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# Beating Japan and Pointing Results

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Latest Developments  
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2005



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## Winning One for the U.S. of A.

**W**orlds was a fantastic tournament from my standpoint. The participants really seemed to enjoy all the formats, and I heard essentially no complaints about anything (compared to the beatings I endured in previous years with regards to cards like *Skullclamp*, *Cranial Plating*, and *Umezawa's Jitte*). Standard was diverse, with green-white finally making its presence felt, and Extended has proven itself to be remarkably interesting considering it lost several years worth of cards in the last rotation.



Anyway, the big story coming out of Worlds has been the dominance of Japanese **Magic**. They ran the table at the event, winning the individual title, the team title, and the Player of the Year crown. The only major title that eluded them was Rookie of the Year, something they've won multiple times in the past. Well, I just want to let you know that they didn't win *everything* that week.

That's right, Richard Garfield, Mark Rosewater, and I (playing as the R&D team) took down the Japanese High School Championship Team in an exhibition match of unified Team Standard.

I was in charge of building the decks, which had its fair share of challenges considering neither Richard or Mark had played a meaningful match of Constructed **Magic** in years. In fact, the few games they managed to play against locals in the week leading up to the event marked the first time either of them played with or against *Umezawa's Jitte*, *Gifts Ungiven*, and many of the other Standard-defining cards.



Team Standard is going to be a PTQ season later next year, and it should prove quite interesting. I knew right away that I wanted a "Jitte deck" and a "(Sensei's Divining) Top deck" and that the third deck would be up for grabs. I figured that I'd be the one playing the Top deck, as it would be the most intricate, and the other two would be up for grabs. Brian Schneider had been gunslinging with a green-white *Glare of Subdual* deck at States this year, and it looked really strong, so I planned to use that as my Jitte deck. Brian's version used *Chord of Calling* as its tutor as opposed to the Japanese deck that played *Congregation at Dawn*. I really like Chord as it can mess up the board mid-combat or sneak a key creature into play under countermagic. The deck had a beatdown core (4x

*Guildmage*, *Watchwolf*, and *Hierarchy*), and a toolbox of other creatures to Chord out.

I then began searching decklists online for something that ran neither Jitte nor Top and came across Patrick Sullivan's mono-red weenie burn deck that he played in the LCQ at PTLA. I swapped in white mana and *Lightning Helixes* and left most of the rest of it the same, and that was deck two. For my deck I went with something I'd been playing online for a while—three-color *Battle of Wits*. The most successful Battle decks in our FFL testing were the ones that had access to the game-winning enchantment but also an armada of awesome creatures, not the one-trick pony control decks that I've been seeing posted lately. So I put together a "Green Battle" deck that also packed tons of awesome fatties—*Grave-Shell Scarabs*, *Kokushos*, *Melokus*, *Keigas*, *Kagemaros*, and so on. It won lots and lots of matches, of which less than half the games were decided by *Battle of Wits*. The creatures usually tied my opponents in knots. These three decks combined let us play almost every good card in the format, which is something every team should consider looking at doing (okay, it wasn't that hard considering my deck was 240 cards).

Prior to the event, Richard changed his deck by taking out the two *Genju of the Spires* for another land and a *Hunted Dragon* (a pet card of his) for style points, and it ended up costing him. Here are our decklists:

<b>Boros Burn (Team Standard)</b>	
Richard Garfield	
Main Deck	Sideboard

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RULES

60 cards

- 4 Battlefield Forge
- 14 Mountain
- 1 Plains
- 4 Sacred Foundry
- 4 Char
- 4 Lightning Helix
- 4 Shock
- 4 Volcanic Hammer

23 lands

16 other spells

- 2 Boiling Seas
- 2 Flames of the Blood Hand
- 2 Genju of the Spires
- 4 Kami of Ancient Law
- 4 Pithing Needle
- 1 Plains

15 sideboard cards

- 4 Boros Guildmage
- 4 Frenzied Goblin
- 4 Frostling
- 4 Hearth Kami
- 1 Hunted Dragon
- 4 Zo-Zu the Punisher

