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## 57th Street, 7th Avenue

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Limited Information  
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**P**ro Tour – Geneva is this weekend. Yay! Limited Pro Tours are the plutonium of draft theory. People discuss the ramifications of the winners' choices for months and months after. To me, one of the most fascinating parts of the Pro Tour experience is watching how technology changes through the event. We players and pundits will spend the weeks after deciphering coverage notes and match results into cohesive draft blueprints. Given enough time, I'm sure anyone will figure something out. What's more interesting is watching commonly accepted beliefs morph through the tournament itself. Perhaps the majority of the PT players entered thinking R/U suspend-storm was the golden ticket, but by the end it turned out G/U turbo-Acid was the sleeper hit. In draft one, the players with the secret tech dominate the tables, but word spreads. By draft four, the **Dream Stalkers** are being hated out and everyone looks like an imitator. Ah, but for the first couple of drafts, the originators are going to run the table. How does one get the opportunity to warp the Pro Tour metagame, alter the value of a single "mediocre" card? Same way you get to Carnegie Hall.

For a long time I resisted the idea that a Magic player needed a playgroup to shine. In theory, Magic is utterly self-reliant. There's no teamwork, no handicapping, no weight class, no divisions. It's just you versus the other guy. In my wayward youth, that romantic highlander concept had a lot of appeal. If I came up with some crazy, tournament-viable deck idea, I wanted the reward of being the only one who got to win with it. This, I came to realize, is a very flawed paradigm.

First of all, in the realm of competitive Magic, doing it by yourself will only take you so far. No matter how much natural talent you have (or think you have), eventually you *will* hit a ~~sacred foun~~ plateau. To reach the true pinnacles of Magic skill and success, you can't do it alone. You need other people, for playtesting, for bouncing ideas back and forth, and for generally maintaining interest. Cliché or not, in the sphere of Magic a group of players is stronger than its individual parts. I'll be talking more about that idea in a couple weeks.

The relevance for this is that large tournament this weekend. My city of residence, Seattle, Washington, has a very solid representation of quality players. Seattle's sending a number of these competitors to the big show. And wouldn't you know it, they want to practice. They've all pored over the spoiler lists and read the articles, but when it comes down to execution-time, there's no substitute for mixing it up with your testing buddies.

Amazingly, testing for Limited Pro Tours is a lot of fun. It's a credit to the game, or perhaps one's friends, that training for the ultimate high-level event is such an entertaining experience. *Of course* I'll come over and draft and discuss theory and archetypes. *Of course* our discussions of card strengths will be supplemented by bizarre, off-topic conversations. In the interest of full-disclosure for would-be PT competitors and drafting aficionados, this week I bring the results of both.

### Pack 1

#### Pack 1, Pick 1

Terramorphic Expanse, Snapback, Rift Bolt, Pentarch Ward, Bonesplitter Sliver, Cyclopean Giant, Brass Gnat, Savage Thallid, Screeching Sliver, Momentary Blink, Chronatog Totem, Knight of the Holy Nimbus, Dreadship Reef, Magus of the Mirror, Coalition Victory

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For the opener, things appeared simple. In this booster, **Rift Bolt** is the strongest card no question. It's cheap, versatile, and splashes as well as anything. The tricky part in the analysis is not basing its strength relative to the other cards in the pack, but relative to the colors in the format. In that regard, both the **Blink** and **Snapback** deserve attention. While blue is still awfully strong, and **Snapback** is almost a requirement in dedicated blue builds, it's not nearly strong enough to override **Rift Bolt's** appeal. **Momentary Blink** is closer, a new ranking courtesy of **Planar Chaos**. White is excellent in that set, and **Blink** plays very well with some of the new themes. It almost gets there, but this early I can't justify taking a weaker card for hopeful situations down the road. **Rift Bolt** is just too excellent, and color rankings notwithstanding, I do enjoy red though **Planar Chaos** and **Time Spiral**. In the end the obvious choice was the correct one, but going through the analytical process always has merit.

My pick: **Rift Bolt**

#### Pack 1, Pick 2

Venser's Sliver, Clockspinning, Dream Stalker, Gaze of Justice, Scarwood Treefolk, Flamecore Elemental, Wormwood Dryad, Fathom Seer, Slipstream Serpent, Might of Old Krosa, Brine Elemental, Nightshade Assassin, Vesuvan Shapeshifter, Feldon's Cane

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In the beginning of the draft, there were rumblings of trying to keep things silent and serious, to better mimic Pro Tour conditions. That lasted all of one pick. How does your group draft? For us, there's no pick or pack that doesn't deserve some exclamation of glee, or soliloquies on a neighbor's drafting skill and/or lineage. It's all in good fun, I'm sure, but those drinking ditties are *foul*. I bring this up because this pack earned such a string. I really should stop getting so mad every time somebody passes me a pack short *Disintegrate*. Also, nice blue.



There seems to be a top three blue common, a top three blue uncommon, and could it be? The best blue rare in the set? (I say it beats out Psi Blast and ties with Teferi, not that rare rankings mean a whole lot.) The point being: Nice blue. Guaranteed power, for the not-so-small price of horrid signaling. And you know, that's okay. I don't know what my neighbor took here, but I don't like much over *Vesuvan Shapeshifter*. The card is beyond incredible. Even so, the fine stuff I'm passing it here may mean I get cut off blue. In the worst-case scenario, I splash for one of the best rares in the set. In the best case, I have a stronger mana base for a deck that includes one of the best rares in the set. That seems like a worthy "gamble."

