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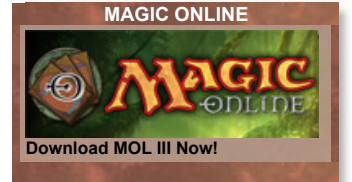
Scanning the Horizon

Brian David-Marshall
Swimming With Sharks
Wednesday, March 24, 2004



Today is my birthday. As an early gift to myself I actually had the opportunity to play in a PTQ this past Saturday at Neutral Ground. Not only did I get to play but it made it easy to round up my friends for an evening of bowling and beverages to celebrate my aging process. In a recent article on Star City Games, Mike Flores referenced something he learned from Dave Price. Dave's observation was that there is a point that you realize your 'Magic friends' are simply your friends. I have been extraordinarily lucky in my life to stop using 'Magic' as an adjective to describe countless people and had the further good fortune to spend Saturday evening with a great many of them.

I am a huge Mets fan—it is not the darkest secret I will reveal this week—and before the tournament started Matt Urban gave me a Lenny Dykstra rookie card from 1986. Matt is a Phillies fan and then proceeded to torment me by offering to trade with me for a Juan Samuel card. Memories of terrible deals aside I hoped that "Nails" would bring me some luck in my only PTQ of this season.



PTQ Sealed Deck 03/20/04	
Mirrodin/Darksteel Limited	
Main Deck	Sideboard
41 cards	
1 Ancient Den	1 Blinding Beam
1 Great Furnace	1 Bonesplitter
5 Island	1 Chromatic Sphere
2 Mountain	1 Echoing Ruin
7 Plains	1 Fireball
1 Seat of the Synod	1 Purge
17 lands	1 Serum Tank
	1 Shatter
	1 Unforge
	1 Viridian Longbow
	1 Vulshok Battlegear
	11 other spells
1 Arcbound Stinger	
1 Auriok Transfixer	
1 Clockwork Condor	
1 Cobalt Golem	
1 Domineer	
1 Iron Myr	
1 Leonin Shikari	
1 Luminous Angel	
1 Myr Retriever	
1 Neurok Prodigy	
1 Skyhunter Patrol	
1 Somber Hoverguard	
1 Yotian Soldier	
13 creatures	
	1 Angel's Feather
	1 Arcbound Hybrid
	1 Arcbound Lancer
	1 Chittering Rats
	1 Clockwork Beetle
	1 Consume Spirit
	1 Contaminated Bond
	1 Damping Matrix
	3 Darksteel Pendant
	1 Drooling Ogre
	1 Elf Replica
	1 Farsight Mask
	1 Fatespinner
	1 Fists of the Anvil
	1 Galvanic Key
	1 Grimclaw Bats
	1 Hallow
	1 Incite War
	1 Inflamm
	1 Isochron Scepter
	1 Journey of Discovery
	1 Krark-Clan Stoker
	1 Leonin Bola
	1 Leonin Elder
	1 Lumengrid Warden
	1 Machinate
	1 Magnetic Flux
	1 Myr Landshaper
	1 Neurok Familiar
	1 Nim Shambler
	2 Oxidda Golem
	1 Relic Bane
	1 Rustmouth Ogre
	1 Seething Song
	1 Spincrusher
	1 Tangle Spider
	1 Tel-Jilad Chosen
	1 Tel-Jilad Outrider
	1 Thought Prison
	1 Titanium Golem
	1 Trinisphere
	1 Voltaic Construct
	1 Vulshok Berserker
	1 Wail of the Nim
	1 Welding Jar

Yes, I know. I played forty-one cards. There you have my worst dark secret. I wanted to play all the cards I had in the deck but with the [Luminous Angel](#) and the [Fireball](#) I wanted seventeen lands. Mike Flores was building right next to me and was facing a similar quandary. We decided to channel our friend and forty-one card advocate Jon Becker. Once Jon, Mike, and I played as Team Forty-One in a Team limited event. We all played one over the recommended minimum and made the finals of the event. Jon was home watching Syracuse play and storing up marital goodwill so he could attend [Grand Prix: Columbus](#) this weekend. In honor of our missing friend we both decided to play forty-one cards.

