

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Two Is Better Than One

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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I am sitting in an airport terminal in Hong Kong waiting for my delayed flight to Taipei, from where I'll bring you the latest APAC tech from this weekend's Grand Prix. I was supposed to have done this column on the flight from JFK to Hong Kong but it would have involved contorting my body in ways that I have long since determined to be impossible in the small space I was afforded.

That delay in writing was frustrating, because I am very excited to bring you the news of a new sanctioned format for **Magic: The Gathering** that might just appeal to some of the forum dwellers out there who otherwise turn up their collective noses at tournament news.

For those eagle-eyed Gen Con attendees, by now you've noticed an interesting entry in the **Magic** section of event catalog at the four-day convention: sanctioned Two-Headed Giant events. Despite being around since the dawn of **Magic** (or at least an early issue of *The Duelist*), the Two-Headed Giant format is finally being recognized as a sanctionable tournament format.

Way back in the pre-Pro Tour days when I was running \$1,000 tournaments and the New Yorker hotel, we had one of our customers come up to us with an alternate format that he had read about in the pages of *The Duelist*. The format was Two-Headed Giant and it quickly became one of the more popular tournaments on our side event schedule.

Teams would design decks specifically for the format and the tandem that sticks out in my memory featured one head's deck built around finding and casting **Eureka** as quickly as possible. The deck featured as much tutoring and card drawing it could pack into a sixty-card frame. The other head's deck was nothing but giant monsters – I mean nothing but monsters, not even any land. He just wanted to have as many threats as possible in hand when his teammate screamed **Eureka**.

Fast forward a decade or so and Two-Headed Giant is once again looming over the tournament scene. Stores and TOs can start running sanctioned Two-Headed Giant events on October 1, 2005. They can start signing up to run them on September 16 (Online sanctioning begins September 26).



Players eager to find out if two heads are indeed better than one don't have to wait until October, though. Gen Con has several scheduled events, the headliner of the weekend being a [Friday tournament](#) with \$5,000 in BestBuy gift certificates. The winning team will take down a \$750 gift certificate for each head and prizes will go down to 12th place.

The format for all the Gen Con events will be Standard format using the new "unified deck construction." That means you treat the two decks as one for the purposes of the four-copies-of-a-card limit. The easiest way to think of it is if you stacked the two decks on top of each other, it would need to be a tournament legal deck.

The biggest development that I can see is the way turns are handled. Two-Headed Giant has always been a regionalized format with many different ways to play it. The turn order has always been a source of debate. In my area, the play would alternate back and forth between the individual players on opposite teams. The turn order would go across the table, diagonally back, then across, and then back to player one on the diagonal. I won't lie to you, turns may have been taken out of order.

Under the new rules each team takes a turn with both players on a team – designated as primary and secondary – drawing their cards, laying lands, and making plays on the same turn. It is the same turn order as a regular game of **Magic**, just with more heads.

You may be asking, why Two-Headed Giant and why now? Well, I went straight to the source for all things DCI-related to get the story.

"Two-Headed Giant sanctioning and support was long overdue, but as it often happens, it took some sort of perverse reverse engineering process to figure out that this was the case," explained Organized Play Senior



No, not this Two-Headed Giant...

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Program Manager Ilja Rotelli. "I was at the Tournament Organizers Conference in Las Vegas back in 2004, tinkering with a well-known problem that our TOs had rightfully brought up: the Team Format doesn't work.

"Team Limited was great for high-level competition, it was skill-intensive and fun, but evidence suggested that the base of **Magic** players just did not pick it up. The number of tournaments per year, compared to the individual formats, was abysmal. On the spot, I was tasked by my boss to find a solution for the problem, and I was trying my best. The simple concept that it's way easier for two people to get together to play than three came soon. But it wasn't as easy as just changing the team format to two players team, just because you cannot break ties within the time restraint of a tournament, and every other tie-breaking mechanic we came up with seemed awkward or just unfair. Later at the office, I learned that R&D had this long-term project up of streamlining the **Magic** card texts so that they would be fit to be played in multiplayer **Magic**."

Like many tournament veterans, Ilja looked back to his first tournament experiences for his inspiration – and recalled the early success of Two-Headed Giant.