My pick: *Vesuvan Shapeshifter*

### Pack 1, Pick 3

*Viscid Lemures*, *Ground Rift*, *Empty the Warrens*, *Molder*, *Children of Korlis*, *Terramorphic Expanse*, *Drudge Reavers*, *Crookclaw Transmuter*, *Mogg War Marshal*, *Premature Burial*, *Harmonic Sliver*, *Fury Sliver*, *Gauntlet of Power*

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Riding high after being passed *Vesuvan Shapeshifter*, and exhausted after finding so many rhymes for "mama" and "jive turkey," I make a mispick in this pack. Considering the previous two boosters, the best cards here are *Empty the Warrens*, *Crookclaw Transmuter*, *Terramorphic Expanse*, *Fury Sliver*, *Mogg War Marshal*, and *Gauntlet of Power*. Of those, the Gauntlet, War Marshal, and *Fury Sliver* are easy cuts. The Gauntlet is a fine, perhaps underrated, card, but it fits best in decks that are near-mono. Red and blue, being very popular colors, make this an unlikely possibility. In addition, splashing for *Rift Bolt* or *Shapeshifter* further reduces the chance of a single color build. The War Marshal is a perfectly fine card, but slightly weak compared to the other choices above. Similarly, *Fury Sliver* has its place at the high end of the curve or in a more sliverish deck. Since I currently have no idea what kind of deck I'm building or any idea where the holes in the curve lie, I'd rather stick with cards that are universally safer and includable.

*Terramorphic Expanse* is a very interesting choice here. While I don't care for it in two-color decks, it's invaluable in three-plus. Considering the quality of the first two picks, taking strides to play them is perfectly reasonable. If I was certain I was not playing red/blue exclusively, I'd be all over the Expanse here. But we don't know that yet. Ideally this deck does play only two colors, and as I said, I really don't like the card without a special reason to use it. Comes-into-play-tapped lands are rough in the tempo-centric *Time Spiral* drafts. Expanse is a safe pick, in that it's guaranteed playable in all decks, merely unexciting in some. Safe... doesn't interest me. I'm going to make the assumption I'll be with a two-color deck and draft accordingly. If something comes along later that says to abandon ship and shift I'll of course listen, but I don't like to weaken my core plan without a compelling reason. The balance on this point is tricky, and I certainly wouldn't look down on someone who took the Expanse for insurance purposes. I'm just a shoot-the-moon kinda guy.

For me, this pack is a choice between *Crookclaw* and *Empty the Warrens*. Let me start out by saying that in triple-T, I'd take *Empty the Warrens* here in a heartbeat. By now, most people realize how strong this card is. Four power for four mana is quite likely, and the storm-suspend mechanic means there's some other critter in play at the same time. Adding in opportunities to get more goblins just increases Empty's power. *Crookclaw Transmuter* is great as a three-power flier with card advantage potential, it just doesn't quite reach Empty the Warren status.



Ah, but this isn't triple-T anymore, is it? *Planar Chaos* is in the mix, and that cuts a leg out from under the storm plan. Foolishly, randomly, I hadn't read last week's Peabody-nominated *Limited Information*, where the author discusses the dip in power level of *Empty the Warrens*-type cards. The other problem with the pick is that Empty isn't a great splash card, whereas *Crookclaw* is functional in the role. I know I just got done saying I'm planning on playing two colors, but that doesn't mean I want to paint myself into a corner either. Sometimes you *hope* a pick works out and sometimes you *depend* on a pick working out. The former is far safer than the latter, although given a strong enough card, the risk would be worth it. In TTT I would argue *Empty the Warrens* was worth the risk. In TTP, missing a pack of *Halberdiers* and *Errant Ephemeron* puts it just under. Thus, I should have taken *Crookclaw Transmuter* here. It was a mistake, but that happens. I'll try not to do it again.

My pick: *Empty the Warrens*

### Pack 1, Pick 4

Mogg War Marshal, Ghitu Firebreathing, Bewilder, Temporal Eddy, Flickering Spirit, Lightning Axe, Chameleon Blur, Tendrils of Corruption, Havenwood Wurm, Thunder Totem, Haunting Hymn, Ith, High Arcanist

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As I mentioned above, our conversations turn to topics of surprising variety. One of these has been the “rooms in the mansion” conversation. As in, what kind of rooms would you have built in your dream house? Obviously there’s a huge movie and video game library, great chefs, etc. We had more esoteric ideas, like the “ribbons of peanut butter” room, or the “trampoline and Velcro room.” My vote? A gigantic ball pit.

I was an advocate of the ball pit for so long. Now, I think I’m going to have to change it to the “fourth-pick **Lightning Axe**” room.

My pick: **Lightning Axe**

#### Pack 1, Pick 5

Sidewinder Sliver, Viashino Bladescout, Ophidian Eye, Temporal Eddy, Aether Web, Amrou Seekers, Assassinate, Mwonvuli Acid-Moss, Yavimaya Dryad, Plated Pegasus, Coalition Victory

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It got worse! What we got here is poor red, poor blue, adequate green, white, and black, and YOU WIN THE GAME OMG, a card quickly shoved to the back of the pack. Getting cut off notwithstanding, is it time to move to a new color? I think not. None of the green-black-white cards are awful, yet none of them are exciting as splash cards either, or even particularly amazing in the maindeck. Playable certainly, but if I’m going to make the big move towards changing colors, I want a more compelling reason to do so than 2/2 reverse fear. Of the remaining U/R cards, **Temporal Eddy** is the best of the bunch. Eddy has always been a little tough to pin down, occasionally amazing and other times strictly mediocre. On the hope it would be amazing for the final deck, safe in the knowledge it would be playable no matter what, I remained on target and took the blue sorcery.

My pick: **Temporal Eddy**

#### Pack 1, Pick 6

Pentarch Ward, Viscid Lemures, Assassinate, Sidewinder Sliver, Clockspinning, Thallid Germinator, Cancel, Haunting Hymn, Assembly-Worker, Uncle Istvan

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Yes, vanishing made **Clockspinning** a better card. That’s like saying compost *a la mode* tastes better than regular. While technically true, you still know what you’re eating at the end of the day. Ideally I would get a **Chronozoa** in *Planar Chaos* and do crazy time counter tricks and... You know, that’s a pretty long sentence. Let’s try...