Aside from playing with an odd amount of cards I am sure that the deck is built incorrectly. I think there is a better, more aggressive build that is solidly red-white. The two [Oxidda Golems](#), [Arcbound Hybrid](#), and [Vulshok Berserker](#) would have provided haste where blue offered a pair of fliers and a [Domineer](#). [Rustmouth Ogre](#) would have been a nice mid game card and my mana would have been far more consistent. As it stood I should have been playing at least one more Mountain. With a [Fireball](#) as a finisher I should have opted for the faster and more consistent configuration.



Fireball makes aggro that much more attractive...

I took my first loss in the second round against Jim Davis. I managed to [Unforge](#) a [Loxodon Warhammer](#) in combat during game one. He stumbled a bit on mana and I went right to seven to play a [Luminous Angel](#). In the second game I died with no Islands or Mountains in sight while he had a quick draw.

Game three saw me get very greedy. I decided to [Shatter](#) his second land drop. I knew he had Warhammer in his deck from the first game but when he passed the second turn with no play I thought attacking his mana was correct. I was able to attack him down to one but he double [Thoughtcast](#) (one was foil) into his Warhammer on the last possible turn and he was able to just stay ahead of the damage I had on the table.

I thought I was going to take my second loss in the fourth round against Josh Ravitz. It looked like I was going to lose early on in game one when I suddenly turned things around in an eighteen to three life deficit. I drew a [Blinding Beam](#) on the last turn it could possibly save me and had Josh down to one with three creatures in play. If I attack with everyone including my [Auriok Transfixer](#) there is no way I can lose. For some reason I thought I should leave my Transfixer back... Josh had a [Betrayal of the Flesh](#) with his black mana cleverly disguised as a [Darksteel Ingot](#) and killed one creature and blocked the other with his reanimated [Quicksilver Behemoth](#). If I had attacked with the stupid 1/1 there would have been no way out of the situation for him.

The second game was looking dire until I drew [Blinding Beam](#) again. It bought me enough time to chump block Josh's creatures while moving my [Viridian Longbow](#) around at instant speed to whittle down his life total. Thanks to [Leonin Shikari](#) I won the game at one point of life. Game three all my fliers showed up and with a [Bonesplitter](#) to pass around Josh could not keep up.

I played another friend in the fifth round, Steve Sadin. While Steve and I waited for a deck check we tried to find in interesting way to choose who would play first. I offered to flip my Lenny Dykstra card for choice but Steve seemed leery of my eagerness. I once flipped almost two thousand face-up baseball cards in a row so this may have been a good call on his part. Instead we chose to twist off an Oreo for choice. Whoever ended up with the cookie half with the most filling would get choice. I won the twist but lost the match waiting for an [Unforge](#) that never showed up in the final game.

With two losses I dropped from the tournament and went for a pre-bowling dinner. When we returned the Top 8 was underway with six Neutral Ground regulars fighting for the slot with two players I did not know. Joe Vas, Hogan Long, Paul Allison, Richard Fein, Tony Tsai, and Zev Gurwitz made up the six and Zev Gurwitz ended up taking home the blue envelope. It was nice to see him suddenly reinvigorated about playing [Magic](#) after a brief separation.

Next weekend there are a handful of North American PTQs south of the Mason Dixon Line and West of the Mississippi but that was it for the PTQ season in the Northeast portion of the United States. There is only the Grand Prix in Columbus and the obligatory Sunday PTQ at that venue and then we move onto the Team Limited format.

Team Limited

For those of you unfamiliar with Team Limited allow me to introduce you to one of my favorite formats of all time. You play in three-person teams and your team's performance is tracked by the combination of your three DCI numbers. In an effort to get the Pro Tour season in line with the calendar year Wizards has added a second team stop on the Pro Tour this year. The first was in Boston and the one coming up in July will be in [Seattle, Washington](#).

