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Simic to Win It

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 Limited Information
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Welcome back to Limited Information. This week is Simic Week, so today is dedicated to those tricky evil scientists of *Dissension*. We're going to cover some interesting Simic cards in detail, as well as a more thorough look at the Graft mechanic. First however, the scenario from last week:

PRODUCTS

MAGIC ONLINE

2007 WORLDS

RRG Draft

Main Deck 26 cards	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Boros Garrison 1 Orzhov Basilica <hr/> <p>2 lands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Absolver Thrull 1 Agrus Kos, Wojek Veteran 1 Conclave Equenaut 1 Izzet Chronarch 1 Molten Sentry 1 Moroi 1 Mourning Thrull 1 Orzhov Euthanist 1 Petrahydrox 1 Skeletal Vampire 1 Skyknight Legionnaire 1 Sparkmage Apprentice 1 Vedalken Dismissor 2 Veteran Armorer <hr/> <p>15 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Bathe in Light 1 Boros Fury-Shield 1 Boros Signet 1 Dimir Signet 1 Douse in Gloom 1 Hypervolt Grasp 1 Last Gasp 1 Peel from Reality 1 Terrarion <hr/> <p>9 other spells</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Benediction of Moons 1 Boros Recruit 1 Conclave's Blessing 1 Courier Hawk 1 Cry of Contrition 1 Cyclopean Snare 1 Dimir Infiltrator 1 Dromad Purebred 1 Fencer's Magemark 1 Grayscaled Gharial 1 Instill Furor 1 Mnemonic Nexus 1 Necromantic Thirst 1 Poisonbelly Ogre 1 Sabertooth Alley Cat 1 Stoneshaker Shaman 1 Suppression Field 1 Thunderheads 1 Withstand <hr/> <p>19 sideboard cards</p>

This deck certainly contains a lot of quality cards, but that's to be expected with this many colors. The puzzle remains, what's the optimal land configuration? The mana questions from last week are still applicable:

How Much Mana Do I Want?

A deck with this much power doesn't need to get fancy. The reason to squeeze extra cards into a deck (by playing less mana) only comes into play if the spells don't pass muster. This deck does not have that particular issue. With four colors, and some expensive cards, let's make sure we err on the side of the quantity. With two Signets, two bounce lands, and some cheap guys to block early, I think 16 lands total is just fine.

What Type of Mana Do I Want and When Do I Want It?

I believe White and Black are our most important colors. They provide the cheapest creatures and/or the inexpensive removal. Drawing an early glut of White or Black mana is not the end of the world. Those are the colors that *keep us alive* while we try to get the other stuff online. If it takes a little more time to cast **Izzet Chronarch**, that's ok because **Douse in Gloom** or **Veteran Armorer** preserve our life totals long enough to make it happen.

Power or Consistency?

The previous questions touched on this, but again, mana consistency is the way to go here. This deck was drafted at an 8-4 queue with a lot of strong players. Therefore, opponents are going to be aggressive and have a good understanding of card quality. That means we don't get to assume our opponents will be playing fifty-card decks with poor mana; we are going to be trading our good cards for theirs. However, our card quality is above the curve, so as long as both players get correct mana draws, our deck strength should be enough to win the match. Since the individual cards provide the power, the mana can provide the consistency. Here's the build I used:

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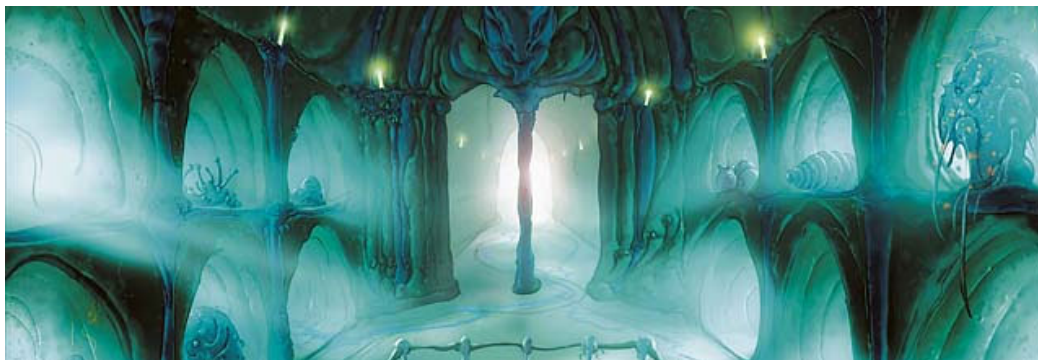
magicthegathering.com Forum

