playable in regular sealed deck but in Two-Headed they're just considered "late game". The seven- and eight-mana slots are where the action really heats up as each team brings out their bombs after their opponents have wasted their answers on the relatively puny four through six-mana threats. Even if you draw all the pricey stuff in your opening hand, the new mulligan rule that we'll look into later gives you a free chance to fix things.

An extra complication when it comes to creature selection is the large number of creatures that are likely to be in play. With two players drawing and playing spells, you quickly end up with a very crowded board situation. As Zvi [explained admirably](#) a few weeks ago, a complicated board favours the defender. Your Golgari Rotwurm isn't going to get much accomplished offensively when facing a Netherborn Phalanx and Civic Wayfinder, and will happily sit back to trade with the more expensive Siege Wurm should it come looking for trouble. While it's possible to get through all this with combat tricks and creature enhancements (and sometimes you will), it's a lot easier to go around it with evasion. Fear is your first level of evasion with Dimir House Guard and Undercity Shade (though some cool options are available if you can fit a Concerted Effort in there as well) but every team will be using their black creatures so it becomes a bit limited. Flying is the more popular option and the skies can get very crowded as players try to race or break through a built-up position. In the end, however, Landwalking is the secret weapon that doesn't get a lot of play in individual competition. When you know your opponents will have at least four colours (five if they like blue), then each landwalker becomes



unblockable. There aren't that many of them, but even the 2/2 Goblin Spelunkers make the cut if you have any form of creature enhancement (and you should since so much is resting on what few evasion creatures you can find).

Always keep in mind that Two-Headed decks are going to be better than any other sealed format, as each team gets to use the best cards from four of the five colours (and often five out of five with judicious use of splashing). This compares favourably to traditional sealed where you can only use the best two or three colours, and also to three-man team sealed where you often have to split a colour or use sub-par cards to get a consistent mono-colour deck.

So what's the new mulligan rule for Two-Headed play? Each player can mulligan once and still get seven cards, but each subsequent mulligan costs you a card as usual. Use this to your advantage, as between free mulligans and having a partner to help cover you if you stumble, you can play a bit fast and loose with your mana. I'd start 0.5 to 1 less mana sources than usual (non-land mana sources such as Signets are often considered "half" a mana source) and chuckle as my opponents complain about how lucky I am to draw so many spells.

Another way to increase your spell count is to draw first. Traditionally in sealed deck it has always been better to draw first as the lower quality spells and oft-complicated mana bases means aggressive starts are difficult to consistently pull off and not worth the loss of a card. Two-Headed is no different –the games go long and early aggression is a waste of time – but even more importantly, if you go first you get *two* extra cards, not just one as each player shares the draw step. I don't know about you, but extra cards always give me a warm glowy feeling inside.

Here's a summary of what you should have picked up so far:

1. The games will be long so don't worry so much about the earlier game and getting in some "quick beats";
2. Play more expensive spells
3. Play less land; (probably the first time you've heard that particular combination of advice)
4. Evasion is king
5. Draw first

Let's pause for a moment to catch our breath and absorb all of that learnin'. As a quick change of pace to get your mind refreshed for part two I'd like each of you to send a quick [email to Wizards of the Coast](#) in support of [Jon Becker's crusade](#) to bring spiders back to prominence in **Magic**. The exact details of the crusade are in that article but may I offer evidence of the righteousness of his work in the form of Selesnya



Sagittars? A 2/5 creature that can not only block fliers but can also block multiple creatures **and yet isn't a spider!?!?** Outside of Ravnica the only elves with a combined power and toughness of 7 or more are Aberrations and Mutants – does WotC understand what "aberration" and "mutant" mean? What makes this Archer so darn tough? Obviously the elf lobbyists are getting a little cosy with Mr. Rosewater and friends despite already having the archer-like sky-dominating Elvish Skysweeper. You know, Mark's not so tall and I can't say for certain that he doesn't have pointy ears... Everyone rested and keen to learn more? Excellent, let's continue. There's going to be homework and a pop-quiz next week so don't let your mind wander (you think I'm kidding, but that's why I can still call it a pop-quiz).

From what I've just described it appears that Two-Headed sealed is all about bombs, and in many ways that's true. But I also said sealed deck has a lot of skill in it, and that's true as well. So how are they compatible? With superior deck construction. Many people lose despite having fantastic bombs and the mark of a good player is the ability to find synergy between mediocre cards that turn reasonable decks into great ones. Here are a bunch of ideas and environmental quirks to help get the most out of what you open.

Your life totals are doubled, your creatures and spells are bigger, the board is more complicated – but the one thing that isn't any different is the size of your library. You still only have forty cards in each library and if either player loses the game then the entire team is finished. All you have to do is mill away a single library to check off that 'W' column. While traditionally milling strategies have been considered too slow, we've already determined that this format isn't about speed. In Two-Headed *Ravnica* sealed, a strong milling deck is nearly unstoppable. You use the non-blue player as defence with lots of high-toughness creatures such as Carven Caryatid and Conclave Phalanx to slow the game down while protecting your milling creatures with cards like Bathe in Light, Gaze of the Gorgon and Seeds of Strength. Meanwhile the blue deck attacks the opposing black-green library as much as he or she can. Why the black-green deck? Because black-green decks have lots of dredge and by attacking their library you either deny them dredging or they speed up their own demise whenever they use it. If you're worried about putting dredgable bombs into their graveyard then you can attack the blue deck that is drawing lots of cards, but if their blue deck is drawing as many cards as most decks dredge, then you've got much bigger troubles.

