

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Early Draft Returns

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The Week That Was
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In my poorly punned [Guildpact Prerelease Primer](#), I professed my love – sight unseen – for the Izzet guild. Like some poor schlub taking an engagement ring along on a blind date arranged over the Internet I was already planning on fueling my sealed deck build with [Izzet Boilerworks](#) and [Steam Vents](#).

As it turns out, blue was the only color I didn't play with in my Midnight Madness deck at Neutral Ground. [Ghost Council of Orzhova](#), [Drooling Grootion](#), and [Savage Twister](#) pulled me in the other four directions instead. Despite [Birds of Paradise](#), [Farseek](#), [Gruul Signet](#), [Gruul Turf](#), and [Orzhov Basilica](#), I could not make the mana work correctly and I was steamrolled by [Loxodon Hierarch/Gleancrawler](#) in one round and [Borborygmus](#) in the next while I was scuffling to make my drops.



Lesson learned, I moved onto a fresh flight on Saturday afternoon planning to stick to three colors. Once again green mana fixing lured me into the Forests but I could not decide between the remaining colors. There seemed to be solid ties between Orzhov and Golgari as well as Izzet/Gruul variations for the remaining cards, and I ended up switching back and forth between the two decks based on matchups. I did manage to snag [Steam Vents](#) No. 1 for my troubles. I went 1-1 with the deck losing to an amazing common/uncommon/rare syzygy of [Selesnya Evangel/Selesnya Guildmage/Hour of \(W\)reckoning](#) and dropped to play in the team event with Rich Fein and Scott McCord.

I am not presenting the card pool I had to work with. Keep in mind that this is not representative of what you will have to work with at the PTQs since there is a third pack of [Guildpact](#) thrown into the mix. I will get into some specific lists in just a little bit though, so please just bear with me through the team portion of my weekend.

I finally got to witness the power of Izzet when we laid out our card pool for three-person Team Sealed. With multiple come-into-play effects, card drawing, damage sources, and paths to victory I was able to somehow corner the market on the blue-red guild. I gave up a pair of [Belltower Sphinxes](#) to the black-white card pool and ended up playing the following.

Team Sealed

Main Deck
 40 cards

1 Gruul Turf 8 Island 7 Mountain <hr/> 16 lands	1 Drift of Phantasms 1 Gelectrode 1 Goblin Flectomancer 1 Izzet Chronarch 1 Izzet Guildmage 1 Lore Broker 2 Ogre Savant 1 Steamcore Weird 1 Tidewater Minion 1 Torch Drake 2 Vedalken Dismissal 1 Vedalken Entrancer 1 Wee Dragonauts <hr/> 15 creatures	1 Cerebral Vortex 1 Followed Footsteps 2 Hypervolt Grasp 1 Izzet Signet 1 Peel from Reality 2 Pyromatics 1 Train of Thought <hr/> 9 other spells
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Most of the people I have talked to so far seem summarily unimpressed with [Train of Thought](#) but I found it to be a game breaker. I could “cycle” it for land early or draw 3-5 cards in the late game. The goal of the deck was to end up with a [Vedalken Dismissal/Followed Footsteps](#) lock and card drawing played a key role in setting that up.

The team ended up going 2-1 with our decks. I lost the pivotal match to a pesky [Moldervine Cloak](#) that just would not go away no matter what I did to the creatures under it. I only got a [Followed Footsteps](#) off once in the three rounds where my opponent did not immediately concede. Rather than put it on a [Dismissal](#) – I suspected burn that turn – I put it on a [Tidewater Minion](#). The game dragged on and I was eventually able to machine gun my way to victory with [Hypervolt Grasp](#) and [Gelectrode](#).

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RULES

I had been experimenting with drafting red-blue on *Magic Online* in the triple-*Ravnica* queues for the past week and I was looking forward to drafting similar decks with my friends in the coming days. My strategy in the drafts which were *Ravnica*, *Ravnica*, *Guildpact* – the same format as the eventual draft queues and PTQ Top 8s – was to draft Dimir but try to avoid a heavy black commitment. If the good red cards were in the first two packs I would take them as well.