RULES

RRG Draft		
		
Main Deck		Sideboard
40 cards		
1 Boros Garrison	1 Bathe in Light	1 Benediction of Moons
2 Island	1 Boros Fury-Shield	1 Boros Recruit
3 Mountain	1 Boros Signet	1 Conclave's Blessing
1 Orzhov Basilica	1 Dimir Signet	1 Cry of Contrition
5 Plains	1 Douse in Gloom	1 Cyclopean Snare
4 Swamp	1 Hypervolt Grasp	1 Dimir Infiltrator
	1 Last Gasp	1 Dromad Purebred
16 lands	1 Peel from Reality	1 Fencer's Magemark
	1 Terrarion	1 Grayscaled Gharial
1 Absolver Thrull	9 other spells	1 Instill Furor
1 Agrus Kos, Wojek Veteran		1 Island
1 Conclave Equenaut		1 Mnemonic Nexus
1 Courier Hawk		1 Mourning Thrull
1 Izzet Chronarch		1 Necromantic Thirst
1 Molten Sentry		1 Poisonbelly Ogre
1 Moroi		1 Sabertooth Alley Cat
1 Orzhov Euthanist		1 Stoneshaker Shaman
1 Petrahydrox		1 Suppression Field
1 Skeletal Vampire		1 Thunderheads
1 Skyknight Legionnaire		1 Withstand
1 Sparkmage Apprentice		
1 Vedalken Dismissal		20 sideboard cards
2 Veteran Armorer		
15 creatures		

What's interesting here is that this build contains one more Swamp than strictly necessary. The only card that requires double Black is a late card, and all the other Black cards are effective at any stage of the game. However, since those Black cards keep us alive, it's worth giving them a little more attention. Blue is the opposite; another Island would be safer, but since all the Blue cards are narrow and/or very late game cards, we can wait around a bit to get the cards and mana aligned. Red kind of splits the difference here, so the Mountains ended up in the middle.

In practice, the deck did flood a bit in Black and under-draw Blue, but that was the accepted risk. More importantly, the Black cards and White cards kept us alive until we drew Islands & Blue cards or the almighty **Skeletal Vampire**. It was enough to win the draft.



Now for something a little more on theme. I have to admit here, I'm fully attached to the Simic and their Graft skills. The Simic are *strong!* They offer an awful lot of power, depth, and flexibility to the G/U drafter. Boros-based decks seem to play out the same way every game. Not so with the Simic, who offer very different experiences each time. That's a lot of fun, but it can also be kind of difficult.

What the Simic excel at, more than anything else, is offering choice. Every creature played demands a choice. Certain Simic cards literally call for you to make a decision, and others simply give you a very wide range of options on how to best use them. There's rarely an absolute here; the best play one game can easily become the worst play in the next. These are tricky waters, but the benefits exist. A lot of players think the Simic are the most powerful guild in *Dissension*. That might be true. At the very least, they're a lot of fun to work with.

Before we delve into the Graft guys, let's look at some interesting Simic cards that may or may not be worth inclusion.

Shielding Plax: This one is known in the business as "filler". Not a bad card *per se*, but it doesn't really do anything. Spending mana to protect your own creatures usually isn't worth it. Does my opponent already have removal in hand? Then the Plax is pointless, or worse, card disadvantage. If they don't have removal in hand, then my quality, protection-worthy creature should end the game quickly. *If* my creature lives long enough to let me play the Plax, and then *If* my opponent draws a (now) dead removal spell, **Shielding Plax** looks alright. That's a bit too many "ifs" for my taste. Usually it's thrown on a random creature simply for the card draw. If cycling is what you want, so be it. There are two exceptions though.

The first is **Freewind Equenaut**. This little Amazon isn't actually worth protecting until it's already safe. To put it another way, 2/2 flying untargetable **Heavy Ballistas** are good. The other appeal to **Shielding Plax** is using it on your opponent's creatures (but not their **Freewind Equenaut**). This is fine for making sure you get the card draw, but once in a while, you'll want to prevent them from pumping their creature. Their **Gruul Guildmage** or **Ghost Warden** could make this a possibility. It's a rather narrow application, but it does come up now and again.

Simic Signet and **Simic Growth Chamber**: The Simic are quite the mana-hungry guild. Besides the usual high-end casting costs of Big Green Fatties™, the Graft-based abilities don't come cheap. Simic is not a guild that gets by on missed land drops, so cards like the Signet and Growth Chamber are quality valuable. Don't expect either one of those cards to go around the table; draft accordingly for your needs.

