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# Prerelease Postscript

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The Week That Was  
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I may have found my breaking point. I played **Magic** all weekend at the Prerelease. I took part in a Team Sealed, one individual Sealed Deck flight, and did many full-block drafts with friends preparing to attend Pro Tour-Prague. The early part of this week has followed suit with night after night of drafts (and sometimes into morning after morning) at either Neutral Ground or Jon Finkel's apartment.

I need to take a break.

That's right. No **Magic** for me on Thursday. None. Nope. Not drafting. (I can get started early on Friday if anyone is interested, though.)

In case you haven't figured it out, I love playing with the new set. I am sure it is the best full-block draft format the game has ever seen. It is both challenging to draft and fun to play. Former Worlds Top 8 competitor Jamie Parke – and coiner of the **Bramble Elemental's** new nickname Antwaan Bramble EI -- could barely contain his glee as he drafted the new cards for the first time. As he marveled at card after card, he finally stood up and declared his intention to buy multiple cases of each set in the block so he would never have to be without this draft format as long as he can still shuffle a deck. There was nary a person at the draft table who wasn't ready to chip in their share.



All that drafting wiped out our intrepid reporter.

My first taste of the new set came on Saturday morning at the Prerelease, when I did a draft with some friends who had won packs at the Midnight Madness Prerelease at Neutral Ground a dozen hours earlier. My plan going into the draft was to draft Boros-Izzet-Azorius and a first pick **Lightning Helix** seemed like a step in the right direction. **Flame-Kin Zealot** followed but the Boros cards were just not there and I finished out the pack with karoos and signets in the appropriate guild colors.



It turned out that many of my drafts have played out like this. *Ravnica* is a big set, and as a result the desirable commons are far more diluted than they are in the smaller subsequent sets. I have had many a draft already with only one or two non-mana fixing spells from the first set. *Guildpact* did not offer me the Izzet cards that I was hoping for, but there were *Pyromatics* and a couple of Orzhov cards for the plucking.

I was worried going into third pack and definitely needed creatures. I took a **Jagged Poppet** with a little trepidation. On one hand he had the same stats and converted mana cost as **Burning-Tree Shaman**, but on the other hand – hey where did my hand go? Oh, someone blocked my Poppet. Of course, with **Rakdos** that can have its advantages. I had a shot at a second Poppet with my next pick but took **Wrecking Ball** instead. Fortunately everyone else was even more cautious about the Poppet because he ended up tabling back to me. In between the **Wrecking Ball** and the return of the Poppet, I picked up **Hellhole Rats**, **Cackling Flames**, **Demon's Jester**, **Seal of Doom**, and a **Crypt Champion**.

I did not keep the deck completely intact but it looked something like this:

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Rakdos Draft Deck		
<b>Main Deck</b> 40 cards		
1 Boros Garrison	1 Bloodscale Prowler	2 Boros Signet
7 Mountain	1 Crypt Champion	1 Cackling Flames
1 Orzhov Basilica	1 Demon's Jester	1 Delirium Skeins
	1 Flame-Kin Zealot	1 Lightning Helix

2 Plains	2 Gobhobler Rats	1 Pyromatics
6 Swamp	1 Hellhole Rats	1 Seal of Doom
17 lands	2 Jagged Poppet	1 Wrecking Ball
	1 Kill-Suit Cultist	8 other spells
	1 Orzhov Euthanist	
	1 Scorched Rusalka	
	1 Sell-Sword Brute	
	1 Tin Street Hooligan	
	1 Viashino Slasher	
	15 creatures	

The deck ended up being really exciting. The Poppets were monstrous and I was struck by how the sheer aggression of the Rakdos puts your opponent back on his heels. There was some mild uproar this week when Ken Krouner and Jeroen Remie began to debate whether you play or draw in Ravnica limited format. Ken's claim was that tempo was non-existent and the only thing that mattered was card advantage. As a result he always opts for the extra card from drawing.

I had one match against Chris Manning where I was down to five cards on the play. I will admit that I wished I was on the draw for this game. I recovered nicely against Chris's slower deck but was sure I was going to be frustrated in the end.

"If only I had two more cards," I complained to Chris. "I am sure I would have you this game."

Suddenly I ripped a white source off the top of my deck. I looked over at Chris's life total.

"You're at eight?"

Flame-Kin Zealot hit play, my **Demon's Jester** got bent from here to H-E-double hockey sticks and Chris took an unexpected eight.

"If I had two more cards I am not sure I could have beaten you that game," I laughed at the sudden reversal of fortunes and positions. Rakdos is going to take some getting used to.



