

Controlling Your Aggressive Tender Search

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Wow.

In the days leading up to last Tuesday's article I was getting increasingly excited about the new draft machine that Wizards web dev Kevin Endo did such an amazing job developing for my article. And you guys did not disappoint. With 25 forum responses in the first half-hour, and almost 300 by noon Friday when this was submitted, it is second only to the 311 comments disputing Mark Rosewater's suggestion that Mike Long be nominated for the Hall of Fame. I like to be #1 so if you haven't done the draft walk-through yet, I highly suggest you try it out and then post your picks!

While Christmas may have come early for all the readers, it was substantially more effort for this poor columnist who had to read through all those entries. Early ideas of adding up card picks were quickly abandoned after working out the stats on the very first pick. The elves at Wizards are busy working away on improvements for the New Year that may help with this. And no, despite popular rumour, the draft machine was not a sneak preview at *Magic Online* 3.0.

Before I get started, I'd like to apologize in advance for any reduction in writing quality this week. As I begin this I already have 8,000 words worth of rough notes (approximately three regular-sized columns worth, or 32 double-spaced typed pages) so please forgive me if my thoughts jump around a bit and there's a touch less cohesiveness to things. After enveloping myself in all things red and white (I'm also hosting a 100-person Christmas gala this Saturday), I expect I won't touch Boros cards for months!

The Draft

One recurring theme that I've noticed in the forums whenever I write an article is that people have a tendency to get fixated on a single aspect of drafting and quickly become fanatical to the point of doing very strange things in order to "draft correctly". Case in point – Boros Decks Should Be Aggressive.

While it's certainly true that the red and white cards lend themselves to aggressive decks, it is not the only option available. One of the secrets to successful drafting is to zig when everyone else zags. If everyone is placing a premium on aggressive cards, then there's an opportunity to pick up better and more controlling cards later than usual. It is equivalent to learning how to win with the bad cards that no one wants as you know you'll get lots of them. It's never wrong to gain from someone else's prejudice.

If you go into this draft thinking Boros is always aggressive and rule out anything that doesn't cost less than four mana or tap to enter the red zone, then you've already handicapped yourself before the first card is picked. When I see people complaining that they can't take a War-Torch Goblin or Rally the Righteous over the efficiently costed and highly effective Viashino Fangtail, I don't know whether to rejoice that I'll always be able to beat them, or cry because they're so blinded to the possibilities. I admit, I'm a control player at heart – the longer the game goes the more chance my deck-building and playing skills can overcome an unlucky draw – but even with my distaste for aggression, I still know a good card from a mediocre one.

I also found it interesting how many people didn't think they drafted very well. Perhaps it was lack of experience (it surprised me how many non-drafters read the column) or they were worried about

being mocked by other readers, but with most of your picks restricted to only the best cards, I don't think anyone could have ended up with an absolutely unplayable deck. I know some of you hate me for not letting you pick Seismic Spike out of the first pack and I'm okay with that. Trust me, it was for your own good. And for those of you who have never drafted before my article, remember me when you're winning your first Pro Tour!

One of the key points that these exercises continually remind me of is that everyone drafts differently. From my review of the hundreds of draft submissions, very few are exactly alike and not only did I force the colours you were to pick from, I restricted the picks themselves! This shows you that each person brings their own perspective to drafts (one of the reasons signaling is so difficult), and helps explain why some cards get to you so late while others are always taken before you get a chance. It pays to be able to adapt – if the other Boros drafters at your table like taking the aggressive cards, then you need to pick up on that early and start taking the Torpid Molochs over the Sell-Sword Brutes.

Pack 1, Pick 1

Tattered Drake, Strands of Undeath, Barbarian Riftcutter, **Screeching Griffin**, Vedalken Entrancer, Golgari Rotwurm, Thoughtpicker Witch, Seismic Spike, Elvish Skysweeper, **Skyknight Legionnaire**, **Conclave Equenaut**, Leashling, Carven Caryatid, Festival of the Guildpact, **Brightflame**

Screeching Griffin

Skyknight Legionnaire

Conclave Equenaut

Brightflame

Of the first 260 posts, 216 had draft listings. Of these, 61 people picked the Brightflame, 146 picked Skyknight Legionnaire, 5 picked the Equenaut and 4 picked the Screeching Griffin which came back around the table anyway. A small group of people insisted that the Entrancer, Rotwurm or Caryatid were better picks. These people have what is commonly referred to on report cards as "trouble following instructions". While there is validity in passing all the Boros cards for others to fight over, Brightflame is a bomb and first-pack-first-pick bombs should never be passed.

I'm not sure people truly appreciate how good a card Brightflame is. Would you take a card that said "🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥 – Destroy all creatures, gain 19 life"? One thing I've learned after 10 years of limited play is "mass kill is always good" (except maybe for Blockbuster as we'll see in today's homework assignment). Heck, just last week I described how mass kill schooled me in the top 8 of Pro Tour Atlanta. Even if it only kills one creature because they sacrifice the target, Brightflame is still removal. It's also one of the few ways Boros has of attaining card advantage. Aggressive decks run out of gas. Brightflame is high-octane jet fuel. I hate hitting turn eight and knowing that I can no longer win as my opponent is either drawing more cards, better cards, or both. The Brightflame gives you options and the ability to win games that you've lost control of – not something to ever be taken lightly. It also lets you recover from a mana-flood, the bane of an aggressive deck.

This is not to say that the Legionnaire isn't good. It's very good – the embodiment of the Boros Guild with speed and evasion. But it's also replaceable – there are other fliers and you'll have other chances at a Legionnaire. You won't have so many chances at mass removal and board-clearing effects. A lot



of people say "I hope to have won before the late game arrives and the Brightflame matters". Guess what - your opponent is hoping you don't. Why take the risk if you can give yourself options for when plan A (win quickly) turns into plan B (try to recover from inferior cards and no card advantage).

From a signaling perspective, you should take the Brightflame. A Legionnaire can get splashed - the person to your left could be easily tempted into the Selesnya cards if you block the rest of the red stuff. Brightflame says, "if you don't play heavy Boros, you're wasting this pick". It also says the person in front of you isn't playing heavy Boros, so the colour is free.

A more advanced theory deals with the current draft metagame. It looks like most Boros drafters are going aggressive so you want to avoid competing with them by taking the control cards. Let them have their Sparkmages while you grab the Ancestors, Fangtails and Rain of Embers.

The other two choices are both reasonable cards but they don't compare to the Legionnaire as fliers unless you're drafting a slower control deck at which point you take the Brightflame. Even in the more controlling decks the Equehaut is a bit slow and the Griffin's evasion not generally needed, so there's no reason not to take the cheaper Legionnaire even if you just use it for blocking.

Pack 1, Pick 2

Coalhauler Swine, Dimir Aquedecut, Courier Hawk, **Screeching Griffin**, Muddle the Mixture, Sadistic Augermage, Dryad's Caress, Dromad Purebred, Dizzy Spell, Transluminant, **Sandsower**, Psychic Drain, **Flame-Kin Zealot**, Autochthon Wurm

Screeching Griffin

Sandsower

Flame-Kin Zealot

Should Have Taken: **Screeching Griffin**



It's always gratifying to get passed the second pack and only see cards in your colour. Most of the time it means you've been lucky enough to not draft the same cards as the person upstream, and it keeps things flexible by not requiring a switch to any other guilds just yet.

Many people immediately grab the gold card as it matches their guild and is nice and aggressive. It also sends a good signal as we want to encourage our downstream neighbour to switch into Selesnya and we can't do that by passing him or her playable Boros cards all the time. The Zealot is Boros Viagra - it pumps up your weenies, making them bigger and more effective. That's exactly what you want in an aggressive deck. While the Brightflame seems to push us towards control, nothing is locked in yet.