Thrive: Everyone loves X spells in Limited, right? **Yes** and **no**. To explore the quality of **Thrive**, let's look at possible scenarios. First of all, if you have zero to two creatures in play, **Thrive**'s pretty weak. You might do some damage, but it's extremely unlikely to generate a hard-to-stop threat and/or card advantage. With three or four creatures in play, **Thrive** does better. However, one has to ask, why aren't you already winning? If you have the only creatures on the board, **Thrive** is unnecessary. If your creatures are significantly outclassed, **Thrive** probably won't matter. **Thrive** is playable in a creature standoff or if your deck is designed to put a *lot* of creatures into play, such as a Selesnya deck or a very heavy creature build. In those instances **Thrive** isn't bad, but hopefully, your deck can do better.

Simic Guildmage: I don't know if it's a he or a she, but this, um, person is exceptionally dominant. Never mind the fact that Simic decks enjoy early creatures to play. Never mind the rarely employed but occasionally useful Blue ability. Never even mind that the +1/+1 moving ability is effective for your creatures *and* against your opponent's. Nope, the real viciousness of this card is that it allows you to go into pure aggression mode. Not only does **Simic Guildmage** make combat and damage-based removal basically impossible for your opponent, it drastically reduces the time your opponent gets to actually find an answer. However innocuous it looks, seeing it in action will change your mind quite quickly. A frightening card.

Fertile Imagination: This is a card I simply cannot get a bead on. Players whose opinions I highly respect have wildly different opinions about the quality, or the likely potential, of this card. Personally, I haven't been impressed. There have been stories about 8-10 tokens, and it's certainly a vicious card when your opponent is mana screwed. My question then is: what isn't? On my fourth turn, I hope to play a card with more consistent impact. The problem is this card continues to reduce itself in quality as the game goes on. I think it has appeal as a sideboard card against certain slow decks, but I'd have a lot of trepidation giving it maindeck status. Anyone want to chime in on this one?



Vigean Intuition: I'm not a fan of this card at all. Five mana is an awful lot to pay for anything. The fact this card could give you *nothing*; well, it doesn't look like a very good deal. Instant card drawing is nice, but this is not a card that will get you out of a losing situation. If you're winning, it *may* allow you to continue your dominance, but it's more likely that any regular five-mana creature would do that just as well. The only instance I could imagine this card having consistent appeal is if you were digging for a very powerful card, and said card is the only way your deck could win. Naming "enchantments" in a deck with **Faith's Fetters** and **Glare of Subdual** doesn't seem awful, on the assumption that you'll either hit it or get four cards closer. That's a pretty underwhelming and narrow application for the most part. I'd prefer to just stick with **Compulsive Research** or **Train of Thought**. They're less potentially explosive, but wayyy more reliable.

Cytoshape: It's basically a Green/Blue version of **Mortify** or **Putrefy**. It's basically a Green/Blue version of **Mortify** or **Putrefy**! This card is quite good, and people don't seem to be giving it much respect. Occasionally it won't function as pure removal, but that's balanced by the rare instances it will make one of your creatures extra large. It's often nice to turn their biggest guy into a 0/0, and it's occasionally useful to turn your unblocked saproling into a **Bramble Elemental** for the final points of damage. All in all, a highly useful spell.



Coiling Oracle: This little guy has been garnering quite a bit of scrutiny lately. How good is a 1/1 that merely replaces itself? Like a lot of questions involving the Simic, the answer is "it depends". **Coiling Oracle** isn't just a Pyknite, it's also an occasional **Wood Elves**. Both of those effects cost three mana, so you could be getting a discount, except two specific colors is at least as difficult to generate as one color and some generic. In addition, it's not exactly reliable as either a card drawer or mana source. Undependability is pretty much my least favorite trait in a card, especially in one that can actually be difficult to cast. In any other set, I'd be pretty unimpressed.