21 creatures

## Chord-Glare (Team Standard)

Mark Rosewater



### Main Deck

60 cards

- 4 Brushland
- 1 Eiganjo Castle
- 4 Forest
- 1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers
- 2 Plains
- 3 Selesnya Sanctuary
- 4 Temple Garden
- 2 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree
- 4 Chord of Calling
- 3 Glare of Subdual
- 4 Umezawa's Jitte

11 other spells

21 lands

- 1 Arashi, the Sky Asunder
- 4 Birds of Paradise
- 2 Hokori, Dust Drinker
- 1 Kodama of the North Tree
- 4 Llanowar Elves
- 4 Loxodon Hierarch
- 1 Nikko-Onna
- 1 Seedborn Muse
- 4 Selesnya Guildmage
- 1 Tolsimir Wolfblood
- 1 Viridian Shaman
- 4 Watchwolf

28 creatures

### Sideboard

- 1 Arashi, the Sky Asunder
- 2 Dosan the Falling Leaf
- 1 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails
- 1 Hokori, Dust Drinker
- 1 Nikko-Onna
- 1 Nullmage Shepherd
- 1 Opal-Eye, Konda's Yojimbo
- 3 Samurai of the Pale Curtain
- 1 Trophy Hunter
- 1 Viridian Shaman
- 2 Yosei, the Morning Star

15 sideboard cards

## Green Battle (Team Standard)

Aaron Forsythe



### Main Deck

240 cards

- 4 Dimir Aqueduct
- 16 Forest
- 4 Golgari Rot Farm
- 17 Island
- 4 Llanowar Wastes
- 1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge
- 1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds
- 1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers
- 4 Overgrown Tomb
- 1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse
- 16 Swamp
- 4 Tendo Ice Bridge
- 4 Underground River
- 4 Watery Grave
- 4 Yavimaya Coast
- 4 Battle of Wits
- 1 Boomerang
- 4 Brainspoil
- 4 Compulsive Research
- 4 Cruel Edict
- 1 Death Denied
- 4 Diabolic Tutor
- 1 Distress
- 4 Farseek
- 4 Gifts Ungiven
- 4 Hideous Laughter
- 4 Hinder
- 1 Kiku's Shadow
- 4 Kodama's Reach
- 4 Last Gasp
- 1 Life from the Loam
- 4 Mana Leak
- 1 Manriki-Gusari
- 4 Muddle the Mixture

85 lands

### Sideboard

- 4 Carven Caryatid
- 4 Cranial Extraction
- 1 Dark Heart of the Wood
- 4 Darkblast
- 2 Nezumi Shortfang

15 sideboard cards

1 Arashi, the Sky Asunder	4 Naturalize
1 Dimir Guildmage	1 Nightmare Void
4 Dimir Infiltrator	4 Phyrexian Arena
4 Elves of Deep Shadow	2 Plague Boiler
4 Grave-Shell Scarab	4 Putrefy
1 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni	4 Rampant Growth
4 Jushi Apprentice	2 Recollect
4 Kagemaro, First to Suffer	4 Remand
4 Keiga, the Tide Star	4 Rend Flesh
1 Kodama of the North Tree	4 Sensei's Divining Top
4 Kokusho, the Evening Star	1 Shred Memory
4 Meloku the Clouded Mirror	4 Sickening Shoal
1 Nezumi Graverobber	4 Telling Time
2 Nezumi Shortfang	4 Terrarion
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	1 Tidings
4 Wood Elves	1 Time of Need
	1 Trade Routes
	1 Wear Away
47 creatures	
	108 other spells

My opponent had their non-Jitte non-Top deck—he was playing red-white straight burn with **Howling Mines**. He had no way of stopping the Battle one it was in play, and I won easily in two quick games.