Ideally I would get **Chronozoa** in *Planar Chaos*.

Nope, **Clockspinning** isn’t going to do it. It’s time to look to a new color. Black and green seem, based on this pack and the previous, to be the most open colors, with black looking slightly stronger. Unfortunately, I abhor drafting black in PLC without white beside it. Chaos black has the best rare in the set, perhaps the best uncommon in the set, and a whole lot of dross after. I don’t feel safe in taking black cards yet, and **Assassinate** or **Haunting Hymn** aren’t strong enough to try. On the other hand green took a boost and Germinator is probably the best card in here anyway. It’s compelling enough.

My pick: **Thallid Germinator**

#### Pack 1, Pick 7

Detainment Spell, Foriysian Interceptor, Aetherflame Wall, Icatian Crier, Ironclaw Buzzardiers, Sprout, Thunder Totem, Tectonic Fiend, Hypergenesis

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A fairly difficult pick. **Ironclaw Buzzardiers** are best in aggro, and the Wall is obviously a defensive card. The question is, which style is this deck? Pre-Chaos I’ve found R/U to *generally* veer towards controlling paths, with hard-to-stop fliers or One Big Turn inciting the final points. *Planar Chaos* makes these strategies slightly tougher to pull off, which in turn leads to more aggro builds. **Stingscourger** is still my favorite common in the set, and he *loves* playing the aggressive role. Above all that, I prefer drafting aggro over control because I believe aggro plays better against quality opposition than control decks. Considering the talent at this table, I want all the edge I can get.

My pick: **Ironclaw Buzzardiers**

#### Pack 1, Pick 8

Gustcloak Cavalier, Brass Gnat, Dream Stalker, Deathspore Thallid, Gorgon Recluse, Skulking Knight, Living End, Consecrate Land

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There's that black again. The only thing I have against the color is that it's no good. Aside from that, it's great. Besides, the lovely and underrated **Dream Stalker** is in this booster. And why is the Stalker of Dreams such an appealing card? Two actual words and a phonetically-satisfying jumble: **Reality Acid** and **Stingscourger**. One kills a permanent dead, and the other just makes an opponent wish he were. Either way, **Dream Stalker** plays real nice in R/U TTP. That's all besides your classic combos involving **Riftwing Cloudskate**, **Fathom Seer**, and having tons of toughness (combos with not dying). I think **Dream Stalker** was an underrated fella in the olden days, although it could legitimately table. Now that its value has risen even more, I'm going to outright label it a gift.

My pick: **Dream Stalker**

#### **Pack 1, Pick 9**

Pentarch Ward, Brass Gnat, Savage Thallid, Screeching Sliver, Chronatog Totem, Dreadship Reef, Coalition Victory

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It's not that **Chronatog Totem** would be more useful more often than the Reef. It's that **Dreadship Reef**, if/when it does become useful, will be overall much stronger than the Totem. The signals in this draft have been weird, but I respect the fact that I may diverge into three colors, and one of those colors may be black. If so, I'll be far happier with the Reef than the Totem. If I stick with R/U then the Totem would fit better, but it would never be exciting. Thus, I take the card with some scrap of influence and potential.

My pick: **Dreadship Reef**

#### **Pack 1, Pick 10**

Clockspinning, Dream Stalker, Gaze of Justice, Scarwood Treefolk, Wormwood Dryad, Feldon's Cane

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See my inflammatory **Clockspinning** argument above, than check out the **Dream Stalker** love-fest a little below it. I take the **Dream Stalker**.

My pick: **Dream Stalker**

#### **Pack 1, Pick 11**

Ground Rift, Molder, Children of Korlis, Drudge Reavers, Harmonic Sliver

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Meh, nothing to see here. Card most likely to be played and card I least want played against me? Check and double check.

My pick: **Drudge Reavers**

#### **Pack 1, Pick 12**

Bewilder, Ghitu Firebreathing, Chameleon Blur, Haunting Hymn

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I admit, this pick also made me consider black as a main color. Clearly my distaste for B/X builds is shared by others. Either way, I'm happy no one else is playing this card. It's a scary song!

My pick: **Haunting Hymn**

#### **Pack 1, Pick 13**

Ophidian Eye, Plated Pegasus, Coalition Victory

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Honestly, this should have been **Plated Pegasus** here just in case I found a windfall of **Grapeshot**, but no one ever sides in Pegasus anyway. Afeared of being short playables, I took the Eye. This pick did prompt a group discussion on whether **Ophidian Eye** or **Keen Sense** was a better bad card in G/U decks. Thoughts?

**Which is better in G/U decks?**

Ophidian Eye

Keen Sense

The 19th land

My pick: **Ophidian Eye**

### Pack 1, Pick 14

**Clockspinning**, **Sidewinder Sliver**

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I'm not the only one who still finds **Clockspinning** a trap card. I mean, it's *possible* it has a place, but really I'm hoping the person on my left sticks with a white deck.

My pick: **Clockspinning**

### Pack 1, Pick 15

What do you get when you cross Peter Gabriel, Phil Collins, and Awesome?

