

Looking back on one of the most important years in Vintage ever. A Vintage Year in Review

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The Vintage format (also referred to by its older name, "Type 1") has undergone an important transformation this year. Last year it rose from the ashes, and now it has become part of something one can only describe as the Vintage PTQ Circuit. What does this mean and what can we learn from Vintage in 2004? Read on.

For some time Vintage was widely regarded as a dead format. In recognition of the format's resurgent popularity, Wizards decided to add a Vintage Championship at Gencon. This year was another important step in the development of the format. Star City Games and a few other bold individuals like Ray Robillard hosted tournaments across the United States that attracted hundreds of players because of their attractive prize structure. The tournament scene has grown and there are important strategic consequences that follow.



Before this year, the idea in Vintage was to find the best deck and play that deck at every tournament. There were two reasons for this. First, the card pool is so deep, the theory went, that there was almost always going to be "one best deck" and anything else was just second best. Second, there really wasn't a metagame, as such. Aside from Origins, Gencon, and the online metagame, Vintage tournaments were mostly local store events, with no trend or top 8 that one could point to nationally as defining the format. New decks were emerging, slowly but surely, but people generally didn't change what they played – they just tweaked.

That has all changed.

In this article I'm going to trace the shifts in the Vintage metagame over the past year and suggest what this will mean for the next year. With such clearly defined metagame roles and shifts (as you will see) there is a lot that can be learned about this format simply by looking back on how we got here.

Generally speaking, there are two things that drive change in Vintage more than anything else: new card sets and restrictions. New sets create brand new decks that the existing field must contend with.

Restrictions generally remove decks from the format and as a result transform the whole metagame landscape and dynamic. As 2004 opened up, both types of changes dramatically altered Vintage.

Mirrodin Block In Vintage



Mirrodin Block hit Vintage. Hard. *Mirrodin* itself was the benchmark, adding no less than *twenty* playable cards to the format. Many of the cards have become entire new decks like [Mindslaver](#) and [Goblin Charbelcher](#). Others are just great utility, like [Platinum Angel](#) in Oath or [Duplicant](#) in Workshop Aggro. In other cases, they are all-purpose hosers like [Chalice of the Void](#) or [Damping Matrix](#). In my opinion, *Mirrodin* hasn't even fully had its impact felt. I believe [Skullclamp](#) will continue to grow in popularity, first in Kobold-Clamp decklists abusing [Glimpse of Nature](#) and secondly in Mike Long's Vintage Suicide Virus deck which uses [Artificer's Intuition](#) to recur [Myr Servitors](#), which you clamp to generate tremendous card advantage.

At the beginning of 2004, with just *Mirrodin* released, the struggle was to find the best way to abuse it. Almost immediately, two variants of [Mindslaver](#) decks emerged: one used [Mana Drain](#) and the other used [Mishra's Workshop](#). In the end, the [Mana Drain](#) build is still popular and quite successful, while [Mishra's Workshop](#) found a more comfortable home in other decks. Although both Control decks, the [Mana Drain](#) variant is commonly referred to as Control Slaver and the Workshop deck is known as Workshop Slaver.

Control Slaver



Main Deck

61 cards

3 Flooded Strand	1 Ancestral Recall	Sideboard
1 Island	1 Black Lotus	4 Chalice of the Void
1 Library of Alexandria	4 Brainstorm	1 Mind's Eye
2 Polluted Delta	1 Demonic Tutor	3 Rack and Ruin
2 Seat of the Synod	3 Fire // Ice	3 Red Elemental Blast
1 Strip Mine	4 Force of Will	3 Tormod's Crypt
1 Tolarian Academy	4 Mana Drain	1 Vampiric Tutor
3 Underground Sea	1 Memory Jar	<hr/>
4 Volcanic Island	1 Mind Twist	15 sideboard cards
1 Wasteland	1 Mind's Eye	
<hr/>	2 Mindslaver	
19 lands	1 Mox Emerald	
	1 Mox Jet	
4 Goblin Welder	1 Mox Pearl	
1 Gorilla Shaman	1 Mox Ruby	
1 Pentavus	1 Mox Sapphire	
<hr/>	1 Sol Ring	

6 creatures

- 4 [Thirst for Knowledge](#)
- 1 [Time Walk](#)
- 1 [Tinker](#)
- 1 [Yawgmoth's Will](#)

36 other spells



This deck first appeared in the German "Dülmen," in which over a hundred players compete in a monthly tournament held at a store called "Trader." The deck was later popularized in the United States by Rich Shay (who, incidentally, finished in the money at Pro Tour Columbus and did quite well at Nationals this year). This list was to become a major hit over 2004, eventually winning the Vintage Championship at Gencon. The deck basically played like a Control deck with a combo finish. It would counter your spells with [Mana Drain](#) and [Force of Will](#) and then draw cards with [Thirst for Knowledge](#), a new draw engine. It would then try to get [Goblin Welder](#) to weld in a discarded [Mindslaver](#) and start recurring the [Mindslaver](#) enough times until it could find [Pentavus](#) to create an infinite [Mindslaver](#)lock. At that point, the deck would generally win with Pentavite tokens or, frankly, however it wanted.

Workshop Slaver



Main Deck

60 cards

- 1 [Ancient Tomb](#)
- 1 [Library of Alexandria](#)
- 4 [Mishra's Workshop](#)
- 2 [Polluted Delta](#)
- 1 [Ancestral Recall](#)
- 1 [Black Lotus](#)
- 4 [Brainstorm](#)
- 4 [Chalice of the Void](#)

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 2 Shivan Reef | 1 Fact or Fiction |
| 1 Tolarian Academy | 4 Force of Will |
| 4 Volcanic Island | 3 Gilded Lotus |
| <hr/> | |
| 15 lands | 1 Mana Crypt |
| | 1 Mana Vault |
| | 1 Memory Jar |
| 4 Goblin Welder | 3 Mindslaver |
| 1 Memnarch | 1 Mox Emerald |
| 1 Pentavus | 1 Mox Jet |
| <hr/> | |
| 6 creatures | 1 Mox Pearl |
| | 1 Mox Ruby |
| | 1 Mox Sapphire |
| | 1 Sol Ring |
| | 4 Thirst for Knowledge |
| | 1 Time Walk |
| | 1 Timetwister |
| | 1 Tinker |
| | 1 Wheel of Fortune |
| | 1 Windfall |
| <hr/> | |
| | 39 other spells |



This decklist played very similarly to the German build, but instead would accelerate out with [Gilded Lotus](#) and [Mishra's Workshop](#) to achieve the same [Mindslaver](#) lock. The difference is that it was playing with more fun restricted cards to achieve that goal more quickly. Perhaps the most important thing to happen to the metagame as of January 1, 2004 was the restriction of [Burning Wish](#) and [Lion's Eye Diamond](#). Very rarely does the DCI find something so abhorrent that it feels it necessary to restrict two parts to the deck. Well, that is precisely what

happened to Long.dec. Randy Beuhler talked about the deck in his article on the bannings, [Classic Developments](#).

