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Playing It Cool: Part 2x2

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Limited Information
 Tuesday, September 12, 2006



My esteemed colleague BDM scooped me on this topic but to reiterate, Two-Headed Giant formats are some fun. Back at Pro Tour--Charleston, Randy Beuhler was grabbing people off the street, getting them to test his newest of Limited formats, Two-Headed Draft.

After participating in the third or fourth said draft, I innocently asked Randy, "Will this become a supported format?"

Randy: "Could be, could be..."

Well, [as we know from here](#), Two-Headed Giant draft isn't just going to be a sanctioned format, it's going to be a Pro Tour one! That's great news for a lot of players. It gives friends a chance to qualify and travel together. It's a virgin format, which means it's rife for discovering and creating new strategies. That's a real bonus for the creative types, and adding a partner only increases the dimensions. Most of all, and this is a particularly relevant point here, 2HG is *fun*. It's actually a blast to argue and debate with your partner, engage in dual duel trash talking (see below), and generally play **Magic** in a different way. Ah, but how different is two-headed really? It's an interesting question, and I'm sure when Pro Tour--San Diego gets closer that rift will be explored in further detail. For now Two-Headed Limited isn't, strictly speaking, that different from regular **Magic**. Yes, there are adjustments you need to make, which will be covered. But saying two-headed is a completely different animal is going a bit too far. You want similarities? Let's count the ways:

Resource progression: Each turn, each head lays a land. That may sound like a lot, but there's no sharing of mana here. If you want to cast **Gleancrawler**, it's still going to require *you* to have five lands and a Signet. There are a few exceptions like **Spectral Searchlight** or **Tidewater Minion**, but for the most part you're on your own for finding mana-stuffs. Mana curve, colored casting costs; these remain very relevant.

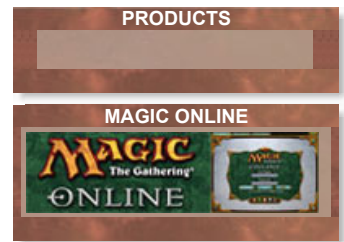
Card advantage: It's also your responsibility for finding routes of card advantage. **Strands of Undeath** or **Perilous Research** needs to be cast from you, not your partner. In fact, your partner is going to be trying to get his own advantages, just to keep the team competitive. There are only a few exceptions to this, like **Compulsive Research**. Usually every player is going to need independent routes to extra cards.

Tempo matters: The 40 life does give you a bit of a buffer, and that's relevant for some card evaluations. Even so, you can't assume your opponents will be resting on their laurels for turns 2-5. **Guardian of Vitu-Ghazi** is a legitimate inclusion, but if that's your first spell of the game, your team is going to be blown out of the water. It's not so much that you need early aggression, it's that both of you need to be engaging both opponents, because they will be working together to fight back. When a head is absent from the match, the game turns incredibly lopsided. All players *must* contribute to the game, or the tempo will be too much to overcome. One head playing threats while another head clears the way looks a lot better than one head trying to do both, while the other sits there Jolting his thumbs. This comes back to the curve issue. If you're not using your mana effectively, you'll have a lot of problems against teams that do.

At the base level, good **Magic** strategy in one-on-one matches will serve you well in two-headed. Players that understand core strategies in standard **Magic** will be able to reasonably adapt to two-headed. This doesn't mean you should ignore the heady perfume of playing with a comrade, heavens no. Your teammate is fundamentally a partner and a resource, just like you are to him.

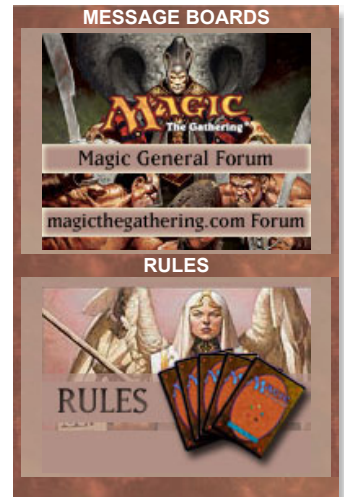
Synergy is everything: In your standard duel, synergy looks good but it's not strictly required. You want to play with cards that work well with your other cards, but brute force or hyper-speed can substitute in a pinch. This is not true in two-headed. Your decks must, in some way, gel. You have to project a unified front, complementing each other as much as possible. It's one of the great benefits of creating two decks at once; you can draft with the plan of making something greater than the sum of its parts. There are very few decks out there that are so good they can beat two players working together. If you're not at that level, you're in for a rude awakening

