

Mark L. Gottlieb

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Last week, I ran the fifth Reject Rare Draft held at Wizards of the Coast. What the Okk is a Reject Rare Draft? It's my favorite **Magic** format of all time—a fantastical realm where Timmy, Johnny, and Spike all stand on (sorta) equal footing. For the story of the origins of the RRD, a description of how I run it here, and tales of last year's zany antics, click here. Don't feel like reading two articles today? The quick description, then, is that Reject Rare Draft is a booster draft in which every card is a **Magic** rare—an *awful Magic* rare.

What's a "reject rare"? By my definition, it's any rare worth so little to its owner that it gets donated to this draft. (Every card in the draft pool was donated in advance by the participants.) But I'm inside Wizards of the Coast, where we can't sell cards or use them in tournaments—so the value that most people would ascribe to a card gets obliterated. For example, Neophyte Columnist Who Doesn't Seem To Realize Who the Funny One Is Around Here Aaron Forsythe's submissions included howlers like Forsaken City and Psychic Trance, casual favorites like Tombstone Stairwell and Draco, playable cards like Gilded Drake and Turbulent Dreams, and 40-megaton bombs like Verdant Force and Tolarian Academy. Granted, the awful cards were out in full force: Stampede, Mercenaries (the card, not the creature type), Infinite Hourglass, etc., but even a single Verdant Force is jaw-dropping.

The Packs

As I randomly assorted everyone's cards into "booster packs," I worried there wouldn't be enough creatures for people to make functional decks. A head count showed there were about 15 creatures or token-generators per person (though not all of them were *playable*), and I warned everyone of that before the draft started. I also warned them that removal of any sort was light, and removal of artifacts and enchantments was especially scarce (think about it: how often are Disenchant effects printed on rare cards?), so they had a lot to ponder going into their first pack.

My first pack was not tremendously exciting. It had Samite Sanctuary, Kormus Bell, Donate, Back to Basics, Endemic Plague, Oppression, Tower of the Magistrate, Mage's Contest, Grand Melee, Kavu Mauler, Terravore, Sacred Ground, Wormfang Manta, Field of Souls, and Mesmeric Orb. Yecch. Tower was better than you'd think; there were more artifacts in the draft pool (179) than cards of any single color. But it wasn't a first pick. Kavu Mauler was intriguing simply because it was a decent creature; its ability is worthless, but 4/4 for 6 is efficient here. However, unless I opened Elvish




"broken in RRD" Piper, I swore I'd avoid the underrepresented green (only 107 cards) at all costs. (Everyone else knew these numbers as well.) My pick came down to Field of Souls or the amazing Mesmeric Orb. The Orb, I knew, would just win games in this format. It could mill faster than my opponent could deal damage. But it didn't seem fun to me. It was the Spike way to go, and though I could rack up the wins with it, I didn't want to play the Orb game over and over. I took Field of Souls, and the Orb made it through Director of **Magic** R&D Randy Buehler, Playtester/Associate Developer Mons Johnson, and **Magic Online** Flunky Dan Myers so R&D Developer/Contractor/Intern Paul Sottosanti could snatch it up. Paul's Spike instincts had overwhelmed his Johnny instincts (which are remarkably strong), and he was putting together a killer deck you'll hear about later.

Meanwhile, Developer Devin Low, sitting to my right, opened a pack with a healthy array of creatures and removal: Sulfurous Springs, Thran Lens, Weird Harvest, Ill-Gotten Gains, Greener Pastures, Chain Stasis, Volley of Boulders, Planar Collapse, Junk Diver, Degavolver, Bog Elemental, Butcher Orgg, and Draco. He took the Draco, though he questioned it later, which left me the Planar Collapse (setting me up for my favorite RRD deck) and gave Randy, to my left, the Butcher Orgg.

