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Draft with the Masters

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Masters Edition was released a few days ago, and although its purpose was to introduce old cards for the Magic Online Classic formats, it has been available to play in Limited. We've been able to play with it in triple Masters Edition and Masters / Tenth / Tenth drafts and in Masters / Tenth Sealed. Obviously, this set wasn't designed for Limited, but this doesn't mean we can't have fun with it. It's a very small set which means, much like *Coldsnap*, we're able to analyze it very quickly and when we draft it, and it's almost like drafting a Constructed deck because you can be sure to end up with multiples of most commons, especially if they are late picks.

The set has several irregularities. There is no enchantment removal and no colour fixing. Most creatures are very small. There are plenty of one-toughness creatures. There are lots of colour-hosing spells, meaning that some cards' value goes up in certain matchups (like *Roots* in green-black versus an *Order of Leitbur*). There are, as was the nature of cards back in the day, plenty of cards with two or three coloured mana in their casting costs, which on top of the lack of fixing, makes for tight mana bases in exclusively two colour decks. In triple Masters, the three-colour gold cards are completely unplayable and can be discounted as blanks. There are also no combat tricks; only *Death Ward* (bad) and *Holy Light* are contenders for this category, meaning you can block and attack safely. I'm going to take a quick glance at each of the colours and what they have to offer, paying close attention to any synergistic plans we can come up with.

White

Unfortunately, white has very little to offer. I often feel that this is the case, largely because it occupies very little of the colour pie with any real stamp of authority. Blue has bounce, evasion, counters and card draw. Red has little men and burn (its chaos aspect, basically any card that gives your opponent an option or involves a coin flip, tend to be unplayable). Black has some evasion, some card draw, graveyard manipulation and hard removal. Green has acceleration, colour fixing and fat. White, on the other hand, has a splattering of basically nothing. It has some efficient weenies, good defence, a few fliers, no card advantage, and some pretty poor, mostly combat-reliant removal. It is the colour of average. *Masters* does not disappoint.

Exile stands alone as its best common, providing some great defensive removal that is normally obvious to spot a mile off. After that comes the *Order of Leitbur* and *Knights of Thorn*. The Order, as with their black counterpart, is an incredibly efficient creature that can dominate the late game due to being pretty unstoppable with a lot of mana behind them and go unblocked for the early turns. They do, however, represent a huge colour commitment in a colour you really do not want to be. Banding is the reason why the Knights are so good, and it is because they have a toughness of two and not one like the other two banders in the set. This means that they can effectively leapfrog onto the back of another creature whilst attacking so the two creatures must be blocked as if they were a single creature and then, to top it all off, you get to assign where combat damage goes rather than the defending player, meaning you will either spread it out so nothing dies (much like an *en-Kor* creature such as *Outrider en-Kor*) or dump all the damage on the weaker creature of the two. It works very similarly in defence, where you again choose where damage is dealt. Both creatures have the ever-annoying protection from [insert colour], to add to their value.



After these three cards, there is almost nothing. *Holy Light* is a surprisingly good card as lots of creatures in the format have one toughness or are alarmingly small, meaning that *Holy Light*, when used in conjunction with combat, can both save your guys and kill theirs. To summarize though, the colour has no good creature with power greater than two, and its only efficient removal can only kill attacking men. None of its uncommons or rares are good enough for you to want to force the colour, except maybe *Seraph*. I can see no reason why you would ever want to be white and I pray I never open *Seraph*.

Blue

For all those people who have followed my draft walkthroughs and have noticed a possibly unhealthy liking for this colour, it will be pleasing to know that I hate the colour in *Masters*. Like white, it has next to nothing to offer. Like white, its best common is the only real reason to be playing the colour at all—*Phantom Monster*. Not only is a guy with *Hill Giant* stats a monster in this format, but this guy rules the skies unrivalled.