The Sandsower, on the other hand, is a very interesting card.

A lot of people were big fans of the Sandsower and I have to admit I've lost to it many times when I thought I had the board in hand. The key issue here is that I was probably playing against a Selesnya deck where there were lots of Saprolings to use with the Sandsower and likely a giant Wurm or Elemental that smacked me around once my key blockers were tapped. Boros decks don't tend to function that way - when you tap your creatures you want them to be entering the red zone, not tapping a creature at end of turn. One of the fascinating aspects of *Ravnica* drafting is how the cards wildly vary in power depending on what type of deck you're playing.

I believe people who take the Sandsower this early have fallen into the trap of believing that what is good in one deck is good in all decks. As pointed out in the forums, Incite Hysteria, a tool not available to pure Selesnya decks, is often a faster and more effective way to remove blockers than Sandsower. There's no need to use an early pick when a later one will do the job.

Some people argued that the Zealot is a "win more" card. That is, a card that helps you win when you're already winning. In many ways this is true, but that is the burden of the aggressive drafter. You assume that you'll have an upper hand early on and pray that you win before it goes away. If that was the entirety of the strategy, it would be deeply flawed as even the most aggressive constructed decks have at least one tactic for the late game (Cursed Scroll anyone?) But we assume that we have some late game cards that will pick up the slack if our early aggression falls short (Brightflame) and this gives us a bit of room for "win more" cards to complement our quick start. It is the reversal of the control strategy which uses "don't affect the board at all" cards such as Compulsive Research with the assumption that it will survive the early game long enough to take advantage of the extra resources.

So the Zealot is a reasonable card and as most Boros decks are aggressive, it seems like the best pick. But in the past two weeks I've come to realize it's not quite that simple and even at the time I was tempted by the Griffin. The Griffin is a mid to late game card that doesn't hit that quickly or that hard, but it is essentially unblockable which is a very significant ability. The Zealot often means an immediate hit for about four points of damage but then it's a random bear, and sometimes it skips the four damage part. The Griffin will hit for a lot more than that if it stays alive. The Zealot is never a bad choice, and I'm reluctant to send the bad signals (though it's not world-ending to be drafting Boros control beside an aggressive Boros deck if that's what happens), but I think the Griffin is best here. Thanks to Richard Hoaen for privately confirming what my gut was telling me at the time - one of the reasons I picked this draft to highlight were choices like this one.

Pack 1, Pick 3

Gaze of the Gorgon, Goblin Spelunkers, Greater Mossdog, Sabertooth Alley Cat, Gather Courage, Goblin Fire Fiend, Perplex, Gate Hound, Flight of Fancy, **Galvanic Arc**, Halcyon Glaze, Darkblast, Stoneshaker Shaman

Galvanic Arc

This is a fantastic pack for us. A third pick Arc tells us that no one ahead of us is playing red, the perfect situation. At this point I'd like to disagree with all the readers who wanted to run a different Guild, presumably based on the cards they saw in later packs. That is the first error that drafters will have to overcome. Consistency is good. Not throwing away early picks is good. Strong signals that neither of the two players in front of you is in R/W are good. Why would you ever want to switch colours and/or splash when the cards are begging you to go Boros?

Pack 1, Pick 4

Induce Paranoia, Mortipede, Torpid Moloch, Clinging Darkness, **Ordrun Commando**, Quickchange, Sewerdreg, Seismic Spike, Elves of Deep Shadow, **Conclave Equenaut**, **Flash Conscription**, Leashling

Ordrun Commando

Conclave Equenaut

Flash Conscription

Should Have Taken: ***Conclave Equenaut***

Here's where things get tricky. At this point we have to start deciding which direction our deck is heading. Will we be hitting hard and fast or taking control of the game with our better cards and eventual card advantage?

Flash Conscription is a good card. Many of you may fondly remember Grab the Reins, Blind with Anger or Ray of Command, all of which are in the same family as Flash Conscription. It is tempting to think that since all of those were good, the Conscription is also good. And you would be right. It is good. It's just not as good as those other three (except perhaps Blind with Anger as I was always getting hit by pesky legends that I couldn't do anything about). In particular, Ravnica has a bunch of common creatures with "sacrifice creature" abilities that make this removal as opposed to card advantage (still good, but not great). But has it sunk below a 3/3 flier for six mana?



Fine, we'll say five mana because of Convoke, but if you're aggressive you don't want to be tapping creatures to play spells, and if you're controlling you'll need those creatures to block the aggressive decks. Let's agree that the Equenaut is a 3/3 flier, and those are never bad, but it's not particularly cheap. So we're comparing two high-quality over-costed spells and the Commando. The Commando isn't really in the same class as the other two and we can expect to get them later. It's a bit too vulnerable for controlling decks and lacks evasion when getting aggressive, so it's definitely the last choice of the bunch.

In the end, I took the Conscription because I'm a sucker for card advantage and it helps me race and/or deal with large creatures. But at the time I was just beginning to play with Boros decks and I believe I over-rated the Conscription – it's just too expensive. In hindsight I think the 3/3 flier, while over-costed, isn't as bad as the Conscription and sets us up for a strategy of stalling the ground and winning through the air. At this point we're almost definitely drafting a control deck.

Pack 1, Pick 5

Unknown Pack.

Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree (no other Boros cards)

Some people took this pick as an argument to jump into green. While Vitu-Ghazi is certainly reasonable, it's not good enough to be splashing, especially when we don't really have any engines that get fed by extra creatures such as Grootdion or Rotwurm. The option to go into green is open if something amazing shows up (Tolsimir or Glare, for example) but it's mostly a wasted pick that should be ignored. Don't start taking Scatter the Seeds or Seeds of Strength just because you were stuck with this!

I found a real push from readers to split off into a third or fourth colour. Consistency will win you a lot more drafts than splashes will. Only splash bombs. This is not a bomb.

Pack 1, Pick 6

Wojek Siren, Convoluted, Dimir Aqueduct, **Ordrun Commando**, Drake Familiar, Shred memory, Surge of Zeal, Dimir Signet, **Sell-Sword Brute**, Lore Broker

Ordruun Commando

Sell-Sword Brute

Should Have Taken: ***Sell-Sword Brute***

We rejected the Commando earlier for lacking evasion but it should fare better against other ground creatures. Four points of power for four mana is aggressive and efficient, and if you can clear the way or provide evasion (perhaps through Galvanic Arc providing first strike) then this will hit hard.

But by the time the Commando is ready to roll, the Brute has already dealt four points of damage and is coming in for two more. With a side-effect that is negligible to aggressive players, there is a strong argument for grabbing the Brute as an efficient early drop that will allow you to get the jump on your opponent. And the Brute works much better with our Zealot.

In hindsight, I should have taken the Brute. You're going to get other chances at these cards later in the draft so it's a bit of a guessing game as to which one is better though the Brute has recently been increasing in value. You don't want to end up with three of either, but one or two of each isn't the end of the world. Knowing my tendency to pick expensive spells, the Brute would help soften my mana curve as I may be forced to use him even in a control deck. The Commando looks good on paper, and that's what I went with at the time, but I'm never really happy to see one in my opening hand while I'm almost always glad to find a Brute.

Pack 1, Pick 7

Barbarian Riftcutter , **Courier Hawk**, **Sabertooth Alley Cat**, Sundering Vitae, Leave No Trace, Zephyr Spirit, Dimir Signet, Duskmantle, Mark of Eviction

Barbarian Riftcutter

Courier Hawk

Sabertooth Alley Cat

Should Have Taken: ***Courier Hawk***

Here's another case where drafting a deck instead of a collection of good cards becomes relevant. If you've already drafted the Sandsower, then vigilance becomes extra valuable and you may look to the Hawk. If you're aggressively attacking with cheap spells and extra mana, the Alley Cat's evasion can often act as a finisher. The Riftcutter should never be taken – it's overpriced and the ability is rarely relevant.