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My pick: **Hypergenesis**

## Pack 2

### Pack 2, Pick 1

**Zealot il-Vec**, **Urborg Syphon-Mage**, **Snapback**, **aether Web**, **Lightning Axe**, **Cloudchaser Kestrel**, **Ancient Grudge**, **Flickering Spirit**, **Call to the Netherworld**, **Drifter il-Dal**, **Durkwood Tracker**, **Tromp the Domains**, **Vampiric Sliver**, **Magus of the Candelabra**, **Zhalfirin Commander**

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I proclaimed aloud during the exploration of pack two that the readers would lambaste my bones over this decision. Here's a preview: "Why does Noah McStupidPants hate **Tromp the Domains** so much?" I like Tromp, I swear! But let's not kid around, that Germinator pick in p1p6 was an aberration. If I'm taking **Tromp the Domains** here, it's the third color. That's not a Good Thing, but for a card like Tromp it's a perfectly fair trade off. The issue with that pick is simple: to take **Tromp the Domains** here, I'm passing a **Lightning Axe**. I don't want to do that, for the simple reason that **Lightning Axe** is cheap and amazing. If that's too abstract, consider that by taking Tromp here, I also cut into my capability to splash some other third color. It's not just that I'm taking Tromp and passing Axe, it's also that I'm taking green above everything else, and passing **Lightning Axe** to do so. Taking the Axe here allows me to keep my capabilities available *while still* adding an awesome card to the final deck. It's my concession to the long view, but I do like keeping one's options open. Trust me when I say this was a very tough pick during the draft, but then as now, I'll stand by this choice.

My pick: **Lightning Axe**

### Pack 2, Pick 2

**Flowstone Channeler**, **Spinneret Sliver**, **Trespasser il-Vec**, **Fortify**, **Ghitu Firebreathing**, **Bewilder**, **Tolarian Sentinel**, **Detainment Spell**, **Penumbra Spider**, **Psychotic Episode**, **Return to Dust**, **Paradise Plume**, **Paradox Haze**, **Chronosavant**

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Chronosavant is a fine card – not as good as Tromp, but worth playing. In fact, Chrono's second ability is much more likely to trigger alongside dual **Lightning Axe**. Are there any other cards worth considering? In this booster, there's also **Tolarian Sentinel** and **Flowstone Channeler** in color. The Sentinel is interesting as complementary to **Dream Stalker**. There's a limit, though, on how many cards I want with that effect before I actually receive a combo card. The Sentinel is reasonable on its own, no doubt, but I think this pack can do better. The **Flowstone Channeler** is such a card, in-color, in a good place for the mana curve. It's also a source of much-needed, albeit limited, removal. It's no **Lightning Axe**, but then again, **Chronosavant** is no **Tromp the Domains**. My arguments above remain in effect; taking an off-color card here precludes all others. The Channeler isn't amazing, but it's a functional ogre, and I like what it does in a deck. It's worth the pick here.

My pick: **Flowstone Channeler**

### **Pack 2, Pick 3**

**Feebleness**, **Flamecore Elemental**, **Flickering Spirit**, **Chromatic Star**, **Gemhide Sliver**, **Chameleon Blur**, **Havenwood Wurm**, **Basal Sliver**, **Calciform Pools**, **Fallen Ideal**, **Ignite Memory**, **Ith**, **High Arcanist**, **Void**

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Good things come to those who wait. They tried to tempt me with green cards and white cards, but I stayed the course. But **Void**? Versus the mediocre **Flamecore Elemental**? Versus **Ith**? (Why that's in the pack I have no idea.) Regardless, **Void**, in a color I already have a small fix for, gets the big thumbs up. My pick: **Void**

### **Pack 2, Pick 4**

**Children of Korlis**, **Herd Gnarr**, **Gorgon Recluse**, **Mystical Teachings**, **Swamp**, **Thrill of the Hunt**, **Viashino**, **Bladscout**, **Sangrophage**, **Fortify**, **Celestial Crusader**, **Paradox Haze**, **Mystic Snake**

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Ah but for Tromp, mine own **Mystic Snake**! If only I had considered the possibility that I'd be passed a blue/green rarer-than-rare. You may remember instead I snagged a second **Lightning Axe** over the green sorcery. Anything here that plays well with two discard-centric instants? In the color(s) being played? Named **Mystical Teachings**?

My pick: **Mystical Teachings**

### **Pack 2, Pick 5**

**Mindstab**, **Savage Thallid**, **Ancient Grudge**, **Flickering Spirit**, **Gaze of Justice**, **Call to the Netherworld**, **Drifter il-Dal**, **Fool's Demise**, **Smallpox**, **Unyaro Bees**, **Shadow Guildmage**

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Neat, repetitive removal. And since **Shadow G.** is a splash card, I'll have access to both halves. There's nothing here even remotely worth considering compared to that one, so in it goes. My pick: **Shadow Guildmage**

### **Pack 2, Pick 6**

**Terramorphic Expanse**, **Wormwood Dryad**, **Two-Headed Sliver**, **Thallid Germinator**, **D'avenant Healer**, **Mystical Teachings**, **Urborg Syphon-Mage**, **Krosan Grip**, **Fungal Reaches**, **Liege of the Pit**

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A second **Teachings** is a lot less appealing than the ability to flashback the first one. Plus, you know, do other stuff. My pick: **Terramorphic Expanse**

### **Pack 2, Pick 7**

**Coal Stoker**, **D'Avenant Healer**, **Shadow Sliver**, **Traitor's Clutch**, **Glass Asp**, **Deathspore Thallid**, **Bogardan Rager**, **Telekinetic Sliver**, **Firewake Sliver**

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Wow, that's an awesome present this late. **Coal Stoker** is an incredible card in draft, especially in the R/U archetype with storm and morph. It's a tier one common, and to get it this late is exciting. The rest of the table can only wonder what my muted giggling portends.

My pick: **Coal Stoker**

### **Pack 2, Pick 8**

**Basal Sliver**, **Ghitu Firebreathing**, **Sage of Epityr**, **Gorgon Recluse**, **Spell Burst**, **Return to Dust**, **Voidmage Husher**, **Saffi Eriksdotter**

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People have said **Sage of Epityr** is fairly playable. I remain unconvinced, but the fact there are still questions this late is a credit to the format. Regardless, with two **Dream Stalkers** and **Empty the Warrens** (and **Vesuvan Shapeshifter!**), I like it more than **Spell Burst** and **Voidmage Husher**. Someone on my right has a really good deck.

