

Underrated All-Stars (and Translation to *Morningtide*)

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Limited Information
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hey, you guys playing cards?

Jon Becker here. I'm guessing most of you know me in some capacity—Pro Tour Coverage, Pro Tour playing (well, only if you were playing during the Nixon Administration), playing 41 cards a lot, or perhaps just general curmudgeonliness—but this week the Powers That Be have deigned to let me have a little slice of bandwidth to talk about Limited.

This is pretty exciting.

But what to write about? I was going to write about Jonny Magic's channeling Tom Champeng in the [Kuala Lumpur Top 8 draft](#), but [someone just did that](#). I was going to talk about a really really interesting draft which honestly had like five difficult choices to make, but a draft walkthrough won't really show you anything but my color and card preferences, which are of dubious use to you without a larger context of how I draft and approach drafts, so that won't work; instead, I just talked about it with [BDM](#) and put it to sleep (the answers, by the way, were [Muldriifter](#) (isn't it always), [Summon the School](#), "never," "of course," and "obviously"). So, instead I decided that I should do a bit on Dave Guskin's [Creature Type Web](#), complete with color pie and pizza charts, and four color analytical graphs, but wouldn't you know it, when I sat down last Tuesday night to write it, Dave Guskin had beaten me to it. With the math and everything. Damn your eyes Guskin! OK, I was never going to write about that, but I'm glad someone else did. Saves me a ton of grappling with graphing software, which (as is the case with much modern technology) is not my friend.

So, instead, I decided to write about something that isn't earth shattering, but I think bears discussion—something that I call BDM about literally six nights a week. I know that seems like a lot of times per week, but I am being literal (in the literal-literal sense, not the disturbing literal-figurative sense). I am around thirty cards from redeeming my eighth *Lorwyn* set. On [Magic Online](#), I have something in the range of one hundred and eighty thousand cards. Almost exclusively from drafting.

My name is Jon Becker, and I'm a draftaholic.

As such, I get to see a fairly ridiculous number of packs, and there are a number of cards that seem, to me, to be pretty consistently underdrafted. Let's meet some of the underdrafted all stars, and see if we can get an early jump on translating them into *Morningtide*.



The Spanish Inquisition

Shriekmaw. Man, do I love me a **Shriekmaw**. But who doesn't? A clear first pick ninety-eight times out of a hundred, irrespective of pack or color commitment, right? What would you say **Shriekmaw's** winning percentage is? It's pretty high. I mean, how often do you resolve a **Shriekmaw** and lose? One in seven or eight? Okay, it's unanimous, everyone loves the 'maw.

How about the Spanish Inquisition? You know who I mean. You never expect it, or see it coming. When it goes on the stack you let off an audible groan, because you know that you are about to get totally worked over. Guesses?

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Ok, really, here he is:



Yep. This guy has wrecked me at least ninety percent as often as **Shriekmaw** has; maybe as much as the 'maw, since **Briarhorn** can push that extra 3 through for the win, while **Shriekmaw** happily (but one-dimensionally) gaaks a troublesome animal. **Briarhorn** is fan-freaking-tastic. Yet, I (and I am sure you) routinely get **Briarhorn** third, fourth, fifth—I got one eighth just last night. Can you imagine what you would think of the "people" at your table if you got a fifth-pick **Shriekmaw**? Is your reaction different for **Briarhorn**? It should be, but not by all that much.

As boring as I am, I think at least two nights a week one of my calls to Brian starts like this:

Brian: Hello?

Me: Can you believe I just got a (insert arbitrarily late pick here) **Briarhorn**? That guy is the nuts!

Yes, yes, I'm sure YOU first- or second-pick **Briarhorn** all the time, and your girlfriend can confirm this, except she's from Canada, so we can't actually meet her ever, etc. (unless you are Canadian, and then your girlfriend likely is from Canada, and will be subjected to cross examination on this issue later). All I can tell you is that from hundreds and hundreds of actual drafts a lot of you are not taking this guy before fourth, fifth, sixth, because I get him there with staggering frequency.

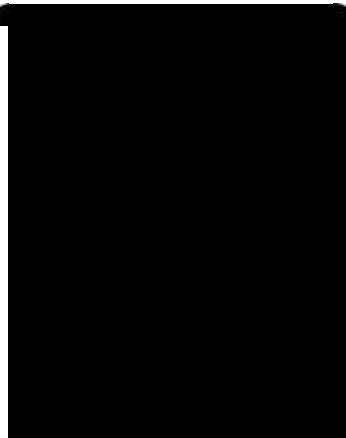
And why? **Briarhorn** is just as splashable as **Shriekmaw**, has a similar impact on the game in terms of its "comes into play" effect, and can do some things that 'maw cannot: it can ambush a huge guy and live; it can, and often does, two-for-one (or two for none, depending on your math, since **Briarhorn** generally leaves a 3/3 body behind) on defense, and it can be a reasonably priced blocker that doesn't die to a **Tarfire** or **Moonglove Extract**. I understand none of this is as seductive as the **Shriekmaw**, and **Shriekmaw** is obviously better, but we thought about the 'maw's winning percentage earlier—is **Briarhorn** all that much lower, or does he just play for the Rockies instead of the Red Sox?

