

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Take Your Pick

Quentin Martin
 Limited Information
 Tuesday, August 28, 2007



Tenth Edition has been out online for a few weeks now and it's given us enough time to make the needed changes, although not too many, from what we learnt from drafting *Ninth*. The most important factors are still removal, card advantage, and fatties. It is still a very slow format where games are often determined by who floods first, meaning it is not so important to be the first person to get to your good stuff, but to be the person with more. I've only done a few drafts, including a crazy 2HG one at Nationals, but these few games, and the observations I've made whilst watching others, have given what I feel is enough to share with you. When I get back, I'll bring you a *Tenth* draft walkthrough to put some of this theory into action. All these pick orders are a work in progress and, if mentioned, susceptible to colour combination alterations.



White

There are lots of junky white commons, most of which resemble *Grizzly Bears*. This is still a format where early speed seldom matters; rather what counts is how much influence a card will have when drawn in the late game. These sorts of little beaters get dwarfed quickly and can only really be viably played in white-blue quick evasive decks and red-black burn decks (which I'll be talking about later).

I love the return of *Loxodon Mystic*, which was always a favourite of mine, and I feel the card is almost stronger than the *Master Decoy* it replaces. The Decoy tended not to do too much stuff in the early game as your mana was better spent elsewhere, and the Mystic not only beats for more when you need it to, but its size offers two new possibilities. When on D, it can be used to deter two-power creatures from attacking and then tap a potential blocker in the end step (rather than just taking out the largest attacker as the Decoy was more prone to do). It is also more resilient to burn spells, although in the new format it will only really dodge *Shock* and a weak *Spitting Earth*.

Pacifism still reigns supreme, because it simply gets there more often than not. Its far weaker alternative, *Heart of Light*, can find a place in white-blue decks with lots of flyers, where it becomes much akin to *Pacifism*. In decks like this, you should pick *Aven Cloudchaser* lower, as you will often be destroying one of your own cards. Despite this, I still love the Cloudchaser, as there are several juicy new targets for it like *Persuasion* and *Arcane Teachings*.

Although the loss of the almost unkillable *Aven Flock* is a blow, its void is amply filled by *Skyhunter Patrol* and *Wild Griffin*. The Patrol was hard to kill the first time around and it still holds true, beating up almost every other common flyer other than *Aven Windreader*. *Wild Griffin* is perfectly costed, as it fills a slight hole in the white mana curve whilst also being a great evasion creature. I think you will tend to pick it over the Cloudchaser, especially if you already have a playable enchantment or two.

Ghost Warden presents a conundrum that only more experience will provide an answer to. It can dominate the board like all repeatable pump effects have done in the past, but it is susceptible to the many things in the format that kill one-toughness dorks—*Prodigal Pyromancer*, *Afflict*, *Rod of Ruin*, and *Arcane Teachings* being easy examples. For now I feel he is better than *Angelic Wall*, but it is close. The Wall is loved in some decks where there is a lack of early defense or the curve is weak, and scorned in more aggressive decks where it is simply not needed. I love *Angelic Wall* because I am often found with white-blue evasion / card advantage decks, where I tend to prefer it to the weak *Skyhunter Prowler*. The Prowler is an overrated card that does little. It can't attack through many of the good flyers and doesn't do a good job of blocking ground-pounders. It tends to be in my sideboard most of the time, only coming in for the white mirror where it defends versus all the opposing flyers.

White does have two nifty combat tricks though: *Benalish Knight* and *Bandage*. Neither is outrageous in its own right, in fact, I'm not even that big a fan of the Knight; he tends to just fit the curve and occasionally get the job done. I think he's good versus black decks where he can ambush their 2/2s all day long. *Bandage* is one of my favourite Mental Magic cards, and its return is welcomed. Its cost is so cheap that many players will walk into it. It will foil many a removal spell and will help you make efficient doubles blocks and one up straight out trades.