Simply put, this deck was designed to win on turn one or two by casting [Burning Wish](#) (finding [Yawgmoth's Will](#) in the sideboard) while sacrificing Lion's Eye Diamond in response to pay for the [Yawgmoth's Will](#). The [Yawgmoth's Will](#) would then permit you to replay the [Lion's Eye Diamond](#), which would hopefully permit you to cast [Tendrils of Agony](#). Since the [Lion's Eye Diamond](#), [Burning Wish](#), and [Yawgmoth's Will](#) combo costs four spells (you play the LED twice), you are halfway toward lethal storm at the same time. This is often how Long would play out, assuming a normal turn two kill:
Turn One:



[Gemstone Mine](#), [Brainstorm](#).

Turn Two:

Play a [City of Brass](#).

Tap the [City of Brass](#) for black to play [Dark Ritual](#). Play [Duress](#). Storm Count 2.

Play [Lion's Eye Diamond](#). Storm Count 3 and ☠☠ floating.

Play Mox (of any color, let's say [Emerald](#)). Storm Count 4.

Tap the [Gemstone Mine](#) and the Mox and play [Burning Wish](#). In response, sacrifice the [Lion's Eye Diamond](#) for ☠☠☠ discarding your hand, including [Tendrils of Agony](#). ☠☠☠☠☠ floating and storm count 5.

Retrieve [Yawgmoth's Will](#) from the Sideboard and play it leaving ☠☠ floating. Storm Count 6 and ☠ floating.

Replay [Dark Ritual](#). Replay [Lion's Eye Diamond](#) and sacrifice it for Blue. ☠☠☠☠☠☠ floating and Storm Count 8.

Replay [Duress](#), leaving ☠☠☠☠☠ floating.

Replay [Brainstorm](#), leaving ☠☠☠☠☠ floating. Storm Count 10.

Now play that Tendrils from your graveyard for 22 points of damage.

A Sign of Things to Come - January, 2004

The first major tournament of the year was the Waterbury. The Waterbury is a quarterly tournament held in Waterbury, Connecticut by the esteemed Raymond Robillard. Ray has steadily built up a player base over the course of the last two years and now he regularly breaks one-fifty. He rents out a major hotel ballroom, and this time 192 players came to compete in the first major US tournament of the year. This, to date, was the largest Vintage tournament in the US probably since the format has been called "Vintage".

Metagame Going In

The northeast is renown for being control heavy. Long.dec, at its peak, was barely seen out there. Workshop decks are as scarce. The best players play [Mana Drain](#) Control decks – that means lots of

Keeper (very heavy control) and Landstill (a control deck that uses Standstill and manlands) variants. To be honest, the real concern in that field was how well [Worldgorger Dragon](#) combo would perform. With Long.dec out of the format, the metagame was almost entirely Aggro, Aggro-Control, and Control and a reconstituted GroAtog deck played by Scott Limoges sounded the opening volley into the Vintage New Year.

GroAtog



Main Deck

60 cards

2 [Flooded Strand](#)
4 [Island](#)
3 [Polluted Delta](#)
1 [Strip Mine](#)
3 [Tropical Island](#)
4 [Underground Sea](#)

17 lands

2 [Psychatog](#)
4 [Quirion Dryad](#)

6 creatures

4 [Accumulated Knowledge](#)
1 [Ancestral Recall](#)
1 [Black Lotus](#)
4 [Brainstorm](#)
2 [Cunning Wish](#)
1 [Demonic Tutor](#)
2 [Duress](#)
4 [Force of Will](#)
1 [Gush](#)
4 [Mana Drain](#)
1 [Merchant Scroll](#)
1 [Mind Twist](#)
2 [Misdirection](#)
1 [Mox Emerald](#)
1 [Mox Jet](#)
1 [Mox Pearl](#)
1 [Mox Ruby](#)
1 [Mox Sapphire](#)
1 [Mystical Tutor](#)
1 [Time Walk](#)
1 [Vampiric Tutor](#)
1 [Yawgmoth's Will](#)

37 other spells

Sideboard

1 [Berserk](#)
1 [Blue Elemental Blast](#)
2 [Diabolic Edict](#)
1 [Fact or Fiction](#)
1 [Hurkyl's Recall](#)
3 [Naturalize](#)
2 [Pernicious Deed](#)
4 [Tormod's Crypt](#)

15 sideboard cards



This decklist was reconstituted with [Accumulated Knowledge](#). The most dominant deck of 2003 was 4-[Gush](#) GroAtog in terms of the number of players it put into top 8s. It was as a result of this deck ancestor that [Gush](#) was restricted. This deck was slower, but proved it was still potent at growing massive [Quiron Dryads](#).