40 life is a lot: And it's even more than it looks like at first blush. One good blocker from either side works against both players, and of course, there are twice as many people to find that good blocker. Speedy, ground-based attack strategies are simply awful in 2HG. 1/1s are exceptionally small, so much so that even a card like **Scatter the Seeds** doesn't do much without serious help. Between two players, it's very easy to create an impenetrable ground defense. This makes evasion particularly good in two-headed, but even then, mini-fliers like **Beacon Hawk** have no place in the format.



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Acceptable Taunts:

Theatrics: With all due respect to the psychological aspects of one on one play, two-headed takes it to whole new level. In two-headed Limited, the trash talking is extreme. Make sure you and your partner are comfortable with the latest taunts to opponents' style, play skills, and/or lineage (see sidebar). These skills will be tested to the limit.

Slightly more relevant to actually winning is throwing out misinformation. Many a time my partner and I talked aloud about the optimum time to play a spell, which was usually just someone's extra land. By the same token, one of the partners can give away a lot of genuine information to the people across from you. Make sure your communication plans are intact, via code or whispering or whatever, before the game actually starts. You shouldn't take either one of these methods to their extreme, if only for avoiding slow play violations. But a key concept of this is being in tune with your partner's plans, while hopefully disguising those same schemes to the opposition.

One game matches: This is an extremely important difference of two-headed versus regular **Magic**. Your sideboard cards better come alongside Wishes, or they're going to stay unused for the tournament. This isn't to say perennial sideboard cards don't have a place in someone's maindeck. It just means if they're not going to fit there, you're better off taking something else. As you'll see below, I like **Smash** in my maindeck of *Ravnica* two-headed. A couple players were bemoaning a lack of **Leave No Trace** in their decks. The on-gameness of the format means an unstoppable artifact or enchantment really is unstoppable; you won't get a second chance at beating **Glare of Subdual** or **Sunforger**. Since control strategies are so prevalent in two-headed, feel free to include a few more "narrow" cards than you would normally.

Another aspect of this style is risk-taking. Specifically, do so. Be more aggressive with mulligans. You've got a free one after all. While you shouldn't just cash in your hand looking for perfection, average usually doesn't cut it either. Assuming you two drafted with synergy and cohesion in mind, toss a hand or two until you actually get two hands that play well *together*. It's not like you've got games two and three to figure out their strategy. If the two hands don't gestalt this time around, then spin the wheel and grab some fresh ones.

These concepts play equally well in two-headed sealed and two-headed draft. Which format you want to play is entirely in your hands. Our group decided to give two-headed draft a shot one evening. This was just an experiment, although it's guaranteed some of the gents will be playing at PT--San Diego next year. Why not get started practicing a little early? Four positives and four negatives got together to put the theory into practice. Wanting to give *Ravnica* block its last hurrah before the extraordinary *Time Spiral* dominates our feeble minds, RRGDD was the choice this time. Besides, we had [BDM's primer as a guide](#).

Random assignments gave me the local game store *Cardhaus'* manager Eric Reasoner as my teammate. I begged for 45 life to make things fair, but no one sympathized. We paired off around the cardinal points of the table and opened pack one of six.

The first *Ravnica* booster had a number of interesting choices. **Strands of Undeath**, **Darkblast**, a foil **Birds of Paradise**, **Compulsive Research**, **Faith's Fetters**, and **Seed Spark** were all potential first picks. The strategy we attempted to adhere to was minimizing our decks' *Ravnica* guilds. With *Ravnica* having extra mono-colored cards, and quality ones at that, going into Boros or Golgari paints you into a corner you don't need. Some bleed is going to happen of course, we were just hoping to overly focus on the next six guilds. As such, **Seed Spark** couldn't be considered, even though it's actually fantastic in two-headed. We went with **Compulsive Research** and **Faith's Fetters**. **Fetters** is always excellent, but **Compulsive** is particularly good here. The ability to enhance a teammate that's faltering or victimized by a team's worth of discard spells is very appealing. Flexible, single colored picks look great this early, though that foil **Birds** wasn't hard on the eyes either.