The strategy has worked really well this week posting something along the lines of an 8-1 record in three drafts using Guildpact packs people won over the weekend, split between Neutral Ground and Neutral Ground circa 1999 (sometimes also known as Jon Finkel's house). Here are the three decks I drafted along with some comments about each one.



Deck One		
3-0 at Neutral Ground		
Main Deck		
40 cards		
2 Boros Garrison	1 Dimir House Guard	1 Brainspoil
3 Dimir Aqueduct	1 Dimir Infiltrator	1 Convolute
5 Island	1 Drift of Phantasms	1 Fiery Conclusion
1 Izzet Boilerworks	2 Izzet Chronarch	1 Last Gasp
2 Mountain	1 Mindleech Mass	1 Mindmoil
3 Swamp	1 Ogre Savant	1 Peel from Reality
	1 Plagued Rusalka	1 Train of Thought
16 lands	1 Skeletal Vampire	
	1 Steamcore Weird	7 other spells
	1 Surveilling Sprite	
	1 Tattered Drake	
	1 Terraformer	
	1 Tidewater Minion	
	1 Torch Drake	
	1 Vedalken Entrancer	
	1 Wee Dragonauts	
	17 creatures	

The strategy was still percolating as I drafted this deck and not fully done. It is definitely the blackest of the three decks. I try to avoid Brainspoil in general because it has gotten slightly worse with the addition of Guildpact and all its auras – including one that is common and can be played at instant speed. The mana was not an issue since I was able to pick up so many Karoos.

I like having between four and six in my draft decks these days and will often play them in place of one color, as I did here with the Boros Garrisons. I did not pick up any significant red in the first two packs but the Boros Garrisons were going to be in my deck regardless of whether I went Orzhov or Izzet if I could not pick up the appropriate guild lands.



Despite playing 16 lands, this deck featured 22 mana thanks to the double lands. With some of my best cards lurking higher on the curve, this allowed me to hit my drops without drawing a ton of land. One basic and two karooos is essentially the same as five basics on turn five. It also made my Mindmoil that much better since I could hold back basic lands to dig deeper into my deck once the Mindmoil was in play.

Mindmoil is actually my most drafted rare on MTGO by a wide margin. I first heard about it at Worlds when Neil Reeves raved about the power of the enchantment that I had previously dismissed as a crap rare. Since then I have been taking higher and higher and will even splash it into non-red decks. Basically you don't want to play out more lands than what your deck needs to operate. You can then cash in a fistful of lands for the best card out of the next chunk of your deck. It basically means that you will turn the best spell in your hand each turn into an Impulse. Unless you have instants you won't be able to play more than one from any set of cards you are holding, but you rip through your deck so fast you just won't mind that minor drawback.

Another card that was powered up by the Karoos was Mindleech Mass. The Mass is not a card I would normally play with, but because I wanted to be able to use all my deck's mana I gave it a whirl and was very happy

with the results.

The best thing that happened with this deck was a **Mindleech Mass** lock involving it, **Peel from Reality** and **Izzet Chronarch**. I could bounce my opponent's creature and the Chronarch every turn. As long as my opponent could not muster more than six points of toughness I was able to trample over and play the freshly bounced critter for free from his hand.

The best **Mindleech Mass** story I ever heard came from Jamie Parke the other day. Unfortunately for him, he was on the wrong end of it. Jamie was playing online with blue-black. His opponent was red-white and neither of them had anything in play. The red-white player was empty handed while Jamie was waiting for something to **Dream Leash**. Instead he drew **Mindleech Mass** and played it into his empty-handed opponent's empty board.

His opponent top-decked **Flash Conscript** and attacked Jamie with his own Mindleech. He then got to look at Jamie's hand and play the **Dream Leash** on the tapped monster and keep it for the remainder of the game. Call it the Bad Beat of the Week.



