

Mark L. Gottlieb

Thursday, March 17, 2005

At House of Cards, Draft Week can only mean that it's time for my favorite **Magic** format of all time, Reject Rare Draft. This is an opportunity to resurrect all the bizarre, unplayable, or merely neglected rares gathering dust in your collection and put them to work once again. Reject Rare Draft is a completely normal booster draft with one major exception: Instead of using booster packs of the latest expansion, we use 15-card packs I've created out of rare cards that the participants in the event donate. Every card in the draft is a rare, and every one has been rejected by their owners simply by tossing it away into the draft pool. Each participant gets back 45 different rares (the ones they draft), which both leaves them even in terms of rare count and sets them up for the next draft.

I was surprised to hear moans of dismay from the players that the cards in this draft pool were too powerful. Powerful? This was, by far, the weakest overall card pool to grace the five RRDs I've run, which was great—it meant you needed to be even more clever and opportunistic in finding ways to build a winning deck. Of course, there were some broken cards. Just because “reject” is in the title doesn't mean the cards must be bad *in the Reject Rare Draft format*. It only means that the cards are bad in your collection. Lots of low-valued cards are Limited bombs, and by reusing them, they get a chance to dance in the spotlight once again. A perfect example: the Ogre Shaman that wound up in Scott Johns's deck. (Then there's Mr. Comedian Aaron Forsythe, who donated Arcbound Ravager and Metalworker to reflect their rejection by the DCI.) There was one card in the pool that was so powerful that I had to pull it out of there and ban it from the format: Richard Garfield, Ph.D. I was actually more concerned with how long that card would stretch games than its unutterable power level; ultimately, though, it came down to the spirit of the draft—the whole point is to *play* with these misfit rares, not turn them into good rares instead.

Mark of Ill Omen

I'll start with my favorite draft subject: Me. Hey, I'm the only one whose games I observed fully. My first pack looked like this:



That is one motley collection of cards. While Konda was intriguing (keep in mind that this format is very slow), my choice lay between Bloodshot Cyclops (pros: it's a creature, its cost is reasonable, it's a direct damage source) and Defense of the Heart (pros: it's ridiculously broken). I took the green enchantment that would let me pop obscenely humongous monsters into play. The problem with that strategy was that I never drafted any obscenely humongous monsters. My draft started out green-white, veered sharply into black, detoured halfheartedly into blue when there was nothing else to take, swung back to white, toyed with a milling strategy, panicked at the lack of creatures, eventually solidified the blue and black, and wound up playing only half the blue I took. It had issues. I ran a 4-color deck—green wound up being a splash, and although I probably should have cut it, I really didn't have the sideboard cards to replace it.

Mark Gottlieb



Main Deck

40 cards

2 Forest	1 Auriok Steelshaper	1 ??? Mystery Card ???
5 Island	1 Collector Protector	1 Defense of the Heart
5 Plains	1 Nim Devourer	1 Doom Cannon
5 Swamp	1 Saprazzan Heir	1 Endless Whispers
	1 Tek	1 Evacuation
17 lands	1 Tethered Griffin	1 Memory Jar
	1 Warping Wurm	1 Oath of Lieges
	7 creatures	1 Oathkeeper, Takeno's Daisho

- 1 Spirit Mirror
- 1 Spreading Plague
- 1 Sunder
- 1 Tooth of Ramos
- 1 Unfulfilled Desires
- 1 Unnatural Hunger
- 1 Verdant Touch

16 other spells

Yikes! Seven creatures! To be fair, Spirit Mirror, Metrognome, and Verdant Touch all kinda count as creatures here. And the Mystery Card was often a creature. What's the Mystery Card? That's the card I never ever played. In most of my games it was a Dreamborn Muse, but when I realized I never wanted to play it, I swapped it out for a Loxodon Peacekeeper, which I also never wanted to play, so that became a Denying Wind that I never played either.

The deck seems miserable, huh? And yet I went 3-1 with it, losing to Paul Sottosanti at the end of the night. How? Combos, combos, combos!

In my first game, Unnatural Hunger and Endless Whispers made life miserable for former R&D member and current freelancer Tyler Bielman. The Hunger was on his Konda, so every turn he had the choice of taking 3 damage or giving me one of his creatures. Because that was too mundane, I also had Spreading Plague join the party, which (eventually) permanently removed all non-indestructible red and white creatures from play. Sure, they'd pop back in under someone's control at the end of every turn, but then they'd all destroy each other. The very hungry Konda would stick around (luckily for me), as would all artifact creatures and the blue Saprazan Heir. The Hunger eventually won that game for me.



