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# 2004: The Year That Was, Part I

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The Week That Was  
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What? Reprint articles for the next two weeks? That doesn't leave me any time before we delve headfirst into *Betrayers of Kamigawa*. I guess that means I have to do my Year in Review this week . . . I was going to share my all-common Standard deck that has an 80% matchup against Affinity in Game 1, but we'll have to table that article and look back at the plays, players, and the played of 2004. We'll start with the first six months this week, and then wrap up the nostalgia the first week of January.

It was the a transition year for the Pro Tour as the powers-that-be decided to gently nudge the Pro Tour calendar to coincide with the actual calendar. An extra team Pro Tour was added to the schedule to stretch out the year. It is a slow process that will only become visible at the end of the coming season. The 2006 season will actually start in January of that year . . .but we're getting ahead of ourselves. The year in question in 2004, and when it kicked off we were two events into the 2003-2004 Pro Tour season.

## January

The third event of the year was [Pro Tour-Amsterdam](#), which was triple-*Mirrodin* Rochester Draft. Amsterdam featured a stellar Top 8 and saw Nicolai Herzog win his first Pro Tour (after losing in the finals to Kai Budde during the previous season's Rochester event).

Osamu Fujita was Nico's opponent this time around -- and it was another heart-breaking second-place finisher for the Japanese player who had been nicknamed "The Silver Collector" for his string of such finishes. Japan continued to put players into the finals on the Pro Tour, but the same nickname could be applied to the country's players as a whole. It seemed like the big Pro Tour check would never be cashed at a Japanese bank.



Osamu Fujita, left, and Nicolai Herzog battled in Amsterdam.

There was only one American player in the Top 8, the soon-to-be-retired Mike Turian. Depending on whom you spoke with -- and what part of the world they hailed from -- this was evidence of either the decline of American **Magic** or the ascendancy of the European and Japanese **Magic** scenes. Turian was just one of the players in this Top 8 who would become familiar faces to devotees of event coverage in the coming months. Granted, the Top 8 was pretty well known to begin with, as only Aeo Paquette had an unknown face.

"The Top 8 in Amsterdam was definitely a crazy group, seven of the best known players in the world, and myself," recalled the Canadian teenager. "It was my first Pro Tour so I was very happy to just come that far. I gave it my all and came up just short, but it was a good learning experience and an amazing trip."

Coming into the Rochester Draft tournament most players were debating the merits of offense boosting equipment such as *Bonesplitter* and *Loxodon Warhammer*. During Pro Tour-Amsterdam it became apparent that the preferred equipment for arming your creatures was the *Viridian Longbow*. Turian routinely picked the card first and pushed the card up ahead of *Bonesplitter* in many players' pick orders after the event.



Do you recognize this man? By the end of 2004, Aeo Paquette had made his mark on **Magic**.

Another card that made its "debut" in Amsterdam was *Disciple of the Vault*. Many players tried to draft the Spellbomb deck with varying results. The deck "cycled" through spellbombs to draw cards and fire up the Disciples. *Darksteel* was waiting in the wings, as was the next Block Constructed Pro Tour. Like Aeo, the Disciple would get another chance to do well on the Pro Tour.

The rise of the Japanese **Magic** player was clearly one of the biggest developments in the 2003-2004 season. While the Pros drafted in Amsterdam, the rank-and-file of the **Magic** world were in the middle of an Extended PTQ season. When the PTQ season started it was played under the same Banned and Restricted list that was in place for Pro Tour-New Orleans. By the time [Grand Prix-Okayama](#) rolled around, many of those cards were removed from the Extended landscape. Okayama would end up being one of the most influential Grand Prix events of the year, but that realization wouldn't come until nearly three-quarters of the calendar had passed.

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That same weekend in January also saw the first appearance of *Darksteel* at worldwide prerelease events. You know that ominous score they used in "Jaws" whenever the shark was approaching an unwitting victim? You can start humming that right about here.

## February

*Darksteel* made its tournament debut in the Booster Draft Grand Prix events in Oakland and Madrid. In [Oakland](#), Ken Ho announced *Skullclamp*'s power with authority as the card was featured heavily in his mono-black, double Disciple of the Vault deck. You could feel the shark's rough hide as it passed by your flailing legs in the inky deep.

Almost 1,400 players descended on [Madrid](#) to play with the new set in the hopes of hoisting the trophy, but in the end Kai Budde defeated all comers with his red-white, rein-grabbing deck. It seemed like business as usual for the German Juggernaut who had taken home the Player of the Year title for the past three seasons. Shockingly it would be Kai's the last major tournament victory for the remainder of the year.



