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Champions Roundtable

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The Week That Was
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The official release of *Champions of Kamigawa* is right around the corner. Sealed Deck Pro Tour Qualifiers kick off immediately, and mad scientists everywhere have locked themselves in their laboratories to build decks for the upcoming Standard tournaments featuring the new set.

To get an early read on the set and its impact in tournament play, I spoke with a handful of influential and well-known players. Two different Block Constructed Pro Tour champions, the most influential writer on Magic theory in the history of the game, a recent World Championship finalist, and one of the most widely read Limited writers on the Internet offered their opinions on the Beast from the East... *Champions of Kamigawa*.

BDM: So what were your initial impressions of the new set?

Gabriel Nassif: I didn't really try to find out what's good in constructed and we barely started testing extended. The format is fun in Limited but the good rares spoil it a lot. Like the dragons are very good, all 5/5 flyers -- which is huge. If you are able to deal with them, they still are a pain. I only drafted a few times, but I think I like every color as they all seem to be fine, maybe blue a little less. That's about it. Sorry, I realize this doesn't help you much, but I never really know what I think when a set is released.

Osy Lebedowicz: I think the new set is underpowered and poorly designed for Constructed. I think in block at least they made blue too powerful, so they probably have to fix that in the second set or the Block PT won't be much fun.

Mike Flores: I quite like it. I actually have disliked almost every set since *Invasion* for Constructed because I believe that the heavily mechanic based cards point players too concretely into particular directions. For example, the multicolored cards in both *Invasion* Block and *Odyssey* block were vastly overpowered for their mana costs, leading directly to Fires and Psychatog decks with little room for variation or dissent. You have essentially the same situation with Affinity but I don't see any such mechanic in *Champions of Kamigawa*. In fact, I think that the aggressive costing of Legends lends itself to difficult design choices. For example, if you want to hit 2/2 on turn 1, how many Hounds will you loose?

Zvi Mowshowitz: My impression of the set is that it has a lot of fun stuff in it, and plenty of cool ideas, but that it doesn't have what it takes to compete with *Mirrodin* Block.

Ken Kroner: I am not a Constructed expert so it is hard for me to pick out things in the early going there, but I think this appears to be the best set for Limited since *Odyssey*. I am really excited about drafting it.

Aeo Paquette: I like every new set to some extent. I enjoy playing with new cards, drafting sets that I don't yet know very well, but when comparing this set to most other recent ones I don't have very much to say about it. There is basically nothing special about it, no money rares or cool new mechanics of any sort. I would give the new set a 3 out of 10 on the CrazyAeo scale.

Who's sitting at the table?

This panel of six prominent Magic personalities represents a cross-section of some of the top names in the game. I had hoped to include Gabriel Nassif more extensively in the round table, but he has actually not formed much of an opinion of *Champions* yet and his contributions petered out after the first question.

Gabriel Nassif is the reigning Player of the Year and the designer of the Tooth and Nail deck known as TwelvePost that reached finals of Pro Tour-Kobe this past year. As he indicated in his interview with me after Worlds 2004, Nassif approaches the set through Limited play and he has not yet drafted enough to have any firm ideas about Constructed, much less any of the specific cards.

Osy Lebedowicz used Astral Slide to win Pro Tour-Venice and Affinity to take home the top prize at Grand Prix-Orlando. His exaggerated and humorous writing style often causes people to overlook his place as one of the best players in the world and his keen sense for the most potent decks in any given format.

Zvi Mowshowitz's voice has been missing from the early set reviews for the news set but the Pro Tour-Tokyo winner took a few minutes to share some perceptions with readers of magicthegathering.com.

Mike Flores has been writing about Magic since before Jackal's were a Pup and is one of the most influential voices in the game, offering insightful theory on the game ranging from Who's the Beatdown to his more recent Philosophy of Fire.

Part strategy writer and part Dear Abby, **Ken Kroner** is one of the most influential and controversial Limited voices in the game and has never been afraid of turning a sacred cow into chopped sirloin. Ken's most famous hamburger is his stance on *Loxodon Warhammer* from the previous block. While most players feared and desired the Warhammer in Limited, Ken scoffed at it as an expensive over-hyped card.

Also a Limited specialist, **Aeo Paquette** has made the Top 8 in the only two Pro Tours he has ever played in -- including reaching the finals of this year's Magic World Championships. You can never be sure what Pro Tours the self-proclaimed slacker will show up for, but you can always find him drafting on MTGO.