With the mill archetype you spend almost no resources on attacking. Your Dimir House Guards stay back on defence with your Belltower Sphinx and Drift of Phantasms. You spend valuable card slots on search tools such as Telling Time as well as recovery spells like Vigor Mortis, Recollect and Sins of the Past to bring back Entrancers, Psychic Drains and Glimpse the Unthinkable (as well as removal and any other bombs). Ghosts of the Innocent is a surprise hit in this deck as is Chant of the Vhиту-Ghazi as they both can prolong the game for a half-dozen extra turns. In the end you will have a very frustrated set of opponents, but you'll have won the game and match.



Another area where a lot of card advantage can be gained is through "mass" effects – spells that affect all players but reward the ones that are better prepared. In individual play these spells can be difficult to take advantage of – there's no point in playing Necroplasm when you've just drawn and played all your early rush creatures, and if anyone has tried to use Razia's Purification they'll know how tough it can be to gain advantage if they're not already winning. But with four players you double the number of people who don't know it's coming while both you and your teammate can hold back. The obvious use of this strategy is with Hour of Reckoning or Cleansing Beam, where your team pretends to be drawing lots and lots of lands until your opponents get suspicious. More advanced players can build decks and plays around Warp World (generate as many permanents as possible to be replaced by cards from your decks) and Empty the Catacombs (use Transmute to get extra cards into your graveyard to be returned and save your removal until after you play it when possible).

With each match consisting of a single game, everything is a surprise. Your opponents will have no opportunity to play around or sideboard against the cards they saw in previous games because after one game you're done. Flash Conscriptio and the like are always good and your mass effects are even more devastating. Milling strategies are to be expected but until they see that first Entrancer, there's no way for an opponent to know to hold back on the dredging or to save up his or her removal (be extra careful not to accidentally drop cards while shuffling!).

Creatures are very vulnerable in Two-Headed as teams tend to choose the colours to maximize their available removal spells. But with so many quality threats relative to what's expected in individual games, beginners often use up their kill early as they forget they have 40 life and can probably take a couple of hits without wincing. You need to be careful not to waste removal on early blockers just so you can get through for an extra three damage. With each team drawing two cards a turn, there will always be replacement blockers. Our group did a ton of practicing for this article, and during that process my team lost a game trying to keep the path clear for our Dimir House Guard to pound through (well, at 40 life it was more of a tip-toe) only to have our opponents draw multiple swamp dwellers and eventually fly in for victory as our hastily-used Disembowel mocked us from the graveyard.

In addition to strategically playing your cards well, it is also important to strategically play your opponents. Bluffing can be a big help but you need to have both players on board or it's just going to look silly. A team that can feign excitement when they both draw lands or both look confident when they attack with no tricks is going to have a lot more success than the team where one player sighs loudly every time they draw a land, unless that too is a bluff. This means you and your teammate have to understand one another and be able to go with the flow when the other one attempts a bluff and starts pointing at cards as if planning to destroy them while you're both holding lands.

"Be careful not to waste removal on early blockers just so you can get through for an extra three damage. With each team drawing two cards a turn, there will always be replacement blockers."

An opponent pointing at cards is one of the biggest signals available to you. Unlike team draft where there are a couple of common signals ("counterdraft", "take this card", "I have no creatures"), there are endless options inside a game of **Magic** and they're often very complicated, so it's nearly impossible to work out all the necessary code words ahead of time. How exactly do you indicate to your partner that there's no need to leave blockers back because you're going to use Flash

Conscription to steal this attacker and block that one without pointing at any permanents? Or even worse, the following finally had to be said out loud by my opponents in a recent match: "Don't kill theMortipede when it forces our Rotwurm and Razia to block as we can sacrifice the 5/4 to itself so theMortipede damage has to be done to the angel and can be re-directed to the Thundersong Trumpeterthat's keeping her from attacking". Needless to say, we figured out what they were up to merely by listening – luckily it fit perfectly with our plans and we attacked anyway! If one player on the team is very good then the other can trust their moves without questioning, but even the best in the world miss things once in a while, and in the ego-filled world of **Magic**, it's hard to find players willing to be that subordinate. Needless to say, multi-lingual teams are going to have a distinct advantage – finally a purpose to French class!

Speaking of French, does your brain hurt yet? I know my fingers do. To keep us both from keeling over, now that I've got the basics covered I'm going to finish up next week with some more advanced tips, along with lists of specific cards that improve (or worsen) in the Two-Headed environment. I know, I know, you're begging to hear more, but when the topic is "Two-Headed" do you really expect everything to be in one article?

But don't worry, you won't be bored – just like French class, I've got homework to dish out! After working through three thousand odd words I'm sure everyone is keen to rush out and put it to the test by playing some Two-Headed Giant. Lucky for them, there are [tournaments all around the country this weekend!](#) Your assignment is to play in a tournament and come back next week to tell me everything I got right (or wrong) as well as share any great stories or extra advice you might have. Have fun!