

Today Noah covers the cards that you chose from last week and discusses what he would have done in the same situation. New Guilds, New Draft Strategies Part II

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Monday, March 20, 2006

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Welcome back everyone! [Last week](#) we talked about mana and guild rankings for the new set and how those influence the drafting environment. Apparently this is a hot topic for the readers, which is great. I'm a huge fan of discussions like these; I think nothing is more valuable than discourse with your fellow players. Hopefully this time we can give everyone even more to chew on. Let's get started with the reader exercises from last week.

Scenario #1

As mentioned last time, it's not just about taking the strongest card, it's about making the strongest deck. This pack had a couple of interesting options. I'll give my take on it, but first, here's the reader's poll:

Which card do you first-pick?

Faith's Fetters

5287 41.6%

Devouring Light	2012	15.9%
Shambling Shell	1330	10.5%
Snapping Drake	1319	10.4%
Hammerfist Giant	1103	8.7%
Thundersong Trumpeter	627	4.9%
Sunhome, Fortress of the Legion	311	2.4%
Dizzy Spell	202	1.6%
Ethereal Usher	127	1.0%
Transluminant	97	0.8%
Gather Courage	73	0.6%
Benevolent Ancestor	73	0.6%
Ordruun Commando	52	0.4%
Dryad's Caress	43	0.3%
Dromad Purebred	38	0.3%
Total	12694	100.0%

I must admit, I'm really surprised to see Devouring Light that high up. The first decision is what color you're going to start with. If you are going to take a White card, Devouring Light is just the worse option. Devouring Light is decent removal, but it's clunky and commits you far more as a dedicated White player. If you're interested in starting off with a White card, at least take the best version.

This pack should come down to Snapping Drake, Faith's Fetters, or Hammerfist Giant. Shambling Shell is pretty weak for a first pick, as well as unfortunately committing you to two colors off the bat. Certainly taking a multi-color bomb as your first pick is fine; people were happy to commit to three colors if their first pick was Croxis, The Purger. However, Shambling Shell is no dragon, or even a Lightning Helix. Shambling Shell is a fine card for a confirmed Golgari deck, but we're not ready to make that call yet.



Most people agree that Faith's Fetters is the strongest card in the pack. Snapping Drake is solid, but it doesn't have the impact you'd like in a first pick. From what people seem to be saying, Snapping Drake's appeal doesn't come from its own power, but rather the potential to cut off Blue. That's an interesting argument, which I'll get to in a bit.

To me, the debate is between Hammerfist Giant or Faith's Fetters. Pre-Guildpact it would be Fetters in a heartbeat. Faith's Fetters was a much more flexible pick, with less stringent color and guild

requirements. Even if you were dead set on playing Boros (Red/White), you'd still rather have Faith's Fetters than Hammerfist Giant.

These days, Fetters has a couple of strikes against it. One is that White is probably the weakest color in RRG. That's not as big a deal as it sounds, since splashing for a single powerful card is perfectly reasonable. However, dedicated White decks are often striving for cards to include, e.g. Absolver Thrull. Another is the presence of two more common bounce spells in *Guildpact*. Faith's Fetters does worsen when the enchanted creature is now less likely to be gone for good.

On the flip side, Red got quite a bit better. In Gruul, Hammerfist Giant is an automatic Bloodthirst enabler, working especially well with Ghor-Clan Savage. It's a great finisher for speedy R/G decks, even if the casting cost is a little high. On the Izzet side, Hammerfist is a fine card in decks with lots of fliers like Wee Dragonauts, Drift of Phantasms, or Torch Drake. Hammerfist Giant also works well with Flight of Fancy, for obvious reasons.

I really wanted to advocate Hammerfist Giant, for the reasons stated above. It could be insane! But in the end, Faith's Fetters is the right call. It's powerful, consistent, and it doesn't hamstring your deck construction like a double Red card would. A Hammerfist Giant gives you the *potential* for an incredible deck, but there are genuine risks of picking a Red-Red card this early, especially one that needs special treatment with the rest of your draft. Fetters is a safe pick, probably going into any deck you end up with. With power and consistency, Faith's Fetters gets the nod here.