My next two experiences with *Dissension* were more Simic in flavor. I have always been partial to blue-green and had been looking forward to giving the guild a test drive. Having done a draft and talking to players who had been playing since midnight, I was also eager to play with graft — and the card I was most hoping to see when we built our team decks was **Doubling Season**.

My teammates for the three-person Team Sealed were Scott McCord and Steve Sadin. All three of us have had some fair success in team sealed over the years and we had no problems dividing up the cards based on the three guilds in the new set. Steve built a ridiculous red-black deck and Scott went blue-white — I know that this will not shock anyone who knows Scott at all.

One of the cards we were trying to evaluate as we built the deck was **Ocular Halo**. Scott broke the card in half by pairing it with his **Beacon Hawk**. Multiple times during the tournament he enchanted his unimposing looking flier with the card-drawing aura. He would pay  $\{*$  to give the Hawk vigilance and with damage on the stack he would tap it to draw a card. Then the **Beacon Hawk's** ability would trigger and he would use it to untap itself. He was able to draw three cards a turn.

My deck looked something like this:

Team Sealed		
Main Deck 40 cards		
1 Dimir Aqueduct	1 Aquastrand Spider	1 Dimir Signet
5 Forest	1 Assault Zeppelin	1 Disembowel
2 Golgari Rot Farm	1 Birds of Paradise	1 Doubling Season
5 Island	2 Civic Wayfinder	1 Halcyon Glaze
1 Novijen, Heart of Progress	2 Coiling Oracle	1 Scatter the Seeds
1 Plains	1 Cytospawn Shambler	1 Simic Signet
15 lands	1 Elves of Deep Shadow	1 Supply // Demand
	1 Helium Squirter	7 other spells
	1 Indrik Stomphowler	
	1 Moroi	
	1 Plaxmanta	
	1 Silkwing Scout	
	2 Trygon Predator	
	2 Vigeon Hydropon	
	18 creatures	

Again, the decklist may be one or two cards off as I am recreating it from an increasingly aged memory. One thing I am sure of is that **Doubling Season** is going to be a first pick for me in drafts for the foreseeable future. I made 12/12 Shamblers, had ridiculous Scatters, and my Novijen was working double time.

The highlight of the tournament for me came after we split in the finals with NY State Champion Julian Levin's team. My opponent was Asher Hecht and we decided to play out our match. I ran him over pretty quickly with a curvy draw of Predators, Zeppelid, and **Halcyon Glaze**. In the second game, I got to live the dream.

I had a somewhat slow draw and did not have much in play when I dropped **Doubling Season** on turn four. On the following turn I made a 10/10 **Vigean Hydropon**. Turn seven I cast Supply for three, putting six 3/3 tokens into play with the graft from the plant. I then activated my Novijen to put another double helping of counters on each of them and ended up with six 5/5 creatures on turn seven. Asher conceded before we got to turn eight.

My third experience – if you don't count several more drafts in between – was a Sealed Deck flight on Sunday. I went 2-1 in the flight with a loss to a deck featuring **Blazing Archon**, **Simic Sky Swallower**, and Hour of (W)reckoning. It was the second prerelease in a row where the Wrath effect destroyed me – although to be fair, my deck did not have many answers to the Sky Swallower.

I did get the other more obvious **Ocular Halo** combo in that deck with **Simic Ragworm**, which was a lot of fun. The deck also had **Novijen**, **Heart of Progress** and **Supply // Demand** once again. Here is the deck I played Sunday.



Sealed Deck		
<b>Main Deck</b> 40 cards		
1 Azorius Chancery	1 Aquastrand Spider	1 Azorius Signet
5 Forest	1 Assault Zeppelid	1 Fists of Ironwood
1 Golgari Rot Farm	1 Azorius Guildmage	1 Gather Courage
5 Island	1 Dowsing Shaman	1 Halcyon Glaze
1 Novijen, Heart of Progress	1 Freewind Equeonaut	1 Ocular Halo
4 Plains	1 Sandsower	1 Overwhelm
17 lands	1 Selesnya Evangel	1 Peel from Reality
	1 Selesnya Guildmage	2 Plumes of Peace
	1 Siege Wurm	1 Supply // Demand
	1 Silkwing Scout	1 Thrive
	1 Simic Ragworm	
	1 Vedalken Dismissal	11 other spells
	12 creatures	

Wow. All this talk about *Dissension* has made me want to draft. I wonder if anyone is at the Ground tonight.

## Firestarter: Rate the Guilds, Mages!

While I had a positive experience with Rakdos, it is clear that my heart belongs to Simic. What was your prerelease experience like? Which guilds were strong for you? Give us your mini-tournament reports in the forums by clicking on the discuss link below.

*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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