"That made me think of the early days of **Magic**, my first tournament, before the DCI even existed: Two-Headed Giant. While people practiced **Magic** one on one, for whatever reasons everyone back then felt that the right format for tournament play was Two-Headed Giant.

"Some more research let us figure out that Two-Headed Giant has survived on its own all these years, played around the globe by people with all sorts of good reasons to do so: because it's fun, because you can play with your girlfriend, because you can always blame your teammate, because it brings more variety to the game; because you have more than one friend and more than one enemy."

There are no immediate plans to do away with three-person teams for higher level play in favor of the new/old format, but Rotelli didn't completely close the door on that idea either.

"At any rate, we felt that Two-Headed Giant could be the format that would be welcomed by the player base, and decided to start to build from the ground up. We would give to the players a format we know they love, and see what they did with it. A Two-Headed Giant Pro Tour? Not in the plans, but you know what? We'll let the player base decide."

"Two-Headed Giant sanctioning and support was long overdue, but as it often happens, it took some sort of perverse reverse engineering process to figure out that this was the case." – Ilja Rotelli

TWO-HEADED GIANT INFO

Comprehensive rules for Two-Headed Giant can be found at <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=magic/rules/tourneyplayer>.

Complete Floor rules for Two-Headed Giant (including FAQ) can be found at <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dcil/doccenter/home>.

Irish Nationals

The Nationals caravan rolled into Ireland last weekend. Three-time Pro Tour Top 8 competitor John Larkin showed up to try his hand at getting back onto the Irish National team. John was last seen in the Top 8 of Pro Tour-Houston and made a valiant effort to reach the Top 8 but fell one match short in the final round when he squared off against one of Ireland's top players, Stewart Shinkens.

Shinkens went on to make the National team along with Dave Coghlan and 2005 Irish National Champion Darragh Long. Congratulations to all three of you and good luck in Yokohama.

Darragh Long - Ponza		2005 Irish National Champion	
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Chrome Mox	4 Fractured Loyalty	
13 Mountain	3 Jinxed Choker	3 Frostling	
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep	4 Magma Jet	4 Shatter	
18 lands	4 Molten Rain	3 Sword of Fire and Ice	
	3 Pulse of the Forge	1 Vulshok Sorcerer	
	4 Shock		15 sideboard cards
4 Hearth Kami	3 Shrapnel Blast		
4 Slith Firewalker	3 Volcanic Hammer		
3 Vulshok Sorcerer			
3 Zo-Zu the Punisher	28 other spells		
14 creatures			

Dave Coghlan - Tooth and Nail		2nd Place Irish Nationals	
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	

7 Forest	3 Chrome Mox	1 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	3 Oblivion Stone	3 Circle of Protection: Red
4 Urza's Mine	4 Plow Under	4 Creeping Mold
4 Urza's Power Plant	4 Reap and Sow	1 Oblivion Stone
4 Urza's Tower	4 Sensei's Divining Top	2 Pentavus
20 lands	4 Sylvan Scrying	1 Plains
	4 Tooth and Nail	1 Sundering Titan
	26 other spells	1 Vine Trellis
1 Darksteel Colossus		1 Viridian Shaman
1 Duplicant		15 sideboard cards
3 Eternal Witness		
1 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
1 Sundering Titan		
3 Vine Trellis		
14 creatures		

Stewart Shinkins - Rats!

3rd Place Irish Nationals

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	1 Aether Spellbomb	4 Distress
3 City of Brass	4 Aether Vial	2 Engineered Explosives
2 Island	1 Engineered Explosives	1 Kagemaro, First to Suffer
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	4 Mana Leak	4 Lose Hope
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds	3 Pithing Needle	1 Nezumi Shortfang
4 Salt Marsh	3 Umezawa's Jitte	1 Pithing Needle
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	16 other spells	2 Sword of Light and Shadow
7 Swamp		15 sideboard cards
1 Tomb of Urami		
24 lands		
4 Chittering Rats		
1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror		
3 Nekrataal		
1 Nezumi Shortfang		
1 Patron of the Nezumi		
4 Ravenous Rats		
3 Skull Collector		
3 Trinket Mage		
20 creatures		

