

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

# Last Man Standing

Brian David-Marshall  
The Week That Was  
Thursday, August 12, 2004



Welcome to the first modern installment of The Week that Was (formerly Week in Review by Alex Shvartsman). This marks the fourth different column I have helmed for this site, and while that is indicative of something, I am not sure what it is. By now you have surely noticed that Mike Flores is [swimming with the sharks](#) these days -- and I am as excited as you are to get a double dose of Mike Flores each week between his work for this site and [Starcitygames.com](#). I anticipate a lot of interaction between Mike's column and my own, as he brings you the best decks from the competitive **Magic** scene while I bring you the stories of the players who wield them.

And for those of you fooled by [last week's format](#), you can click on the "Original Format" link in the header to view the page in its modern design.

## Last Man Standing

With the **Magic: the Gathering** World Championships looming, last weekend saw the final chance for players to qualify for the tournament. The finals of the MTGO World Championship Qualifier saw more than 450 players fight not only for an invite to the tournament, but for airfare and accommodations too. Players had to win one of umpteen qualifying events in the weeks leading up to Sunday's tournament in order to play.

After 14 rounds of Standard, Toshinori Shigehara won the last invite and all the trimmings with his green-Urza build of Tooth and Nail featuring **Mephidross Vampire** and **Triskelion** (Chad showcased the Top 8 decks from the tournament in [his column on Tuesday](#)). Shigehara is an 18-year-old college student from a rural part of Japan near Hiroshima. He does not run in the same circles as Japan's more famous players and has never made the Top 8 at either a Grand Prix or Pro Tour—in fact, this will be the first Pro Tour he has ever attended.



The Japanese players have been tearing it up on **Magic Online** and it did not come as a surprise when three Japanese players surfaced in the Top 8 of the event. Nobody was expecting Shigehara to win though -- not even himself. He has played in countless PTQs in his **Magic** career and this was the first time his efforts have resulted in an invite.

"I didn't think that I could qualify," he said. "I had thought I would drop with 2-2, but finally I recorded 11-0-2. Even I was very surprised."

Shigehara calls his deck LastStand-Green because "Last Stand" is his favorite English term, so much so that it is the name of his Japanese homepage. He prepared to make his last stand by testing extensively online.

"I usually play **Magic** with my friends. I tested my decks in the Online 'Serious Decks' room. It was a lot of work to get *Fifth Dawn* cards for my deck, especially because the qualifiers were just after *Fifth Dawn* became legal on MTGO -- especially **Eternal Witnesses** and **Night's Whisper**."

He played the deck because he had experience with it from the *Mirrodon* Block Constructed PTQ season. He also liked his green-Urza version because, as he put it, "I placed importance on the mana stability. I decided to go mono-color because I was concerned about the deck's consistency -- I decided that this was very important. In Japan now, four-color Tooth and Nail decks are popular, but when I put one together and tested it, I decided it didn't work for me, so I made it mono-green.

"Personally, I hate Affinity, so when I started making decks, I naturally went for Tooth and Nail."

While many of the Block Constructed versions of Tooth and Nail have sideboarded the **Mephidross Vampire/Triskelion** combo, Shigehara felt it was a mandatory main deck inclusion in the Standard version.

"I chose to go with **Triskelion** and **Mephidross Vampire** in the main deck because I was concerned about Goblins. I debated about **Platinum Angel** and **Leonin Abunas**, but because I was concerned about the speed of Affinity I chose to go with the former."

With Eternal Slide decks becoming such a popular metagame choice, Shigehara felt he should have included two copies of the 7/10 artifact

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creature in his main deck.

"I was expecting to encounter a lot of GW cycling decks, so I decided to put **Sundering Titan** in the main deck. It lived up to my expectations -- I played GW decks about 3 or 4 times, and they all lost to the Titan. Looking back on it, I wish I had played with 2 in the main deck."

I asked him to describe his Top 8 matchups and share some sideboarding tech. He broke down all three matchups and gave very specific sideboard strategies.

"In the first round of the finals, I was paired up against another mono-green Tooth and Nail deck," he said. "We were basically evenly paired in the matchup."

Here's how he sideboarded:

*In: **Creeping Mold** x3, **Duplicant** x1, **Mindslaver** x1, **Eternal Witness** x1*

*Out: **Tel-Jilad Justice** x3, **Triskelion** x1, **Mephidross Vampire** x1, **Sundering Titan** x1*

"In the second game, I basically played my deck as if it were land destruction, and blew up my opponent's lands as much as possible."

"The second round of the finals, I was paired against UW control. I believe one of the reasons I won was because of my opponent's land screws."