Take a look at the Semi-Finalist decklist:

T1 Dumptruck



Main Deck

60 cards

1 City of Brass	1 Ancestral Recall
2 Flooded Strand	1 Black Lotus
1 Island	4 Brainstorm
1 Plains	1 Demonic Tutor
2 Polluted Delta	3 Duress
1 Strip Mine	1 Fact or Fiction
4 Tundra	4 Force of Will
3 Underground Sea	4 Mana Drain
4 Wasteland	1 Mox Jet
-----	1 Mox Pearl
19 lands	1 Mox Sapphire
	1 Mystical Tutor
2 Exalted Angel	1 Sol Ring

Sideboard

1 Blue Elemental Blast
3 Damping Matrix
1 Disenchant
1 Ebony Charm
1 Energy Flux
1 Exalted Angel
1 Hurkyl's Recall
1 Moat
1 Serenity
2 Stifle
2 Swords to Plowshares

15 sideboard cards

- 4 [Meddling Mage](#)
- 3 [Ophidian](#)
- 3 [Phyrexian Negator](#)

12 creatures

- 1 [Swords to Plowshares](#)
- 1 [Time Walk](#)
- 2 [Vindicate](#)
- 1 [Yawgmoth's Will](#)

29 other spells



The top 8 was:

1. GroATog
2. DumpTruck
3. Workshop Slavery
4. Bazaar of Baghdad Stompy (mono green Madness)
5. Landstill
6. Bazaar of Baghdad Stompy
7. Psychatog
8. Tools 'N Tubbies (Workshop Aggro With Survival of the Fittest – hence, "Tools")

As you can see, this field is composed entirely of Aggro, Control, and Aggro-Control with the only two Aggro-Control decks to make top 8 placing first and second. The one commonality the two winning decklists had is that they were aggro-control. Aggro-Control was the touchstone of this tournament as it beat both Aggro and Control. The northeast has historically been characterized as lovers of Control. As a result, the Northeast metagame tends to split into Aggro designed to beat control and Control decks. GroAtog and EBA were good choices because they beat both archetypes. These two Aggro-Control decks managed not only to do that, but they beat all the other aggro-control decks in the field. You might be curious how [Quirion Dryads](#) and [Exalted Angel](#) could best aggro? Both GroAtog and Dumptruck play as tempo decks in Vintage. They counter to buy time and finish you off before you can win first. [Exalted Angel](#) is quite powerful at reversing the beatdown player's plan by gaining life while it is killing you. Dragon was heavily hated out because everyone had [Tormod's Crypts](#) in their sideboard.

This tournament doesn't really tell us much about how the format will shape out the rest of the year because of the heavy metagame distortions of the Northeast: few [Workshops](#), lots of Aggro decks, and a tremendous amount of blue based control. But that isn't surprising. Look at the tournament data from January in 2004 on Dr. Phil Stanton's charts over at Star City Games and you will see an unpredictable grab bag of winners. The metagame was in flux and lacked national coherence. The importance of the Waterbury is that it set the tone for the rest of the year in terms of tournament size. Vintage continues to add players at an astonishing rate.

The Best Kept Secret - February, 2004

A little February tournament in Columbus, Ohio had shockwaves that are still reverberating. Michael Simister played in a field of twenty with a new [Goblin Charbelcher](#) deck running on *two land*.

2 Land Belcher



Main Deck

61 cards

1 Bayou	1 Ancestral Recall
1 Tropical Island	2 Barbed Sextant
_____	1 Black Lotus
2 lands	2 Brainstorm
	2 Cabal Ritual
4 Elvish Spirit Guide	1 Channel
2 Goblin Welder	4 Chromatic Sphere
1 Scavenger Folk	1 Chrome Mox
4 Tinder Wall	4 Dark Ritual
_____	1 Demonic Tutor
11 creatures	4 Goblin Charbelcher
	4 Land Grant
	1 Lion's Eye Diamond
	2 Living Wish
	1 Lotus Petal
	1 Mana Crypt
	1 Mana Vault
	1 Memory Jar
	1 Mox Emerald
	1 Mox Jet
	1 Mox Pearl
	1 Mox Ruby
	1 Mox Sapphire
	1 Mystical Tutor
	1 Sol Ring

Sideboard

2 Artifact Mutation
1 Balance
1 Gemstone Mine
2 Goblin Welder
1 Maze of Ith
1 Mishra's Workshop
3 Oxidize
1 Tormod's Crypt
2 Xantid Swarm

14 sideboard cards

- 1 [Tendrils of Agony](#)
- 1 [Timetwister](#)
- 1 [Tinker](#)
- 1 [Vampiric Tutor](#)
- 1 [Wheel of Fortune](#)
- 1 [Yawgmoth's Bargain](#)
- 1 [Yawgmoth's Will](#)


48 other spells



How does this thing work? Quite simply, it tries to play [Goblin Charbelcher](#) and kill you as soon as possible. That's why it only has two lands. The pilot may well have played [Land Grant](#) to find one of

them. The hope is that by activating the [Goblin Charbelcher](#), they will be able to do 20 damage before seeing the other.

The deck might play like this:

Remove [Elvish Spirit Guide](#) from game to play [Tinder Wall](#). Play [Mox Pearl](#). Tap [Mox Pearl](#) to play [Chromatic Sphere](#). Sacrifice [Tinder Wall](#) for . Tap and activate [Chromatic Sphere](#) for blue mana. Draw a card. Play [Brainstorm](#). Now play [Land Grant](#) finding [Bayou](#). Tap [Bayou](#) for black mana. Play [Dark Ritual](#). Play [Goblin Charbelcher](#). If they counter it, then you can use the remaining red mana to play [Goblin Welder](#). Hopefully by now you'll have enough mana to activate the Belcher.

In the United States, this deck would virtually disappear until mid summer. The Germans were much quicker. Team CAB rode this monster to first place at the very next Dülman. They made two or three card changes and started putting up unbelievable numbers. [Goblin Charbelcher](#) is a very interesting deck. The deck goldfishes (wins without an opponent) an amazing amount of times on turn one, and nearly every other game on turn two. However, the deck has serious consistency problems and is easily disrupted. Nonetheless, Simister had his revenge by getting third place at the Vintage Championship by winning in a field of [Force of Will](#) and [Trinisphere](#) – no small feat and a testament to the creator's skill with the monster.

The Return and Demise of the Tog



By late March, [Psychatog](#) was cleaning up. Psychatog was the most successful tournament deck in the United States and Europe at this time. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the Psychatog deck might have "strategic superiority" over most of the other Vintage strategies. Psychatog was a huge wall against Aggro decks. Yet it was a wall that would turn into a vicious killer at the drop of a hat. The tog player might be holding back the Tog only to have drawn that needed [Gush](#) and suddenly the Tog has lethal damage with the simple play of [Cunning Wish](#) for [Berserk](#). Tog had a stronger card draw engine than any other Vintage deck with the [Intuition/AK](#) engine. Tog was potent against Aggro, Control and Aggro-Control. The Tog was bigger than any beatdown creature. Psychatog needed no utility or answers because the [Tog](#) was defense and offense. As a result, it had no dead cards in the

control mirrors. In combination with the best card advantage engine in the format, Tog had little trouble dispatching Control mirrors.

