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The Angel, the Spider, and the Invitational

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Latest Developments
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I love Brian David-Marshall. You all know he's a great writer, a well-connected traveler, and our very own Pro Tour Historian. Some of you know him as one of the founders of the famous Neutral Ground store in New York as well as the Gray Matter tournament group, making him one of the unsung pioneers of Magic Organized Play. To me, he's a grand storyteller, mischief-maker, and reveler that really makes the off-the-clock time at big events worth the trip for me.

Having traded places with BDM for last week's "Swap" theme/experiment/fiasco, I find myself with several loose-end topics this week that all kind of step on the toes of the stuff BDM usually writes about or has written about in the past. Too bad for him; I need all the compelling content I can find.

Revisiting BDM, Part 1

I got a bit of email after last week's "The Week That Was" column from fan's of Kamiel Cornelissen's **Firemane Angel** deck hoping that I could somehow get in touch with Kamiel and have him answer the same batch of questions that Nikolas Nygaard and Pierre Canali did.

I had no plans to hound Kamiel about it, but lo and behold, his answers were waiting for me in my Inbox when I returned from vacation. Here is what the Dutch superstar had to say about the unconventional control deck he took to a Top 16 finish in Honolulu.

Kamiel Cornelissen

Main Deck
61 cards

- 6 Island
- 5 Plains
- 4 Steam Vents
- 2 Sacred Foundry
- 4 Adarkar Wastes
- 2 Boros Garrison
- 1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds
- 24 lands
- 1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror
- 4 Firemane Angel
- 5 creatures

Sideboard

- 2 Boros Signet
- 2 Izzet Signet
- 4 Lightning Helix
- 3 Faith's Fetters
- 4 Wrath of God
- 4 Compulsive Research
- 2 Gifts Ungiven
- 1 Rewind
- 4 Hinder
- 4 Mana Leak
- 2 Zur's Weirding
- 32 other spells

1 Twincast

1 Shard Phoenix

1 Pithing Needle

1 Ivory Mask

4 Jushi Apprentice

2 Meloku the Clouded Mirror

4 Descendant of Kiyomaro

1 Tatumasa, the Dragon's Fang

15 sideboard cards

AF: Who designed the deck you played?

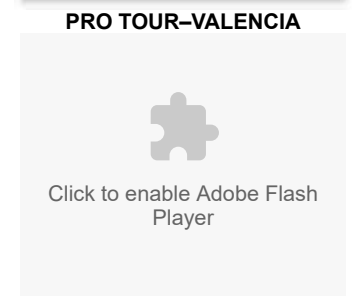
KC: When we started testing at the Beach House on the north shore of Oahu (not the Remie/Walls/Herberholz Beach House), where some of the Dutch and Geoffrey Siron and Bernardo da Costa Cabral stayed eight days before the PT, there was already a basic version of the deck. I'm not sure who designed it. Julien [Nuijten] and I liked it the best and started tuning it.

AF: Did you playtest it much?

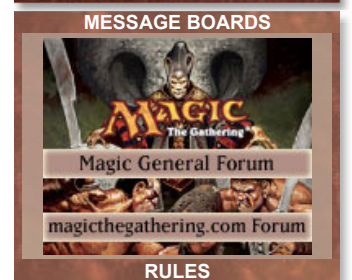
KC: The first couple of days I played all kind of decks and I couldn't find any deck that I really liked. The UWR deck was the deck I liked best, so the last three days I only played that deck against the decks we expected most.

AF: What metagame were you anticipating at the PT (what decks did you think would show up)?

KC: I expected a lot of different decks with no deck more than 20% of the field. Decks I expected to see most were Zoo, Mono U control, B/W card advantage (rats, Grottesque, Confidant), Gifts with Greater Good, B/W control.



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AF: What is your matchup like against "Owling Mine" (Tiago Chan's or Antoine Ruel's deck)?

KC: Actually I never tested a single game against the deck, because the other Dutch tested [it] mostly against Zoo and discarded the Owling Mine deck because it couldn't beat Zoo. I didn't play against it in the tournament either, only in the last round in which I ID'ed against Ryouma Shiozu. He told me the matchup would probably be about 50/50. On the one hand I have a lot of clunky cards like *Wrath of God* and *Faith's Fetters*, but I also have mana acceleration in the form of Signets and a lot of life gain with Helix, *Firemane Angel* and *Descendant of Kiyomaro*, which might make it hard for the Owling Mine player to actually kill me.

AF: What is your matchup like against aggro Black/White with lots of discard?

KC: It's pretty good for me as long as I try to play as an active deck and not sit back too much on counterspells. I took out *Hinder* and *Rewind* after sideboarding and brought in active cards like Meloku, Jushi, Tatsumasa and sometimes *Pithing Needle* and *Shard Phoenix*, depending on their version. This made the matchup a lot better.

AF: What are your best matchups?

KC: Creature decks like Zoo, Gruul beatdown and slower White, Green or Red creature decks. They can't beat all the creature removal and life gain. Gifts is also pretty good, because they need everything to come together and if you have *Zur's Weirding* early, they are usually missing either some color of mana, the sixth land or a business spell, so you can lock them out of the game.

