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# North American Challenge



Alex Shvartsman · Week In Review  
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## Paul Rietzl wins it all!

Although there were no Premier tournaments this weekend, the North American Challenge finals held in Milford, MA certainly felt like a Grand Prix. With about \$10,000 in prize money, professional-looking t-shirts, feature matches and a highly experienced judging staff, it really made the players feel they were competing in a very high class tournament.



All this is a far cry from this tournament circuit's humble beginnings. Started four years ago as a New England Challenge, it involved only a dozen or so stores back then, all located within a couple of hours of Boston. Tom Guevin emerged the winner of the very first NEC. It was Kush Patel who got the top prize in 2002. A few weeks later he went on to make top 8 at the JSS Finals. Last year the circuit was upgraded to a North East Challenge to accommodate for a larger variety of stores eager to participate. Adam Chambers was last year's champion.

This weekend, the newly named "North American Challenge" rolled out. Stores from all over the place have signed up to participate, so once again the circuit outgrew its old name. A total of 124 players showed up – that is the majority of just over 160 players that qualified. There were a total of seven swiss rounds cutting to the top 8. 5-1-1 or better was the record necessary to make it to the single elimination rounds.

A number of **Magic** pros attended the event including Darwin Kastle, Pete Guevin and Ken Krouner. Nat Fairbanks was the head judge, assisted by another pro player, Mike Canu.

Tom Guevin was making a strong run for a repeat title as he remained at the top of the swiss standings throughout the tournament with his Elf and Nail deck. But his dreams were crushed by friend and teammate Paul Rietzl, who navigated his Affinity deck into the finals. Although Affinity is considered a favorable matchup for Elf and Nail, Rietzl was not only able to defeat Guevin, but he also managed to sweep Domenic Minicucci – who was also playing that strategy - in the finals.

### Paul Rietzl (Academy Games)

Ravager Affinity

Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Darksteel Citadel</li> <li>4 Seat of the Synod</li> <li>4 Great Furnace</li> <li>4 Vault of Whispers</li> <li>3 Glimmervoid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Welding Jar</li> <li>4 Thoughtcast</li> <li>3 Chromatic Sphere</li> <li>3 Shrapnel Blast</li> <li>4 Skullclamp</li> </ul>

19 land	18 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Arcbound Ravager 4 Arcbound Worker 4 Disciple of the Vault 4 Frogmite 4 Myr Enforcer 3 Ornithopter		
23 creatures		

Domenic Minicucci (Larry's Comics)		
Tooth and Nail		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
1 Mountain	3 Tooth and Nail	1 Vine Trellis
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Vernal Bloom	1 Viridian Shaman
16 Forest	4 Skullclamp	1 Tooth and Nail
21 land	11 other spells	1 Symbiotic Wurm
1 Sundering Titan		3 Oblivion Stone
1 Darksteel Colossus		4 Oxidize
1 Triskelion		4 Pyroclasm
2 Duplicant		15 sideboard cards
1 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa		
3 Vine Trellis		
4 Birds of Paradise		
4 Wirewood Symbiote		
4 Wood Elves		
3 Wirewood Herald		
3 Viridian Shaman		
1 Elvish Aberration		
28 creatures		

Tom Guevin (Gamer's Haven)		
Tooth and Nail		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
1 Mountain	3 Tooth and Nail	4 Triskelion
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Vernal Bloom	1 Duplicant
16 Forest	4 Skullclamp	1 Viridian Shaman
21 land	4 Pyroclasm	1 Symbiotic Wurm
1 Darksteel Colossus	15 other spells	4 Oxidize
1 Duplicant		11 sideboard cards
1 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa		
3 Vine Trellis		
4 Birds of Paradise		
4 Wirewood Symbiote		
4 Wood Elves		
2 Wirewood Herald		
3 Viridian Shaman		
1 Akroma, Angel of Wrath		

There are a lot of different ways to build an Elf and Nail deck. Guevin's choice of playing with four main-deck **Pyroclasm**s may have been tremendously helpful in getting him to the top 8. This card seems very solid in today's metagame.

Paul Rietzl's version of Affinity was fairly standard, but very solid. I have watched game after game – including the final game of the Guevin-Rietzl match – where things looked all but hopeless and yet the sheer power of the Affinity deck would come to the rescue and allow Rietzl to pull through.



Which is not to detract from his skill or ability. Rietzl has been playing **Magic** in New England for over five years. Nicknamed “Little Darwin”, Rietzl hung out with the YMG crew and has been getting better and better at the game with each year. His breakthrough finally came after he moved to California for college. This year Rietzl earned back to back top 8 finishes on the Grand Prix circuit at Anaheim and Oakland. That combined with a string of solid Pro Tour finishes has earned Rietzl a spot on the gravy train. He is qualified for the foreseeable future as he currently has 26 Pro points this season. I would not at all be surprised to see Rietzl make a Pro Tour top 8 sometime within the next year.

