

Inducting the first Magic Pro Tour Hall of Fame class

The First Class

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- [Brian David-Marshall Archive](#)

It began with a little tease in Randy Buehler's announcement for the Players Club. Hidden among the appearance fees, player levels, and paid airfare and accommodations was a single line of text that created almost as much buzz as the announcement of the Players Club itself:

"Pro Tour Hall of Fame members automatically receive Level 3 benefits."

The **Magic** Pro Tour Hall of Fame took shape a few weeks later when the normally reclusive and internet-phobic Chris Galvin spilled the details and [announced the first class of eligible candidates](#), introduced the Selection Committee, and laid out the criteria voters were supposed to use when casting their ballots.

The ensuing weeks have been a flurry of nostalgia and controversy as voters shared their ballots and the reasoning behind them

on [magicthegathering.com](#) and

other **Magic** websites. Both the public ballots and the heated forum discussions surrounding the Hall

seemed to vindicate the concept of a Pro Tour Hall of Fame. It also served to heighten the anticipation surrounding this announcement of the 2005 Hall of Fame class.

MORE ABOUT THE CLASS OF 2005

- [Photo Gallery of Class of 2005](#)
- [Event-by-Event Results of Class of 2005](#)
- [All 69 Ballots](#)
- [Hall of Fame Page](#)

It is my pleasure to introduce the first four inductees in the inaugural class of the **Magic** Pro Tour Hall of Fame:

Jon Finkel: 67 votes

Jon Finkel is simply one of the all-time greatest players the game of **Magic** has ever seen. He was winning tournaments before there was anything called a Pro Tour. Once the Pro Tour set up shop in the Puck Building one blustery weekend during February of 1996, Jon Finkel began winning there as well. In addition to his unprecedented – and still unmatched – career with 11 Pro Tour Top 8 finishes, Jon racked up two Junior Pro Tour Top 8s during that first season. That means Jon has played on Sunday of a Pro Tour a staggering 13 times, just one of several reasons why he was the top vote-getter among eligible players.

JON FINKEL

Career Top 8s: 11

"It's a great honor to be elected to the Pro Tour Hall of Fame," Finkel said. "Playing **Magic** was one of the best experiences of my life and prepared me for everything else I have done since.

Lifetime Winnings: \$291,869
Lifetime Pro Points: 380

I am very happy to be recognized by the **Magic** community for my accomplishments in this game. "

Toward the end of that first Pro Tour season, Finkel had built up the confidence to get in the ring with the big boys. He swept through the Standard portion of U.S. Nationals 1996 with Blue-white Control – an archetype that would become his calling card – although he failed to make the Top 8. At [Worlds that year](#) (the event that put him on this first ballot), he finished ninth playing a modified Turbo Stasis that found room for an innovative Balance.

The following season was a quiet one for Jonny Magic with "only" three Top 16 finishes to show for his efforts on the senior circuit. He did make the Top 8 at U.S. Nationals but lost out in his bid to be on the National team.

The 1997-98 season was Jon's breakout year. He finally broke through to Sunday in Chicago. He posted two Top 32 finishes at the next two Pro Tours before winning a [Pro Tour in New York](#).

The Top 8 there included two players with whom he came up through the ranks – David Bachmann and John Chinnock. His victory over Bachmann in the semifinals – and the securing of that first trophy by defeating Dominic Crapuchettes – seemed to mark an important moment in Jon's career as he drifted from being one of the "Jersey kids" to developing a lasting relationship with the Deadguys: Dave Price,

Jon Finkel, Magic's first superstar.

Chris Pikula, Worth Wollpert, and Tony Tsai. Jon also made the U.S. National team that year. The U.S. [won the team event at Worlds](#), Jon finished third in the individual competition, and won the title of Player of the Year. Players began to get the sneaking suspicion Finkel was the best player in the game.

By Jon's own admission, he had accomplished everything he had set out to do in **Magic**. He admits his motivation level declined after the '98 season, which is hard to believe when you consider the accolades and trophies that he had yet to win.

That drop in motivation did nothing to dispel the legend, though. It may have only served to build it up as Jon continued to breeze his way through the Pro Tour with seemingly little preparation, displaying an ease that has never been matched. He made two more Top 8s the next season, losing to his good friend Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz in the [finals of Los Angeles](#). That was also the year he passed off the title of Player of the Year to Kai Budde and set the stage for countless debates centered around two of the greatest players to ever sling a spell.