My pick: **Sage of Epityr**

#### **Pack 2, Pick 9**

**Zealot ilVec**, **Urborg Syphon-Mage**, **Ancient Grudge**, **Call to the Netherworld**, **Drifter il-Dal**, **Durkwood Tracker**, **Magus of the Candelabra**

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The Zealot almost got the hate draft here until I remember the card doesn't do anything without multiple brothers. The Syphon-Mage actually would have been a reasonable card to hate away, but I took Drifter on the very slim chance it makes the final build. Drifter isn't the worst card, but maindeck inclusion is definitely depressing. A decent sideboard option though.

My pick: **Drifter il-Dal**

#### **Pack 2, Pick 10**

**Trespasser il-Vec**, **Ghitu Firebreathing**, **Psychotic Episode**, **Detainment Spell**, **Paradox Haze**, **Paradise Plume**

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Alright, enough black to my (I'm sure) appreciating neighbor. I'd much rather prevent an opponent from receiving a very mana-efficient madness outlet than add a **Paradise Plume** to the deck.

My pick: **Trespasser il-Vec**

#### **Pack 2, Pick 11**

**Havenwood Wurm**, **Flickering Spirit**, **Chameleon Blur**, **Fallen Ideal**, **Ignite Memories**

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This isn't a bad pack for five cards left. You could D-draft a number of these, but **Ignite Memories** does have some small capability as a sideboard card. An unlikely event, but far more common than me playing or playing against **Havenwood Wurm**.

My pick: **Ignite Memories**

#### **Pack 2, Pick 12**

**Swamp**, **Sangrophage**, **Children of Korlis**, **Paradox Haze**

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The weird thing about **Sangrophage** is that when it's good, it's really good. That's an extremely rare occurrence mind you, but I have no qualms making it even rarer.

My pick: **Sangrophage**

#### **Pack 2, Pick 13**

**Call to the Netherworld**, **Ancient Grudge**, **Smallpox**

[Click here](#)

Again, the most potentially dangerous card. No revered artifacts means **Smallpox** gets the pickup. My pick: **Smallpox**

#### **Pack 2, Pick 14**

**Mystical Teachings**, **Krosan Grip**

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See above, except this one could actually be playable if PLC produces the goods. A nice grab for #14.

My pick: [Mystical Teachings](#)

### Pack 2, Pick 15

[Glass Asp](#)

[Click here](#)

My pick: [Glass Asp](#)

## Pack 3

### Pack 3, Pick 1

[Spitting Sliver](#), [Aven Riftwatcher](#), [Stingscourger](#), [Saltfield Recluse](#), [Firefright Mage](#), [Pallid Mycoderm](#), [Uktabi Drake](#), [Deadly Grub](#), [Healing Leaves](#), [Sinew Sliver](#), [Rathi Trapper](#), [Frenetic Sliver](#), [Circle of Affliction](#), [Frozen Aether](#), [Braids](#), [Conjurer Adept](#)

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Y'all remember the time I loved [Stingscourger](#), which is every day ever? I do.

My pick: [Stingscourger](#)

We had a discussion on the role of this column for cards like [Stingscourger](#), cards with "undefined" strengths. One Geneva attendee wished I hadn't let the cat out of the bag on this little **GOBLIN-goblin-goblin** so quickly. I retorted that [Stingscourger](#)'s quality wasn't exactly hidden knowledge, and besides, I didn't really have the influence that he attributed. We couldn't come to an agreement on the issue, so I'll ask you guys.



**Do you think reading a columnist's opinion makes someone more likely to believe that opinion?**

- It makes a person less likely to believe that opinion
- It's irrelevant
- Yes
- Yes, but only if they say it does

### Pack 3, Pick 2

[Uktabi Drake](#), [Sinew Sliver](#), [Dust Corona](#), [Keldon Marauders](#), [Poultice Sliver](#), [Melancholy](#), [Reflex Sliver](#), [Gossamer Phantasm](#), [Cradle to Grave](#), [Big Game Hunter](#), [Aven Riftwatcher](#), [Malach of the Dawn](#), [Aether Membrane](#), [Body Double](#)

[Click here](#)

Someone's going to enjoy the white from this pack for weeks to come. For this U/R/b player, the choices revolved around [Aether Membrane](#) and [Body Double](#). I said earlier that defensive cards are tough to gauge in R/U, and passed [Aetherflame Wall](#) because of it. Now that the deck is more defined, I can say with confidence it's split right down the middle between aggression and control. That makes the Membrane more appealing, plus it's vastly stronger and more annoying than [Aetherflame Wall](#). On the other hand, I find [Body Double](#) interesting. Its power intrinsically goes up as the game goes on, and plays well with the removal the deck has collected so far. The real decider is that this deck is missing a strong finisher in the truest sense of the word. Good tempo, good removal, but no one card I could point to to finish the job. With [Body Double](#) I could do just that, or more precisely, point to a card in their graveyard to do just that.

My pick: [Body Double](#)

### Pack 3, Pick 3

[Erratic Mutation](#), [Ghost Tactician](#), [Simian Spirit Guide](#), [Shade of Trokair](#), [Gossamer Phantasm](#), [Midnight Charm](#), [Bog Serpent](#), [Aquamorph Entity](#), [Uktabi Drake](#), [Stingscourger](#), [Frenetic Sliver](#), [Stormfront Riders](#), [Dunerider Outlaw](#)

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This pack had a number of justifiable picks for this archetype, ranging from aggressive ([Gossamer Phantasm](#)), removal ([Erratic Mutation](#)), more 1/5s ([Aquamorph Entity](#)), or the random ([Frenetic Sliver](#)). None of those, unfortunately, were named [Stingscourger](#).

