

Peasants, Creatures, and Wacky H Search

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Last Thursday through Sunday was Gen Con, the largest gaming convention in the United States. Probably. (Hey, I don't have a fact checker. I've gotta hedge my bets.) Over the course of those four days, a whopping seventy-nine thousand **Magic** tournaments were held. (Scott! Fact checker! Seriously!) Besides the Type 1 Championships, there were PTQs, Extended tourneys, Standard tourneys, and more booster drafts than you could shake a stick at. (See, a fact checker could be shaking a stick at some large number of tournaments to test the validity of that statement, but nope—here I am with my stick-shaking credibility dangling over the ledge of lies.) I didn't pay any attention to those. Instead, I checked out the tournaments that really matter—the unsanctioned bizarre formats!

There were a few unsanctioned events that I didn't get to cover. I know there were some Five Color (also known as 5-Color, also known as 250, also known as Nebraska Weasel Slap) tournaments, but they were apparently listed in the wrong place in the program book. On Saturday night at about 9:30, the tournament organizers announced an unsanctioned Italian *Legends* draft queue, but it hadn't gone off by 12:30 and I don't know what happened to it. The events that I popped my head into were the two Peasant **Magic** tourneys, the two Creature Feature tourneys, and the *Unglued-Mirrodin* Sealed Deck tourney.

Peasantville

Peasant Magic **is a format for the common man. Wait, did I say "man"? I meant "player."** **Wait, did I say "common"? I meant "poor."** **Yes, in this format, every rare that hasn't ever been printed as a common or uncommon card is banned. That means Hurricane is in but Mudhole is out. Each deck and sideboard combined may have up to five uncommons total and no rares at all; the rest of the cards must be common. A card is counted at its most favorable rarity, so River Boa is a common (as it was in *Visions*), not uncommon (as it was in *Sixth Edition*). There are no other restrictions—not only are Alpha cards legal, so are *Portal* and *Unglued* cards. And thus, the format is balanced, affordable, and leisurely.**

If you consider Chaos Confetti or Lightning Bolt balanced.

If you consider Skullclamp or Demonic Tutor affordable.


If you consider first-turn Dark Ritual-Hypnotic Specter or second-turn Channel-Fireball leisurely.


Defenestrate your expectations, because this format has teeth. Three years ago at the first Gen Con Peasant Magic tourney, a brash whippersnapper by the name of Mark Gottlieb finished second with a balls-to-the-wall (I'm sorry, can we say "wall" here?) monogreen Stompy deck that plowed through a sea of monored Sligh decks before losing to a monowhite deck that was teched out to hate red (but, ironically, not green). I'd estimate that more than 80% of that field was GoblBurn (OK, Sligh), and blue was so scarce that I maindecked four Mtenda Lions. The format has matured, and the two tournaments at Gen Con this year featured such stunning breakthroughs as two-color decks and blue cards. Ah, science.

So what did I see? A very diverse field. Sligh was still there of course (people are going to ignore Lightning Bolt?!), but its numbers are down to a reasonable level for a crazy good deck. Affinity (though not *Ravager Affinity*) has broken onto the scene in a big way, and those two decks split in the finals of the first tournament. Some of the other archetypes are just what you'd expect: Stompy, White Weenie, Necro-less Necro, Draw-Go. Others are more interesting. There is room for creativity here, as seen in Glenn McDonald's Phantom deck that made use of Spidersilk Armor and Armadillo Cloak.


It's fair to say that the format is shaped by the uncommons, since that's where a deck can dip into power. If you could only have five uncommons from throughout the history of Magic, what would you pick? I've already mentioned old favorites Demonic Tutor, Channel, and Hypnotic Specter. Fact or Fiction shows up. In 2001, I hitched my wagon to Treetop Village and wasn't disappointed. Some new entries popped up this year: Skullclamp, naturally, and the *Mirrodin*-block artifact it was outshone by: Isochron Scepter. The Scepter was everywhere—it's good with counters, it's good with burn, and it's good with counter-burn. Jon Anderson splashed Mystic Zealots and Life Bursts in his otherwise monoblue counter-bounce deck—a Life Burst in the Scepter could spell trouble for red decks.

Here are a few of the decks that I found interesting.