Jon joined forces with Steve OMS and Steve's brother Dan to form Antarctica, one of the greatest three-person teams in history. They finished third at the [inaugural Team Pro Tour in Washington, D.C.](#) (losing to Your Move Games in the semis), and in an exhibition tournament for ESPN2 reached the finals against Black Ops (a squad featuring a pair of up-and-coming players in Olivier and Antoine Ruel). Later that year he was the [U.S. National champion](#) and went on to defeat Bob Maher, Jr. in the finals of the [World Championships](#) for his second and final Pro Tour title. To top it all off, he lead the

U.S. National team to victory in the team competition as well – winning more than \$40,000 of his lifetime \$291,896 winnings in that one weekend.

Jon Finkel

"Napster" - 2000 U.S. Nationals

Jon's win at the 2001 **Magic** Invitational immortalized him as the Shadowmage Infiltrator. Jon reached the Top 8 four more times over the next three seasons – he had two during the 2000-01 season and two more during 2002-03 – with his last such appearance being in the Top 8 of [Pro Tour-](#)

ONE MAN'S BALLOT

During the voting process, Selection Committee members had the option of sharing their votes with the public before the results were announced, along with their analysis behind their votes.

- [Brian Schneider](#)
- [Monty Ashley](#)
- [Bill Rose](#)
- [Charlie Catino](#)
- [Gary Wise](#)
- [Elaine Chase](#)
- [Ron Foster](#)
- [Randy Buehler](#)
- [Brian David-Marshall](#)
- [Michael "elf" Feuell](#)
- [Richard Garfield](#)
- [Didier Monin](#)
- [Matthew Vienneau](#)
- [Worth Wollpert](#)
- [Joe Hauck](#)

[Yokohama 2003.](#)

In Yokohama, his play against Benjamin Caumes in that final Top 8 showed just what made Jon such a great player over the course of his career. Jon had a Sparksmith on the board without another Goblin in sight and was not holding one either – he actually had very few in his deck. Ben had played Wirewood Herald which threatened to fetch one of Caumes' Timberwatch Elf – a card that could be disastrous for Jon. So what does Jon do? He shot the Herald and Ben retrieved another Herald. Caumes assumed that Jon had to be holding another Goblin or he never would have shot the Herald in the first place, and refused to play the pumping elf until it was too late. From his first Pro Tour Top 8 in the Junior division of New York to the Top 8 of Yokohama, Jon exemplified the mental aspects of the game like no other player.

Asked for the person he would most likely thank for his Pro Tour career and the honor of being inducted into the Hall of Fame, Jon had an unexpectedly sweet answer.

"It is clearly my Dad," he said. "The reason I was able to become the best **Magic** player in the world was clearly my Dad. He bought me my first computer in 1981 and played games with me my whole life."

Darwin Kastle: 43 votes

Of the three Your Move Games stalwarts on the first ballot, Darwin was the only one to get elected by the Selection Committee. When you look at the resume Darwin has amassed, it is painfully obvious why he is the first member of YMG to stride into the Hall. Darwin is third on the all-time list with eight Pro Tour Top 8s, has achieved double-digit Grand Prix Top 8s (including nine in North America at a time when many of the other players in that class were doing so against an at-the-time weaker Asian Grand Prix field), won the second Invitational, and was one of the first players to put forth the notion of playing **Magic** professionally.

Darwin was a veteran player of the Northeastern U.S. tournament scene long before the Pro Tour came to New York. He played in that first event courtesy of a nimble dialing finger but finished a mere 65th. He found his way to Sunday in the very next stop, making his first of eight Top 8s at [Pro Tour- Los Angeles](#). That event's top three players all hailed from New England, and Kastle lost to local nemesis "Hammer" Regnier in the semifinals.

The next trip to the Sunday stage brought Darwin to the finals of [Pro Tour-Atlanta](#) where he fell to Frank Adler. His success in back-to-back Limited Pro Tours handed him the label as the game's first Limited specialist – something that seems to chaff at anyone who wears that title. Darwin quickly put an end to the idea that he could not do well at Constructed events with a Top 4 finish at [Paris in 1997](#), the first Pro Tour held outside of the United States – recognition that could have come sooner, if not for a misstep in Texas.

"I became labeled as a 'Limited' specialist after finishing second at the one and only Sealed tour in Atlanta," explained Kastle. "PT Paris was one of my more successful attempts at a rogue deck as I dismissed doubts that I could succeed at Constructed with a third-place finish. Frankly, in the Northeast I was known as a Type 1 player and only a foolish intentional draw with Mark Justice (whom I was in undue awe of) kept me out of the Top 8 of the Type 1 PT in Dallas."