Now the metagame seemed to be coalescing. [Psychatog](#) was clearly the prime target. But what would be the answer?

Rich Shay believed that Control Slaver was the answer. Mindslaving someone with [Psychatog](#) is truly a brutal thing to do. You not only discard their hand, but you remove their hand and graveyard from the game. On March 20th, Rich Shay clawed his way to first place on the back of a few broken [Psychatog](#) bones.

Andy Stokinger, hoping to emulate the success of Ray Robillard, put up multiple pieces of "power" (AKA "The Power Nine" – [Black Lotus](#), the [Moxes](#), [Ancestral Recall](#), etc.) for prizes at Newington, Connecticut to draw out nearly a hundred and fifty players. Here's what shook down:

The Top 8:

1. Control Slaver piloted by Rich Shay
2. U/G Fish
3. Psychatog
4. Control Slaver
5. Rector Trix
6. Food Chain Goblins,
7. Dragon
8. Food Chain Goblins

Three decks here made Top 8 on the strength of their argument that they beat Psychatog. Rich Shay managed to take the first, but not his last, win with Control Slaver at a major tournament. This persistence of Rich with this deck would have ramifications that would be felt throughout the year.

With this tournament, we also get our first hint of how good Fish might be. Take a look at the 2nd place decklist:

Worse Than Fish.dec



Main Deck

60 cards

3 Faerie Conclave	1 Ancestral Recall
4 Flooded Strand	4 Curiosity
1 Island	4 Force of Will
4 Mishra's Factory	1 Mox Emerald
1 Strip Mine	1 Mox Sapphire
4 Tropical Island	3 Null Rod
4 Wasteland	2 Oxidize
1 Yavimaya Coast	4 Standstill
_____	2 Stifle

22 lands

- 4 [Cloud of Faeries](#)
- 4 [River Boa](#)
- 4 [Spiketail Hatchling](#)
- 3 [Sug'Ata Firewalker](#)

15 creatures

1 [Time Walk](#)

23 other spells

Sideboard

- 2 [Annul](#)
- 2 [Drop of Honey](#)
- 2 [Hidden Guerrillas](#)
- 2 [Magus of the Unseen](#)
- 2 [Maze of Ith](#)
- 2 [Naturalize](#)
- 1 [Null Rod](#)
- 1 [Stifle](#)
- 1 [Sword of Fire and Ice](#)

15 sideboard cards



This decklist marks the beginning of a trend that would continue throughout most of the year. Cheap beats, efficient counters, and [Null Rod](#) proves to be a strong archetype. It would be some time before we would fully understand Fish's true power and place in the metagame.

By April, everyone wanted a piece of the Tog. [Food Chain](#) Goblins, it was claimed, would beat Psychatog and had good matchups against many other matchups. This extended import certainly made its impact:

Goblin Chains



Main Deck

60 cards

5	Mountain	1	Black Lotus
1	Strip Mine	1	Chrome Mox
4	Taiga	4	Food Chain
4	Wasteland	1	Lotus Petal
4	Wooded Foothills	1	Mana Crypt
<hr/>		1	Mox Emerald
18	lands	1	Mox Ruby
		1	Sol Ring
3	Gempalm Incinerator	<hr/>	
4	Goblin Lackey	11	other spells
2	Goblin Matron		
4	Goblin Piledriver		
4	Goblin Recruiter		
4	Goblin Ringleader		
1	Goblin Sharpshooter		
3	Goblin Warchief		
2	Siege-Gang Commander		
4	Skirk Prospector		
<hr/>			
31	creatures		



For an extensive explanation of how to play this deck, you can read a [detailed primer here](#). Food Chain Goblins was ascendant! At the next Waterbury (150+ players), in the same month, there were over four Food Chain Goblins decks in the Top 8, including the winner.

Two other decks are worth mentioning. A revised and retooled combo deck was beginning a long climb upward in Europe: The Perfect Storm. This deck was designed to beat Control and did it quite well. This deck would continue to put up numbers the rest of the year, but was never quite able to win the big tournaments in the US the way it was in Europe.

The Perfect Storm



Main Deck

60 cards

1 [Flooded Strand](#)
2 [Island](#)
4 [Polluted Delta](#)
2 [Swamp](#)
1 [Tolarian Academy](#)
1 [Underground River](#)
4 [Underground Sea](#)

15 lands

0 creatures

1 [Ancestral Recall](#)
1 [Black Lotus](#)
4 [Brainstorm](#)
1 [Chain of Vapor](#)
1 [Cunning Wish](#)
4 [Dark Ritual](#)
1 [Demonic Tutor](#)
4 [Duress](#)
4 [Force of Will](#)
1 [Frantic Search](#)
1 [Future Sight](#)
1 [Lotus Petal](#)
1 [Mana Crypt](#)
1 [Mana Vault](#)
1 [Mind's Desire](#)
1 [Mox Emerald](#)
1 [Mox Jet](#)
1 [Mox Pearl](#)
1 [Mox Ruby](#)
1 [Mox Sapphire](#)
1 [Mystical Tutor](#)
1 [Necropotence](#)
1 [Rebuild](#)
1 [Sol Ring](#)
2 [Tendrils of Agony](#)
1 [Time Spiral](#)
1 [Time Walk](#)
1 [Timetwister](#)
1 [Vampiric Tutor](#)
1 [Windfall](#)
1 [Yawgmoth's Bargain](#)

Sideboard

4 [Blue Elemental Blast](#)
1 [Brain Freeze](#)
1 [Chain of Vapor](#)
1 [Coffin Purge](#)
1 [Ebony Charm](#)
1 [Echoing Truth](#)
1 [Fact or Fiction](#)
1 [Hurkyl's Recall](#)
1 [Misdirection](#)
1 [Rebuild](#)
1 [Skeletal Scrying](#)
1 [Stifle](#)

15 sideboard cards

1 [Yawgmoth's Will](#)

45 other spells



You might be curious, where are the [Mishra's Workshop](#) decks? If you've been paying attention to Vintage in the last six months, you know that [Mishra's Workshop](#) is a hot button topic. However, before April, Workshop decks that weren't built around [Mindslaver](#) weren't putting up any numbers. [Trinisphere](#) is the card that brings [Mishra's Workshop](#) back into the fold.