Richard was paired against their control deck—a version of the blue-red Urzatron “Hattori Hanzo” deck. He really missed the Genjus, as the control deck’s answers to creatures were counters and **Pyroclasm**, both of which are weak against the enchant land. The ‘Clasms made short work of Richard’s horde of 2/2’s, and he lost 0-2.



That left it up to Mark. He lost game one in the green-white mirror to Glare, but won game two after his opponent had to mulligan to five. In the match-deciding game three, Mark made the great decision to mulligan a slow hand into a much faster six-card one, and capitalized on a crucial error by his opponent to seal the deal.

Even though the match was just for show, it felt good to win. Our opponents were very good and had great decks—I honestly expect that we’d lose that match seven times out of ten if we played it over and over. I guess that the moral of the story is that, even though I work on **Magic** just about every day of my life, I miss playing meaningful matches.

The *worst* part of the event for me was when Richard just gave one of the high schoolers my four Russian **Volcanic Hammers** out of his deck. Those things don’t grow on trees, you know. “I’m sure you don’t mind,” Richard said to me. “No, no,” I gulped, “it’s fine.” I’m sure it made that kid’s day.



## Point-Counterpoint

And now for what I’ve been promising for weeks, the results from the pointing survey I put forth in “[Pointing Out the Obvious](#).”

These pointing exercises are always enjoyable for me, not just because I like seeing numeric metrics of how the public views some of our cards, but because I like revisiting the values that I and my coworkers assigned to these very same cards many months ago. “How right is the public?” is just one of the important questions. The one I like investigating is “How right was R&D?”

Over 10,000 of you took the time to complete the pointing survey several weeks ago. Awesome! I was disappointed that the software didn’t allow the same level of “granularity” that I like to use when I point (you couldn’t select anything ending in .25 or .75—distinctions that I feel are important), but the sample size is significantly large that everything should average out. Just as many of you probably erred high that erred low.

Let's take a look at the results, starting with the batch of blue commons.

### Stasis Cell

Your average rating: **1.65**

R&D's average rating: **1.46**

The two groups both had this card at about one-and-a-half—R&D just below it and the readers just above it. Time has shown that rating to be too generous; you almost never actually want to play this card as blue has too many better options. In reality the card is about a 1.0—you should feel bad if this is consistently showing up in your main deck. It's a bit too expensive to be good. I'm surprised R&D's rating was as high as it was as I barely remember anyone playing this card much.

### Surveilling Sprite

Your average rating: **1.84**

R&D's average rating: **1.69**

To me, this card is the quintessential 1.5—you don't pick it very highly, sometimes you cut it from your deck, but you don't feel bad about playing it, even in multiples. Even if you don't play it, it's an excellent sideboard option against decks with lots of one-toughness creatures. You rated it slightly higher than we did, but I can't fault you for that.

### Tattered Drake

Your average rating: **1.62**

R&D's average rating: **1.73**

Ah, the first card that you rated lower than we did. Understandable. The Drake looks an awful lot like a bad card, but he proves to be quite effective at slowing the game down in Dimir decks, which in turn helps enable the milling strategy. Essentially a gold card, you almost always play this card in Dimir, and almost never in a deck that has no access to black mana. If he regenerated for ♠ he'd be over a 2.

### Terraformer

Your average rating: **1.31**

R&D's average rating: **1.17**

**Terraformer** seems like a reasonable card. He does lots of things—fix your mana, protect you from landwalk, and enable oddball cards like **Flow of Ideas**. But most of that isn't necessary in a good limited deck in this format, so he's often on the bench. He may seem similar to playable *Invasion* block cards like **Kavu Recluse** and **Tundra Kavu**—**Gray Ogres** that could fix your mana. But the Kavu triplets—like their pals **Dream Thrush** and **Reef Shaman**—could also screw your opponent out of colors, something the 'Former can't do. As the block progresses and decks become more colorful, **Terraformer** may rise in value.