Things took a turn into loopy-land in my second match. I was playing freelance **Magic** writer Rei Nakazawa, and I was getting my butt kicked. I had Collector Protector, a souped-up Tek, and a Reflection token (from Spirit Mirror) in play. Seems decent. Rei, however, had the unblockable (by me) Cateran Slaver, the unblockable (by me) Flow of Maggots, a 3/3 Mindwarper, and Orcish Settlers in play. And I was at 6. On Rei's turn, he'd win the game, and the only thing that could save me was Evacuation. Besides my creatures, I also had Memory Jar and Unfulfilled Desires on the table. On my

turn, when I didn't draw what I needed, I broke the Jar. Rei and I each drew 7 cards. No Evacuation. I used Unfulfilled Desires. Zip. Again. No luck. Again. Diddly-squat. I activated it one last time (although this sent me to 2 life, not 1, it left me with only 5 mana available counting the sacrifice of Tooth of Ramos—this was my last shot for Evacuation). Rei was bemused by my desperate digging... until that last card *was* Evacuation. I played it, and bounced all creatures. Then Memory Jar's end-of-turn trigger went off and Rei discarded his hand, *which included all the creatures I bounced*. On Rei's turn, he did nothing. On my turn, I got a Reflection token from the Mirror, played Oathkeeper, and played Sunder! On consecutive turns, I had removed all creatures and all lands from the board. I played a land. The following turn, I played another land, equipped the Oathkeeper to my Reflection, and the 5/3 token went all the way in 4 turns. I *love* this format!



In game 2 against Rei, I once again got Unnatural Hunger & Endless Whispers going. I also got Oath of Lieges and Verdant Touch to work together. I also also got Metrognome and Doom Cannon active, one of the two reasons to include Doom Cannon in a deck with fewer than 10 creatures. Naming either "Reflection" or "Gnome" is good times for me. The Doom Cannon quickly proved to be useless, however, as Rei had That Which Was Taken in play; anything I targeted would get a divinity counter on it. Could I throw Gnomes at Rei's head? Nope—the first creature to become indestructible was True Believer, meaning Rei was untargetable. That True Believer became unnaturally hungry, however, so things worked out for me in the end.

After the game ended, Rei showed me that he was holding two copies of one of the most ridiculous cards in the format... and yet they were dead against me. What card? Rare-B-Gone! In a format where every card is rare, it wipes out everything except basic lands! It's completely fair as a reset button (though clearly undercosted) as it hits both players equally and the game becomes a topdeck war. But wait—Rare-B-Gone doesn't hit *absolutely* everything. It won't kill animated lands, which is why Rei could never play it against me. I'd've been left with a couple of 2/2 Verdant-Touched lands on an otherwise creatureless board. It also won't kill token creatures, so Metrognome and Spirit Mirror afforded me even more protection. (And if it made me discard Metrognome... more tokens!) Since face-down creatures have no rarity, it won't B-Gone them either. There were other countermeasures floating around, like Pulse of the Dross, Coffin Puppets, and Summoner's Egg, but they were few and far between. And as if the card itself wasn't bombtastic enough, Rei was able to break the symmetry by comboing it with his own token-producing Luminous Angel.

For my third match, I played **Magic Online** Developer Michael Feuell ("Elf"). Game 1 saw Unnatural Hunger come down on Elf's Emberwilde Caliph, which meant that thing couldn't stop damaging its

master. Game 2 saw me play Sunder and respond by activating Memory Jar, which is equivalent to Armageddon.



Tick... Tick... Tick...

And then came my showdown with Mad Bomber Paul Sottosanti. He had a fantastic deck; in fact, he drafted my favorite RRD archetype with some new weapons thrown in.

