

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM

ARTICLES

- ▾ [Related links](#)
- ➔ [Read other articles](#)

TOURNAMENTS

MAGIC ONLINE

Article Search ▾ ➔

# Banning and Online Extended



Chad Ellis · *Online and Enjoying It*  
Tuesday, August 10, 2004

Last Sunday was the finals of the MTGO World Championship Qualifier. This is now the second time that MTGO play has put someone on the Pro Tour (Andrew Cuneo was the first, from last year's Worlds Qualifier). Congratulations to Toshinori Shigehara of Japan, who piloted his Tooth and Nail build to victory in the finals! Here are the top 8 decklists:

**“tori3” - Toshinori Shigehara, Japan**

2004 MTGO World Championship Qualifier - 1st Place

Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 Forest</li> <li>4 Urza's Mine</li> <li>4 Urza's Power Plant</li> <li>4 Urza's Tower</li> <li>1 Tranquil Thicket</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>23 land</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Triskelion</li> <li>4 Vine Trellis</li> <li>4 Solemn Simulacrum</li> <li>1 Darksteel Colossus</li> <li>1 Sundering Titan</li> <li>3 Eternal Witness</li> <li>1 Mephidross Vampire</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>15 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 Mindslaver</li> <li>4 Oblivion Stone</li> <li>4 Sylvan Scrying</li> <li>4 Tooth and Nail</li> <li>4 Reap and Sow</li> <li>3 Tel-Jilad Justice</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>22 other spells</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 Creeping Mold</li> <li>1 Triskelion</li> <li>1 Naturalize</li> <li>2 Xantid Swarm</li> <li>1 Duplicant</li> <li>1 Mindslaver</li> <li>4 Oxidize</li> <li>1 Sundering Titan</li> <li>1 Eternal Witness</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>15 sideboard cards</p>

**“FFfreak” - Bradley Nelson, USA**

2004 MTGO World Championship Qualifier - 2nd Place

Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 Glimmervoid</li> <li>4 Great Furnace</li> <li>4 Seat of the Synod</li> <li>4 Vault of Whispers</li> <li>3 Blinkmoth Nexus</li> <li>2 Darksteel Citadel</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>20 land</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Chromatic Sphere</li> <li>4 Shrapnel Blast</li> <li>4 Thoughtcast</li> <li>4 Cranial Plating</li> <li>2 Night's Whisper</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>18 other spells</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 Mana Leak</li> <li>3 Pyroclasm</li> <li>3 Electrostatic Bolt</li> <li>2 Myr Enforcer</li> <li>4 Welding Jar</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>15 sideboard cards</p>

- 3 Ornithopter
- 4 Disciple of the Vault
- 4 Frogmite
- 3 Somber Hoverguard
- 4 Arcbound Ravager
- 4 Arcbound Worker

22 creatures

## “realize” - Tosimitsu Sakuma, Japan



2004 MTGO World Championship Qualifier - 3rd Place

### Main Deck

60 cards

- 9 Island
- 8 Plains
- 4 Flooded Strand
- 4 Cloudpost

25 land

- 2 Eternal Dragon

2 creatures

- 3 Annul
- 4 Mana Leak
- 2 Rewind
- 4 Wrath of God
- 2 Akroma's Vengeance
- 4 Decree of Justice
- 2 Mindslaver
- 4 Thirst for Knowledge
- 1 Pulse of the Fields
- 4 Condescend
- 1 Vedalken Shackles
- 2 Wayfarer's Bauble

33 other spells

### Sideboard

- 3 Circle of Protection: Red
- 4 Relic Barrier
- 2 Rewind
- 2 Exalted Angel
- 3 Stifle
- 1 Acquire

15 sideboard cards

## “Booster her” - Natan Azabal Pereira, Germany



2004 MTGO World Championship Qualifier - 4th Place

### Main Deck

60 cards

- 13 Mountain
- 3 Swamp
- 3 City of Brass
- 4 Bloodstained Mire

23 land

- 4 Goblin Piledriver
- 4 Goblin Sharpshooter
- 4 Goblin Sledder
- 4 Skirk Prospector
- 4 Sparksmith
- 3 Clickslither
- 4 Goblin Warchief
- 4 Siege-Gang Commander