How does **Briarhorn** translate into *Morningtide*? Well, in this case, R&D took care of you, and created a mechanic called reinforce, which has a distinctively **Briarhorn** flavor to it. Not that I've tasted an actual **Briarhorn**. Not recently. Wait, hold on.

Okay. Now let's find a **Burrenton Bombardier**.....Wow! In fact, they taste almost identical. Try it! I'll wait. See? They do a lot of the same things, but most people have been right on the bandwagon regarding the general awesomeness of reinforce. And, still, **Briarhorn** gets no love.

Probably the closest direct translation of **Briarhorn** in *Morningtide* is **Hunting Triad**. **Hunting Triad** can give +3/+3 as an instant (uncounterable!), and can make 3 power and toughness of Elf Warriors, all for the same cost as **Briarhorn**—a very reasonable 3. Also an uncommon (so you will see it just about as often—well, half as often, since there is only one *Morningtide* pack), and just as splashable. Yet, just like you might expect, in the dozen and a half *Morningtide* drafts I've done, the **Hunting Triad** floats its way around the table, looking for a home. This doesn't make sense with **Briarhorn**, and it doesn't make sense with **Hunting Triad**.

Wait, you already knew reinforce was awesome? Then why weren't you snapping up **Briarhorn**? And why am I getting Triads fifth? You didn't really



taste the **Briarhorn**, right? Good, good. Though if you did, I respect your dedication to your craft.

Hey, my draft is starting—I'll be right back. Of course I'm drafting! Didn't you read the introduction?

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Six packs and two missing rares from that set to the good, and I'm back. While I was drafting, I was thinking about how to frame this underdrafted card matter, and I wanted to clarify something. Just because something is underdrafted doesn't mean you have to jump on it at the first opportunity. It's more a function of being willing to pay a little more than current market for a card than paying for a card's actual value. For example, with **Briarhorn**,

let's say this guy is a second pickable quality card. Does that mean you have to take him second? Nope, because the general public, at the moment, considers **Briarhorn** a fourth- or fifth-pick quality card. So if you are willing to pay a little more—say, taking him third—you will end up getting a bargain on his actual value, and should have no problem beating the market for his services. It's kind of like in fantasy football, where almost no one takes a kicker until the ninth round; if you take one in the eighth, you won't have spent considerably more than anyone else, but you will almost assuredly end up with the kicker for the Patriots instead of the kicker for the Chiefs.

Burly Hurly

Another undervalued card which was (re)brought to my attention a few minutes ago is the innocuous Burly Hurly.



No, no, no. I mean **Hurly-Burly**!



Do you draft this card? Do you eschew it as chaff? Well, like, **Briarhorn**, this one doesn't go highly, but unlike **Briarhorn**, it probably shouldn't. That doesn't mean you shouldn't take it, just that you should take it a little more highly than you do (I'll bet there has never been a **Hurly-Burly** that hasn't lapped), or you should hate draft it a little more often, and you should definitely play it a lot more often than you do as well.



Admittedly, **Hurly-Burly** doesn't appear all that impressive at first blush, a little less than half a **Pyroclasm**. But the uses! It is a wrecker of Merfolk and a ruiner of Elves. It kills half of the Faeries in the environment and a third of the Kithkin. It lets you play aggressively with your slightly smaller men than your opponent, knowing that if he or she makes all the "right" blocks, you will likely be able to clear most of the board and start fresh on the creature front. If you love/hate **Silvergill Douser** as much as I do, then this little card is for you. I know that if I am blue-black Faeries, or Merfolk, or even Elves, I snap this thing up if I see it floating late, because while it is a weapon with a narrow application, that narrow application is, well, me.