Paul Sottosanti



Main Deck 40 cards

- | | | |
|----------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 8 Plains | 1 Andradite Leech | 1 Bottle of Suleiman |
| 9 Swamp | 1 Body Snatcher | 1 Hold the Line |
| 17 lands | 1 Bronze Horse | 1 Last Laugh |
| | 1 Minion of the Wastes | 1 Letter Bomb |
| | 1 Patron of the Nezumi | 1 Lurking Skirge |

1 Possessed Nomad
1 Primal Whisperer
1 Selfless Exorcist
1 Sensei Golden-Tail
1 Tethered Griffin
1 Vebulid

11 creatures

1 Planar Collapse
1 Promise of Power
1 Rune of Protection: Lands
1 Tower of Eons
1 Winds of Rath
1 Words of Worship
1 Zzzyxas's Abyss

12 other spells

That's got 11 creatures, plus Bottle of Suleiman, Lurking Skirge, and Promise of Power. It's also got 4 board sweepers in Last Laugh, Planar Collapse, Winds of Rath, and Zzzyxas's Abyss. Paul could beat down with creatures, but his real plan was to stall, gaining life and destroying all creatures, while his Letter Bomb and Booby Trap (which he never maindecked but always brought in for game 2) counted down to his opponents' inevitable doom.



While playing Scott Johns and his double-Fervent Charge(!) deck, Paul had a Booby Trap set to "Fervent Charge" when he played Letter Bomb. Shuffling Letter Bomb into Scott's deck caused Fervent Charge to pop to the top for the win.

While playing R&D Intern Nate Heiss... well, I'll let Paul describe it:

Against Nate, I kept a hand with six lands and Tower of Eons (a *fine* hand for the format), and drew Winds of Rath within the first couple turns. Eventually he had four power of guys and I had played the Tower, but wanted to kill more creatures with the Winds, so I resolved to live until I could start gaining life. I played out a chump blocker and fell to 2, then rose to 12 on my eighth turn and kept on going from there. When he added Vizzerdrix, I used the Winds and played out Words of Worship, then sent Nate a nice little Letter Bomb. Eventually I found Booby Trap as well, but he found Dreamborn Muse, which threatened to ruin my plans for any number of reasons. I was theoretically immune to decking because of the Words, but I had seen Turbulent Dreams the game before so I had to be careful. Attacking was not really an option, as he had Kor Haven and the Minamo to let him re-use it.

I used Promise of Power to gain some life and draw some cards, and found what I was looking for, Last Laugh. I played it out, then used Selfless Exorcist's ability to remove Vizzerdrix from the game. The ghost of Vizzerdrix slew the poor Exorcist, and the Last Laugh triggered, starting a huge chain that resulted in the board clearing and Nate taking 10 damage plus an additional 2 from a Patron of the Nezumi that my Body Snatcher retrieved in the middle of all of this. Ironically, if I hadn't played a random Vebulid at the beginning of the turn, the Patron would have lived and Last Laugh would have stayed in play, which is clearly a better position but it didn't end up mattering as the Booby Trap went off the very next turn. Good thing, too, as the card after that was a World-Bottling Kit that would have wrecked my board in one crippling way or another.

I love this format! Paul's next match was against **Magic** Creative Coordinator Brandon Bozzi. In game 1, Paul, who was at 21, considered creating a 20/20 Minion of the Wastes. Since there's nearly no direct damage in the format, falling to 1 isn't too big of a danger. Paul played it conservatively, though, and only made a 15/15 Minion—which was lucky, because Brandon topdecked Shivan Gorge. I'll let Paul pick up the game 2 commentary:

In the second game, I was beating down with Tethered Griffin and looking for a way to finish him with the Last Laugh in my hand. If I attacked with all my creatures, he definitely had to block, which would set off the Last Laugh... but he could block everything except the Griffin and this would leave him at 1 (there were nine creatures in play and he was at 12 before the attack) with a completely cleared board. I read Last Laugh one more time and suddenly the correct play hit me. I attacked with Tethered Griffin, taking him to 10, and then tapped a Plains that his Mine Layer had conveniently saddled with a mine counter. The Plains hit the graveyard, the Last Laugh started doing its thing again, and all nine creatures died, which along with the Plains dealt exactly 10 damage and won the match.

One of my favorite things about the deck was the knowledge of my opponent's draws. The Trap and the Bomb both have a built in Peek which was a pretty strong side effect in a format where your opponents are drawing crazy cards you would never expect. I also enjoyed the synergies between many of my cards, although there was a bit of negative synergy between Zzyxas's Abyss and Booby Trap that hurt me against Gottlieb in our epic final match. But I'm sure he'll tell you about that one.

