

What's better than merely opening packs? Why battling with them, of course!

Limited Options: Introducing MindMaster

Kelly Digges

Monday, August 14, 2006

- 
- 



- [Kelly Digges Archive](#)

We all do it sooner or later. Some of us think that it's normal. We may not even realize that there's an alternative. Others know what a strange and unnatural thing it is, and cringe even as we indulge our darker passions. We all give in eventually. You have, and I have, and the sooner we admit that it's a problem, the sooner we'll get through it.

I am talking, of course, about opening packs.

What's that you say? There's nothing wrong with opening packs? We need to talk.

Simply put, you can either just open the pack, or you can open the pack in a Limited format, play some **Magic**, and *still* get 15 cards when you're done. I can count on one hand the number of times in the last 5 years I have simply cracked a pack open to see what was in it. Every time I see someone rip open a pack when they could be playing **Magic**, I die a little inside. Playing Limited with your packs is, as an economics student would say, *value added*. As *Time Spiral* hits pre-releases and store shelves in the coming month, many of you will buy or win packs, and you can have a lot more fun with them if you use them to play Limited.



Of course, you can't always get six or (optimistically) eight people together for a draft. My own local play group can be more than a little difficult to round up. Fortunately, there are a few other people in the group whose constant appetite for cardslinging equals my own, and we frequently occupy ourselves with two-man Limited formats. Of course, there are no official ones, so we've had to get increasingly creative.

We started with a format that's common in many playgroups, **MiniMaster**, a.k.a. Pack Wars. Each player opens one booster pack without looking at it, shuffles in two of each basic land, and then uses that as his or her library. Players don't lose for being unable to draw a card, and there's usually a rule

to enable cards with three or more of one colored mana symbol to be played (for instance, once per game you may exchange a basic land in your hand for another type of basic land). As a variant, some groups let you look at the pack first and add as many basic land of each type as you want.

We then advanced to a format we call **MegaMaster**, in which each player shuffles up an entire tournament pack (or three boosters and six of each basic land) and the special rules about decking and mana production aren't needed. Unlike MiniMaster, MegaMaster is often worth doing for an entire match with the same decks – best 2 out of 3, 3 out of 5, or even 5 out of 7. My friend David and I have played MegaMaster matches for a number of different card pools now (tournament packs of *Ravnica*, *Champions*, and *Mirrodin* as well as *Ravnica-Guildpact-Dissension*, *Mirrodin-Darksteel-Fifth Dawn*, and triple-*Onslaught* boosters, although that last was compromised by too many duplicate commons), and we're currently tied at 41 games each.

The problem with MiniMaster and MegaMaster (and any other variations on that theme) is that they're very random. In order to win, you have to be lucky enough to have a decent pack *and* lucky enough to draw the right lands to go with your business spells. They are fine diversions, but when you have a lot of packs (as David and I did after taking 4th place at the Two-Headed Giant Limited Championship in Illinois this year), the randomness makes them grow dull in a hurry. "Oh, gosh, I won again? Wow. How exciting."

Seeing that MiniMaster was no longer holding our attention and certainly wasn't teaching us anything or improving our play skill, we started trying other things. Two-man draft formats shook things up for us a little, but they're closed systems in which it's too easy for one player to gain a big advantage, and they're rather too involved for just a few games worth of fun. After the *Ravnica* prerelease, we had accumulated quite a lot of packs and were looking for something to do with them. Realizing that the best thing about MiniMaster is how easy it is set up and play, I concocted a format that promised to be just as portable but much more skill-intensive.

