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In It to Win It

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The Week That Was
Thursday, October 7, 2004



Champions of Kamigawa hit the stores this past weekend and before you could even put Bushido on the stack the Limited Pro Tour Qualifier season for Pro Tour–Nagoya had begun. There were qualifiers all over the world utilizing *Champions of Kamigawa* Sealed Deck with a Rochester Draft Top 8.

Here on the East Coast of the United States, Rob Dougherty and the YMG gang were hosting one such tournament in lovely Brighton, Mass. There were more than 100 players vying for the invite, pack prizes, and \$500 travel award. When the battling came to a close there was a magicthegathering.com columnist holding the elusive blue envelope...

No, it wasn't me -- the first chance I will have to play in a PTQ this season falls on my wedding anniversary. I got my wife what she wanted, so hopefully I will be able to play. Had I been in Brighton it may have been a different outcome, but it was former magicthegathering.com columnist Chad Ellis making his triumphant return to the Pro Tour after a prolonged absence.

Chad was a fixture on the Pro Tour for a couple of years and had an assigned seat on the so-called Gravy Train. He was a big part of the successful YMG team and wrote extremely popular columns mainstream **Magic** websites. He has one Pro Tour Top 8 to his credit, when he drafted his way to the final table of Pro Tour–Barcelona.

You know the story. The obligations of the post-college world beckoned and Chad drifted away from the game, living in Germany far away from his support network of New England gamers. As regular readers of magicthegathering.com know, Chad has been back for the past year or so and trying to get back on the Tour. I am happy to report that he was successful in his quest and even happier that he agreed to take some time to talk about his tournament and the current Limited format.

BDM: First off, congratulations on your win. How long has it been since you were last qualified?

Chad: I left competitive **Magic** after Pro Tour–Nice [May 2002] when I accepted a management job with Siemens Mobile in Germany. Since then I've been largely absent from competitive play, although I did draft a lot on MODO while in Munich.

BDM: Were you trying to qualify for the past few seasons? If so what made the difference for you this time out?

Chad: I played in two *Mirrodin* Limited PTQs. I made Top 8 in one and went 0-2 drop in the other. Then personal stuff (having a baby, starting Your Move Games as a game company and moving back from Canada after my wife's visa problems were over) kept me from going to a single MBC qualifier. This caused Robert Dougherty to comment that a new strategy might be in order: play in a PTQ.

BDM: How much practice with the new set had managed prior to the PTQ?

Chad: Almost none. I had to miss the prerelease for a wedding, so basically I did two drafts starting at midnight Thursday and one practice sealed deck. That was enough to give me a feel for how the set plays, but it was much less than normal of course.

BDM: How big was the field?

Chad: We had about 100 players and seven rounds of Swiss. I managed to be one of two players starting off at 5-0 and then drew twice into the Top 8.

BDM: How do you like the new set for Limited after the PTQ?

Chad: Actually I like it a lot. There are tons of decisions to make all the way through and I really felt like I had room to outplay opponents rather than just dropping my best creature and smashing. Another thing I like is that most of the bombs in *Champions* can be answered by a variety of commons.

BDM: What was the Rochester Draft like? I imagine it is quite an adjustment after the pale colors of *Mirrodin* to have to focus on signaling and staking out your colors.

Chad: The Rochester draft was fun. I was reading many of the cards for the first time. Plus, the draft was done in good spirit, which let me joke around a bit. Normally you can only joke during play or in a casual draft, but with



Rochester it becomes possible if the judges and other players don't mind.

BDM: Were there any cards you failed to include in your sealed deck that you later learned you should have played?

Chad: I don't think so. I showed my build to several people and they all agreed with me. The only real question was whether to push my mana base to have a real third color or limit myself to a splash, and I went with the "real" color. The ironic part is I ran Godo but not **Tenza**, **Godo's Maul** (I ran **No-Dachi** instead), but that seems to have been the right call.

BDM: Most valuable card?