[Pro Tour-Kobe](#) marked the Constructed debut of *Darksteel*. By this time, all of Amity Island was aware of the shark in their midst.

*Skullclamp* and *Arcbound Ravager* had everyone nervous. *Ravager* Affinity tore bloody chunks out of the Standard format [Last Chance Qualifier](#) that preceded the Block Constructed Pro Tour and Sheriff Randy Buehler prowled the beach wondering if he was going to have to go shark hunting.

A funny thing happened on the way to the Top 8. While Affinity was a powerful deck, it only pushed two players through to single-elimination play. Sunday's action was dominated by the arrival of Big Red, and when everything played out the Japanese finally had their champion. Masashiro Kuroda defeated Gabriel Nassif and ended his country's winless ways on the Pro Tour. The fact that it happened on Japanese soil only made victory all the sweeter for the [popular Kuroda \(9.62 MB QuickTime zip\)](#).

While Big Red was the dominant deck for that tournament, it was TwelvePost (or Tooth and Nail) which seemed to capture the fancy of **Magic** players. Nassif made the Top 8 of his second straight Constructed Pro Tour with his unexpected mono-green deck. Nassif had also made the Top 8 in Venice and finished ninth at Worlds in 2003. It was becoming readily apparent that he was among the very best in the world and that France was now one of the epicenters of the game for Pro Tour play.

Lost in that Top 8 was Jelger Wiegiersma's Affinity deck that exploited Aether Vial to thoroughly abuse the synergies between *Myr Retriever* and *Skullclamp*. The pieces of the Affinity puzzle were slowly coming together, although it was not necessarily apparent due to the success of the Big Red and TwelvePost decks at the tournament. Jelger continued a trend of Dutch players in the Top 8 of Pro Tours as the Netherlands made its bid to for **Magic** dominance, along with France and Japan.

## March

March came and the Banned and Restricted List made no changes to any formats. There were no Constructed events on the immediate horizon, but Regional Championships were not too far off and players resigned themselves to testing with and against Affinity. Meanwhile, drafters had back-to-back Limited PTQ rounds to look forward to.

This year also marked the Master Series being supplanted by the year-end payout, the ramifications of which could be seen by the presence of European and American players at Asian Grand Prix events in March. A Ruel brother each made a Top 8 in [Hong Kong](#) and [Sendai](#), while Gabe Walls popped up in the Top 8 of Hong Kong.



*Ichiro Shimura defeated a loaded Top 8 in Sendai, Japan.*

Despite name players from Europe, Japan, and the United States, Chuen Hwa Tan emerged as the victor in Hong Kong. In Japan, Ichiro Shimura burst forth onto the **Magic** scene from a Top 8 that included Antoine Ruel, Jin Okamoto, and Masahiko Morita.

The last weekend of March saw a pair of Grand Prix tournaments. One in the heartland of American **Magic** -- [Columbus, Ohio](#) -- and the other in Birmingham, England. Columbus set the North American attendance record with more than 800 players vying for a share of the cash prize. The lion's share of the \$25,000 went to Mike Turian, who continued his farewell **Magic** tour before moving to Seattle and landing a dream job with Wizards.

After playing an elimination match in the final round of the Swiss against none other than Kai Budde, the Top 8 of [Grand Prix-Birmingham](#) was a cakewalk for Stefan Jedlicka. Frank Karsten lost in the first elimination round of that Top 8 without much fanfare. The next time his name popped up in a Grand Prix Top 8 it would have far greater impact.

## April

April was the calm before the Regionals storm, with only a pair of Team Grand Prix events on the calendar. [Grand Prix-Washington D.C.](#) was won by Thaaat's Me (Bill Stead, Charles Gindy, and Chris Fennell). They defeated a

team of TOGIT's finest: Shenanigans was made up of Osyp Lebedowicz, Patrick Sullivan, and Adam Horvath. DC was also one of those infrequent Jon Finkel sightings, as he showed up with Brian Kibler and Eric Froelich and managed a Top 4 finish along with a YMG/Illuminati hybrid of Darwin Kastle, Rob Dougherty, and Alex Shvartsman.

That same weekend saw Kamiel Cornelissen's two brothers, Stijn and Jesse, team up with former World Champion Tom Van de Logt to win [Grand Prix–Bochum](#) as Shietkoe (Dutch for "shooting cow"). They defeated the powerhouse Team Burkas made up of Anton Jonsson, Tuomo Niemenin, and Nicolai Herzog.

Japanese Regionals were under way and Affinity, Tooth and Nail, and Goblin Bidding were the clear top dogs. Hirata Tatsuya won the second Kanto Regionals with a teched-out Affinity build and his [sideboard of Seething Song/Furnace Dragon](#) would soon become de rigeur for the deck.