BDM: Are there any cards that stand out for Constructed? Specifically, are there any cards that intrigue you for Standard? If you were preparing for States/Provincials/Prefectural Championships, what cards would you be focused on?

Aeo Paquette: If you know me at all you know I'm strictly a Limited player. I've never really cared for Constructed, so I haven't really looked into it at all. If I were to say off the top of my head what the top 5 constructed cards are...in no order I would say *Zo-Zu the Punisher*, *Ghostly Prison*, *Hinder*, *Cranial Extraction* and...well...I guess *Sakura-Tribe Elder*.





Mike Flores: Cranial Extraction, Keiga, the Tide Star, Kodama's Reach, Horobi, Death's Wail, Nezumi Shortfang, Nezumi Graverobber. The best Constructed card in the set is probably Sakura-Tribe Elder.

Osyp Lebedowicz: There are some cards that seem pretty solid for Constructed play in T2. I like Peer Through Depths as a replacement for Thirst for Knowledge in blue-white and the like -- it effectively does the same thing but digs two cards deeper. Imi Statue seems like a very good card in combination with Relic Barrier against Affinity. Boseiju, Who Shelters All seems very good in Tooth and Nail against control decks -- so much so that I have to believe a permission deck would need to board in Time Stop in order to deal with it. Although I'm not sure that would be enough. Sakura-Tribe Elder is strictly better than Rampant Growth for the green-white deck and Hinder is the best counter they've made in a long time. Samurai of the Pale Curtain, Gifts Ungiven, Glacial Ray, Nezumi Shortfang, Glimpse of Nature, Soilshaper, and Dosan the Falling Leaf all seem like playable cards in Constructed.

Ken Krouner: No cards really jump out at me right now. Ghostly Prison maybe. Affinity looks to be even more dominant than it was before and to tell the truth I think it was underplayed at Worlds this year. I expect Affinity

to rule the day at States.

Zvi Mowshowitz: A few cards stand out. Players will have to watch out for the new land that makes spells uncounterable and there are several other Constructed-worthy cards. However, anyone who doesn't play a Mirrodin Block deck at States is going to get run over. The new land makes Tooth and Nail a lock over blue decks, and Affinity is as strong as ever.

BDM: Do you see any new deck archetypes emerging from the new set, such as blue-green Madness, Astral Slide, and Affinity from the last three blocks?

Zvi Mowshowitz: The Arcane deck seems interesting, but I don't expect it to make an impact on Standard for another, oh, 13 months.

Ken Krouner: I think that if Affinity is reined in it would be possible to make an interesting Arcane deck, but again, Constructed isn't my bag.

Osyp Lebedowicz: As long as Affinity exists I don't believe it's possible for a beatdown deck to exist. That limits your options when constructing decks.

Mike Flores: Every year people say White Weenie. I actually think mono-red control got a lot of tools but I don't know if mono-red control can possibly be good in a format with some of the available cards in black and green. Then again, green lost Ravenous Baloth.

Aeo Paquette: Not a single.

BDM: If not, are there any cards that help or hose existing decks?

Ken Krouner: Ghostly Prison was a key card. This really needed to be printed to give control decks a shot. Imi Statue looks good in conjunction with Ghostly Prison, but I fear it isn't quite enough on its own.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Imi Statue gets a "good hustle" and there a few other nice cards for standard of course, but I think, "meet the new metagame -- same as the old metagame."

Mike Flores: Imi Statue and Cranial Extraction are the obvious answers but the reason I think that Sakura-Tribe Elder is so good is because it really strengthens the ability of Tooth and Nail, blue-green, and black-green decks to fight Affinity in the early game. Sakura-Tribe Elder puts the breaks on Arcbound Ravager and sets the game up for a bomb turn.

Nezumi Shortfang is going to destroy any slow deck without point removal, from blue- or white-based control to Tooth and Nail. I have no idea how some of these decks will be able to fight Nezumi Shortfang's A game and also race it with no hand after it has flipped into The Rack form... that's six a turn!

Aeo Paquette: Well, there are two cards that stand out for this category, one of them which is in the top five for this reason alone -- Cranial Extraction. It seems quite good against Tooth and Nail. The other card I would think could hose an existing deck would be Imi Statue. It's not mentioned above because I'm not completely sure just how much hosing this hose card can hose. . .



BDM: Any thoughts on Limited with the new set? Strong colors? Top picks? Color combinations?