Nothin' Lives 	
Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard
7 Plains	2 Circle of Protection: Black
16 Swamp	2 Circle of Protection: Blue
23 lands	2 Circle of Protection: Green
4 Abyssal Gatekeeper	2 Circle of Protection: Red
3 Crypt Rats	2 Circle of Protection: White
4 Duskrider Falcon	3 Consume Spirit
4 Phyrexian Rager	2 Disenchant
4 Putrid Warrior	14 other spells
4 Teroh's Faithful	15 sideboard cards
23 creatures	

Denying Flames 	
Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard
	2 Arcane Denial

12 Island	1 Arc Lightning	1 Blue Elemental Blast
10 Mountain	4 Condescend	3 Boomerang
<hr/>	4 Counterspell	1 Drafna's Restoration
22 lands	4 Incinerate	1 Ghost Ship
	4 Isochron Scepter	2 Red Elemental Blast
2 Ghost Ship	4 Lightning Bolt	2 Shatter
2 Illusionary Forces	1 Rolling Thunder	2 Shock
4 Wayward Soul	2 Shatter	1 Sigil of Sleep
2 Yotian Soldier	2 Shock	<hr/>
<hr/>	1 Sigil of Sleep	15 sideboard cards
10 creatures	1 Sol Ring	
	<hr/>	
	28 other spells	

Unnamed Deck		
	Main Deck	Sideboard
	60 cards	
10 Forest	4 Channel	2 Brown Ouphe
8 Mountain	2 Chaos Confetti	2 Guerrilla Tactics
<hr/>	4 Fireball	4 Red Elemental Blast
18 lands	2 Fling	2 Scavenger Folk
	4 Giant Growth	2 Shatter
4 Crash of Rhinos	2 Guerrilla Tactics	1 Shatterstorm
4 Harvest Wurm	4 Lightning Bolt	2 Tranquility
4 Orcish Lumberjack	<hr/>	15 sideboard cards
2 Quirion Elves	22 other spells	
4 Spark Elemental		
2 Tinder Wall		
<hr/>		
20 creatures		

Rob is the creator of Peasant Magic, and he played in both Gen Con tournaments this year. He noted on this decklist, next to his sideboard, that he had a "special reserve" of 14 Chaos Confettis (for the obvious reasons). Rob did pull off ye olde Channel-Fireball win on turn 2 with an assist from Orcish Lumberjack, and the judges implemented a "game range" of 1 to accommodate his Chaos Confetti (and inconvenience his neighbors). Rob's deck for the other Peasant Magic event was much the same as this one, but he maindecked a Shatterstorm (for affinity), a couple of Red Elemental Blasts (for permission), and a Marhault Elsdragon (for... um... I love this guy.)

Ungluedier

I didn't get to witness too much of the *Unglued-Mirrodin Sealed Deck* event, but the few minutes I was there was plenty. The judges had donned appropriately silly hats. The game range of 1 was back. And tomfoolery and hogwash filled the air. I heard singing and loud chickenesque clucking. I saw Knight of the Hokey Pokey imprinted on a Soul Foundry, and I heard about Goblin Bookie being in there earlier. I saw Fiery Gambit being played *without* a Goblin Bookie on the table. I was told the tale of a player, confused about the game range of 1, asking a judge about whether his neighbors would have to say "Sorry" since he had a Sorry on the board—and being told no, but that he had just taken 4 damage. I saw a guy remove his pants while his opponent was already pantsless. I got the hell out of there.



Feature Match


The other wacky constructed format I followed at Gen Con was Creature Feature. Wait, did I say "followed"? I meant "broke." In Creature Feature, decks and sideboards can have two things: creatures and basic lands. That's it. This makes for a fun format that's surprisingly robust. Well, it was robust until I broke it. You see, this was the one Magic tournament during the convention that I could play in. (I was allowed to play in the other unsanctioned events but I was committed to working a booth until 6 PM; this was the only event that started late enough.) I rarely get to compete in Magic tournaments—if I'm lucky, I'll find two a year—and I was jonesing hard. So I went Spike bigtime. Oh, there was still some Johnny there. My deck has some neat combosque synergies, and I was jazzed by the puzzle of how to beat the format. So let's start with what that format is.

I was expecting Goblins. More specifically, I was expecting all Goblins all the time. Influenced by memories of my last Gen Con tournament (that red-bathed Peasant tourney from 2001) and knowledge of how good Goblins have been in recent Standard and Extended, I figured that everyone would be running them—and if I could beat Goblins, I could beat the field. So I started tinkering with a red-blue control concoction that had pingers and bouncers and sweepers and bolters. It didn't feel right.

Discussing the conundrum with my cubicle neighbor Devin Low, he suggested that the way to beat Goblins was with monowhite control. Load my deck with Auriok Champions and other pro-red creatures and Goblins would have a problem. He also suggested that if I was looking for sweepers, False Prophet was the way to go. Yup. Out went the blue and in went the white. I wanted the cornerstone of my deck to be Shard Phoenix (this was about a week before it went up on the Selecting *Ninth Edition* vote, and I'm thrilled that it won). Its recursive nature means it's one of the few ways to generate card advantage in an all-creature format, it has evasion, and it can wipe out hordes of Goblins and Elves. When I thought about pairing it with pro-red creatures, I did a jig. A silent jig. In my head. No one noticed. Shard Phoenix-False Prophet seemed like a fantastic combo. I could sac the Phoenix to set off my Prophet, and by the time the Prophet took everyone else on the Escalator to Nowhere, my Phoenix would be nesting safely in my graveyard. Red-white also gave me Desolation Giant. Tuning my deck to be anti-creature seemed like a good plan for the metagame. Fear of green led



me to include Beloved Chaplain among my white cards (protection from creatures seems strong here), and Eternal Dragon upped my graveyard recursion and mana fixing (always staples of red and white).