## May

The year really started to heat up once the temperatures started to rise. The first weekend saw the U.S. Regional Championships -- and the shark that everyone had been fearing began sending red frothy waves crashing onto the once tranquil beaches of Amity Island. It wasn't just Affinity, though -- it was **Skullclamp** that was a problem. It not only fueled the Affinity decks but made Goblin Bidding a formidable foe as well. Tooth and Nail was a popular alternative for the stubbornly anti-Clamp crowd, but an elf-based variant known as Elf and Nail sprung forth from the Northwest Regionals and it too used the powerful equipment. Something had to give -- and it was looking a lot like **Skullclamp**.

That weekend also saw **Seething Song/Furnace Dragon** become a popular choice for the sideboards of Affinity decks everywhere in anticipation of the mirror match. It should be noted that even this was largely fueled by **Skullclamp**, since the ridiculous card-drawing power of the Clamp made it much more likely that you would draw the two pieces of the combo.

Bob Maher took what may well have been his final bow with his victory over Mattias Jorstedt at the [Magic Invitational](#), fought on the virtual landscape of *Magic Online* at the annual consumer electronics show E3. Maher's original pass at designing a card (rewarded to the Invitational winner) was a sorcery that gave target player nine poison counters, but once Bob actually won the event he had a change of heart. He and Mark Rosewater huddled together and developed something that was more up to recent standards and it will be released in the *Kamigawa* block.

Despite many complaints about some of the *Mirrodin* cards for Constructed formats, the block was proving to be one of the most skill-rewarding draft sets in recent memory. Three of the Top 8 finishers from Pro Tour–Amsterdam sat down to draft again at [Pro Tour–San Diego](#) and Nicolai Herzog dispatched this Top 8 as well to win back-to-back Limited Pro Tours. With two Pro Tour wins in one season, Nico seemed like a lock to unseat Kai as the new Player of the Year.



Nicolai Herzog won two Pro Tours in the 2003 season.

Mike Turian and Anton Jonsson were the other two holdovers from Amsterdam. It was Turian's final appearance on the Pro Tour, and because of that became the sentimental favorite to win. That was not to be, as his hopes were shattered by Nicolai's Panoptic Mirror draft deck in the semifinals. Other Top 8 competitors included Ben Stark and Antoine Ruel, who both had *Mirrodin* Limited Grand Prix Top 8s on their 2004 resumes. Stark's Top 8 was his second such finish in his last two Pro Tour events.

It would not be a Pro Tour Top 8 in 2004 without a Japanese player, and Masashi Oiso took the open set for the second such appearance of his young career. Speaking of young careers, Mark Heberholz and Angel Perez del Pozo both made the first Top 8s of their respective careers.

The next weekend saw the completion of the *Mirrodin* Block with *Fifth Dawn* Prerelease tournaments. While it is becoming apparent that something was going to be done about **Skullclamp**, it seemed like the new set might just be able to offer up some new equipment for Affinity decks looking to fill those final few slots.

May closed with the Standard format [Grand Prix–Brussels](#) and another dominating performance by Affinity. The event started out promisingly enough with **Pristine Angel** control and Elf and Nail on top of the standings, but the final was an Affinity mirror match between Kai Budde and Tobias Henke (with Henke emerging on top). The Top 8 featured three Affinity, three Goblins, one Ponzam, and the Angel control deck.

One of the more interesting names to show up at the Brussels Top 8 tables was that of a young Dutch player Julien Nuijten. Julien piloted his Goblin deck to a Top 4 matchup



Gindy, Fennell, and Stead (left to right) captured the Grand Prix–Washington title.

with Kai Budde. Although it was the first time the 15-year-old surfaced among the throng of standout Dutch **Magic** players, it would be far from the last.

## June

June kicked off with word that **Skullclamp** was being banned in both Standard and Constructed formats, although it would still be legal for both formats for any of the National Championships that took place before June 20. This presented an interesting scenario for U.S. Nationals, which started before June 20 but ended smack dab on the day the card would be banned. **Skullclamp** would be legal for U.S. Nationals.



Julien Nuijten knocked off Kai Budde in Brussels.

Before U.S. Nationals could be contested, there were the Italian and Japanese National Championships. [In Italy](#), Sameer Merchant's Elf and Nail creation earned two Italian players Top 8 berths, but Affinity was still the dominant deck. However, [Japanese Nationals](#) was the big tournament that the world's eyes were on. At the previous season's Standard Grand Prix in Thailand, Tsuyoshi Fujita displayed the power of Goblin Bidding and it had remained a Standard fixture throughout the year.