Zvi Mowshowitz: Hard to tell without playing and I didn't prerelease. White clearly got the shaft for Constructed in a big way but I believe that Limited can only be learned by playing.

Ken Kroner: I think that red-blue Arcane will likely be the best deck. I think that monoblack or black with some splash will be the next best. Green looks powerful too. They printed two of the best mana fixers of all time in this set. I think that while white is extremely deep, it is likely the worst color simply because there are no commons that can really take over a game, and all the other colors have them. **Glacial Ray** is hands down the best common in the set. After that it gets a little fuzzy.

Osy Lebedowicz: I like red-white in Limited, all the colors are pretty solid though. I would shy away from blue, though.

Mike Flores: See my column next week. :)

Aeo Paquette: Well I'm not going to go much into Limited, although I love Limited there are far too many bomb-limited rares in this set full of half-decent cards. New red **Masticore**... dragons up the yin-yang... I will however give you another top five of mine, all commons though since they are the important picks: **Cage of Hands**, **Glacial Ray**, **Yamabushi's Flame**, **Rend Flesh** and **Rend Spirit**. I could easily be completely missing some bomb common that I don't even know exists yet.

So there you have some initial impressions and more than a little apprehension about Affinity in Standard. What are your thoughts on the new set in both Limited and Constructed? Do you agree with the Pros or do you other ideas? Will you be playing Affinity at States or does **Imi Statue**, **Ghostly Prison**, and the like give you the tools to keep the deck at bay? I would like to hear what you have to say -- use either the forums or the handy email button on the bottom of this column!

Closing the Columbus Qualifier Door

It was a slow week for the **Magic** community. There were no Premier Events and it marked the halfway point between the Prerelease and actual release of *Champions of Kamigawa*. While the majority of the **Magic** community waited for the new set there were a handful of events around the world that put a bow on the *Mirrodin* Block Constructed Pro Tour Qualifier season.

While you were home tuning your Azuza, Lost but Seeking/Meloku the Clouded Mirror deck in honor of Combo week, pockets of players across the globe were sacrificing artifacts, removing the top 10 cards of their library from the game, and putting two creatures from their hand directly into play as the final weekend of qualifier tournaments for Pro Tour--Columbus came one week prior to the *Champions of Kamigawa* sealed deck season for Pro Tour--Nagoya.

One of those events was held by a senior member of the old guard, Dan Gray and his Aztlan Productions in Los Angeles. The legendary Costa Mesa Women's club hosted 112 players who battled it out for the final slot to be awarded in that area. Seventeen-year old high school student Matt Abrams emerged from the scrum clutching the elusive blue envelope.

Abrams earned his first ever Pro Tour invite playing a variation on the same blue-green deck he had played throughout the season. This was his third go-around with the deck, and after fumbling away strong starts of 4-0 and 5-0 in his last two events he finally found the stamina to make it all the way through to the elimination rounds -- and win those last three all-or-nothing rounds. He defeated Adam Prosak and his red-green artifact hate deck in the finals.

It seems odd that one of the final events to close out the season should be played out between two decks without a single **Arcbound Ravager** between them, but there was no chance that Abrams would ever play the format's defining archetype.

"I played in 3 PTQs to qualify for Columbus and in all I ran blue-green," Abrams said. "I choose not to play Affinity because of one simple thing, I hate the deck. The deck has too much hate to play against and its all draw dependent in my opinion.

"I did play out the finals of my PTQ because I considered the matchup a very good one and my opponent also wanted the slot."

There were not many matchups that the young Californian considered to be bad. "When I played blue-green and saw my opponent lay an artifact land, Forest, **Cloudpost**, or Mountain I mentally fist-pumped since these matchups were very good in my opinion. Basically the tier 1 and 1.5 decks were good matchups but the Cog and five-color control decks were very bad matchups. Luckily there were none in sight."

Here are the decks that were in sight of everyone watching the Top 8. There was of course some Affinity and an interesting red-white deck called Trailer Trash. While everyone is bemoaning the fate of Standard as an infinity of Affinity after *Onslaught* Block rotates out, the variety of decks that continually popped up in the Top 8 of PTQs and Grand Prix events offer some hope that the format will be more open than people expect.



