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Ravnica Roundtable

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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Ravnica hits the retail shelves just as my column is going live here on the East Coast of the United States. It's been two weeks since the Prerelease Tournaments, and [Release Events](#) will be taking place in stores all over the world this weekend. Just like everyone else, the pros are eager to get their hands on the new cards and see what decks they can devise. I caught up with a handful of the game's top players and asked them to share their opinions of the new block.

The Players

Olivier Ruel currently leads the 2005 Player of the Year race thanks to a pair of Top 8 finishes – and a passport stamped on every useable surface from traveling to any Grand Prix on any given weekend. Both of Olivier's Top 8 finishes this year were at Constructed Pro Tours while his Grand Prix titles have come in Limited formats.



Rich Hoaen has strung together umpteen money finishes in Limited Pro Tours going back over the last three seasons. With only one Top 8 to show for it, Rich had flown under many people's radar until recently. He is recognized as one of the very best Limited players in the game. He is alleged to have done more drafts than anyone else alive based on his seeming 24-7 presence on *Magic Online*.



Jeroen Remie is one of the most popular players in the world, parlaying that image (and his Pro Tour Seattle victory) into a berth at the *Magic Invitational* and the Russian *Ninth Edition Release Invitational*. Jeroen has been an ambassador between the best Dutch players and the rest of the world. His Jushi Blue deck propelled Neil Reeves to a National team spot at U.S. Nationals. Heading into Pro Tour-Los Angeles, Jeroen and the Dutchies are joining forces with the Ruel brothers to create a European all-star think tank for the Extended format.



Back in May, **Terry Soh** joined an exclusive club that includes Olle Rade, Darwin Kastle, Mike Long, Chris Pikula, Jon Finkel, Kai Budde, Jens Thoren, and Bob Maher when he won this year's *Magic Invitational* over Resident Genius Tsuyoshi Fujita. We will be discussing his contribution to the Invitationalists' canon at this time next year, but for now he'll be part of the group discussing Bob's *Dark Confidant* (along with everything else *Ravnica*) with us today.

The Roundtable



BDM: What are everyone's initial impressions of *Ravnica*?

Ruel: Lot of diversity, both in Constructed and Limited; it seems like a good expansion.

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Hoæn: Seems very interesting. They've found a new old way to stray from a simplistic Limited format like *Kamigawa* block.

Remie: I feel it's a very nice set that has a lot of interesting cards. I feel the set is mainly a set of support cards, like *Lightning Helix* and *Putrefy*.

Soh: The gold cards are exciting. It feels like a different take on *Invasion* block.

BDM: *What kind of impact will Ravnica have on Pro Tour-Los Angeles?*

Ruel: Big impact on mana.

Hoæn: Spell-wise, there are some cards that seem playable, with Bob leading the pack. What's more interesting are the lands. Together with saclands, they seem to encourage people to play more colors and discourage the color combinations without the new duals.

Remie: A huge impact. The combination of saclands and the new duals open up so many possibilities that were previously impossible. It should change up a lot. Those duals make all the difference.

Soh: The. New. Duals.

BDM: *Do any cards look like they will be broken for Constructed? Any cards that might seem overpowered, like a couple of artifacts that come to mind?*

Ruel: In Extended, the dual lands because of their synergy with fetchlands. In Standard, the best cards are still the lands, but nothing seems really broken to me. My top 10 in Constructed would be:

1. The lands
2. *Birds of Paradise*
3. *Loxodon Hierarch*
4. *Carven Caryatid*
5. *Dimir Cutpurse*
6. *Lightning Helix*
7. *Last Gasp*
8. *Watchwolf*
9. *Moroii*
10. *Telling Time*

Hoæn: Nothing looks outright broken, not even the best card, Bob.

Remie: Like I said previously, I feel the set is mainly filled with support cards. The only card I feel could potentially be broken is Bob's card, *Dark Confidant*. It requires you to build a deck around him, and he is very fragile, but his effect is very, very powerful. Other than that, cards like *Putrefy* and *Dimir Cutpurse* look great but I don't think anything really broken will come out of it. Maybe *Eye of the Storm*...

Soh: The dual lands for sure! You just gotta love these lands.

BDM: *Are there any cards that you are looking to build a deck around?*

Ruel: *Eye of the Storm* can be interesting with *Early Harvest* and the transmute mechanic in Standard. This is not a finely tuned list and was thrown together very fast. I am not sure if the deck is funny or good. The *Drift of Phantasms* transmutes for almost everything in the deck, including *Maga*.



Storming States
Olivier Ruel

Main Deck
60 cards

10 Forest	3 Carven Caryatid	3 Compulsive Research
9 Island	4 Drift of Phantasms	4 Early Harvest
1 Swamp	1 Maga, Traitor to Mortals	3 Eye of the Storm
	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	1 Heartbeat of Spring
20 lands		3 Kodama's Reach
	12 creatures	3 Rampant Growth
		2 Recollect
		4 Sleight of Hand
		3 Telling Time
		2 Tidings
		28 other spells

Remie: I am a Rock mage at heart, so I am looking at all the lovely black-green cards I got...more toys, more toys. I am more excited about using them for Standard than Extended, though.

Soh: I know it's boring, but again, the dual lands. They allow a lot of space for deckbuilders to come out with creative ideas and construct a healthy environment for creature, control and combo.

BDM: *What impact will Transmute have on Constructed? Will players transmute Dizzy Spell into Pithing Needle? Brainspoil into Battle of Wits?*

Ruel: Probably not in a fast format, but there are good chance to see it in block or in combo decks in Standard (see above).

Hoanen: Transmute seems pretty slow for Constructed. I suppose its good in fun decks like **Battle of Wits**.