Introducing MindMaster

In order to play MindMaster (so named for its greater emphasis on skill), each player needs one booster pack, as in MiniMaster. Set aside at least ten or fifteen of each basic land organized into piles by type. After determining who goes first (an issue we'll touch on in a moment), each of you opens your booster pack, which becomes your hand. Yes, you heard me, your *hand*. The following special rules apply:



- There are no libraries and no card drawing in MindMaster. Instructions to draw a card or manipulate the top of your library in any way, and most instructions to search your library, are ignored. This does mean that some cards (such as [Counsel of the Soratami](#)) and abilities (such as Ripple) do absolutely nothing, while any cantrips or “slowtrips” such as [Swift Maneuver](#) aren't quite as good as usual. The graveyard works normally.
- Each turn, you may play one basic land of your choice or a land from your hand (usually nonbasic (or snow-covered basic) land, but sometimes a basic land that's been returned to your hand). Over the course of the game, you may take a maximum of ten basic lands from the land piles, no exceptions. This is mainly to prevent situations with X-spells and Replicate cards from encouraging horrible stalls. “I can kill you with [Pyromatics](#) just as soon as I get to 40 mana!” Pass on that, thanks. It also means that nonbasic lands and land destruction affect your total available mana. Essentially, think of it as having ten basic lands of your choice in your library.
- If a card instructs you to search your library for a land and put it into play, you may take a land from any of the basic land piles (or, if the card can get nonbasic lands, from your hand). This counts toward your ten-land limit, but as usual doesn't count as your land drop for the turn.

We tried MindMaster, and I was astonished at just how well it played and how much fun it was. We've stopped playing MiniMaster completely, because there is simply no reason to. MindMaster is more engaging, more demanding, less random, less frustrating, and above all, more fun.

MindMaster is skill-intensive and decision-rich because you have to plan very carefully. If you want to play [Magmatic Core](#) on turn 4, you won't be able to curve out with [Rimebound Dead](#), [Kjeldoran Outrider](#), and [Sound the Call](#) on turns 1 through 3. You have in your hands all the cards you're going to get, and it's up to you to decide what to play early, what to save for later, and what sort of course to plot through the contents of your booster. MindMaster games take anywhere from 15 minutes to half an hour, because every turn involves careful decisions about the rest of the game.

In one game of *Ninth Edition* MindMaster, I had a very weak pack. David played down a few early creatures and then dropped a [Sengir Vampire](#) on turn 5. I used my only piece of removal, a [Pacifism](#), to shut it out of the game. He had a [Coercion](#) that he could have used to look at my hand (a very strong advantage in MindMaster) and strip it of anything that could deal with the Vampire, but he got

headstrong, went for the throat, and paid dearly for it. He did end up winning that game, but it was close. There are more examples of these sorts of decision trees in the game walkthroughs below. There are some oddities that crop up, particularly concerning cards such as [Condemn](#) and Jötun Grunt that put cards on the bottom of your library. Technically you have no library, so instructions to put things on the bottom of it should be ignored, but our guideline is to preserve the printed functionality of cards as much as possible. [Train of Thought](#) is a total loss, but there's no reason that [Condemn](#) needs to be. We've ruled that you do have a library but have no way to interact with it, and thus cards put on the bottom of it are effectively removed from the game (which is usually the case in Limited anyway).

It's up to you to decide how hard to work to preserve functionality; too few fixes for minor issues make too many cards become blank (or just plain weird), but too many start to make it feel as if you're playing some other game entirely. Above all, any such "patches" should be decided on beforehand with the intention of making games of MindMaster more fun. We found a fix for Dredge (discard cards equal to the Dredge number and skip your land drop), but not Transmute or Ripple. People we know have suggested various ways of making card drawing do something, from getting an extra land to returning cards from your graveyard, but all of these distort the game more than simply accepting that "draw a card" doesn't mean anything and some cards don't work the way you're used to. [Compulsive Research](#), for instance, is a discard spell. As we played more MindMaster and fell further in love with it, one issue started to nag at me: Going first is a huge advantage with no disadvantage to mitigate it. Because a quick start in MindMaster can be hard to beat, especially if your pack is light on removal, the player who wins the die roll always goes first and always gains an edge because of it. This is contrary to the idea of the format as a haven of skill; to put it another way, I would ideally want the contents of the pack to be the only thing left to chance. We brainstormed a number of ways of getting around this. Most of them will require letting people look at their packs before they decide whether to go first or second so that they can evaluate how much their pack will benefit from going first.