Tsuyoshi earned his country's National Championship with a green-red Goblin deck that eschewed the card drawing of **Skullclamp** (in the main deck anyway) and the recursion of **Patriarch's Bidding** for green artifact removal. Fujita's deck could run with Affinity and the rest of the world began to shift away from black-red toward green-red goblins.

When the Top 8 for [U.S. Nationals](#) finally rolled around, it featured only one green-red goblin deck. Surprisingly, there were two Elf and Nail decks in the Top 8 and one of them helped TOGIT's Craig Krempels earn the title of U.S. National Champion. Even more surprising was the success of a green-white control deck that had been championed by **Magic** columnist Mike Flores, who had played a similar deck during Regionals. Brian Kibler and Bill Stead both played the deck, and it earned the latter a spot on the US National team. The third spot was earned by Ben Zoz with his Affinity-hating blue-white control deck.



Tsuyoshi Fujita took home Japan's National Championship trophy.

While Krempels was busy bouncing Shamans with his Symbiotes, another young player was winning the Junior Super Series Championships with a more traditional Urza land-based Tooth and Nail deck. Jeff Garza stepped up in his final year of eligibility and earned himself a healthy chunk of his college tuition. Like many of the other young players mentioned throughout this article, Garza would go on to prove that youth was being served throughout **Magic** in 2004

The final weekend of June saw two major constructed events. [English Nationals](#) was a Standard affair, won by John Omerod. He played Tooth and Nail in the post-**Skullclamp** environment. Joining him at Worlds would be Neil Rigby (who played blue-red Obliterate) and Paul Willis, with the freshly minted **Cranial Plating** understudying for **Skullclamp** in his Affinity build.

[Grand Prix-Zurich](#) also featured a Tooth and Nail deck winning the whole deal, although this was a *Mirrodin* Block Constructed event although Manuel Bucher's deck was not the one the internet **Magic** community was abuzz about in the following weeks. His finals opponent was Matteo Cirigliano, playing a deck that came to be known as Crystal Witness. It used **Crystal Shard** to bounce **Viridian Shamans** and **Eternal Witnesses** to take control of the game.

Lost in the buzz about Crystal Witness was Frank Karsten's Top 8 appearance with Vial Affinity. The Dutch players had removed **Myr Retrievers** and **Aether Vials** from their Affinity builds until Nuijten suggested they try and put them back in, even without the synergies of **Skullclamp**. Of all the various Affinity iterations in the past six months, this would become the most dominant version in both the Standard and Block Constructed formats. This was not readily apparent in the wake of goodwill the **Magic** community felt for the blue-green control deck that finished second.

Looking for the rest of the year? Check back on Jan. 6 for a review of July through December.

## Flashing forward

This past weekend saw a handful of Team PTQs in North America. As it turns out, I do not face any dilemma regarding whether to work or play on the Pro Tour in Atlanta because my team did not fare as well as we have in previous qualifiers. I am happy to report that three friends -- Paul Allison, Vince Kozlowski, and Dan Olmo -- took the slot. All three are long time Neutral Ground regulars going way back to when I owned the shop. Congratulations to them and everyone else who qualified for Atlanta this past weekend.

Event City	Event Date	Event TO	Team Attendance
Denver (PT Qualifier)	12/11/2004	Eric Smith	19
Finish: 1. Veggie Check (Jesse Maddox, Tyler Hatchel, Nick Buhrer); 2. Waste Management (Jonathan Cassidy, Russell Harris, William Grimes)			
Memphis, Ark. (PT Qualifier)	12/11/2004	Mike Rodieck	9

Finish: 1. Wow Wow Wow (Matt Garrison, Kevin Adamowicz, Scott Adamowicz); 2. Do I Look Chinese (Griffin Poole, Steven Strasberg, Zac Hill)

Phoenix, Ariz. (PT Qualifier) 12/1/2004 Ray Powers 14

Finish: 1. Chimera (Dusty Ochoa, Johnny Bates, Paolo Lumadao); 2. Riad Doesn't Care (Sean Fitzgerald, Riad Mourssali, Joe Weber)

## Firestarter: Favorite drafts

Triple *Champions of Kamigawa* has been my favorite draft format in quite some time. What is the best draft format of all time? Is it something with three packs of the first set in an expansion such as a *Champions of Kamigawa* draft, or a full-on block like *Invasion/Planeshift/Apocalypse*? Come to think of it, *Mirage/Mirage/Visions* might be my all-time fave.

What's yours? Let us know by clicking on the Discuss link below.

*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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