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National Colors

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Limited Information
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

It's that time of the year again. It's Nationals time. I love Nationals. It's where you get to compete against your comrades for something real, something that means something, something that means more than a PT invite. Nationals has been a tournament that's always frustrated me—I missed last years because I was travelling and have finished in the Top 16 for the previous eight years, so I'm as hungry as the rest of you to make the last eight.

There is always a heavy focus on the Standard portion of the event. Players often forget that, outside of the elimination rounds, half the tournament is Limited. Players who practice for Nationals might play over fifty games of Standard, but most will have done less than ten drafts. It is here that I have an edge, and it is probably easier to improve your edge with your Limited game than in Constructed. Here's a draft walkthrough to whet your teeth on.

Pack 1, Pick 1

Herd Gnarr, Trespasser *ii-Vec*, Amrou Scout, Grapeshot, Scarwood Treefolk, Two-Headed Sliver, Blazing Blade Askari, Shadow Sliver, Ophidian Eye, Pendelhaven Elder, Quilled Sliver, Basalt Gargoyle, Spectral Force, Arena, Island

Click [here](#).

An easy pick to kick things off. The rest of the pack is also pretty solid. Although it shouldn't, I'm hoping/expecting the **Arena** to return. **Magus of the Arena** gets all the hype it deserves as it comes along with a large body to abuse its ability. However, for some reason this reprint is underrated. Paired with some large creatures—often a Hill Giant is enough—it will dominate the game. If it comes online early, it will win you the game right there. I expect the guy on my left to take either the **Amrou Scout** or **Grapeshot** depending on which matches his first pick.



Pick: **Spectral Force**

Pack 1, Pick 2

Cloudchaser Kestrel, Drudge Reavers, Goblin Skycutter, Cancel, Penumbra Spider, Pentarch Ward, Jedit's Dragoons, Sprout, Foriysian Interceptor, Aetherflame Wall, Thunder Totem, Conflagrate, Trickbind, Withered Wretch

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Only two cards leap out at me. I can either wade further into green with **Penumbra Spider** or take the tricky red removal spell. **Conflagrate** is an interesting card. At first it seems very expensive, costing three mana for 1 damage and five for 2, but it has the potential to kill two creatures for five mana and is far more likely to kill two for seven. Its flashback once more seems too expensive, but it will often be your only out to an **Errant Ephemeron** or something of that ilk, and will also offer you either further multiple removal or a good finisher and something to do with your excess land. Conversely, the Spider deals with all the large fliers in **Future Sight**, fills a hole in green, and provides card advantage to boot. I really want to play the **Spectral Force**, and I'm more than happy following it with a Spider.

Pick: **Penumbra Spider**

Pack 1, Pick 3

Coal Stoker, Deathspore Thallid, Tolarian Sentinel, Benalish Cavalry, Orcish Cannonade, Venser's Sliver, Clockspinning, Bogardan Rager, Sangrophage, Spirit Loop, Truth or Tale, Sudden Death, Island

Click [here](#).

Benalish Cavalry is a great card, but not strong enough for us to pick over the other goodies this pack has to offer. Red is incredibly deep. I'm never entirely sure which order to pick these in; I prefer the **Orcish Cannonade** to the **Coal Stoker**. However, nothing can compare in power to the startlingly late **Sudden Death**. Death kills practically everything for only three mana, and you can gain a great advantage with its Split Second by catching the opponent unawares.

Update on Rain Delay



Pick: Sudden Death

Pack 1, Pick 4

Gemhide Sliver, Mindstab, Gaze of Justice, D'Avenant Healer, Wormwood Dryad, Mystical Teachings, Two-Headed Sliver, Fungal Reaches, Conflagrate, Faceless Devourer, Saffi Eriksdotter, Dodecapod

Click [here](#).

This pack is still full of great cards. I'm surprised to find both the **Conflagrate** and the **Gemhide Sliver** still here. This is an easy pick as I have no reason to deviate from green as of yet. This pack is so deep I expect to wheel the **Fungal Reaches**, **Wormwood Dryad**, or **Faceless Devourer**.