The team PTQ season is not as long as most other seasons and there are fewer PTQs and Grand Prix than for individual seasons. Despite this it is still one of the easiest Pro Tours to qualify for. Unlike other Pro Tours where there are a fixed number of rating invitations handed out to the Top 50 players that are previously unqualified, the Team Pro Tours offer invitations based on a rating plateau of 1750. This means that



Brock Parker, William Jensen and Matt Linde - PT Boston '03 Champions

every team that achieves a 1750 rating or better by the ratings published on May 26th, 2004 is automatically qualified for Pro Tour Seattle.

It sure makes those Team Sealed flights at the Prereleases more enticing doesn't it? In addition to the PTQs in your area you should keep an eye out for [Grand Prix Trials for Grand Prix DC](#). I know there was one in my area on Sunday so they should already be underway. Trials are an excellent opportunity to earn ratings points. There will likely be many teams playing in the Friday Trial at Grand Prix DC just looking for a ratings boost.

In fact, [Grand Prix DC](#) is going to be a ridiculous incubator for ratings points with three different high level team events offered. In addition to the Trial and the Grand Prix itself there will be another PTQ on Sunday. I'm not sure how many matches a team needs to win in order to reach 1750 but I'm sure you can get most of the way there over the course of the weekend.

You should also compel your local tournament organizer to run team events as often as possible between now and the middle of May. Every point counts and you have a definite goal of 1750 to reach unlike the more nebulous ratings race for individual events.

What is great about the Team format is that it is much more fun than any other form of **Magic**—provided you choose the right teammates. If you play with people at your same skill level who you are on friendly terms with you can never go wrong. You definitely want one take charge type person who can make the hard decisions about splitting up colors and which decks get played by whom.

Because you are relying on winning the best two out of three matches against the opposing team the entire burden of winning each round doesn't fall squarely on one player's shoulders. It is a team effort and if you lose it can spur your teammates onto victory and if you win an early match it can relieve some of the pressure of a tight game for your wingmen.

I played in a PTQ last season with Tim McKenna and Mike Flores. I lost my match and Tim won his. Mike found himself behind the eight ball in game three of the deciding match when his opponent unmorphed an **Exalted Angel** on turn four. Tim walked away thinking the match was over but I decided to stick it out. My dejection turned to exhilaration when Mike smote the Angel two turns later with a **Pinpoint Avalanche** after a chump blocker got in its way. It was an amazing win and we went on to win the PTQ and a \$750 travel award.

If you are looking to qualify on rating you do need to play with the same team each time. Anytime a different player joins the team—even if the other two players have played together—they are treated as a new team with their own rating. So pull together two good friends and plan your rating attack. Between PTQs, Trials, and if you are able to get to DC, the Grand Prix you should be able to mount a serious assault. Building a set of Team Sealed Decks can be challenging and I advise you to practice a little before your first outing.

Team Sealed Practice

One of the reasons I shared the card pool from my Sealed Deck this weekend is to get you halfway toward a cardpool you can use to practice building three decks from a Team Sealed card pool. For the Sealed portion of each event teams will receive two *Mirrodin* tournament packs and four *Darksteel* boosters. From this you need to construct three decks and sideboards.

[Scott Wills](#) and I talked about collaborating on a column to go over an individual Sealed Deck pool. Just as we were preparing to do that my attention was pulled toward constructed for a few weeks. We are kind of collaborating here—although Scott is not aware of it—as I have combined his impressive Sealed Deck card pool from his equally impressive column [this past Monday](#) with my card pool to give you an idea of what you will have to work with for these events.

Artifact:

1 AEther Spellbomb
1 AEther Vial
1 Angel's Feather
1 Arcbound Bruiser
1 Arcbound Hybrid
1 Arcbound Lancer
1 Arcbound Stinger
2 Bonesplitter
1 Chromatic Sphere
1 Clockwork Beetle
1 Clockwork Condor
1 Cobalt Golem
1 Damping Matrix
3 Darksteel Pendant
1 Dross Golem
2 Elf Replica
1 Farsight Mask
1 Frogmite
1 Galvanic Key
1 Genesis Chamber
1 Goblin Replica
1 Hematite Golem
1 Iron Myr
2 Isochron Scepter
1 Juggernaut
2 Leonin Bola
1 Loxodon Warhammer