All About Me Me Me

When the drafting was over, I had a black-white deck that had efficient creatures, some recursion, some card drawing, some board-sweepers, a utility spell, and a splash of red for Degavolver and Vulshok Battlemaster. (2/2 with haste for only 5? Wow!)

Mark Gottlieb 

Main Deck
40 cards

3 Mountain	1 Abyssal Horror	1 Barrin's Codex
8 Plains	1 Degavolver	1 Circle of Solace
7 Swamp	1 Dross Harvester	1 Field of Souls
<hr/>	1 Instigator	1 Harsh Mercy
18 lands	1 Paladin en-Vec	1 Lurking Skirge
	1 Personal Incarnation	1 March of Souls
	1 Ravenous Vampire	1 Planar Collapse
	1 Rebel Informer	1 Purgatory
	1 Sidar Jabari	1 Purify
	1 Vulshok Battlemaster	1 Urza's Blueprints
	1 Wall of Nets	<hr/>
	1 Zhalfirin Crusader	10 other spells
	<hr/>	
	12 creatures	

I piloted the deck to a 5-4 record. Sometimes I'd speed out with Paladin en-Vec and Sidar Jabari and cruise to victory. Sometimes I wouldn't. My deck embraced death: My sweepers would take out my own creatures, which was great! I'd gain life with Dross Harvester, get tokens with Field of Souls, or store the critter in Purgatory to get back later. That's why I included such subpar creatures as Instigator and Mercenary Informer (as fodder) and Ravenous Vampire (to snack on the fodder). That, and because I needed any creature I could get my hands on. The deck also features some non-combos: March of Souls was very, very bad if Personal Incarnation or Wall of Nets was on the table. The first would cut my life in half and the second would swing the creature advantage to my opponent. Also, I was dismayed to find that Field of Souls and Purgatory don't work together: Purgatory has been given errata to make it a replacement effect, so the dead creature never actually hits the graveyard to trigger the Field.

Some of my memorable escapades:





- Against Software Engineer Alan Comer: He had stolen my Personal Incarnation with Yavimaya's Embrace, and I was at 2 life... but thanks to the pro-white Dross Harvester (which would kill me at

the end of the turn) and the flying Abyssal Horror, he couldn't block my creatures and I squeaked out a win.

- Against Devin, who had a painful Rivalry out: He attacked with a face-down creature, and I blocked with Wall of Nets. I reasoned aloud that it couldn't possibly have 7 power with the mana he had... but I had forgotten about Unstable Hulk! It took down my Wall, and gave me an extra turn to be hit by Rivalry!
- Against Organized Play Policy Manager John Grant: I pulled off a turn 5 Purify which destroyed my Lurking Skirge... and his Gauntlets of Chaos, Grindstone, and Skyship Weatherlight, which was holding Shauku, Endbringer; Andradite Leech; Minion of Tevesh Szat; and Dark Hatchling. He didn't recover.
- Against Miniatures Designer Rob Watkins: My March of Souls (while I had a Field of Souls in play) took out my Essence token, Sidar Jabari, and Dross Harvester... while taking out his Mogg Sentry, Cromat, and Trained Orgg. I got 5 1/1 tokens (two Essence, three Spirit) and gained 12 life. He *did* recover; Fervent Charge made his Spirit tokens impossible to stop.



The Decks

How about the other players? (I can stop writing about myself every now and then.) Rob took the Timmy route. His five-color deck, which featured cards with mana costs , , , and  twice(!), looked awful on paper. But he took it to a 4-0 record, including trouncing me.

