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Magic is a game of both skill and luck. Unlike chess, which is a game of perfect information, **Magic** is interesting because sometimes the less skillful player beats the grand champion. We complain about manascrew... but rarely about the other guy getting manascrewed. We vilify "netdeckers," but are constantly scouring message boards, Premium content, and most importantly the Top 8 lists here on *Swimming With Sharks*, to find the next killer deck. Have you ever wondered how it is the former happens or why it is that we spend so much effort on the latter? Remember that **Magic** is a game of both skill and luck. A lesser player can approximate skill against a stronger player if he has enough preparation, and in **Magic**, such preparation can masquerade as a player making his own luck.

Now when the local hero takes down a Pro Tour Champion, be it at the weekly Friday Night Magic or a team side draft, more often than not it is because – let's face it – the champ was manascrewed. But the remainder of the time, it is because that lucky upstart had some sort of edge. That edge may have been opening Savage Twister (and not telegraphing it while the confident favored master plays out his ostensibly perfect curve), or, in the realms of Constructed **Magic** where the edge doesn't necessarily disappear after a couple of draft rounds, that edge will usually manifest as a more focused or efficient strategy. It is in that vein that we can say that the most important – perhaps the only important – message any **Magic** strategy writer can convey to a reader is *how to get an edge*. An edge can be secret or breaking knowledge about the hidden gems of a draft format, or it can be introducing readers to a new way of thinking so that they can sharpen their own edges in the future. But there is no more common edge that readers seek than the edge on *deck*. The idea that if they have that new killer deck, they will have a greater chance to win the upcoming PTQ, Regional Championships, Friday Night Magic, or just the next match than they would with last week's tech is captivating to many.



The reasons a player can get an edge on deck are as varied as the good decks that get written about on the Internet (just as the blunted non-edges *given away* by unknowing players buying into bad decks come in as many flavors as bad deck articles). With the unveiling of *Coldsnap* this past weekend, and with it the return of cards that recall Force of Will or Bounty of the Hunt, the question seems to be whether any of *Coldsnap*'s ridiculous looking Cumulative Upkeep permanents might be the next (previously ridiculous looking) Illusions of Grandeur.

Even without a viable Illusions of Grandeur deck until Extended 2000, when *Ice Age* Block was the current set the first time around, getting an edge on deck was no less important than it is today. Believe it or not, while the level of deck technology found in the decks of old might not be quite peer to what we expect from today's top designers, the Pro Tour--Columbus Top 4 players – at both the Masters and Juniors levels – contributed greatly to the development of the game, and, in their best moments, showed a keen understanding of the metagame that would make any of today's best rogues thank them for laying down the groundwork.

Sean Fleischman



Sean Fleischman

Main Deck

61 cards

4 Adarkar Wastes	2 Blinking Spirit	3 Counterspell
4 Island	2 Ivory Gargoyle	3 Disenchant
2 Kjeldoran Outpost	4 creatures	2 Force of Will
6 Mountain		3 Incinerate
6 Plains		2 Jokulhaups
3 Sulfurous Springs		1 Lim-Dul's Vault
3 Thawing Glaciers		2 Mind Warp
2 Underground River		3 Power Sink
30 lands		2 Pyroclasm
		2 Stone Rain
		3 Swords to Plowshares
		1 Zuran Orb
		27 other spells



Ivory Gargoyle into Jokulhaups was one of the key combinations of *Ice Age* Block Constructed. The idea was that a player could use Jokulhaups to destroy almost every permanent, but with Ivory Gargoyle down, he would have a enough of a positional advantage to win the game, even if he were giving up his next draw step. The sweep was relatively poor - with Soulscour roughly a decade away in the third installment of the Block, there was no true Wrath of God analogue - so the metagame created a strange niche where Red board control defined many elements of the format, while Blue control decks for the most part, took a back seat in popularity.

While R/W Ivory Gargoyle/Jokulhaups decks were quite common and certainly known in the format, Sean Fleischman added an additional layer to his deck. Sean was playing Thawing Glaciers anyway... So why not take advantage of it, *really* take advantage? Instead of staying pure R/W,

Fleischman touched for Blue and Black. A light counter suite and the ability to maul the hand of an opposing control deck with Mind Warp (Sean would have tons of land in play because of his Glaciers, remember) were the differentiating factors of his deck, diversifying his options while still retaining the core values of Ivory Gargoyle, Jokulhaups, and Thawing Glaciers.