Trinistax Pre-Fifth Dawn



Main Deck

60 cards

2 Ancient Tomb	1 Ancestral Recall
4 Mishra's Workshop	1 Black Lotus
3 Polluted Delta	4 Chalice of the Void
1 Strip Mine	1 Grim Monolith
1 Tolarian Academy	1 Lotus Petal
4 Volcanic Island	1 Mana Crypt
4 Wasteland	1 Mana Vault
_____	1 Memory Jar
19 lands	1 Mox Emerald
	1 Mox Jet
4 Goblin Welder	1 Mox Pearl
1 Karn, Silver Golem	1 Mox Ruby

5 creatures

- 1 [Mox Sapphire](#)
- 4 [Smokestack](#)
- 1 [Sol Ring](#)
- 4 [Tangle Wire](#)
- 4 [Thirst for Knowledge](#)
- 1 [Timetwister](#)
- 1 [Tinker](#)
- 4 [Trinisphere](#)
- 1 [Wheel of Fortune](#)

36 other spells



Despite a number of high profile tournaments with the results that I just cited, we weren't at the point yet where we could say that a Vintage metagame was developing on a national scale. The only constant was a constant attack on Psychatog. Psychatog was holding back other multi-color control decks from doing well. As a result, two trends started at the same time:

The Rise of Fish and Four Color Control

Star City announced a trophy and power to players who would attend the East Coast Championship, to be held in Washington D.C. with Grand Prix D.C in April. This tournament signaled the beginning of a long tournament season that would end with the Star City Games Power Nine Tournament III, Chicago.

90 Players showed up. Something around 20 of them were playing the Workshop Slaver list. Workshop Slaver had just been publicized as one of *the* decks to play and as a result, everyone came prepared to beat it or play it.

Star City Games East Coast Championship Top 8:

1. U/R Fish
2. Psychatog
3. Worldgorger Dragon Combo
4. The 7/10 Split
5. Psychatog
6. Landstill
7. Psychatog
8. U/R Fish

The most important feature of this tournament is that Marc Perez won the tournament with U/R Fish. This was the first trophy of the season that Fish would take home, but not the last. It would be some time before we'd learn our lesson. The top was mostly Tog, Fish, Dragon and a new breakout deck: the 7/10 split. Despite the overpowering numbers of Workshop Slaver, it failed to muster a single Top 8. Team Short Bus took our Workshop Slaver design and cut [Mindslavers](#) for large men, such as [Sundering Titan](#) (hence the name seven ten split). Out of this tournament, you have two archetypes that will come to define the format for the rest of the year: a Workshop-Aggro deck with [Sundering Titans](#) and U/R Fish.

This Top 8 was going to be repeated in the next tournament. My team was stubborn. We had tested against 7/10 and Fish and decided that Tog was the best deck to play. We felt that Tog was the "objectively" best deck in the format. This may be, but Tog loses to Fish. A lesson I, and many others, would learn the hard way.

Central Coast Championship

North Carolina, USA
6-12-04

The Top 8 lists were:

1. 1) Fish (Marc Perez/ The Phantom Tapeworm)
2. 2) Fish
3. 3) Tog
4. 4) Tog (me)
5. 5) Tog
6. 6) 7/10
7. 7) 7/10
8. 8) 7/10

Once again, Marc Perez took home a trophy and a Black Lotus.

This tournament was a centrifuge for the top decks. It should have demonstrated to everyone Fish's dominance. The Top 8 decklists after the Swiss did not have such a clear breakdown. I was first in the standings with Tog. Both fish players played a Tog deck and a 7/10 deck – so it wasn't as if the Tog decks knocked out the 7/10 players and then got killed by Fish – Fish dominated both Tog and 7/10. This tournament could not have produced a clearer result. Fish was the deck to beat – although nobody believed it. While Fish continued its meteoric, yet mysteriously unnoticed, rise in the United States, Europe was quickly discovering Four Color Control, Steve O'Connell and a few Germans's

radically redesigned inheritor of Weissman's "The Deck." Four Color was winning tournament after tournament in Europe. Finally, Four Color was to get its due in the US.

The Discovery of Workshop Aggro and the Unholy Trio

Star City announced a huge tournament in Virginia where the top 8 would draft power nine (hence the name of the tournament) for July. The tournament came and the result was:

Star City Games Power Nine I

7-17-2004

167 players

And the top 8 was:

1. Four Color Control
2. Workshop Aggro
3. Fish
4. Fish
5. GroAtog
6. Fish
7. Meandeck Titan
8. Landstill

Here is the first place deck:

4 Color Control



Main Deck

60 cards

2 City of Brass	1 Ancestral Recall	Sideboard
1 Island	1 Balance	1 Blue Elemental Blast
1 Library of Alexandria	1 Black Lotus	1 Coffin Purge
4 Polluted Delta	4 Brainstorm	1 Damping Matrix
1 Strip Mine	3 Cunning Wish	1 Disenchant
3 Tundra	2 Decree of Justice	1 Flametongue Kavu
3 Underground Sea	1 Demonic Tutor	1 Gorilla Shaman
2 Volcanic Island	1 Fact or Fiction	1 Gush
3 Wasteland	2 Fire // Ice	2 Rack and Ruin
_____	4 Force of Will	3 Red Elemental Blast
20 lands	4 Mana Drain	1 Skeletal Scrying
	1 Mind Twist	1 Swords to Plowshares
		1 Vampiric Tutor

		15 sideboard cards

2 [Exalted Angel](#)
1 [Gorilla Shaman](#)

3 creatures

1 [Mox Jet](#)
1 [Mox Pearl](#)
1 [Mox Ruby](#)
1 [Mox Sapphire](#)
1 [Mystical Tutor](#)
2 [Skeletal Scrying](#)
1 [Sol Ring](#)
2 [Swords to Plowshares](#)
1 [Time Walk](#)
1 [Yawgmoth's Will](#)

37 other spells



Looking back on it, this tournament was probably the most important tournament of the year. There were four key lessons from this event:

1) Fish dominated this tournament. There were 14 Fish, 14 Four Color Control, and 13 7/10 Split decks. Four Color Control took the top spot, but the next highest finishing 4CC player was 13th. Fish placed 3 of its numbers in the top 6. No 7/10 actually made top 8.