However **Ravnica** block is a slightly different animal. The first reason **Coiling Oracle** goes up in value is that it chump blocks remarkably well. The Simic are probably one of the best guilds in the late game, due to generally bigger creatures and having plenty of mana available for their Graft abilities. As such, getting to the late game is appealing, and **Coiling Oracle** helps a player do exactly that. Whether it's by preserving your life total, accelerating your mana, or both, Coily Joe pushes your development in a positive manner. The other major reason the Oracle looks better is those trusty bounce lands. While admittedly unlikely, tripping a bounce land off the Oracle is a gigantic boost in mana, the equivalent of an early game Mox. Adding up those positives make **Coiling Oracle** an effective package, but it doesn't have to be an automatic early pick. If your mana curve is low,

or you're short on bounce lands, or your deck requirements are just too tight, don't be sad to leave this one on the bench.

Plaxmanta: What a beast! An instant speed **Grizzly Bears**, or a creature preservation spell with a great kicker; it's quite a nice little package. This creature is something of a modal spell, which requires yet another decision. There's no easy answer to this one, but it seems a lot of players get married to the idea of playing **Plaxmanta** in a certain way. It's either a dude or a counter, switching gears seems difficult.

I was watching a friend of mine play his G/U/W deck against a fellow's R/U/B. Both players had empty boards and practically empty hands. My friend had a **Plaxmanta** in the grip for turn after turn, never even considering playing it like a **King Cheetah** and going aggressive. To him, it was **Confound** with a different bonus effect, nothing more. There are times when **Plaxmanta** is exactly that, but it's definitely not always. He lost the game because he was convinced the best way to use **Plaxmanta** never changed from situation to situation. With Limited in general, and the Simic in particular, "best" changes quite frequently. Convincing yourself there's only one way to play a card is the a great technique to hamstringing a deck's potential.

The Graft Guys: Alright, now we come to it. How good are these beady eyed mutants, really? Pretty good actually, to the tune of \$40,000.



Main Deck 40 cards		Sideboard
8 Forest	1 Char	1 Gather Courage
6 Mountain	1 Douse in Gloom	1 Incite Hysteria
3 Swamp	1 Scatter the Seeds	1 Infectious Host
17 lands	1 Seal of Doom	1 Living Inferno
	2 Utopia Sprawl	1 Macabre Waltz
	6 other spells	1 Necromantic Thirst
3 Aquastrand Spider		2 Peel from Reality
1 Cytoplast Root-Kin		1 Primeval Light
1 Exhumer Thrull		1 Sabertooth Alley Cat
1 Ghor-Clan Savage		1 Shattering Spree
2 Golgari Rotwurm		1 Silhana Ledgewalker
1 Gruul Scrapper		1 Skarrgan Pit-Skulk
1 Gruul Scrapper		1 Sundering Vitae
1 Mortipede		1 Vesper Ghoul
1 Scab-Clan Mauler		1 Vigean Intuition
2 Simic Initiate		1 Vision Skeins
1 Sporeback Troll		1 Woebringer Demon
1 Streetbreaker Wurm		18 sideboard cards
1 War-Torch Goblin		
17 creatures		

I love Takuya Osawa's first place deck from Pro Tour--Prague. This particular build eschews the Blue half of the Simic, but the Graft mechanic is still a major player. The first reason Graft works so well here are the already naturally beefy creatures in Takuya's deck. Four toughness is kind of the sweet spot of creatures. At that level, an opponent who wants to block and kill the four-toughness creature *usually* needs a double block. At the very least that can translate to card advantage. Things get sticky when you add instant speed removal to the equation - now you get to kill one of the blockers before damage your big fatty crushes the remaining blocker and stays alive. The defending player now needs *another* two creatures to block, continuing risk and 2-for-1s. Not too many decks can withstand that kind of assault.

Graft, quite simply, increases the chance of having a bigger threat. At the cost of weakening one of your own creatures, you create a monster that requires heroic efforts to stop. That's not bad at all, and when you include something obscene like **Flying** or **Un-targetability** into the mix, things can get downright degenerate. Takuya's deck employed this principle perfectly. His creatures are already naturally large. Making them gigantic, or just creating a 4/3 **Gruul Scrapper** to fight alongside a wurm, was very effective. In addition, Takuya had two sources of instant speed removal to break up a potential double block. Takuya also had two of the almighty Graft cards: **Scatter the Seeds**, for an instant **Grizzly Fate**, and **Cytoplast Root-Kin**, which is just plain nuts in any kind of Graft-based deck. The **Simic Initiates** look a lot better when they can make a 4/4 **Scab-Clan Mauler** or become 2/2s themselves under **Root-Kin**. It's clear Takuya Osawa build a very strong Graft deck and...well you know the rest.

