

Mike Flores

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**B**efore we get into this week's PTQ Top 8 coverage and analysis, let us pause a moment to go over an open question from last week's *Is There Any Doubt?*. Many readers of this column were wondering about why a card like *Aether Vial* is useful. To their eyes, *Aether Vial* doesn't necessarily make a lot of sense, especially for tapping out big beaters like *Myr Enforcer*, in some cases *Somber Hoverguard*, or even the small and relatively inexpensive *Frogmite*.



The reason *Aether Vial* is so effective is that it generates a ton of speed. Playing an *Aether Vial* on turn one allows you to play out a *Disciple of the Vault* or *Arcbound Worker* for free on the second turn, regardless of whatever else you do. Because the *Vial Affinity* decks have a high concentration of 1-drops and 2-drops (typically eight or more creatures at each of these mana costs), *Aether Vial* can do a lot of damage, even if you are not adding additional counters. You can use *Aether Vial* to put creatures into play at instant speed, limiting your opponent's options and giving you more. At a recent Online Worlds Qualifier tournament, for instance, a player with two one-counter *Aether Vials* and one two-counter *Vial* attacked with his *Arcbound Ravager*. The opponent did the math three times. *He can't kill me... He's a couple of points short, even if both his cards in hand are relevant artifact creatures.*

"No blocks."

The *Vial Affinity* player deployed *Arcbound Worker* with one one-counter *Vial*, sacrificed it to *Arcbound Ravager* for two +1/+1 counters, used his two-counter *Vial* to deploy *Myr Retriever*, sacrificed the *Retriever* for a +1/+1 counter, returned the *Arcbound Worker*, re-played the *Worker* with the third *Aether Vial*, sacrificed it to the *Ravager* for two +1/+1 counters *again*, and had just enough extra damage to kill his opponent and make the Top 8 to qualify!

Besides assisting the redundancy of 1-drops and 2-drops, *Aether Vial* is also a random cheap artifact. Like any cheap artifact, from *Chromatic Sphere* on up, *Aether Vial* helps reduce the old fashioned mana cost of cards like *Myr Enforcer* and *Frogmite* that it might not necessarily be able to play using its own tap effect.

In sum, *Aether Vial* helps speed up an already quick deck. It facilitates the best draws, cleans up terrible draws, can play a *Disciple of the Vault* to pair with an *Arcbound Ravager* even when a *Vault of Whispers* is wanting, and works deceptively well with *Myr Enforcer*. It lets a clever controller pull some fancy tricks, and keeps most other players healthy in a competitive room. When your starting hand is low on lands, there are few one mana artifacts you would rather see than this one.

Now back to the PTQ Top 8 coverage you love here at *Swimming with Sharks*:

While some of **Magic's** greatest players were preparing to lay down to *Tooth and Nail* starting *Electrostatic Bolt* in the largest Grand Prix in North American history, across the very same room, Grand Prix New Jersey's dejected Day One aspirants, still unqualified, gathered to once again clash

their Wayfarer's Baubles and Chromatic Spheres against one another. Though played in the very same room at the very same time that Jeff Garza raced to the head of a Top 8 where five of the single elimination competitors chose Arcbound Ravager for their Weapons of Choice, the PTQ on the other side of the RexPlex showed a very different finale.

## Brad Taulbee, Champion



### Main Deck

60 cards

9 Forest	2 Annul
14 Island	4 Condescend
-----	2 Last Word
23 lands	4 Oxidize
	2 Rude Awakening
4 Eternal Witness	4 Thirst for Knowledge
3 Solemn Simulacrum	4 Vedalken Shackles
4 Viridian Shaman	4 Wayfarer's Bauble
-----	-----
11 creatures	26 other spells

### Sideboard

4 Echoing Truth  
 4 Engineered Explosives  
 1 Hoverguard Sweepers  
 1 Last Word  
 2 March of the Machines  
 3 Thought Courier  
 -----  
 15 sideboard cards