Now regarding the large number of White cards in the pack, there's no doubt you're sending a bad signal. There is a possibility one of the better White cards will come back, like Thundersong Trumpeter or Benevolent Ancestor. After all, you're not the only player concerned with a good signaling. Regardless, that is not your concern. There is a chance that Faith's Fetters will be your only White card, and it will be in your fourth or fifth color. That's ok, because *you can do that!* Off color bounce lands, off color signets, even just a Silhana Starfletcher or two makes the card castable, and therefore useful. Just because you can't consistently throw it down on turn 4 doesn't make it unplayable. In fact, it can be better in the very late game, where your opponent has used up his bounce spells and random sacrifice outlets. While the hope is a powerful deck with great mana, there's no reason not to risk a little, if the rewards are there.

To tell the truth, I see a pack like this one and I think it's sending a Green signal, not a White one. Green/White, and particularly Red/Green/White, all effectively use the cards in this pack. I would take the Faith's Fetters and keep an eye towards U/B/w or R/U/w. Ironically, taking this White card and passing that Blue one is still a better Blue signal than taking Snapping Drake. The reality is, you won't know what people are actually doing until the pack comes back to you in pick 9. In the absence of that information, just take the strongest card: Faith's Fetters.

Scenario #2



Which card do you pick for your deck?

Galvanic Arc	5074	54.0%
Selesnya Evangel	1225	13.0%
Hour of Reckoning	742	7.9%
Frenzied Goblin	511	5.4%
Scatter the Seeds	507	5.4%
Bramble Elemental	331	3.5%
Terrarion	238	2.5%
Telling Time	220	2.3%
Screeching Griffin	212	2.3%
War-Torch Goblin	80	0.9%
Woodwraith Strangler	77	0.8%
Undercity Shade	64	0.7%
Vedalken Entrancer	51	0.5%
Snapping Drake	44	0.5%
Zephyr Spirit	15	0.2%
Total	9391	100.0%

A second Frenzied Goblin is pretty tempting, but in the end Galvanic Arc is the best card, as the readers overwhelmingly determined. Hour of Reckoning is a trap card, giving the deck a bomb we cannot make use of it in any way. Hour of Reckoning's mana cost is extremely prohibitive, and there's no reason to jump into White headfirst. Selesnya Evangel is slightly more appropriate mana-wise, but there's still no good reason to determine your third color yet. Galvanic Arc is powerful, keeps us on

our main guild scheme, and allows the deck options into any third color down the road. Let the other people fight for White cards; it's possible the excellent Frenzied Goblin will table. There's nothing wrong with switching when you're forced into a corner, but this is definitely not one of those times. Take the Galvanic Arc and keep those options open.

Scenario #3



Which card do you pick for your deck?

Pillory of the Sleepless	7001	78.9%
Douse in Gloom	856	9.6%
Ghost Warden	242	2.7%
Absolver Thrull	163	1.8%
Withstand	106	1.2%
Restless Bones	104	1.2%
Gruul Signet	84	0.9%
Bloodscale Prowler	82	0.9%
Petrahydrox	67	0.8%
Ghor-Clan Bloodscale	58	0.7%
Nivix, Aerie of the Firemind	52	0.6%
Skyrider Trainee	43	0.5%
Runeboggle	19	0.2%
Total	8877	100.0%

This is where I disagree with the majority of the readers and choose Douse in Gloom. Specifically, this is an instance of the cards already drafted changing the values of the correct pick. In the abstract, Pillory of the Sleepless is the strongest spell. A card that keeps you alive while killing your opponent, and at such a cheap price, is absolutely wonderful. However, it's a very aggressive pick. Pillory is fantastic when you're already winning, but it is vulnerable when you're on the defensive. Absolver Thrull, bounce effects, and the fact it doesn't actually contain certain creatures (like the Guildmages) are genuine concerns.

The B/W/r deck that's being drafted right now is loaded to the brim with very powerful, very expensive cards. The later the game goes on with this deck, the higher your chances are of winning. As such, there's no need to gamble. Douse in Gloom is a cheap card that kills a cheap guy while gaining you life. It's best in the early turns, but those are the turns you want to shore up. Basically, it's exactly the card *your* deck is looking for, and it should be your pick, even if it means passing a technically stronger card.