The second booster had **Circu**, **Dimir Lobotomist** and a bounce land for us. As BDM's article discussed, decking is highly viable in two-headed. There are certainly more ways to take life than cards, but forty life is still a lot. Forty cards, on the other hand, can go pretty quickly. Entrancer is a **Shock** every turn, **Enigma Eidolon** is a recursive **Lightning Bolt**, etc. Decking probably won't be a primary route in future sets, but since *Ravnica* block does have a legitimate theme of milling, it's a fine tactic. **Circu** was an open invitation to try.

In the second *Ravnica* booster, we took a **Dimir Signet** and **Belltower Sphinx** for that mill deck. The **Signet** was important because we hoped to go either U/R or U/W; either way with just a hint of U/B, to again avoid *Ravnica* guilds. This pack also had a **Putrefy** we shipped along. We definitely didn't want a G/U/B deck, and we *really* didn't want **Black** to be divided up between the decks. This is a common example of the changing evaluations you need when doing a draft like this. Deciding what works best for the team, instead of just each player's deck, is crucial to success. The decision looked a little worse when we got passed another **Putrefy**. The logic was still sound though and we passed it again, although we may have made special efforts to

"You two can't tap your way out of a paper bag."

"We can beat your team with one head tied behind our backs"

"Word to your mother(s)"

Also be aware of anything you can say that will spark infighting among your opponents.



accommodate both of them, had we known two were coming. As it turned out, they would have fit the decks well, but I maintain it was a rare situation.

Our plan after *Ravnica* was R/B/U and G/W/U. Blue is a great color to divide, although this combination gives up a lot in *Guildpact*. Things started off alright, with an incredibly loaded initial *Guildpact* booster. *Djinn Illuminatus*, *Steamcore Weird*, *Izzet Chronarch*, *Blind Hunter*, *Ogre Savant*, *Blind Hunter*, and *Douse in Gloom*. Maintaining our avoidance of *Ohrzov*, we went with *Steamcore Weird* and the rare. The next pack was two more gems: *Gelectrode* and *Stitch in Time*. Wait, *Stitch in Time*? Isn't that card a bit... random? Sure it is, just like loaded dice.

Regular game of Magic: Spend three mana and give up a turn, maybe get it back, maybe not. 🟢

Two-Headed Giant: Spend three mana and give up half of your turn. Lose half a turn, or gain two back. These aren't just any extra turns either, these are two more turns with two highly cohesive decks, *against* two highly cohesive decks. Sounds like a winner to me!

Guildpact proceeded along as the R/B/U deck got great picks, while the other deck seemed rather MPD-like, appropriate for a format called two-headed giant I guess. When the next round of *Guildpact* was opened, two great *Ohrzov* cards stared back. We couldn't weather the temptation and picked *Mortify* and *Pillory of the Sleepless*, although it was almost guaranteed to make the Green deck four colors. I was a little hesitant with this pick, but my teammate repeatedly shushed me, just reminding me to "have faith". That's right, in two-headed Limited it's not just your skills that are tested, it's your piety. Off to the side, we heard one teammate exclaim to his partner, "I'm not going to play with those cards. You just take whatever you want!" A bad time for domestic troubles.

The *Dissension* packs rounded things out with some bounce lands and two *Enigma Eidolons*. A *Loaming Shaman* was a surprisingly late and welcome pick, a fine card that we were happy to remove from being played against us. Here are the decks:

Deck A		
Main Deck 40 cards		
7 Island	1 Belltower Sphinx	1 Compulsive Research
1 Izzet Boilerworks	1 Circu, Dimir Lobotomist	1 Consult the Necrosages
5 Mountain	1 Djinn Illuminatus	1 Dimir Signet
3 Swamp	2 Enigma Eidolon	1 Flight of Fancy
16 lands	1 Gelectrode	1 Induce Paranoia
	1 Izzet Chronarch	1 Leap of Flame
	1 Izzet Guildmage	1 Remand
	2 Steamcore Weird	1 Reroute
	1 Stinkweed Imp	1 Runeboggle
	1 Torch Drake	1 Skyscribing
	12 creatures	1 Smash
		1 <i>Stitch in Time</i>
		12 other spells