*In: **Xantid Swarm** x2, **Mindslaver** x1, **Duplicant** x1, **Sundering Titan** x1*  
*OUT: **Tel-Jilad Justice** x3, **Oblivion Stone** x2*

"Of course, the **Xantid Swarm** -- which I got out with **Tooth and Nail** -- ended up not being much help (heh).

"My opponent in the finals was playing Affinity," said Shigehara. "To tell the truth, I was really nervous once I knew what he was playing. Since he got off to a slow start, I was able to get a **Mindslaver** out, which basically let me win. When I used **Mindslaver**, he had one **Shrapnel Blast**, and then I (he) drew another. At that point, my opponent conceded. I was lucky."

*In: **Triskelion** x1, **Oxidize** x4, **Naturalize** x1, **Eternal Witness** x1*  
*Out: **Solemn Simulacrum** x2, **Mindslaver** x3, **Sundering Titan** x1, **Darksteel Colossus** x1*

"I had a hard time deciding, but these are the choices I made. Basically, I was hoping on the **Triskelion** in the sideboard to pull me through."

In addition to winning the Qualifier, he gets the honor of being my first play of the week, which came from one of his matches in the Swiss.

"I was playing a white-green deck, and the board was locked up, I was able to set up a perpetual loop using my **Eternal Witness** and **Mindslaver**, and my opponent's **Astral Slide** and **Eternal Dragon**."

He is definitely going to take advantage of the opportunity to play in the World Championship, but will likely have to rely on **Magic Online** for the bulk of his playtesting.

"I intend on going to San Francisco," Shigehara said. "I haven't had the opportunity to meet any of the famous Japanese players, so I don't know if I will be working with them. If I can playtest with them, I would very much like to do so."

Hopefully, Tsuyoshi Fujita, Itaru Ishida, and Masashi Oiso will take him under their collective wing. Failing that, Shigehara can build a replica of Japan's best players to test against -- apparently he builds robots in his spare time!

As we wrapped up the interview, he asked me to pass on the following sentiment: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who supported me online."

Good luck in San Francisco, Toshinori. I will definitely be pulling for you!

## Poor Ben Seck

Last month I had the opportunity to cover Grand Prix Kuala Lumpur. In my coverage for the event, I featured a deck called Thai Breakfast played by Pulperm Phungprachit (and designed by countryman Apiwat Pod Niyomjoy).



The deck was an Elf and Nail variant that replaced the card drawing of **Skullclamp** with **Fecundity** and the **Tooth and Nail** engine with **Beacon of Creation** and **Blasting Station**. The deck seemed very powerful to me despite a poor result by Pulperm. I wrote about it in broad strokes on Day 1 and revealed the actual list during play on Sunday.

Ben was reading the coverage and was inspired to build his own version of the deck. He was planning on attempting to qualify for this past Sunday's tournament and decided to give it a whirl with the product of his tinkering. He won the opportunity to play in the finals with the following decklist:



It Came from Australia		
Ben Seck -- Winner Online Qualifier		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		<b>Sideboard</b>
22 Forest	4 Beacon of Creation	4 Naturalize
22 lands	4 Fecundity	3 Nourish
4 Wood Elves	3 Blasting Station	1 Oxidize
4 Eternal Witness	2 Coat of Arms	4 Ravenous Baloth
4 Birds of Paradise	3 Oxidize	3 Sword of Fire and Ice
3 Solemn Simulacrum	2 Rude Awakening	15 sideboard cards
3 Wirewood Symbiote	18 other spells	
2 Viridian Shaman		
20 creatures		

"I missed Grand Prix Kuala Lumpur due to work commitments," explained Seck. "I was getting ready to choose a deck for the Modo Worlds Q's. I decided that I want to run something new, a la Reanimator. So I looked into a whole heap of rogue decks but this one really stood out for me after reading the coverage from KL."

(The Reanimator deck that Ben referred to was his Angry Pete deck from the Gateway of the Chicago Masters in 2003.)

The biggest difference between Ben's build and Pulperm's is the inclusion of **Rude Awakening**. The deck develops so much mana between the **Wood Elves/Wirewood Symbiote** action that it is a very logical addition that gives the deck what Jon Becker likes to call "greater threat diversity."

After winning the opportunity to play in the finals, Ben faced a decision to stay with the rogue deck or to make the safe play and choose one of the dominant archetypes, such as Goblins, Affinity, or Tooth and Nail. Anyone who has ever met Ben knows which route he chose -- although he did modify the deck based on his tournament experience. He cut the **Coat of Arms** and had to deal with a growing persistent threat.