### Tidewater Minion

Your average rating: **1.79**

R&D's average rating: **0.98**

Our number is invalid because the Minion cost ♣♣♣ at the time we did this pointing. I thought the card had very interesting applications in limited and argued for it to go down to five mana late in development, where it most likely points at around 2. But you guys knew that already!

### Vedalken Dismisser

Your average rating: **1.55**

R&D's average rating: **1.94**

This fellow gets no respect. I assume most players see the six mana price tag on a 2/2 and immediately chalk it up as unplayable. But this guy is a backbreaker in the midgame. He's a two-for-one—you get a creature and your opponent loses a draw step, and sometimes he's even better than that if you can hit something that's enchanted. He combos with milling cards to act as removal. He's almost a hard lock with **Mark of Eviction**. If nothing else, clearing a blocker for just a turn can be crucial, and the tempo loss your opponent suffers will almost always be significant. In early playtesting, I asked Brian Schneider if I could point the Dismisser at 4.0, not because he was first-pick quality, but because I'd honestly consider playing him as the only card of his color. Our final pointing is a little low—he should be over a 2. You should always play at least one if you are playing blue, and it is often correct to play multiples.

Not bad on the blue commons, fellows. You tended to rate the cheaper cards higher than R&D did, and the more expensive cards lower. Once you learn to love the common "Karoo" lands, you'll begin to appreciate the five and six mana spells more! On to multicolored uncommons...

### Lightning Helix

Your average rating: **3.56**

R&D's average rating: **3.24**

I was in a team draft at Worlds wherein one of my Pro teammates played a **Lightning Helix** in a blue-black deck with only a **Boros Signet** and a **Terrarion** to cast it. And it was completely reasonable. This card is definite power and its high rating is justified.

### Moroi

Your average rating: **3.15**

R&D's average rating: **3.11**

Here's one we can all agree on. **Moroi** is a fantastic beater and definitely first-pick quality, even though he doesn't necessarily mesh with what most of the other Dimir cards are trying to accomplish. For a decent chunk of



development **Moroii** was a rare, but we moved him to uncommon because we felt he'd give direction to a different kind of Dimir deck in limited play. He does that quite well, and isn't entirely out of place in the mill deck, either.

### Pollenbright Wings

Your average rating: **2.59**

R&D's average rating: **2.02**

Here's a six-mana spell you do seem to like. I think your pointing is a hair high, and ours has proven to be a hair low—the card is probably really a 2.25 (which wasn't an option on the poll, I understand). I think R&D rated it low because we were used to playing it at four mana, so the six-mana version just seemed less reasonable than it really is. That said, I have cut this card from green-white decks multiple times.

### Psychic Drain

Your average rating: **2.29**

R&D's average rating: **0.88**

We certainly dropped the ball on rating this one. **Psychic Drain** is quite good in—some might even call it important to—the milling deck, yet R&D rated it as nearly unplayable. I think what happened there was that **Glimpse the Unthinkable** was common for some time, and the Drain is laughable compared to that card as far as milling goes. So no one ever played the Drain in-house, even after Glimpse was moved up to rare. (No one except Alan Comer—I still remember being stunned when he beat me with back-to-back **Psychic Drains**.) As the designer of the card, I'm glad it worked out, even if we severely underestimated it. If I had to do it over, I'd call it a 1.75.

### Putrefy

Your average rating: **3.53**

R&D's average rating: **3.31**

Another extremely powerful card that deserves the accolades it gets from players and developers alike. It's evident looking at the numbers on this card and **Lightning Helix** that you point higher than we do in general, which is normal when you haven't pointed a lot or studied others' pointing much. With a rating of 3.5, I'd imagine half of you gave **Putrefy** a 4 or higher. The only card that came close to being a 4 in R&D was **Glare of Subdual** (what I consider the best possible card to have in this format), and then the good removal starts showing up between 2.75 and 3.5.

### Selesnya Sagittars

Your average rating: **2.17**

R&D's average rating: **1.92**

The Sagittars are pretty run-of-the-mill. If your deck needs help against flying, you'll gladly play them, but they aren't worth seeking out. I'll stand by our "under 2" mark.