## Gregory Darkeff, Finalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Darksteel Citadel	4 Condescend
4 Great Furnace	4 Electrostatic Bolt
5 Island	4 Magma Jet
8 Mountain	4 Seething Song
2 Seat of the Synod	4 Thirst for Knowledge
-----	4 Wayfarer's Bauble
23 lands	-----
	24 other spells

### Sideboard

3 Echoing Ruin  
 1 Furnace Dragon  
 4 Furnace Whelp  
 3 Last Word  
 4 Shatter  
 -----  
 15 sideboard cards

4 Arc-Slogger  
 3 Furnace Dragon  
 2 Megatog  
 4 Solemn Simulacrum  
 -----  
 13 creatures

## Don Huang, Semifinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

3 Blinkmoth Nexus  
2 Glimmervoid  
4 Great Furnace  
4 Seat of the Synod  
3 Tree of Tales  
4 Vault of Whispers

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20 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
4 Arcbound Worker  
3 Atog  
4 Disciple of the Vault  
4 Frogmite  
2 Moriok Rigger  
2 Myr Enforcer  
2 Myr Retriever

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25 creatures

4 Aether Vial  
4 Chromatic Sphere  
3 Cranial Plating  
4 Thoughtcast

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15 other spells

### Sideboard

1 Cranial Plating  
1 Glimmervoid  
4 Oxidize  
3 Shrapnel Blast  
2 Somber Hoverguard  
1 Tree of Tales  
3 Viridian Shaman

---

15 sideboard cards

## Bryan Upham, Semifinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

12 Forest  
12 Island

---

24 lands

2 Duplicant  
4 Eternal Witness  
4 Solemn Simulacrum  
4 Viridian Shaman

---

14 creatures

2 Annul  
4 Condescend  
4 Echoing Truth  
4 Oxidize  
2 Rude Awakening  
4 Thirst for Knowledge  
2 Vex

---

22 other spells

### Sideboard

4 Isochron Scepter  
3 Last Word  
4 Nourish  
3 Tel-Jilad Justice  
1 Vex

---

15 sideboard cards

## Jason Rubinfeld, Quarterfinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus  
4 Darksteel Citadel  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Great Furnace  
4 Seat of the Synod  
4 Vault of Whispers

---

20 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
4 Arcbound Worker  
2 Atog  
4 Disciple of the Vault  
4 Frogmite  
4 Myr Enforcer  
2 Myr Retriever

---

24 creatures

4 Aether Vial  
4 Chromatic Sphere  
4 Cranial Plating  
4 Thoughtcast

---

16 other spells

### Sideboard

1 Atog  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Oxidize  
3 Shrapnel Blast  
4 Tree of Tales  
3 Viridian Shaman

---

15 sideboard cards

## Ross Merriam, Quarterfinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus  
4 Darksteel Citadel  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Great Furnace  
4 Seat of the Synod  
4 Vault of Whispers

---

20 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
4 Arcbound Worker  
2 Atog  
4 Disciple of the Vault

4 Aether Vial  
4 Chromatic Sphere  
4 Cranial Plating  
4 Thoughtcast

---

16 other spells

### Sideboard

1 Atog  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Oxidize  
3 Shrapnel Blast  
4 Tree of Tales  
3 Viridian Shaman

---

15 sideboard cards

4 Frogmite  
4 Myr Enforcer  
2 Myr Retriever

---

24 creatures

## David Lane, Quarterfinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus  
3 Darksteel Citadel  
2 Glimmervoid  
4 Great Furnace  
4 Seat of the Synod  
4 Vault of Whispers

---

21 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
4 Arcbound Worker  
3 Atog  
4 Disciple of the Vault  
4 Frogmite  
4 Myr Enforcer