- Accept it and move on. This is our current solution. Correlation between going first and winning is well under 100%, and seems to take a back seat to pack contents and play decisions. You will occasionally (or more than occasionally) encounter games that are decided by who goes first, but if you play MindMaster primarily as a quick diversion, this might not bother you too much.
- Once per game, the player who went second may, without using a land drop, exchange one of his or her lands in play for a land in the land pile, thus gaining more freedom in terms of the order in which he or she can play things (for instance, turn 2 [Watchwolf](#) into turn 3 [Dimir Cutpurse](#)) or the ability to trade in lands that are no longer useful in exchange for lands that are (for instance, a player who has no more green cards in hand but controls a [Steam Spitter](#) might exchange a Forest for a Mountain). This ability would happen at sorcery speed, and the new land would come into play tapped if the exchanged land was tapped. This is a small advantage, and people would probably still always choose to play first, but it's a nice little bonus to slightly offset the

disadvantage of playing second and simulate the extra options granted by drawing an extra card. We haven't actually tried this one, but I like it.

- Bid life for the privilege of going first. Some people like this idea and others hate it. I think of it as an advanced option for people who want their MindMaster games to be more involved with an extra layer of skill. Each player conceals a die indicating how much life they're bidding, and the winning bidder loses that much life and goes first. The losing bidder loses no life. In case of a tie, nobody loses life and you roll dice (or you could try bidding again...). Note again that you get to look at your hand before making this decision, so you'll need to evaluate how much that hand will benefit from going first or suffer from going second. We considered doing Invitational style open bidding, but once again the first bidder gains undue advantage.

Remember that anything other than simply rolling a die to see who goes first is very much an optional rule (and, indeed, as this is an informal format, *all* rules are adjustable). If people try out some of these, I'd love to hear about it, but they're not essential to the MindMaster experience. That said, we've become very enamored of bidding, and you'll notice that each of the sample games below is a bidding game.

Fun and Informative

Not only is MindMaster a fun way to blow half an hour and a great mental exercise for technical play, it also helps illuminate two of the fundamental concepts in **Magic**, tempo and card advantage, key concepts for which I'll offer woefully incomplete but sufficient explanations.

Tempo, or the speed at which each player is threatening the other, is key because you have the ability to come out of the gate lightning quick. A turn-two [Boreal Centaur](#) can be followed by a turn-three [Frost Raptor](#) and a turn-four [Blizzard Specter](#), and that's pretty tough to beat. You need to assess whether you have a pack that supports a strong tempo opening, and if it does, you should almost always go for the throat.

Card advantage, or a player having access to more (and better) cards than another over time, is also extremely important. Although the archetypal source of card advantage, drawing cards, does not apply in MindMaster, other types of card advantage, such as using one card to take out two or more of an opponents', more than make up the difference. You only have 15 cards, and so does your opponent. You have to make every one count. Just as a strong tempo opening can decide a game, a single 3-for-1 trade can be absolutely devastating. However, card advantage in MindMaster has much more to do with card quality than elsewhere; other decks put each of their cards in for a reason, but MindMaster packs are filled with things like [Perilous Research](#) that they don't particularly want and don't mind losing. Lose three or four creatures without inflicting similar losses on your opponent, though, and the game is probably over.

Sample Games

After the *Coldsnap* prerelease, my friends and I had a number of packs to get through. We played a few pick-up games at White Castle on the way home from the prerelease in Indianapolis. We don't have White Castle in Illinois, so we were very excited. I then decided to record the rest of our games for posterity.

In honor of Rakdos Week, we led off with a few *Dissension* packs we had left over after making the Top 8 at a Grand Prix Trial in Springfield (having battled our way through a grueling 4 rounds in a field of 11 people). It's very difficult to become Hellbent when your hand starts at 15 cards, of course, but with no card draw, once you have it working, it'll keep working. Meanwhile, the other guilds fare better, with Graft helping beef up your guys and Forecast allowing you to gain advantage without using a card.