White:

1 Auriok Transfixer
2 Blinding Beam
1 Echoing Calm
1 Hallow
1 Leonin Den-Guard
1 Leonin Elder
1 Leonin Shikari
1 Luminous Angel
1 Metal Fatigue
1 Pteron Ghost
1 Pulse of the Fields
1 Purge
1 Skyhunter Cub
2 Skyhunter Patrol

Black:

1 AEther Snap
1 Chimney Imp
1 Chittering Rats
1 Consume Spirit
1 Contaminated Bond
1 Echoing Decay
1 Grimclaw Bats
1 Nim Lasher
1 Nim Shambler
1 Relic Bane

Blue:

1 Assert Authority
1 Domineer
1 Fatespinner
1 Hoverguard Observer
1 Inertia Bubble
2 Lumengrid Warden
1 Machinate
2 Magnetic Flux
2 Neurok Familiar
1 Neurok Prodigy
1 Override
1 Psychic Membrane
1 Quicksilver Behemoth
1 Somber Hoverguard

Land:

1 Ancient Den
2 Great Furnace
1 Glimmervoid
2 Seat of the Synod

Green:

1 Battlegrowth
1 Brown Ouphe
1 Copperhoof Vorrac
1 Journey of Discovery
1 Tangle Spider

1 Myr Adapter
1 Myr Enforcer
2 Myr Landshaper
2 Myr Retriever
1 Needlebug
3 Oxidda Golem
1 Pewter Golem
1 Serum Tank
1 Skeleton Shard
1 Skullclamp
1 Spincrusher
1 Steel Wall
1 Thought Prison
1 Titanium Golem
1 Trinisphere
1 Triskelion
1 Ur-Golem's Eye
1 Viridian Longbow
1 Voltaic Construct
1 Vorrac Battlehorns
1 Vulshok Battlegear
1 Vulshok Morningstar
2 Welding Jar
1 Whispersilk Cloak
1 Wizard Replica
1 Yotian Soldier

1 Scavenging Scarab
1 Wail of the Nim

Red:

2 Barbed Lightning
1 Detonate
2 Drooling Ogre
1 Echoing Ruin
1 Electrostatic Bolt
1 Fireball
2 Fists of the Anvil
1 Incite War
2 Inflammate
2 Krark-Clan Stoker
2 Rustmouth Ogre
2 Seething Song
1 Shatter
1 Spikeshot Goblin
1 Unforge
1 Vulshok Berserker
1 Vulshok War Boar

2 Tel-Jilad Chosen
2 Tel-Jilad Outrider
1 Tel-Jilad Wolf
1 Turn to Dust

If you have some teammates in mind you should look this pool over with all three of you together. It is important in Team Limited to talk through your reasoning and learn how not to be too greedy when assigning cards. Players often want all the best cards in their own deck but one of the keys to success is learning how to break up the cards in an equitable manner. There are definitely times when your card pool is weak and you might want to put most of the good cards into two decks and hope the third deck gets lucky or that the remaining two decks are so good that the junk deck doesn't need to win. Most of the time you will need to build three solid decks and sometimes that means the red player does not get all the red.

Please avail yourself of the forums to discuss potential team builds for this card pool. I will post my suggestions next week. Who knows, maybe Scott Wills will chime in as well. If you want to look at additional card pools I highly recommend [looking through the coverage](#) from Grand Prix Oakland, Hong Kong, and Sendai. Each of those events has some complete card pools from the players' Sealed Decks. Just combine any two of them and you will have a Team Sealed Pool—granted it will likely be a very high quality card pool.

I will try to provide ample decklists this weekend from Grand Prix: Columbus. I will pull some of the decklists and randomly combine them next Wednesday so you can have a steady supply of card pools to work at building.

Don't forget to check in this weekend for the live event coverage from Columbus as the Pro Tour San Diego qualifier season comes to its dramatic conclusion!

Brian may be reached at brian@fightlikeapes.com.

*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.*



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