2) The breakout deck of the tournament was Eric Miller's The Man Show. Eric has been playing Workshop [Juggernaut](#) decks for some time, and his unique design enabled him to go undefeated in games in the swiss. Not only was he running the amazingly powerful one-two punch of [Trinisphere](#) and [Crucible of Worlds](#) (in combination with [Wastelands](#)) but he also had some cards like [Chains of Mephistopheles](#) to stop control decks.

In retrospect, it was obvious why Aggro-Workshop was winning. This deck simply cannot lose to Fish. [Juggernauts](#), [Trinispheres](#) and [Crucibles](#) + [Wasteland](#) are three absolutely devastating cards to a deck that plays 1/1 creatures and manlands.



This was the breakout of the [Trinisphere](#) + [Crucible of Worlds](#) combo. *Darksteel* and *Fifth Dawn* finally make their full impact, creating the unholy trio of [Mishra's Workshop](#), [Trinisphere](#), and [Crucible of Worlds](#) (aided by [Wasteland](#)).

The most powerful card in this whole tournament seemed to be [Crucible of Worlds](#). Lots and lots of decks in this tournament used and abused [Crucible of Worlds](#), including Marc Perez with Fish.

3) This was also the peak of Four Color Control. Four Color Control had been winning numerous tournaments in Europe and was quite strong here as well. The highest placing Four Color Control player had intelligently metagamed to beat Fish and did so while many others floundered. Four Color Control happens to have a good match against Aggro-Workshop and won the tournament as a result.

4) Titan had at last found its home. Not in Workshop decks, as had previously been thought, but in a [Mana Drain](#) deck. The idea of using [Sundering Titan](#) with dual lands seemed counter-intuitive, yet made perfect sense when actually played.

The metagame was pretty well-defined at this point. Aggro Workshop beats Fish pretty soundly. Fish was still strong and had good games against everything else. Four Color Control was still a powerful control deck and performing well everywhere.

Therefore, it is obvious why I played Mono Blue Control at Gencon. [Back to Basics](#) destroys Four Color Control and Fish and my sideboard of [Energy Flux](#) dispatches any Workshop deck. I also ran [Control Magic](#), [Propaganda](#) and [Blue Elemental Blast](#) to deal with Workshop decks.

Gencon had arrived. The first major Gencon tournament occurred on Friday afternoon. This heralded the arrival of the first fully tuned Workshop deck to pack both [Crucible](#) and [Trinisphere](#).

"5/3"



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 4 Mishra's Workshop | 1 Ancestral Recall |
| 2 Polluted Delta | 1 Black Lotus |
| 3 Shivan Reef | 3 Crucible of Worlds |
| 1 Strip Mine | 2 Fire // Ice |
| 1 Tolarian Academy | 1 Mana Crypt |
| 4 Volcanic Island | 1 Mana Vault |
| 4 Wasteland | 1 Memory Jar |
| <hr/> | |
| 19 lands | 1 Mox Emerald |
| | 1 Mox Jet |
| | 1 Mox Pearl |
| | 1 Mox Ruby |
| 1 Duplicant | 1 Mox Sapphire |
| 4 Goblin Welder | 1 Mystical Tutor |
| 1 Gorilla Shaman | 1 Sol Ring |
| 4 Juggernaut | 4 Thirst for Knowledge |
| 2 Su-Chi | 1 Time Walk |
| 1 Sundering Titan | 1 Tinker |
| 1 Triskelion | 3 Trinisphere |
| <hr/> | |
| 14 creatures | 1 Wheel of Fortune |

27 other spells

Sideboard

- 4 [Chalice of the Void](#)
- 3 [Hydroblast](#)
- 3 [Rack and Ruin](#)
- 3 [Red Elemental Blast](#)
- 1 [Sundering Titan](#)
- 1 [Trinisphere](#)

15 sideboard cards



We didn't know it at the time, but this deck would slowly become the most successful archetype for the rest of the year. David didn't do half bad the next day either. He got 2nd place with the same deck:

The Gencon Vintage Championship

August, 2004

The Gencon Top 8 was:

1. Control Slaver
2. 5/3 – Workshop Beatdown
3. 2-Land Belcher Combo
4. Aggro-Workshop
5. Mono Blue Ophidian (me)
6. Workshop Smokestack (TriniStax)
7. Tools And Tubbies
8. U/R Fish

Fish was now at its lowest ebb in months. People had brought out the hate, in force. The one control slaver deck that managed to squeak into Top 8 managed to survive a brutal match against Kevin Cron's Stax and thereby murder the remaining Workshop Aggro decks he had to deal with to win the whole tournament.

Half the Top 8 was Aggro-Workshop. The other half was Mono Blue [Ophidian](#), Control Slaver, Fish and a 2 land combo deck. Workshop-Aggro cleaned up in large part because of so much Fish. Each of these decks has creatures. Immediately I began thinking of [Oath of Druids](#) as a potential metagame play of choice. Wizards made this choice much easier.

It should be important to note here, however, that the metagame had basically shifted away from multi-color control decks of early-mid 2004 and to decks with fewer colors and more resiliency to [Trinisphere](#), [Crucible of Worlds](#) and [Wasteland](#). Only the decks that could survive Crucible and [Trinisphere](#) made it to this point.

Despite the fact that Workshop Aggro dominated the tournament as a result of Fish being such a strong contender (as we knew it would be – see [A Player's Guide to Type 1](#)), a few other decks seemed poised to return and make a big splash. Mono Blue seemed to be in a position to really capitalize on the fact that nearly every deck has nonbasics, and the power of [Energy Flux](#). Most importantly, Mark Biller barely managed to slip into Top 8 and, despite some intense matches, walked away with the prize after piloting Control Slaver.

At this point in the year, everyone had finally recognized the significantly ramped up power of [Tinker.Tinker](#) had been a great tutor in the past, but now it is recognized as one of the most powerful cards in the format. Control decks were adding a [Darksteel Colossus](#) to [Tinker](#) up.

Forbidden Tech

Fast forward a month to the second Star City Games power nine tournament. [Forbidden Orchard](#) had just been printed and my team had decided that the Gencon Top 8 made Oath an irresistible choice.