Deck B		
Main Deck 40 cards		
1 Azorius Chancery	1 Azorius Herald	1 Azorius Signet
5 Forest	1 Conclave Equenaut	1 Castigate
1 Orzhov Basilica	1 Conclave Phalanx	1 Faith's Fetters
4 Plains	1 Cytospawn Shambler	1 Leafdrake Roost
1 Selesnya Sanctuary	2 Guardian of the Guildpact	1 Mortify
1 Simic Growth Chamber	1 Loaming Shaman	1 Pillory of the Sleepless
3 Swamp	1 Ratcatcher	1 Selesnya Signet
16 lands	1 Screeching Griffin	1 Withstand
	1 Selesnya Evangel	8 other spells
	1 Shrieking Grottesque	
	1 Simic Ragworm	
	1 Soulsworn Jury	
	1 Stone-Seeder Hierophant	
	1 Verdant Eidolon	
	1 Vigean Hydropon	
	16 creatures	

These are decent but not spectacular. They're pretty good at playing dual roles; one can play at victory while the other supports. Deck B ended up a bit fragmented, partially because we bounced around on colors and partially because we focused too much on deck A. Finding the balance is crucial, which is why practice like this is so beneficial.

Round 1

This match had two problems for us. The first was deck B getting horribly flooded. We were doing alright for a while with the decking plan, but in the midgame it changed from 2v2 to 2v1. That's an uphill battle any way you slice it. We were still in it until our careful plan went askew.

B's **Castigate** revealed the R/B/U deck to have Euthanist and **Wrecking Ball** in hand. The **Wrecking Ball** was the right discard, but that Euthanist was going to go well with their own **Gelectrode** in play. Because of that Euthanist, A skipped a key Stinkweed dredge so he could have **Reroute** mana open to bounce back their main step **Gelectrode** ping, back to itself. It was a nice plan, but the opponent drew Chronarch that turn, which meant they were one mana short for Euthanist. The lost mana we saved for **Reroute** went to waste, which ended up costing us the round turns later. **Skyscribing** + **Enigma Eidolon** was set to give us the win, but those lost life points were just enough to cost us the game the turn before we were going to go off.

Round 2

This round was the perfect illustration of how bad pure aggression is in this format. Our opponents are high-fiving each other over their perfect draw, which is something like Tin-Street Hooligan and **Courier Hawk**. Those mighty creatures get us all the way down to *thirty* before we stabilize. Now we have two hands full of relevant cards and they're dwindled to nothing with some very obsolete creatures in play. The first **Stitch in Time** misses, but the second via **Izzet Chronarch** hits and the advantage turns overwhelming. **Leafdrake Roost** provides the win.

Round 3

Sadly, this game was extremely one-sided. Our opponents had a R/G/U "action" deck and a B/U/W "support" deck. The action deck kept a two-land, Signet draw and wasn't able to draw out of it. The support deck tried to hang on with **Three Dreams** and the occasional removal spell. It wasn't enough; under no pressure we quickly assembled dual armies and just overran them.

It was a fun evening, something a little different. We all agreed the PTQ season and the Pro Tour itself were going to be entertaining affairs. PaulThomas posted in a forum that he doesn't like the idea of a two-headed Pro Tour because, if I understand this right, a player and a cabbage could be champions. Lettuce be serious for a second, there's no way a vegetable is going to win a PT trophy. Besides, even if you could play with an entire salad bar, why would you skip out on playing with a buddy? Two-Headed Giant Limited is a skill testing format that happens to be a shared, enjoyable experience. Having a player whose skills you respect is a great way to do well and improve each other's play. More important is having a wingman whom you actually enjoy spending time with. It's really a lot of fun. If you want to see for yourselves, why not give your two-headed sealed skills a try over at [the Time Spiral pre-release, September 23 and 24](#). Enjoy the rest of the previews, and thanks for reading.

-Noah Weil



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