My pick: [Stingscourger](#)

### Pack 3, Pick 4

[Midnight Charm](#), [Battering Sliver](#), [Uktabi Drake](#), [Ghost Tactician](#), [Firefight Mage](#), [Healing Leaves](#), [Shaper Parasite](#), [Primal Plasma](#), [Wistful Thinking](#), [Seal of Primordium](#), [Ana Battlemage](#), [Fungal Behemoth](#)

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If I lived in a world a little grayer, a world without [Stingscourgers](#), I'd point to [Shaper Parasite](#) as the numero uno common in *Planar Chaos*. Grudgingly I'll admit that in some decks, a lot of decks, the Parasite could edge out the goblin. Regardless, there's nothing here that comes close to the excellent morph-'taal. That pair of [Dream Stalkers](#) only add to the potency.

My pick: [Shaper Parasite](#)

### Pack 3, Pick 5

[Uktabi Drake](#), [Cradle to Grave](#), [Pallid Mycoderm](#), [Reflex Sliver](#), [Revered Dead](#), [Dreamscape Artist](#), [Firefight Mage](#), [Healing Leaves](#), [Hammerheim Deadeye](#), [Psychothrope Thallid](#), [Braids](#), [Conjurer Adept](#)

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Around the prerelease, I couldn't quite get a bead on the [Dreamscape Artist](#). Harrow was always a great card, and repetitive castings *seemed* solid. Yet this version is fragile and a touch slow for the first couple of times. Curious, I gave it a shot in my Sealed deck. The fact that the deck was four colors helped, but I really loved how [Dreamscape Artist](#) performed. Unlike [Greenseeker](#), the deck was thinned extremely quickly, making its influence on the game fairly immediate. Since then I've become quite a fan of the card, making sure to pick one up in all my blue decks. It's not a super-high pick, but given a three-color or slow build, its effect on your board and deck is noticeable. The Deadeye does have some char here as a 3/3, but without knowing if there is going to be another chance at a [Dreamscape Artist](#), I take my shot.

(The card performed well for me that evening, but perhaps my experiences were above the norm. Anyone want to chime in with their experiences?)

My pick: [Dreamscape Artist](#)

### Pack 3, Pick 6

[Uktabi Drake](#), [Synchronous Sliver](#), [Vampiric Link](#), [Dreamscape Artist](#), [Piracy Charm](#), [Aquamorph Entity](#), [Needlepeak Spider](#), [Saltfield Recluse](#), [Psychothrope Thallid](#), [Gaeas Anthem](#)

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I take another [Dreamscape Artist](#) here, and looking back I'm not sure why. I clearly like the Artist, but [Aquamorph Entity](#) is no slouch either. Perhaps I thought I needed more fixing and/or there was going to be more non-RU cards played? I know why I skipped [Piracy Charm](#), as it didn't offer anything the deck was really looking for. Still, passing the Entity is a weird move.

My pick: [Dreamscape Artist](#)

### Pack 3, Pick 7

[Revered Dead](#), [Erratic Mutation](#), [Fa'adiyah Seer](#), [Evolution Charm](#), [Reality Acid](#), [Needlepeak Spider](#), [Deadly Grub](#), [Mantle of Leadership](#), [Mycologist](#)

[Click here](#)

This pick is surprisingly close, between two blue removal spells (wha...?) The Acid without a helper is essentially trash, but helpers it does have. The [Erratic Mutation](#) is paradoxically more consistent, but with three one-cost cards, +1/-1 wouldn't be breaking down any doors. The decider for me is that, while [Reality Acid](#) does have help, those helpers have lots of other targets as well. Who wants to be put in a decision where they have to return [Reality Acid](#) or [Shaper Parasite](#)? [Erratic Mutation](#) is fine on its own, although I would be hoping to double-cast [Mystical Teachings](#) before it fired.

My pick: [Erratic Mutation](#)

### Pack 3, Pick 8

Saltfield Recluse, Primal Plasma, Wistful Thinking, Dash Hopes, Keldon Marauders, Firefright Mage, Needlepeak Spider, Circle of Affliction

[Click here](#)

For blue decks especially, **Primal Plasma** is going to be 70/20/10 **Hill Giant/Wind Drake/Wall**. Only one of those forms matches the actual casting cost, but I particularly like that card in Limited. An easy decision.

My pick: **Primal Plasma**

### Pack 3, Pick 9

Firefright Mage, Pallid Mycoderm, Uktabi Drake, Healing Leaves, Frenetic Sliver, Circle of Affliction, Frozen Aether, Braids Conjurer Adept

[Click here](#)

Could I be the only blue/red drafter? That's exciting. **Frenetic Sliver** is quite powerful, and more importantly, a real pain for an opponent to play against. Those are two great attributes for playing against one's close friends. While there are some strong cards here to take away from opponents, nothing else here is on the same power arc that **Frenetic Sliver** is. A lucky grab.

My pick: **Frenetic Sliver**

### Pack 3, Pick 10

Gossamer Phantasm, Aven Riftwatcher, Reflex Sliver, Poultice Sliver, Keldon Marauders, Dust Corona

[Click here](#)

Between **Gossamer Phantasm** and **Keldon Marauders**, I have to think the Phantasm will deal more damage, although there is plenty of variance. Passing that Riftwatcher is a bit concerning. Vowing to keep an eye on rebel searchers, I take the potential maindeck creature.

My pick: **Gossamer Phantasm**

### Pack 3, Pick 11

Gossamer Phantasm, Simian Spirit Guide, Shade of Trokair, Ghost Tactician, Frenetic Sliver

[Click here](#)

Two Frenetics are about as good as one, times two. Good enough for me. This pack is saying **Shade of Trokair** or white in general is getting underrated this draft, which is interesting. Atypical?

