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Post-Guildpact PDC

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Into the Aether
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Two-Headed Giant Champs

As a follow-up to my [Swimming with Sharks](#) foray, I thought I'd touch on playing in Two-Headed Giant Champs this past weekend. I hope that lots of you were able to give the format a try; it really is a lot of fun! It's also quite skill-testing - while we were playing, I could quickly tell whether my opponents had actually tested 2HG rather than just leaning exclusively on experience playing *Ravnica* block Limited. A common mistake was playing Magemarks on your teammate's creatures without realizing they don't function unless they are on a creature you control.

Team Jolly Green consisted of myself and longtime friend Josh Adams. In addition to playtesting the format with me, Josh is also a compulsive Limited player on MTGO, and puts in at least one draft a day. He knows *Ravnica* block Limited very well, so I was counting on him to recognize some synergies that might have otherwise gotten missed. One contribution I made was pointing out to him that *Cloudstone Curio* has the word "may" on it, so that you can use it when you want to. Josh did some ridiculous things with the Curio throughout the day.

After seven rounds of Swiss, we found ourselves blessed by math and good fortune. One team at 5-2 would make Top 4, and that team was Jolly Green. We had an astonishing 67% for our tie-breakers; the very last round, nearly every team we had played in the Swiss after the first round was still in contention for the Top 4. After getting past the round of 4, winning the title was in sight. I got a fantastically aggressive draw: turn 1 *Frenzied Goblin*; Josh played a turn 2 *Dimir Infiltrator*. On turns 3 and 4 I played *Skyknight Legionnaires*, and on turn 5 *Ghor-Clan Savage* with a Bloodthirst counter. Our opponents had a slow start, with one Head stalled on mana, and the other Head with no fliers. We got our opponents from 40 to 24 life pretty quickly. Josh had a *Convolute* in hand and an *Orzhova, the Church of Deals* in play, but decided to tap down to play his *Conclave Equenaut*. I didn't object because my biggest concern was our opponents drawing a way to deal with my Savage; I really had no other beef in my hand and we wanted to put the game away before the guy drew out of his mana screw. There was only one card that would have made the Equenaut a terrible, terrible play, since it would be our sixth creature.

Out of 88 possible rares in *Ravnica*, what would we least want to see be one of their 4 *Ravnica* rares? Yep; despite really good odds they would not have it, next turn they cast *Hex*. We did not recover in time to prevent the game from swinging around in their favor, and ended up settling for 2nd place.



Now, one thing I've often read about when it comes to trying to better yourself as a **Magic** player is harnessing the inherent luck that's a factor in **Magic**. You can't do anything about "bad luck" or "good luck", but you can certainly play the game to try and swing things in your favor. A great player would have realized there was no real reason to play another creature when we had clear board superiority; while the odds were against being so brutally punished for the move, we should have shut that window of opportunity for our opponent. Josh could have sat on the *Convolute* and just activated the Church EOT if he didn't need to stop a spell. I learned a valuable lesson, and hope that next time I can think like a great player.

Win a Trip to L.A. for the Magic Invitational!

We will all be checking out the [Magic Invitational](#) on *Magic Online* May 10-12, but wouldn't it be nice to attend the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) and see it in person? For the next week, about half of all MTGO Premier Events will be designated "E3 Qualifier Events." Each E3 Qualifier will invite the Top 8 finishers to play in the "Magic Invitational at E3" Tournament on Saturday April 1, 2006. See the [Magic Online Event Schedule](#) for a complete schedule of E3 Qualifiers, and check out the [Magic Invitational](#) at E3 page for more details!

Guildpact for PDC

[Two weeks](#) back I checked in with some multiplayer fans to see what Guildpact cards they thought would make a splash in group games. This week I checked in with some of the Pauper Deck Challenge crew. For those who might be unfamiliar with PDC, I wrote about it here ([Spotlight on PDC](#)) and there are some links to other columns talking about the format. It's basically an all-common format, and there are Player Run Events tournaments that you can join, so if Standard, Extended or Classic gets a little rich for your blood, give PDC a try!