Darwin Kastle

DARWIN KASTLE
Career Top 8s: 8
Lifetime Winnings: \$147,897
Lifetime Pro Points: 320

Darwin's "Kastle" - Pro Tour-Paris 1997 (*Mirage/Visions* Block Constructed)

After three Pro Tour Top 8s over the first two seasons, Darwin hit a mini-slump without any more appearances over the next two seasons. He did win a **Magic** Invitational – then known as [The Duelist Invitational](#) – and as his reward he created the always popular Avalanche Riders.

Darwin Kastle was one of the first players to earn a living by playing Magic.

Darwin returned to the Sunday stage during the first event of the 1999-00 season as a member of Team Your Move Games. After defeating Jon Finkel and his Antarctica teammates in the semifinals, Darwin would go onto square off with Kurt Burgner of Game Empire in the finals. [YMG's victory in Washington](#) marked Darwin's best finish on the Pro Tour and marked one of the most satisfying moments in his career, after three second- and third-place finishes kept him from glory.

"The three biggest highlights of my career were winning PT-DC, winning the Invitational in Rio, and winning [GP-Manchester](#)," he said. "This is because as awesome as a top 3 in a PT is, you can only feel the purity of victory by finishing in first place. It was important to prove that I didn't have any psychological barriers to finishing first."

While Darwin won a Limited Pro Tour and started his career with back-to-back Limited Top 8s, he would close it with a display of Constructed prowess. After D.C., he reached the Top 8 of one more Limited Pro Tour – the following Pro Tour stop in London – before rattling off three more Top 8s in Constructed formats.

FINAL RESULTS	
Name	Total
Jon Finkel	67
Darwin Kastle (Mess)	43
Tommi Hovi	36
Alan Comer	32
Olle Råde	24
Robert Dougherty	23
Michael Long	15
Mark Justice	14
David Humpherys	13
Chris Pikula	11
Brian Hacker	9
Jakub Slemr	9
David Price	8

After an Extended Top 8 in [New Orleans](#) the season previous, Darwin was part of the YMG juggernaut that took down the top three spots at [Pro Tour-Houston](#) with three different Extended decks. Two events later Darwin appeared in the [Top 8 of Venice](#) piloting dragons in the tribal-themed *Onslaught* Block Constructed Pro Tour. Darwin has been working as game designer since he stopped playing on the Pro Tour. His induction has special meaning for him as he has found himself looking back at his career and trying to put it into the context of his life.

"I look around me at other people my age with families, houses, and advanced careers," he said. "Then I wonder if I wasted prime years of my life pursuing a passion that was ultimately a distraction? This gives me something more tangible to show that my efforts over many years had meaning and are remembered. With the way things are going for me, perhaps I have been advancing my career all these years."

The induction and attendant Level 3 benefits will likely inspire Darwin to pursue high-level **Magic** once again, and don't be surprised if Venice is the not the last entry on Kastle's resume.

"Count on it," was Darwin's response when asked if he would partake of his lifetime qualification. "It may take awhile before I have another impressive finish, but if you are patient, you can count on that too."

It should come as no surprise that Darwin took an opportunity to single out several players from various points in Your Move Games history when asked about who he would like to thank for his Pro Tour career. "Dave Humpherys, Rob Dougherty, Michelle Bush, Danny Mandel, and Brad Mennell. Especially Dave," he said.

The consistency that marked Darwin's career is an impressive sight, recording an amazing 48 consecutive Pro Tours and Worlds attended – from the very first to Pro Tour-Kobe 2004. With those appearances came results that put him in rare territory among **Magic** players, cementing Darwin Kastle's place in **Magic** history.

Tommi Hovi: 36 votes

Like the two previous inductees, Tommi popped up on the radar during the first season of the Pro Tour. He made a quiet debut with his Top 8 appearance during [Worlds 1996](#) (one spot ahead of Finkel). His next appearance was anything but quiet as he won [Pro Tour-Los Angeles](#) after a

Michael Pustilnik	8
Satoshi Nakamura	6
Scott Johns	6
Shawn "Hammer" Regnier	4
Svend Sparre Geertsen	3
Matthew Vienneau	2
Peer Kröger	2
Gary Krakower	1
Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz	1
David Bachmann	0
Gabriel Tsang	0
Kurt Burgner	0
Peter Leiher	0
Terry Tsang	0
Thomas Guevin	0

controversial judge call gave a match loss to his opponent David Mills in the finals. Mills had continually played his spells before tapping his mana and received repeated warnings from the judge staff, which eventually resulted in him losing the match in unprecedented fashion. Tommi never felt entirely comfortable with his win and yearned to "actually" win a Pro Tour.