Today, we build decks with philosophies coming out of Fleischman's all the time. Just look at the modern Heartbeat of Spring deck:

Maximilian Bracht - Heartbeat



Main Deck

60 cards

10 Forest	1 Boomerang
10 Island	1 Compulsive Research
1 Mountain	4 Early Harvest
1 Swamp	4 Heartbeat of Spring
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22 lands	1 Invoke the Firemind
	4 Kodama's Reach
	4 Muddle the Mixture
	1 Recollect
4 Drift of Phantasms	4 Remand
1 Maga, Traitor to Mortals	4 Sensei's Divining Top
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	1 Weird Harvest
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9 creatures	29 other spells

Sideboard

3 Iwamori of the Open Fist
1 Keiga, the Tide Star
2 Meloku the Clouded Mirror
1 Pyroclasm
3 Savage Twister
1 Umezawa's Jitte
4 Vinelasher Kudzu

15 sideboard cards

While most of the Heartbeat of Spring decks that we saw in the past had Maga kills, Bracht's team innovated in Honolulu with the addition of Invoke the Firemind, a change that eventually became an archetype staple. The Heartbeat of Spring deck is core U/G, just as the core Ivory Gargoyle/Jokulhaups deck was core R/W. However, with its Sensei's Divining Tops and scads of basic land search, Heartbeat can successfully touch both Black and Red for its late game, just as Fleischman added Black and Blue... Bracht's deck was one of the best-tuned in Hawaii, which is why it saw so little revision in the main deck through the PTQ season to today. The only thing missing from Sean's deck, innovative as it was, was probably a single Swamp; his mana base could probably have afforded it.

Jon Finkel

On the other side of the tournament in the Juniors division, the uncrowned best player in the world was just tuning up, slaying sixteen year olds left and right... But Jon Finkel was an innovative **Magic** genius even in his early years, declaring innovation with his deck list that would weather the ice and stay with us a decade later.

Jon Finkel



Main Deck

62 cards

4 Adarkar Wastes	1 Binding Grasp
7 Island	4 Counterspell
2 Kjeldoran Outpost	4 Disenchant
5 Mountain	2 Force of Will
	1 Hydroblast

Sideboard

1 Binding Grasp
3 Burnout
1 Circle of Protection: Black
2 Circle of Protection: Green
2 Circle of Protection: Red
1 Circle of Protection: White

6 Plains	3 Icy Manipulator	1 Hydroblast
3 Thawing Glaciers	2 Jester's Cap	2 Lodestone Bauble
<hr/>	1 Lava Burst	1 Pyroblast
27 lands	2 Power Sink	1 Pyroclasm
	2 Pyroclasm	<hr/>
4 Blinking Spirit	4 Stone Rain	15 sideboard cards
<hr/>	4 Swords to Plowshares	
4 creatures	1 Zuran Orb	
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	31 other spells	

Just as many players had R/W Jokulhaups decks, U/W Counter-Post was a known, if probably less popular, strategy. The problem with most U/W decks was that they had no answer to someone else's Kjeldoran Outpost, or for that matter a Knight of Stromgald... But Finkel, per usual, had the solution.

Splashing Red was both perfect and easy for Jon. As with Fleischman, Finkel had access to the Thawing Glaciers engine necessary to branch out of his colors. The Red access gave him Pyroclasm, a card that, while not strictly *needed*, was more than good enough as a splash card on its own. Remember, U/W had no Wrath of God, and as this was *Ice Age*, U/W players had to deal with Knight of Stromgald (please refer to last week's article). Pyroclasm allowed the U/W deck to kill Knight of Stromgald despite its Protection from White, in situations where it would inevitably fall behind even with Binding Grasp access. The really important and innovative splash, however, was Stone Rain.



Stone Rain killed Kjeldoran Outpost.

That's it.

That's clearly not the whole story... *Ice Age / Alliances* was all about special lands. We had not just Kjeldoran Outpost but the arguably more important Thawing Glaciers. Blue mages supplemented their Browsers with Soldevi Excavations, and Black mages cast frighteningly large Soul Burns with the mighty Lake of the Dead. But yes, the reason that Stone Rain was ingenious for a deck with permission spells and strong interactive elements was that when it came down to a U/W-on-U/W shootout, Outpost was often an inexorable threat. Just as in Standard, where many a control deck can try to race Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree with Wrath of God or Wildfire, but going long that seemingly slow long game card will portend the death knell ten turns early, *Ice Age* era U/W players had few options in their traditional colors besides drawing more Outposts – and sufficient lands to power them – when faced with angry dude ranch.