I took the Cat but that was definitely a mistake. As a Dimir drafter, the Cat has frequently burned me while the Hawk is often just a speed bump. As a Boros control drafter I should have realized that the Hawk doesn't require a constant upkeep to survive and comes out a turn earlier. In hindsight, I wish I'd taken the Hawk but at the time I was still locked into "Boros must attack".

Pack 1, Pick 8

Courier Hawk , Convolute, Golgari Rot Farm, **Centaur Safeguard**, Tidewater Minion, Dizzy Spell, Infectious Host, Lore Broker

Courier Hawk

Centaur Safeguard

Here's another seemingly simple pick that brings up a lot of subtle issues. I can't help but like three power for three mana, while one power for two mana seems wasteful. Sure, it evades and has



vigilance so convoke is better, but there aren't that many quality mono-white convoke spells, and most fliers shut them down just by standing (floating?) there. If your opponent is mana-screwed, or you otherwise have board dominance, is smacking them for one point of damage a turn really pressing the advantage? Add in various first strike abilities from the Arc, Sunhome or Boros Guildmage and the high-powered creatures seem like a better bet, especially when it can help swing a race just by chump blocking.

Yet most people took the Hawk. Of course, they also took one or two Sparkmage Apprentices, a choice I'll disagree with later. I suspect there's a large group of players who play Sparkmage and thus find 1-toughness creatures very vulnerable. It's interesting to think that all these people are making inferior draft choices to compensate for other people's inferior draft choices.

In the end, whether you're aggressive or controlling, I think the Centaur is a reasonable pick here. An argument can definitely be made that aggressive decks need a certain number of two drops to guarantee one in their opening hand (approximately four would do it, five would nearly guarantee) and this is a reasonable two-drop. But aggressive decks also need three-drops and there aren't any three-drops outside of the Legionnaire that hit harder than the Centaur.

Pack 1, Pick 9

Tattered Drake, **Screaching Griffin**, Thoughtpicker Witch, Seismic Spike, Elvish Skysweeper, Leashling, Festival of the Guildpact

Screaching Griffin comes back around the table (unless you picked it first at which point assume you get Festival of the Guildpact)

This pick ended up confusing people as there was a Griffin in both the first pack (where no one took it) and the second pack (where several people took it). While I never want to take the Griffin first, I'm always happy to take it ninth. And there is no more compelling an argument for not taking it first than seeing it circle the table and come back. This demonstrates an effect I once wrote an article about where you can intentionally long-range two cards out of the opening pack by taking the colour with the most playables. With only four guilds, *Ravnica* plays a lot like early *Invasion* block limited with just five allied colour combinations. There may be some value in reading older strategy articles to get a jump on opponents.

For those of you that prefer the Festival, I think you're just flat out crazy. The Festival is a cycling card for **G** that may prevent some damage but you don't want to depend on it. A "half land" (and 45% of all cycling cards end up becoming lands) is never as good as a 2/2 flier with super evasion. It should never make your deck.

Late picks

Psychic Drain, Sabertooth Alley Cat, Induce Paranoia, Tattered Drake, Wojek Siren, Zephyr Spirit

A lot of people got very worked up by all the "amazing" Dimir cards in the final five picks and claimed that this indicated how under-drafted Dimir is. In the defence of the other drafters, this draft was held before the Dimir mill deck became common knowledge so many players likely didn't realize the value of these cards in that archetype.

Pack 2, Pick 1

Viashino Slasher, Golgari Rot Farm, Consult the Necrosages, Fists of Ironwood, War-Torch Goblin, Sundering Vitae, Caregiver, Dizzy Spell, Peel from Reality, Shambling Shell, **Fiery Conclusion**, Golgari Germination, Vigor Mortis, **Flash Conscription**, Spawnbroker
Fiery Conclusion

Flash Conscription

At the time this decision was very easy for me. I will always take a two-for-one card over a one-for-two. I would never play Death Bomb over Spinal Embrace in *Invasion* block, and despite Conscription getting weaker, I'm not sure the differences are sufficient to change my mind just yet.

The Conclusion is at best a one-for-one trade if the creature that you're sacrificing is already going to the graveyard. This is not a reasonable deal and many times I've had to throw a creature away just to use it, or taken extra damage while waiting for a good opportunity when any creature could have traded. Slow decks don't have the mana open to use the Conclusion in the early game. Fast decks don't want to remove their own creature to clear a way for the remaining attackers, and are likely tapping out to play threats and thus unable to react with it on their own turn. It's a mid to late game card when the control decks should already be in control, and the aggressive decks are hoping to already have won.



But...it's one of the only ways Boros decks have of getting through the huge Golgari men or the various cheap walls and Entrancers. When a single Bramble Elemental is holding off eight power worth of weenies, the Conclusion is exactly what you're looking for if you're playing aggressively.

As it stands, we're looking to play control so we'll take the Conscription. If necessary, there should be other opportunities to get Conclusions – first pick is a bit early.

Pack 2, Pick 2

Strands of Undeath, Coalhauler Swine, Dimir Aqueduct, Stinkweed Imp, Sparkmage Apprentice, Fists of Ironwood, Shred Memory, Rain of Embers, Dryad's Caress, Transluminant, Golgari Thug, Drooling Grootion, **Cleansing Beam**, Breath of Fury

Cleansing Beam

A lot of people seem confused by this card. Jagged Lightning dealt three damage to two creatures for the same price and was widely considered a bomb. Pyroclasm has always been popular as mass removal. The Beam is a mixture of both and some people are leaving it in their sideboard! You're rarely going to be facing the mirror and it's pretty easy to hit all of an opponent's creatures because of the hybrid and gold cards, so it's a one-sided Pyroclasm. That's good. Even a two-sided Pyroclasm isn't so bad. What's not to love?

Pack 2, Pick 3

Woodwraith Strangler, Drift of Phantasms, Strands of Undeath, **Incite Hysteria**, Grayscaled Gharial, Shred Memory, **Rain of Embers**, Compulsive Research, Brainspoil, Shambling Shell, Netherborn Phalanx, **Glass Golem**, Congregation at Dawn

Incite Hysteria
Rain of Embers
Glass Golem



This was a pick with a lot of different answers. Many people really don't like the Golem, despite being one of the few creatures in all of **Magic** with a power higher than the casting cost. In a guild that can't handle big creatures, this guy helps pave the way. One of the best uses of artifacts is to shore up weaknesses in your colours and these infrequent opportunities should always be examined closely. It's definitely pricey in an already expensive deck, but we're short on quality creatures and right now we roll over and die to anything with a significant toughness. Sure, he dies to everything, but he also *kills* everything, and that's a convincing selling point. He's also immune to radiance effects such as our two pieces of mass kill so it's a bit easier to clear a path. Throw an Arc on him and he's nearly unbeatable!

The Hysteria is a finisher but we're playing control so it isn't likely to be all that useful, and most of our creatures already have evasion of some sort. More importantly, it's only the third pick of the second pack and the Hysteria is a 9th through 15th pick (as we'll see later) so we don't want to be grabbing it this early.

The Embers is a sideboard card against certain aggressive decks and Selesnya decks. It too will come back in the second half of a pack. If you happen to have a lot of recurring kill such as two Fangtails, it can be useful for that extra point, but still not really optimal as the Boros creatures tend to also be the most vulnerable creatures.