"At the time it didn't matter to me," explained Hovi. "But later I realized some people didn't consider it as a true win. I still didn't think people recognized me as a good player so I wanted to have more good finishes."

He got his wish two seasons later when he dispatched Nicolas LaBarre in the finals of Pro Tour-Rome with a Tolarian Academy deck. Not only did he get the win he had been craving, but he became the first player in the history of the game to win two Pro Tours – legitimizing the Pro Tour in the minds of many players as a skill-based arena.

TOMMI HOVI
Career Top 8s: 4
Lifetime Winnings: \$102,685
Lifetime Pro Points: 215

"Not only did I think I had finally proven to the community that I could win a Pro Tour without a DQ, but during the games in the PT I also felt that I played the deck very well," Hovi said. "In L.A. it wasn't about my play skills as much as the fact that I realized green was underdrafted."

Tommi's final Top 8 appearance was a couple years later when he reached the quarterfinals of [Worlds 2001](#). Tommi's career was much shorter than either of the two players preceding him in the inaugural class. He played in only 30 Pro Tours compared to Finkel's 47 appearances and Kastle's 49. During that relatively brief window, Tommi's median finish was 28th – meaning he was in the Top 32 in at

Tommi Hovi's two Pro Tour wins showed how Magic was a skill-tested game. least 15 of those Pro Tours he played on.

Tommi marks Europe's impact on the Pro Tour as the only non-U.S. player to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. While the game is dominated by players from all over the world today, that was not always the case. The quiet Finnish player – along with Olle Råde – paved the way for the globalization of the Pro Tour and showed the world that while **Magic** may have begun in North America, that was not necessarily where it was going to end.

While Tommi was an obvious choice for the Hall of Fame to many observers, for him, his induction was a pleasant surprise.

"I'm very happy that I got into it, I thought I didn't have a good chance because I'm not very popular and I thought it would be some kind of good-guy competition," he said.

It seems likely that Hovi will show up at the Pro Tour again in the future, although how often remains to be seen. "It depends on several things: who else is going from Finland, where the PT is, and what format it's going to be (and where do I get a deck if it's Constructed). I think I'll go to some, maybe even all, but I can't say for sure yet."

As an interview subject, Tommi has always been known for his taciturn answers to questions (much to the frustration of Mark Rosewater at Pro Tour-Los Angeles, for example). When asked to single out anyone for thanks in regard to his **Magic** career, he instead looked inward and reflected on his thoughtful and analytical play style.

"I don't think there's anyone particular. I think the most important thing is to analyze your games afterwards and not blame bad luck for your losses. I always had a better feeling if I had lost because of my own mistake (might've been very small also), then if I couldn't find a mistake in my game. Then I knew I can still improve and win the game when the same situation comes around the next time."

Tommi Hovi

"Stasis" - Finland Nationals 1996

Alan Comer: 32 votes

Like Hovi, Alan Comer's career is several seasons shorter than the first two members of this class. Comer's career was cut short not by a lack of interest or waning skills, but by his decision to join Wizards of the Coast to work on **Magic Online**. That choice makes him the only member of the class who will not be eligible to play in this year's World Championships when he is inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Alan is also the only member of the class without a Pro Tour victory, despite an impressive five trips under the Sunday spotlights. An Englishman living in California, Alan's first Sunday appearance was (fittingly enough) aboard the Queen Mary in his adopted home state. He took third place at [Pro Tour-Los Angeles 1997](#) and joked – in reference to the David Mills disqualification – that his semifinal loss to Tommi was actually the closest he has ever come to winning a Pro Tour.

"Yeah, for me, the one that got away was Pro Tour-L.A. II. Whilst I have come second twice – once in Barcelona, and one in the Team event at D.C. – I feel that the closest was actually L.A. In L.A., it came down to mana troubles in Game 5 against Hovi, with the winner facing Dave Mills, who unfortunately got himself DQ'ed. However, I was playing three colors, and the risk that you take with three colors is exactly what brought me down."

Despite multiple second-place finishes without ever winning an event, that was not the lasting regret of Alan's Pro Tour career.