Scenario #4

Which configuration do you use for your deck?		
7 Forest, 4 Mountain, 1 Swamp, 1 Island, 3 bounce lands (16 land)	1067	18.1%
6 Forest, 4 Mountain, 1 Swamp, 1 Island, 4 bounce lands (16 land)	942	16.0%
6 Forest, 4 Mountain, 1 Island, 1 Swamp, 3 bounce lands + Terrarion (15 land)	817	13.8%
5 Forest, 5 Mountain, 2 Island, 4 bounce lands (16 land)	727	12.3%
5 Forest, 4 Mountain, 1 Island, 1 Swamp, 4 bounce lands + Terrarion (15 land)	626	10.6%
6 Forest, 4 Mountain, 1 Island, 4 bounce lands + Terrarion (15 land)	568	9.6%
5 Forest, 4 Mountain, 1 Island, 1 Swamp, 3 bounce lands + Terrarion and Scab-Clan Mauler (14 land)	432	7.3%
5 Forest, 4 Mountain, 1 Island, 4 bounce lands + Terrarion and Scab-Clan Mauler (14 land)	369	6.3%
5 Forest, 3 Mountain, 1 Island, 1 Swamp, 4 bounce lands + Terrarion and Scab-Clan Mauler (14 land)	354	6.0%
Total	5902	100.0%

This is, I think, the most interesting exercise, which is why I was surprised to see 6,000 fewer responses to this question versus scenario one. No question, the mana puzzle is tricky in this format. Luckily, we players are given at least ten minutes to figure that out, as opposed to the 50 or so seconds for a draft pick from these previous examples. It's a good thing that kind of time is given, because it's often a tough assignment, as evidenced by the myriad survey responses. An E-Mail I

received a number of times was questioning the lack of a 17 land or even 18 land option. Well they're not there for the same reasons I think the 16 lands options are too much.

Your curve is not particularly high, and the presence of the bounce lands, the signets, and the Green fixers provides lots of extra mana. With 16+ lands, you run into a real danger of flooding.

Unfortunately for this deck, you have no good place to put that extra mana. Some Guildmages or additional replicate cards can make you more inclined to play extra sources; you're happy when your mana is going *somewhere*. But since we don't have those options here, 16 or more is just too much.

The other reason is that while this deck is solid, it's unlikely to be the most powerful at the table. Unlike the previous exercise, we are definitely not interested in the game going super long. That means to win, one is going to need a continuous stream of business spells. Since we don't have lots of quality, we'll rely on quantity. Playing more lands is somewhat safer in the sense we won't get mana screwed as often, but to what end? Perfect, plentiful mana while getting smashed by stronger cards is thoroughly unexciting. Playing too many lands sacrifices a lot of power for just a little consistency.



Next, Swamp or no. The advantage of having a Swamp in there is that it's searchable with Civic Wayfinder or Farseek. The disadvantage is that it's colorless when you don't need the Black, which will be most of the time. Putrefy is the only card that requires Black mana in the deck, and it's certainly a good one. It's so good that even in the very late game it still has an excellent effect. Therefore, you can handle waiting a little while longer to find a Black source. Including a Swamp still wouldn't be a problem, except our color requirements are actually kind of tight. Yes, there are a lot of fixers, but for cards like Tin Street Hooligan, having Red and Green as early as possible is a definite advantage. In the interest of playing less land, the colors have to matter more. That random Swamp could sting. And since we're playing another color fixer instead of the 16th land, the Swamp really has no place here.

The question of three or four bounce lands is a no-brainer. I'm pretty sure I fawned over them enough last week, but just to hammer the point home, they're excellent. Playing all four makes too much sense in a deck like this.

Back to the land quantity, it's between 15 and 14. For the record, this deck can afford 14 lands. It would be a tight fit, but the option is there. Two things inhibit that choice. The first is by forcing so much reliance on the bounce lands, you are far more likely to miss playing a two-mana spell on turn 2. The quick curve is part of the appeal of a deck like this. When almost 30% of your lands come into play tapped, you're going to take a blow to your speed. This deck does not *need* the quickest of starts to win, but it doesn't hurt.

The second problem with 14 lands is what you gain with that extra slot, which in this case is Scab-Clan Mauler. The Mauler is pleasant enough, but it's not amazing in this deck. Bloodthirst isn't easy to obtain, and you already have better guys that benefit if you do manage to trigger a Bloodthirst effect. Ulasht, the Hate Seed makes the Mauler look slightly more appealing, but in the end, this is simply not a deck Scab-Clan Mauler shines in. Playing a card just to make your bomb even better is not strong reasoning.

With the inclusion of Terrarion, I find option four (6 Forest, 4 Mountain, 1 Island, and 4 bounce lands) to be the best choice. Terrarion reduces the need of a Swamp, as well as allowing you to play Tin Street Hooligan without fear of hurting your own board. 15 lands is a safe amount. While 14 is viable, you don't need to get fancy with an extra spell, especially that weak option. Essentially, drawing a good mix of land and spells should win you most games. 15 lands in this deck gives you the best chance of exactly that.