Battle of the Vegetarians

Right-o. This was the last match of the night, and even though I don't run this event as a tournament at all, the tension between 3-0 decks was palpable. So, of course, the first game came down to a coin flip. I had a Tek equipped with Oathkeeper, making it a 7/5 creature with flying. (No trample, no first strike.) Paul had a Bottle of Suleiman and a Lurking Skirge. I attacked, knowing Paul had to flip the coin. If he lost the flip, he'd take 12 damage that turn and when the turn ended, he'd have no creatures and I'd still have my Dragon. If he won the flip, his 5/5 Djinn would block Tek, they'd both die, and his Skirge would wake up. 12 damage vs. 0 damage.

Me having a 7/5 flyer vs. Paul having a 3/2 flyer. Pretty swingy. He won the flip. Later on, I played Evacuation against an awakened Lurking Skirge, a Promise of Power token, and a Sensei Golden-Tail with a counter on it. (All I had was a Saprazan Heir.) The token vanished and the Skirge went back to sleep, but Paul rebuilt quickly and went on to win the game.

Game 2 was one for the ages. As we developed our boards, I assembled the Metrognome-Doom Cannon machine, but barely had time to fire off any shots before Zzyxas's Abyss came down and picked off the Cannon. I arrested the progress of the Abyss by making a Gnome token for it to eat every turn. I also got Spirit Mirror up (sometimes the Reflections turned into Nim Devourer), and I

was plowing through my deck with Unfulfilled Desires. Paul wasn't drawing well and I got him to 2 while I was still at 11. On Paul's turn, he attacked me with Patron of the Nezumi. I chump blocked it with a Reflection, which sent me to 10... which is exactly what Paul needed to play Booby Trap. It had been sitting dead in his hand because Zzzyxas's Abyss would eat it on Paul's upkeep, so he had a single shot to deal 10 damage to me on my upkeep. He deliberated for ages. He ruled out naming Evacuation because it might be in my hand (it was!), and eventually named "Oathkeeper, Takeno's Daisho." On my turn, Warping Wurm phased in as a lethal 2/2 creature (and Paul had no blockers), and I revealed... Tek. The Wurm attacked for the win. The very next card in my library? Oathkeeper.



In game 3, Paul got an early Djinn from Bottle of Suleiman (he won the flip again), then played Booby Trap naming Nim Devourer (which was a ticking time bomb), then played a Tombstone Stairwell that gave him 4 hasty Zombie tokens and gave me a whopping 0. He crushed me. I salute you, Paul Sottosanti, and your accursed coin-flipping luck.

Latest Developments

Aaron Forsythe went 3-0 with an amazing monogreen deck (well, half green, half artifact, and one Dermoplasm only ever played face-down—which meant all his basic lands were Forests). He first-picked Elvish Soultiller (as a 5/4 creature for 3GG, Aaron described it as a "model of efficiency"), then got passed Thopter Squadron and Flowstone Sculpture from the immensely generous Brandon Bozzi. He continues:

I decided to be heavy green, and then only deviate if I found a good reason to mess up my mana base. I picked up more artifacts and a Metalworker, then later a Vernal Bloom which really made me want to stick to monogreen. I opened insane red cards in pack three (Pyromancy and Lightning Surge), but stuck to my guns with a one-color deck.

Aaron Forsythe

Main Deck
40 cards

16 Forest	1 Beast of Burden	1 Bottle of Suleiman
1 High Market	1 Colossus of Sardia	1 Floodwater Dam
<hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/>	1 Dermoplasm	1 Ground Seal
17 lands	1 Elvish Soultiller	1 Hidden Stag
	1 Flowstone Sculpture	1 Natural Order
	1 Fungus Elemental	1 Preferred Selection
	1 Junk Golem	1 Rowen
	1 Metalworker	1 Sporogenesis
	1 Pale Bears	1 Squirrel Farm
	1 Pangosaur	1 Vernal Bloom
	1 Skyshroud Poacher	<hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/>
		10 other spells

1 Stone-Tongue Basilisk

1 Thopter Squadron

13 creatures

Aaron had 13 creatures, plus Bottle of Suleiman, Hidden Stag, Sporogenesis, and Squirrel Farm. And combos galore! Pangosaur & Hidden Stag meant that whether or not you played a land, Aaron would have a creature coming for you. Floodwater Dam & either Vernal Bloom or Metalworker meant your lands were getting tapped (though Nate broke out of it with Turbulent Dreams and won that particular game). Thopter Squadron & Beast of Burden seems good, but Aaron never had them out at the same time. Rowen & Preferred Selection would let him draw 2 cards a turn by making sure the first card he drew was a land, or the Selection would just let him draw a good card.

