

Mike Flores

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## #1: This Great Glass-Spinner Thing

(Old news) As many of you pointed out on the forums and via email, Aether Vial and Kira, Great Glass-Spinner is not a combo. Or at least not an up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, start super-combo. Sorry about that. New cards. Nothing to see here. Moving on . . .

## #2: This PTQ season's Extended Decks

(Less old news) This resource here on **MagicTheGathering.com** is about the coolest thing I have ever heard of, let alone seen. Not since the bygone days of The Dojo has there been a constructed season organized in this friendly manner. This time around, the TOs are officially in on it!

In PTQ **Magic**, information is king. You will often see huge swings in player trends from week to week, such that over the course of a single season, the decks that do well in the first weeks look nothing like those that win the fifth- or sixth-week PTQs. This resource can help you track what decks will be popular, what you have to prepare to beat, and what kinds of decks have shown viability around the country.

For example, last week, Brian's column unveiled the "Teen Titans" deck, a brand new deck that had a powerful impact in Week Two of this season. Without this little page, you might have never heard of Goblin Welder Reanimator, whereas given that knowledge, Goblin Welder decks made a big splash at...

### THIS WEEK IN PTQ LAND

Eight more Top 8 decklists have been added to the Extended PTQ page: Birmingham, Ala., Costa Mesa, Calif., Wheat Ridge, Colo., Shreveport, La., Omaha, Neb., San Antonio, Texas, plus Tokyo and Yokohama, Japan (thanks Ron Foster!). So what are you waiting for? Go check them out!

## #3 Grand Prix–Boston

(Newest news) Grand Prix–Boston was an event that grew into a story that had little story kids, it was so interesting. Basically the coolest part was the Japanese invasion of an American Grand Prix. At first this was surprising, until you dial back the fact that some years ago, it was common practice for American pros to storm foreign Grand Prix and steal money spots. Brian Hacker, Randy Buehler, and even a couple of the Deadguys would routinely score Top 8 finishes on the international level, while Alex Shvartsman's legendary Top 8 count was built almost entirely on his willingness to travel. Now that many of **Magic's** top superstars are from Japan, is it any surprise that they are willing to stretch across oceans to compete on American soil?

If there's one thing that I know about this Extended format, it's that no one knows what deck is best, or even what kind of deck. Over the course of 11 or so rounds in Boston, I played against the same deck only one time! If your opponent plays Polluted Delta and Brainstorm, he could be not only Mind's Desire, Psychatog, or Reanimator, but Aluren... and Underground River might make him Affinity! Masashi Oiso took the Boston trophy back to Japan.

So anyway, on Day One, the question came up, "what deck is going to win this Grand Prix?" Gabe Walls, a top U.S. Nationals and Worlds competitor joked "whatever Masashi Oiso is playing, because

he's the best." Oiso showed that he really is the best and took his Aluren to the No. 1 spot. Believe the hype.

Oiso's victory was far from certain, as his back was up against the wall going into the Top 8. In Game 3 of the last round of Swiss, Masashi was forced to mulligan to five against John Fiorello with Mind's Desire. After a few turns, Oiso played a Pernicious Deed with his Birds of Paradise and City of Brass, leaving up Havenwood Battleground. You can often tell a lot about a player's skill by how he taps his mana, and this choice was a signal to Fiorello that Oiso could defend against a combo kill, because he could break the Battleground to Deed for two to destroy any Sapphire Medallion or Sunscape Familiar mid-combo.

Fiorello forced the issue the next turn by sequencing Snap and Cloud of Faeries; Masashi traded his Havenwood Battleground, Pernicious Deed, and Birds of Paradise for an enabling Sapphire Medallion, stopping a potential combo kill (or was it just a bait?). This play, which may have been what Fiorello wanted to be honest, left Oiso with only a City of Brass and Volrath's Stronghold to Fiorello's far superior board.

And Oiso came back.