Chad: I had two bombs in the Swiss, Godo and **Nezumi Graverobber**. Each of them won me games.

BDM: What was the general mood of the players in the tournament toward the new set?

Chad: It seemed pretty positive. Everyone seemed to be having fun and I don't think I heard anyone saying it was a bad set for Limited. Since **Magic** players like to complain so much, that's really saying something.

BDM: Any other notables in the tournament?

Chad: Boston PTQs are really tough. Our Top 8 had five people who have been on the Pro Tour before, and there were lots more in the Swiss. I think I'm the only former gravy-trainer who was there, but it was a very strong field.

BDM: What do players participating in this season's PTQs need to know about Sealed Deck? About Rochester?

Chad: A winning *Champions* sealed deck needs to be able to fight for tempo in the early game but still have good spells to play in the later game. I won a lot of games either by taking the lead early and then using that to force my opponent into bad situations or else by locking things up early so my more powerful spells (e.g. **Hideous Laughter** or spliced **Glacial Ray** onto **Swallowing Plague**) could remove my opponent's board. It's hard to know what to say about Rochester that's unique to this set. Play nice with your neighbors.

BDM: Any funny stories you want to share? Good beats/bad beats?

Chad: In round four we finished game 2 with three minutes left in the round. My opponent wanted to agree a draw, but I wanted to play since my deck was faster and I was going first. I came out with a perfect draw (**Nezumi Cutthroat**, **Ronin Houndmaster**, **Mothrider Samurai**) and quickly knocked him down to 4. Then I tapped six mana and tried to Swallowing Plague him out, not realizing it only works on creatures -- a prerelease play at the undefeated tables.

The most fun I had was casting **Ronin Houndmaster**. I would always look my opponent in the eye and say (in my Monty Burns voice), "Smithers... release the hounds." If that card isn't called "Smithers" by every serious **Magic** player, it will be an injustice.

My worst beat came in the semifinals. I mulliganed to six into basically a hand of land and **Kumano**, **Master Yamabushi**. I played him on turn five and he's so insane he was ready to take control of the whole game for me. I played a sixth land and shot down my opponent's flyer, leaving him with two 2/2s on the ground. He said "go" and being the tight player that I am I remembered to shoot him for one. He let it resolve and showed me **Reciprocate**. Because I wasn't familiar with the set I didn't follow the Rochester draft as closely as I would have normally and forgot he had that spell -- and since it's a new set, the possibility of **Reciprocate** wasn't ingrained in my mind. Fortunately I came back and won the next two.

BDM: I assume you will be going to Nagoya. How will you prepare?

Chad: Actually, that's very much an open question. I've sunk a bunch of money into Your Move Games and it will be a while before we start seeing any come back, even if it does well. A U.S. Pro Tour can be done for less than a \$1000 and a European one can be done for not too much more, but going to Japan is much more expensive. Even more importantly, I have a baby girl and going to Nagoya will mean being away from her and my wife for a solid week (and then coming back jet-lagged). I'd love to go, but at this point I don't know if I will be able to.

BDM: Has not playing/being qualified for a while changed the experience of winning a PTQ?

Chad: I don't think it's changed much. It's a great feeling to do so well against a strong field, although after you've won a handful of PTQs it's different than the first few times. Being off the train didn't really change that. I had as much or more experience with Limited as anyone in the room, so I just needed to get good cards and play well to have a good chance of winning. I feel pretty good about my play overall, and I had good luck with the cards, so there it is.

Well done, Chad. Here are the other PTQ results from the past weekend. As always, if you don't see the results of your Top 8 posted here you should gently prod your local organizer to send in the results in a more timely fashion. Might I suggest using a cattle prod?