Pro Tour Geneva Webcast

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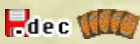
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NOVELS

Time Spiral
Time Spiral Cycle, Book 1
by Scott McGough

GloinOin and SpikeBoyM gave us their thoughts on Guildpact for PDC:

GloinOin: I think the main cards that will develop into staples are the ones which bring entirely new elements to PDC. Obviously the “karoo” lands help two-color decks and **Scab-Clan Mauler** will see a lot of play in Red/Green beats. My personal standouts so far have been **Izzet Chronarch** and **Steamcore Weird**; they helped me to win mini PDC recently with a 12-0 game record. It's a basic Red/Blue counter-burn deck with *Guildpact* added. Evu came up with the idea of running **Cloudposts** to provide additional mana boosts to **Kaervek's Torch** and **Condescend**.

Counter-burn (PDC) by GloinOin 

Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard	
4 Cloudpost	3 Compulsive Research	4 Firebolt
1 Forgotten Cave	4 Condescend	1 Izzet Chronarch
12 Island	4 Counterspell	3 Repeal
2 Izzet Boilerworks	4 Exclude	4 Smash
5 Mountain	4 Incinerate	3 Syncopate
24 land	4 Kaervek's Torch	15 sideboard cards
	2 Repulse	
	25 other spells	
3 Izzet Chronarch		
2 Ninja of the Deep Hours		
3 Shimmering Glasskite		
3 Steamcore Weird		
11 creatures		

GloinOin: The sideboard was prepared for an aggro metagame, with **Smash** there to help fend off Affinity. Currently the main decks to beat are: Red/Green beats, mono-Blue control Affinity, and Mono-Black Control. Counter-burn decks and a deck based around abusing **Nantuko Husk** and token creatures are on the rise. The Husk deck is capable of turn 4 or 5 kills on a good day. There is also a pet project of lathspel and myself, built around **Spiraling Embers** and **Oboro Breezecaller**. It can goldfish on turn 5, but is inconsistent against control. It uses **Rush of Knowledge** and the land Affinity golems from *Darksteel*.

SpikeBoyM: Some of the early heavy hitters now are the “karoo” lands (which we love) and **Blind Hunter** because it is in colors that don't get used often, and it's just a nutty card in a creature-based format like PDC. A lot of people are going to try and make **Wee Dragonauts** work because they can get ridiculous fast. I feel the best place for them is in the **Ire of Kaminari** decks floating around, with the Dragonauts as an alternate win condition. There's nothing like **Lava Spike** spliced with **Glacial Ray**, then cast **Glacial Ray**, then attacking for 5.

Ire Dragonauts (PDC) by SpikeBoyM 

60 cards

9 Island	2 Izzet Chronarch	3 First Volley
4 Izzet Boilerworks	3 Wee Dragonauts	4 Glacial Ray
9 Mountain	5 creatures	4 Ire of Kaminari
22 land		4 Lava Spike
		3 Murmurs from Beyond
		4 Peer Through Depths
		4 Reach Through Mists
		2 Sift Through Sands
		2 Spiraling Embers
		3 Toils of Night and Day
		33 other spells

SpikeBoyM: Most of the Bloodthirst creatures will make a huge splash, especially the Mauler and the Ghor Clan commons. They will really make Red/Green aggro even better. My sleeper pick for *Guildpact* would have to be **Mourning Thrull**, it just seems like it could be really powerful.

Thanks, guys!

Standard 4x Open (706922) Recap

Saturday, March 18 2006

The first post-*Guildpact*, post-*Pro Tour Honolulu* Standard Open 4x event kicked off with a good crowd of 154 players. Unlike Honolulu, this Top 8 was dominated by Orzhov, with full half sporting White and Black spells. Heezy Street (Gruul), Zoo, Izzetron, Owling Mine and Heartbeat were all MIA for this one.