Game 1 vs. Chris (*Dissension*)

Chris likes the bidding special rule, so he and I agree to use it. I look at my hand:

- [Aquastrand Spider](#)
- [Azorius Chancery](#)
- [Freewind Equenaut](#)
- [Overrule](#)
- [Plumes of Peace](#)
- [Psychotic Fury](#)
- [Seal of Doom](#)
- [Soulsworn Jury](#)
- [Utvara Scalper](#)
- [Verdant Eidolon](#)
- [Vision Skeins](#)
- [Blessing of the Nephilim](#)
- [Indrik Stomphowler](#)
- [Sky Hussar](#)
- [Bound // Determined](#)




Not a bad pack at all, but definitely a strange one. My plan is basically to win on the back of [Sky Hussar](#) (fantastic even when his Forecast ability is blank), and that means clearing the air of any removal first and playing the Hussar as late as I can get away with. My other guys aren't very good, though, so we'll see how this works out. [Seal of Doom](#) is fantastic (removal always is, in MindMaster as elsewhere), and [Bound // Determined](#) is recursion, which is potentially huge even for one card in a format of such finite resources.

Chris has a history of bidding fairly high, and I decide that I need to go on the offensive to force him to use his removal. We each conceal a die and then reveal them in unison. I show a 4 and he shows a 3, so I'll be going first, albeit at the steep cost of starting at 16 life.

I play Plains, and he plays a Plains and a [Haazda Exonerator](#). That'll have to go. I lay a Forest and [Aquastrand Spider](#), but he trumps it with [Azorius First-Wing](#). I play an Island and swing with the Spider. He doesn't block, taking him down to 18, and I play [Freewind Equenaut](#). On his turn, he Forecasts [Paladin of Prahv](#) – ooh, boy – and swings with the now-[Spirit Linked](#) First-Wing. I don't block (though in retrospect I really should have). I go down to 14, and he goes back up to 20. He plays a Mountain and passes the turn. So far, I'm on the back foot. No good.

On my turn, I attack in with [Aquastrand Spider](#), putting him at 18 for the second time. I lay a Swamp, play a [Verdant Eidolon](#), and pass the turn. He forecasts again and attacks with the First-Wing, and I block this time, preserving my life total and getting the flyers off the board but sending him back up to 20. He plays a Forest and a [Rakdos Signet](#) and passes the turn.

I play a Mountain (I have domain!) and attack in with the Spider and the [Verdant Eidolon](#). He blocks the Eidolon with the Exonerator, sending him to 18 for a *third* time. I then play [Indrik Stomphowler](#), destroying his signet, and say go. Using a Stomphowler on a Signet in a format where [Plumes of Peace](#) could be lurking is definitely a waste, but in this case I needed the body, and at least I got something with it. He grimaces and untaps, and then plays [Kindle the Carnage](#). Oh my! He fans out his cards for me to pick from at random, and I pluck [Azorius Chancery](#). He shrugs – zero damage, but basically a noncard – and tells me to pick another. I flip another one – and it's [Cackling Flames](#). He shakes his head. “Unbelievable. Why couldn't it have been one of my Eidolons?” On the plus side for him, my guys are all dead.

I play a Plains and drop [Soulsworn Jury](#) to menace an empty board, with  up. I pass the turn. On his turn, he drops a Swamp, [Verdant Eidolon](#) (blockable by the Jury, and therefore not worth countering) and [Kill-Suit Cultist](#) (same deal, although this was a closer choice – I was a little worried about it teaming up with a [Rakdos Ickspitter](#) later to kill my [Sky Hussar](#)).