31 creatures

- 2 Patriarch's Bidding
- 4 Electrostatic Bolt

6 other spells

### Sideboard

- 4 Shatter
- 3 Terror
- 2 Patriarch's Bidding
- 3 Sulfuric Vortex
- 3 Echoing Ruin

15 sideboard cards

## “voyage” - Norihito Nishimura, Japan



2004 MTGO World Championship Qualifier - 5th Place

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
12 Island	4 Mana Leak	4 Annul
9 Mountain	2 Obliterate	3 Rewind
2 Grand Coliseum	3 Pyroclasm	3 Stalking Stones
<hr/>		3 Dwarven Blastminer
23 land	2 Future Sight	2 Culling Scales
<hr/>		15 sideboard cards
0 creatures	2 Slice and Dice	
	4 Electrostatic Bolt	
	4 March of the Machines	
	2 Thirst for Knowledge	
	4 Darksteel Ingot	
	2 Darksteel Pendant	
	2 Echoing Truth	
	2 Condescend	
	4 Serum Visions	
	<hr/>	
	37 other spells	

<b>“DweamHeBe.leiz” - Lei (Tim) He, Australia</b> 		
2004 MTGO World Championship Qualifier - 6th Place		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
19 Mountain	4 Lay Waste	4 Flashfires
4 Stalking Stones	4 Pyroclasm	4 Relic Barrier
2 Forgotten Cave	4 Shatter	2 Demolish
<hr/>		1 Forgotten Cave
25 land	4 Stone Rain	4 Culling Scales
4 Dwarven Blastminer	2 Demolish	15 sideboard cards
1 Rorix Bladewing	4 Electrostatic Bolt	
4 Arc-Slogger	4 Molten Rain	
<hr/>		
9 creatures	26 other spells	

<b>“Sunda” - Rafael Barros, Vieira, Brazil</b> 		
2004 MTGO World Championship Qualifier - 7th Place		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
7 Island	2 Annul	1 Annul
9 Plains	4 Mana Leak	4 Exalted Angel
4 Flooded Strand	3 Rewind	2 Stifle
1 Secluded Steppe	4 Wrath of God	3 March of the Machines
2 Temple of the False God	2 Akroma's Vengeance	2 Scrabbling Claws
2 Darksteel Citadel	4 Decree of Justice	3 Purge
<hr/>		15 sideboard cards
25 land	3 Thirst for Knowledge	
3 Eternal Dragon	2 Echoing Truth	
<hr/>		
3 creatures	2 Pulse of the Fields	
	3 Condescend	
	3 Wayfarer's Bauble	
	<hr/>	
	32 other spells	

<b>“manabird4” - Lee Sang Yul, South Korea</b>
--

2004 MTGO World Championship Qualifier - 8th Place  
0 cards

0 (decklist unavailable)

0 creatures

0 other spells

0 land

Next week we'll take an in-depth look at the finals and what this tournament says about the Standard environment, both online and off. For now, however, I'm going to take a look at the Online Extended metagame (based on the recent qualifiers), which raise some interesting questions for Wizards of the Coast as they consider what changes, if any, to make to the banned and restricted lists in September.

Before I begin, I should make two things clear. First, and most important, while I write this column for Wizards of the Coast, I am not a Wizards employee – let alone someone with any involvement in determining the banned or restricted lists for sanctioned play. What follows is my *personal* take on the situation and should not be seen as a policy statement (or even policy hint) from Wizards. Second, I'm not trying to make a case for any particular solution. The options all have their drawbacks and even as an outsider (unburdened by the need to put any choice into action) it's not clear to me what the best path is.

The online Extended metagame can be summed up with one card and one deck. The card is **Skullclamp**; the deck is Ravager Affinity. Affinity decks have been dominating the Top 8s of Online Extended qualifiers, and the other decks that have shown success (such as Rock, Elf and Nail and Goblins) have typically been running massive amounts of artifact hate and/or **Skullclamps** of their own. In one Extended PE, for example, seven out of eight T8 decks were running four **Skullclamps** each. The only deck not running **Skullclamp** ran four maindeck **Artifact Mutations** and four each of **Overload** and **Oxidize** in the sideboard.