Pack 2, Pick 4

Wojek Siren, Terraformer, Consult the Necrosages, Surveilling Sprite, Dimir House Guard, Drake Familiar, Thoughtpicker Witch, Goblin Fire Fiend, **Selesnya Signet**, **Indentured Oaf**, Svogthos, the Restless Tomb, Chant of Vitu-Ghazi

Wojek Siren
Selesnya Signet
Indentured Oaf

The Oaf seems like an obvious pick to me. In the majority of cases he's an aggressively-costed 4/3 in a world of obnoxious Bramble Elementals, Oathsworn Giants, Minions and Rotwurms. In your worst case scenario he's racing a Greater Forgeling, but your Siren and Signet won't help there either. The Siren isn't consistent and is rarely worth the cost of a card, the Signet is off-colour as we don't have any good splash options yet, and hate-drafting doesn't make sense when there's an option that's playable.

People talk about sideboarding out the Oaf against other Boros decks and I think that's wrong. It forces them to hold back a red creature or take a beating, and sometimes that's tough to do. It's not like it can't still block most red creatures and survive!

Pack 2, Pick 5

Induce Paranoia, Gather Courage, **Sparkmage Apprentice**, Conclave's Blessing, Quickchange, Sewerdreg, Flight of Fancy, **Sell-Sword Brute**, Dark Heart of the Woods, Flow of Ideas, **Bottled Cloister**

Sparkmage Apprentice
Sell-Sword Brute

Bottled Cloister

A lot of people dismissed the Cloister and I think that's a huge mistake. Boros decks are desperate for late game cards to fuel their early rush and make up for their aggressive yet poor quality creatures. While Dimir has many ways of gaining extra cards, Boros decks have limited options and should reach for the Bottle eagerly if they don't want to be sitting on lots of untapped lands after turn six. To quote "lathspel": "Boros's usual problem is running out of steam, and this card will get you steam."

Some people complained about losing access to tricks and worried about the number of instants they had or were going to draft. It's true that Flash Conscription is much worse on your own turn, but drawing an extra card every turn tends to counteract any lost card advantage from tricks. In fact, drawing extra cards tends to solve almost every problem. And on the plus side, you're immune to discard.



The love for the Sparkmage Apprentice confuses me. At least Flare gets you a random card and is an instant! There just aren't that many 1-toughness creatures that you need to worry about such as the 3/1 and 2/1 fliers of previous blocks (or the 1/1 tappers and pingers of much earlier blocks). The Trumpeter is about the worst of the 1-toughness creatures that I would expect to see, and after that the quality rapidly diminishes to Mortipede and Nightguard Patrol. The Apprentice is a card in an under-drafted colour pairing that is best in the mirror. Can we say, "never optimal"? And for those of you riding the "it's aggressive" bandwagon, since when is a 1/1 for two mana aggressive? Are you planning on slapping it down on turn two and pinging your opponent for one? At that point, it's an over-costed Raging Goblin!

Pack 2, Pick 6

Votary of the Conclave, Terraformer, Tidewater Minion, Stinkweed Imp, **Conclave's Blessing**, Dimir Infiltrator, Necromantic Thirst, **Seeds of Strength**, Rolling Spoil, Hunted Horror

Votary of the Conclave
Conclave's Blessing

Seeds of Strength

Hate/Rare Draft Tidewater Minion, Stinkweed Imp or Hunted Horror

This was a bad pack in general. At this point I'm fairly certain I won't be in green as it's a bit late to think of splashing. But I wanted to keep my options open if things took a turn for the worse and I was scrambling for enough cards in three colours. I never want to touch the Votary as 1/1s for 1 need incredible abilities to be worth it to me (recall again the pingers and tappers from past blocks). The Blessing is unplayable though "Planesblazer" did point out how good it can be on a Selesnya Sagittars - the equivalent of Sandskin on Ironfist Crusher back in *Onslaught*.

If you're comfortable with sticking to red/white, hate drafting is certainly a valid option. The Horror doesn't have much of a resale value so it may be better to grab the Imp that can recur to stop our limited flying threats. Heck, if things really go nuts maybe we'll end up in black and splash it!

Pack 2, Pick 7

Induce Paranoia, Roofstalker Wight, **Torpid Moloch**, **Sparkmage Apprentice**, Sewerdreg, **Smash**, Peel from Reality, Mnemonic Nexus, Carrion Howler

Torpid Moloch

Sparkmage Apprentice

Smash

We already know how much I hate the Apprentice. Smash, on the other hand, is a card that theoretically works for me. Almost every deck has at least one common signet if not two, and there are almost a dozen uncommon and rare artifacts that can be annoying (including the Bottled Cloister if you foolishly passed it earlier) so destroying a permanent and drawing a card is good. But I still never seem to find room for it in any of my decks.

In any case, our deck so far has been very controlling with a lot of expensive spells. What we need are cheap defensive creatures that can hold the fort and Torpid Moloch fits the bill perfectly. I know the aggressive drafters are throwing their hands up in disgust, but I want to gum up the ground and win with card advantage and air superiority and a 3/2 for 🐼 is perfect.

Pack 2, Pick 8

Benevolent Ancestor, Surveilling Sprite, Clinging Darkness, **Rain of Embers**, Stone-Seeder Hierophant, Leave No Trace, **Auratouched Mage**, **Breath of Fury**

Benevolent Ancestor

Rain of Embers

Auratouched Mage

Breath of Fury



Auratouched Mage was a juicy temptation for many of our drafters as they dreamed of finding a second Arc to bring out for free. But that's bad math and incorrect drafting. I've looked through the set and Galvanic Arc is the only one non-rare red or white enchantment that we could possibly search for so we're hoping for a single specific card. The Arc generally gets taken in the first four picks. There is only one pack left to open. And the Mage is absolutely horrid if you don't have something to search for. Do we want to take a gamble on an expensive pick when we could pick up something consistent? I don't think so.

Rain of Embers is not an 8th pick card if you can avoid it. Having already drafted a variety of one-toughness creatures, it is even more of a mistake, but even if we hadn't I know another one will come available later, perhaps the one we passed five picks earlier. Plus we already have two better pieces of mass removal so why not attack our weaknesses

rather than add redundancy to our strengths?

Looking at potential weaknesses, our expensive deck still has significant shortcomings in the early game and Benevolent Ancestor is the perfect answer. It buys us time early on, helps negate evasion creatures, and assists us in combat – that’s a pretty saucy package! While not optimal, even aggressive decks can benefit from the Ancestor’s ability to keep guys alive for another round of combat.

Unfortunately I still have no experience with the Breath and was hoping people in the forums could fill me in. Sacrificing your evasion creatures seems bad or extremely situational (which means “bad”), but I’ve mis-judged cards before. I suspect there are certain combinations of cards that work well with the Breath such as Pollenbright Wings, but you need to have several creatures and almost no blockers to make this work, and not too many opponents are going to give you that option. If they do, haven’t you won already?

Pack 2, Pick 9

Viashino Slasher, Consult the Necrosages, Sundering Vitae, Caregiver, Dizzy Spell, Peel from Reality, Golgari Germination

Viashino Slasher comes back around the table.

In hindsight, the Slasher is fairly irrelevant for a Boros control deck. But at the time I was still under the impression that every Boros deck had to be aggressive so I was constantly trying to grab early guys in hopes it would come together. Unfortunately my half-hearted commitment to attacking means I’m wasting my time when I take the little guys though it could help out if my early game is soft. The alternative of the Caregiver wasn’t even provided as an option as I view her as unplayable. I can see situations where you might want a white sacrifice ability, particularly against other radiance decks, but it’s very situational and as we already know, I dislike situational cards almost as much as I dislike 1/1s for one with insignificant abilities.

Late picks

Rain of Embers, Strands of Undeath, Consult the Necrosages, Flow of Ideas, Terraformer, Peel from Reality

As expected, we picked up a Rain of Embers. It appears that blue is underdrafted but again, it was early in the season and few people had figured out how to win with Dimir at that point.