PRODUCTS

PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Update on Rain Delay

MAGIC ONLINE

MESSAGE BOARDS

Magic General Forum
 magicthegathering.com Forum

RULES

White's Top Commons

Pacifism
Loxodon Mystic
Skyhunter Patrol
Wild Griffin
Aven Cloudchaser
Ghost Warden
Angelic Wall
Bandage
Benalish Knight
Skyhunter Prowler

In general, I dislike white because it has so few exciting reasons to play it. After **Pacifism**, the rest of the cards just seem like a poor Sealed Deck selection that are used to just make up the numbers. It's not as if the uncommons and rares are too inspiring either.

Blue

As always, blue has a lot of meat to it—the veins run deep. Evasion in **Aven Windreader**, **Snapping Drake**, **Aven Fisher**, and **Cloud Elemental**. Semi-removal in **Cancel**, **Remove Soul**, **Boomerang**, and **Unsummon**. Card advantage in the form of **Counsel of the Soratami** and **Sift**. **Sleight of Hand** has been replaced by **Peek**, which is one of my all-time pet favourites. **Peek** gives you so much information about the game, whether to lead with your bomb or save the counter or removal for something else. Unfortunately, there are so many good blue cards that it will seldom make the deck (although I did play five of them in a deck with **Quirion Dryad**...).

Merfolk Looter is the cream of the crop. In a format where most land past number five are redundant draws, this guy will turn them all into shiny new spells. He will help you curve out and find the answers to your opponent's problem cards. Running a close second is **Aven Windreader**, because he's just bigger than all the other common flyers and his ability will often come in handy when you want to know whether to overextend or not.

Snapping Drake is a great card, but comes in behind the Windreader because it dies to almost all the other flyers, gets owned by **Skyhunter Patrol**, and dies to **Shock**. **Aven Fisher** is, as always, awesome, providing both evasion and card advantage in one nifty package. **Cloud Elemental** is the surprise card for me. I started playing it because I was light on the curve or just needed more evasion, but it's absolutely great. I might start picking it higher. It dodges past lots of the other flyers, holds off a **Skyhunter Patrol**, can't be **Shocked**—and who wants to block with their turn-three evasion creature anyway?

Unsummon and **Boomerang** are difficult cards to rate. The cheaper is obviously superior, but it's hard to know when to pick it over once of the flyers. In general, if your deck is looking fairly tempo-orientated, or if the only way to deal with opposing bombs is to bounce / counter them, then it goes up in value.

Remove Soul is still a phenomonal card, neutralizing all of the format's monsters at a cheap, cheap price. It is joined by the initially deceiving **Cancel**. We've been playing it recently in a format where it seldom makes the main deck. In *Tenth* I feel it will make the main deck almost all of the time. I find it hard to rate on a pick order, because it keeps going up in my estimation. In a format so often about who draws/digs to their bombs first, it deals with everything for three mana, and in the late, often flooded, game, it is not too expensive to keep open when needed.

Dehydration is still the poor man's **Assassinate**, but it tends to get the job done when you have no other better tools to hand. It combos reasonably well with **Twitch**, which is a nuisance card that I think is bad but that might often be exactly what a deck needs. It might make it into tempo decks as the 23rd card, over **Peek**, because it can sometimes bring huge tempo shifts.

Blue's Top Commons

Merfolk Looter
Aven Windreader
Sift
Remove Soul
Snapping Drake
Aven Fisher
Unsummon
Cancel
Counsel of the Soratami
Cloud Elemental

Whereas with white, only the first three cards aroused any excitement, the top ten blue commons are all very playable and would all begrudgingly be found on the bench. It has always been my favourite colour in core set drafting and it continues to be, with more depth and possibly even more strength to boot.

Black



Black is a fairly balanced colour in *Tenth*. There are lots of little combos and not too much to shout home to your mama about. As with red, it will suffer from other players, especially green drafters, stealing its first few picks, but there is another angle the colour has to offer. If it is underdrafted, or if you force from the beginning, it is possible to end up with a near mono-colour deck. I feel this allows cards like **Looming Shade** to truly shine, makes great cards like **Distress** even better and late picks like **Severed Legion** far more maindeckable.