This clearly meets the criteria for banning, as Aaron Forsythe [summed up](#) excellently when discussing the banning of **Skullclamp** in Standard:

*Skullclamp was banned in Standard, frankly, because it was everywhere. Every competitive deck either had four in the main deck, had four in the sideboard, or was built to try and defend against it. And there were a lot more successful decks in the first two categories than in the third. Such representation is completely unhealthy for the format. Your deck has to either have **Skullclamps**, or have **Skullclamp** in its crosshairs—a definitive case of a card “warping the metagame.”*

*Look, for example, at the Top 8 decks from [Ohio Valley Regionals](#). Or at those from the more recent [German Nationals](#). Combined, those 16 decks contained 58 out of a possible 64 **Skullclamps**. Never in my memory have I ever seen a card show up in those numbers.*

By all appearances, **Skullclamp** is now appearing in comparable numbers in Online Extended tournaments. Moreover, it's not just numbers. Continuing with Aaron's explanation:

*The three “best decks” in Standard pre-banning—Ravager Affinity, Goblins, and Elf and Nail—can all do ridiculous things early in the game without **Skullclamp**. Affinity can play **Disciple of the Vault**, sacrifice everything to **Arcbound Ravager**, and **Shrapnel Blast** you to death by turn 4. Goblins can also kill on turn 4 easily with **Goblin Piledriver**, **Goblin Warchief**, and **Siege-Gang Commander**. Elf and Nail can*

play *Tooth and Nail* entwined on turn 4 with the help of *Vine Trellis* and *Vernal Bloom*. All three decks, should they survive into the newer metagame, will still be capable of such antics. Decks that can sometimes make plays like that are fun and exciting—the problem was that *Skullclamp* gave them all a resilience and a robustness that they had no right to have. Removal and board-sweepers should be able to dent their strategies, not just let them draw more cards! Note that the ideal *Tooth and Nail* plan makes no use of one-toughness creatures, yet the way to make the deck a winner was to add sixteen one-toughness creatures and four *Skullclamps*.

This applies as well. Psychatog decks have been on the run and are virtually extinct, as are most other decks built around a board-sweeping strategy. And it's arguably worse in MTGO Extended than it was in Standard, because of a card that never co-existed with *Skullclamp* in Standard: *Cabal Therapy*.

I'm a huge fan of *Cabal Therapy* as a card, both because of the choices it presents and the deck-building constraints it implies. If you play it on turn one, you obviously risk missing. Sacrificing a creature is a steep cost to play it again, although often correct, especially if you had some way to benefit from the creature's death, e.g. *Symbiotic Wurm* in Reanimator decks.

But in an environment dominated by *Skullclamp*, this often doesn't apply. In some matchups, the Affinity player's only real concern is *Pernicious Deed*, so if he misses he may not care. More importantly, *Skullclamp* makes a joke out of *Therapy*'s flashback "cost".

Now, if this were happening in the offline Extended environment, the next step would be clear. *Skullclamp* would meet the criteria for banning and we would all expect Wizards to announce its relegation to Type I. (It would be unfortunate that an important tournament series ran in a broken environment, but most of us accept that as a necessary cost of having **Magic** cards that push the envelope.)



But offline Extended hasn't seen enough serious tournaments with *Skullclamp* to know whether it meets the criteria for banning there, and one could certainly make an argument that it shouldn't be banned there at this time.

Offline Extended has a lot of answers to Affinity that aren't available online. *Pulverize*, *Rack and Ruin*, *Meltdown*, *Powder Keg*, *Null Rod*, *Wasteland*, *Energy Flux*, and others all represent a serious threat to Affinity decks. Offline Extended also has a much greater card pool to build decks from, so extrapolating from online to offline is as risky as extrapolating from Standard to Extended.