Deck Two		
3-0 at Neutral Ground Past		
Main Deck 40 cards		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Dimir Aqueduct 1 Gruul Turf 6 Island 2 Izzet Boilerworks 6 Mountain 16 lands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Bloodscale Prowler 2 Drift of Phantasms 2 Ogre Savant 1 Spawnbroker 1 Surveilling Sprite 1 Tattered Drake 1 Terraformer 2 Tin Street Hooligan 1 Torch Drake 2 Vedalken Dismissers 1 Vedalken Plotter 1 Wojek Embermage 16 creatures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Cloudstone Curio 1 Convolute 1 Dismebowel 1 Gigadrowse 1 Halcyon Glaze 1 Pyromatics 1 Remand 1 Terrarion 8 other spells

My second-most drafted *Ravnica* rare on MTGO is **Cloudstone Curio**. After kicking off this draft with **Vedalken Dismissers** and a second-pick **Disembowel**, I decided to third-pick the artifact and not risk it not coming back around the table. Tony Tsai was in the draft and is known to love the card as much as I do – if not more – and I really wanted to secure the card in anticipation of **Ogre Savants** in the third pack.

I took another **Vedalken Dismissers** first in the second pack – over Szadek – and never looked back. With a pair of Drifts to tutor for either the Curio or the **Halcyon Glaze** – my primary win condition – I never had any trouble getting my deck to jump through hoops, walk on its hind legs, and calculate mersenne primes.

The **Tin Street Hooligans** were in the deck largely to trade with early drops on the other side of the table but thanks to the “off-color” **Gruul Turf** I was able to smash a couple of key signets and even put down Eric Kesselman's team mascot, the Junktroller. They also gave me a cheap creature to bounce my Savants and Dismissers with if the Curio was in play.

Spawnbroker created some real amusing situations where I was able to bounce a guy with Savant. Play the **Spawnbroker**, giving them Savant and taking one of their guys, and bounce something else back to my hand with the Curio. The second Savant would return my first Savant and bounce back my **Spawnbroker** for another cycle.

Karoos are a little harder to come by at Neutral Ground Past than other gaming arenas. I first started to appreciate the lands when Finkel drafted them higher than I was used to in the opening weeks of the *Ravnica* release. Since then they have crept up everyone's pick order and will even go as high as second or third around Jon's dining room table. With that in mind I tried out **Vedalken Plotter** – a little guy that came highly touted by Steve Sadin. It never happened for me but the prospect of stealing someone's turn-two Karoo on my third turn makes me giddy enough to keep trying.



Draft Three
2-1

Main Deck 41 cards		
6 Island	2 Dimir Infiltrator	1 Brainspoil
1 Izzet Boilerworks	1 Izzet Chronarch	1 Clinging Darkness
4 Mountain	1 Lurking Informant	2 Convolute
6 Swamp	1 Mausoleum Turnkey	1 Dimir Signet
17 lands	1 Snapping Drake	1 Frazzle
	1 Stratozeppelin	1 Galvanic Arc
	1 Tattered Drake	1 Izzet Signet
	1 Terraformer	2 Last Gasp
	1 Thoughtpicker Witch	1 Pyromatics
	2 Torch Drake	1 Repeal
	12 creatures	12 other spells

This final draft did not go as well as the previous one. I was very disappointed with the mana and expected to see certain cards come back around that did not – *Train of Thought* and *Vacuumelt*, specifically – but double *Last Gasp* covers a lot of the deck's holes. The card I found myself wanting to draw more often than any other was the Chronarch, who is steadily climbing in my pick order. *Odyssey Block* was all about *Anarchist/Innocent Blood* for me and Chronarch's interaction with anything from *Last Gasp* to *Invoke the Firemind* seems just about a million-times better than either *Anarchist* or *Scrivener* on their own.

Firestarter: Primer Primer

I am heading out to try and squeeze one more night of Izzet goodness in before the gig is completely up. I want to know how your prerelease experiences were. I am especially interested in hearing from people who went to their first tournament this past weekend. What advice would have been helpful to you going in? Was there anything you found yourself caught unawares by? Feel free to post in the forums or send me emails as I will try to incorporate your feedback into my *Dissension* primer.

Brian David-Marshall has been involved in Magic since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



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