Rietzl was not the only one to bring an Affinity deck to the table in this tournament. In fact, you could hardly fling a **Skullclamp** in the room without it landing on someone's **Arcbound Ravager**. Surprisingly only two Affinity decks fought their way into the top 8 (with Peter Ceprano's Affinity missing the cut on tiebreakers). The rest of top 8 was two Goblin decks (one mono-red and one Bidding), two Tooth and Nail decks, a Beasts deck and a black Clerics deck. Jacou Bruce's Clerics was clearly the most rogue strategy in the top 8. He felt confident it could beat the field and gave the eventual finalist Minicucci a real run for his money in the quarterfinals.

Jacob Bruce (Crossroad Games)		
Main Deck 56 cards		Sideboard
1 <b>Unholy Grotto</b>	3 <b>Death Cloud</b>	1 <b>Death Cloud</b>
20 <b>Swamp</b>	2 <b>Lightning Greaves</b>	4 <b>Emissary of Despair</b>
21 land	4 <b>Skullclamp</b>	2 <b>Headhunter</b>
1 <b>Scion of Darkness</b>	2 <b>Smother</b>	2 <b>Blackmail</b>
4 <b>Rotlung Reanimator</b>	2 <b>Grave Pact</b>	4 <b>Echoing Decay</b>
4 <b>Withered Wretch</b>	3 <b>Chrome Mox</b>	2 <b>Smother</b>
2 <b>Headhunter</b>	16 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 <b>Dark Supplicant</b>		
4 <b>Disciple of the Vault</b>		
19 creatures		

Mono-black control was an unusually popular choice at this tournament. Many players from Academy Games pursued this strategy. Ben Caless finished top 16 with the following list:

Ben Caless		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 <b>Blinkmoth Nexus</b>	4 <b>Death Cloud</b>	3 <b>Smother</b>

17 Swamp	3 Damping Matrix	3 Infest
21 land	2 Underworld Dreams	3 Emissary of Despair
4 Chittering Rats	4 Chrome Mox	3 Greater Harvester
4 Withered Wretch	4 Dark Banishing	3 Persecute
4 Solemn Simulacrum	3 Echoing Decay	15 sideboard cards
3 Ravenous Rats	20 other spells	
4 Rotlung Reanimator		
19 creatures		

That's a lot of cards that do not normally see constructed tournament play! It goes to show you that even in a very established, almost stagnant metagame like this one, you can still do well with a rogue deck. On that note, I am also happy to see a pair of March of the Machines decks making top 16.

I spent a day writing up feature matches and other coverage for the event. Check back on Monday's update for complete coverage of the event.

## Magic Trivia

Last week's question:

*What **Magic** novelist was an Editor-in-Chief of Duelist magazine?*

Will McDermott, who wrote several **Magic** novels, was Duelist Editor-in-Chief in its last days.

New question:

*What Fifth Dawn card is a reprint from Antiquities?*

(Please do not e-mail me the answer. It will be posted in next week's column.)

## Play of the Week

I saw this as I was watching matches being played out at the NAC last weekend, but I don't know the names of the players involved.

A Tooth and Nail deck resolved its namesake card against blue-white control, putting a **Sundering Titan** and **Darksteel Colossus** into play. The green mage must've been feeling pretty good... until his opponent tapped all of his mana to cast **Bribery!** This seldom-seen rare card helped the control player to find **Duplicant**, which he put into play to take out the opposing Colossus. An 11/11 creature then outraced **Sundering Titan**, winning the game. **Bribery** seems like a very cool sideboard card against Tooth and Nail's giant monsters, and this player definitely deserves props for coming up with it.

## Play of the Week #2

Courtesy of Umer Mirza:

"I was playing against my friend's G/W Slide deck with my Mono-Red Control. I'd lost the first game, so we sideboarded for the second. I start off well but soon enough he played a **Circle of Protection: Red**. He was so convinced that he had the game in the bag, but I decided to play it out anyway. We then had a little argument about it being possible for me to even remove the pesky enchantment. He was so sure that I had absolutely no way to kill it, that he started to slack off. Then I cast my sideboard card, **Reversal of Fortune!** I took a look at his hand and saw... **Akroma's Vengeance!** I wiped out the COP, along with his other permanents in play.

This may also be the bad play of the week because... He could have cycled the Vengeance in response!"

## Bad Play of the Week

Courtesy of Walter Schuck:

"He had 10 1/1 clerics in play and I had a **Havoc Demon**. He thought he would lose until he drew a **Pacifism**; he used it on my demon and attacked with a **Cabal Executioner**. I lost 2 life and had to sacrifice a creature, which allowed me to sacrifice the demon, destroying all his clerics. I drew a **Phage the Untouchable** and beat him the next turn."

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