Rob Watkins



Main Deck

41 cards

5 Forest	1 Avatar of Might	1 Bottle of Suleiman
4 Island	1 Body Snatcher	1 Chromatic Armor
4 Mountain	1 Cateran Slaver	1 Energy Field
2 Plains	1 Chlorophant	1 Fervent Charge
5 Swamp	1 Cromat	1 Last Stand
	1 Leonin Shikari	1 Lightning Blow
20 lands	1 Lord of the Pit	1 Torture Chamber
	1 Mogg Sentry	
	1 Molten Hydra	7 other spells
	1 Nomad Mythmaker	
	1 Primal Whisperer	
	1 Roaring Slagwurm	
	1 Rukh Egg	
	1 Trained Orgg	
	14 creatures	

Alan Comer decided to Johnny things up. His 7-creature deck won by milling, and the main combos were some I've put forth in a *Constructed* deck: Dreamborn Muse with Wheel and Deal and Turbulent Dreams! Clear the Land and New Frontiers let him accelerate mana while pulling cards out of his opponent's deck, Wand of Denial was both decking and threat-elimination, and Worry Beads sped along the inevitable. Gurzigost, and the 44-card size of his deck, helped Alan avoid being decked himself.

Alan Comer		
		
Main Deck		
<i>44 cards</i>		
8 Snow-Covered Forest	1 Caller of the Hunt	2 Aladdin's Lamp
10 Snow-Covered Island	1 Dreamborn Muse	1 Aladdin's Ring
3 Snow-Covered Swamp	1 Empress Galina	1 Awakening
-----	1 Gargantuan Gorilla	1 Barrin's Spite
21 lands	1 Gurzigost	1 Clear the Land
	1 Ivy Elemental	1 Hidden Stag
	1 Junk Golem	1 New Frontiers
	-----	1 Quicksilver Amulet
	7 creatures	1 Scrying Glass
		1 Turbulent Dreams
		2 Ventifact Bottle
		1 Wand of Denial
		1 Wheel and Deal
		1 Yavimaya's Embrace

		16 other spells

Land denial was also a viable strategy to draft a deck around. In his deposition, Awesome Intern Matt Place described the theory behind his white-black-red deck: "Knowing that everyone else's mana would be sketchy, I took all the LD I could find. I found some good ones: Rumbling Crescendo, Epicenter, Scorched Earth, and 2 x Graceful Antelope." In his first game against Magic Creative Coordinator Brandon Bozzi, Matt destroyed most of Brandon's lands and turned the rest into Plains via Antelope lovin'. This did not amuse Brandon, who was playing a blue-red deck. However, Brandon had some serious land disruption of his own. Matt continues to testify: "Being the genius that he is, he played Shimmer [set to Plains] on turn 4 in game 2. Not only did this hurt my mana, but also converted his Plains that my Antelope gave him back into Islands and Mountains. It is hard to win against a genius."

Richard Garfield used a completely different form of mana denial. Sure, he had Petradox and Global Ruin, but Richard built his deck to abuse Damping Engine—which might be the first time that's ever happened. He had a Quicksilver Amulet, meaning he only needed four lands to bring out giant creatures, so he kept his own permanent count low to force his opponent to sacrifice permanents or do nothing. Ankh of Mishra and Umbilicus kept the squeeze on. In his best game, Richard's Terravore was 10/10 thanks to a raft of sacrificed lands. He attacked Brandon with it, Brandon blocked with 10 power worth of creatures, Richard assigned damage... then Bloodshot Cyclops flung Terravore at Brandon's huge Copper-Leaf Angel, which had been eating Brandon's lands. Later, Richard put Petradox into play and removed his own lands to keep up the Damping Engine pressure.

Microsoft Software Design Engineer (geez, you couldn't write "Programmer," Matt?) Matt Ruhlen knew that RRD is a slo-o-o-ow format, so he drafted a deck that would end games before they had a chance to start. Shivan Gorge, Sulfuric Vortex, Sleeper Agent, and Latulla, Keldon Overseer could all go to the dome. Words of Worship would let him win any life attrition races, and it made a vicious combo with Greed. Though he only had 10 creatures, an early Obstinate Familiar (which wasn't a crazy choice with all the milling decks floating around) and True Believer backed by Leonin Sun Standard could end a game in a hurry. (Trust me.) Matt's MVP was Limited Resources, which irreparably shut down a LOT of decks by stranding them at five lands, while it barely hindered him at all. The most interesting match I witnessed was Matt vs. Alan Comer. Alan played Aladdin's Ring, and Matt answered with Limited Resources to make the Ring impossible to activate. A few turns later, Alan subverted Matt's enchantment with New Frontiers to go from five lands to nine. By then Matt had the Greed-Words of Worship engine going, so Alan would have a hard time winning by damage (since Matt could gain so much life) and a hard time winning by decking (since Matt could skip his draws). It came down to the wire, but Alan's Wheel and Deal was too much for Matt to overcome.