Pro Tour-Nagoya Qualifier Season

It's never too early to start thinking about qualifying for the next Pro Tour event. The [PTQ season for Pro Tour-Nagoya](#) begins Oct. 2. The format for the Nagoya PTQs is *Champions of Kamigawa* Block Limited (Sealed Deck) with Top 8 Rochester draft. Find a qualifier near you and get your spot reserved for [Pro Tour-Nagoya](#), to be held January 28-30, 2005.

- [North America Qualifiers](#)
- [Japan Qualifiers](#)
- [Latin America Qualifiers](#)
- [France Qualifiers](#)

Matt Abrams, 1st Place

PTQ Columbus 9/25/04



Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
2 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Condescend	4 Last Word
11 Forest	2 Crystal Shard	3 March of the Machines
11 Island	3 Echoing Truth	4 Tel-Jilad Justice
24 lands	4 Oxidize	4 Troll Ascetic
4 Eternal Witness	3 Rude Awakening	15 sideboard cards
4 Solemn Simulacrum	4 Thirst for Knowledge	
4 Viridian Shaman	4 Wayfarer's Bauble	
12 creatures	24 other spells	

Adam Prosak, 2nd Place PTQ Columbus 9/25/04		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
12 Forest	2 Electrostatic Bolt	3 Isochron Scepter
1 Mirrodin's Core	2 Fireball	1 Mirrodin's Core
11 Mountain	4 Magma Jet	4 Molten Rain
24 lands	4 Oxidize	3 Reap and Sow
4 Arc-Slogger	2 Rude Awakening	1 Rude Awakening
4 Eternal Witness	4 Wayfarer's Bauble	3 Tel-Jilad Justice
4 Solemn Simulacrum	18 other spells	15 sideboard cards
3 Troll Ascetic		
3 Viridian Shaman		
18 creatures		

Andrew Moores, 3rd Place PTQ Columbus 9/25/04 - Mono-Red Control		
Main Deck 61 cards		Sideboard
4 Great Furnace	3 Beacon of Destruction	3 Furnace Dragon
16 Mountain	3 Chrome Mox	2 Grab the Reins
20 lands	4 Electrostatic Bolt	3 Molten Rain
4 Arc-Slogger	3 Flamebreak	4 Shatter
3 Furnace Whelp	4 Magma Jet	3 Slith Firewalker
4 Solemn Simulacrum	3 Pulse of the Forge	15 sideboard cards
11 creatures	3 Seething Song	
	3 Shrapnel Blast	
	2 Talisman of Impulse	
	2 Talisman of Indulgence	
	30 other spells	

Bryan Paris, 4th Place PTQ Columbus 9/25/04		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 AEther Vial	1 Atog
4 Darksteel Citadel	4 Chromatic Sphere	4 Electrostatic Bolt
1 Glimmervoid	3 Cranial Plating	1 Glimmervoid
3 Great Furnace	4 Thoughtcast	1 Great Furnace
4 Seat of the Synod	15 other spells	2 Moriok Rigger
4 Vault of Whispers		4 Relic Barrier
20 lands		2 Terror
4 Arcbound Ravager		15 sideboard cards
4 Arcbound Worker		
3 Atog		

- 4 Disciple of the Vault
- 4 Frogmite
- 2 Moriok Rigger
- 4 Myr Enforcer

25 creatures

Matthew Rivera, 5th Place

PTQ Columbus 9/25/04



Main Deck

60 cards

- 4 Cloudpost
 - 13 Forest
 - 6 Mountain
-
- 23 lands
- 1 Bosh, Iron Golem
 - 2 Darksteel Colossus
 - 1 Duplicant
 - 4 Eternal Witness
 - 4 Solemn Simulacrum
-
- 3 Electrostatic Bolt
 - 2 Oblivion Stone
 - 3 Oxidize
 - 4 Reap and Sow
 - 2 Rude Awakening
 - 4 Sylvan Scrying
 - 3 Talisman of Impulse
 - 4 Tooth and Nail
-
- 25 other spells

12 creatures

Sideboard

- 3 Creeping Mold
- 1 Mephidross Vampire
- 1 Oblivion Stone
- 1 Oxidize
- 2 Sundering Titan
- 3 Tel-Jilad Justice
- 1 Triskelion
- 3 Viridian Shaman

15 sideboard cards

Ian Wittkopp, 6th Place

PTQ Columbus 9/25/04 - MBC in MBC



Main Deck

60 cards

- 4 Blinkmoth Nexus
 - 20 Swamp
-
- 24 lands
- 4 Chittering Rats
 - 4 Greater Harvester
 - 4 Solemn Simulacrum
-
- 4 Barter in Blood
 - 4 Death Cloud
 - 4 Echoing Decay
 - 4 Lose Hope
 - 4 Shattered Dreams
 - 4 Wayfarer's Bauble
-
- 24 other spells

