

The Many Faces of Malka

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Mike Flores

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The Rock came into the recent Pro Tour Columbus as the unconditional leader in terms of popularity. With over 60 representatives, The Rock made up more than 20% of the field... yet not a one made Top 8 in a tournament that boasted *eight different archetypes*.

Now for players interested in statistical performance, this should tell you that the "noblest deck" fared pretty badly, but I am pretty sure that regardless of the numbers, the Pro Tour aspirants out there will reclaim their love for The Rock once the Extended PTQ season hits. Over the past three years, The Rock has gone from a 100% rogue choice to a deck that every team has to prepare for.



Now unlike previous years, the PT Columbus crowd showed us several legitimately different looks at Sol Malka's baby. The most basic is probably exemplified by the version played by Joe "Mouth" Kambourakis:

Joseph Kambourakis - The Rock



Main Deck

60 cards

- 1 Dust Bowl
- 7 Forest
- 4 Llanowar Wastes
- 6 Swamp
- 4 Treetop Village
- 1 Volrath's Stronghold

23 lands

- 4 Birds of Paradise
- 4 Eternal Witness
- 1 Kokusho, the Evening Star
- 4 Ravenous Baloth
- 4 Sakura-Tribe Elder
- 1 Visara the Dreadful

18 creatures

- 4 Cabal Therapy
- 2 Cranial Extraction
- 1 Diabolic Edict
- 3 Duress
- 1 Engineered Plague
- 4 Pernicious Deed
- 1 Recurring Nightmare
- 3 Vampiric Tutor

19 other spells

Sideboard

- 2 Coffin Purge
- 2 Cranial Extraction
- 3 Diabolic Edict
- 1 Duress
- 2 Engineered Plague
- 1 Haunting Echoes
- 4 Wall of Blossoms

15 sideboard cards

Mouth's deck shows off a combination of new innovations without ever deviating from the classic Rock plan. He replaces Wall of Blossoms with Sakura-Tribe Elder, which makes up a lot for the missing Yavimaya Elder (whose spot was stolen by the superb Eternal Witness). This deck is pretty straightforward, with the same 23 lands we have seen for several years, 4 Treetop Villages, all of it. In addition to the Snake Shaman, *Champions of Kamigawa* adds Kokusho, the Evening Star and two copies of Cranial Extraction to the main deck.

Contrast this very basic deck to the one played by Jeroen Remie:

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
8 Forest	4 Cabal Therapy	3 Coffin Purge
4 Llanowar Wastes	3 Diabolic Edict	1 Diabolic Edict
7 Swamp	4 Duesess	3 Engineered Plague
3 Treetop Village	4 Pernicious Deed	4 Nezumi Graverobber
1 Volrath's Stronghold		1 Uktabi Orangutan
	15 other spells	1 Viridian Shaman
23 lands		2 Visara the Dreadful
		15 sideboard cards
4 Birds of Paradise		
3 Eternal Witness		
4 Llanowar Elves		
4 Phyrexian Negator		
2 Ravenous Baloth		
2 Spiritmonger		
3 Troll Ascetic		
22 creatures		

Jeroen is one of the most decorated Malka players in recent years; he did not disappoint in Columbus, playing straight B/G once again to a money finish.

Even though his deck is straight B/G, Remie's deck is a far cry from what we would expect from a classic Rock. His deck brings back Spiritmonger -- albeit only two copies -- as the big finisher, but adds a ton of beats along the way.

Turn 1: Forest + Bird or Elf
 Turn 2: Swamp + Negator or Troll


Turn 1: Treetop Village
 Turn 2: Swamp + Duesess + Bird or Elf
 Turn 3: Ravenous Baloth



Remie's deck adds Llanowar Elves to Birds of Paradise, allowing his deck to get serious threats like Troll Ascetic and Phyrexian Negator down in short order. Contrast the baseline philosophy of this B/G deck with the previous one. While both Jeroen and Mouth play two colors with many cards in common, Jeroen almost doesn't need a card like Cranial Extraction to fight combo. He has four Duress and four Cabal Therapy starting, and shortens the number of turns a Mind's Desire or Aluren deck has to win after even light disruption *just because he has Phyrexian Negator in his deck!*

Jeroen can wipe away blockers with Diabolic Edict, and has a good long game with his Pernicious Deeds because he plays with actual regenerating creatures. In order to play these cards, his version gives up the gradual card advantage from Wall of Blossoms, Yavimaya Elder, and Dust Bowl that have been The Rock's hallmarks.

