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# From Osaka to Kansas



## National Championship Season Heats Up

*Alex Shvartsman · Week In Review  
Thursday, June 17, 2004*

Over the last several years, the Japanese tournament scene has becoming more and more of an influence on world's metagame. The results from [Japan Nationals](#) (held last weekend) are no exception - Japanese players managed to surprise us by producing a few unexpected results in what had been considered a very stagnant format.

Despite about every fourth competitor casting **Arcbound Ravagers**, only two Affinity decks appear in the Top 8. Instead, the day was carried by Goblins. Go Anan - a much-hyped deck designer responsible for a lot of interesting tech coming from the land of the rising sun these days - tuned Goblins for his team in order to beat Affinity as much as possible. Two copies of this Goblin variant made it into the single elimination rounds.

One of the two Goblin players fell to another deck that can certainly be considered rogue in this metagame - a blue-white control strategy played by Shunsuke Kamei. Kamei swept Goblins 3-0, and must have been feeling pretty good when his top 4 match-up was an exact same copy of the deck he just beat. However, his opponent this time was none other than Tsuyoshi Fujita - the first Japanese player to earn a Pro Tour Top 8 and still one of the top competitors from Asia today. Kamei, who just defeated Goblins 3-0 proceeded to lose to Fujita with the same record! In the finals Fujita faced an Affinity deck navigated by Kenji Tsumura and he trounced it 3-1.

By far the strangest deck in the top 8 was Tomohiro Yokosuka's "Crazy 26" - a number which might represent a total of the cards he played that you would not expect to show up in a top 8 of a major tournament:

Tomohiro Yokosuka - Crazy 26		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
7 Plains	3 Renewed Faith	2 Mycosynth Lattice
6 Forest	4 Wrath of God	2 Worship
1 Island	3 March of the Machines	1 Pulse of the Fields
4 Elfame Palace	4 Oxidize	4 Wing Shards
4 Windswept Heath	3 Naturalize	4 Purge
1 Flooded Strand	2 Pulse of the Fields	2 Tooth and Nail
1 Grand Coliseum	1 Mycosynth Lattice	
24 land	20 other spells	15 sideboard cards
3 Pristine Angel		
3 Viridian Shaman		
4 Silver Knight		
4 Krosan Tusker		
2 Solemn Simulacrum		
16 creatures		

Yokosuka started out with a **March of the Machines** strategy that already hates Affinity a lot, and added green to it in order to play with ten artifact removal spells main deck. I am not sure exactly how this deck beats anything other than Affinity, but Yokosuka's tournament finish speaks for itself. **Silver Knights** must've done their job against Goblins (with the sideboard **Worships** helping a lot) but how this deck beat **Tooth and Nail** or any of the other strategies remains a mystery to this reporter. Perhaps the most baffling are two copies of **Tooth and Nail** in the sideboard, considering that the most expensive creature in the deck is **Pristine Angel** at six mana. Meanwhile, **Tooth and Nail** takes seven to cast or nine to Entwine. All this from a player who never made top 8 of a Pro Tour before!



## Italian Nationals

Unfortunately the deck lists from Italian nationals do not appear to be available as of the writing of this article. We do know that their 2004 national champion is Mario Pascoli and that he defeated Dario Parazzoli in the finals, playing an Affinity mirror match. Luca Chiera took third place with a mono-red control deck. Federico Dato dominated the swiss rounds with a **March of the Machines** deck but lost to Chiera in the quarter-finals.

## Coming Up: [US Nationals and Magic Weekend](#)

In a series of National championships, here comes the big one.

U.S. Nationals and JSS Championship Finals will both take place in Kansas City this coming weekend. This will be the last gasp for **Skullclamp**, since its banning will take effect at the same time that **Fifth Dawn** rotates in. Technically, this will happen on Sunday, but that won't affect multi-day events that have already started. And that's good news for US Nationals competitors, because it seems likely that some of the people playing in the Top 8 on Sunday will have **Skullclamps** in their decks.

So what are the chances of Affinity decks *not* winning this tournament? I would definitely put even money on Ravager climbing its way to the top. It has been my experience that American pros are less prone to rogue decks, especially when there is a clearly defined top deck in the environment. In addition, nearly half of all the players who qualified through Regionals did so by playing Affinity - and most people stick to their Regionals deck when it comes to competing in Nationals.

In contrast to the predictable Standard metagame, the Limited portion will be very interesting: it's the first major opportunity to watch American pros draft **Fifth Dawn**. The third set significantly alters the draft environment: It is expected that Affinity decks will be less viable as a pack of artifact lands and Spellbombs trades off for a pack that only offers the archetype **Pentad Prism**. Cards that are capable of producing or cycling mana will be drafted higher as players hope to take advantage of Sunburst. **Fifth Dawn** will not have the effect of Apocalypse (which made players use more colors in their deck), but it will certainly encourage them to splash lands of additional colors, making those **Mirrodin** artifact lands that just became more rare even more desirable!

**Loxodon Anchorite** appears to be the best common draft card in the set. White seems very good overall with **Stasis Cocoon**, **Stand Firm** and **Leonin Squire** among the better commons.

With so much talent attending this event, it is of course impossible to predict the winners. However, there are several players who are worth watching closely this weekend:

**Paul Rietzl** - Fresh off his win at the [North American Challenge](#), Rietzl is obviously in top form and understands the Standard format. He is one of the most promising

young players today and he is hungry for more high finishes. Rietzl is definitely one of my picks to Top 8 in this tournament.

**Jon Finkel** - You can never count out Jon Finkel. True, it has not been a strong year for him, but he remains one of the most talented players in the game and if he invested even a little bit of work into this tournament, he has a strong shot at doing well.

**Sol Malka** - There is an excellent chance of Sol playing a **Death Cloud** deck in this tournament. He loves Green-Black so very much, and in any tournament where Green-Black is a viable archetype, he has a shot at the money.

**Steve Sadin** - A local New York player, he has not made any splashes on the tournament scene yet, but Sadin is highly respected by his peers (among the pros, especially by teammate Mike Pustilnik) and may surprise people this weekend.

## Magic Trivia

### Last week's question:

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

**Circle of Protection: Artifacts** was originally printed in *Antiquities*. Although it is not a very good card, its flavor seemed perfect for *Mirrodin* block and it finally made an appearance in *Fifth Dawn*.

### New question:

What do *Ice Age's* **Runed Arch** and **Chaos Lord** have in common?

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

## Play of the Week

### Courtesy of Michiel Valcke:

"Player A was playing Blue/Red control with 3 **Morphling** as his only kill condition, Player B was playing some mono blue **Cowardice** deck.

At a certain point player A casts his last **Morphling**, and player B casts **Last Word** to eliminate his opponents last win condition. Player A ponders a long time and then casts **Memory Lapse** targeting his own **Morphling**. Since player B had no further counterspells, player A drew and played a **Morphling** the next turn and won the game a few turns later."

## Bad Play of the Week

### Courtesy of MrNiceGuy

"I was playing a black cleric deck in the mirror match. I had 2 **Rotlung Reanimators**, a **Withered Wretch**, a **Disciple of the Vault**, and a **Dark Supplicant** in play.

For some reason, my opponent cast **Patriarch's Bidding**. In response, I tapped out and removed all of the creatures in his graveyard from the game with the **Wretch**. Then I sacrificed the **Wretch**, the **Disciple**, and the **Supplicant** to search for a **Scion of Darkness**, and put 6 - 2/2 zombies into play.

Then I resolved the **Bidding**, naming Clerics, and my opponent conceded."

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