---

23 creatures

4 Aether Vial  
4 Chromatic Sphere  
4 Cranial Plating  
4 Thoughtcast

---

16 other spells

### Sideboard

4 Electrostatic Bolt  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Moriok Rigger  
4 Shatter  
3 Shrapnel Blast

---

15 sideboard cards

## Joe Dubois, Quarterfinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

14 Forest  
9 Swamp

---

23 lands

4 Chattering Rats

3 Death Cloud  
4 Echoing Decay  
3 Night's Whisper  
3 Nourish  
4 Oxidize  
4 Wayfarer's Bauble

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### Sideboard

4 Karstoderm  
3 Sword of Fire and Ice  
4 Tel-Jilad Justice  
3 Terror  
1 Troll Ascetic

---

15 sideboard cards

3 Eternal Witness                    21 other spells  
3 Molder Slug  
3 Troll Ascetic  
3 Viridian Shaman

---

16 creatures

This time around, U/G ended up on top. The big winner had Rude Awakening for the kill and Vedalken Shackles as its unique element. As a booster of Vedalken Shackles for some time, I am happy to see the card picking up a competitive PTQ win... on the other hand, as a Ravager Affinity participant in this particular PTQ, I was less than thrilled to have my Moriok Rigger switching sides unexpectedly to stifle my own offense.

While Vedalken Shackles might seem a bit odd for a U/G deck, its synergies with the baseline U/G strategy are significant once you think about it. U/G is all about ramping out lands for the Rude Awakening kill. It has Solemn Simulacrum to help spit out more lands more quickly, can use Echoing Truth to replay the same Solemn Simulacrum, and has started to add Wayfarer's Bauble for a Rampant Growth-like effect early game. Why not pump out the Islands to play one of the most powerful cards in the format?



Vedalken Shackles is one of the best blue control cards to see play in a long time. Even though it has a built-in limiting factor, the size of the creatures in *Mirrodin* Block will not typically prohibit its power. While grabbing a Darksteel Colossus might not be easy, because Vedalken Shackles doesn't check constantly (only when it is used the first time if left tapped) Shackles players can do things like grab a regular sized Moriok Rigger on two Islands and then use their green cards to pump it way past their ostensible Island thresholds by destroying the opponent's artifact base. In any case, because Myr Enforcer is typically the biggest threat on the other side of the table (and Disciple of the Vault the most immediately dangerous), Shackles seems a more than efficient answer card to the format's defining threat deck.

Vedalken Shackles is a great card for stalling the board while a U/G player ramps up his mana for the big Rude Awakening. Many players are unwilling to send their boys into their other boys knowing their remaining boys are just going to get gobbled up but the machine's next untap. In some cases, a Shackles player can take a powerful threat and just start sending it offensively while the opponent suffers from a decided disparity in both card and board advantage.

The downside? Everyone and their kid sisters have got Oxidizes, Viridian Shamans, and similar answer cards.

The upside? Affinity players don't be sidin' dem in against U/G.

There were two U/G decks in the PTQ New Jersey Top 8. While the presence of four Aether Vial decks is hardly surprising -- especially given the room in which players were competing -- the last two decks in this Top 8 definitely warrant a mention. Pairing the Big Red core with blue control cards has

been done a couple of different ways this season, but Gregory Darkeff's choices still seem fresh in a format largely dominated by a single deck. It can make many of the classic Big Red plays, but still defend itself with blue instants. It has the ultimate trump in Furnace Dragon, can go for the power kill with Megatog, and takes advantage of subtle synergies with its many artifact lands, Thirst for Knowledge, and the above two artifact-friendly / artifact-hostile monsters.

Joe Dubois's list is a variation on the new archetype DC Green. Dubois has several ways to gain a short term card advantage -- Solemn Simulacrum, Chittering Rats, Night's Whisper, and others -- which he can leverage into a long game advantage using Death Cloud. Despite its effectiveness as a Cloud deck, Dubois's Weapon of Choice can do a lot against straight Affinity (where Death Cloud is much less effective) with Oxidize, Molder Slug, and Tel-Jilad Justice advantage. Joe also plays Nourish, which is less than common to say the least, but a card that has some definite play in a field where so many decks try to finish the opponent by overloading on direct damage or life loss, no matter the cost.