Pick: Gemhide Sliver

Pack 1, Pick 5

Mogg War Marshal, Think Twice, Ashcoat Bear, Brass Gnat, Savage Thallid, Screeching Sliver, Momentary Blink, Ghostflame Sliver, Paradise Plume, Academy Ruins, Pandemonium

Click [here](#).

This is a light pack and nothing jumps out. I have no reason to commit to a Thallid deck, and **Ashcoat Bears** almost never makes the deck. Apart from the third-pick **Sudden Death**, I've received no other reason to be black, whereas red spells continue to come, so I'll pick the **Mogg War Marshal**. I really expect the **Arena** to wheel, and I want my deck to be full of fatties. The War Marshal will help me survive into the late game. I don't expect red to come in *Planar Chaos* given that I have already passed so much, but I still bank on it coming in *Future Sight*.

Pick: Mogg War Marshal

Pack 1, Pick 6

Thallid Germinator, Terramorphic Expanse, Ancient Grudge, Greenseeker, Foriysian Interceptor, Basal Sliver, Drifter *il-Dal*, Opaline Sliver, Assembly-Worker, Sindbad

Click [here](#).

The **Terramorphic Expanse** is tempting, especially on top of the **Gemhide Sliver**, because it would mean that I could splash any single coloured card that comes my way. Unfortunately, **Thallid Germinator** is a great card, and I know I'm in green. The Germinator gets even better with **Sprout Swarm** and fits cosily into my deck.

Pick: Thallid Germinator

Pack 1, Pick 7

Ivory Giant, Clockspinning, Sidewinder Sliver, Viscid Lemures, Mwonvuli Acid-Moss, Dread Return, Fool's Demise, Calciform Pools, Funeral Charm

Click [here](#).

Here I have the option between **Funeral Charm** and **Mwonvuli Acid-Moss**. I think the Charm is an easily replaceable card (**Feebleness**, **Midnight Charm**, etc.) and I might not even be playing black as I haven't seen a good black card since the Death. The Acid-Moss is a personal favourite of mine and I play it whenever opportunity opens the door. I want to cut green and also keep the fattie/**Arena** plan open.

Pick: Mwonvuli Acid-Moss

Pack 1, Pick 8

Ironclaw Buzzardiers, Detainment Spell, Bewilder, Call to the Netherworld, Cyclopean Giant, Opaline Sliver, Voidmage Husher, Aspect of Mongoose

Pick: Ironclaw Buzzardiers

Pack 1, Pick 9

Scarwood Treefolk, Shadow Sliver, Ophidian Eye, Pendelhaven Elder, Quilled Sliver, Arena, Island

As expected, the **Arena** wheels. Now I'm definitely looking for any fattie that comes my way. It should be noted that you play the **Arena** in place of a spell, not a land, as it does not tap for mana.

Pick: Arena

Pack 1, Pick 10

Drudge Reavers, Pentarch Ward, Jedit's Dragoons, Sprout, Foriysian Interceptor, Aetherflame Wall

Pick: Jedit's Dragoons

Pack 1, Pick 11

Clockspinning, Sangrophage, Spirit Loop, Truth or Tale, Island

Pick: Spirit Loop

Pack 1, Pick 12

Gaze of Justice, D'Avenant Healer, Wormwood Dryad, Two-Headed Sliver

Pick: Wormwood Dryad

Pack 1, Pick 13

Brass Gnat, Screeching Sliver, Paradise Plume

Pick: Screeching Sliver

Pack 1, Pick 14

Ancient Grudge, Foriysian Interceptor

Pick: Ancient Grudge

Pack 1, Pick 15

Clockspinning

A fairly disappointing first pack. I'm solidly locked into green with the option to go into almost any colour. **Sudden Death** pulls me towards black, but I've received enough signals to suppose that red will be open in *Future Sight*. Let's see what *Planar Chaos* has to offer.