Pack 3, Pick 1

Terrarion, Votary of the Conclave, Drift of Phantasms, Incite Hysteria, Scatter the Seeds, Boros Recruit, Quickchange, Infectious Host, Golgari Signet, Disembowel, **Boros Signet**, Moroi, Golgari Thug, Drooling Groomion, Helldozer

Boros Signet

Hate Draft the Disembowel, Moroi, Drooling Groomion or Helldozer

This is what every drafter hates to see. A first pack with absolutely nothing of quality in either of their colours, not even a splashable card that shares a guild. When I was younger I would have hate-drafted something just out of spite, and I suspect many continue to do so. But hate-drafting here doesn’t make a heck of a lot of sense.

It seems that there are still lots of drafters out there who don’t fully understand the math of hate-drafting. There is only a 3 in 7 chance of playing the person with the card you’ve taken. And since you play the person across from you first, and it’s not likely to make it around to them if the card is that

good, the probability reduces even more as you'll have to win your first round before it matters – let's say a 2 in 7 chance. If the person right next to you takes it (or three next to you), then you have to win twice before facing it, so let's average that out to 1.5 in 7. And that presumes the person who gets it wins their matches as well, bringing us down to maybe 1 in 7. And even if you defeat all those odds and face the person with the Grootion or Moroi in their deck, they still have to draw it and have it make a difference. Hmm...every 8 to 10 drafts, hate-drafting actually works. People who like those odds are probably big fans of lotteries and roulette when they really have nothing to fear.

The alternative? Grab a card that will actually make your deck and will likely see play at least once in half of your drafts. If there is nothing playable, hate with a passion, but with a card that will make it, hating is always wrong. Hate leads to the dark side, and I don't mean Dimir.



To be fair, I suspect many people were gunning for a hard-core aggressive deck and thus a Signet doesn't fit into their plans. I think this is mistaken logic. While acceleration may not be what you want to play on turn two if you could slap down a Brute, you won't *always* have a turn two play (I quite often seem to draw my four most expensive spells in my opening hand). Or you may be screwed for one colour and unable to play your Courier Hawk. Or on turn three you can play the Signet *and* a second 2-drop while accelerating up to the heavy stuff.

But since I'm playing Boros control with lots of expensive spells and a tougher early game, I'm taking the Signet and then complaining afterwards about how bad a pack that was for me.

Pack 3, Pick 2

Stasis Cell, Guardian of Vitu-Ghazi, Viashino Slasher, **Benevolent Ancestor**, Vedalken Entrancer, **Thundersong Trumpeter**, Boros Recruit, Smash, Gulgari Brownscale, Siege Wurm, **Boros Signet**, Mausoleum Turnkey, **Greater Forgeling**, Trophy Hunter

Benevolent Ancestor

Thundersong Trumpeter

Boros Signet

Greater Forgeling

At first I highlighted the beefy Forgeling, but that's my inner Timmy speaking. Tappers with their versatility have always been better than mid-sized creatures, especially when the ability is free. And while not quite as good as a tapper, in our deck we need the early drop and creature control more than we need more expensive spells that will likely be blocking more than attacking.

The Trumpeter is truly an amazing creature. A bit fragile, but they're so good that their mere existence almost (*almost*) justifies playing main-deck Sparkmage Apprentice, Rain of Embers or Rolling Spoil and certainly invites bringing them in from the sideboard.

The Signet isn't necessary as we already have one, and it's just worse than the other cards at this point. The Ancestor is very good but the Trumpeter does roughly the same thing (removes an attacker) and more.

Pack 3, Pick 3

Goblin Spelunkers, Farseek, Woodwraith Strangler, Nightguard Patrol, Muddle the Mixture, Stinkweed Imp, Golgari Brownscale, Gate Hound, Lurking Informant, **Skyknight Legionnaire**, Grifter's Blade, Ivy Dancer, Bathe in Light

Skyknight Legionnaire

No one disputed this pick, though many pointed out the multi-purpose nature of Bathe in Light, specifically the ability to Falter your opponents and attack for the win. As mentioned before, the Legionnaire is the epitome of Boros and a solid creature for any deck.

Pack 3, Pick 4

Torpid Moloch, Terrarion, **Nightguard Patrol**, Vedalken Dismissor, Clinging Darkness, Seismic Spike, Stone-Seeder Hierophant, Dimir Infiltrator, Elves of Deep Shadow, **Conclave Equenaut**, Ethereal Usher, **Sunhome, Fortress of the Legion**

Nightguard Patrol

Conclave Equenaut

Sunhome, Fortress of the Legion



Sunhome is absolutely AMAZING in an aggressive deck – anyone who says otherwise hasn't seen it played properly. As a Dimir or even Golgari player, it's absolutely wrecked me as I attempt to set up my defences only to see everything crumble to the difficult-to-deal-with Fortress. It's a fantastic mana sink for the faster Boros decks and allows them to deal with beefy blockers or rapidly accelerate the win through the air.

So why didn't I take it? My deck is too slow already and will have other uses for mana in the late game – I'm not trying to punch through blockers for the quick finish, I'm trying to develop a stall that I can break with Brightflame or Cleansing Beam. This leaves me with the Patrol and the Equenaut when I already have plenty of expensive spells and am worried about the early game. Despite that, you just can't say no to a 3/3 evasion creature and I went with the flier.

The Patrol was certainly considered as an option, but at this point I have an Ancestor, Legionnaire, Centaur and two Alley Cats along with a Trumpeter and a Signet, so I'm not as worried about making a turn three creature. And again, a 3/3 flier is nothing to sneeze at!

Pack 3, Pick 5

Convolute, Dogpile, Ordruun Commando, Infectious Host, Rally the Righteous, Elvish Skysweeper, **Viashino Fangtail**, Telling Time, Undercity Shade, Frenzied Goblin, Cloudstone Curio

Viashino Fangtail

It stuns me that some people wanted to grab the Goblin or the Rally here. Recurring kill on a solid body in red is such a rarity that I can't understand why people don't grab as many of these as they can. But again, I'm a control player and the Fangtail is one of the few methods Boros decks have to attain card advantage.

Still, a 3/3 for four mana with a great ability that can act as a direct-damage finisher? And you want a 1/1 with mediocre talent? I welcome discussion on this one in the forums, but I think that's a ridiculous decision.

Pack 3, Pick 6

Terrarion, Woodwraith Strangler, Drift of Phantasms, Muddle the Mixture, Stone-Seeder Hierophant, Dimir Infiltrator, Grayscaled Gharial, Compulsive Research, Shambling Shell, **Festival of the Guildpact**

Terrarion

Festival of the Guildpact

Hate Draft Drift of Phantasms or ***Shambling Shell***

At this point, with 10 picks remaining, I have 22 cards that I expect to be playing so the Festival would never make the cut and there's no point in drafting it. Terrarion is a bad card unless you're playing three colours and desperate for mana-fixers. It's a situational cyler (granted, it's a fairly common situation) that takes a turn to use. Half the time it's like drawing a land that comes into play tapped. How often can a spell say it is worse than a basic land? I wouldn't play Terrarion over a land and I wouldn't play it over a spell, and that doesn't leave us with too many other options. Let your opponents draw the Terrarions and cackle at the free turn that they're giving you.

I took the Shambling Shell as I never worry about hate-drafting walls. Walls won't kill me, a recurring 3/1 creature might. If you're drafting an aggressive Boros deck then the Drift is the correct hate-draft as it stops the fliers that are often critical to winning and also shuts down the Alley Cat. In the end, it likely won't matter – remember what we just learned about hating?