Volrath's Stronghold eventually allowed Oiso to not just survive a Brain Freeze, but use his graveyard to increase his virtual hand size by dozens of cards. Under pressure from a flurry of Cabal Therapies, Fiorello's relatively large -- but not lethal -- Brain Freeze was designed to strip all the Alurens out of Oiso's deck... but John had no was of knowing Masashi had been holding one since the beginning of the game. Oiso carefully put a Raven Familiar and Cavern Harpy back on top of his deck, allowing him to set up his combo and win in short order. Even after nearly 10 years of playing around top-level **Magic**, I found Oiso's composure and decision-making in this match humbling.



## Masashi Oiso



### Main Deck

60 cards

- |                          |                  |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| 4 City of Brass          | 4 Aluren         |
| 4 Havenwood Battleground | 4 Brainstorm     |
| 2 Island                 | 4 Cabal Therapy  |
| 4 Llanowar Wastes        | 1 Chrome Mox     |
| 3 Polluted Delta         | 2 Intuition      |
| 1 Reflecting Pool        | 3 Living Wish    |
| 2 Swamp                  | 3 Vampiric Tutor |
| 2 Yavimaya Coast         |                  |
| <hr/>                    |                  |
| 22 lands                 | 21 other spells  |

### Sideboard

- 1 Auriok Champion
- 1 Bone Shredder
- 1 Cavern Harpy
- 1 Eternal Witness
- 1 Gilded Drake
- 1 Maggot Carrier
- 3 Naturalize
- 3 Pernicious Deed
- 1 Raven Familiar
- 1 Stern Proctor
- 1 Volrath's Stronghold

15 sideboard cards

- 1 Auriok Champion
- 4 Birds of Paradise
- 3 Cavern Harpy

- 1 Cloud of Faeries
- 1 Eternal Witness
- 3 Raven Familiar
- 4 Wall of Blossoms

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17 creatures

In addition to the format's almost completely unsung Aluren deck, GP Boston was a hotbed of innovation. Consider Lucas Glavin's weapon of choice:

## Lucas Glavin



### Main Deck

60 cards

- 1 Adarkar Wastes
- 1 Brushland
- 1 Caves of Koilos
- 4 City of Brass
- 4 Forbidden Orchard
- 2 Llanowar Wastes
- 2 Starlit Sanctum
- 2 Tarnished Citadel
- 1 Underground River
- 1 Yavimaya Coast

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19 lands

- 3 Cephalid Illusionist
- 3 Daru Spiritualist
- 1 Korsan Cloudscaper
- 3 Nomads En-Kor
- 1 Shaman En-Kor
- 1 Sutured Ghoul

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12 creatures

- 4 Aether Vial
- 4 Brainstorm
- 3 Cabal Therapy
- 2 Chrome Mox
- 1 Dragon Breath
- 1 Exhume
- 1 Krosan Reclamation
- 3 Living Wish
- 1 Reanimate
- 4 Vampiric Tutor
- 4 Worldly Tutor
- 1 Worthy Cause

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29 other spells

### Sideboard

- 1 Battlefield Scrounger
- 1 Bone Shredder
- 1 Cephalid Illusionist
- 1 Daru Spiritualist
- 1 Dragon Shadow
- 1 Energy Field
- 1 Forsaken City
- 2 Gilded Drake
- 2 Kami of Ancient Law
- 1 Nomads En-Kor
- 1 Rootwater Thief
- 1 Starlit Sanctum
- 1 Uktabi Orangutan

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15 sideboard cards

I distinctly remember being told that Lucas was playing Cephalid Breakfast, but every time I walked by him, he seemed to have Life combo pieces in play. The reason? Lucas was playing *both* decks!

Cephalid Breakfast seeks to play a Cephalid Illusionist and a Nomads en-Kor. The Nomads en-Kor targets the Cephalid Illusionist multiple times, until its controller's library is completely depleted by the Illusionist's triggered ability. At that point, Krosan Reclamation is flashed to put Exhume and



Reanimate back as the only cards in the deck, while Cabal Therapy serves the dual purpose of removing the Cephalid Illusionist from play and clearing the opponent's hand of resistance. It is key to remove the Illusionist because if the opponent targets it, the Cephalid Breakfast player will lose his Exhume and Reanimate, such that he is unable to complete the combo.

