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# Continental Drift

*Brian David-Marshall  
The Week That Was  
Friday, May 6, 2005*



By the time most of you are reading this, the [first day of the Pro Tour](#) will be under way. The months of playtesting that each player has put in – or lack thereof – will finally be in the rearview mirror and the Philadelphia triple-elimination gauntlet will determine the merits of that precious commodity known as “tech.”

In the end, one player will win with a deck that he or she will become identified with throughout the upcoming block season and beyond. That will happen regardless of whether or not that person was the driving force behind the deck. Tsuyoshi Fujita designed the Big Red deck that Masashiro Kuroda used to scorch his way through the Top 8 of Pro Tour-Kobe, but the deck will forever be associated with Kuroda.

Many times the story behind the deck is elusive, or in some cases the storyteller gets a little lazy and it becomes easier to simply let the winners write the history. A couple of weeks back when I interviewed Zvi Mowshowitz for this column, I made a claim about Zvi's deckbuilding prowess with the phrase, “the sharp mind that allowed him and Scott Johns to arrive at The Solution for Pro Tour-Tokyo.”

That phrasing prompted a terse e-mail from Oliver Schneider, who wanted to correct history and attribute the original design of the deck to John Ormerod. I was actually aware of John's design, which is why I used the term “arrived at the Solution” rather than claiming that Zvi and Scott designed the deck.



*Expect new tech from Tsuyoshi Fujita at Pro Tour-Philadelphia.*



*Zvi vs. Fujita in Tokyo.*

I wanted to get into the focus of the article, which was the interview with Zvi regarding the current block season, and did not dwell on the history of the deck. After a couple of back and forths with Oliver I decided to look into the history of The Solution a little more. It seemed like a nice stroll back through time against the backdrop of the current Pro Tour since it illustrates how much can change in making a deck decision over the course of playtesting.

As a member of the Mogg Squad, Zvi had hammered out the Rising Waters build that his teammate Sigurd Eskeland used to defeat a Rebels-wielding Warren Marsh of The European Alliance in the finals of [Pro Tour-New York](#). As the next year's Block Pro Tour approached, Warren Marsh and Zvi began to talk about trimming down their respective rosters and

merging the lean results into a new team known as Godzilla in order to stomp all over the upcoming Block Constructed format in Tokyo.

One of the central figures in that new list was Ormerod, a prolific deckbuilder with an excellent resume. The Solution was one list among many that John threw out to the mailing list early on. The deck was apparently dismissed as underpowered, with Sealed Deck staples like [Crimson Acolyte](#) deemed unworthy of Constructed play – especially maindeck.

“John Ormerod came up with the original idea,” explained Zvi. “Complete with Acolyte maindeck. Over time as things become more established I came back to it and put the Acolytes back in – they had been removed. I built the board but John's original maindeck ended up being used almost exactly. It was Ormerod's design, my board and I pushed the deck on the team in the end with a lot of good testing and feedback from Scott Johns – he helped with the board too.”

The interesting nugget in Zvi's quote is “as things became established.” For more details on what that meant, I turned to Zvi's deckbuilding wingman Johns. While Zvi's involvement with the deck came later on in the process, Johns and Brian Selden saw something in the initial list and added one crucial card.



*John Ormerod, the original brains behind The Solution.*

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"Ormerod had sent out an email with *many* different rough deck ideas, and the blue-white metagame deck was one of them," Scott elaborated. "If memory serves, just about the only main thing different from the main board was the absence of **Fact or Fiction**. The deck got almost no attention but Brian Selden and I lived close enough to still test live and we both liked this deck quite a bit as we both enjoyed just how much it hosed all the red decks we expected. It was a lot more versatile than it looked on paper. I added **Fact or Fiction** to increase its staying power and the deck really took off. However, it wasn't our main deck until Sean McKeown wrote his Rocket Shoes article for Neutral Ground letting the red-green speed deck out of the bag with **Overabundance** that the deck became a headliner for the rest of the team.