Day One Wrap-up



After the Monster comes **Giant Tortoise**. This was always one of my favourite cards in the old Shandalar computer game, as you always started on a very low life total at the beginning of the game. It is probably because of Shandalar that I grasped the ins and outs of this format as quickly as I did. Here, the Tortoise blocks all of the pump Knights, **Erg Raiders** and **Ghazbán Ogres** that your opponent will throw at you, as well as blocking almost every other ground creature around, even several of the five mana ones. It is the ultimate defence whilst the Monsters swings gracefully above. **Word of Undoing** is the last of blue's good commons, doing what **Unsummon** has always done in the past.

Sea Sprite and **River Merfolk** are some random dorks that help bulk out the curve, although the Sprites are the better of the two as there aren't too many flyers in the format and they can annoy red mages to boot. **Arcane Denial** is nice to deal with the bombs of the format... but there are almost no bombs in the format, so never play the card. It is one of the few sources of card advantage around *for your opponent*, unless you counter your own bad spell (seldom worth playing it for, as you invest two cards and a lot of mana to draw three).

Very few of the rares are worth causing you to dip into blue, especially as the only good ones are creatures that fall to most of the set's removal. A weak colour that only really works out if you have plenty of **Phantom Monsters** and the odd **Serendib Efreet** or two.



Black

We reach the set's strongest colour, not red as is commonly believed. It is actually a contest as to what the colour's best common is: **Feast or Famine** or **Oubliette**. Other players have championed **Feast or Famine** because of its versatility. It can kill virtually anything, and against black decks it is a 2/2 with flash. I love it when you catch an attacking **Wyluli Wolf** with it, netting some much needed card advantage. The fact that it is an instant helps a lot too, allowing you to keep your options open. However, **Oubliette** is the far more versatile of the two because it kills absolutely everything. This set has no enchantment removal (**Nevinyrral's Disk** aside), meaning **Oubliette** gets the job done for good. Sure, it may have two black mana in its casting cost, but as we will soon learn, black is a heavy colour and you just have to factor this in whilst playing the colour.

Hyalopterous Lemure wins the award for the best name in the set. Knowing Wizards, it's probably an anagram of something but I'm not in the mood for figuring it out. Answers on a postcard. He is also black's best creature, being, effectively, a 3/3 flyer for five. Once more, this format's men are small, so this guy really shines. After that comes the stellar **Paralyze**. This card varies in strength depending on how aggressive your deck is, as in the late game there is nothing to stop them untapping their creature each turn and hitting you with it, or untapping it once and holding it back on defence. Then comes **Phyrexian Boon**, which is capable of offering several annoying creatures, like **Brothers of Fire**, but suffers because it just doesn't kill enough of the good creatures.

After the four removal and best creature come three great two-drops. It is pretty difficult to know when to pick these guys over each other as they all do different things. In my favourite triple **Masters** archetype, for example, I pick **Erg Raiders** very highly because I do not want too many ☠️ cards in my deck. In a void, **Cuombajj Witches** is probably the best because they block all the early guys and shut down so many of the one-toughness guys. They can be pretty hard to use effectively though, so make sure you don't accidentally kill off one of your guys from earlier combat damage. **Order of the Ebon Hand** is, as previously stated, a very solid guy. The Order and the Witches are close and I tend to pick whichever one is better for the deck at the time—depending on how defensive or aggressive I am.

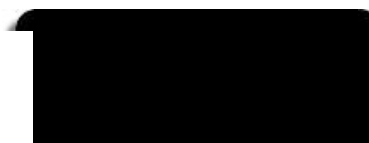


Mindstab Thrull rounds off the list and tends to be better than **Onulet** if you have no mana issues, especially as he is one of the few sources of card advantage the set offers. On top of the best commons, there are also plenty of good uncommons and rares like **Derelor** and **Hymn to Tourach**. The colour is deep, offering plenty of removal and some of the best creatures around. Much like blue in **Tenth**, I am in black in every draft.