As we've seen from these examples, *Guildpact* continues to exert influence over the environment as a whole. *Guildpact* is only one third of the total drafted cards, yet that little tendril affects every decision. The best players are incorporating what *Guildpact* has to offer into strong decks. We've examined some of the overall rankings of the guilds last week. This time it's going to be a bit more specific, with a look at the best of the *Guildpact* cards from each guild, as well as some of the common archetypes.

The Strongest Cards from Each Guild

Izzet (Red/Blue)

The Izzet player wins by drowning their opponent in an avalanche of card advantage and tempo. The individual cards don't do a whole lot, but continually casting Izzet spells will place an opponent in an unwinnable position. The best Izzet decks stay alive until they pull off a series of card advantage or bounce spells, then ride the effects to a victory.

Common #1: Steamcore Weird. Steamcore Weirdis exactly what the Izzet deck wants: a reasonably costed creature that provides card advantage, has good defensive capabilities, returns to the hand well, and provides difficult to stop damage in the late game. Steamcore can take out a blocker for your quick Gruul/Izzet start, or stave off an aggressive start from your opponent by killing one creature and blocking another. Regardless of your deck or your needs, you can never be Weird enough.



Common #2: Train of Thought. The second best common is actually a very difficult label for a Red/Blue deck. It really depends on what holes an individual deck wants to fill. For example, a lot of

cheap creatures makes Ogre Savant look better, or a lot of Peels From Reality is fantastic with Izzet Chronarchs. Ultimately, I picked Train of Thought because it's so appealing at any stage of the game. If you're behind, maximizing it won't be incredible. However, in any kind of parity situation or when you're even a little ahead, a Train for a few cards can be overwhelming.

Uncommon #1: Gelectrode. This little 0/1 is deceptively powerful. It's free direct damage, which is great for Bloodthirst cards or just a cluttered board. It also has the potential to absolutely dominate and decimate your opponent's creatures. The fact that Red/Blue decks can have a lot of spells, and some of those spells protect Gelectrode only heightens its appeal. Except for Niv-Mizzet, the Firemind, there's not a single Izzet card I'd rather have in my deck than Gelectrode.

Orzhov (Black/White)

The Orzhov also offers difficult-to-stop damage, some evasion, and some direct damage. A lot of Black/White/x decks are slow, which means the best Orzhov cards both keeps you alive and puts your plan into action as soon as possible.

Common #1: Pillory of the Sleepless. This aura is vulnerable, as discussed above. However it's very cheap and does a good job of creating a difficult to stop threat. On its own, Pillory is not enough to win a game, but like Steamcore Weird, it's excellent at either pressing an advantage or slowing down an opponent's aggressive start.



Common #2: Blind Hunter. Blind Hunter is one of those cards that looks unexciting until you see how effectively all its abilities work in tandem. The flight plus life loss creates a difficult-to-stop threat for your opponent. The life gain gives you some breathing room, essentially erasing the penalty of playing such a smallish creature on turn 4. And the Haunt ability, while not totally reliable, is always strictly a boon. Cards like Orzhov Euthanist or Absolver Thrull's haunt effect can't always be used when you want them to, but Blind Hunter's effect is great any time you can get it to trigger. Adding this up gives you a highly efficient creature that any Black/White deck is happy to include as many as they can find.

Uncommon #1: Mortify. Nothing fancy here, just an efficient kill spell. It's versatile, cheap, and a welcome addition in any deck that can cast it.

Gruul (Red/Green)

The Gruul Clan is the speediest of the guilds in *Guildpact*. It also has the biggest monsters, which gives the combination a lot of staying power. There are times when the other decks can contain your

creatures, which leaves the Gruul player very few options. However, no other guild can offer hyper-quick wins or so many large creatures that an opponent is simply overwhelmed.

Common #1: Wildsize. This card is a backbreaker, and its existence can fundamentally alter the way a game is played. The +2/+2 bonus is plenty when your creatures are already default larger; catching them in a double block is cruel. If you want to, there's no penalty in exchanging Wildsize for another card and doing two more damage along the way. And trample?! A powerful card that fits perfectly into any Green-based strategy.



Common #2: Streetbreaker Wurm. Sometimes fat is where it's at. A gigantic, no frills creature, its sheer size for the cost is often enough to give an opponent fits. Add in Green's combat spells like, say... Wildsize, and you have a card with great impact at a very reasonable price.