One week later, all the way out in Berlin, Germany, yet another PTQ Top 8 played out. Again it was a fight, seemingly, between Ravager Affinity and everything else. This time, though, the PTQ was a two-slot event, with both Dennis Johannsen and Patrick A. Lutz receiving flights to the Extended Pro Tour.

Special thanks to Sebastian Rittau for the Berlin Top 8 information.

### Dennis Johannsen, Finalist

<b>Main Deck</b> <i>60 cards</i>		<b>Sideboard</b>
11 Forest 4 Mirrodin's Core 10 Mountain <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 25 lands  4 Arc-Slogger 4 Eternal Witness 4 Karstoderm 1 Molder Slug 4 Tel-Jilad Chosen 3 Viridian Shaman <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 20 creatures	2 Electrostatic Bolt 3 Fireball 4 Magma Jet 4 Molten Rain 2 Reaper and Sow <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 15 other spells	2 Creeping Mold 2 Electrostatic Bolt 1 Mountain 4 Oxidize 2 Reaper and Sow 4 Tel-Jilad Justice <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 15 sideboard cards

### Patrick Lutz, Finalist

<b>Main Deck</b>	<b>Sideboard</b>

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus  
4 Darksteel Citadel  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Great Furnace  
4 Seat of the Synod  
4 Vault of Whispers

---

20 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
4 Arcbound Worker  
2 Atog  
4 Disciple of the Vault  
4 Frogmite  
4 Myr Enforcer  
2 Myr Retriever

---

24 creatures

4 Aether Vial  
4 Chromatic Sphere  
4 Cranial Plating  
4 Thoughtcast

---

16 other spells

1 Atog  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Oxidize  
3 Shrapnel Blast  
4 Tree of Tales  
3 Viridian Shaman

---

15 sideboard cards

**Lukas Rohland, Semifinalist**



**Main Deck**

60 cards

4 Darksteel Citadel  
4 Great Furnace  
14 Mountain  
2 Vault of Whispers

---

24 lands

4 Arc-Slogger  
3 Furnace Dragon  
3 Megatog  
4 Solemn Simulacrum

---

14 creatures

4 Fireball  
4 Molten Rain  
4 Pyrite Spellbomb  
4 Shatter  
3 Talisman of Impulse  
3 Talisman of Indulgence

---

22 other spells

**Sideboard**

4 Electrostatic Bolt  
1 Furnace Dragon  
3 Grab the Reins  
4 Seething Song  
3 Shrapnel Blast

---

15 sideboard cards

**Sebastian Homann, Semifinalist**



**Main Deck***60 cards*

4 Cloudpost  
 15 Forest  
 4 Mountain  
 -----  
 23 lands

1 Darksteel Colossus  
 1 Duplicant  
 4 Eternal Witness  
 1 Leonin Abunas  
 1 Platinum Angel  
 4 Solemn Simulacrum  
 -----  
 12 creatures

4 Electrostatic Bolt  
 4 Oxidize  
 3 Reap and Sow  
 2 Rude Awakening  
 4 Sylvan Scrying  
 4 Talisman of Impulse  
 4 Tooth and Nail  
 -----

25 other spells

**Sideboard**

1 Duplicant  
 1 Mephidross Vampire  
 3 Mindslaver  
 1 Reap and Sow  
 1 Sundering Titan  
 3 Tel-Jilad Justice  
 1 Triskelion  
 4 Viridian Shaman  
 -----  
 15 sideboard cards

**Andreas Kruschel, Quarterfinalist****Main Deck***60 cards*

4 Blinkmoth Nexus  
 1 Glimmervoid  
 3 Great Furnace  
 4 Seat of the Synod  
 4 Tree of Tales  
 4 Vault of Whispers  
 -----  
 20 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
 4 Arcbound Worker  
 3 Atog  
 4 Disciple of the Vault  
 4 Frogmite  
 4 Myr Enforcer  
 1 Myr Retriever  
 -----  
 24 creatures