Pack 2, Pick 1

Ridged Kusite, Saltfield Recluse, Needlepeak Spider, Reality Acid, Deadly Grub, Citanul Woodreaders, Brain Gorgers, Keldon Marauders, Simian Spirit Guide, Fa'adiyah Seer, Primal Plasma, Phantasmagorian, Hunting Wilds, Shrouded Lore, Braids, Conjuror Adept

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This is a very empty booster. The most powerful card is **Saltfield Recluse**, and I haven't ruled out going White here. All I have so far is a **Jedit's Dragoons**, but the Recluse is a temptation. On top of this, I already have a **Gemhide Sliver**, so splashing white shouldn't be too hard (I might also pick up some **Evolution Charms**), and if I do wind up black then I can search it out if I pick up a **Blight Speaker**. However, I'm not going to stray from the green path, so I'll take the **Citanul Woodreaders**, one of my favourite cards. It will help me dig towards the **Spectral Force** and is another incentive to play the **Mwonvoli Acid-Moss**, as well as any future fatties I will snatch up.

Pick: Citanul Woodreaders



Pack 2, Pick 2

Giant Dustwasp, Stingscourger, Synchronous Sliver, Utopia Vow, Dawn Charm, Uktabi Drake, Blightspeaker, Aquamorph Entity, Melancholy, Merfolk Thaumaturgist, Gossamer Phantasm, Timecrafting, Pouncing Wurm, Torchling

Click [here](#).

Pouncing Wurm, **Utopia Vow**, **Uktabi Drake**, and **Stingscourger** all fall by the wayside this pick as I have to choose between the ever-powerful, on-colour **Giant Dustwasp** and the bomblicious **Torchling**. This is a tight pick, but I find it hard to pass **Morphling's** twin, especially as I feel that I want to be red anyway.

Pick: Torchling

Pack 2, Pick 3

Utopia Vow, Spitting Sliver, Aven Riftwatcher, Stingscourger, Evolution Charm, Shade of Trokair, Fury Charm, Piracy Charm, Skirk Shaman, Revered Dead, Deadwood Treefolk, Mantle of Leadership, Harmonize

Click [here](#).

Once more, as great as **Stingscourger** is, it still pales in significance, as do all the other good cards in the pack, to both green card advantage spells. This is an incredibly difficult decision. One has to take into account that we have **Spectral Force**, **Torchling**, and **Citanul Woodreaders**. These influence both cards: they are more expensive cards, meaning that the **Deadwood Treefolk** might make the deck a little top heavy, but they are also great creatures to return with the **Treefolk**. Arguing for the **Harmonize**, I feel that this has a better chance of me getting to my decks bombs, rather than getting them back if they die in the first place. Also, the more card draw I have the more likely I will be to turn **Arena** into a bomb (as there will be a higher chance of combining it with a large enough creature).

Pick: Harmonize

Pack 2, Pick 4

Dawn Charm, Cradle to Grave, Reality Acid, Citanul Woodreaders, Pallid Mycoderm, Keldon Marauders, Dust Corona, Essence Warden, Simian Spirit Guide, Auramancer's Guise, Waning Wurm, Groundbreaker

Pick: Citanul Woodreaders

Pack 2, Pick 5

Midnight Charm, Vitaspore Thallid, Deadly Grub, Firefright Mage, Blightspeaker, Seal of Primordium, Bog Serpent, Cautery Sliver, Lavacore Elemental, Frozen Aether, Fungal Behemoth

Pick: Blightspeaker

Pack 2, Pick 6

Battering Sliver, Utopia Vow, Veiling Oddity, Ghost Tactician, Fury Charm, Healing Leaves, Mana Tithe, Melancholy, Dismal Failure, Tidewalker

Pick: Utopia Vow

Pack 2, Pick 7

Dreamscape Artist, Ridged Kusite, Ghost Tactician, Wistful Thinking, Dash Hopes, Revered Dead, Melancholy, Vampiric Link, Frenetic Sliver

Pick: Melancholy

Pack 2, Pick 8

Spitting Sliver, Evolution Charm, Brain Gorgers, Dust Corona, Vitaspore Thallid, Fa'adiyah Seer, Dormant Sliver, Mantle of Leadership