Exhume or Reanimate will then set up Sutured Ghoul, which leeches on (traditionally two copies of) Krosan Cloudscaper; Dragon Breath provides haste, and 20+ points of immediate trample come crashing through the Red Zone.

Glavin's deck sort of notices that Cephalid Breakfast and Life have a lot in common. Both are creature-based combination decks that use similar creatures and mechanics to set up their wins. While Lucas may be playing a slightly inferior Cephalid Breakfast deck he is *also*

playing a slightly inferior Life deck!

Cephalid Breakfast is mediocre against Red Deck Wins (because of that deck's ability to burn a Cephalid Illusionist) . . . but Life is great against Red! Osyp Lebedowicz had Masahiko Morita dead to rights in the last round of the Swiss . . . but then drew with him because the Pro Tour-Venice champion *wanted* Life in the Top 8. While Osyp's deck is powerful against green-white Life, his match with Glavin showed vulnerability to the other side of Lucas's combo deck. If you think about it, it makes sense: Osyp wants to run Lucas out of cards . . . Lucas *also* wants to run Lucas out of cards! Unless Mind's Desire can set up a timely Deep Analysis, decking Cephalid Breakfast, with its powerful Krosan Reclamation, simply sets up a Ghoul kill the next turn.



Once again, the card that makes all of this possible is Aether Vial. Morita's Life deck cheats Meddling Mage and Gilded Drake into play with the ubiquitous Vial, and Lucas's deck uses it to fix the mana in an abominable base that includes City of Brass, Forbidden Orchard, Tarnished Citadel . . . and not a single basic. Aether Vial has at this point gone from being just in Affinity to joining the Goblins to making Life more resilient, to just playing a mana-fixing Mana Vault in the great combo deck tradition.

Like Morita's blue creatures, other decks from GP-Boston also showed small innovations with big impacts. Unspeakable Symbol lets B/W Life win a turn faster than Test of Endurance in G/W Life. Osyp out-gamed the metagame by playing no copies of Sphere of Law in his Desire sideboard. The theory goes like this: Mind's Desire is faster than Red Deck Wins; Red Deck Wins sideboards Pyrostatic Pillar to beat Mind's Desire; Sphere of Law trumps Pyrostatic Pillar, so Red Deck Wins says "hey, it was a good idea while it lasted," and dumps the Pillar tech because it expects to lose to Sphere of Law; Mind's Desire ignores Sphere of Law because it is faster than Red Deck Wins not playing Pyrostatic Pillar; no one plays either sideboard card and we are back to "Mind's Desire is faster than Red Deck Wins." Got that?

My favorite part about the Boston Top 8, though, has got to be Daniel O'Mahoney-Schwartz's triumphant return with "the never-changing face of" blue-green Madness. Dan is a Generation 1.5 pro from New York's Golden Age. He is brother to legendary Rochester Draft champion Steve O'Mahoney-Schwartz, and a former Antarctica teammate of the great Jon Finkel. Seeing Dan win, and win with

slightly older cards printed before the defining powerhouse Exalted Angels, Aether Vials, and Chrome Moxes, brought a smile to my face. I cheered for Dan up until his squashing at the hands -- or is it giant feet? -- of Keith McLaughlin's Sundering Titans. It is heartwarming to see a (now) Boston resident show up to his local Grand Prix with the cards that he had three years ago take names all the way to the Top 8! To check out all the Top 8 decklists, go here.

This week, we focused mainly on GP Boston because we will have ample Top 8s to study throughout the season, but won't have a Grand Prix with pro-level innovations every week. That said, the remaining Top 8s can give us a good idea of what the average PTQ player is thinking.

To see the world make a little more sense (that is, a 7/10 artifact creature produced by green, rather than Red, mana acceleration), the return of Desolation Angel to competitive finishes, and the continued success of the Pro Tour–Columbus Decks to Beat, check out Week Two.

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