Pack 3, Pick 7

Selesnya Sanctuary, Stasis Cell, Roofstalker Wight, Vedalken Dismissor, Zephyr Spirit, Surge of Zeal, Root-Kin Ally, Recollect, Wojek Apothecary

Selesnya Sanctuary

Hate Draft Stasis Cell, Roofstalker Wight, Root-Kin Ally or ***Recollect***

At this point I've abandoned any intentions of splashing green so the double-land was left on the table. Having said that, I've really come to appreciate the power of Recollect in the past few weeks so I figured it was the best cards to keep from my opponents. Some people considered splashing Recollect but I think that's a mistake. While it can be grossly good in a Golgari dredge deck, our best cards so far are very expensive (we're surprisingly short on fast removal) so it would just act as card disadvantage most of the time with nothing worthwhile to target. In the end, it's not removal or a bomb, so we don't want to splash it.

Pack 3, Pick 8

War-Torch Goblin, Perplex, Dryad's Caress, Caregiver, Compulsive Research, **Viashino Fangtail**, Wized Snitches, Peregrine Mask

Viashino Fangtail

Seeing a Fangtail as an eighth pick was a huge surprise for me and it put a big smile on my face. It seems to confirm that my early passes of Boros cards put the person one or two downstream from me into red and white, but with the two of us grabbing everything, no one else was tempted into our fiery Guild. However the lack of any playables in the previous few packs makes me think that this

pack was just extra juicy and I lucked out. Unfortunately I didn't think to check everyone's colours afterwards so we could know for certain – as one joker in the forums pointed out, "there's a reason it's called Limited Information!"

Pack 3, Pick 9

Terrarion, Votary of the Conclave, Drift of Phantasms, **Incite Hysteria**, Scatter the Seeds, Quickchange, Infectious Host

Terrarion

Incite Hysteria

Hate Draft Drift of Phantasms or Scatter the Seeds

The Incite Hysteria isn't going to make my main deck, but with three pieces of mass removal and two Fangtails I'm not scared of the Seeds. As a control deck, the Drift doesn't bother me. But the Hysteria could randomly lose me a game that I've got control of and may be helpful as a sideboard card against an extremely defensive deck.

Terrarion...well, how happy would you be to draw Terrarion when you're desperately looking for that sixth or seven mana to use Flash Conscriptio or Brightflame? I already know I'm playing 17 lands and a signet, why would I add another half-land that comes into play tapped?

Pack 3, Pick 10

Stasis Cell, **Viashino Slasher**, **Benevolent Ancestor**, Vedalken Entrancer, Boros Recruit, **Smash**

Viashino Slasher

Benevolent Ancestor

Smash

Hate Draft Stasis Cell or Vedalken Entrancer

Much like the Fangtail two picks earlier, a tenth pick Ancestor is a fantastic gift for our deck for all the reasons it was good back in pack two. A couple of people expressed dismay that they couldn't take the Recruit. This greatly confuses me. By itself, the Recruit, in a best case scenario, may hit for three points of damage? Are you excited about opening with "Mountain, Bolt you"? Sure, it benefits from a Rally, and can be sacrificed to a Fiery Conclusion, but that's true of any creature, including the Slasher who consistently does twice as much damage. There just aren't enough X/1 creatures where the first strike on the Recruit will make a difference.

I understand that the effectiveness of the Rally and other aggressive cards multiplies for each additional creature on the board so being able to throw someone down on the first turn is a significant advantage. And I'm even willing to admit that I'm no expert on aggressive decks and those that are have probably already walked away from their computer in disgust. But I'd like to introduce everyone to the "Squish Test". If you have two cards and want to know which is better, pretend their going head to head and see which one wins. Removal defeats creatures, big creatures defeat small creatures, and Benevolent Ancestor slaps the Recruit around like a holiday pinata at a children's party.

Smash once again just doesn't cut it and neither does the Slasher, though I can at least see an argument in this direction if you're going aggressive. Hate drafting is wrong again. I know, I know, the Entrancer is really good and you really don't want to face it. Trust me, you probably won't so let it go by and let the Boros player to your left hate draft it for you.

Late picks

Goblin Spelunkers, Seismic Spike, Rally the Righteous (over Ordruun Commando), Muddle the Mixture, Zephyr Spirit

The Spelunkers is a nice bonus as unblockable 2/2 creatures are a bit of a problem for our deck. Many were excited by the late-pick Rally and I have to admit I wasn't displeased, but as it turns out the Rally should never have been in my deck so it was irrelevant. Again, I wasn't entirely aware that Boros control existed and was still randomly grabbing aggressive options. It's also good to get the Seismic Spike as we know there's at least one Sunhome out there, but this only occurs to me now – when actually facing a Boros deck I totally forgot to bring it in.

How Did It All Turn Out?

Here are the cards I drafted:

1. Brightflame
2. Flame-Kin Zealot
3. Galvanic Arc
4. Flash Conscription
5. Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree
6. Ordruun Commando
7. Sabertooth Alley Cat
8. Centaur Safeguard
9. Screeching Griffin
10. Psychic Drain
11. Sabertooth Alley Cat
12. Induce Paranoia
13. Tattered Drake
14. Wojek Siren
15. Zephyr Spirit
16. Flash Conscription
17. Cleansing Beam
18. Glass Golem
19. Indentured Oaf
20. Bottled Cloister
21. Seeds of Strength
22. Torpid Moloch
23. Benevolent Ancestor
24. Viashino Slasher
25. Rain of Embers
26. Strands of Undeath
27. Consult the Necrosages
28. Flow of Ideas
29. Terraformer
30. Peel from Reality
31. Boros Signet
32. Thundersong Trumpeter
33. Skyknight Legionnaire
34. Conclave Equenaut
35. Viashino Fangtail
36. Shambling Shell
37. Recollect
38. Viashino Fangtail
39. Incite Hysteria
40. Benevolent Ancestor

41. Goblin Spelunkers
42. Seismic Spike
43. Rally the Righteous
44. Muddle the Mixture
45. Zephyr Spirit

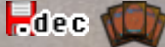
Keep in mind that these are not the best cards to draft, these just happen to be the ones I selected. Now that I've had a few weeks and almost 300 comments to ponder, I'd probably suggest this as the optimal draft as it brings down the mana curve slightly with a few more defensive spells:


1. Brightflame
2. Screeching Griffin
3. Galvanic Arc
4. Conclave Equenaut
5. Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree
6. Sell-Sword Brute
7. Courier Hawk
8. Centaur Safeguard
9. Screeching Griffin
10. Psychic Drain
11. Sabertooth Alley Cat
12. Induce Paranoia
13. Tattered Drake
14. Wojek Siren
15. Zephyr Spirit
16. Flash Conscription
17. Cleansing Beam
18. Glass Golem
19. Indentured Oaf
20. Bottled Cloister
21. Seeds of Strength
22. Torpid Moloch
23. Benevolent Ancestor
24. Viashino Slasher
25. Rain of Embers
26. Strands of Undeath
27. Consult the Necrosages
28. Flow of Ideas
29. Terraformer
30. Peel from Reality
31. Boros Signet
32. Thundersong Trumpeter
33. Skyknight Legionnaire
34. Conclave Equenaut
35. Viashino Fangtail
36. Shambling Shell
37. Recollect
38. Viashino Fangtail
39. Incite Hysteria
40. Benevolent Ancestor
41. Goblin Spelunkers
42. Seismic Spike
43. Rally the Righteous

44. Muddle the Mixture

45. Zephyr Spirit

Here is the deck I took into round one:

Limited Information			
Main Deck		Sideboard	
40 cards			
10 Mountain	1 Boros Signet	1 Consult the Necrosages	
7 Plains	1 Bottled Cloister	1 Flow of Ideas	
<hr/>		4 Forest	
17 lands	1 Brightflame	1 Goblin Spelunkers	
	1 Cleansing Beam	1 Incite Hysteria	
	2 Flash Conscription	1 Induce Paranoia	
2 Benevolent Ancestor	1 Galvanic Arc	1 Muddle the Mixture	
1 Centaur Safeguard	1 Rally the Righteous	1 Peel from Reality	
1 Conclave Equenaut	<hr/>		1 Plains
1 Flame-Kin Zealot	8 other spells	1 Psychic Drain	
1 Glass Golem		1 Rain of Embers	
1 Indentured Oaf		1 Recollect	
1 Ordruun Commando		1 Seeds of Strength	
2 Sabertooth Alley Cat		1 Seismic Spike	
1 Screeching Griffin		1 Shambling Shell	
1 Skyknight Legionnaire		1 Strands of Undeath	
1 Thundersong Trumpeter		1 Tattered Drake	
2 Viashino Fangtail		1 Terraformer	
<hr/>		1 Torpid Moloch	
15 creatures		1 Viashino Slasher	
		1 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree	
		1 Wojek Siren	
		2 Zephyr Spirit	
		<hr/>	
		27 sideboard cards	

With the five mono-white spells soundly outnumbered by the five  spells costing four or less, I went with 10 Mountains and 7 Plains. Without the Signet I'd have gone to 18 lands as I have four spells that cost six mana or more and another two at five. The two walls make me feel a bit safer with the lower land count as I know a 0/4 on turn three can really buy you some time.

I made the mistake of many readers and attempting an aggressive build despite having controlling cards. The Alley Cats in particular are a problem as I never have the mana to use their ability early on while the Rally just doesn't fit with how I'm expecting to win. The deck would have been improved by replacing these with the Torpid Moloch, Goblin Spelunkers and the Rain of Embers that function nearly identically and yet act as pre-sideboarding against other Boros and Selesnya decks.

Round 1 against "Agent":

Going first I keep a dubious hand of Plains, Plains, Plains, Mountains, Signet, Flash Conscripton and Conclave Equenaut. This gives me no play until turn 5, but I'm hoping to draw at least one spell that I can accelerate out and the Flash Conscripton should let me recover from a slow start. It was a mistake and a gamble I never should have made.

Three Mountains and Brightflame later, I'm playing a turn five Equenaut to face off against a Mossdog and Nightguard Patrol. The Equenaut is Fettered, the Conscripton is stopped by a Bathe in Light, and while the Brightflame removes the Dog and some Fists of Ironwood tokens, even a Bottled Cloister doesn't save me from two consecutive Bramble Elementals backed up by Disembowel.

I'm a bit disheartened, but I know deep down it's my fault for not using my mulligan. While I did draw four more lands than my opponent, the real error was made when I kept my opening hand.



I sideboard out a Sabertooth Alley Cat for Rain of Embers to handle the saprolings and replace Rally the Righteous with Torpid Moloch as I want an extra high-powered creature against the green beef. It's at this point that I realize my deck isn't really that fast, so I shouldn't be worrying about attacking early. With two walls and a bunch of mass removal, going second is the better way to play.

Despite my sudden realization of the control nature of the deck, game two opens aggressively with turn two Trumpeter, turn three Centaur Safeguard and turn four Viashino Fangtail. My quick start gets negated by a Fists of Ironwood and Scatter the Seeds (the Fangtail was Disemboweled) but a Brightflame when he's tapped out of white mana gets us even again. Except that I have two Flash Conscriptons in hand and he has no cards. The Conscriptons prove particularly useful against his Moroi as I keep gaining four life and attacking back with little guys while his life slowly slips away. When I bring out the second Fangtail at seventeen life to his five, he concedes.

Game three is a bit disappointing as he mulligans to six, misses his second land drop and concedes the match.

Round 2 against "muchacho_"

Because I'm stuck with my original "try to be aggressive" build, I choose to go first and immediately have to mulligan to Mountain, Mountain, Plains, Rally, Fangtail. The Fangtail deals with a Shambling Shell and Flash Conscripton removes his Dimir House Guard. The Fangtail is forcing him to hold back cards but he eventually throws down two Mortipedes after I attack for three with the lizard warrior. A Brightflame on his Stinkweed Imp means 12 life for me, Wrath of God for him and victory is only a few turns away due to my massive creature advantage.

Game two has us both playing creatures when he puts Fists of Ironwood on his Bramble Elemental to generate four extra guys as I pick at his life total with a Screeching Griffin. An off-the-top Brightflame puts an end to his army leaving just the Elemental. A Dimir House Guard increases the threat level as he continues to Dredge a Shambling Shell in order to get the Elemental through my Benevolent Ancestor, but Glass Zombie puts a stop to that pretty quickly. Between the Griffin and an Alley Cat I'm taking control of the game but suddenly Plague Boiler hits play and we're starting all over, except he gets to keep the House Guard while playing a second Shambling Shell.

I'm holding Flash Conscriptio so the House Guard is quickly disposed of, and a second Benevolent Ancestor helps keep the two Shambling Shells at bay as I look for an answer. Cleansing Beam turns out to be an excellent solution, as is Thundersong Trumpeter and a Fangtail to his draw of four more lands. The match is mine.

Round 3 against "Jeeper"



The finals are against another Boros deck, presumably the one on my near left. I have a fantastic opening of Trumpeter, Legionnaire, and Griffin and I feel he makes an error when instead of sacrificing his Nightguard Patrol, he send his Trumpeter to a Fiery Conclusion aimed at my Trumpeter leaving no way to deal with my fliers. My air force is joined by a Sabertooth Alley Cat and Rally the Righteous helps deal the final twelve points for a turn six victory.

Sideboarding was interesting as I wasn't sure if I should remove my radiance spells in the mirror. I pondered taking out the Brightflame but quickly realized that even if it kills every creature (worse case), it's still a Wrath of God with a Stream of Life kicker. I bring in the Spelunkers and Rain of Embers for the two Alley Cats and replace the Rally with the Torpid Moloch as I suspect I just have to live long enough for all my mass kill to give me the advantage. As they say in constructed, I have "inevitability".

For the second game he chooses to draw first and it costs him as he's forced to discard Boros Fury-Shield after playing a turn two Boros Garrison – a fairly common scenario with the double lands. I have a juicy hand of 4-drops and only three lands but my deck comes through with a turn three Ancestor and turn four Fangtail. Jeeper is forced to use both a Helix and an Arc to remove the Fangtail only to have me follow it up with a Conclave Equenaut. A second Ancestor on my side makes life very difficult though he's able to remove the Equanaut with a straight-up sacrifice to Fiery Conclusion.

Now that I've benefited from a pair of "two-for-ones" I'm in the driver's seat. A second Fangtail joined by Indentured Oaf means I'm hitting him for seven a turn after using Brightflame to clear out all his white blockers. A turn away from victory he plays a Brightflame of his own and all of a sudden it's just two walls facing an opponent with 17 life. He peels four quick spells but at 31 life I have plenty of time to find answers, especially with the two Ancestors complicating the board. The card advantage I gained early in the game really makes the difference as I'm drawing a couple too many lands. The Spelunkers eventually come down and start attacking through the ground stall and Jeeper concedes.

So apparently the key to Boros is playing control, which I then read about in the Worlds coverage. Who knew?

For those of you keeping count at home, Brightflame made an appearance six times in the draft, one of which was for my opponent who also made the finals with it:

Game 1 – removes Mossdog, two tokens (lose)

Game 2 – removes five saprolings (win)

Game 4 – removes two Mortipedes and Stinkweed Imp (win)

Game 5 – removes four saprolings (win)

Game 7 – removes two creatures (win); opponent also uses it to remove a Fangtail and Oaf (but loses).

