



The Future of Limited

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Limited Information
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It is time to take a closer look at the new set. I will break down the colours individually—examining what they lack and what strengths they bring to their colours. I will, of course, be dealing only with the commons as these are the cards you will be thinking about as you head towards your third booster. Before I delve into each colour, it is important to note that Gathan Raiders will feature in every single colour. It will be a high pick, one you will probably only pick either removal, a bomb, or a very synergistic card over it.

White

The four big cards this colour has are Judge Unworthy, Lucent Liminid, Whip-Spine Drake, and Knight of Sursi. It should be of no surprise to see all the quality evasion and removal in the cards that are the best. I will try to list cards roughly in their pick order, but this will be very speculative at this stage. For example, Gathan Raiders and Judge Unworthy are very close in value, and I know not which to pick.

Blade of the Sixth Pride is not only the colour's only good common Rebel, but also its best two drop. This last detail will, in itself, ensure that this guy might get picked a little higher than he ought to, just to fill out the curve. Lumithread Field and Lymph Sliver round the colour out as unimpressive cards for their costs. Saltskitter is a card upon which the jury is still out. It has vigilance when you have a creature to cast after combat, yet cannot block if your opponent has a creature during his turn. Flash creatures wreck it. There might be some nifty combos with it, such as Pandemonium, but for now I will leave the guy along with the other unplayables.

Marshalling Cry is an interesting card. I first played it because it cycled, so I could 'cheat' on my land count and get to my bombs a little faster, whilst simultaneously leaving a residual effect in the graveyard for later. It does all of this very well. It does a little more too though. If your deck is quite fast and has several creatures, then much like Fortify, it can serve as a finisher, especially if you are inclined to play it twice in one turn for a mini-Overrun effect.



Its main strength lies in the virtual effect it has whilst looming in a graveyard. Every turn, your opponent will have to consider what his blocks will look like if you do not flash it back and if you do. Every turn, he has to try and make both outcomes favourable for him. I have seen it swing games that have stalled late on, so it might be worth sideboarding it in slow mirrors. This is not to say that it is always a maindeck card, but it is a card of interesting worth that, like Fortify, might well sneak up the pick order.

It should also be noted that there are no good common combat tricks in *Future Sight*. This will raise the premium of all the *Time Spiral* tricks, as there were very few to play with in *Planar Chaos* too.

Blue

Let us see how my favourite colour fared in its newest outing. Not too well I'm afraid. It starts well, as all colours tend to, with Infiltrator i/-Kor, Foresee, and Whip-Spine Drake. Gathan Raiders is probably better than all three, to get him out the way nice and early. I think that's the order in which to pick them, but I could be wrong. As a side note, it should be noted that Whip-Spine Drake will not be a very common common to see, due to its bi-colour quality.

I'm very tempted to place Foresee one higher, as it is my favourite card in the set. It is comparable to Careful Consideration, and it is

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better in one aspect and worse in another. The latter can let you discard excess lands, but I like excess lands and find that it is more often correct that they should be in play, rather than in your hand, in the first place. The massive scry effect of Foresee means that you will tend to scry away the extra land you would have drawn, were it a Careful Consideration. Its advantage is that if you are digging for a specific card, then this can dig you six cards deep if you wish rather than just four, and if you scry into four excellent cards you can draw the two you need now and the other two when you need them in the immediate future.



The next ensemble is clearly headed by Aven Augur whilst the rest—Venser's Diffusion, Sarcomite Myr and Leaden Fists, can be picked in any order depending on the needs of your deck. The Augur, as a four mana 2/2 flyer, will always see play, and his ability will threaten to swing games and will often do so. The Diffusion is a standard bounce spell and will probably be played if you are light on removal. The Fists can serve a dual purpose—they can make one of your defenders massive, but this invites the two for one and isn't too exciting in the first place. It will more commonly be seen strapped onto an opponent's guy as a poor man's Exhaustion; again, not the most exciting. However, due to flash, it can often be used as a defensive pump spell, which will leave behind a formidable wall. The Myr is unexciting once more, but it does have the potential to be an evasion creature and the potential to be card advantage, and this is good enough for it to have a soft spot in my books.

Unblinking Bleb, Blind Phantasm, and Logic Knot round off the potential playables. None of them are exciting. The first two serve the same purpose—random defensive filler that will often be used to keep the creature count high enough. Some of my favourite Limited cards are like Blind Phantasm, cards that go late that will bolster a deck's defences so that its power and card advantage have enough time to come online. The Knot is a bad counterspell and as such, will normally be nestled in the sideboard alongside its superior, Cancel.

Blue has no playable two drops and an abundance of average three drops, exactly the same as the other two sets, so when you draft it remember to pick up two drops in your other colour.

Black

Much like Planar Chaos before it, the black in Future Sight is depressing. Its two removal spells lead the way—Ichor Slick will get picked above Gathan Raiders and, depending on the needs of your deck, Death Rattle might be sometimes too, but after that it goes downhill fast.



Mass of Ghouls may well be its next best card, as it provides a large body that the colour always needs—something with a bit of power to smash away whilst you play all of your removal spells. I haven't played black enough yet to tell you which is the better of the next two critters—Augur of Skulls and Deepcavern Imp. It will often be dependant on you other colour. If it is blue you are paired with then the Augur will stand out, providing some much needed defence and some late game card advantage; if white is your other colour then the Imp will be more at home, mainly thanks to him being a Rebel. As for the other two colours, that will depend more on your deck than anything else. Cutthroat il-Dal is there simply to fill out a deck that's lacking in power or curve.