On my turn, I decide it's time to go for the face. I play an Island and lay the Hussar. He forecasts the [Paladin of Prahv](#) on the [Verdant Eidolon](#), then plays [Writ of Passage](#) on it. The Cultist and Eidolon swing in. I won't risk my precious [Sky Hussar](#) blocking, and I can't help but think that [Soulsworn Jury](#) might be destined to counter something juicy. I take 3 and, just like Spinal Tap's amplifiers, go to 11. He goes back up to 20 and drops a Plains and [Entropic Eidolon](#).



My plan at this point is to attack in as many times as I need to in order to get him in range of a lethal [Psychotic Fury](#) on the [Sky Hussar](#).

Unfortunately, I screw up—I misread [Blessing of the Nephilim](#) as an instant. Had I played it immediately, I could have snuck in more damage; as it is, I attack with the Hussar and send him to 16. After combat, I play an Island and [Seal of Doom](#), passing the turn with plenty of mana up.

He forecasts [Paladin of Prahv](#) onto [Entropic Eidolon](#) and attacks in with both Eidolons and [Kill-Suit Cultist](#). I kill the unblocked [Verdant Eidolon](#) with the [Seal of Doom](#) and block the Cultist

with [Soulsworn Jury](#) (the [Entropic Eidolon](#) would have been better). He sacks the Kill-Suit for mutual annihilation with the Jury. I go down to 9, and he goes back up to 18 for the *fourth* time. After combat, he plays [Plaxcaster Frogling](#) (returning [Verdant Eidolon](#)), but I [Overrule](#) it for 3, countering it and putting me back up at a slightly more comfortable 12. He forgot to play a land that turn, but it wouldn't have pushed the Frogling through anyway.

On my turn, I take him to 14 with the Hussar, then play [Plumes of Peace](#) on [Entropic Eidolon](#) and [Utvara Scalper](#). Unfortunately, his answer is [Stalking Vengeance](#), which attacks, taking me down to 7. I swing back with my two guys, taking him to 9, then decide it's time to get clever. I play the Bound half of [Bound // Determined](#), sacrificing my [Utvara Scalper](#) to return and play the [Seal of Doom](#). “Uh... wow,” he says.

On his turn, he plays [Aurora Eidolon](#) and swings with the [Vengeance](#). I kill it with Seal, and he sacrifices both Eidolons in response, dealing me 4 damage with the [Vengeance](#)'s ability and another

one with the [Entropic Eidolon](#)'s. This takes me down to 2. On my turn, I flash him [Blessing of the Nephilim](#) and [Psychotic Fury](#), and that's the end of a close game.

Game 2 vs. Chris (*Dissension*)

We play another game with *Dissension* in which I pay 3 life to go first. I play a Plains, he plays an Island, and I lay a Forest and play [Beacon Hawk](#) – which he [Spell Snares](#). So much for my tempo advantage. Things go downhill from there, although I do keep myself alive an extra turn at the end by playing [Ocular Halo](#) on my [Enemy of the Guildpact](#) so I can tap it to do nothing, keeping it from being forced to attack by [Nettling Curse](#). It's clever, but it's not enough. Chris wins, largely on the strength of a turn-two [Drekavac](#) and the repeat power of [Steeling Stance](#).

Game 3 vs. Chris (*Coldsnap*)

Chris and I move on to the *Coldsnap* packs. We discovered earlier that *Coldsnap* MindMaster is a whole different experience, partly due to the dearth of removal.

I open my pack and like what I see:

- [Aurochs Herd](#)
- [Boreal Druid](#)
- [Disciple of Tevesh Szat](#)
- [Drelnoch](#)
- [Ohran Yeti](#)
- [Ronom Unicorn](#)
- [Skred](#)
- [Snow-Covered Mountain](#)
- [Surging Dementia](#)
- [Surging Sentinels](#)
- [Survivor of the Unseen](#)
- [Greater Stone Spirit](#)
- [Resize](#)
- [Rime Transfusion](#)
- [Zur the Enchanter](#)



It's got removal, beef, a healthy creature count, and *the* combat trick. What could go wrong?