For a complete departure from classic The Rock design, check out the version played by the current best player on the planet:


Gabriel Nassif – The Rock		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
<i>60 cards</i>		
9 Forest	4 Cabal Therapy	2 Duress
1 Island	1 Coffin Purge	1 Energy Flux
4 Llanowar Wastes	1 Cranial Extraction	2 Engineered Plague
4 Polluted Delta	3 Intuition	1 Gilded Drake
4 Swamp	1 Living Death	1 Oxidize
-----	1 Living Wish	2 Pernicious Deed
22 lands	2 Pernicious Deed	3 Smother
	1 Recurring Nightmare	1 Spike Feeder
4 Birds of Paradise	2 Vampiric Tutor	1 Spike Weaver
3 Eternal Witness	-----	1 Withered Wretch
1 Genesis	16 other spells	15 sideboard cards
1 Kokusho, the Evening Star		
3 Ravenous Baloth		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
1 Solemn Simulacrum		
1 Spike Weaver		
4 Wall of Blossoms		

22 creatures		

This is the example that breaks the rule. If The Rock is meant to be the noblest deck in Extended, steer any judges away from Nassif's version... it's full of broken cards! Intuition seems a natural addition to the deck, setting up Genesis, Recurring Nightmare, and other threats. Again, we see Nassif playing Cranial Extraction, setting that card up with Vampiric Tutor. Though he doesn't start Duress, Cabal Therapy is better in Nassif's deck than in either of the previous versions because of his Walls.

One mistake too many of The Rock's adherents made in Columbus was to underrate Affinity. They assumed that with four Pernicious Deeds and a couple of Vampiric Tutors, they would have the Affinity matchup in the bag. Nassif is arguably worse against an Affinity deck because he only plays two Deeds... but his sideboard finishes off the set with Oxidize and, more importantly, Energy Flux. With Vampiric Tutor setting up Energy Flux and ready access to his Island, Nassif's version seems the best to me at fighting Canali's deck over the course of three games.

That said, we saved the best for last. Torben Twiefel made Top 16 with Red Rock.

Torben Twiefel		
Main Deck		Sideboard
<i>60 cards</i>		
1 Bloodstained Mire	4 Cabal Therapy	1 Cranial Extraction
6 Forest	1 Cranial Extraction	3 Diabolic Edict
4 Llanowar Wastes	1 Diabolic Edict	3 Engineered Plague
2 Mountain	3 Duress	1 Flametongue Kavu
3 Swamp	1 Engineered Plague	1 Kamahl, Fist of Krosa
4 Treetop Village	4 Pernicious Deed	3 Naturalize
1 Volrath's Stronghold	1 Recurring Nightmare	1 Ravenous Baloth
1 Wasteland	3 Vampiric Tutor	1 Uktabi Orangutan
1 Wooded Foothills		1 Withered Wretch
	18 other spells	15 sideboard cards
23 lands		
4 Birds of Paradise		
4 Eternal Witness		
3 Flametongue Kavu		
4 Solemn Simulacrum		
4 Wall of Blossoms		
19 creatures		

The fun thing about typing in innumerable deck lists is that you can really get into a player's head when you are reading his list for an open field event. It's almost like different players are playing in different tournaments. Twiefel makes a concession to combination decks with his 7 Duresses and main-deck Cranial Extraction... but Torben plays with main-deck Flametongue Kavu as well! While most of his contemporaries had Sakura-Tribe Elder, Red Rock stacks its four-drops with Solemn Simulacrum. It's almost like Twiefel is prepared for *a different tournament*.

But Torben obviously had something up his sleeve, because he was the only player out of over 20% of the field to crack the Top 16 with The Rock. What does it mean when the anti-creature version, splashing red and playing more clunky four mana creatures, is the best performer? Does it mean that the lone Cranial Extraction silver bullet is enough to ward off combo decks? Does it mean that the format isn't as fast as we thought?

I am guessing that any Malka players out there who want to go the way of Mr. Twiefel will want to add at least one Meltdown to the sideboard. You've got 3 Vampiric Tutors, after all.

For yet another completely different look at Red Rock, here is a deck that Kai Budde used to finish in the money at GP Reims two years ago. Kai's deck is obviously several sets removed, but what I think is interesting is his choice to splash red for Terminate main and nothing else; while Flametongue Kavu is good at fighting creatures, Terminate is a lot better at killing enemy Spiritmongers.



Kai Budde

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
5 Forest	2 Cabal Therapy	2 Buried Alive
3 Karplusan Forest	4 Duress	2 Cabal Therapy
4 Llanowar Wastes	1 Living Death	1 Crypt Creeper
1 Mountain	3 Living Wish	1 Dust Bowl
7 Swamp	4 Pernicious Deed	1 Faceless Butcher
3 Treetop Village	3 Terminate	1 Filth
23 lands	2 Vampiric Tutor	1 Genesis
	19 other spells	1 Naturalize
4 Birds of Paradise		2 Spike Feeder
1 Genesis		1 Stronghold Taskmaster
2 Ravenous Baloth		1 Terminate
3 Spiritmonger		1 Thrull Surgeon
4 Wall of Blossoms		15 sideboard cards
4 Yavimaya Elder		
18 creatures		

Obviously, there are several ways to build The Rock. Many players -- some of them great -- have gone several different ways. Not that long ago, **Magic's** original Juggernaut, Gab Tsang, finished in the Top 32 of PT Houston with a version touching white for Vindicate. He didn't have access to Sakura-Tribe Elder (or Torben's Solemn Simulacrum), but supported those flexible white cards with the help of four Krosan Tuskers!

Whether straight B/G or splashing one of the other three colors of **Magic** is the right build remains to be seen. Despite its disappointing finish in Columbus, I would be shocked if the noblest deck in Extended did not buy many a Top 8 finish and PT slot in the upcoming qualifier season.

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