My pick: **Frenetic Sliver**

### Pack 3, Pick 12

Wistful Thinking, Ghost Tactician, Uktabi Drake, Fungal Behemoth

[Click here](#)

Also, people aren't much into **Uktabi Drakes**. On the other hand, the first six packs had them, so people may simply have been saturated. Either way, the sketchy discard spell has more appeal, but only just.

My pick: **Wistful Thinking**

### Pack 3, Pick 13

Firefright Mage, Reflex Sliver, Braids, Conjurer Adept

[Click here](#)

I don't care about red fear, and I actively hope they play Blue Braids. What's left but a potentially scary sliver? This is the end stage; the reasoning for picking a card is getting tenuous.

My pick: **Reflex Sliver**

### Pack 3, Pick 14

Vampiric Link, Uktabi Drake

[Click here](#)

Similar to above, **Vampiric Link** is near-unplayable and certainly a card I'm not afraid of them running.

My pick: **Uktabi Drake**

### Pack 3, Pick 15

Mantle of Leadership

[Click here](#)

My pick: **Mantle of Leadership**

TSP-TSP-PLC Draft Deck		
<b>Main Deck</b> 40 cards		
1 <b>Dreadship Reef</b>	1 <b>Body Double</b>	1 <b>Empty the Warrens</b>
7 <b>Island</b>	1 <b>Coal Stoker</b>	1 <b>Erratic Mutation</b>
7 <b>Mountain</b>	2 <b>Dream Stalker</b>	2 <b>Lightning Axe</b>
1 <b>Swamp</b>	2 <b>Dreamscape Artist</b>	1 <b>Mystical Teachings</b>
1 <b>Terramorphic Expanse</b>	1 <b>Flowstone Channeler</b>	1 <b>Rift Bolt</b>
17 lands	2 <b>Frenetic Sliver</b>	2 <b>Stingscourger</b>
	1 <b>Ironclaw Buzzardiers</b>	1 <b>Void</b>
	1 <b>Primal Plasma</b>	9 other spells
	1 <b>Shadow Guildmage</b>	
	1 <b>Shaper Parasite</b>	
	1 <b>Vesuvan Shapeshifter</b>	
	14 creatures	

I like this deck. It has a healthy mix of removal, card advantage, and a few late game bombs. It's slightly short on creatures with power, having a higher percentage of one and two-power creatures than I was comfortable with. Still, it's a strong deck with plenty of synergistic pieces. As expected, the **Empty the Warrens** ended up being one of the weaker components to the final build. I'd have much preferred **Crookclaw Transmuter** here, but hindsight etc. How about those games?

## Round 1 vs. Brian Wong

### Game 1

This game demonstrated the sheer power of tempo-based R/U decks. A **Frenetic Sliver** into **Coal Stoker** into a face-down **Shaper Parasite** is a sick opening. Brian had a fairly effective G/U deck, an archetype that got a serious boost via **Planar Chaos**. Brian was holding on well despite the killer opening and, in a surprising turn, was actually throwing some damage back at me. Things turned south for him when I threw all my long game resources to **Teachings** for a **Lightning Axe**, tossing **Void**. That was worth some good damage, with one card remaining. Brian tried to stabilize with **Ana Battlemage**, but the second **Axe** nullified the whole affair. A raw **Empty the Warrens** was enough to seal the game.

Out went one of the **Dreamscape Artists** for **Temporal Eddy**.

### Game 2

Brian started off excellently with **Scryb Ranger** and **Penumbra Spider**. That's a pair of creatures that this deck has a tough time dealing with, and Brian used that time to set up a great position. **Durkwood Baloth** didn't hit until Brian had the mana left over to cast **Might of Old Krosa**, nullifying **Lightning Axe**. The real nail in the coffin was that vicious **Ana Battlemage**, forcing me to pitch **Void**, followed by the sick **Gaea's Anthem**. There was no way to overcome that much resilience.

### Game 3

This game revolved around one card, that remaining **Dreamscape Artist**. Brian's draw was slightly slow, giving me time to activate the Artist a total of four times, alongside putting counters on the **Dreadship Reef**. I took a little damage, but the flipped **Shaper Parasite** helped settle things down. I eventually got the lands and counters where I wanted them. Tapping everything for maximum mana, I went **Dream Stalker** picking up **Dream Stalker**, **Dream Stalker** picking up **Shaper Parasite**, replayed a facedown **Shaper Parasite**, and ended with an **Empty the Warrens** for eight tokens. This sounds good, and it was good, but Brian wasn't ready to concede yet. The cost of all this storm trickery was an undeveloped board, which meant Brian's **Baloth**, **Giant Dustwasp**, and **Penumbra Spider**

were the biggest guys around. I was dealing damage, of course, but was lower in life than was truly comfortable. A **Void** did good work, allowing me to **Body Double** a Dustwasp to stand against an **Uktabi Drake**. Things settled down after that, with both of us at low life and not quite willing to commit to a final assault. I just bided my time until I found what I was looking for, which in this case was **Stingscourger** plus **Temporal Eddy**. The two bounce spells did the job, and Brian had to pack it in.

## Round 2 vs. Mike Gurney

### Game 1

Mike is one of the competitors heading to Geneva, a very strong player always at the top of the tournament standings. He was piloting a fairly vicious U/W deck, an archetype made even more deadly by the bizarrely abundant amount of blue and white removal in the final booster. The first game I got my life total handed to me when Gurney curved **Looter il-Kor** into **Cloudchaser Kestrel**, **Malach of the Dawn**, and **Castle Raptors**. I made the attempt to race with **Frenetics** and **Lightning Axe**, but I was short black mana the whole game. Having my **Guildmage** and **Void** as dead cards was just too much of a deficit to overcome.