The best combo was something Aaron got going against Assistant **Magic** Brand Manager Jake Theis: Skyshtroud Poacher & Elvish Soultiller. If the Soultiller ever died, it'd shuffle itself back into Aaron's library so he could fetch it with the Poacher again. Aaron also had Sporogenesis and High Market, meaning he had a 4-mana cycle that netted him 1 life, 1 Saproling token, and an unkillable 5/4 every turn.

More Combos! More Wacky Plays!

From Elf: Grand Melee & Heat Stroke. That's comedy right there, folks.



*From Monty Ashley, Online Media's **Magic** Managing Producer:* Monty's 7/7 first striking Cosmic Horror wasn't horrific enough, so he let it die on upkeep (preventing the damage to himself with Pentagram of the Ages, of course) in order to free up enough mana to play Hypnox. In a different game, Monty got out from under Seismic Mage lock (which was keeping him Forestless) by reanimating Seton, Krosan Protector with Body Snatcher.

From Brandon: Meekstone & Maddening Imp. Also, Shaman en-Kor & Spirit Mirror OR (even better) Cho-Manno, Revolutionary OR (even better) Glarecaster.

*From Director of **Magic** R&D Randy Buehler:* Helm of Possession & Infernal Tribute (and a note that Fevered Convulsions & Bog Elemental is *not* a combo!)



From Matt Ruhlen, Software Development Lead at a local software company I hope makes it big one day: At one point, Matt's Decimate (a power card in this format) knocked out Senior Software Engineer Alan Comer's Suncrusher and Fevered Convulsions and Corrupt Official and lone Plains.

From **Magic** Online Developer Rachel Reynolds: Cromat & Samite Elder, which was good defense vs. Jake's Death Pits of Rath & Molten Hydra OR Jeska, Warrior Adept combo.

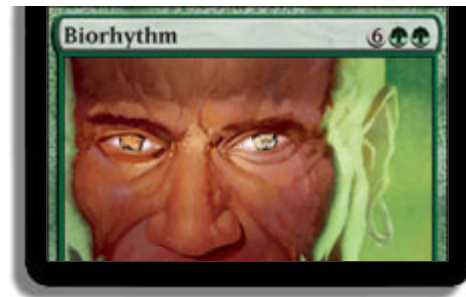
From Quill, Iron Monkey: One of the funniest plays I saw all day. Tyler was attacking with a 1/1 token created by Quill's Infernal Genesis (one of the 13 Tyler got, while Quill got exactly 0—he flipped 4 lands in a row). Quill used Quicksilver Amulet to port in a blocker.. Vaevictis Asmadi! Also, in a game against Rachel, Quill played exactly one spell in a game that lasted 20 minutes. That spell? Nature's Revolt. Rachel, meanwhile, Cloned a land, played some 1/1 creatures, and eventually destroyed all lands, all creatures, and Quill with Last Laugh.

From R&D Intern Mike Turian: Mike enchanted his Timber Wolves with Aspect of Wolf! Now that's both old-school and flavoriffic.

From Online Media **Magic** Producer Scott Johns: Seismic Mage & Fool's Tome. Also, in a game against Ryan Lorenz from Market Research, Scott used Thieves' Auction to steal Genju of the Realm for the win!

From Senior Editor Del Laugel: Form of the Squirrel followed by Biorhythm when no other creatures were in play—it's an instant 1-0 win! Of course, it's also illegal: With Form of the Squirrel out, you can't play spells. It just goes to show that the two most rules-knowledgable people in the room (Del and her opponent, **Magic** Rules Manager John Carter) are powerless against Mark Rosewater's insidious silver-bordered cards.





Bombo alert!

There's more, so much more: Combo, bombos, cringe-inducing draft packs, and cringe-inducing decks (Paul's deck and Aaron's deck were *not* typical), but these shenanigans have gone on long enough. If you like fun, I urge you to try out the format. Give your musty, dusty rares another day of glory, or pick up some bulk bad rares on the cheap from a dealer. It's **Magic** like you've never experienced it before.

Until next week, have fun drafting!

Mark

© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