Here were the final standings:

1st Place: mikeman29, Greater Gifts
2nd Place: Khaim, Ghost Dad
4th Place: WedUK, G/W Aggro
4th Place: Kirushi, Ghost Dad
8th Place: Decimator88, B/W Aggro
8th Place: bobthedog, B/W Aggro
8th Place: LankanProdigy, Boros Burn
8th Place: rip_kolm, Wildfire

In taking the top prize, mikeman29 went with tried-and-true power, utilizing the *Gifts Ungiven* engine to set up *Yosei, the Morning Star* and *Greater Good*. From the replays, Khaim's Ghost Dad looked like a fairly standard build, while Kirushi took a page from Olivier Ruel's Hand in Hand deck and added the resilient *Paladin en-Vec* to the *Tallowisp* team. WedUK had many elements of Ghazi-Glare, but appeared to be a bit more aggressive and I never saw *Glare of Subdual*. His early game critters picked up *Jittes* and swung, before accelerating into *Arashi, the Sky Asunders* and *Kodama of the North Tree*. Decimator88 and bobthedog's B/W aggro decks appeared to be very similar to Ruel's Honolulu Top 8 Hand in Hand deck. LankanProdigy walked a rogue path with a Boros mana base chock full of efficient damage dealers like *Lava Spike*, *Char* and *Lightning Helix* backed with *Isamaru* and *Scorched Rusalka*. rip_kolm utilized the familiar but still potent sorcery-driven *Wildfire* strategy to punish weenie decks and shaky mana bases alike.

Magic Invitational: My Writer's Pick

For the Writer's Pick in the **Magic** Invitational voting, *Scrye* magazine was given a vote. In addition to writing *Into The Aether* for mtg.com, I have also written for *Scrye* for several years, and as Contributing Editor covering **Magic**, I was given the honor of determining our vote. We did not have room in our next issue to fully explain my picks, so I thought I'd do so here.

The voting criteria is "Best combination of talent and personality," and we were given a pool of 15 pro players to pick from. I decided to rate these players by the following measures:

Gut Check—as someone who's played the game and read about it for over a decade, how do these players hit my radar in terms of name recognition and personality? I also asked my friend Ken Krouner, a pro player who's plugged into the pro community, what he thought of these guys.

Lifetime Pro Points—all are talented or else they wouldn't be pros and they wouldn't be on the list to begin with, but I had to figure out a way to rate them relative to one another in terms of raw skill. This seemed like the most straightforward approach.

Wizards.com Search Hits—Pro Tours and Grand Prix are covered on Wizards' website, and between the interviews, feature matches, and reporter blogs, I figured this would be one way to see who has attracted the most attention.

Google Search Hits—some of these guys show up on other websites by writing or being written about, so I widened the search to the entirety of the Internet.

I ranked the nominees by each measure, giving 15 if they were at the top of the list, on down to 1 point if they were on the bottom. I then totaled each player's ranking points for each measure and ranked them from highest points to lowest.*

I realize that these measures aren't exactly scientifically accurate, but when the imperfect calculus was done I was very pleased with my Top 5 list. Following are my picks for the **Magic** Invitational, along with Ken Krouner's thoughts on each one.

#1 Jeff Cunningham

Krouner: "Jeff is likely the most clever person to ever play on the PT in both humor and skill. Jeff won with unconventional draft picks and unexpected Constructed tech. He's one of the few North American pros to be at the top of the game in both Limited and Constructed."



#2 Antonino De Rosa

Krouner: "Antonino likes to put on the loveable buffoon act, but the boy can play. He's not only a great technical player; he's very good at reading his opponents and inducing errors. On top of all this he is a brilliant Constructed theorist and excels at draft. Most importantly of all, though, there are few better at putting a smile on your face."

#3 Neil Reeves

Krouner: "Neil is most likely the smartest man in the game today. I'd also wager that at this moment in time, he's the best player in the US. Neil is not exactly a student of the game, but that's because he doesn't have to be. If you hand Neil a deck he likes, he'll probably Top 8 with it. He spends a lot of time drafting, and you'll always find him looking for a team draft after Day 1 regardless of his performance."