Event City	Event Date	Event TO	Attendance
Denver, Colo. (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Eric Smith	57
Finish: 1. Jason Lemmer; 2. Curt Fried; 3. Chris Jilot; 4. Patrick Miller; 5. Mark Angle; 6. Tyler Hatchel; 7. William			

Grimes; 8. Kevin Hansen			
Rockville, Mary. (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Laurel Chiat	107
Finish: 1. Andres Miguel; 2. Tommy Ashton; 3. Stephen King; 4. Chris McDaniel; 5. Raymond Merz; 6. Semion Bezrukov; 7. Phil Esposito; 8. William Han			
Montreal, Quebec (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Mauro Bongiovanni	62
Finish: 1. Karim Saliba; 2. Etienne Vaillancourt; 3. Jean Francois Gascon; 4. Jean-Denis Lacourse; 5. Francis Cormier; 6. Pierre Lue Girard; 7. Christian Potvin; 8. Steeve Bisson			
Brighton, Mass. (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Rob Dougherty	95
Finish: 1. Chad Ellis; 2. Lucas Glavin; 3. Jim Dyke; 4. Greg Schwartz; 5. Gou Anan; 6. Sam Strassman; 7. Christopher Thoms; 8. Joshua Smith			
Seattle, Wash. (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Tim Shields	80
Finish: 1. Daniel Diamant; 2. Hao Kung; 3. Ross Christian Freeman; 4. Jordan Murari; 5. Michael Aitchison; 6. Corbett Gray; 7. Noah Sandler; 8. Tyler Butterworth			
Houston, Texas (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Tim Weissman	52
Finish: 1. Cannon Boling; 2. Bryan Hubble; 3. Salvador Cena; 4. Billy Moore; 5. Jerry Hansbro; 6. Bill Macey; 7. David Solis; 8. Eric Willis			
Atlanta (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Anthony Edwards	68
Finish: 1. Tim Bonneville; 2. Scott Adamowicz; 3. Egan Brown; 4. Zach Parker; 5. Brandon Sprowls; 6. Henry Lu; 7. Micha Medders; 8. Randy Ellis			
Edmonton, Alberta (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Jason Ness	59
Finish: 1. Mike Handfield; 2. Bryce Paradis; 3. Forrest Evans; 4. Ricky Gill; 5. Douglas Potter; 6. Liam Walker; 7. Roma lwaskiw; 8. Russell Heitzmann			
Phoenix, Ariz. (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Ray Powers	47
Finish: 1. Tim Rivera; 2. Brian Gates; 3. Sean Fitzgerald; 4. Adam Prosak; 5. Robert Jamison; 6. Richmund Wenzel; 7. Daniel Lawyer; 8. Alex Tamblyn			
Madison, Wis. (PT Qualifier)	10/2/2004	Steve Port	77
Finish: 1. Brian Ziegler; 2. John Stolzmann; 3. Sam Black; 4. Mike Hron; 5. Matt Severa; 6. Jeremy Quinn; 7. Dustin Marquis; 8. Bob Wagner			

Roundtable Feedback

There was quite a bit of feedback on the forums and in my email folder after last week's roundtable with several high-profile players about the *Champions of Kamigawa* release. The feedback illustrated (for me anyway) the divide that exists between the professional **Magic** community and the more casual set. I am always amazed at **Magic's** ability to be visible across so many wavelengths. Whether the game has captured the imagination of a small group who gather weekly around a kitchen table or it occupies every waking moment of a group of professional playtesters huddled around the Rochester Draft table looking for any advantage for Grand Prix–Austin, opinions about the game are equally strong at both tables -- as they are at every table in between, regardless of whether those tables are used for Friday Night **Magic**, a raucous game of Emperor, or a Pro Tour Qualifier.

Most of the comments seemed to be concerning the pessimism that many of the pros expressed in regard to *Champions* helping to keep Affinity decks at bay for the upcoming State/Province/Territory/Island Championships. While the pros seemed to be throwing their hands up in defeat, many of you out there made it clear that you were not going to go down without a knock-down, drag-out fight.

One way of dealing with the modular decks out there came from someone known simply as "Soul."