Alan Meaney - Tooth and Nail

4th Place Irish Nationals

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
8 Forest	3 Chrome Mox	3 Circle of Protection: Red
4 Urza's Mine	3 Oblivion Stone	3 Creeping Mold
4 Urza's Power Plant	4 Plow Under	1 Duplicant
4 Urza's Tower	4 Reap and Sow	2 Iwamori of the Open Fist
20 lands	4 Sensei's Divining Top	1 Oblivion Stone
	4 Sylvan Scrying	1 Plains
	4 Tooth and Nail	4 Troll Ascetic
1 Darksteel Colossus	26 other spells	15 sideboard cards
1 Duplicant		
3 Eternal Witness		
1 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
1 Sundering Titan		
3 Vine Trellis		
14 creatures		

Edward Hooten - Ponza

Top 8 Irish Nationals

Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus
15 Mountain
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep

20 lands

4 Arc-Slogger
4 Frostling
4 Hearth Kami
4 Slith Firewalker
3 Zo-Zu the Punisher

19 creatures

4 Chrome Mox
3 Jinxed Choker
4 Magma Jet
4 Molten Rain
3 Seething Song
3 Sword of Fire and Ice

21 other spells

Sideboard

3 Flamebreak
2 Pulse of the Forge
4 Stone Rain
3 Sun Droplet
3 Unforge

15 sideboard cards

Michael Higgins - Rats!

Top 8 Irish Nationals



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse
17 Swamp
1 Tomb of Urami

23 lands

4 Chittering Rats
2 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni
4 Nekrataal
3 Nezumi Shortfang
4 Ravenous Rats
3 Skull Collector
2 Skullsnatcher

22 creatures

4 Aether Vial
2 Echoing Decay
3 Pithing Needle
2 Rend Flesh
4 Umezawa's Jitte

15 other spells

Sideboard

4 Cranial Extraction
3 Distress
1 Echoing Decay
2 Razormane Masticore
1 Rend Flesh
4 Sun Droplet

15 sideboard cards

Cormac Smyth - Proteus Control

Top 8 Irish Nationals



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus
4 Cloudpost
15 Island

23 lands

1 Darksteel Colossus

1 creatures

3 Aether Spellbomb
3 Boomerang
2 Chrome Mox
4 Condescend
4 Hinder
4 Mana Leak
3 Proteus Staff
2 Rewind
4 Serum Visions
4 Thirst for Knowledge
3 Vedalken Shackles

36 other spells

Sideboard

1 Boomerang
2 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
2 Bribery
1 Goblin Charbelcher
2 Rewind
4 Sun Droplet
2 Time Stop
1 Vedalken Shackles

15 sideboard cards

Dara Butler - Beacon Green

Top 8 Irish Nationals



Main Deck

60 cards

2 Blinkmoth Nexus
18 Forest
1 Island
1 Swamp

4 Beacon of Creation
3 Cranial Extraction
4 Plow Under
3 Sensei's Divining Top

Sideboard

3 Circle of Protection: Red
1 Cranial Extraction
3 Engineered Explosives
2 Iwamori of the Open Fist
1 Plains

22 lands	3 Sword of Fire and Ice	1 Troll Ascetic
	2 Umezawa's Jitte	4 Wear Away
4 Birds of Paradise	19 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Eternal Witness		
1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
2 Stampeding Serow		
3 Troll Ascetic		
1 Wood Elves		
19 creatures		

The Final Spot

The **Magic** Pro Tour Hall of Fame is ready to welcome in Jon Finkel, Darwin Kastle, Tommi Hovi and Alan Comer as the [inaugural class](#), but there's one seat left unfilled. That fifth spot goes to the winner of the Players Committee vote, which started this week. Every player with 100 or more lifetime Pro Points was emailed a ballot, with the final results to be announced September 9.

If you have 100 or more Pro Points and haven't received your ballot yet, visit the [Hall of Fame page](#) and follow directions for getting a replacement ballot.



Firestarter: Two-Headed Thoughts?

So, what do you think about the Two-Headed Giant announcement? Is this something you are more or less likely to participate in than three-person teams? Is this something you are more or less likely to participate in than other sanctioned formats in general?

Click on the "Discuss" button and discuss away in the forums!

*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.*



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