In each of these cases, significant life was gained to help survive until my better cards could come out, not to mention the much improved board position when two or more opposing creatures are no longer present. It really is that good.

I found it very amusing to read the various posts where the draft was slagged as horrible and the deck unlikely to win a match. While I admit that three matches is hardly a large sample size, the deck obviously has some staying power. I'd also like to point out that it was a fluke that the one draft I saved every pick from happened to be a 3-0 draft. There were several drafts I started to record but the picks weren't very interesting so I didn't continue. This was the first one with real decisions through the entire draft, and I fortunately was able to get three matches out of it for a better idea of sideboarding and how it played. To give you an idea of how good Boros control can be, not only did I misdraft and misbuild my deck, I made an error with my mulligans and yet still only lost a single game despite taking a first pick Boros Signet in pack three. Imagine what might have happened had I done everything perfectly and opened better cards?

It was also amusing to see everyone trying to hate draft the "all-powerful Dimir milling deck" that they were certain they were passing. As it turns out, we didn't face a single blue deck so any hate-drafting of blue cards (Drift, Entrancer, Moroi) would have been totally wasted. We also didn't face either of the Grootdions that had people pooping their pants either. In the finals, we actually faced the mirror, so every hate draft actually *hurt* us as it gave our opponent, likely the guy sitting to our left, additional cards. See why hate drafting isn't a good idea?

In Other News...

Last week's challenge to describe a turn four victory was matched only by another Hunting-related story involving Hunted Horror (which no one should play, especially on turn two). I'm starting to wonder, is it even possible to win a game of limited *Ravnica* on turn four without a Hunted creature or other ridiculous play such as turn four Moonlight Bargain for five cards? Consider that a challenge for those of you who like puzzles. I've already come up with one unlikely answer:

Land, Elf (1 guy)

Land, Fists of Ironwood, Elf (4 guys)

Land, Scatter the Seeds, Scatter the Seeds (10 guys)

Land, Breath of Fury, attack for 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 = 55 damage. (But this requires no blockers on turn four, so perhaps your opponent played and attacked with a Legionnaire?)

My challenge to provide me with hidden Extended 'tech also went un-met as everyone flocked to the shiny new draft toy, though perhaps I shouldn't expect much when asking for constructed help in a limited column. It turned out not to be an issue as I was unable to compete in the PTQ due to a lack of cards. I'm used to owning all the cards from when I played in real life every week, but the new Extended format only includes cards from *Invasion* onwards, coincidentally when **Magic Online** went live and I started playing a lot more wearing nothing but pajamas. I would have had to have spent \$250 just to find the lands and other rares required for a competitive deck. It seems that constructed **Magic** will have to wait until I've earned a bit more money from column-writing – perhaps I'll try Block Constructed first and hope that prices have fallen!

I would like to take a moment to offer congratulations to Katsuhiko Mori for winning the 2005 World Championships. I first noticed Mori back in 2000 as he was becoming Rookie of the Year (and couldn't attend the Invitational because he had been playing so much **Magic** that his education was suffering). As I explained last week, I was covering a variety of Asian events back then as a Sideboard reporter and had never seen anyone play professional **Magic** so incredibly quickly without making mistakes – his hands are often a blur of tapping cards. He played so fast that in game one of the APAC semi-finals a judge actually had to step in and slow the game down, not only so I could follow along as the reporter, but to make sure the judges could keep up in case there was an error

they had to rule on! At Worlds that year I was excited at the chance to play against Mori three times in two days between side events and side drafts and he owned me in every match. While I'm certainly not surprised, as a longtime Katsuhiko Mori fan, I'm delighted to see him continue to fulfill his potential as a **Magic** player by becoming the World Champion. Congratulations!

And as a moment of random complaining, does anyone care to explain how in eight online *Ravnica* Pre-Release sealed events and two subsequent drafts, I managed to open three Empty the Catacombs and three Hammerfist Giants, but only one of the new dual-lands? I suspect that someone out there has opened up all my lands and I'd like them back please...

Play of the Week

One of the benefits to being a columnist is having access to all the cards for playtesting various ideas. In preparation for the PTQ I didn't end up attending, I'm playing Olivier Ruel's Extended GP-winning CAL deck from a few weeks ago. After my opponent plays Heartbeat of Spring I quickly Burning Wish for Cranial Extraction naming Early Harvest even though I have yet to see one as I know it's the other half of the combo. My opponent immediately concedes the match with:

9:38 <opponent>: oi, sorry man, i was lookin for a tourney worthy opponent

I immediately assume I've named the wrong card with the Extraction and perhaps should have gone with Mind's Desire or something similar so I follow-up with a private chat to see if he'll share my mistakes with me in order for me to improve.

What do I find? Well, it appears the deck that won two Grand Prix in two weeks is "luck-based" because it lacks consistent search:

9:36 <opponent>: praying that you'll draw a card that fits a situation is a luck deck

9:37 limitedinformation: You're saying I need tutors for this kind of deck

9:37 <opponent>: tutors isn't acceleration, but it helps

9:37 limitedinformation: But it consistently went 13-X or whatever to win the GP

9:37 limitedinformation: And it finished in the top 8 at a Japanese GP

9:37 limitedinformation: There's apparently something consistent about it?

9:37 <opponent>: very lucky deck then ;p

Ahh..."very lucky deck". Yes, that's a much better description than "consistent" or "powerful". No one tell Mr. Ruel!

Play of the Week #2

Another benefit to being a columnist is that you get a couple of free drafts once in a while to base your articles on or test wacky archetypes and strange rares. But you're unable to trade anything you win so there's absolutely no incentive to rare-draft.

In my very first "free" draft, I open or get passed the following:

Watery Grave

Char

Life from the Loam



24 tickets worth of cards (at the time), and I had to just pass them along! So if you see me in a draft, pray you're next to me as not only do I not hate draft, I pass money rares!

A Fond Farewell

I would like to take a moment to thank everyone who chatted with me while playing online. Not surprisingly I find people are a lot nicer when I'm playing as a columnist than they tend to be when I'm using my regular account. On the other hand, I'm likely a bit sweeter as well so I can't complain. It was nice to have friendly matches and decent conversations about **Magic** while playing – something I encourage everyone to try. It was like we were playing in real life!

This is my last week writing "Limited Information". While Scott has generously offered me the opportunity to write every week, my inability to restrict myself to 2500 words (this article is over 11,000) and bite-sized topics means I'm skipping work and spending 10-12 hours a week trying to get things completed on time. For the benefit of those of you who haven't yet found long-term gainful employment, repeated four-day work weeks are generally frowned upon. The frustrating part is that I still have lots of stuff to write about. Tips on deckbuilding, advice and questions about draft picks, there are dozens of articles running around in my head, but no time to get them out!

That being said, this isn't the last of me (or the draft toy) – I'm sure I'll find time in the New Year to give my keyboard a workout. There will be limited PTQs in the near future and I'm keen to get back on the tour, so you'll definitely see me around. If you can't wait that long, feel free to read the non-magic articles on my blog as I'm a glutton for attention.

Homework Assignment

Despite not being able to follow up next week, I love generating discussion in the forums so I'm going to leave you with a few questions to answer:

How good is Blockbuster? Describe when it is good, how high you pick it, and what sort of decks it best fits in. It's mass kill, but I just can't seem to get it to work and I've started getting them as 15th picks.

Do you pick Oathsworn Giant or Overwhelm in Selesnya decks? Why? What are the factors affecting the decision?

Conclave Equenaut or Screeching Griffin in aggressive Boros decks? Why?

First pick, first pack - Skyknight Legionnaire or Twilight Drover? Why?

See you in 2006!

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