AF: Would you play the same deck again if you could? Would you make changes to it?

KC: I liked the deck a lot, so I would probably play it again. I didn't like my matchups against U/R *Wildfire/Magnivore* and against B/W control decks with *Phyrexian Arena*, but I didn't think of a way to fix it. Gifts was usually not really spectacular, so I might cut it. *Shard Phoenix* was not very useful, because I had it mainly for the U/b Jushi/Confidant deck and the B/W deck with Lions and Isamaru, and both weren't played much.

AF: Would you recommend it to people playing Standard on *Magic Online* or in the Team PTQs?

KC: I think it's a great deck to beat all the aggressive decks and if you play against a control deck, the matchup is still pretty good because they don't know what you are playing. During the PT I got Extracted twice for cards that weren't in my deck (once for *Enduring Ideal* and once for *Wrath of God* after sideboarding).

As a responsible author, I have to point out that the other player piloting this deck in the event, Julien Nuijten, posted an abysmal record with it (zero wins), so consistency is not one of its strong points. More on young Mr. Nuijten later.

With the cat out of the proverbial bag, players that choose this deck should no longer expect opponents to "whiff" with *Cranial Extractions*, so diversifying the maindeck threats—even by one card—may be in order. It will be interesting to see if and how this deck evolves in the *Magic Online* and Team PTQ metagames.

Revisiting BDM, Part 2

In his valiant attempt at filling my size-12 Vans last week, BDM gave a rundown of various imaginary cards he'd created over the years. As someone whose job it is to analyze "made-up" **Magic** cards (when I'm not making them up myself), I think it'll be fun to give my gut-instinct developer's reaction to his cards.

