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I don't know about the rest of you, but I am ready to read about some **Magic**. I am looking forward to seeing the coverage from Brussels as the best players in the World put the newest set through it paces in a Limited Grand Prix, as well as hear stories from Launch Parties and Release Events around the globe.

This Grand Prix offers invitations to Pro Tour–Berlin—interestingly, Berlin will be a Constructed event, but Brussels is the first of multiple Grand Prix tournaments this year that have their formats untethered to the Pro Tour they are feeding. It is not unusual to see a Standard Grand Prix during Extended season or the occasional Legacy event during Block season, but the card minimums usually remain the same—60-card Grand Prix events for 60-card Pro Tours.

This 40-card departure could not come at a better time. *Shadowmoor* finally hits sale this very weekend, two weeks after Prerelease. In those intervening weeks I have done more than my fair share of drafting with packs won at Prereleases. Whether you are "watching" the Grand Prix from home or taking part in Launch Parties happening all over the world, I wanted to share some of my observations of *Shadowmoor* Limited with you.

Steve Sadin wrote an excellent column this week assessing the game-breaking power of the cycle of hybrid Auras that mirror the Avatar cycle in each color combination. Leaving draft aside for the moment, I cannot imagine playing nine rounds of Sealed Deck in Brussels—or even four or five at local Launch Parties—without packing some way to deal with Steel of the Godhead or Runes of the Deus. There is not a lot of common traditional creature destruction in this set, and even fewer once you account for a bonus of +2/+2 that the avatar auras are most likely to be granting.

There is only one "Dark Banishing" effect and it costs five mana at sorcery speed. The only red spells that are going to get the job done—once the Aura is in play—are Burn Trail and Flame Javelin. Plus, none of those are going to do much against Shield of the Oversoul on a green creature. Green does have the sorcery-speed Gleeful Sabotage but it feels like all the best answers to the auras lie in the Azorius slice of the color pie, with bounce spells like Aethertow, Consign to Dream, and the bounce-like Turn to Mist.

One of my favorite ways to deal with a Shield of the Oversoul on a two drop creature such as Medicine Runner is to flash out Prismwake Merrow, 'shut off' the aura by making the creature black, and block it for a tidy two-for-one exchange. Since the auras don't offer any fixed bonus and rely on the colors of the enchanted creature, any effect that changes the color of a creature is going to have a chance to shine in this format. Scuttlemutt has shot up locally on players' pick orders and it is not unusual to see one picked first in a draft.

The Wisps also offer a quasi-solution to the avatar auras. I have already seen multiple games where players used their Niveous Wisps to tap an enchanted creature in the hopes of drawing an answer on the following turn when simply changing the creature's color to white in mid-combat could potentially result in the holy grail of **Magic**—the three for one. Of course the Wisps are tricky to use this way. For example, Aphotic Wisps may negate the effect of Runes of the Deus but you better have a black or artifact creature to block the sudden beneficiary of Fear.

Cerulean Wisps has been a very interesting card to me so far. It was pointed out to me by a fellow old-school **Magic** player how excited we used to get over Jolt. It cost three and you had to wait a turn to draw your card but we loved it nonetheless (or course you could tap a land with it, but that is beside the point). My point is that if you wanted to untap a creature back in those days, it was like walking uphill in the snow to school. Now the creatures come with that ability built in—which is what makes Cerulean Wisps so exciting.



Silkbind Faerie is one of the top commons in the set (and another solid way to cope with enchanted creatures in the Azorius colors) and can dominate the board; sneaking in for one evasive point of damage per turn while cocking itself to untap and tap down your best offensive option. Cerulean Wisps has "tapped" more things for me than the Niveous version so far in this format. In the topsy-turvy world of *Shadowmoor*, untapping can be functionally the same as tapping in the right situation. By untapping opposing Silkbind Fairies or the Saltfield Recluse-like Merrow Grimeblotter at the end of your opponent's turn, you suddenly have a lot more options available for combat once you untap.

There are few cards in the history of **Magic** that I like as much as Pemmin's Aura. I have equipped many a Timberwatch Elves and Daru Stinger with the Morphling enchantment for maximum greediness. I was super-excited about similar possibilities once I heard about the untap mechanic in *Shadowmoor*.