Soul writes:

*With all the white weenies who are sporting Bushido, I feel as if it's entirely possible for those decks to go head to head against some of the decks in the current metagame... I believe that **Samurai of the Pale Curtain** prevents "put into graveyard effects," does it not? Doesn't that mean that both **Arcbound** and **Disciple's** abilities become negated? And **Solemn Simulacrum's** utility has just been halved? Even if the **Dragon legends** become played, their graveyard power is stripped from them. All this attached to a 2/2 body for WW that acts as a 3/3 most of the time seems like a pretty solid foundation for white weenie to make a comeback. Attach this to **SB Imi Statue** or **Ghostly Prison**, and it seems like it has a pretty strong game against Ravfinity.*

Good call, Soul! I had actually missed many of the implications of **Samurai of the Pale Curtain** in constructed. There is no doubt that the effect is very potent if you can keep him on the board. The biggest threat that a White Weenie deck faces is from **Wrath of God**. You rely on overwhelming your opponent with multiple creatures, which plays right into the Wrath's hands. Maybe splashing blue for **Thoughtbind**? Or perhaps traditional Wrath-based control decks won't be the right call for the current metagame (I know I have been disappointed with the one I have tested so far) and the window for White Weenie to make its long-awaited comeback will begin to open.



Mark Burton writes:

I will admit I am no tournament player.

Despite my casual background, however, there are some things which stay true no matter how you play the game. A new set's influence is one of them.

Other than maybe Homelands, I think most every new expansion has greatly impacted the game for all players. When a new set comes out and you've opened up your strange new cards, do you really want to go and play the same old deck you've been dragging around for a year? No, you want to start tweaking your old decks and building entirely new ones.

Besides the allure of fresh ideas, I found the opinions of the pros you interviewed very conservative and, I might say, jaded. Again, I admit I've never fought a Ravager Affinity deck, but I think expecting little change is a fool's errand. No matter how good the old is, the new comes in with about 300 cards' worth of inventiveness. I am already certain that pioneer deckbuilders will find archetypes capable of making it on the tournament scene, of beating this Ravager Affinity everyone seems to think is immovable.

*Not that it matters much, but in my opinion control strategies will be what dominates the tournament scene during the unveiling of Kamigawa. Combinations like **Damping Matrix**, **Imi Statue** and **Ghostly Prison** are going to be what wins games in the new metagame. I could be entirely wrong, of course: maybe Ravager beats you before the third turn. I wouldn't know.*

As for myself, I'll be playing in a far more diverse and less-powerful scene, and I've got about 4 new decks to build when Champions hits the store shelves. Hopefully you'll enjoy the new set as much as I plan to.

I wish you had shared some of the decks, Mark. As for Affinity being an immovable object . . . I think the PTQ and GP scene has shown that if you want to beat Affinity, you can certainly accomplish that task. That is one of the complaints many people have about Affinity -- you are either playing with it or against it, with little room for any other variation. I certainly share your excitement about building decks with a new set of cards. I have already been toying around with the Splice onto Arcane mechanic and expect that deck to stake out its territory in the metagame once Kamigawa has been more fully explored -- although I'm not sure what the right colors are yet!

One card that many of the pros and non-pros alike seemed excited about was **Cranial Extraction**. Here is deck designed to abuse the card that was suggested in the forums.

Anti-Tank posted:

*It's a shame the stars of **Magic** didn't see any viable archetypes coming out of Kamigawa. I came up with a very strong version of **The Rock** that has great matchups against Affinity and **Tooth and Nail** so far, is a very strong deck in general and is capable of doing some awesome things thanks to **Cranial Extraction**. I'm going to next try it against my new version of **Tooth and Nail** which I plan on taking to States. (I feel bad that I can't take both.) I like to call it **Ghostbusters** because it is the closest thing to an Arcane deck in T2, and I get to refer to the top tier archetypes as the 'ghosts.'*

*The deck's main focus is a **Cranial Extraction** recycling plant. I'm a bit surprised none of those dudes thought of this. It could use a little tweaking, mainly in the sideboard to deal with control matchups.*