Main Deck		Sideboard
<i>60 cards</i>		
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	1 Blaze	4 Annex
4 Shivan Reef	4 Compulsive Research	4 Giant Solifuge
4 Steam Vents	2 Confiscate	2 Pyroclasm
2 Tendo Ice Bridge	4 Electrolyze	2 Repeal
4 Urza's Mine	1 Invoke the Firemind	1 Ryusei, the Falling Star
4 Urza's Power Plant	4 Izzet Signet	2 Smash
4 Urza's Tower	4 Mana Leak	-----
-----	2 Pyroclasm	15 sideboard cards
23 lands	4 Remand	
	2 Telling Time	
	1 Tidings	
4 Keiga, the Tide Star	-----	
4 Meloku the Clouded Mirror	29 other spells	

8 creatures		

At this point you are probably used to looking at U/R UrzaTron decks with Wildfire or perhaps really extravagant lists with Simic Sky Swallower splashes, but for Pro Tour--Honolulu, the version Osyp Lebedowicz used to score Day One's only perfect record was built more for fundamental efficiency and developmental consistency than raw power once he already had the `Tron in place. For our purposes though, the important cards are to be found in the sideboard..

Annex-Wildfire was itself an archetype going into Pro Tour--Honolulu, but while Osyp's deck eschewed the fairly popular main deck Wildfires of later `Tron decks, he played a suite of somewhat unusual sideboard Annexes. These cards were partly there to disrupt Gifts Ungiven decks, but also won Osyp at least one match in the `Tron mirror. You see, just as Jon could create a sort of "Outpost advantage" (not to mention the raw two-for-one of destroying a Plains-eating Kjeldoran Outpost itself), Osyp could complete his own `Tron machinery – and simultaneously unseat the opponent's mana engine – with a single Annex. Woe on the bad guys if he drew two.

Olle Rade

Main Deck		Sideboard
<i>61 cards</i>		
7 Forest	2 Giant Growth	1 Anarchy
4 Karplusan Forest	4 Incinerate	2 Essence Filter
7 Mountain	1 Jokulhaups	1 Icy Manipulator
-----	2 Lava Burst	1 Jester's Cap
18 lands	2 Lodestone Bauble	1 Jokulhaups
	3 Pillage	1 Monsoon
	1 Pyroclasm	1 Primitive Justice
4 Deadly Insect	3 Stormbind	2 Pyroblast
4 Fyndhorn Elves	4 Urza's Bauble	2 Pyroclasm

4 Giant Trap Door Spider
1 Gorilla Shaman
2 Orcish Cannoneers
2 Storm Shaman
4 Woolly Spider

22 other spells

2 Vexing Arcanix
1 Zuran Orb

15 sideboard cards

21 creatures

It would be basically impossible to present an article on gaining an edge on deck in *Ice Age* Block and ignore the unassuming most successful deck of them all. Olle Rade leapt onto the international stage with his win at Pro Tour--Columbus with an odd looking G/R "beatdown" deck featuring the queerest alleged attackers of all... 2/3 Spiders for three mana.



As we have discussed in the past, these Spiders, still somewhat aggressive, were a superb metagame call. Look at the two contemporary decks above. Remember the limitation on White removal we have already discussed. Consider Olle's own colors and how he can use their strengths and limitations to sculpt a weapon to perfectly fit the needs of the format. Finally, consider the glacial speed of his opponents' decks, and what might qualify as an attack deck in that context. 2/3 Spiders and other three-drops suddenly seem less ridiculous.

Alongside Pyroclasm as the main sweeper, another important tool for a long game – and a card Olle himself used – was Stormbind. Stormbind was awesome against many of the format's defining creatures, and provided a nearly limitless supply of Glacial Rays to point at the opponent's head, even when his hand was full of permission. In a stroke of clear understanding – remembering what we said about the known factor of Ivory Gargoyle/Jokulhaups – Rade won the Pro Tour

by recovering from Fleischman's Jokulhaups with a Fyndhorn Elves and then denying him every draw step in the late game. As good as Stormbind was, just like Pyroclasm, *it simply did not stop a Spider*, at least without great cost (for lowly Spider-killing, that is). While Olle did play some cards that could die to common removal – notably the aforementioned Fyndhorn Elves (and these are the equivalent of Llanowar Elves we are talking about) – his offensive suite for the most part dodged the common Red removal cards. Orcish Cannoneers shared Team Spider's three toughness and their resistance to Pyroclasm and Stormbind, while themselves presenting a strong two direct damage front to supplement Olle's own firepower. Deadly Insect, while vulnerable to Pyroclasm, could be targeted by neither Swords to Plowshares nor Incinerate, and was generally hell on control and a difficult creature for Necropotence to beat. Storm Shaman resisted both Pyroclasm *and* Incinerate while presenting anything but an attractive target for Swords to Plowshares...