6 of the top 8 decks had [Goblin Welder](#) in it. [Goblin Welder](#) appeared to be the most powerful creature in the format at the moment. If we could win before the Welder would become a nuisance, then that would be a powerful asset.

We also knew that we were returning to Virginia, the home of Fish. What beats Aggro-Workshop and Fish? Oath. When you clean up the Control Slaver match, Oath is clearly one of the perfect metagame choices for Virginia. Take a look:

Star City Games Power Nine II

Top 8:

1. Meandeck Oath
2. Workshop Aggro with Smokestacks
3. Meandeck Oath
4. Workshop Aggro
5. Control Titan
6. Meandeck Oath
7. Meandeck Oath (me)
8. Workshop Aggro

Meandeck Oath



Main Deck

60 cards

4 [Flooded Strand](#)
4 [Forbidden Orchard](#)

4 [Accumulated Knowledge](#)
1 [Ancestral Recall](#)

Sideboard
2 [Arcane Laboratory](#)

- 5 [Island](#)
- 1 [Strip Mine](#)
- 1 [Tropical Island](#)
- 2 [Wasteland](#)

17 lands

- 1 [Akroma, Angel of Wrath](#)
- 1 [Spirit of the Night](#)

2 creatures

- 1 [Black Lotus](#)
- 4 [Brainstorm](#)
- 4 [Force of Will](#)
- 1 [Gaea's Blessing](#)
- 2 [Impulse](#)
- 4 [Intuition](#)
- 4 [Mana Drain](#)
- 4 [Mana Leak](#)
- 2 [Misdirection](#)
- 1 [Mox Emerald](#)
- 1 [Mox Jet](#)
- 1 [Mox Pearl](#)
- 1 [Mox Ruby](#)
- 1 [Mox Sapphire](#)
- 4 [Oath of Druids](#)
- 1 [Time Walk](#)

41 other spells

- 2 [Back to Basics](#)
- 2 [Control Magic](#)
- 3 [Energy Flux](#)
- 3 [Ground Seal](#)
- 1 [Iridescent Angel](#)
- 1 [Platinum Angel](#)
- 1 [Pristine Angel](#)

15 sideboard cards



At this point, you can see a crystallization in the metagame. Fish was being wiped out by the Workshop decks – which we saw at Gencon. The Control decks were limited to those that could survive [Wasteland](#) recursion (Oath, Slaver, and mono blue). Aaron Forsythe decided to see what all the hubbub was about and also piloted a unique Oath concoction that you can [read all about here](#). Workshop Aggro clearly is on the rise. It had put 4 players in the Gencon Top 8 and 3 in the top 8 here. The remaining question was: would Workshop Aggro continue to do well given that the new deck, Oath, is designed to take advantage of the fact that your opponent is likely to be playing with creatures.

Objectively speaking, the important question for the next tournament is whether Workshop Aggro would adjust to handle the Oath matchup, or whether Oath would drive Aggro out of the format entirely.

Although that is an interesting question, it was one that ultimately went unanswered.

Workshop Aggro Comes Out on Top

Starcitygames, Power Nine III, Nov. 2004

The Top 8 was:

1. 5/3
2. 7/10 Split
3. Meandeck Doomsday
4. Stax
5. Control Slaver
6. Psychatog
7. Workshop Beatdown
8. U/W Fish (Phish)

Over 140 players showed up to Chicago, Illinois for the first major Vintage tournament in the area for years. This was a competitive tournament with recent Pro Tour Columbus quarter-finalist Gadiel Szleifer piloting R/G Madness to the upper tables, but unable to make top 8. Nearly forty players decided to play Oath and the rest of the field was very well prepared to beat it. As a result, even if Oath may have favorable matchups against Workshop Aggro, Oath was driven from the field and the result was that Workshop Aggro performed quite well. Two Workshop Beatdown decks finished in the top two. The Workshop Aggro decks that performed well were well prepared for Oath regardless using such gems as [Seal of Cleansing](#) maindeck.

Not wanting to play the same old deck, I decided to pilot one of my team's most recent concoctions despite a public leak. During the September Banned and Restricted list announcement, the DCI moved to unrestrict a number of Vintage cards in conjunction with the Legacy and Vintage list split. One of the cards unrestricted was [Doomsday](#). Almost immediately, we began to work on a Doomsday list, but decided to play Oath at SCG II instead, saving DDay for SCG III. That's precisely what we did. The breakout deck of this tournament is Meandeck Doomsday.

Meandeck Doomsday



Main Deck 60 cards

- 2 [Flooded Strand](#)
- 3 [Island](#)
- 4 [Polluted Delta](#)

- 1 [Ancestral Recall](#)
- 1 [Beacon of Destruction](#)
- 1 [Black Lotus](#)

Sideboard

- 3 [Back to Basics](#)
- 1 [Chain of Vapor](#)
- 3 [Defense Grid](#)

1 [Swamp](#)
4 [Underground Sea](#)

14 lands

0 creatures

4 [Brainstorm](#)
2 [Cabal Ritual](#)
1 [Chromatic Sphere](#)
4 [Dark Ritual](#)
1 [Demonic Tutor](#)
4 [Doomsday](#)
4 [Duress](#)
4 [Force of Will](#)
1 [Gush](#)
1 [Hurkyl's Recall](#)
1 [Lim-Dul's Vault](#)
1 [Lion's Eye Diamond](#)
1 [Lotus Petal](#)
1 [Mind's Desire](#)
1 [Mox Jet](#)
1 [Mox Sapphire](#)
1 [Mystical Tutor](#)
1 [Necropotence](#)
1 [Tendrils of Agony](#)
1 [Time Walk](#)
1 [Timetwister](#)
4 [Unmask](#)
1 [Vampiric Tutor](#)
1 [Yawgmoth's Will](#)

46 other spells

3 [Energy Flux](#)
2 [Null Rod](#)
3 [Old Man of the Sea](#)

15 sideboard cards



The concept is simple:

Doomsday for: Ancestral Recall, Black Lotus, Dark Ritual, Mind's Desire, and Beacon of Destruction
Cast the Ancestral, drawing Black Lotus, Dark Ritual, and the Mind's Desire. Play Dark Ritual and Black Lotus and then Mind's Desire with storm count 3. Let one copy of Mind's Desire resolve and reveal Beacon of Destruction. Play it before the second copy resolves and you will kill your opponent in one of the most elegant ways conceivable.