12 creatures

Sideboard

- 4 Emissary of Despair
- 4 Relic Barrier
- 3 Scrabbling Claws
- 4 Wrench Mind

15 sideboard cards

Daniel Leichtling, 7th Place

PTQ Columbus 9/25/04 - Trailer Trash



Main Deck

60 cards

- 17 Mountain
 - 7 Plains
-
- 24 lands
- 4 Arc-Slogger
 - 3 Leonin Abunas
 - 4 Pristine Angel
 - 4 Solemn Simulacrum
-
- 4 Electrostatic Bolt
 - 2 Grab the Reins
 - 4 Magma Jet
 - 4 Molten Rain
 - 3 Pulse of the Forge
 - 4 Wayfarer's Bauble
-
- 21 other spells

15 creatures

Sideboard

- 3 Damping Matrix
- 1 Grab the Reins
- 4 Purge
- 4 Shatter
- 3 Shunt

15 sideboard cards

Kevin L. Parker, 8th Place

PTQ Columbus 9/25/04



Main Deck

60 cards

- 3 Darksteel Citadel
 - 4 Glimmervoid
-
- 4 Cranial Plating
 - 3 Night's Whisper

Sideboard

- 3 Annul
- 3 Furnace Dragon

4 Great Furnace	4 Paradise Mantle	2 Qumulox
4 Seat of the Synod	4 Shrapnel Blast	3 Seething Song
4 Vault of Whispers	4 Thoughtcast	4 Terror
19 lands	19 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Arcbound Ravager		
4 Disciple of the Vault		
4 Frogmite		
4 Ornithopter		
2 Qumulox		
4 Somber Hoverguard		
22 creatures		

Abrams said that he relied on *Magic Online* as his primary tool for playtesting, which could present some challenges leading up to Pro Tour–Columbus since MTGO does not support all of the sets necessary to the Extended *Magic* player. Still he was excited about his opportunity to take his game to the Pro Tour level.

"If I can figure out the format in time I think I should at least Day 2 the PT, but this is my first time so I don't know what to expect," Abrams said.

Congratulations and good luck to everyone who won a PTQ this past weekend. Now that the PTQs and the Ratings invites have all been decided, only the Last Chance Qualifier remains as a route for players to qualify for Columbus. If the vast sea of people that show up for every constructed event in Columbus is any indication of what to expect for the LCQ, it could easily be one of the largest such tournaments since they were added to the Pro Tour.

Here are the results from some of the other PTQs that were held this weekend. If you made Top 8 and your event is not listed it probably means the event is not in the Wizards database yet and you need to give your local organizer a shin kick to send in the results in a more timely fashion.

Event City	Event Date	Event TO
Des Moines Iowa (PT Qualifier)	9/25/2004	Barratt Moy
Finish: 1. Reggie Matthews; 2. Daniel Brown; 3. Justin Klein; 4. Rylan Klatt; 5. Gabriel De La Cerda; 6. Anthony Gianpetro; 7. Nick McDonald; 8. Tim Bauer		
Los Angeles (PT Qualifier)	9/25/2004	Dan Gray
Finish: 1. Matt Abrams; 2. Adam Prosak; 3. Andrew Moores; 4. Bryan Paris; 5. Matthew Rivera; 6. Ian Wittkopp; 7. Daniel Leichtling; 8. Kevin Parker		
Columbus, Ohio (PT Qualifier)	9/25/2004	Mike Guptil
Finish: 1. Amos Claiborne; 2. Stephen Timmons; 3. Chuck Bowman; 4. Ryan Holland; 5. Sean Inlow; 6. Michael Day; 7. D.J. Meyer; 8. Ervin Thomas		
Boston (PT Qualifier)	9/25/2004	Rob Dougherty
Finish: 1. Anthony Shaheen; 2. Jim Dyke; 3. Jonathan Morawski; 4. Walter Egli; 5. Brian Siu; 6. Todd Derbyshire; 7. Alex Batista; 8. Gou Anan		

I'll be back next week with your ideas and decks and a peek at the first weekend of Limited PTQs as we gear up for the following weekend's Grand Prix–Austin and Grand Prix–Vienna.

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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