#4 Osyp Lebedowicz

Krouner: "While he isn't putting up the numbers he once did, Osyp is a great player with an amazing resume. Few consummate pros that don't live in Japan put the kind of work into Constructed that he does. Think what you will of his humor, he definitely has an audience. Sound bites from Osyp often make PTs worth following."

#5 Tsuyoshi Fujita

Krouner: "Fujita has been around for a long time and has really earned his stripes as a true constructed mastermind and juggernaut, almost always coming to tournaments with inventive decks, or at a minimum, decks that people let fall off the radar."

*Reeves, Lebedowicz, and Fujita were all tied in Cumulative Rating Points. I broke the tie this way: Reeves got #3 because the other two went last year and I decided I'd go in favor of new blood. Lebedowicz got #4 because he scored higher on my Gut Check than Fujita. Osyp's well known for having a larger than life personality, but I haven't personally heard much about Fujita outside of being a fantastic **Magic** player.

	Gut Check Rating	Lifetime Pro Points	Lifetime PP Rating	Wizards Search Hits	Wizards Search Hits Rating	Google Hits	Google Hits Rating	Cumulative Rating Points
Jeff Cunningham	10	128	9	477	14	48,900	15	48
Antonino De Rosa	13	163	12	388	11	19,500	10	46
Neil Reeves	15	123	7	362	9	35,000	14	45
Osyp Lebedowicz	14	154	11	474	13	15,600	7	45
Tsuyoshi Fujita	3	244	15	522	15	24,500	12	45
Jeroen Remie	9	154	10	402	12	16,100	8	39
Masashi Oiso	2	175	14	350	8	20,800	11	35
Sam Gomersall	11	94	6	341	7	14,800	6	30
Tomi Walamies	8	165	13	279	5	10,200	3	29
Gerard Fabiano	6	124	8	372	10	13,000	5	29
Tim Aten	12	53	1	153	2	34,000	13	28
Gabe Walls	7	92	5	314	6	17,300	9	27
Craig Krempels	5	88	4	239	4	774	1	14
Mark Herberholz	4	74	3	175	3	893	2	12
Tomoharu Saitou	1	66	2	69	1	11,100	4	8

MTGO Events Calendar

I got an email from [WizO_Kwai_Chang](#), who wanted to share with us a new feature now found on the Wizards.Community forum boards.

WizO_Kwai_Chang: I am a moderator on the Wizards Message Boards. I wanted to alert you of our new "MTGO Events Calendar."

Recently two weekly columns sprung up covering the results of Standard Premier Events online. Both articles are a good read every week, but as an online player I found them lacking. Both articles focus solely on Standard, leaving out the other online Constructed formats. So I asked the MTGO Boards denizens for volunteers to help report on those other events.

I then asked my superiors for some means to provide the results to the public. And so, the [MTGO Events Calendar](#) was born!

So far one "Eye of Grog" (our catchy name for the reporters) has kept abreast of Premier events as shown there. Offkorn has done a spectacular job, and thankfully he will be getting some more help too.

We only have about a week's worth of events, due to the lull in Constructed play during Release Week. Over time this will increase. We will also have threads discussing results in the appropriate forums on the message boards.

I just hoped that you could share this with the Aether, I think many people will like the up to date results. -- Kwai Chang

Thanks, Kwai! If you haven't seen it yet, check it out! There are recaps from events starting from March 8th going forward, providing a very good way to get a quick look at how the lightning fast MTGO metagame evolves!

*Bennie Smith has been playing **Magic** since Arabian Nights, and writing about it nearly as long. Several of his early musings appeared on the Magic Dojo, and from there he became a featured writer for Star City Games and a Contributing Editor for Scrye Magazine before he started writing for [magicthegathering.com](#). While a casual gamer at heart, Bennie also thoroughly enjoys the competitive side of **Magic** and won the Virginia State Championship in 1999.*



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