Pick: Evolution Charm

Pack 2, Pick 9

Ridged Kusite, Deadly Grub, Brain Gorgers, Fa'adiyah Seer, Phantasmagorian, Shrouded Lore, Braids, Conjurer Adept

Pick: Brain Gorgers

Pack 2, Pick 10

Utopia Vow, Uktabi Drake, Melancholy, Merfolk Thaumaturgist, Gossamer Phantasm, Timecrafting

This is a pick where I feel I differ from a lot of other players. Both [Utopia Vow](#) and [Uktabi Drake](#) bring something to the table that green often lacks—be it removal or evasion. I am light on both right now, and looking back it might have been in my interests to take the [Utopia Vow](#), as I have three great card drawers and the Vow will help me win in the late game, but I felt like I needed a few more win conditions, so I took the personally favoured flyer.

Pick: [Uktabi Drake](#)

Pack 2, Pick 11

Spitting Sliver, Evolution Charm, Fury Charm, Revered Dead, Mantle of Leadership

Pick: Evolution Charm

Pack 2, Pick 12

Reality Acid, Dust Corona, Auramancer's Guise, Waning Wurm

Pick: Reality Acid

Pack 2, Pick 13

Deadly Grub, Firefright Mage, Bog Serpent

Pick: Bog Serpent

Pack 2, Pick 14

Ghost Tactician, Melancholy

Pick: Melancholy

Pack 2, Pick 15

Dash Hopes

After a few initial trying picks, the rest of the pack was pretty simple. There were three major impacts to the deck: three quality card advantage spells, two **Evolution Charms** meaning I can splash anything I want and return the Woodreaders in the late game, and **Torchling** prompting me towards red a little further. **Arena** is still a highly influential factor and I want to pick up a few more fatties to power it, now that I have enough card draw to piece them together. I picked up a lot of filler black cards to go with the **Sudden Death** if red dries up or I open some strong black cards, but for now I want to play the game-winning **Torchling**.

Pack 3, Pick 1

Gathan Raiders, Llanowar Augur, Augur of Skulls, Sprout Swarm, Samite Censer-Bearer, Aven Augur, Frenzy Sliver, Ghostfire, Fomori Nomad, Patrician's Scorn, Logic Knot, Snake Cult Initiation, Emblem of the Warmind, Imperiosaur, Jhoira of the Ghitu

Click [here](#).

Straight off the bat we're faced with a four-way decision of great magnitude. Imperiosaur, **Sprout Swarm**, **Gathan Raiders**, and **Ghostfire** are all very viable options. I feel like I can take the Raiders out of the equation because they seem inferior to the Imperiosaur, and as much as I need removal, I feel that the two green cards are powerful enough to single games single-handed. I find this a hard decision even were it in a vacuum, but there are two factors to take into account—the **Arena** and the card draw. The card draw is an interesting one here as once I've drawn all these additional cards, I need to win the game still. **Sprout Swarm** has the power to turn a game around all by itself, but I feel like I already have a bunch of powerful late game bombs—whilst the **Imperiosaur** has an immediately powerful effect on the game as soon as it shows up, as well as comboing well with the **Arena**.



Pick: Imperiosaur

Pack 3, Pick 2

Gift of Granite, Quiet Disrepair, Foresee, Rift Elemental, Augur *i/-*Vec, Llanowar Empath, Whip-Spine Drake, Mass of Ghouls, Lucent Liminid, Thornweald Archer, Flowstone Embrace, Cloudseeder, Minions' Murmurs, Llanowar Reborn

Click [here](#).

Llanowar Reborn, Llanowar Empath, Thornweald Archer and Flowstone Embrace are our choices. I love the land as it's a free card in your deck, but it isn't as powerful as the other options. The Empath is an absolutely great card, but right now I need both two-drops and answers to flyers, so I can discard him in favour of the Archer. However, I have absolutely no removal spells (I guess I really should have taken the **Utopia Vow** over the **Uktabi Drake**) and would have taken the Embrace here even had I a plethora of them.