4 Aether Vial  
 4 Chromatic Sphere  
 4 Cranial Plating  
 4 Thoughtcast  
 -----  
 16 other spells

**Sideboard**

1 Glimmervoid  
 3 Moriok Rigger  
 1 Myr Retriever  
 4 Oxidize  
 3 Shrapnel Blast  
 3 Viridian Shaman  
 -----  
 15 sideboard cards

## Gunnar GeiÅler, Quarterfinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

3 Blinkmoth Nexus  
6 Island  
14 Swamp  
-----  
23 lands  
  
2 Greater Harvester  
4 Solemn Simulacrum  
-----  
6 creatures

4 Barter in Blood  
4 Condescend  
4 Darksteel Ingot  
4 Death Cloud  
4 Echoing Decay  
3 Guardian Idol  
4 Thirst for Knowledge  
4 Wayfarer's Bauble  
-----  
31 other spells

### Sideboard

4 Annul  
1 Crucible of Worlds  
2 Echoing Truth  
2 Greater Harvester  
4 March of the Machines  
2 Terror  
-----  
15 sideboard cards

## Marian Held, Quarterfinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

12 Forest  
11 Island  
-----  
23 lands  
  
4 Eternal Witness  
3 Molder Slug  
2 Neurok Transmuter  
4 Solemn Simulacrum  
4 Viridian Shaman  
-----  
17 creatures

4 Condescend  
4 Echoing Truth  
2 Last Word  
4 Oxidize  
2 Rude Awakening  
4 Serum Visions  
-----  
20 other spells

### Sideboard

2 Last Word  
4 March of the Machines  
1 Rude Awakening  
4 Tel-Jilad Justice  
4 Troll Ascetic  
-----  
15 sideboard cards

## Max Gamper, Quarterfinalist



### Main Deck

60 cards

### Sideboard

2 Blinkmoth Nexus  
4 Darksteel Citadel  
1 Glimmervoid  
4 Great Furnace  
4 Seat of the Synod  
4 Vault of Whispers

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19 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
4 Arcbound Worker  
2 Atog  
4 Disciple of the Vault  
4 Frogmite  
4 Myr Enforcer  
2 Ornithopter

---

24 creatures

4 AEther Vial  
3 Chromatic Sphere  
4 Cranial Plating  
2 Shrapnel Blast  
4 Thoughtcast

---

17 other spells

1 Atog  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Oxidize  
2 Scrabbling Claws  
1 Shrapnel Blast  
4 Tree of Tales  
3 Viridian Shaman

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15 sideboard cards

With five in the GP Top 8 and four in the New Jersey Top 8, PTQ Berlin shows only three Affinity decks in its Top 8. This time, though, with Patrick Lutz's split in the finals, one of them takes equal share in the event championship.

Once again we see a R/G Land Destruction deck claiming a PTQ slot. While this time Johannsen's deck is much more aggressive than Allen Jackson's, using Tel-Jilad's Chosen as an effective early drop and Karstoderm as a faux Blastoderm, the principles are the same: creatures, removal, and light land destruction to keep the opponent off-balance. And once again, Oxidize is in the sideboard in the qualifying build.

Rounding out the Top 8 are Tooth and Nail with Electrostatic Bolt (the deck we featured last week with Jeff Garza's win at the Grand Prix), B/U control using Death Cloud and March of the Machines to control the board (depending on the matchup), and two interesting looks at decks that we have seen many times before. Marian Held's version of U/G has Neurok Transmuter; though the Transmuter seems merely a Gray Ogre a lot of the time, its synergy with Molder Slug and other artifact-hostile cards seems considerable in some matchups. I can see this card having a lot of play in a U/G mirror, or helping to pick off Mephidross Vampire. The most exciting deck, though, is Lukas Rohland's bigger Big Red deck. With the rest of the world starting Electrostatic Bolt to take care of Big Red's Slith Firewalkers, Lukas decided to go the opposite direction... artifact heavy with the biggest possible monsters only.



This deck is so exciting that... I'll leave that for BDM to say. Tune in tomorrow for Week in Review and Brian's Play of the Week!

Next Up: Time Advantage in *Kamigawa*

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