



Everything Will Make Sense a Week From Now

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Before he became the producer of magicthegathering.com, our fearless leader Scott Johns was a professional **Magic** player, a champion of no mean ability. As a member of the Pacific Coast Legends, Scott was on the leading edge of early **Magic** strategy, while later in his career, he joined up with the innovative Mogg Squad, a team distinguished by some of the most impressive deck designers of all time, Alan Comer and Zvi Mowshowitz... not to mention a couple of World Champions. Over the years, Scott played a number of impressive decks that even today illustrate a number of **Magic's** most salient principles.

Scott Johns		 	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
3 City of Brass	1 Ancestral Recall	2 Disenchant	
1 Library of Alexandria	1 Balance	1 Gorilla Shaman	
3 Plateau	1 Black Lotus	4 Guerrilla Tactics	
2 Savannah	4 Black Vise	3 Meekstone	
4 Strip Mine	1 Diminishing Returns	4 Whirling Dervish	
2 Taiga	1 Disenchant	1 Zuran Orb	
2 Tropical Island	4 Incinerate		
1 Tundra	4 Lightning Bolt		15 sideboard cards
3 Volcanic Island	1 Mox Pearl		
	1 Mox Ruby		
21 lands	2 Mystical Tutor		
	3 Psionic Blast		
	1 Regrowth		
2 Gorilla Shaman	1 Swords to Plowshares		
4 Kird Ape	1 Time Walk		
4 Savannah Lions	1 Timetwister		
	1 Wheel of Fortune		
10 creatures			
	29 other spells		

Back when I played my first Pro Tour at Dallas in 1996, Wizards of the Coast used to run preliminary mini-Pro Tours concurrently, or sort of before, each main event. Scott won the 1996 Type I Championship with this deck, which lends its name and tradition to the more recent "Zoo" decks of the past Extended season.



The Zoo was an interesting case because its cards were so *not* powerful given what was available. How could this deck compete with Necropotence, or win in a tournament where Brian Weissman himself appeared, deftly drawing cards and countering spells in the format that he used to define all **Magic** strategy? As we look back at Scott's Kird Apes and Savannah Lions, the answer is not obvious today, and was downright baffling back in 1996.

The secret of The Zoo is that the cards are so cheap. Notice how Scott didn't run anything very expensive, or even middle-of-the-road in cost. Scott's curve was flat for most of the deck, and he eschewed the default G/R beater of the day, Erhnam Djinn, without a second thought. Instead Scott was all about one-mana pups, like Kird Ape and Savannah Lions, and could obviously get the lucky win on the back of a first turn Black Vise with a couple of Lightning Bolts, regardless of what his opponent's game plan was.

What you might not normally expect out of ostensibly a G/R/x beatdown deck is the inclusion of Blue manipulation cards. Scott ran *Mystical Tutor*, a card that we usually expect out of High Tide or Replenish, not a deck that brawls early and crashes often with Kird Apes. He would empty his hand of beaters and flame, then *Mystical Tutor* for *Wheel of Fortune*, *Diminishing Returns*, or *Timetwister* to refill, and then go crazy on the cheap offense again. The deck worked precisely because Scott's cards were not pricey... How much utility would Scott have been able to seize if his hand were clogged with four-drops? I'm sure he was much happier to drop his jewelry and then unload the Black Vises, knowing his next reset was just one mana away.



I always love it when good deck designers kill their darlings. Tuning decks - even (or especially) established ideas - is hard, and we usually dismiss the possibility of not playing certain cards because they have always been played in the past (*Gempalm Incinerator* in *Goblins*, for instance). However when a maverick can look past the staples, that is when he can do something new, specifically by differentiating his deck from the expected cards that have come before. *Erhnam Djinn* was an obvious omission, but I think Scott himself had something more interesting and less obvious to say: "It didn't get any attention at the time, but one of the most revolutionary things about that deck imo was that it didn't run *Sol Ring*."