Ghostbusters		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
14 Forest	4 Cranial Extraction	2 Barter in Blood
1 Island	4 Echoing Decay	1 Eerie Procession
7 Swamp	2 Eerie Procession	2 Hana Kami
22 lands	1 Lose Hope	2 Hideous Laughter
	4 Night's Whisper	1 Lose Hope
	4 Rend Flesh	2 March of the Machines
4 Birds of Paradise	19 other spells	3 Naturalize
4 Eternal Witness		2 Plow Under
3 Molder Slug		15 sideboard cards
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
4 Viridian Shaman		
19 creatures		

Good luck at States, whichever deck you decide to play. I have to admit the idea of recycling **Cranial Extraction** makes me feel all warm and fuzzy. My favorite deck of all time involved recycling **Jester's Caps** with **Gaea's Blessings**. It does not seem like much of stretch for the popular Crystal Witness deck from the PTQ season to touch black for **Cranial Extraction**. You also get to play with the Splice onto Arcane mechanic with **Wear Away**. Hmmm . . . something to tinker with for sure. Thanks for the inspiration!

Speaking of the Splice mechanic, another e-mailer had a differing opinion from the pros in regard to their top common lists for Limited, and also weighed in about the best colors to abuse Splice in Limited. He also had an idea or two about Constructed.

Chris DeJohn writes:

*While I am not a Pro Tour player, I do play a lot of **Magic**, especially Limited. I attended the Champions prerelease in my hometown of Pittsburgh, Pa., and the team event the following day. I have already played with Champions in Limited (sealed deck and draft) a total of 7 times and there were some things in your article that some people didn't mention that surprised me.*

*The first was the lack of any talk about **Wicked Akuba**. This card is amazing in Limited. Drop it on turn two, and if your opponent doesn't respond, he's taking 5 on turn 3. Several of my friends were able to abuse this card at the prerelease doing upwards of 8 per turn. It shocks me that no one has mentioned this card. To me, if you open a pack in draft with this baby, you gotta take it and ride black all the way to the house.*

*In addition, many players are saying how arcane blue-red decks work well in draft/sealed deck. Well, I would like to refute this statement with the experience I have had so far. Black-green and black or white with red have worked the best. While I will agree that this set is slower, a good early game can often win it for you. A black-green deck has an AMAZING early game with the control of black to keep things rolling. The same is true with white-red. White's great in the early game with this set. Combining it with red allows players to splice some great red control onto some amazing white stall cards (*Ethereal Haze* splicing *Glacial Ray*, for example).*



*As far as constructed goes, I think big red gets a pretty big boost from this set. Cards like *Ben-Ben Akki Hermit*, *Kiki-Jiki Mirror Breaker*, and *Kumano, Master Yamabushi* provide some extra control cards to big red. I am already considering replacing *Arc-Slogger* with *Kumano*. This card is not only good in constructed, but AMAZING in limited (wrecked me at the prerelease). With the addition of *Imi Statue* and *Cranial Extraction*, I think there are enough good sideboard cards out there to combat Affinity.*

I have been a little disappointed with the Akuba myself, Chris. I prefer the *Nezumi Cutthroat* since you can cast him more reliably on turn two in a two-color deck and he is more likely to get through, thanks to fear. That said, I see *Wicked Akubas* going around the table wicked late. I am sure you can draft a tight little black deck with these guys and the soulshift chain. If you can fear him up with *Kami of the Waning Moon* he can do a lot of damage very quickly.

Thanks to everyone who wrote in or posted in the forums. I love the feedback and I always enjoy hearing from everyone.

Next week: The first two major *Champions of Kamigawa* events will be under our collective belts and the format will start taking shape. It was around this time last year in Kansas City that *Molder Slug* first emerged from the dark to become a dominating Limited (and constructed) force. Tune in next week to see if there were any similar surprises and to meet the winners. Good luck to everyone playing this weekend. Hopefully I will be talking to you!

*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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