"The deck did well for a while but kept losing to **Somber Hoverguard**, which was finding the main decks of affinity due to **Tooth and Nail**," Ben said. "So I decided to add red, which meant **Magma Jets**, and basically the deck became what it is now."

Here is what Ben chose to play this past Sunday:



TBS: The Blasting Station		
Ben Seck -- 12th place, MTGO World Championship Qualifier		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		<b>Sideboard</b>
20 Forest	4 Beacon of Creation	4 Naturalize
1 Mountain	4 Fecundity	3 Fractured Loyalty
21 lands	3 Blasting Station	1 Oxidize
	3 Magma Jet	3 Electrostatic Bolt
	3 Oxidize	1 Mountain
	2 Rude Awakening	3 Sword of Fire and Ice

4 Wood Elves	19 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Eternal Witness		
4 Birds of Paradise		
3 Solemn Simulacrum		
3 Wirewood Symbiote		
1 Wirewood Herald		
1 Viridian Shaman		
20 creatures		

Ben went 8-2 with the deck and finished in 12th place out of a 450-person field.

"The losses were disappointing especially since one was a time-related mistake," Ben said. "I was going to win but needed to be more aggressive to win in time because of how modo deals with triggers. It took me seven minutes to kill one guy since I had two **Blasting Stations** and two **Fecundity** out. I had to say 'yes' and 'no' alternatively."

Ben recorded a 6-0 record against affinity players -- which should be of interest to players grappling with what to play in the Standard portion of Worlds. His other two victories came over Goblin Bidding and a blue-black Deathcloud deck. His two losses came against Eternal Slide and the blue-red Obliterate deck that made it to the Top 8. The Slide deck was the match he ran afoul of the clock, and he pleaded mana screw in the final match that sent the Obliterate player into the elimination rounds.

"I'm pretty sure this deck should be a force at Worlds," said Ben. "It plays terrific and is a lot of fun. I got to steal one player's Angel token with **Fractured Loyalty** for the win."

The Loyalty is in the deck mostly for Tooth and Nail, allowing you to steal the opposing player's **Darksteel Colossus**. With few ways to target in Tooth decks, they rarely get a chance to take it back, and even if they do it will usually be futile. In addition to being able to target with the **Blasting Station**, Ben pointed out that you can untap the opponent's creatures with **Wirewood Symbiote** -- something I never realized until talking with him for this column. Here's Ben's take on the deck's matchups in Standard.



"Affinity is a good matchup," he said. "Eternal Slide is a fine match up unless they get **Plow Under** Recursion because your plan is to just **Rude Awakening** them out. They can't slide out anything really all your guys are resilient to Slide, and **Fecundity** is horrendous for them.

"The goblins are the worst matchup in general, but the **Sword of Fire and Ice** is there to even out that match," he explained. "And that's exactly what happened in the Worlds Qualifier. I went turn-one **Birds of Paradise** then turn-two **Sword** . . . good game."

**Fecundity** is a critical card in the deck but its symmetry can work against you in certain matchups, he noted.

"All white control matchups come down to **Fecundity** or **Rude Awakening** but you board **Fecundity** out versus Goblins and Affinity," Ben said.

The idea of a Ravager Affinity deck or Goblin Bidding deck having access to a free card every time they sacrifice a creature is just gruesome. This could explain some of Pulperm's troubles with the deck since I watched him lose at least one sideboarded game to a **Clickslither** with **Fecundity** in play on his side of the table.

## Setting the Standard

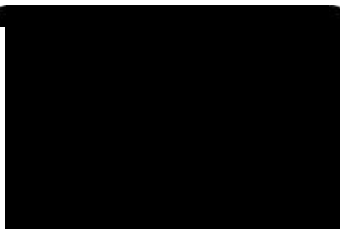
The Grand Prix in Kuala Lumpur and the MTGO World Championship Qualifier have made their collective contribution to the Standard metagame with the Blasting Station deck. There is still going to be an opportunity for more late entries into the Standard derby the weekend before the World Championships. Nagoya, Japan will be the site of another Standard Grand Prix. It will be interesting to see if any new decks emerge from that event.

## Bad Beat of the Week

I played in a PTQ two weekends ago -- the one Mike wrote about in his column this week -- and I have to nominate my experience there as the Bad Beat of the Week. I sat down to play against Damien Mancuso and he recognized me from my SwS column. He laughed as we started to play and it became apparent that we were both playing Vial Affinity.

He won the first game after I double-mulliganed and was facing off against two **Somber Hoverguards** and a **Cranial Plating** on turn three. I fought as valiantly as one can under those circumstances but eventually succumbed. As we sideboarded for the second game I was startled by how many cards he was bringing in -- it looked like 12 or 13 cards -- and I said "Wow, you're bringing in a lot of cards for me there."