Pick: Flowstone Embrace

Pack 3, Pick 3

Grave Peril, Marshaling Cry, Kavu Primarch, Emberwilde Augur, Frenzy Sliver, Mesmeric Sliver, Patrician's Scorn, Sarcomite Myr, Henchfiend of Ukor, Thornweald Archer, Char-Rumbler, Utopia Mycon, Nihilith

Click [here](#).

Again, I'm trapped between two great cards: Kavu Primarch or Thornweald Archer. This is the kind of pick where you are torn between deck priorities. I need fatties to fuel the **Arena**, but I also need early drops to stay alive so my card advantage gets me there. Between these two pressing issues, the need to stay alive is the greater as I already have a tonne of great cards that will keep me busy in the end game.

Pick: Thornweald Archer

Pack 3, Pick 4

Unblinking Bleb, Llanowar Augur, Riddle of Lightning, Venser's Diffusion, Kavu Primarch, Homing Sliver, Lymph Sliver, Blind Phantasm, Virulent Sliver, Stronghold Rats, Dakmor Salvage, Centaur Omenreader

Click [here](#).

Future Sight isn't going easy on me. I pumped a fist when I saw another Primarch, but then I saw the **Centaur Omenreader** and I knew I would be torn with indecision. Normally the Centaur gets the nod, but I'm still preoccupied with fatties. Were it just a decision between the two I think I would still go with the Centaur, even if only to make my Woodreaders a turn early. However, there is a **Riddle of Lightning** still in the pack and I need removal more than Snow White needed her Dwarves.

Pick: Riddle of Lightning

Pack 3, Pick 5

Bogardan Lancer, Grave Peril, Wrap in Vigor, Nessian Courser, Grave Scrabblers, Henchfiend of Ukor, Lymph Sliver, Homing Sliver, Ramosian Revivalist, Second Wind, Street Wraith

Pick: Nessian Courser

Pack 3, Pick 6

Augur *il*-Vec, Petrified Plating, Bogardan Lancer, Venser's Diffusion, Blind Phantasm, Edge of Autumn, Fleshwrither, Bloodshot Trainee, Magus of the Moon, Wrap in Vigor

Pick: Edge of Autumn

Pack 3, Pick 7

Oblivion Crown, Saltskitter, Cutthroat *il*-Dal, Deepcavern Imp, Logic Knot, Lucent Luminid, Vedalken Aethermage, Virulent Sliver, Arcanum Wings

Pick: Lucent Luminid

Pack 3, Pick 8

Oblivion Crown, Cutthroat *il*-Dal, Mass of Ghouls, Vedalken Aethermage, Grinning Ignus, Sliversmith, Dust of Moments, Magus of the Moat

Pick: Grinning Ignus

Pack 3, Pick 9

Llanowar Augur, Augur of Skulls, Frenzy Sliver, Patrician's Scorn, Logic Knot, Snake Cult Initiation, Emblem of the Warmind

Pick: Augur of Skulls

Pack 3, Pick 10

Gift of Granite, Quiet Disrepair, Rift Elemental, Augur *il*-Vec, Minions' Murmurs, Llanowar Reborn

Pick: Llanowar Reborn

Pack 3, Pick 11

Grave Peril, Marshaling Cry, Frenzy Sliver, Patrician's Scorn, Utopia Mycon

Pick: Marshaling Cry

Pack 3, Pick 12

Llanowar Augur, Lymph Sliver, Virulent Sliver, Dakmor Salvage

Pick: Lymph Sliver

Pack 3, Pick 13

Grave Peril, Wrap in Vigor, Homing Sliver

Pick: Wrap in Vigor

Pack 3, Pick 14

Petrified Plating, Bogardan Lancer

Pick: Bogardan Lancer

Pack 3, Pick 15

Oblivion Crown

Time Spiral Block Draft Deck		
Main Deck 40 cards		
1 Arena	1 Mogg War Marshal	1 Flowstone Embrace
7 Mountain	1 Torchling	1 Riddle of Lightning
9 Forest	2 Citanul Woodreaders	1 Edge of Autumn
1 Llanowar Reborn	1 Gemhide Sliver	2 Evolution Charm
18 lands	1 Imperiosaur	1 Harmonize
	1 Nessian Courser	1 Mwonvuli Acid-Moss
	1 Penumbra Spider	1 Utopia Vow
	1 Spectral Force	1 Wrap in Vigor
	1 Thallid Germinator	
	1 Thornweald Archer	9 other spells