Red

Red has the best common in the set—**Lightning Bolt**. As always, this card does way too much for its cost, and because everything is so small, it kills virtually everything. **Fissure** is equally capable of killing anything that moves. I have yet to use it as land destruction because I think that each deck has a limited amount of creatures that have a "must kill" sign strapped to their forehead, and you often have more removal than they have things worth killing, meaning you can neutralise their whole deck through tight, disciplined play.

Next into the breach is **Mountain Yeti**. There is nothing bad about this guy (except maybe his 🐼ness, but that can be excused in this set). He hoses both red and white and is the set's only common **Hill Giant**. He's a higher pick than **Brothers of Fire** simply because he is so solid. The Brothers rule in a format so filled with weak guys. I've definitely found



myself picking him over the Yeti from time to time as with enough mana, he becomes a machine gun. Combined with cards like **Shield of the Ages** (again strong in a format where things are small and games come down to attrition), it can be devastating. **Dwarven Soldier** is the last playable. I try not to have him in my decks as he gets trumped by every other two-drop around, but sometimes you just have to play him.

Stone Giant, **Basalt Gargoyle**, and **Dwarven Catapult** are all great uncommons to help lure you into red. The Catapult deserves special mention as it is so underrated. This card comes around late and is capable of being a one-sided **Wrath of God**. If you play correctly it can be crippling post-combat and will often *just* be a **Disintegrate** for an early creature. Red is a solid colour that unfortunately suffers for being too popular and overdrafted as a result. However, I would rather pick up the dregs of red than the solid picks in either white or blue.

Green

I thought that **Roots** was green's best common for the first draft until I played some games. Whilst it is an awesome card, being solid removal for any ground dwelling creature (remember, no enchantment removal), it is flyers that you really want to kill. I've lost several games holding up to three of these in my grip whilst I got beaten up by **Phantom Monsters**. Green's top spot is, unsurprisingly, the biggest common in the set—**Shambling Strider**. He is simply massive. He must be killed on the spot or the game will soon be yours. He is so much bigger than other creatures that with a little removal, you can make sure they can never assemble enough guys to block him effectively, and if they do they leave themselves open to any instant removal.

My next card might be a surprise to most of you, but he has been the cornerstone to my success. I have often picked him over the above green commons when I have multiples of him because he is the rock upon which my Masters draft strategy is based. Ladies and gentleman—the mighty **Ghazbán Ogre**. Combined with the much later pick of **Scryb Sprites**, this guy lets you come out of the blocks flying. Because he is so underrated you often end up with five or more copies of him, especially if you value him this highly. You can often afford to pick another card over him first time around because he will wheel. Why is he good? Sure, he gets trumped by plenty of other cards out there, but he allows you to get punishing starts, and your deck feels like a Constructed deck when you have enough of them. He is huge for his cost. I always get a warm feeling inside when he trades for their third-turn **Mindstab Thrull** and fourth-turn **Knights of Thorn**. Sure, I've had some awkward situations where I've led off with an Ogre and I've been Bolted to the dome. I was chatting with someone about how awesome they were going to be just before my first game in the format and he wasn't so sure. He was convinced that they would backfire too often. This is a screen shot from my first ever game with *Masters Edition*:





Ivory Tower. Awkward!

Next up comes **Wyluli Wolf**. Once more, because the guys are so little, his pump ability has more of an effect than you'd speculate. He also lets your Ogres keep hitting and get past cards like **Dragon Engine**. He is a little fragile with only one point of toughness, but this **Ghost Warden** is worth it. **Thorn Thallid** is a great filler card that tends to take something out every game. **Fyndhorn Elves** is cool, but acceleration is not really needed in this format as it comes down to who has the last big guy, not who gets there first. Often, my freshly topdecked Ogres will still be attacking unimpeded as late as turn thirteen. **Hungry Mist** is twenty-third card filler, but it will definitely trade with something.

Ifh-Biff Efreet, **Autumn Willow**, and **Thicket Basilisk** are all great non-commons that reward you for being in green. The colour is reasonably deep, but the best gift it brings are the Ogres (in my warped opinion, as some decks really do not want them).