He laughed, "What's funny is they are really for YOU. The only reason I am playing Vial Affinity is because I read your column about it. I knew



other people would be thinking the same thing so I prepared for the mirror and built a sideboard for YOUR deck from your column."

Several **Annuls**, **Electrostatic Bolts**, and a **Detonate** later, I was off to an 0-1 start in the tournament. I was disappointed but appreciated the humor of my opponent having a sideboard specifically for me. I followed Damien's progress throughout the day and he finished in a heartbreaking ninth place while I landed in 12th when I lost one more round during the day.

## PTQ Congratulations!

One of the new features of the Week that Was will be the inclusion of results from the past weekend's PTQs. Primarily these are results from North American events, but I am hoping to expand it to include all PTQs around the world.

Congratulations to everyone who won. Mike Flores mentioned that Mike Pustilnik played in Harrisburg the weekend before this and a quick look through the Top 8 reveals a couple of familiar names as well -- most notably Sol Malka and Mark Zajdner.



Event City	Event Date	Event TO
Atlanta	8/7/2004	Anthony Edwards
Finish: 1. Tim Kincaid; 2. Sol Malka; 3. Jefferson Parker; 4. Jesse Kilgore; 5. Kevin Quirk; 6. Geoff Grossack; 7. Brian Joiner; 8. Derrick Sheets		
Chicago	8/7/2004	Barratt Moy
Finish: 1. Matthew Duelfer; 2. Jimmy Fricke; 3. Timothy Gruneich; 4. Scott Williamson; 5. Braden Mcloughlin; 6. Michael Bernat; 7. Paul Ziegler; 8. Kenneth Wallach		
Dallas	8/7/2004	Ed Fox
Finish: 1. Leonard Lansford; 2. Ronnie Jones; 3. Tommy Richardson; 4. Bobby Helms; 5. David Penkauskas; 6. John Varner; 7. Sammy Pence; 8. Clinton Whitehurst		
Charlotte, N.C.	8/7/2004	Jim Bailey
Finish: 1. Robert Gathings; 2. Jesse Hawkins; 3. Jason Vogt; 4. James McCoy; 5. Zachery Byrd; 6. Steven Martin; 7. Matthew Kimbrell; 8. Rodney Hayes		
Boise, ID	8/7/2004	Ken Somerville
Winner: 1. Steve Canty		
Toronto	8/7/2004	Marvin Paguirigan
Finish: 1. Craig Macnaughton; 2. David Felske; 3. Mark Zajdner; 4. Michael Abramovich; 5. Matt Wakisaka; 6. George Popescu; 7. Derek Denholm; 8. Ryan Billing		
Phoenix	8/7/2004	Ray Powers
Finish: 1. Sean Fitzgerald; 2. Eric Melen; 3. Riad Mourssali; 4. Sam Sanders; 5. Chris Basco; 6. Adam Prosak; 7. Phimus Pan; 8. Tim Rivera		
Kansas City	8/8/2004	Steve Ferrell
Finish: 1. Sean Hoelsing; 2. Joel Mangner; 3. David Saylor; 4. Sean Mangner; 5. Adam Boyd; 6. Caleb Scherer; 7. Jack Ewing; 8. Ibrahim Ahmad		
Weimar, Germany	8/8/2004	
Qualified: Jean-Pierre Dziedzicki; Maximilian Bracht		

## The Week That Will Be

The big event this weekend will be in my home state. [Grand Prix–New Jersey](#) is taking place in "lovely" Elizabeth and should be filled to the rafters with **Magic** players from all over the country. I could not pass up an opportunity to play and will be participating in the event rather than sitting in the sidelines behind a computer. I will be keeping a player diary and hope to be able to update it live throughout the weekend. If only I can find a deck that plays fast enough to allow me the time to write between rounds...

I hope to see many of you at the event. There is plenty to do even if you don't want to play in the main event. Aside from a Grand Prix Trial on Friday, a PTQ on Sunday, and countless side drafts all weekend, there will be three significant **Magic** artists appearing. Dan Frazier, rk post, and Donato Gioncola will be on hand to sign cards, prints, and artist proofs. You might even be able to pick up a piece of original art if you are willing to part with a nice chunk of change. [Here's a card checklist](#) for the three artists appearing at Grand Prix–New Jersey.

Next week, I will go behind the scenes of Grand Prix–New Jersey and the PTQ scene to bring you more decks, stories, and personalities from the **Magic** tournament scene.

*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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