Shard Truce		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
12 Mountain	1 Auriok Champion	
12 Plains	3 Ghitu Slinger	
24 lands	2 Goblin Pyromancer	
	2 Keldon Vandals	
	2 Major Teroh	
	2 Paladin en-Vec	
	3 Voice of All	
3 Auriok Champion	15 sideboard cards	
4 Beloved Chaplain		
4 Bloodfire Dwarf		
4 Chartooth Cougar		
4 Desolation Giant		
4 Eternal Dragon		
3 False Prophet		
4 Flametongue Kavu		
2 Paladin en-Vec		
4 Shard Phoenix		
36 creatures		

How did I do? Twelve people played in the tournament, which meant it went four rounds. Over those four rounds, I got as low as 9 life twice. Most games played out the same: Take some early hits, let my opponent overcommit, Wrath, and establish control. The only variation was that sometimes I wouldn't take early hits. In the first couple of rounds I knocked out Masticores and Spiritmongers. In the last two rounds I got my wish—Goblins. When I have enough mana to regrow and play a Shard Phoenix every turn and no creature in your deck has more than 2 toughness, you're in trouble. I sided in my Goblin Pyromancers both matches, but I never got to use them.

The field was much more diverse than I anticipated. The two Goblin decks I played were the only ones in my tourney. The other Creature Feature tournament had just one. The most popular decks were monoblack control and green mana acceleration. An MBC deck is listed below. The green decks took different forms; Llanowar Elves, Priest of Titania, and Rofellos would power out a range of gigantic monsters, from Darksteel Colossus to Masticore to Rushwood Elemental to Thorn Elemental. Slivers appeared, as did green-black Beasts, green-red beats, Rebels (with Morphling), and monowhite super protection (also sampled below). Triskelion-Mephidross Vampire made an appearance. Voice of All is nuts here. StarCity writer Peter Jahn, who was judging one of the events, tipped me off to one of the most powerful cards in the format—and it wasn't something I would have guessed. Mirror Golem is a colorless 3/4 creature with protection from creatures that happens to be

one of the few ways to permanently get rid of a Genesis, Ashen Ghoul, Eternal Dragon, or Shard Phoenix. If Mirror Golem is a powerhouse, this must be a great format.

Phenom



Main Deck 62 cards

Sideboard

23 Swamp

23 lands

4 Abyssal Gatekeeper
4 Ashen Ghoul
2 Avatar of Woe
2 Black Knight
4 Bone Shredder
4 Gravedigger
1 Nekrataal
4 Nether Shadow
3 Phyrexian Plaguelord
4 Ravenous Rats
1 Royal Assassin
4 Sorceress Queen
2 Undertaker

39 creatures

0 other spells

4 Bog Smugglers
2 Bounty Hunter
2 Chainer, Dementia Master
1 Emissary of Despair
1 Rathi Assassin
4 Squirring Mass
1 Undertaker

15 sideboard cards

Wrath of Fallen Empires



Main Deck 60 cards

Sideboard

17 Plains

17 lands

4 Auriok Champion
1 Commander Eesha
4 Deftblade Elite
4 Exalted Angel
4 Icatian Javelineers
4 Icatian Priest
2 Mageta the Lion

0 other spells

4 Crimson Acolyte
3 Exorcist
1 Hand of Justice
4 Planar Guide
3 Righteous Avengers

15 sideboard cards

4 Mother of Runes
4 Silver Knight
4 Soul Warden
2 Veteran Bodyguard
2 Voice of All
4 White Knight

43 creatures

Andrew finished first in the Creature Feature event I wasn't in. He expected my deck to show up, so most of his sideboard (the Acolytes, Guides, and Avengers) are there to beat it. We weren't matched up, however, so it remains to be seen if the countermeasures are enough.

And that's my tour of the unsanctioned Gen Con formats. I believe there were more such events this year than last, and I can only hope for more diversity and interest in the future. I need more tournaments to win, people! Each Peasant Magic tournament drew at least 30 peasants, so I'm willing to bet it'll be back next year. One important note: I'd like to thank judges Andrew Valkanas (aka certifiable lackey) and Barry Steiglitz (aka deputy chef lackey, esq.) for their immense help and enthusiasm, as well as the entire Pastimes event staff.

**Until next week, have fun with wacky formats.
Mark**