"Until that moment, our main deck was a blue-black-red heavy control deck Kai had built (4 **Probe**, 4 **Recoil**, 4 **Fact or Fiction**, etc) that was nearly unstoppable," Scott continued. "Unstoppable that is until Rocket Shoes came around; suddenly the blue-black-red was just impossible, as now all the aggro decks were too good, haste was a problem, and the **Manabarbs** enchantment was hell. The only thing left was to find a way to get The Solution to handle control decks, and the answer to that one turned out to be that crazy white enchantment that made tokens whenever people cast creature spells (**Pure Reflection**), as that enchantment ruined pretty much all of the control decks still viable. Most of the team resisted The Solution until very late in testing as it just looked SO underpowered (in fact, I think Kai never did come around), but as the metagame got more and more narrow most of them came around.

"Incidentally," Scott added, "I'm still of the firm opinion that that Sean McKeown article is probably the single most influential article anyone ever wrote about an upcoming Pro Tour format. The red-green archetype he let out became the absolute deck to beat, and Sean's article completely rewrote the format, something that had never happened in pro tour history before that (or perhaps since). To this day I don't think Sean's article ever got close to the recognition it deserved ... it's easily one of the single most important articles in the history of the game in terms of influencing a Pro Tour, if not *the* most influential, then or now."



You can assign credit for the deck to any number of players. I am sure that if I had talked to Selden, I would have heard a more Selden-centric version of events. It is clear that John Ormerod designed the deck. Scott and Brian were the first team members to seriously flirt with the deck. Zvi fell in love with the deck, championed it to the team, and found the critical **Pure Reflection** for the sideboard. Plus, you can't discount McKeown opening up his "free tech" stand by the side of the information superhighway and pouring out the contents of the red-green deck for a tech-thirsty world.

While it is easy to give credit to any of the parties involved, the truth is that the deck would not have been precisely what was needed to win the Pro Tour. It is clear that Ormerod was the deck's initial designer and that the deck would not have existed without him. It is equally true that every person along the way had a hand in the final product. The final hand was played out by Zvi, though. He defeated Tsuyoshi Fujita with that hand and as a result it is Zvi who will forever be the player most associated with that deck.

Godzilla lasted for about a year after that, until Johns began drifting away from the game and Kai took all of his Germans and went home. Godzilla was the last of its kind. Don't get me wrong, there have been plenty of terrific teams in the ensuing years but the names of those teams leave something to be desired. Maybe I am just an old man who had to walk uphill in the snow to get to school, but I miss the old days when teams had colorful names that were more than just acronyms for schools or stores (CMU, TOGIT, YMG).

I miss the Pacific Coast Legends, Tongonations, Deadguys, Mogg Squads, European Alliances, Godzillas and their like. The current TOGIT/Dutch team does not even have a real name, other than the label of "supersquad" that has been applied by yours truly. I guess technically they are an Expanded TOGIT, but both choices lack the swagger of a team calling itself Godzilla heading into Tokyo for the Pro Tour.



*Aten, center, split from the TOGIT/Dutch supersquad, going his own way with Szeifer, left, and Pelcak, among others.*

Not lacking in swagger is the potential new team that has formed around several ex-members of the TOGIT-Dutch list. Last week I reported that a new group had coalesced around :B team member John Pelcak – who was not on the TOGIT mailing list – and included Tim Aten, Gadiel Szeifer, and Adam Chambers. Since that report, more details have come into focus about the details of the team and the rift that led to several of those team members either leaving or being asked to leave the TOGIT list.

Pelcak did put out the idea of banding the players together and even went so far as to generate the mailing list for the group, but he is not the team's leader. Nobody seems to be filling that role, which seems to be more like a group of players preparing for the event and pooling their information. Part of the frustration for several team members with the original TOGIT list was the rigidity of the list and the hierarchy that came with having so many big names on the team.