Power of Fire quickly rocketed to the top of my common pick order as soon as I saw the interaction between using its ability while enchanting a creature with wither. Wither does not care how the damage was dealt; combat damage is fine but it can just as easily be from the comes-into-play effect of a Furystoke Giant or the Tim-granting ability of the red aura.

My most successful draft deck to date was a blue-red deck that featured Leech Bonder and Power of Fire—Hermetic Study and Horseshoe Crab, anyone? I was able to shoot down a turn-three Ashenmoor Gouger before it could even recover from summoning sickness by enchanting my turn-three Bonder with Power of Fire with access to two blue mana. I shot it twice, moving over two counters in the process, and was going to be content with my 3/3 pinger while waiting for more -1/-1 counters to become available to be moved. Then I actually read my Leech Bonder. The only targets it requires are creatures—not creatures with counters on them. I had a machine gun on my hands and my opponent could not find his Gloomlances fast enough.

Other fine targets to enchant with Power of Fire include Merrow Wavebreakers, Puresight Merrow, the aforementioned Silkbind Faerie and Merrow Grimeblotters, and anything else that has a reasonable untap cost. Probably the best target for Power of Fire is going to be Pili-Pala—and I fully expect multiple significant matches to be won on the back of this tandem in Brussels. Pili-Pala lets you convert every mana available to you into a point of damage once enchanted with Power of Fire. It costs two mana to untap the flyin' Hawaiian, but you net one mana for your efforts. It is basically a fireball every turn—not that there should be many turns left once these cards are in play together.

While it is not nearly on the power level with Power of Fire, Presence of Gond is another fine card to pair with untappers like Pili-Pala and company. I had one blue-black deck that was already splashing for Firespout and I threw in the Presence to give it a try. It is a pretty exciting card to slam down on your Silkbind Faerie. Tapping three creatures while generating the same number of tokens for six mana is a great way to take control of the game in pretty short order.

Both



Presence of Gond and Power of Fire are solidly in colors that don't really pair well with the untap mechanic. Assuming no Pili-Pala, your best-case scenario is going to be blue-red—a combination I actually like quite a bit in this format—or blue-green which flies in the face of the set's themes. In the blue-red draft deck that I mentioned earlier, I was solidly in both colors with Godhead of Awe asking for multiple Islands and Jaws of Stone taxing my Mountains. I also wanted to be able to get my Gatling gun cranking, which also required Islands. No problem. I even had one game where I cast Godhead of Awe on turn five and wiped out my opponent's 1/1 army with Jaws of Stone two turns later. Sounds like a tough task, but not when you have multiple Elsewhere Flasks—another increasingly rare commodity on the local draft scene.

The Flask is obviously a very high pick/must play card if you have Jaws of Stone, Wolf Pack, Corrupt, or Flow of Ideas, but it also lets you splash bomb spells with otherwise unplashable casting costs. I have seen many draft decks already with either Corrupt or Jaws but none of the required basic land types—just a couple of Flasks. Godhead of Awe would have been nigh-uncastable in my blue-red deck and I would not have tried to play it—or the Jaws—without multiple Flasks handy. This card won't often be a first pick in the first pack, but by the time that third pack rolls around don't be surprised to see it getting snapped up without little consideration for the other 14 cards remaining in the pack.

While many of my drafts have been lost to the churn of making new packs from existing cards, I did manage to salvage one list that features a few of the cards I think will have some significant impact this weekend at the local and premier-event levels.

Brian David-Marshall



Main Deck

40 cards

1 Graven Cairns	1 Briarberry Cohort	1 Blowfly Infestation
7 Island	1 Cinderhaze Wretch	1 Ghastly Discovery
9 Swamp	1 Crowd of Cinders	1 Gloomlance
17 lands	1 Cultbrand Cinder	1 Helm of the Ghastlord
	1 Faerie Macabre	1 Power of Fire
	1 Glen Elendra Liege	1 Rite of Consumption
	2 Gravelgill Duo	1 Scarscale Ritual
	1 Grief Tyrant	1 Splitting Headache
	1 Loch Korrigan	1 Torpor Dust
	1 Merrow Grimeblotter	9 other spells

2 Oona's Gatewarden

1 Scuttlemutt

14 creatures

My first pick in this draft was Blowfly Infestation. While I have seen players pass this card around the table (usually into the waiting arms of Dave Williams), it is clearly a card you can pick first and build around. Even though the deck did not pan out as an ideal Infestation deck (with no Leech Bonders or Fate Transfers to kick start the engine), the card was completely dominating. In two of my three matchups, it was difficult for my opponents to make blocks or attacks without fear of losing their team to a chain effect of -1/-1 counters.