So what are the options available to Wizards? Here are the main options as I see them:

- **Separate banned lists.** Many players I've spoken with have suggested separate banned lists for MTGO Extended. Sometimes this is just for *Skullclamp*, but a few have argued that there may be cards like *Entomb* that aren't broken in online Extended and should be *unbanned* for MTGO.
- **Maintain the unified banned list, but take both online and offline into consideration in September.** Wizards could maintain a single list but either ban *Skullclamp* because of its effect on online Extended or at least make that part of their deliberations.
- **Base the Extended banned list on the offline card pool and environment.** This might mean banning *Skullclamp* anyway, but in principle it would mean that Wizards would be willing to accept an imperfect online Extended banned list, at least until card rotations cause online and offline to merge.

None of these options are perfect. The separate banned lists feels like a "perfect world" solution to me, but one that ignores practical problems as well as Wizards' policy towards banning. Ultimately I don't think this is a workable solution, and one that would create as many problems as it solved if they decided to do it.

Banning cards isn't a simple process. While there are occasionally some obvious cards that need to go, most card banning takes a lot of work to get right. Banning the wrong card or cards can easily make an environment worse rather than better, simply replacing one dominant deck with another. Adding a new format for Wizards to keep track of, particularly one where there may or may not be enough major tournaments to provide the necessary input, would not be easy.

Wizards also has a clear policy of being reluctant to ban cards until and unless the evidence is overwhelming. Power cards are an important part of what makes Extended exciting, and it took years of ongoing power or even dominance before cards like *Oath of Druids* and *Force of Will* were banned.

An analogy might be criminal court – a card is considered innocent until proven guilty. Once convicted, furthermore, there is little chance of an appeal. Banned cards seldom come back, and with good reason -- their banning shows that they are not merely powerful but degenerate and would, if allowed to remain, represent a constant risk to the health of the environment as well as a constraint on future card design. (It is for this reason most of all that even with a separate list it would be wrong to bring back *Entomb* for online use.)

Finally, if Wizards did create a separate online banned list, they would eventually have to merge the lists when the formats line up. What if the addition of new sets makes *Skullclamp* “just” a powerful card rather than something that needs banning? Does it wait until the circle is complete and online and offline Extended are identical, or should Wizards try to guess when the new sets make up for the absence of the old?

This brings us to the next option: keeping a single list but considering both Extended environments. This is a compromise solution; almost by definition it cannot lead to a perfect banned list for both environments. If *Skullclamp* isn't a problem for offline Extended but was banned anyway, that would be an injustice to one of **Magic's** more important and fun formats. I doubt very much that Wizards would want a relatively minor online play format to drive the cardpool for the Pro Tour! If, however, the choice is unclear, a good case can be made for letting online Extended play the role of tiebreaker. Obviously if the call is truly 50-50 for offline Extended, it makes sense to do what's right for online. But another reason is that online Extended provides at least a partial preview of what offline Extended will be.

Suppose the anti-artifact cards named above and overall stronger card pool mean that offline Extended can manage with *Skullclamp*. The situation with online Extended is still a strong hint that *Skullclamp* serves as a design constraint and might need banning in the future unless future sets make up for what is lost as sets rotate out.

Finally, Wizards could decide to keep the single list and let offline Extended drive the banning process at or close to 100%. This is by far the easiest option to implement, avoiding all of the problems listed above. If they are planning to ban *Skullclamp* in September I think this option becomes a no-brainer, but even if they don't they may decide that the downside is worth it.

The downside, of course, is that MTGO Extended could remain unhealthy (if *Skullclamp* isn't banned) or become unhealthy again (if *Kamigawa* block contains a card too powerful for Standard but not Extended). How big a problem that is would depend on specific cards and banning decisions, but will in any case be resolved by Fall 2005 when *Tempest*, *Urza's Saga* and *Mercadian Masques* blocks rotate out and the offline and online Extended formats become identical.

I don't know which way Wizards will decide to go. My best guess as to what I'd recommend would be the second option – to ban *Skullclamp* unless there is a solid belief that it doesn't need banning in offline Extended but not to create a separate banned list for online Extended. But all three options have their advantages and disadvantages.