### Game 2

**Dreamscape Artist** once again perfectly set up my mana and primed the rest of the draw steps. Similar to the previous round, I just loaded up on mana and made a huge turn with **Coal Stoker**, **Shadow Guildmage**, **Lightning Axe** and a **Warrens** for eight. Hmm, maybe the **Transmuter** wouldn't have been as strong in the deck. Unfortunately, Mike had the absolutely incredible **Jodah's Avenger** at his beck and call, and due to a previous **Void**, I knew he was also packing **Fortify**. I was pushing in token damage, and it was plentiful, but **Jodah's Avenger** was still dealing a lot. I had a trump prepared for Mike's next play though, that beautiful face-down **Shaper Parasite**. But no, Mike played **Malach of the Dawn**! At seven life, if he attacked the next turn with a shadowed Avenger and Malach, even the negative power usage of Parasite wouldn't be enough to save me. But Mike misplayed, perhaps unaware of the Parasite's existence, in general or as my morph. Shadow plus double strike plus **Fortify** would have been lethal, but for the +2/-2. Mike berated himself for the math error after losing this game. That's okay, Mike, just don't do it in Switzerland!

### Game 3

This game was a bit anticlimactic. Mike kept a reasonable starter but drew into a ton of lands. I made a big misplay and gambled with **Erratic Mutation**. This was over the safer **Shaper Parasite** combined with a blocking-pinging **Shadow Guildmage** to kill **Jodah's Avenger**. Luckily, **Erratic Mutation** didn't hit **Joker Doom**. **Stingscourger** pushed enough damage so that **Rift Bolt** could finish the match.



## Round 3 vs. Eric Reasoner

### Game 1

I won this game, and it was on the back of one thing only: a lucky coin. Eric's **Sulfurous Blast** went a mere two for two, as **Frenetic Sliver** survived to roll again. That was deadly good against Eric's red/black deck, and I spent the rest of the game essentially keeping the path clear for the Frenetic. Eric was in a ridiculous situation, where his removal was only half as effective as his creatures, but those creatures kept dying or getting bounced back. Eric did his best, but my tempo draw was just too strong (**Stingscourger**) and Eric died to that same **Rift Bolt**.

### Game 2

**PYROHEMIA!** Whose bright idea was it bring that back? Visions of 1998 few by as I had to fight through **Pestilence** and end step tricks. Eric made it even worse with **Molten Firebird**, a fairly sick combination. To staunch the fiery flow somewhat, I dealt enough early damage to put me ahead in the life race. **Dream Stalker** started off as an annoying unkillable in that I couldn't finish off the **Pyrohemia**, but turned into a benefit as it slowly whittled Eric down. **Dream Stalker** slipped in a point when possible and held off the **Firebird** at other times. Our removal spells traded away everything else, most critically killing Eric's **Urborg Syphon-Mage**. Things ground to a halt, which forced me to start throwing away whole cards for single points. **Empty the Warrens** for 42 tokens is good for a tap of red, **Dreamscape Artist** is good for a tap of red, etc. Eventually **Vesuvan Shapeshifter** hit as a facedown. Becoming a **Firebird** or **Dream Stalker** as needed, it stymied Eric. The two creatures work in tandem to slowing ping through for the final points.

So what was learned through this practice? Both a little and a lot. No one breached new archetypes or strategies, at least nothing blindingly off the wall. On the other hand, everyone confirmed that **Planar Chaos** mucks with the format quite a bit. Ignoring the new effects of the set was detrimental, as well as forgetting about key morphs or instants. As usual, everyone sat down afterwards to discuss the ramifications and lessons of the draft. Those conclusions are detailed above, as well as "Pestilence is #\$\$\$@ Insane" and "NWell is a filthy lucksack." It was a good session, and I'm pretty sure the competitors felt stronger for the practice. Wanting to squeeze in as much experience before the trip as possible, everyone agreed to one final draft. Here's that list, one that emphasizes a final point for **Time Spiral** limited:



Astute readers may note the presence of two key sorceries. One is **Disintegrate**, which is famous for being really, really good. The other is **Wheel of Fate**, and that one deserves a little more explanation.

See, **Wheel of Fate** sucks in Limited... a lot. And by a lot, I mean 99.9% of the time. But that 0.01% of the time, it's a worthy addition. This deck was that 0.01% of the time, for a few reasons. One, **Disintegrate** is really, really good. It's worth digging deep. For another, **Wheel of Fate** combines particularly well with **Conflagrate**, which by extension, combines well with **Disintegrate**. There are more combinations as well, like **Greater Gargadon** and **Evolution Charm**, or **Timbermare** and **Might of Old Krosa**. In fact, one game was won via **Timbermare** plus main phase **Might of Old Krosa** plus **Brute Force** for 12 points, all off drawing eight cards in one turn. This deck didn't win the whole thing unfortunately, where a **Gargadon** and **Timbermare** combo was short two points, which gave my opponent the time to cast **Akroma, Angel of Wrath** for the win. These things happen when you spin the Wheel. But I'm glad it was there.

Constructed has this trait where someone can create a new deck and win a tournament with it. That's cool and all, but it's rarely so in Limited. In draft, the wins don't go to people who find new decks, but to people who can take old cards and use them in new ways. Just like there are rare times to pass **Disintegrate**, there are rare decks that use **Wheel of Fate**, or some other "trash" card. The only way to find them is practice, preferably amongst friends and people you respect. Watch the coverage of [Pro Tour - Geneva](#) this weekend, I'll bet you see some borderline card used in a unique way, to strong effect. And with a little luck, you'll see some Washington players in the top 8. I'm looking forward to it. Good luck to all the players this weekend, and thanks for reading.



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