ALAN COMER

Career Top 8s: 5

Lifetime Winnings: \$79,085

Lifetime Pro Points: 192

"Ironically, the real unfinished business for me is never having played at the Invitational," he said. "The Invitational is an event where people really get to showcase some pretty strange ideas for decks, and they don't have to be perfect. The event had more of a relaxed atmosphere."

Alan is heralded as one of the great deck designers, working with such luminaries as Zvi Mowshowitz and Scott Johns to come up with some of the game's most popular and enduring decklists such as Comerzilla, Turbo Xerox, and Miracle-Gro. Despite that Constructed prowess, it is interesting to note that all five of his Top 8s were either Limited Pro Tours or featured a day of Limited play (in the case of [Worlds 1998](#)).

Despite that Limited dominance, it was his ability to completely warp Constructed formats with his creations that many voters cited as a primary consideration when voting. Even without a Top 8 at [Grand Prix-Vegas](#), his Turbo Dryad deck – later known as Miracle-Gro – completely transformed the metagame in the wake of that event.

Alan Comer

"Turbo Dryad" - Grand Prix-Las Vegas

As the votes began to trickle in, Alan began to obsess – *Fatal Attraction*-style – over the voting process and realized how much he wanted the honor of being inducted in with the first Hall of Fame class.

"Watching the Hall of Fame balloting has been driving me nuts since people started commenting that I was getting votes," he said. "In the beginning, I never really expected to have a chance. I personally put myself about sixth on the list, and knowing how I did at Invitational votings, actually expected to finish like ninth or lower. Once the votes came in, I became very excited about the possibility. I made up a chart to show how people had voted and kept track of all the ballots that had come in. At one point, I went so far as to start Googling for them after I found out that there were some on other web sites. In short, I became a wreck, thinking way too much about the possibility that I *might* make it. Then people started projecting that I would make it and the thought that I might not make it was worse. The honor I feel from just being voted in is extreme!"

Comer is looking forward to another trip to Japan for the induction ceremony, and to play a little **Magic** (even if he is ineligible for Worlds).

"I will definitely attend [the induction ceremony]. I have really enjoyed every trip I have taken to Japan. It is a wonderful country with wonderful people. I hope to take some sightseeing in before the events start. I will also play. Of course, working for Wizards prevents me from playing in sanctioned events like the Pro Tour and the side drafts, so I am not sure who I will play against. I am sure I will find somebody!"

Not even facing the German Juggernaut in the finals of Barcelona could wipe the smile off Alan's face.

That is not to say that Comer dismisses the possibility of a return the Pro Tour. He is quite happy to have a lifetime qualification for the Pro Tour safely tucked away in his back pocket. "I am sure that one day I will use it. If I ever leave Wizards of the Coast, I will certainly go back to playing on the Pro Tour."

As for who would thank for his induction into the Hall of Fame, Alan didn't have to think long for an answer.

"Scott Johns and Zvi Mowshowitz," came Alan's immediate response. "**Magic** isn't a solo game, and every successful player has a whole suite of people who helped, whether through playtesting, theorizing, or just being there when things were rough."

"Both of them are great playtest partners, and also had great ideas for how to solve deck problems. In particular, they have played against more crappy decks than anybody should ever have to at that level. For every successful deck I made, only they can give you an idea of how many crappy ones littered to road to progress. They were also a big part of why I stuck with the game for so long...to be with friends.

"Larry Janiec was also very supportive," added Comer. "More than anybody, he was the person who was always there to bounce random ideas off of. Turbo Xerox would never have existed with out him. I came back from Pro Tour-Paris with an idea for a decklist, and Larry liked it, built it and played it exclusively for a long time. Every week, we would get together, and he would say what was working, and what wasn't. We would make changes based on the feedback he gave me. In effect, my playtesting of the deck was almost nil, and it is a tribute to Larry that his analysis of what was working and what wasn't was so good we could tune it without any playtesting on my part."

The Next Step

The first few bricks of the Hall of Fame have been laid, but we're not quite done with the foundation. Joining these four players in the Class of 2005 will be a fifth, to be decided by a vote by the Players Committee. Every **Magic** player with 100 or more lifetime Pro Points will be given one vote to cast.

Whichever name of the remaining 24 eligible players gets the most votes will be inducted into the Hall of Fame at Worlds 2005 along with Finkel, Kastle, Hovi, and Comer.

Ballots will be sent out later this week. If you are a Pro with 100 or more lifetime Pro Points and want to ensure you receive your ballot, please update your contact information by [visiting the DCI home page](#). The final inductee will be announced September 9th.