This deck is difficult to master, but is an important new deck because it is the first time that a fully amped up combo deck may be piloted on just five proxies. Since all of the Star City Games power nine tournaments are five proxies, this is an important consideration.

Wrap Up

Had this been any other year, this is the part of the article where I'd say what decks constitute the first two tiers of the Vintage metagame. But if you've read what I've said so far, you've probably already realized where I'm headed. The format is being shook up with every event. Yet, a clear pattern has emerged. Aside from Workshop Aggro being a part of most Top 8s, there has been no other constant. Every deck that is perceived as the "best deck" has been dethroned. In the last six months, no deck won more than two consecutive major tournaments!

We saw the first signs that Fish was going to be very good early in the year, but ignored them. Eric Miller stumbled into the answer inadvertently with his Workshop Aggro deck. Workshop Aggro then became the benchmark at Gencon for beating Fish despite the fact that Control Slaver won the tournament. Oath was designed to combat all of these decks and did so quite successfully... only to be fully hated out at the next event. Doomsday came close, but didn't manage to seize the top spot at the last major tournament, finally letting a Workshop Aggro deck take the top spot. Now that Workshop Aggro has taken the top spot, will it get hated out like every other that was perceived as *the* deck to beat? It remains to be seen whether the metagame hate will finally aim itself directly at Workshop Aggro, or whether Workshop Aggro will continue to perform well. If Workshop Aggro manages to increase its numbers anymore despite the full metagame focus provided by Star City Games III, Trinisphere may be the next restricted card in the format. Hopefully it won't come to that.

PTQ Circuit

The real lesson of the year is that metagaming and innovation are the twin pillars of Vintage success. The theory that Vintage was a format prone to the dominance of an objective "best deck" was a casualty of 2004. The theory suggested that Vintage had such a deep and powerful card pool that it would be possible, always, to discover a deck that would come to dominate the format. This was acceptable because restrictions would continually neuter these decks. I'm not certain whether it was the three restrictions of 2003 that ended the cycle of a dominant deck or whether the Vintage metagame became more responsive to the shifts that it was facing. The greatest strength of Vintage is the depth and range of the card pool. There is a hoser for anything you might want to play – although it might be obscure.

The moment a "best deck" is crowned is the moment that it dies. It took the Vintage metagame some time to realize the role and power of Fish in the format, but once it was recognized, Fish started to fade. This idea has been repeated throughout all the major tournaments of the year. Tog rose up, and Fish and others rose to beat it. Fish rose up, and Workshop Aggro rose to beat it. Then Oath was designed to beat the Workshop Aggro, and Oath dominated Star City Games P9 II, but got utterly destroyed at Star City Games P9 III. This trend suggests two points. Metagaming is crucial - having the proper deck at the proper time is the central key to success. But finding a new deck will likely assist a great performance. In four consecutive tournaments, I played Tog, Mono Blue, Meandek Oath, and Doomsday. Variety is not just the spice of life - it can be a strong weapon. Marc Perez was forced to stop playing his pet U/R Fish deck after a bad defeat at Gencon. The only vintage player who comes to mind that continues to play the same deck is Rich Shay. I wish Rich the best of luck and continued success, but for the rest of us, success will have to come from playing the metagame well.

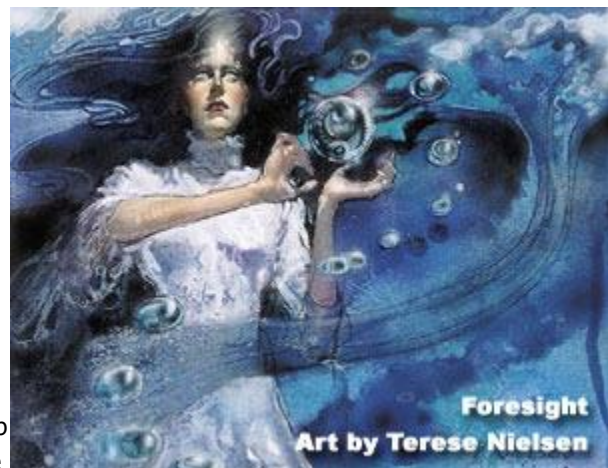
The theory that Vintage was a format prone to the dominance of an objective "best deck" was a casualty of 2004.

For these reasons, my teammates view the Vintage tournament scene as a sort of PTQ Circuit, in that you have to be abreast of a constantly shifting metagame. Instead of trying to break the format (as one might do on the Pro Tour), you should be trying to break the metagame.

With the upcoming Star City Power Nine circuit in 2005, metagaming will become more critical than ever as the metagame shifts from tournament to tournament. Identifying which decks can best the field and tuning them to maximize their chances will likely lead a great number of people to win some power in 2005. This task, it appears, is greatly aided by the efforts of teams. Teammates can provide critical test partners, a source of ideas, a great resource for deck tuning, and a critical motivator to perform well.

Innovation – There is Still Much To Be Done

Almost every successful deck has been a new deck to the format this year. Think about all the new decks: Fish, Belcher, Doomsday, Slaver, Meandek Oath, MeanDeath, new Workshop Aggro decks, and new Four Color Control decks. Yet, there remain many untapped ideas out there, or some which are only now beginning to see success. Mike Long has come up with a fascinating Ravager deck, which I'm convinced is a solid deck. The parts to Kobold-[Skullclamp](#) have been in place since [Glimpse of Nature](#) was printed, yet it hasn't shown up yet in major tournaments. Competitors bold enough to step up to the plate with a new deck stand a good chance of being rewarded by it.



I have no doubt that 2005 will be even more interesting than 2004. This will be the first time that a massive sustained year-round Vintage tournament circuit will exist. It will undoubtedly be important to pay close attention to the results of each tournament in order to predict and gauge what to play at subsequent tournaments. Surprise will be an important factor, but unless the rest of *Champions* block provides a number of great new archetype components or some key card becomes restricted, only the bravest players will be able to come up with new decks and have the guts to play them. For everyone else, good old fashion metagaming will be the key to success.

Good luck and I hope to see you at a tournament near you in 2005!

Stephen Menendian

(With special thanks to my research assistant Jacob Orlove, for helping me dig out some of this data!)