Wizards Invitational Winner Bill Rose also manipulated his life total. He used the insane-in-this-format Planeswalker's Mirth to gain oodles of life, since it was pretty common to find an 8-mana card stuck in someone's hand. He spent his life—half of it at a time!—to use his two Murderous Betrayals and his Lurking Evil, as well as his Grim Tutor. Against Richard, Bill noted that he must have gained over 60 life in one game and still lost.

Devin Low's deck sported the 4-mana green 6/6 tag team of Pangosaur and Argothian Wurm, which have rather different worldviews. Which is it, Devin? More lands or fewer?

The Games

How about some wacky plays?

From Web Developer Doug Beyer:

- Doug's Proteus Staff turned **Magic Online** Software Developer Rachel Reynold's Elder Druid into a Vaevictis Asmadi! And turned *that* into a Krosan Colossus!
- Chump-Blocking Hall of Fame: Doug used Teeka's Dragon to chump Vaevictis.
- Against me, Doug Staffed his own Cephalid Constable into a Broodstar. Yup, a tiny 1/1 Broodstar powered only by the Staff itself.
- In a move that made tournament players the world over involuntarily cringe, Doug saced a 2/2 Arcbound Ravager to itself to put the counters on a *Junk Golem* so it would stay alive. Such (as he says) were his priorities at the time.

From Brandon Bozzi and Doug Beyer, who had their own little Gilded Drake-Latulla war going on:

- Doug wrote that he played the Drake and tried to steal Latulla, so Latulla shot the Drake in response. Brandon wrote about a different game in which Gilded Drake *did* steal Latulla—but the turn before Brandon's Latulla would have burned him out, Doug died to mana burn from his own Blinkmoth Urn.

From **magicthegathering.com** Content Manager Monty Ashley:

- More Chump-Blocking Hall of Fame: Against Rob Watkins, Island Fish Jasconius had to speed-bump a Fervent Charge-enhanced Trained Orgg. Later, Death or Glory let the Island Fish come back just to chump a Fervent Charge-enhanced Avatar of Might!

From acclaimed Jerk Quill:

- Quill had an Aura Thief (broken in RRD! Notice how often I write that? It's one of the joys of Reject Rare Draft to watch an awful card blossom into a superstar for one night) that happily attacked into John Grant's No Mercy... making it Quill's No Mercy.
- Against DCI Honcho Scott Larabee, Quill got his Darksteel Forge-The Hive engine going to churn out indestructible flying creatures. Then Quill's Planar Collapse left his Wasps as the only creatures on the board.
- Versus Matt R., Quill found the "poor man's Icy/Royal Assassin" combo of Sand Squid and Stalking Assassin.

From Mons Johnson:

- Nothing too combo-riffic. Mons just managed to hardcast Hypnox. Twice.


From Bill Rose:

- Bill attacked into **Magic** Rules Manager Paul Barclay's untapped Copper-Leaf Angel with his Ruby Leech. Paul went for broke by blocking the Leech and sacrificing all seven of his lands to the Angel. On Paul's turn, he swung for 13 and was a turn away from the win. But his gamble failed when Bill top-decked a Mountain to play Furnace Dragon (good thing the Leech was gone)—bye-bye Angel. When the game ended in Bill's favor, Paul had nothing but a single land in play.