At first I was inclined to pick **Terror** over **Essence Drain**, because I felt it to be inherently better and cheaper, but I am siding with **Essence Drain** more and more. The life swing has a tremendous impact on the game and gives you more time to put the colour's engine into action. Almost every common creature in the format dies to it, it can kill both black and artifact creatures, and it can dome players.

My favourite thing about black is its graveyard recursion. The engine of **Recover** and **Gravedigger** means that you can continually loop through cards like **Ravenous Rats**, **Highway Robbers**, and **Phyrexian Ragers** to dig deeper into your deck or to provide an almost unavoidable kill condition. Not to mention that decks featuring multiples of the recursive elements will forever be able to bring their bombs back to life. It is this engine that tips black into one of the set's better colours and adds another element to drafting it, as you have to continually reassess picks in the light of how strong the engine is.

Afflict is a great card of old that will always be good. It has card advantage stamped all over it. However, there just aren't too many good targets for it (**Llanowar Elves**, **Merfolk Looter**, **Prodigal Pyromancer**, **Dusk Imp**, and **Ghost Warden**, to scrape the barrel a little bit). As such, it will often wind up playing the part of an **Aggressive Urge** (or **Bandage**...). This is still fine, but none too exciting. **Assassinate** is as good as it is in *Time Spiral-Planar Chaos-Future Sight* and gets picked at exactly the same level, fairly high because it is removal, but below all the top notch cards.

I love **Distress**. In a format all about the best card you have or the great trick in hand, this card single-handedly wins games. It will strip the reason they kept the hand away from them in the early game, and take the bomb or trick lurking in the wings later on. Its only major problem is that it requires a lot of black mana to be effective, and its value diminishes accordingly.

Mind Rot is also a good card because it both provides card advantage and takes away the opponent's last two cards, which are normally their best.

The choice between **Dusk Imp** and **Severed Legion** is a close one. I prefer the Imp, because although it dies to ping effects, it trades for **Snapping Drake** and is always evasion, while **Severed Legion** often runs afoul of unfeared creatures and is much harder to cast.



Black's Top Commons

Essence Drain
Terror
Gravedigger
Recover
Phyrexian Rager
Afflict
Assassinate
Distress
Mind rot
Highway Robbers
Dusk Imp
Severed Legion
Looming Shade

Although only the first eight cards are actually good, the colour does have surprising depth and can make up for its lack of sizable creatures with the late-picked **Mass of Ghouls**. I may be over-hyping the recursion engine, but I feel it is one of the main reasons to go black, and if you pick up creatures that want to be recursed early (like **Kavu Climber**) then, if it is flowing, going black might well be an option worth considering.

Red

Welcome to the set's worst colour. It has very few playables and doesn't even make up for it, as it normally does, by having the top few commons of the set. The colour seems to want to be really aggressive in a format where this is not a good thing. Maybe there are some turbo fast white-red decks fueled by **Lava Axes** and **Angelic Blessings** that can succeed, but I have yet to try this out and don't think it will do too well.

Unsurprisingly, the reprinted **Incinerate** is top of the list, followed by everyone's favourite repeatable effect—**Prodigal Pyromancer**—and closely in third place by **Shock**. After that, things go downhill fast.



Spitting Earth is the next best card, which unfortunately prompts you to play more **Mountains** to be effective, but it can get pretty devastating in the right deck. It is sad statement that the colour's best creature and fifth best card is **Hill Giant**. I think that sums up the colour's lack of depth succinctly enough. **Bloodrock Cyclops** is better than he looks, because there are so few large creatures out there that he will go unblocked for quite some time. I dislike **Bogardan Firefiend** as he is so fragile and you have little control over when he dies. Even when he does, he often won't kill anything good and will sometimes kill your own creature.

I quite like **Lava Axe** in this format. It is like the giant elbow that hangs over every game. Whenever my opponent plays **Mountains**, I continually live in fear of falling below 6 life. In **Tenth**, I think it is possible to draft a red-black drain deck with the black recursive engine, **Highway Robbers**, burn spells, **Lava Axes** and **Soul Feasts**. Look out for early packs where **Soul Feast** and **Lava Axe** will wheel so you can safely go this strategy. Again, I have yet to draft this type of deck, it just feels like a valid and fun option.