Hurly-Burly is often my last cut, and more often than not, I am sad not to have it in my deck. Take, for example, the draft I just came back from. I was playing black-green, a mix of Treefolk and Elves with **Warren Pilferers** and some removal, but with two **Fertile Grounds** and access to a **Vivid Marsh**. I had, conveniently, drafted two **Hurly-Burly** (something like 12th and 13th out of separate packs), in part to protect my little elf engine, but also in case I ran into Merfolk, since there were at least three **Silvergill Douser** that I saw. I didn't main deck them, since my deck was pretty smooth as it was (and even 40 cards), but man, when my Round 1 opponent led with the patented opening of **Island, Springleaf Drum, Island, Silvergill Douser**, I sure wished that I had. I lost that one, more to recursive **Sower of Temptation** than anything else, but my opponent played two **Douser** and a **Goldmeadow Harrier**. So, Game 2, I ditched two higher-end curve cards and a **Swamp**, bringing in the **Vivid Marsh** and the two **Hurly-Burly**. My opener was **Forest, go**. His opener? You got it, **Island, Springleaf Drum**. My play? **Forest, Fertile Ground**. His? C'mon, you know this script already, don'tcha? **Island Silvergill Douser, tap Douser and Springleaf Drum for ♣, Goldmeadow Harrier**.

Did I have the **Hurly-Burly**? Would I be telling you this story if I didn't?

I'll bet my opponent would have been much happier if he had hated up the Pack 3 late **Hurly-Burly** instead of taking some random on-color card sitting in his sideboard.

Even in matches where I don't think it will end up being particularly useful and cut it, at least half the time I end up wishing that it were somewhere in the deck. I don't know if I have ever been sad to draw the **Hurly-Burly**.

Have you ever reset someone's **Bitterblossom** horde with **Hurly-Burly**? It's pretty satisfying.

And it only gets better in *Morningtide*. Check out this little guy, **Hurly-Burly's** animal counterpart:



This guy is **Hurly-Burly**, except he can block and beat. Well, chump and peck, really, but man, does a Merfolk deck hate to see this little guy. They can't play the **Silvergill Douser** or **Pestermite** or **Goldmeadow Harrier** into him. They will generally have to use one of their precious removal spells to deal with him and, as we all know, time is all the Merfolk deck needs to do its thing. If this guy never kills anything but buys you two turns of development, he has done his job. If he kills a **Silvergill Douser** (plus?), he has done it in spades. And hey, what else is cool about this guy? That sneaky reinforce mechanic makes him even more attractive. Imagine reinforcing a **Burrenton Bombardier** on a **Festercreep**—multiple uses without losing the carrier? No deck likes to see that.

But, again, as is the case with **Hunting Triad**, no one takes this guy. Is it because he isn't pretty looking? Does he suffer from *acute non-Guayism*? I think this might be the case. **Festercreep** does basically all that **Hurly-Burly** does, but in a **Seal**-like form—it just sits there for when you need it, and, more importantly, has an impact on your opponent's board development, since (unlike **Hurly-Burly**) they can see it coming, and it will have to be dealt with prior to exploiting a strategy which focuses on tokens (**Summon the School**, **Elves**) or on 1 toughness men (**Douser**, **Harrier**, **Smokebraider**). True, you can't get lucky on the you-have-1-toughness-flyers-and-I-have-1-toughness-ground-men thing, but in a game of little edges this guy buys you a lot of time against a lot of decks, and he should get more consideration than he seems to be getting.

Alrighty, I think we have room for one more, but which one . . . **Distant Melody**, the Poor Man's **Mulldrifter**? **Coffenor's Plans**? Oop—my daughter is paging me, brb.

Dora Star

My daughter is three and a half, and basically never sleeps. Well, she naps, and then wakes up with a list of demands ranging from very specific combinations of binkies (pacifiers to the non-parents out there), juice, covers,

no covers, animals (though never **Festercreep**), more light, less light, air conditioning, a story, peace in the Middle East, the return of *Arrested Development* —you name it, she has wanted it at one point or another. Although I am an attorney by day, I have the night shift with my daughter, and this is where I get a lot of my drafting time in.

She also takes basically anything I own, when she wants it, as hers. Now, I am guilty of distracting her with **Magic** cards when I am trying to get something done, but she only likes the pretty ones. Anything with a "tinkerbell" on it is as good as gone. Periodically, I raid her room and get the stack of cards back, and while I was putting her back to bed just now, I reclaimed a small stack of cards. As you may have deduced, my daughter is a Faeries enthusiast, and the stack included a **Glen Elendra Pranksters** (perfect card for her) and an **Inspired Sprite** (also pretty descriptive), **Islands** (foresightful to bring land for the draft), and an **Amoeboid Changeling**. Why the changeling, I wondered, since it's not a Faerie? (Okay, it IS a Faerie, but she doesn't know that.) It's because it looks like a Dora star.