Grave Peril seems to be the most talked-about black common. It is hard to determine how strong it is. Some players love it to bits, others disdain it as unplayable drivel. It is almost certainly circumstantial, but does it have more going for it. To get the easy bit out of the way, this card is going to be great in a

mono-black deck or one where the majority of its men are black. Other than that, is it just a poor man's Standstill? I think it has a little bit more potential than that. If you play a heavy deck that would dearly like to survive to the late game, then an early Peril can often ensure you will reach turn six as desired. In decks that can put early pressure on or can accelerate their mana, the Peril can be played when your have a superior board position or just after you play the best creature on the board. This will force your opponent to crack the Peril.

Is the downside that he can crack it with whatever he wants enough to disgrace the card? Sure, this will often sock a two drop in the eye, or take out a Goblin token, but most deck do not have that kind of luxury. As you will never be splashing this card, there is always the chance that you will draw some black creatures whilst the Peril stalls the board to tilt it in your favour. All in all, I think the card is not as bad as some players have doomed it to be. It is probably akin to the Deepcavern Imp in power, and this will obviously vary depending on just how black you are.

Red

I guess Gathan Raiders gains even a little more power a home in its own colour when it can come out for five mana all by itself. It is definitely stronger than anything else the colour has to offer. Riddle of Lightning heads red's removal front; partly because scry is just awesome, partly because it has the potential to take out a large creature, and partly because it can be pointed at the dome to provide the last few points or the desperation lucky win. Ghostfire is a tremendous card and deserves its automatic comparisons to Rift Bolt and Urza's Rage. Three damage is a lot, especially for three mana—you will always be loathe to pass this card.



The other two removal spells come bizarrely in the form of enchant creature Auras. They are very close in power, but I'm going to hesitantly suggest that Flowstone Embrace is better than Fatal Attraction, ignoring Julien Nuijten's cries over my shoulder to the contrary. Essentially, they do the same thing—they're sorcery speed Shocks; it is the little differences that separate the two. The Embrace is a mana cheaper, can kill regenerating men and, if need be, can even make one of your own creatures bigger. The Attraction is a mana more and has the potential to deal with a larger creature, at the expense of taking another hit from it, much like Reciprocate (it also combos with Stuffy Doll, but that can be kind of greedy). Which card to pick will often come down to your curve and whether or not you have many ways to deal with 4/4s.

Next into the breach comes a great addition to the red arsenal—Fomori Nomad. No one could ever complain about Durkwood Boars, even when it was green, and people have even less incentive to complain here. Here's where the colour dries out. Next up we have the choice of Grinning Ignus or Emberwilde Augur, which will come down to your deck's curve. If you need two drops, then take the Augur; if you have plenty of things the Ignus will accelerate you to, then snatch it up instead.

Henchfiend of Ukor is limited to Rakdos only, providing a little more incentive to draft those two colours together. It is a strong card, but it will still only be picked after the Nomad.

Green

Sprout Swarm still reigns supreme in my book. It pips Gathan Raiders in sheer 'win the game alone' power, not to mention how sick it becomes with Thallid Germinator or Psychotrope Thallid. The only other two cards that could be picked over the Raiders are

Sporoloth Ancient, in a heavy Thallid deck, or Edge of Autumn, in a five colour Green deck lacking in fixers. Edge of Autumn, along with most other fixer/acceleration spells, is always hard to place in a pick order. They are always good, but always vary depending on your deck and format. Pick it when you need it; if your deck is perfectly average, then it will probably be as powerful as Nessian Courser.

After the Swarm comes Sporoloth Ancient, and then it becomes a close call between Llanowar Empath and Kavu Primarch. The Primarch can often be played as a 7/7—it is easier done than it would seem—and it will also come out on turn three a lot as a fast Hill Giant. The Empath, on the other hand, allows you to fiddle with your deck with scry and acts as card advantage, as you will almost always hit – making it a kind of green Gravedigger. Being the sucker for card advantage that I am, I side with Empath.



Thornweald Archer is a beautiful creature. So many little abilities on one little card. It beats in the early game and trades with their best guy or a removal spell later on. It can also take out a flyer, something always welcomed in Green. You will pick it over Nessian Courser almost every time, unless you have too many two drops already. As is often the case with two drops, if your deck is lacking them by the time the third pack comes around, then the Archer might often be picked higher than normal, but as green has several early guys throughout the format, this will seldom be the case.

It is a testament to green's strength and depth in the *Future Sight* that the Courser is the colour's seventh best common! This guy will make every deck you draft, meaning green has seven cards that you would not begrudgingly first pick. The only other card of note is the set's only common combat trick—Wrap in Vigor. I have yet to play with it, but early reports have stated that it's ok. It can be used to foil a devastating Sulfurous Blast or turn the game around in a large combat phase. Its cheapness and universality will ensure that it has a lot more going for it than it might seem.

All in all, the colours are fairly well balanced. Green is the deepest, offering lots of quality creatures but little else. Black is the shallowest but boasts the set's best common. The other three colours are all reasonably equal—white has a removal spell and evasion, red has three removal spells, and blue has evasion and card advantage. As far as themes are concerned, there is only one strong common Sliver, Lymph Sliver, and only one good Thallid, Sporoloth Ancient, meaning they should dry up a little as common draft archetypes. It seems like almost all the colour combinations are still viable and there are a lot of options out there. Some of these opinions have been speculative and some demand more testing for confirmation. After Grand Prix–Stockholm, I'm sure these uncertainties will have faded away and I will be able to give more solid pick orders. Until then,

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*Widely considered one of the world's foremost Limited competitors, Quentin Martin has four Limited Grand Prix Top 8s and a Top 8 at Pro Tour–Prague 2006. Between his **Magic** expertise and a background in philosophy, it's no surprise Quentin is well known for his strategic insight and theories on the game.*



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