The original rift seems to have formed between Osyp Lebedowicz and Aten. It seems that there is friction between the two of them that goes back to the Writer's Ballot and Fan Favorite Ballots for this year's invitational. Despite that friction, Tim approached Osyp about joining the list.

"In Atlanta I was asking about getting on the list since I was worried about the format," explained Aten. "It was new and I'd never really tested for Constructed. I didn't want to go in completely in the dark. Eventually, somehow they ended up hesitantly adding me to the list. The list was bloated and not very informative and I started testing on [\[Magic Online\]](#). I found that playing in Constructed queues and talking to other people not involved with the supergroup in any way was teaching me a lot."

Over the course of his independent testing, Aten came up with a deck that he felt was pretty good but that he did not post to the mailing list due to the fact that he wanted to test it in public tournaments on [Magic Online](#) – something that was expressly forbidden under the large group's ground rules. Tim was not making any secret of the fact that he had this deck, and when he mentioned it to Josh Ravitz, a chain of events was set off that led to him, Adam Chambers, and Lucas Glavin being banished from the team.

"Ravitz told Osyp I was withholding information and I got booted from the list – which is fine since I didn't want to be on it anyway. I didn't want people to think that my plan the whole time was to get on the list, 'steal' the 'pros' tech, and then use it for my own purposes. I had intended to be a fully contributing member if not for the Osyp thing and the bloated ineffective nature of the list."

The TOGIT list closed ranks over the ensuing weeks and a number of players associated with Aten, Chambers, and Glavin were excised from the list, although not explicitly for that reason. With only a few weeks to go before the Pro Tour, a handful of players from within and without the list were on their own. Pelcak corralled all the strays and the cornerstone of a new North American team was laid featuring some of the game's best young talent.

The core members of the group are Aten, Pelcak, Glavin, Rasmus Sibast ("He's from Denmark I think, but I suppose he's an 'honorary American' for our intents and purposes," quipped Aten.), Eugene Levin, Chris McDaniel (a.k.a. Star Wars Kid), Chambers, Gadiel, Matt Schmaltz, Ken Krouner, Mark Zajdner, Sean Mangner, Andrew Pacifico, Don Smith, and Mike Hayner. (Mangner and Hayner are 'affiliated' with the group but not on the actual mailing list.)

While all of the members will not remain together as a group after the Pro Tour, there is some talk about the core players forming a more lasting team. "Our mailing list thing, the new one, is people working independently and/or on [\[Magic Online\]](#) and sharing ideas. We don't have a 'group deck' or anything although it's probably going to turn into a new team.

"I wanna be Taking Back Sunday. It's the name of a band but it's also you know, the day the Top 8 is on ... and we're gonna take it back," laughed Aten.

Now that is the kind of team name I can get behind. You can follow the exploits of Taking Back Sunday, or TBS for short, all weekend (if their name is to be believed) in our event coverage. Should they pair of with any of the TOGIT members in an elimination match, it will be sure to happen in the spotlight of the feature match area.

Perhaps the most buzzed-about line in Randy Buehler's [Player's Club announcement](#) was his little line about Hall of Fame members automatically being awarded Level 3 benefits, which would translate to automatic invites in perpetuity. I know that when I logged on the following morning I was barraged by instant-message windows from players looking for more info. I can only imagine Randy's in-box that day.

There is not much more info forthcoming at this time, although I was able to wrangle a few details out of Randy. "We figured the 10th anniversary of the Pro Tour was the perfect time to introduce the Hall of Fame," he said. "Season 10 will be wrapping up at Worlds this year and that's where we'll be inducting the first class. Full details about how the ballot works and who gets to vote will be announced in June."

With any luck, Randy will pull the curtain back a little more on the Hall of Fame during Sunday's webcast, which begins at 10:45 a.m. ET.

## Firestarter: Off topic

Pizzaburger or Cheeseburger Pizza? Discuss.

*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.*



*Osyp and the rest of the supersquad closed ranks after Aten, et. al., left.*



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