In total, this particular combination of threats, strange and slow as they might seem for the beatdown, was about more than just playing good cards, more than just playing *different* (read "pet," "rogue," "janky," or "tech") cards. When there are various reasonable cards of similar power level, the most impressive tuning implementations are those that take the opponents' potential strategies into account when making difficult cut decisions. Olle's deck is an attack. Its cards might not look like much, but they are blatantly offensive to opponents with straightforward and predictable strategies. Ten years later, the modern Gruul, a destructive G/R philosophy that is quite obviously lower on the

power curve than many other *Ravnica* Guilds, took up Rade's banner to win the Pro Tour using much the same philosophy.

Mark Herberholz – Gruul Beats



Main Deck

60 cards

6 Forest	4 Char
4 Karplusan Forest	3 Flames of the Blood Hand
7 Mountain	3 Moldervine Cloak
2 Skarrg, the Rage Pits	
4 Stomping Ground	10 other spells

23 lands

4 Burning-Tree Shaman
4 Dryad Sophisticate
3 Frenzied Goblin
4 Giant Solifuge
4 Kird Ape
4 Scab-Clan Mauler
4 Scorched Rusalka

27 creatures

Sideboard

4 Blood Moon
1 Flames of the Blood Hand
2 Naturalize
2 Rumbling Slum
2 Tin Street Hooligan
4 Umezawa's Jitte

15 sideboard cards

This is a deck you have seen in this column repeatedly and you have probably seen it across the table more than once in the past three or four months if you have been playing any organized Standard. Besides being just a good deck with synergistic card selections, Heezy Street plays on the offense, just as Rade's Spider deck did, before ever sitting down at the table, a masterwork of strategic mind games and impeccable preparation.

Here is a simple question: Boros Deck Wins was arguably the most popular deck at Champs in October, and remained the most popular offensive deck in Standard up until *Guildpact* and the advent of the Gruul. Keeping in mind that either strategy can play Giant Solifuge, Shock, Char, and so on, given that R/W arguably plays stronger or at least more efficient support cards than G/R, viz. Lightning Helix, *why is it that not only did Mark win the Pro Tour with his version of G/R, but that there was such a mass exodus from the popular R/W to more G/R-based decks?*

The answer is deceptively simple: Like Rade's Spiders, Mark played a ton of creatures that don't die to Pyroclasm. True, again like Rade, he didn't play *all* creatures that don't die to Pyroclasm, but the move from Leonin Skyhunters and Skyknight Legionnaires to Scab-Clan Maulers and Burning-Tree Shamans (including incidental hybrids like Watchwolf in Zoo) really hurt the ability of the non-White board control decks of the last Standard Pro Tour to defend themselves against x/3 rather than x/2 offenses. In fact, it actually created a disincentive where previously Pyroclasm was an automatic three- or four-of. Osyp didn't play four Pyroclasm main, and though he did side in the balance against Mark, he wasn't particularly happy to do so.

Again echoing Rade's resilience to removal via the format's G/R beatdown deck, Heezy supplemented against White removal and life gain. As has been stressed in every analysis of this truly perfectly tuned deck, Mark used Scorched Rusalka, Giant Solifuge, and Flames of the Blood Hand where other reasonable options (Llanowar Elves, Rumbling Slum and Shock respectively), were available. These concrete decisions, which were made in order to mitigate the effects of Faith's Fetters and Loxodon Hierarchy, went a long way in contributing to the robust offense of Heezy Street in a format with some of the best defensive capabilities – specifically Red-hating ones – in recent Standard memory.

The result was victory.

When we talk about getting an edge on deck, we aren't talking about adopting, necessarily, the most recent Deck to Beat or even taking advantage of the sometimes “broken combos” that present themselves from time to time (though with some decks, missing those decks actually means giving up your best edge in the case that your best edge might be zero rather than a negative), at least not *merely*. Getting an edge is about not just finding that powerful engine, but squeezing another capability out of it, or *colors* as Fleischman did, without disrupting what makes it good in the first place. It is about anticipating the power of other players seeing the same strengths in the best cards and incorporating a strategy that allows you not only to utilize them yourself, but to be able to deal with them when an opponent proves as smart as you (like Finkel did). It means you know what the possibilities for a format, its limits or fundamental turn are, and presenting an offense that makes them laughable, like Rade did.