1 [Uktabi Drake](#)
1 [Wormwood Dryad](#)

13 creatures

The rest of the draft was an auto-pilot, without any decisions to make. I managed to pick up a crucial [Edge of Autumn](#) and the ever-pleasing, slot-filling [Nessian Courser](#). The land wheeled and a late [Wrap in Vigor](#) made it into the deck as its sole combat trick. I cut the [Grinning Ignus](#) in favour of the [Mwonvuli Acid-Moss](#) as I feel it has less impact on the game.

Interestingly, I could have taken the [Mass of Ghouls](#) and [Deepcavern Imp](#) that came late as well as the [Augur of Skulls](#), but I feel that black would not have been worth playing in red's stead even then.

In the first game, I had a strong opening draw of a turn-four [Imperiosaur](#), followed by a [Spectral Force](#) and the [Arena](#), whilst he made a few irrelevant creatures that died to the [Arena](#) and the [Spectral Force](#) swung past his black creatures. I boarded in a [Swamp](#) and the [Bog Serpent](#) for the second game, where I again started killing off his men with the [Arena](#), but he attacked me down to 6 with a continually shadowed [Trespasser //Vec](#) before I [Utopia Vowed](#) it. I had drawn my [Swamp](#) but he had a [Street Wraith](#) to keep the pressure up. I [Riddle of Lightning](#)ed it, but he brought it back with a [Deadwood Treefolk](#). I had found my [Spectral Force](#), and when the Wraith finally made it into the red zone, I sacrificed my [Swamp](#) to [Edge of Autumn](#) to block and won the game from there.

I played Sam Gomersall in the second round. He had a very good blue-red deck featuring the two [Conflagrates](#) I had passed in the draft. We had a gruelling war of attrition in the first game. I pulled ahead with a [Citanul Woodreaders](#), which I recast off an [Evolution Charm](#) once it died. He had a [Magus of the Arena](#) to put me in a tight spot, but [Torchling](#) traded with it. I used my second [Evolution Charm](#) to bring the rare back, and he finished the job a few turns later.

Game 2 was a similar state of affairs where I fell behind to his [Magus of the Arena](#), but I found a [Thornweald Archer](#) to stop him from activating it. The Archer died to a [Grapeshot](#) and the Magus starting killing off my guys. I fell to 9 before I found a Charm to bring it back from the dead to stave off the Magus again. I had my own [Arena](#) but nothing to utilize it with until I drew my Imperiosaur. It seemed like the two 5/5s would trade to my [Arena](#) activation, but Sam drew the [Brute Force](#) to keep his alive. The Archers still held him off from activating his, until his [Aetherflame Wall](#) became large enough to be used as his activation body. He activated his Magus, he chose the Wall and I chose my Archer, and the Archer stayed alive thanks to my [Wrap in Vigour](#), placing us in an [Arena](#) stalemate once again.

I had my [Uktabi Drake](#) that somehow managed to rule to air for several turns before dying to a [Ghostfire](#) but managing to drop Sam to 5 life. My deck was running a little light on action with both my bombs and a [Woodreaders](#) left. I drew the [Torchling](#) and finally enough [Mountains](#) to make a risky all-in, forcing all his blockers to block the red rare whilst the overlap felled him to zero.

I split the finals. It was a great deck but lacked good enough answers to cards like [Prodigal Sorcerer](#) and [Saltfield Recluse](#), which I feared my finals opponent might have, or lots of black removal which my fatties would have difficulty with. The deck was powerful, mainly thanks to a combination of its rares and the deck's ability to draw them reliably. A few more removal spells and it would have been a great deck.

Best of luck at Nationals,

Q

P.S. I've been lucky enough to be included in the European Ballot of the Invitational this week. Although I feel that there are other players in the ballot who might well deserve the slot more than I, I really, really would like to go! If you would like to vote for me, please do. Thanks.

*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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