Chris and I both bid 2, so we roll a die. He wins the die roll and leads off with Swamp into [Rimebound Dead](#). I play a Forest and [Boreal Druid](#), hoping to accelerate into my fat.

Second turn, though, he plays another Swamp, which can only mean – yep, there's the [Stromgald Crusader](#). I now have a few choices; I can either try to outrace it or go ahead and kill it. Options

include [Rime Transfusion](#) on my Druid, [Ronom Unicorn](#) or [Surging Sentinels](#) to keep the Crusader on the block (maybe), or Snow-Covered Mountain so I can [Skred](#) the thing right off. There's another option, though, which is to go for the turn-three [Disciple of Tevesh Szat](#) to kill the Crusader without spending a card. This means missing my two-drop and leaving myself vulnerable to literally any removal in the format, but I go for it anyway. I say Swamp, go; I could have attacked safely, but I'd rather force him to jump over my elf.



Chris jumps the Crusader to take me to 16 and plays another swamp to lay [Krovikan Scoundrel](#). Boy likes his 2/1 two-drops. I, as planned, plays [Disciple of Tevesh Szat](#) and cross my fingers. He, naturally, goes Mountain, [Surging Flame](#) the Disciple, attack for 5 (jumping the Crusader), [Kjeldoran Javelineer](#). Yeep.

This is where it starts to become apparent that riding that Disciple was a terrible idea. Not only is it dead, not only am I at 11 life staring down 5 power and a scalable [Heavy Ballista](#), but now my mana is hopelessly screwed up. Those two Swamps aren't going to do much for me. With the Javiliner on the table and the Crusader able to fly, I can't even rely on any blocker I can play. I play a Snow-Covered Mountain and *pass the turn*, leaving mana up for [Skred](#), [Resize](#), whatever it takes. My [Boreal Druid](#) is looking a little lonely.

Chris pays the Javiliner's upkeep, plays a Forest, and attacks with [Stromgald Crusader](#), [Krovikan Scoundrel](#), and [Rimebound Dead](#). He doesn't give the Crusader flying. I block the Crusader with the Druid, and naturally he pings the elf with the Javelineer. I respond with [Resize](#), but he gives the Crusader +1/+0. $1 + 2 + 1 = 4$, and never has that simple math looked less fortunate for me. I [Skred](#) the Javelineer while the Druid yet lives. Druid, Javelineer, and Crusader all hit the graveyard, and my beautiful [Resize](#) takes a one-way trip to the RFG pile. When the dust settles I am at 8, and Chris drops a [Sheltering Ancient](#) to finish the job.

On my turn, I drop a [Surging Sentinels](#) and give it a Rimebound Transfusion, which can kill the Ancient if he pays the upkeep. I pass the turn, thinking that I may finally have stabilized. He surprises me when he puts a +1/+1 counter on the Sentinels, but all becomes clear when he plays [Thermopod](#), gives it haste, and attacks with his whole team. All I can do is thank Richard Garfield for thinking of first strike as I block the Ancient, killing it without any trample damage and going down to 1. He shows me [Soul Spike](#), and I concede, although I was dead on the table next turn anyway, being able to play down a maximum of two blockers. Where's a [Sun's Bounty](#) when you need one?

I would say that's definitely a game that came down to strategy. The Disciple route was a really bad plan, both because of its awkwardness and because of its vulnerability. I could have much more profitably planned on, say, a turn 2 [Ronom Unicorn](#) and turn 3 [Ohran Yeti](#). Before you can play a game-dominating creature like Disciple in MindMaster, you have to draw removal out of their hand. It's also imperative to keep the pressure up, because playing defense is very risky.

We play a few more games and quickly find that a *Coldsnap* pack without a snow land is invariably left out in the cold, if you'll pardon the pun. There are too many dead cards that aren't playing as intended. To remedy this, we institute a special rule allowing each player to play one basic snow land in addition to whatever's in his or her pack. This ensures that cards like [Rimebound Dead](#) and [Zombie Musher](#) play as intended. Adjustments like these may be necessary for any given set; the goal is to make them as unobtrusive as possible.