Red's Top Commons

Incinerate
Shock
Spitting Earth
Prodigal Pyromancer
Hill Giant
Bloodrock Cyclops
Lava Axe
Bogardan Firefiend

Red needs a big helping hand from its uncommons and rares, and I hope to only really be playing the colour if I open an **Orcish Artillery** or **Shivan Dragon**. Otherwise, I hope I'm playing two **Mountains** and some **Incinerates** in a green deck.

Green

Green runs fairly deep and does what it always has done. It has big men, acceleration, colour fixing, and no way to kill anything. One of the most important things about green, which adds a whole new layer of fun to a base set draft, is that it has several colour fixers at its fingertips—**Rampant Growth**, **Civic Wayfinder**, and **Terramorphic Expanse**. This means that green-based decks will often be four- or even five-colour, allowing you to take the best card from each pack and work the deck out from there.

Its lack of evasion and removal places a premium on **Giant Spider**, so much so that I feel it deserves the colour's top spot, even though cards like **Civic Wayfinder** and **Spined Wurm** are inherently more powerful. **Craw Wurm** is still the massive guy he was of old and still terrorizes little children the world over. In much the same fashion, **Giant Growth** is still as powerful as ever, allowing you to dodge burn spells and take down opposing fatties with the ease of tapping a **Forest**.

I've always loved **Kavu Climber**, because he provides a sizeable body for a reasonable cost and comes with the ever-juicy "draw a card" sentence. I prefer him to **Rootwalla** for this last reason, although the **Walla** tends to deal a tremendously large amount of damage, as he is unblockable for most of the game.

Acceleration is always great, but I have a feeling that getting there is less important than the cards you are getting to. That sentence grates the ears of English teachers the world over, but please forgive me. I mean that dropping an endless stream of large guys is more important than being the one to drop the first large creature but running out first.

It is a testament to green's strength that **Aggressive Urge** and **Stalking Tiger** feature so low down on its pick order despite being great cards in their own right. I am unsure exactly how to pick **Canopy Spider**, and I imagine it goes up depending on how much early defence you need and how little removal / fliers you have to deal with opposing winged creatures. I think that both **Commune with Nature** and **Llanowar Sentinel** are cute, but they will seldom do too much. The **Commune** is more playable if you have a bomb creature to get to, but I think the **Sentinels** will never really be more than unexciting 2/3 dorks. **Naturalize** might well be maindeckable, but for now, at least for me, the jury is still out.

Green's Top Commons

Giant Spider
Civic Wayfinder
Spined Wurm
Craw Wurm
Giant Growth
Kavu Climber
Rootwalla



Rampant Growth
Llanowar Elves
Aggressive Urge
Stalking Tiger

Much like in *Ninth*, I think green has a lot to offer, has a lot of playables, and if drafted correctly (using other colours to compensate for its shortcomings), is probably the second strongest colour in *Tenth*. I think the four- and five-coloured decks it allows will be both fun and strong to draft and I look forward to experimenting with them.

Rough Draft

I want to make a side note about **Rod of Ruin**. For some not-completely-known reason, it is phenomenally powerful. I think it is because not only is it a repeatable effect, and a removal-based one at that, it trumps cards like **Prodigal Pyromancer** because it is much, much harder to kill and can be played in any colour, providing some much needed relief to combinations such as white-blue.

For now, and until further experience proves otherwise, I would take [what I have said in the past](#) about *Ninth Edition* to still be true for *Tenth*. I'll leave you with what I think the top five common pick order is, although some of this involves some colour preference (I might well pick **Terror** over **Incinerate**, in fact; I think I dislike red enough to do so):

Tenth's Top Commons

Merfolk Looter
Essence Drain
Incinerate
Terror
Pacifism

I hope these pick orders are accurate, but I am sure that there are many errors that only drafting more will reveal. For now, if in doubt, take the card that draws more cards.

Q

*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.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Quentin Martin](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