Main Deck

61 cards

11 Forest
 3 Karplusan Forest
 2 Mountain
 2 Mountain Valley
 2 Undiscovered Paradise

20 lands

4 Ghazban Ogre
 3 Granger Guildmage
 3 Jolrael's Centaur
 2 Karoo Meerkat
 2 Lhurgoyf
 4 Llanowar Elves
 4 River Boa
 2 Uktabi Orangutan
 3 Whirling Dervish
 4 Yavimaya Ants

31 creatures

4 Giant Growth
 4 Incinerate
 2 Kaervek's Torch

 10 other spells

Sideboard

2 Dwarven Miner
 3 Emerald Charm
 2 Hall of Gemstone
 1 Karoo Meerkat
 1 Lhurgoyf
 4 Pyroblast
 2 Uktabi Orangutan

15 sideboard cards





The deck Scott played at Regionals 1997 is one of my favorite decks of all time. Few players today know about this deck or have read the report that it came from, yet Meta-Weenie remains highly influential in structure and execution even today. This deck has many elements similar to our first deck: like The Zoo, Meta-Weenie relies on a core strategy of small - but frequent - packets of damage for low mana cost, with relatively few bomb spells. Kird Ape was "too good" for the Standard of 1997, but Scott filled the spot with Ghazban Ogre, another two-power creature for one mana. Though less focused on burn spells than The Zoo, Meta-Weenie had a reasonable arsenal, and played Giant Growth deceptively like a Lightning Bolt. Alongside Granger Guildmage, Scott's one-mana Green spells masqueraded as Red ones.

This deck was a hater... there's a reason it was nicknamed "Meta" by the first Sensei. Many of Meta-Weenie's creatures were selected to help defeat specific enemies, each taking its

spot in response to a particular need given the shapes and curves presented by the format. River Boa had Islandwalk and could withstand Nevinyrral's Disk; alongside Giant Growth, the best Green two-drop prior to Wild Mongrel could even dance past Quicksand. Karoo Meerkat was perhaps even more

difficult for Mono-Blue decks to beat. The latter was invulnerable to Suq'Ata Firewalker shots and could not easily be bounced.

Today Whirling Dervish might not get a second look - not many Slith Predators adopted by the Planeswalkers of Dominia - but that card was a legitimate problem for Necropotence decks. The Mono-Black ones just sort of died against Dervishes that came down on turn 2... especially when they were backed up by Viridian Sha - I mean Uktabi Orangutans - that could squish desperate Nevinyrral's Disks before they untapped.

Scott Johns		 	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
1 Dust Bowl	4 Assault/Battery	3 Earthquake	
11 Forest	4 Chimeric Idol	3 Flashfires	
4 Karplusan Forest	1 Earthquake	4 Kavu Chameleon	
5 Mountain	4 Fires of Yavimaya	1 Obliterate	
4 Rishadan Port	4 Saproling Burst	2 Reverent Silence	
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25 lands	17 other spells	15 sideboard cards	
4 Birds of Paradise			
4 Blastoderm			
3 Jade Leech			
4 Llanowar Elves			
3 Two-Headed Dragon			
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18 creatures			

While it was teammate Zvi Mowshowitz who made Top 8, Scott played essentially the same deck to a PT Chicago 2000 Day 2. Like Zvi, Scott played the distinctively tuned version of G/R fatty beatdown that acquired the name "MY Fires" after Zvi's comically extensive series of articles examining it.

Notice that even though it shares colors with the previous G/R attack deck from Regionals 1997, "Our" Fires has a significantly different focus than Meta-Weenie. Where the earlier Regionals deck was all small creatures, playing only 20 lands, "Our" Fires had a high land count of 25 (something you usually only see in a control deck) and much bigger threats; in fact, the only cheap creatures on Scott's squad in 2000 were the Birds of Paradise and Llanowar Elves that he used to play turn 2 Chimeric Idol or Fires of Yavimaya... Any other conscript of his force was 5/5 and pricey as a Ponza card. River Boa didn't make the cut.



Meta-Weenie was about speed and early game initiative. It had its best game in the early turns, and used its burn spells to either clear a short term path or finish off an opponent who had already been beaten nearly into submission. That deck's plan was to commit to the board and hit hard; if the opponent tapped out, he was eating five points of Ants. When Scott's board inevitably left play, he would play one of his two Lhurgoyfs (the deck's only dedicated class of "fat" creature), which was perfectly suited for post-Wrath cleanup duty.



The Fires deck could not have been more different in execution, even given its identical colors and shared offensive focus. Fires was a *power* deck where Meta-Weenie was a speed deck. Though it could get The Fix accelerator, into Fires, into third turn 'Derm, into lethal Burst draw, Fires was *also* an unparalleled topdeck machine. Lose your board to a White mage? Fine. Just peel a Two-Headed Dragon... You've certainly got the mana for it. The 2000 deck's burn cards are even fewer than the 1997 Regionals deck. Four Assaults are notoriously stapled to Batteries, and the one Earthquake is really sort of an insult to opponents with smaller creatures; you know, the kind that don't have five toughness and certainly can't withstand a 'quake for four followed by an Alpha Strike.