As a parting thought, *Skullclamp* has certainly caused Wizards some headaches and even embarrassment. I remember when I first saw the card at the prerelease (I've stopped looking at spoilers because it's too much fun being surprised) and thinking, “No way, they can't possibly have made this card!” I was right, and the card was broken, but I usually have that reaction to at least one or two cards every set and very few are so good as to need banning in Standard, let alone in Extended. (And let's face it, this is me – my first thought was that they can't possibly have made it *uncommon* since it's so obviously unfair in Limited!)

Wizards continues to push the envelope on card development with cards like *Arcbound Ravager*, *Skullclamp*, *Krark-Clan Ironworks* and *Eternal Witness* – cards that are powerful enough to inspire new archetypes and that potentially break the game. It's impossible to do that

without sometimes going too far and having to fix things with bannings, but **Magic** has needed surprisingly few bannings recently, and constructed **Magic** is healthier now than it was two, three or four years ago. There will always be periods in which a given constructed environment is degenerate because of a broken card or clearly best deck – but better to have such cards and such times than to return to *Homelands* and underpowered **Magic**.

## Aside on /join free

Last week we discussed Twilight's wish that we resurrect the /join free room, and last Wednesday saw it go live again. A sustainable player-run room that depends on a supply of people willing to give up their extra commons and uncommons from leagues and drafts is obviously not an easy proposition, but I would call Wednesday's experience a qualified success.

The room was certainly chaotic, with a few spammers and hecklers, but we also had a good number of people with spare commons and uncommons helping newcomers flesh out their collections. I did an estimated fifteen "trades" and only once felt like the person I was trading with might be trying to scam cards to sell for tickets. Most people were working on casual decks and needed cards that won't see tournament play, or even basic lands. I went back on Thursday and the room was much calmer. I was able to do eight or nine "trades" in maybe forty minutes or less.

The philosophy of /join free is simple. I draft every chance I get. As a result, I have over forty of every *Mirrodin* artifact land – and that's after giving away quite a few! There are a lot of others like me, who have commons from leagues and drafts filling up our binders, and there are a lot of new players who want them.

I remember the first time a friend of mine showed me his "giveaway box". The idea that I could take four **Giant Growths** and four **Lightning Bolts** was the most amazing thing ever. As an old-time player and one-time Pro, it's easy to forget that feeling – but that's what /join free is all about. It may seem silly to take the time to give away cards that someone could buy for a few tickets at most, but it makes a big difference to someone just starting out in the game.

### Interact

Rant, rave and share



[Discuss "Banning and Online Extended"](#) on the message boards



[Respond to Chad Ellis](#) via email

### Consult

More articles by Chad Ellis



[MTGO Sets the Standard](#) More than just a qualifier  
9 days ago

- All [Chad Ellis](#) articles

### Explore

Similar articles



[Odds and Ends](#) A little of this, a little of that.  
3 days ago  
Mark Rosewater



[Un-Believable](#) The tall tale of Unglued development  
6 days ago  
Aaron Forsythe



[Spikeshot's Cap](#) Combining Spikeshot Goblin with Cranial Plating  
6 days ago  
Nate Heiss



[Putting the Un in Fun](#) Designing Unglued  
10 days ago  
Mark Rosewater



[Pristine Green](#) A different kind of control deck  
13 days ago  
Nate Heiss

- More [Behind the Scenes](#) articles
- More [Magic Online](#) articles

### Continue

Other recent articles



[Peasants, Creatures, and Wacky Hats](#) A tour of the important Magic events at Gen Con  
Today  
Mark Gottlieb



[A Fine Vintage, Indeed](#) Inside the growing Vintage tourney scene  
Today  
Brian David-Marshall



[Bosium Strip](#) Sometimes once is never enough  
Yesterday  
Adrian Sullivan



[Across the Room, Across the Ocean](#) Top 8 PTQ decks from New Jersey and Berlin  
Yesterday  
Mike Flores



[doctorjay Does Mirrodin](#) Welcome to the team JMS!  
2 days ago  
Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar

- [More recent articles](#)
- [Return to Magicthegathering.com](#)

© 1995-2004 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
Wizards is headquartered in Renton, Washington, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057.  
PRIVACY STATEMENT