Considering how off R&D was on **Psychic Drain**, I'd say you as a whole did better with gold uncommon than R&D did. Note how powerful these cards are in general—the per-card average is over a full point higher between these six and the six blue commons. Isn't gold awesome? Now the black rares...

### Blood Funnel

Your average rating: **0.73**

R&D's average rating: **0.00**

This card is absolutely unplayable. I'm actually surprised at your 0.73 rating—that means some significant number of you rated it a 1, and possibly even higher. What use are you seeing? Dare I say that **Zephyr Spirit** is significantly more playable than **Blood Funnel** in limited.

### Dark Confidant

Your average rating: **1.81**

R&D's average rating: **1.23**

I'm pretty sure everyone missed high here. Bob is a great card, but in limited you have so little control over the costs of your cards that you could easily end up doing something like 13 damage to yourself over the course of even a short game. That's just too much. Granted, it is possible to get a deck that really takes advantage of this guy, but those cases seem rare enough that he shouldn't get a rating over 1.

### Empty the Catacombs

Your average rating: **1.54**

R&D's average rating: **0.54**

Your generous pointing of this card indicates that, as a whole, you'll play this card about half the times you play black. The number is almost identical to the rating you gave **Vedalken Dismissal**. That can't be right! While I can envision a scenario with a dredge deck (or against a mill deck) where you might have a significantly larger graveyard than your opponent, that just isn't going to come up enough to play this four-mana symmetrical mass **Raise Dead** very often at all. I don't think I've ever seen this played in limited.

### Helldozer

Your average rating: **2.51**

R&D's average rating: **2.75**

Ah, the first of the rares that is actually playable most of the time. **Helldozer** is a great fatty with a significant ability. Only his triple-black mana cost prevents him from being a 3.



## Hex

Your average rating: **2.78**

R&D's average rating: **2.64**

Our pointings are pretty close on this card, and I'm pretty sure they're both wrong low. **Hex** has proven itself to be a bomb in this format, especially in black-green decks that can generate a few insurance tokens of their own. If you cast it, you almost always win. I've heard some Pros say this is the second-best limited card in the set after Glare. While I'm more of a **Selesnya Guildmage** fan myself, I can't argue that **Hex** isn't flat-out amazing. Its double-black cost and the requirement that you plan your deck around it keep it from being in the rarified air of 4, but I think it is at least a 3.5 and maybe higher.

## Hunted Horror

Your average rating: **1.72**

R&D's average rating: **0.77**

In limited at least, what you're giving with this card tends to be much better than what you're getting. While there are certainly cards that can tilt the advantage in your favor—**Peel from Reality**, **Necroplasm**, and so on—they require too much work for the Horror to ever be a real factor. Something would have to have gone terribly wrong with my draft for me to play this card.

And that's black rare for you, full of highs and lows. It's nice to see so many of you give the narrow cards the benefit of the doubt, but I'm sure that if you tried most of them out your opinions would be lowered. Luckily for cards like those there are many more formats available than just limited!

Great job, everyone. I hope you enjoyed this peek into our process. Who knows—maybe your pet techy card is one that R&D undervalued—you just might know something that we don't!

That's it for this year, folks! I get a few weeks off from writing, but I'll be back in January to gear everyone up for the Guildpact previews! Happy holidays!



## Last Week's Poll

How often do you draft?		
Effectively never	3043	29.0%
Less than once a month	2576	24.6%
Once a month	2141	20.4%
Once a week	1746	16.6%
A few times per week	750	7.1%
About every day	119	1.1%
Multiple times per day	117	1.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10492</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

So half the audience drafts once per month, and half of them draft once per week *at least*. I'd call those impressive numbers.

## This Week's Poll

**What would you rather get as a gift this holiday season?**

- Two boxes of *Ravnica* boosters
- A box of *Guildpact* boosters
- An Unlimited *Mox Emerald*
- An iPod Nano
- Socks and underwear

*Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.*



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