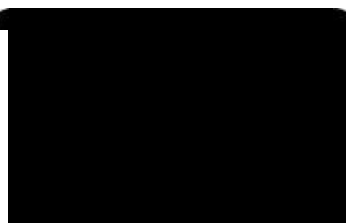
Artifacts and Gold

Discussed in no particular order (probably alphabetical as I work through the list on **Magic Online**): Ashnod's Transmogrator is often the last card I add to many decks. It looms over combat and has the nifty ability to fizzle **Feast or Famine** as it turns the recipient into an artifact. **Dragon Engine** is probably the set's watermark (like **Terramorphic Expanse** and other colourless commons throughout time) for each colour. I tend to pick it over **Mindstab Thrull**, **Thorn Thallid** and **Dwarven Soldier**. It blocks most things, can trade with most things and is a beating in the late game as it gives you something to channel all your excess mana into. **Onulet** is the set's ultimate filler and **Shield Sphere** probably makes blue decks and decks that have too much late game and nothing else to do early. I've boarded it in against very quick decks (like the one I will be talking about in a minute) as it tends to prevent around 10 damage.

For the uncommons, **Clockwork Beast** is massive and should be picked very highly. **Phyrexian War Beast** is big enough to be worth its morbid draw back, and **Walking Wall** is amazing. **Mishra's Factory** is also phenomenal.

Fire Covenant is probably the best card in the format, being an instant (!) one-sided **Wrath of God** for just three mana. It is a savage beating and is one of the many reasons I often end up in red-black.

The Final Analysis



I've reviewed most of these cards with an eye to playing triple *Masters Edition*, but almost everything (except for the **Ghazbán Ogres**) is applicable when the set interacts with *Tenth Edition*. Basically, things that earned their place because *Masters* creatures are so small depreciate in value. **Brothers of Fire** gets better, as does **Roots**, and blue cards become playable again.

A deck that I force whenever I don't open a **Fire Covenant** is green-black aggro. The basic principle of the deck is lots of very quick early creatures backed up by lots of removal. I often only run sixteen land. I pick **Ghazbán Ogres** over almost everything that isn't a removal spell. I think it might be the best archetype in the format. Here's an example of what a deck should look like (it was the second *Masters Edition* draft I did!):



The key cards are the Ogres, **Paralyzes** and **Erg Raiders**. Many versions also have **Witches** or **Orders** but they do not curve very well with the early green drops, which is the reason you pick **Erg Raiders** over them. The 24th card in this deck was a **Mishra's Factory**, in case you were wondering why I was playing so many land.

I really enjoy playing bizarre formats like the ones *Masters Edition* features in. You have to reassess cards all the time. It's enjoyable to play with all the old cards in such a new way. And, due to nature of the cards, some games are truly memorable. In the first game I played I came across an **Ivory Tower** and a **Moat**. I only had a couple of **Scryb Sprites** as fliers and had no way to win. Luckily, I was on the play so he would die of decking. I saved my **Fissures** and **Bolts** for his few fliers and decked him. Thanks to an early **Arcane Denial** from him that I did not draw cards off of, I decked him in the second game too. I played against a green-white deck in the finals of a *Masters / Tenth / Tenth* draft, and when I played a **Ravenous Rats** in the second game I took 5 when he discarded a **Psychic Purge** out of nowhere. One of my opponents had fourteen mana, a **Forcefield**, and a **Shield of the Ages** in play, effectively nullifying everything I could do. I had a **Mirror Universe** in hand, and I engineered the game so I switched the life totals around whilst on 1 life and then attacked him to tap him out and used the two **Bolts** I had sandbagged in hand to finally kill him.

I think all in all it's a great feeling to be playing with cards like **Time Elemental**, **Thawing Glaciers**, and **Giant Tortoise** again. If you never played with them the first time around you get to experience them for the first time, but for players who have been around the block like me, it is a pleasing trip down memory lane.

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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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