There was one very funny interaction with this card in a draft match between Dave and Rob Dougherty during the week of GAMA in Las Vegas. Dave was playing Infestation and Rob had sided in Flourishing Defenses. Defenses is interesting because it triggers on creatures coming into play with -1/-1 counters (such as Morselhoarder) and basically gave Dave's deck fits until he drew the Blowfly Infestation—and then it gave everyone fits.



Rob had eight 1/1 tokens in play and one of them was going to die to getting a -1/-1 counter from—I think—Dave's Scar. Neither player could figure out how this was going to resolve. Rob contended that he was going to end up with the same number of tokens in play when all was said and done, while Dave believed that Rob's entire team would be wiped out. Calls were made and cases were stated to various judges in the hopes of finding an answer. The one that came back basically came down to which player was active when this happened.

If Dave was the active player, the ruling came to us as the game was going to be a draw with an infinite procession of elf warriors coming into play and promptly dying. If Rob was active, then he would have a lone 1/1 standing at the end of the carnage. According to one of my local judges—not consulted at the time of this match—there is no infinite loop because Flourishing Defenses involves a choice to put the token into play and eventually all of Rob's tokens would die. He also stated that if Rob was active then he would keep the same number of tokens that he started with.

More on this story as it develops...I fully expect that this will come up more than once over the weekend in Brussels as both of the cards are uncommons that play into one of the central themes of the set. (Feel free to consider this a bonus Firestarter this week!)

I have already talked about my fondness for Power of Fire and Scuttlemutt—my other two first-picks in the above draft—but I wanted to discuss another card that I think is being overlooked in this set by many players: Cinderhaze Wretch. This is not a very fast format and we have already discussed the dearth of removal spells. The Wretch is a must-kill card or it is going to quickly decimate an opponent's hand.

What is also unique about the Wretch is that its ability is not restricted to sorcery speed, which allows you to attack with it and still get at least one use from its discard ability. If your opponent blocks you can put damage on the stack and then toss on a -1/-1 counter to untap and take a card from your opponent on the way out. If you have any way to pump it—such as from the ability of the Glen Elendra Liege—you can nab more than one card. As much as I like this card in draft, it has to be

utterly dominating in the much slower Sealed Deck format.

There will probably be a couple of uncommons and rares that show up in multiple Day One undefeated decks in every Limited format, and I would be shocked if Furystoke Giant was not one of those frequent rares come Sunday morning in Brussels. I don't know if there is any other card I would pick over this bad boy and I have already seen multiple exciting plays with him, including a Steel of the Godhead-ed Puresight Merrow—with that pesky untap mechanic again—taking down an entire team and gaining its controller about a dozen points of life. I had one purely red-black deck that was able to get double duty out of him on back-to-back turns thanks to Rite of Consumption.

These are just some of my initial impressions about the set and hopefully it provides a little of the groundwork for you heading into whatever events you play in this weekend. Don't forget to check into the Tournament Center for the pros' take on the format as a field of what will undoubtedly be over a thousand players try to sort the format out in pursuit of the \$30,000 purse, invitations to Pro Tour-Berlin, and a piece of **Magic** history.



Friday Night Foil

As if there's not enough coolness on display this weekend (including that Vexing Shusher you can pick up by going to Launch Parties, while supplies last!), here's the shiny prize that awaits players at Friday Night **Magic** in May:



Firestarter: Limited Combos

I have always been a fan of just about anything enchanted with Pemmin's Aura, but Pili-Pala plus Power of Fire is quickly becoming one my favorite all-time two-card combos in Limited. It even fixes your mana to cast the Power of Fire in the first place! What is your favorite combination of cards in Limited? Head to the forums and share your stories and combos there.

