



HYBRID WEEK

MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM

ARCHIVES

TOURNAMENT CENTER

MAGIC ONLINE

GATHERER

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Where Are They Now?

Brian David-Marshall
Learning Curve
Wednesday, August 20, 2003



Where are your **Goblin Assassins**?

For that matter, what did you do with your **Goblin Matrons**, **Goblin Recruiters** and **Goblin Ringleaders** over the years?

It is always fun to watch players scramble for cards they had previously dismissed as unplayable—unworthy of even being picked out of a pile of draft leavings. Going into the **Magic World Championships Legions' Goblin Assassin** was certainly a member of this neglected club. Afterward it was a different story...

...All right, maybe they are not sought after with the same vigor that one would use to pursue other uncommons like **Smother**, **Wing Shards**, **Gempalm Incinerator** or the mighty **Goblin Warchief**. The fact that anyone is looking for them with any degree of vigor at all is a story in and of itself and a testament to the ingenuity of Japanese deckbuilders. Jin Okamoto made it to the finals of the World Championships. A huge part of his success was a 4-1-1 record to close the tournament while playing with "Gob-Vantage," an Extended Goblin deck that relied on the tutoring power of **Goblin Recruiter**, **Goblin Ringleader**, and **Goblin Matron** to follow up the already explosive turn one **Goblin Lackey**.



Gob-Vantage		Jin Okamoto	
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
2 Ancient Tomb	3 Rites of Initiation	1 Gempalm Incinerator	
1 City of Traitors	3 other spells	1 Goblin Assassin	
20 Mountain		1 Goblin Sharpshooter	
23 lands		4 Pillage	
		4 Pyrostatic Pillar	
		4 Seal of Fire	
3 Gempalm Incinerator		15 sideboard cards	
4 Goblin Lackey			
3 Goblin Matron			
4 Goblin Piledriver			
4 Goblin Recruiter			
3 Goblin Ringleader			
3 Goblin Warchief			
4 Mogg Fanatic			
2 Siege-Gang Commander			
3 Skirk Prospector			
1 Sparksmith			
34 creatures			

It should be noted that the deck is an updated version of a deck built by Mons Johnson. Mons, former Wizards employee, is the inspiration for **Mons's Goblin Raiders** and a lover of all things goblin. A couple of PTQ seasons back Mons caused a minor buzz with his **Goblin Recruiter/Goblin Ringleader action**. The deck ended up catching the attention of a Japanese deck building squad—Fireball Pro—and when **Scourge** amped up the power level of all Goblin decks with the **Warchief** and **Siege-Gang Commander** they knew what they were playing at Worlds.



The deck posted a 75% win percentage in the hands of seven different players and was the buzz of the tournament. Jin played in a [feature match](#) against eventual World Champion Daniel Zink. Over the course of the match, Daniel managed to **Exhume** a turn-two **Verdant Force**—normally certain death for the Goblin player—only to find himself chump blocking with his swamp thing to barely stay alive.

One of the deck's features that most impressed was the inclusion of **Goblin Assassin** in the sideboard. If in the weeks leading up to Worlds you suggested that a tournament finalist would include the **Goblin Assassin** in his deck—and that it would be the correct call—you would be ridiculed. There are a number of pretty bad creatures in **Legions**—**Aven Envoy**, **Fugitive Wizard**, and **Dripping Dead** to name a few. Up until Worlds, the **Goblin Assassin** was lumped right in there with them.

Don't get me wrong. The Assassin is not the most important card in the deck. It is just fascinating to me that a card can go from mockingly unplayable to the sideboard of the Worlds finalist's deck in the span of one tournament. Other than **Cursed Scroll**, mono-red decks have almost no options against a **Silver Knight**. You would need three Scrolls to cope with an **Akroma**. Non-Goblins were barely an option in Gob-Vantage because once the deck gets rolling that is all the deck draws. The Recruiter sets it up so that you don't draw land once you have enough mana to operate. The top of your deck gets stacked with a Ringleader and four goblins over and over again so that you draw five cards a turn.

With so many Goblins coming into play each turn the Assassin should always smoke its target, killing protection from red creatures where no Goblin could before. Sure there will be some collateral damage but what are goblins for if not cannon fodder? The Assassin turned out to be an elegant and practical solution to a hole in the deck's strategy. I don't know who's idea it was but I can only imagine the sales resistance he had to overcome when he pitched the idea.

Magic is a diverse game but often we can get locked into commonly held beliefs about deck types and card valuations. When an idea comes down the pike that flies in the face of those beliefs it is often met with contempt and hostility. The people that can weather the force of that and still toss out new ideas and actually try them are the people that keep **Magic** ever-changing. While many of those new ideas will not pan out there will be some that do.

There is nothing in **Magic** that galls me more than another player deriding a card or deck archetype during playtesting. Playtesting! How are you going to find out if something works or not if you don't test it? Remember, some of the games most powerful cards were thought to be unplayable at various points in the game's history.

Before the first Pro Tour both **Necropotence** and **Demonic Consultation** were considered the dregs of *Ice Age*. When Necro decks began to tear through the competition on both floors of the tournament—the main event was downstairs and the Junior Pro Tour several floors above—it began to send ripples throughout the venue. Initially it began with snorts of disdain but when the decks would not go away it caused a paradigm shift in the game that is still felt to this day.

One internet pundit called **Oath of Druids** the “worst of all the Oaths” when it was released. **Dream Halls**, **Necropotence**, and most recently **Temple of the False God** have all been singled out by one particular gaming magazine as among the worst cards in their respective sets when their initial reviews were published. Fortunately—or unfortunately depending on which end of those decks you found yourself facing—someone looked past the reviews and tested the cards for themselves.



Over the next few weeks information about *Mirrodin* will start to trickle out. The newest stand-alone block for **Magic** is chock full of new ideas and interesting cards. The set is sure to create a buzz and everyone will have something to say about how the new cards will impact the game—myself included. No matter how closely the set is scrutinized there will still be a number of powerful cards that initially slip through the cracks. It is your job to find them. They should be easy to find. Just follow the laughter.

Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Brian David-Marshall](#) archive

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

© 1995-2008 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