1) Ancestral Graveyard

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Ancestral Graveyard
Land
As Ancestral Graveyard comes into play, choose a
creature type.
T: Add 1 to your mana pool.
R: Regenerate target creature of the chosen type.
```

Aside from its awesome flavor ("elephants' graveyards" are semi-mythical places where aged pachyderms go to die), the *Arabian Nights Elephant Graveyard* was cool because it gave a real shot in the arm to a group of underpowered creature types. Elephants and Mammoths were non-spectacular during **Magic's** early years, and by giving them this very narrow tool, Richard Garfield hoped that a new deck would spring forth based on those types.

Brian's card, which allows for the choice of which type the land regenerates, is too open-ended to be interesting. While new decks would emerge using the card, the most likely application of it would be in already powerful played-out tribal decks like Goblins, Slivers, Elves, and Zombies. In other words, it would reinforce existing strategies far more than it would encourage new ones—not the best set of qualities for a so-called "Johnny" card.

Granted, BDM came up with this card a decade ago, long before *Tempest's* Sliver hordes or the crushing throngs of *Onslaught's* Goblins and Elves. At that time, the best uses of the card were not that obvious. Were it to have been made, those early days would have been the time for it. But now that creature types are a major design tool, a card like this—at least at this power level—seems unlikely.

But rest assured that there are other fans of *Elephant Graveyard* here in R&D—myself and Mark Rosewater included—and we'll make a nifty new version of it someday soon, I promise.



2) Goblin Operative

Goblin Operative

WU

Creature - Goblin Merfolk Soldier

You may play Goblin Operative any time you could play an instant if you discard a Mountain rather than pay its mana cost.

Protection from red

2/1

If you go second, this is a 2/1 that can attack your opponent *on your first turn*. And it has protection from red. While I'm as much a fan of aggressive creatures as anyone here in the department, some lines shouldn't be crossed. *Mercadian Masques'* *Vine Dryad* already went down this path, offering you a 1/3 forestwalker for two cards and no mana, and that card saw plenty of tournament play in very successful decks. I can only imagine how much more insane a creature with twice as much power would be.

While I can appreciate the attempt to engineer interesting play situations by having the alternate cost vary wildly from the mana cost, the whole thing feels a bit forced, not to mention dangerous.

3) Sylvan Learning Center

Sylvan Learning Center

UB

Enchantment

At the beginning of your draw step, you may draw two cards. If you do, choose two cards in your hand drawn this turn. For each of those cards, pay 4 life or put the card on top of your library.

Here's an instance where we actually listened to BDM. He suggested this card to me and other staffers when Ravnica was still in design. He had no idea that we were working on a gold block at that time, not to mention that Black/Blue was one of the four combinations the first set would be highlighting. This card made it through all of design and the first few weeks of development before crashing and burning in the initial weeks of Constructed playtesting.

The first obstacle was the wording on the card. We copied it word-for-word from *Sylvan Library's* Oracle entry, which is a hacky mess. The problem lies in the fact that you draw a bunch of cards, and then are forced to differentiate the cards in your hand that were drawn this turn and those that were not. That difference is very difficult to enforce in a tournament, especially when you start mixing it with cards like *Howling Mine* and *Sensei's Divining Top*.

On top of the wording issue, the card was really freakin' powerful. Those of you that have played with *Sylvan Library* know that the best play more often than not is to immediately pay eight life for two bonus cards the turn after you play the Library, and then rely on deck shuffling to keep the goods flowing after that. Making the card Blue/Black as opposed to Green didn't change the power level one bit.

Development discussed a bunch of changes we could have made to the wording to clean it up and to the cost to make it more fair, but any change at all just distanced the card from *Sylvan Library*, which kind of defeated the purpose of making it in the first place.

But the real reason the card didn't get made was because of another two-mana Black card that exchanged life for cards given to us by another **Magic** player that didn't work at the company—one we were committed to print. Bob Maher's Invitational card that would become known as *Dark Confidant* occupied space very similar to the one that a Blue/Black *Sylvan Library* did as far as excitement and deckbuilding possibilities were concerned. So Brian, please blame Bob on this one.

4) Greedy's Grasp

Greedy's Grasp

1BG

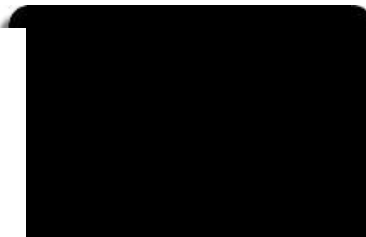
Creature - Spider

1/3

When Greedy's Grasp comes into play, target opponent reveals his or her hand. You may choose a land card from it and put it into play tapped under your control.

Greedy's Grasp may not - under any circumstances - block fliers.

Now here's a card I can get behind—a mana accelerator with sinister undertones. I have some concern with how swingy the card can be; if you play a *Birds of Paradise* on turn 1 and steal your opponent's second—and only remaining—land, the game could be all but over right there. At the same time, it's quite possible that you could play this on turn 3 and get nothing, meaning you just spent your turn on a vanilla 1/3 and got a look at your opponent's spell-packed grip.



I'm sure others in my position here in R&D think this card is patently absurd. Playtesting would bear out one opinion over the other, and I could easily see this thing sliding up a mana before all was said and done, although then it might not be good enough to be heavily played. A typical development dilemma.

In any event, the card piques my interest... almost enough to root for Mike Flores to win the Invitational. Almost.

As for the card's last line of text, while I like the in-joke (Jon Becker, one of Flores and BDM's long-time friends, has openly lamented the recent dearth of Spiders in Magic sets), we'd never print that. But I have assured Becker that there is an honest-to-God Spider in *Dissension* and two more in *Coldsnap*. Hopefully that's enough to keep him quiet.

The Invitational: R&D's Pick

Just like last year, we here in R&D had to keep revising who we wanted to send to the Invitational as our choices were slotted in the other voting categories. Antoine Ruel was the judges' choice, Tsuyoshi Fujita was the players' pick, and Antonino De Rosa won the North American ballot. So instead of having a semi-obvious choice in our back pockets, we had to step back and examine the big picture.

Who did we think embodied everything that was important in a pro **Magic** player? What exactly did we think was important? After a bit of discussion and arguing, we settled on young Julien Nuijten from the Netherlands as our pick.

A bit of historical background first. **Magic's** two best players—Jon Finkel and Kai Budde—have been its World Champion, a testament to the skill involved in the game. Between them they have 18 additional Top 8 appearances. But if you take the other eight World Champions since the inception of the Pro Tour, you'll find only five other Top 8's among them (one for Tom van de Logt, two each for Brian Selden and Jakub Slemr). The majority of **Magic's** World Champions never made a second Pro Tour Top 8. I don't think this contradicts the skill argument of Finkel and Budde's wins, but rather makes a new point: There is little motivation to stay fully dedicated to the game once you have achieved its top honor.

Julien Nuijten has stayed dedicated, winning two Grand Prix since his Worlds victory and making the Top 8 in a third. He travels extensively—impressive for someone not yet sixteen years old. He writes good solid strategy articles on the Internet, which shows a dedication to the community as a whole. Throughout it all, he remains friendly and humble. This amazing youngster is incredibly well-rounded and should be an inspiration to **Magic** players of any age.

Although Julien is on that list of Champions without a second PT Top 8, I expect that to change very shortly. In fact, one day we may list him with Finkel and Budde among the best ever to play.

Last Week's Poll:

Which of BDM's card designs would you most like to see in print?		
Greedy's Grasp	2519	28.8%
Dimir Library	2434	27.8%
Ancestral Graveyard	2158	24.7%
Goblin Operative	1638	18.7%
Total	8749	100.0%

We think alike! Maybe Flores' cheering section will be bigger than I thought...

Two Weeks Ago's Poll:

Should Standard be a regular Pro Tour format?		
Yes, Honolulu was great.	6521	68.7%
I don't care.	1820	19.2%
No, it isn't as interesting as Block or Extended.	616	6.5%
No, I don't like pros dictating the metagame.	535	5.6%
Total	9492	100.0%

I'll certainly bring this data to the next meeting that discusses Pro Tour formats. We plan on doing different things each year, but perhaps Standard will have a little more weight.

*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*



Becker says this is not really a spider.

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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