Uncommon #1: Savage Twister. This isn't just the best Gruul uncommon, it's the best uncommon in the set and possibly the entire block. Extraordinarily cheap, the Wrath of God effect is also adjustable, which means sometimes you can get simply destroy their board while leaving yours safe. The ability to either fully press an advantage or escape from an impossible situation is amazing. Savage Twister's sheer power and versatility can't be overstated.

Ravnica/Guildpact Draft Archetypes

Finally, let's put it all together. What exactly can you draft in this golden world? The short answer is "anything and everything". There is not a single color combination that's unplayable. The best draft decks usually fit into the molds determined by the current seven guilds, but that's a guideline, not a rule. While I wouldn't be eager to draft a U/W/G deck at this point, it's still viable.

The drafter's key job is to determine a primary two-color combination, then what guild or guilds work well with the main one. The archetypes presented below are a sampling of the more common constructions. These are popular strategies because if they're done well, the final versions are generally strong and consistent.

Gruul with Boros (R/G/w): This is a very fast combination. A little removal and some combat tricks, but mostly just very efficient creatures. This deck starts off with some Red or Green cards; Viashino Fangtail is ideal. Then a little bit of R/W, like Skyknight Legionnaire or Sunhome Enforcer. In *Guildpact*, all the Gruul cards you want, with a potential Withstand or Ghost Warden on the White side. If the mana comes together, a very solid deck at all points in the game.

Selesnya/Golgari into Orzhov (G/W/B): This is a very flexible archetype, and it gives a drafter a lot of options on how to proceed. Since most G/W decks splash Black, or G/B decks splash White, adding Orzhov is hardly breaking new ground. Be aware the mana can be strained here. It's very easy to fall

into three even color proportions, which is something you really don't want, even with the Green fixers. This deck can be built in an aggressive or controlling version; both are viable. Keeping the focus clear and the mana consistent will give anyone drafting this kind of deck good results.

Dimir into Izzet (B/U/r): My personal favorite archetype, this is the combination that gives a player the most sheer power. The aggressive Dimir plan works best with lots of cheap fliers leading into the best Izzet cards like Steamcore Weird and Ogre Savant. Pure removal and evasion makes this an all around winner. Sometimes the cards will give you a R/U deck that goes to R/U/b. This is nice because you get to maximize Pyromatics, a card usually sent to the Gruul player. It's rare a deck is drafted in the R/U/x way, but keep your eyes open for the opportunity. R/U/b is just as powerful as U/B/r.

Boros into Izzet (R/W/u): This is another strong, speedy archetype. Something like Sell-Sword Brute, Skyknight Legionnaire, Snapping Drake is an excellent, color intensive opening. You have a little less removal and a few more tricks than your Dimir counterpart. The main flaw is the mana always seems like a much tougher stretch. It's still the best Blue deck that doesn't have Black alongside it.

Gruul with Golgari (G/R/b): This build is acceptable, but loses out on synergy. Your third color doesn't help with Bloodthirst and overall, it's a slower archetype than any other G/R combination. There can be a lot of removal leading into bigger and bigger creatures, but I personally have found this combination to be underwhelming.

The Guildpact Special (R/G/U): This is a tough combination to pull off, but gives potentially gigantic rewards. Basically, you take the best mono-colored cards from the Rav packs, to get a major hookup in GPT. Bramble Elemental is worse than Golgari Rotwurm, but if it leads to a stream of high quality picks in the third pack, so be it. I personally don't draft this style often, but with something like a first pick Civic Wayfinder, keep the idea on the table.

This is really a small percentage of what's available to the drafter right now. Four color decks are common enough, with synergies and card evaluations way beyond the scope of this article. For now, try out new things and see what combos your opponents play. They may give you ideas for cards and decks you haven't considered before. Equally important is determining what works for you and the environment you draft in.

I received a lot of E-Mails regarding last week's guild and mana evaluations. Some people agreed with those views, others did not (emphatically). Who's right? Well, everyone is. Drafting is an organic process that isn't just about taking the best colors. What you open and who you play with is equally important. If you're finding that, for whatever reason, differing strategies work better for you, absolutely go with them. Strategy articles are not canon, they are merely different perspectives on a common problem. Hopefully there are some ideas here that will get you thinking about things in a new way. If you try them out and they don't work for you, fantastic, you're a better player for the experience. The only advice I can give with all surety is to keep playing and keep trying something new. Good luck, and thanks for reading.

-Noah Weil

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