Advantages aside, the decision to Graft is not an automatic one. It's nice when your 7/5 **Streetbreaker Wurm** takes down three opposing creatures. It's not nice when you make your **Aquastrand Spider** a 1/1 just to lose an already imposing creature to a timely **Wrecking Ball**. The rub here is that even what started out to be the correct decision can look pretty poor to a topdecked **Faith's Fetters** or **Plumes of Peace**. Graft players have to decide their chances if/when the gargantuan beast gets taken out. The fact that this decision is irrevocable and must be made within a very short timeframe makes the Simic...exciting.



Personally, I think that's why **Vigean Hydropon** is so popular. It's not a particularly great card. It requires a turn of development sacrifice to use effectively, and it's absolutely horrid in the late game when you have no more creatures left to play. The reason I think the Hydropon has caught the players' fancy is the Graft decision is a really easy one with it in play. *Of course* you move a +1/+1 counter over, what else are you going to do with it? It's comforting to know it's one decision that's tough to mess up. Don't get me wrong, the Hydropon isn't that bad. If your draw is a healthy mix of creatures, the Hydropon boosting naturally strong guys at no cost should be pretty effective. My only issue is that you can't play more than two in a deck, yet you want to draw it as early as possible. **Vigean Hydropon** is merely a decent card, not an amazing one.

Graft requires you, the player, to analyze which creature set is more powerful. Is a 5/5 and a 3/3 better than a 6/6 and 2/2? Two 4/4s better than a 5/5 and a 3/3? These are complicated, board dependent questions. My personal guideline is to make as few 1/1s as possible with my Graft guys. The difference between a 1/1 and 2/2 as far as board impact is concerned is gigantic. 1/1s die to all sorts of commons cards like **Sparkmage Apprentice**, **Flash Foliage**, **Riot Spikes**, and so on. These are all cards that are far less effective against 2/2s. I do my best to minimize the number of 1/1s in play. I rarely Graft onto a creature with an

Aquastrand Spider, and I hardly ever play **Simic Initiate**.

As discussed above, Takuya's deck does break this idea. In his deck specifically, those cards have much more appeal. For one, **Cytoplast Root-Kin** allows them to boost past 1/1 status. For another, **Golgari Rotwurm** turns **Simic Initiate** into a more flexible **Scorched Rusalka**. Then there's the scary potential of a 4/4 **Scab-Clan Mauler**. Under these circumstances, the minor Graft creatures improve greatly. Keep in mind those particular factors don't come around too often. Even though **Simic Initiate** did fit nicely with Osawa's deck, he still only took them 11th and 12th pick. You can see his entire draft, and everyone else's in [the Top 8 of Prague here](#).

The other exception to 1/1 reduction is **Sporeback Troll**. A 2/2 regenerator is quite a threat, compared to something half as large. However, a +1/+1ed, Regenerating **Simic Ragworm** is a *much* greater threat than almost anything. The vulnerability of a 1/1 is greatly reduced when the 1/1 can protect itself, especially when it allows you to make very threatening 4/4 along the way. This is somewhat mana-hungry for the early turns, but late game, the **Sporeback Troll** can be quite a force.

Hopefully this week has made clear the Graft and Simic are a complicated bunch. A player is going to have to make a lot of decisions. They're not an easy guild to employ, but being able to dominate combat like no one's business is very appealing. Take the time to get to know this group, I think you'll be pleased with the results. Explore all the Simic have to offer, and the rest of the guilds, when the *Dissension* release events begin on **Magic Online** June 1st.

For the final exercise today, the question is simple. Given the following deck already drafted, what is the best first pick from this pack? Look for a discussion of this scenario in two weeks. Thanks for reading.

-Noah Weil

The deck so far:

Selesnya Guildmage
Civic Wayfinder
Farseek
Bramble Elemental
Compulsive Research
Courier Hawk
Selesnya Sanctuary
Guardian of Vitu-Ghazi
Seeds of Strength
Gruul Guildmage
Gruul Turf
Wildsize
Repeal
Gristleback
Mourning Thrull
Silhana Starfletcher
Izzet Signet
Infiltrator's Magemark

First pick, first pack of *Dissension*

Your pick:

- Macabre Waltz
- Silkwing Scout
- Assault Zeppelin
- Carom
- Rakkos Signet

- Rakdos Ickspitter
 - Ogre Gatecrasher
 - Ocular Halo
 - Aurora Eidolon
 - Rakdos Carnarium
 - Simic Ragworm
 - Azorius Aethermage
 - Trygon Predator
 - Hit // Run
 - Experiment Kraj
-



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