From Aaron Forsythe:

- "Against [Designer Brian] Tinsman, I knew the format was more powerful than I had imagined when he played a Balduvian Hordes on turn 4 and I won anyway (with Spinal Embrace). In both games against him, he put my Coffin Puppets in the graveyard with Millstone. Free 3/3!"
- "Against Paul S, I played the Altar of Dementia/Tombstone Stairwell combo by turn 6, saced my 2 guys to mill myself for 6, and then milled him out over the next two turns. He beat me in game 2 with an early Mesmeric Orb (the milling is SO GOOD in this format). I won game 3 with Power Matrix—my face-down Ebonblade Reaper, pumped by Ixidor and Power Matrix, took down his Lurking Evil."
- "You know how the games against you went (Altar, Muse, Barrin, etc.)" (I believe he's referring to some sort of imaginary match. I'd certainly remember if he power-milled me in game 1 with the Altar, then, when I spoiled that plan by Purifying away his Altar game 2, he repeatedly bounced my permanents to my hand with Barrin so Dreamborn Muse would mill me instead, allowing him to win even though he only had two permanents left in play at the end of the game. Nope, doesn't ring a bell.)

From Randy Buehler:

- How about a turn-8 Dragon Tyrant powered out by Vernal Bloom? (It dealt 14 for the win next turn.)
- How about hitting Butcher Orgg with Call of the Wild... after six tries!
- How about paying  and sacrificing Ruby Leech to counter Pyromancy? As Randy wrote, "You *have* to counter Pyromancy." (Ten points if you can guess Randy's counterspell.)



From Paul Sottosanti, who wrote the most, and thus gets the most coverage (that's a note to take notes, people!):

- John played Wildfire with Burning Sands in play to make Paul lose all his lands... but Greed let him come all the way back.
- Matt R. had all his damage-to-the-dome tricks working by turn 5: Vortex, Gorge, Sleeper Agent. But after Paul saced Tooth of Ramos to play a turn 5 Phyrexian Colossus(!), Matt had to play March of Souls. Paul untapped, did the math, and played Sunder (which was nuts for him all day). In the end, both players wound up at 1, but Vortex killed Matt first.
- Randy had a Tolarian Serpent chowing on Paul's life total. Paul was at 14 with Balm of Restoration and Bronze Horse in play. Randy had 27 cards in his library. Paul Sundered to prevent Randy from playing anything else. He chumped with the Horse, prevented 2 to himself with the Balm, and Randy decked himself at the start of the turn he would have attacked for the win.
- Paul sent Pyromancy to the head three times against Brandon, hitting Inferno (7!), Booby Trap (6!), and Bronze Horse (another 7!) for a clean total of 20 damage.
- Against Quill, Paul had some epic battles of Pyromancy vs. Aura Thief. (The one creature Pyromancy can't kill! Well, it can, but it shouldn't.) Game 1 was a race Aura Thief won. In their second game, Paul had the enchantment out, and was so scared of the Thief that he used the mighty counterspelling power of *Mage's Contest* to prevent it from seeing play. Paul bid all the way up to 7 before Quill (at 11 life) backed down—and only then did Paul realize that if he had let Quill win the Contest back when he bid 4, his Pyromancy would have ended the game immediately. Paul's entire hand at the time: Searing Wind and Phyrexian Colossus.

If you want to experience the crazy for yourself, this is a format you can recreate at home or (perhaps) convince your local card shop to try out. After all, Reject Rare Draft is the *real* reason bad rares have to exist.

Until next week, have fun with Island Fish Jasconius!
Mark

Extra tidbit 1: Randy's counterspell was Suffocating Blast. It has to target a creature, and Randy's own Leech was the only one in play.

Extra tidbit 2: "My creatures neither deal nor receive combat damage," Tom stated craftily.

Mark may be reached at houseofcardsmail@yahoo.com. Send rules-related **Magic** questions to ask@wizards.com.

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