Remie: Quite possible, although Extended is too fast for expensive spells like these. **Battle of Wits** will love transmute though, and I feel the deck is good again just because of the ability. A little too slow in Extended, but fine in Standard.

Soh: I don't really think so, it's too slow in my opinion.

BDM: *Champs is coming up for the non-Pro player base in a couple of weeks. What is Standard going to look like for Champs, with Mirrodin going away, Ninth Edition in the mix, and Ravnica coming in?*

Ruel: I have no idea. I'm preparing with Extended for L.A. right now.

Remie: A lot like *Kamigawa* bock. Expect Gifts, White Weenie and Aggro Black, as well as Monoblue and decks build around all the guilds. Splashing gets a lot easier with great duals and painlands everywhere. The sky is the limit. I expect Gifts to continue dominating.

Soh: The Gift deck looks very interesting. With the introduction of the dual lands you can just imagine anything crazy with it!



This is a consistent version tuned to beat creatures, as the consensus for States is usually filled with small critters.

Terry Soh		
Gifts Ungiven		
Main Deck		
60 cards		
5 Forest	4 Carven Caryatid	1 Death Denied
1 Island	1 Grave-Shell Scarab	4 Gifts Ungiven
4 Llanowar Wastes	1 Hana Kami	4 Kodama's Reach
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	1 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni	3 Putrefy
2 Overgrown Tomb	3 Kagemaro, First to Suffer	4 Sensei's Divining Top
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	1 Kokusho, the Evening Star	3 Sickening Shoal
4 Swamp	1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror	1 Soulless Revival
2 Tendo Ice Bridge	1 Myojin of Night's Reach	1 Wear Away
2 Watery Grave	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	
22 lands	17 creatures	21 other spells

BDM: *What are the first-pick common cards in Limited and why?*

Ruel: Last Gasp in black, Galvanic Arc in red, Faith's Fetters in white, Compulsive Research in blue, and any of the token cards in green.

Hoanen: Viashino Fangtail, Last Gasp, and Golgari Rotwurm.



Remie: Removal stays insane, as do rares. I don't like first-picking the best common – *Viashino Fangtail* – because I feel red-white and red on its own, in general, are hugely underpowered. I love taking green fix early and rolling with the draft, like *Invasion* block. An interesting option is the blue-black mill deck as well, which is great when you get it, by yourself on the draft table. It is a lot like the *Dampen Thought* deck in that everything needs to go right for it to work.

Soh: *Galvanic Arc*, *Brainspoil* and any solid removals always get my warmest welcome =).

BDM: *How many lands do you recommend for Ravnica Sealed Deck*

release events this weekend?

Ruel: I like to have 18 lands including Signets.

Hoanen: Between 16 and 18 depending on how many non-land fixers they have.

Remie: I have really come to like 15 lands, with 3 of the come-into-play-tapped lands and a couple of Signets. It obviously depends on how many of those you get, but it's definitely less lands than people are used to.

Soh: 16 is reasonable, 17 is too much in this format unless it is in controlish decks since they have the signets to function as talismans now.

BDM: *Play or draw in Sealed Deck?*

Hoanen: In Sealed you likely want to draw because even if you aren't playing lots of colors (which you are a decent amount of the time), your opponent easily could be and will want to draw.

Remie: Sealed Deck – draw; Draft – play, always. Even in 999, tempo is so important in draft that you have to play.

Soh: I chose to draw all the time at the Prerelease because I was running 15-16 lands all the time, but in draft, starting first is always good.

BDM: *Rank the guild colors for Draft.*

Ruel: I've had like two drafts, so I can't really say yet, but the Golgari cards seem very strong.

Hoanen: Golgari (green-black), Selesnya (green-white), Dimir (blue-black), Boros (white-red).

Remie: Green-black, green-white, blue-black, white-red.

I like everything green-based – green-black-blue, green-black-white, green-white-red – because you can go either way and always have two guilds to get your goods from, making the green-black or green-white base great for a draft reactive strategy. Blue-black mill is the best deck if you get it together, but that doesn't happen if there are two people drafting it. I feel red-white is much the same. You need a lot of the good uncommons to make that work, and even then, you have a bunch of small creatures and one-for-one removal.

Soh: White-red is the fastest and only aggro deck out there, followed by black-green, the rest are all fine.

BDM: *In draft can players play non-guild colors, such as blue-white or red-black, without having some kind of bridge color?*

Ruel: I think you need guilds, but you can easily play three colors.

Hoanen: I've tried drafting non-guild colors and it seems pretty much impossible. In Team Sealed at the Prerelease we were able to build a blue-red deck based on the *Drake Familiar*, *Galvanic Arcs*, and *Mark of Eviction*, but in draft it seems very hard to manage.

Remie: No, the gold cards are so much better than the regular cards that it is impossible to do this, give or take a draft or two where you will get weird common runs and it is possible. Red especially is almost devoid of good cards, but maybe black and green can pull it off.

Soh: Red-black and black-white have been my favorite combinations in the past. This question is very dependant on the packs and players. Most of the time I try to avoid picking a gold card in the early going in order to avoid wastage of picks. I try to pick them up slightly later but when they do not come back late, I often have to hook up with the best card available in the pack. At times this has gotten me into red-black or white-black. I would say it is not completely unplayable and it is definitely something worth trying out.

Firestarter: Eye on the Storm

Olivier Ruel presented a rough outline for an *Eye of the Storm* deck that looks interesting to me. I really like his clever use of *Drift of Phantasms* as both an early-game blocker against aggro and as a tutor for just about every key card in the deck. How can we tune this deck up for the big tournament weekend a couple of weeks from now? Remember we are thinking about Standard format, so no *Mirrodin* block or earlier. Post your thoughts and decklists 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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