Game 4 – Chris vs. David (Italian Legends)

Chris won two side drafts at Grand Prix -- St. Louis, and they gave the option of nine packs of any current set(s) or three packs of Italian *Legends*. With visions of [Mana Drain](#) dancing in his head, he ended up with six "bustra" packs of *Leggende*. He can sell them sealed for a good amount, but he knew that he wanted to crack at least a couple to look for valuable cards. Bearing in mind my admonishment never to just open packs, he naturally decided to take this unique opportunity to MindMaster a *very* out-of-print set. Visual spoilers in hand, Chris and David opened packs that were sealed over a decade ago.

Chris spends about five minutes looking up his cards in the visual spoiler, but David spends a full half hour making sure he understands all of his options. Chris fidgets and shows me his hand, which translates to:

- [Clergy of the Holy Nimbus](#)
- [Cyclopean Mummy](#)
- [Force Spike](#)
- [Giant Strength](#)
- [Glyph of Delusion](#)
- [Glyph of Doom](#)
- [Hell Swarm](#)
- [Remove Enchantments](#)
- [Crevasse](#)
- [Tundra Wolves](#)
- [Subdue](#)
- [Jasmine Boreal](#)
- [The Lady of the Mountain](#)
- [Tolaria](#)
- [Akron Legionnaire](#)



The two Glyphs are a bit unfortunate with nary a Wall in sight, but he has some early guys, some beef, and a few tricky tricks. Not much to do on turns 3 and 4, though.

David finally finishes with the spoiler and shows me what he's got:

- [Blazing Effigy](#)
- [D'Avenant Archer](#)
- [Devouring Deep](#)
- [Emerald Dragonfly](#)
- [Giant Turtle](#)
- [Glyph of Destruction](#)
- [Rust](#)
- [Tundra Wolves](#)
- [Wall of Vapor](#)
- [Wolverine Pack](#)
- [Crevasse](#)
- [Life Chisel](#)
- [Relic Barrier](#)
- [Untamed Wilds](#)
- [All Hallow's Eve](#)



Hard to say how this will play out. David has the early and midgame covered, but he has too much useless anti-artifact tech and a distinct lack of fat for the

late game. Unlike Chris, he has a Wall to go with his potentially devastating Glyph. [All Hallow's Eve](#) will be a game-breaker if properly managed... Let's see if David's up to it.

Chris bids 3 life and David bids 4, knowing that superior tempo is his path to victory. He leads off with [Tundra Wolves](#), but Chris ruins David's plans with a [Tundra Wolves](#) of his own.

David plays [Emerald Dragonfly](#) and does not attack (starting 4 life down, he can't afford to race).

Chris attacks in with his Wolves, sending David to 15. He plays an Island and [Clergy of the Holy Nimbus](#), leaving 4 up. I think I see where this is going...

David attacks with the [Emerald Dragonfly](#), taking Chris to 19. David then plays a second Forest in order to drop [Giant Turtle](#) – but Chris [Force Spikes](#) it. Ouch.

Chris attacks with the Clergy and the Wolves, and David blocks the Clergy with his Wolves. They take first strike damage and regenerate, removing them from combat. Meanwhile, David goes to 14. Chris finishes his turn with a Swamp and [Cyclopean Mummy](#).

David plays an Island, takes Chris to 18 with the Dragonfly, and plays [D'Avenant Archer](#) (now a Soldier, in case it matters). Chris plays a Forest and attacks with the Mummy and the Wolves, a play he later said was a mistake. David's Wolves block Chris's Mummy, and David's Archer blocks Chris's Wolves. Chris plays [Subdue](#) to save the Mummy and loses the Wolves, accomplishing nothing with the attack. Chris later told me that his idea of bluffing a good combat trick such that David wouldn't block didn't go at all as planned. I don't know what combat trick he might have been bluffing, but then, neither does David. David's plan, for his part, is to make 1-for-1 trades until he can play [All Hallow's Eve](#), chipping away at Chris's life total with evasion creatures the whole time.