I know I am the only person to call the last card I want to talk about today the Dora Star, because I have tried to make the name catch on for months, and no one is buying it. Really, unless you have a kid under the age of four, I don't know why you would, but if you DO, then you certainly watch Dora the Explorer, and this guy looks like he was ripped straight out of Dora-land and into *Lorwyn*.

What can I say, my daughter is right on the money here. **Amoeboid Changeling** (which I've misspelled three different ways so far, according to spellchecker) is criminally underdrafted.

This guy is the Swiss army knife of changelings. Are you tribal? So is he. Tribe? If you can make blue mana, doesn't matter. Typically, colorwise, he is obviously a Merfolk or a Faerie, but he is everything good, and can be removed (or can make any of your creatures be removed) for every champion effect in the game. AC is a Giant for your **Thundercloud Shaman**, an Elf for your **Wren's Run Packmaster**, a Faerie for your **Mistbind Clique** or **Peppersmoke**, and a Merfolk for your . . . Okay, no one plays **Wanderwine Prophets** . . . um, to play your **Silvergill Adept** and your **Wren's Run Vanquisher** on consecutive turns.

But Becker, every changeling does that, what *e*lse can you give me?

You need one of your nonconforming animals to join a tribe? Done. This guy saves an extra man from the **wrath of the giants**, and immunizes your team from **Consuming Bonfire** and **Eyebright's Ending**. How about screwing with your opponent's plans? **Amoeboid Changeling** is the proverbial sabó in the works. Your opponent plays Packmaster with a single Elf on board? To the bin. **Nova Chaser** off that Elemental Harbinger? To the bin. Your **Boggart Loggers** have nothing to do? With a little help from the Dora Star, that **Purity** or **Dread** is as good as gone. Need to get rid of that **Boggart Mob** with your own **Consuming Bonfire**? Give him all creature types and FOOM (capitalization required by the Comic Book Illustrators Union), no more pesky Goblin-Treefolk. Change math mid-combat on your opponent's **Silvergill Douser** or Jagged Scar Archers, maybe fizzle a **Streambed Aquitects** activation or toggle a lord ability. There is no end to this guy's uses.

But, with all of that said, and as useful as he is, **Amoeboid Changeling** is, almost by definition, in straight *Lorwyn*, a midrange pick. This is because he enables everyone, but, by himself, he doesn't do all that much. I think I have taken **Amoeboid Changeling** as high as third, but I am ecstatic if I get him fifth or later, which is pretty often. While he isn't a high pick, he has no business lapping the table.

Could this guy get better? You bet. **Morningtide** makes **Amoeboid Changeling** better. A lot better. Let's take, for example, kinship. Want to make sure your opponent's kinship never triggers? **Amoeboid Changeling** is your man—er, 'moeba. Want to make sure your kinship always triggers on a creature or tribal card? Done. The Dora Star can power up your (or power down your opponent's) **Pack's Disdain**, **Coordinated Barrage**, or **Roar of the Crowd**, and changes **Rivals' Duel** from **Dead Ringers** clunky into, I dunno, **Reckless Spite** sexy. Okay, not that sexy, but much, much better than as printed. If you like to prowl, the **Amoeboid Changeling** changes whatever creature you have that gets through into a Rogue.

But the fact that **Amoeboid Changeling** is underdrafted isn't really surprising. This type of card always has been. Compare, for example,

Tidal Visionary from *Invasion*; both creatures change "what matters." In *Invasion* block, color mattered. **Tidal Visionary** could enhance **Crimson Acolyte** or **Obsidian Acolyte**, protect from a good chunk of the available removal, and turn the Djinn's on or off among a myriad of other "blue" collar (sorry) tasks. In *Lorwyn*, creature type matters, and the **Amoeboid Changeling** has (or should have, if you put your mind to it), if anything, even more impact on *Lorwyn* battles than **Tidal Visionary** did on *Invasion* fights. Here's a prediction: if there's a guy in *Shadowmoor* that costs 4 or 5 and changes whatever matters in that set, it will also be underdrafted, and there will be value to be found there. Always has been.

I think that given the literally dozens of applications that **Amoeboid Changeling** has and, as crazy as this may sound, the vast number of opportunities he provides your opponents to make a mistake (since this is where a lot of games are won and lost), **Amoeboid Changeling** deserves far more regard than it receives.

Well, thanks to Noah and the gang for letting me bend your ear—er, eye—this week. Apologies if I am a little rambley, but I'm a train of thought kinda guy, and love talking about this stuff. What cards do you think are or will be underdrafted? Is **Distant Melody**, **Veteran's Armaments**, or **Fertiled** your hidden gem? Let us know in the forums. Of course, comments and criticism always welcome—let me know what you think!

Well, after you draft, of course.



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