The whole "I can topdeck better than anyone else in the room" was not a new thing with "Our" Fires. In fact, the season prior Chicago 2000, the guy who held Scott's job immediately

before he did was making headlines with a not dissimilar strategy.

Aaron Forsythe, lately of Latest Developments, won a spot at U.S. Nationals 2000 with an innovative Regionals deck that was originally just for fun... but became what teammate Mike Turian called the best deck in the format:


Aaron Forsythe .txt 

Main Deck
60 cards

11 Forest	4 Avalanche Riders	4 Arc Lightning
2 Gaea's Cradle	4 Birds of Paradise	2 Creeping Mold
4 Karplusan Forest	4 Deranged Hermit	3 Plow Under
2 Mountain	3 Llanowar Elves	9 other spells
3 Rishadan Port	3 Masticore	
3 Treetop Village	2 Rofellos, Llanowar Emissary	
25 lands	3 Uktabi Orangutan	
	3 Yavimaya Elder	
	26 creatures	

The Regionals era Angry Hermit was pretty straightforward, which was exactly how Aaron wanted it. "This deck is mana and bombs, nothing but MANA AND BOMBS," he used to say. Of course that

wasn't precisely true at the Regionals stage: With cards like Creeping Mold in the mix, Aaron's deck was actually a mite utility-oriented.

Aaron Forsythe		.txt 	
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
11 Forest	4 Arc Lightning	2 Ancient Hydra	
2 Gaea's Cradle	4 Plow Under	4 Blastoderm	
4 Karplusan Forest		2 Boil	
2 Mountain	8 other spells	1 Masticore	
4 Rishadan Port		1 Splinter	
2 Treetop Village		3 Thran Foundry	
		2 Uktabi Orangutan	
25 lands		15 sideboard cards	
<hr/>			
4 Avalanche Riders			
4 Birds of Paradise			
4 Deranged Hermit			
4 Llanowar Elves			
3 Masticore			
2 Rofellos, Llanowar Emissary			
3 Skyshroud Poacher			
3 Yavimaya Elder			
27 creatures			



Come U.S. Nationals, that changed a bit. The Nationals version only had two (non-creature) spells: Arc Lightning and Plow Under. Both were doozies that could steal tempo and generate card advantage. Arc Lightning was a powerhouse that had every weenie player quaking in fear, that could essentially remove every threat in even the Nationals winning Black control deck. Plow Under was... Plow Under. In case you were wondering, people didn't like losing two land drops and the better measure of two turns any more in 2000 than they did six months ago.

The major difference in between Regionals and Nationals (besides the removal of Creeping Mold for the fourth Plow Under) was the inclusion of the Skyshroud Poacher as an additional threat. The Nationals Angry Hermit *really* was mana and bombs... It could accelerate on Rofellos and then follow up with a third turn Plow Under and end the game right there.

Angry Hermit could dominate the board with a quick

Blastoderm or Ancient Hydra in much the same way that Red Zone and Fires decks did a few months

subsequent. It could play a card advantage long game between Yavimaya Elder and Skyshrroud Poacher that would dazzle and frustrate the opponent... Aaron had 25 land before "Our" Fires, and especially with Gaea's Cradle in the mix, really wanted something to do with all of it (funneling that mana through Masticore was also a fine way to spend his short term resources).

In case you are not a student of history, Angry Hermit was statistically one of the most successful decks of all time. Aaron and teammate Mike Turian (again his teammate today at Wizards R&D) both made Top 8, and thanks to Dan Clegg, the deck *also* placed both first *and* second in the Day Two standings. Angry Hermit mingled a bomb-based proactive plan with the ability to manascrew an opponent. There aren't a lot of mages who can weather a Deranged Hermit after being battered by Rishadan Port, Avalanche Riders, and Plow Under.

As you can see from this overview, two closely connected colors can be implemented in a number of related, but discrete, strategies. The G/R deck's focus can be on cheap cards and burn, expensive fatties with a little flexible fire support, or somewhere in between. G/R can be about mana and bombs, it can touch for a little utility, or keep the opponent from being able to play his game.



So what does all this mean?

This is Part I (the introduction only)... You're going to have to tune in next week. Any guess on the site's theme?

The real question is "Why do these **magicthegathering.com** guys only play G/R decks?"

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