David takes Chris to 17 with the Dragonfly and lays a Swamp and a [Wolverine Pack](#), which Chris trumps with a Mountain and [Jasmine Boreal](#) (any relation to [Boreal Druid](#), I wonder?).

Finally, the vanilla *Legends* hit the table! David cringes; 4/5 is *huge*. On his turn, he takes Chris to 16 with the Dragonfly and plays [Devouring Deep](#) (75% less scary than it sounds, but potentially relevant at the moment), Mountain, and [Untamed Wilds](#) for another Mountain.

Chris responds with the rather more threatening play of [Giant Strength](#) on [Jasmine Boreal](#) and attacks. David blocks with his face, going down to 8. On his turn, he plays a Swamp and attacks with his evasion guys, but Chris plays [Hell Swarm](#) and takes no damage. After combat, David plays [Wall of Vapor](#), passing the turn with Glyph mana up.



The 6/7 [Jasmine Boreal](#) attacks into the [Wall of Vapor](#), and David blocks and rocks the [Glyph of Destruction](#). Chris saves his [Giant Strength](#) with [Remove Enchantments](#) and Jasmine and the Wall both die. After combat, Chris plays [The Lady of the Mountain](#), and suddenly David's tomfoolery seems less than relevant. On his turn, he drops Chris to 14 with the Dragonfly and [Devouring Deep](#) and plays [Blazing Effigy](#).

Chris attacks into [Blazing Effigy](#) with the Lady, and both of them misread the Effigy completely. I catch it later, well after the game is over. They think that the Effigy deals damage equal to X plus the amount of damage it's been dealt by sources *not* named [Blazing Effigy](#) (which would make it, you know, amazing) when in fact the opposite is true (although it's still pretty good).

Ah, well. I'm not paying close enough attention. The mistake stands, and both creatures die. Chris plays [Tolaria](#) (it makes blue mana!) and drops [Akron Legionnaire](#). David takes Chris to 12 with Dragonfly and Deep and plays [Life Chisel](#).

Chris plays [Giant Strength](#) on the [Akron Legionnaire](#) (now 10/6, for those keeping score at home) and attacks. David chump blocks with the [D'Avenant Archer](#) and swings back on his turn, sending Chris to 10. He drops his trump card, [All Hallow's Eve](#) (now an Enchantment).

The [Wolverine Pack](#) and the Dragonfly fall to the Legionnaire in turn, while David does nothing but pluck counters off [All Hallow's Eve](#). He stacks the last counter, sacrifices [Devouring Deep](#) to [Life Chisel](#), moving back up to 10. The last counter comes off, and all creatures in all graveyards get off their duffs and come back.

At this point, the Legionnaire is blocked every turn by the [Wall of Vapor](#) while David's evasion guys get through unhindered. Chris concedes.

It's worth wondering how that game might have played out had the mistake been caught in time.

David couldn't double-block and still have the Effigy die. However, provided that Chris had still played

the Legionnaire (debatable), David would still have had enough time to chump-block (and, in this case, kill the Legionnaire) while pecking away with evasion guys and taking counters off of [All Hallow's Eve](#).

In Conclusion

Sometimes you have packs that need opening. The last thing you should do with them – other than, I don't know, flush them down the toilet, or use them for kindling, or feed them to your dog...

Let me start over. The last *reasonable* thing you should do with your packs is just open them. MindMaster is a great way to use your packs, hone your skills, and above all, play **Magic**.

That's what we're here for, right?

Special thanks to David Strutz, Chris Thomas, Jon Hall, Tyler McPheters, Brett Merchen, Nate Bohn, Adam Kouzmanoff, Sean Massa, and Ben Lorenz for playing and recording games and brainstorming about the rules.