

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Draft Extravaganza: Part 1

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In the hustle and bustle of Spike Limited, I think it's important to remember that draft is for fun too. This series won't do much for improving your play, but it was a good time. Playing games with friends is a big part of my holiday experience.

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Once in a while, we'll have a discussion about the best draft format of all time. There's no right answer here, it's usually just defined by your personal favorites. For some people, it's the incredible and diverse *Ravnica* block. If your favorite format of all time is *Ravnica* or *Coldsnap* draft, you're in great shape right now. Opportunities to draft your favorite format are abundant. However, there a lot of people with fond memories of the older cards. A lot of those sets are no longer in print, and hence, difficult to play with. Me, I have a soft spot for *Tempest* block, but try getting a draft of *that* going these days.



Enter Tony Mayer. Once upon a time, Seattle's premiere Level 3 judge was in the same place, bemoaning the fact his favorite formats were no longer offered for general consumption. Being surrounded by friends and colleagues who had similar complaints, Tony hatched an idea.

"What if", he mused "we had a tournament where we continuously drafted a bunch of old sets? Then lots of people could reminisce about olden times, while brand new players could draft with cards they've have seen before!" Brilliance incarnate, and the Draft Extravaganza was born. The first extravaganza was a few years ago, and was an absolute smash hit. Draft upon draft over a very long day was practically heaven for a great many local players, yours truly included. Since that time, Tony has run an extravaganza about once a year. It's still wildly popular for those that can

sacrifice a Saturday to attend. Since the extravaganza uses lots of sets, most out of date, the tournament itself isn't sanctioned by the DCI, which means Wizards of the Coast employees are allowed to play. That wouldn't be a big deal if the tournament was held in Nepal, but in the Seattle area, it's pretty relevant. At least a couple Wizards employees have always shown up to play, to the pleasure of us mortals.

This year's extravaganza was coming up soon, to the excitement of all. In past events, Tony had four drafts at three rounds apiece, with a Top 8 draft after the swiss rounds were over. This year he decided to merely do *five* drafts at two rounds apiece and tally up a winner at the end. A day of ten rounds and five drafts was going to take forever! It was going to be great.

The formats were pretty diverse this time around. *Ravnica* block was in because it was something people were comfortable with, and lots of fun to draft besides. *Invasion* block has been in every single extravaganza, for reasons similar to Rav. Those multi-colored blocks seem to generate a lot of loyalty.

Mirrodin block was included because it had been a couple of years since it was in rotation, while still having packs that were available. Why not draft *Beta/Arabian Nights/Portal II*? Hey, you're welcome to it if you can find the packs and people willing to pony up the money to crack them. That kind of draft would probably be a poor one anyway. We wanted sets that were accessible, had nostalgia value, and most importantly were *fun*. The draft extravaganza is a casual format of the first order. *Mirrodin* block had some diehard fans, and it was long enough ago people could rediscover their drafting style. It was a good choice.



The author on the morning of the draft extravaganza.

Also on the list was a brand new concoction - the Core Set draft. Specifically, *7th/8th/9th Edition* drafting. No one had a clue if this was going to be amazing or not, but everyone was game to give it a shot.

The final format was the most advertised of the drafts. *Ice Age/Alliances/Coldsnap* draft was the name of this one, and it promised some very interesting experiences. A lot of players had never played with *Ice Age* at all, and for us old fogeys who had, it had still been a while. Originally the plan was IACC, but a bunch of players raised an

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outcry over "modernizing" the format. There was some debate back and forth, but in the end the interests of the pure won out. It turned out to be an excellent decision.

As I mentioned, this Saturday was going to take a very long time to finish. People wanted to get started early, to have a semblance of a chance of getting home before Sunday. I reasonably argued for a Noon start time, but my circadian arguments were summarily shot down. Ah well, at least there's coffee.



Arriving at 8:30AM, I was greeted by a bunch of people already engaging in games. Mark Gottlieb was hanging out playing highlander. Over in the corner, John Carter was getting trounced by someone's *Mindslaver* concoction. The mood in the room was positive but subdued. You knew everyone was happy to be there, just not *quite* that early. A common **Magic** player trait. I mumbled my hellos and attacked my coffee. When 9:00AM rolled around, Tony welcomed the assembly and thanked everyone for coming. He kept the speech mercifully short, for which we were all grateful. Today was Drafting Day. Sleepy or not, we wanted to draft! Here's a picture of all the packs used on the day. (The packs were given out ahead of time so in case anyone wanted to drop, they'd still get their purchased product.)

38 people came to play. Of those, we had a level 1 judge, a level 2 judge, a level 3 judge, and a level 4 judge. The group also included a former and current rules manager of **Magic: The Gathering**. This may have been the best judged casual event in the history of the game.



The first draft was RGD. This was decided because it allowed people to ease into the process, with a format people were comfortable with. RGD isn't usually an environment people equate with comfort and/or ease, but since no one had a clue what to do with IAC, it did make sense.

My opening pack had the choice of *Peel from Reality* or *Agrus Kos, Wojek Veteran*. While I adore Agrus, I couldn't justify take a two-colored card over a single-colored card of approximate value. Unfortunately for my left-handed neighbor, it was unlikely I was going to stay out of both Red and White, as G/B/U is a pretty weak combination. I could only hope the gentleman on my left, Tony Mayer in this case, could read those signals in time. The next pack was an easy *Oathsworn Giant*, then *Veteran Armorer*, then *Conclave Phalanx*. The *Benevolent Ancestor* from pack one tabled. Clearly White was the color to be in. I had a touch of other Blue to play around with, making Azorius a strong contender for *Dissension*. The real question was whether the W/U was going to go with Izzet or Orzhov. I had a *Skyknight Legionnaire* that would fit well, but there were also some late Dimir cards. The opening of *Guildpact* saw a shiny *Pillory of the Sleepless* staring back, and my decision was set. *Shrieking Grottesque* and *Orzhov Guildmage* were other solid inclusions, as well as two very welcome bounce lands. Mostly though, the real action came in *Dissension*.

The first pack's decision was split between *Cackling Flames* and *Guardian of the Guildpact*. Through the *Izzet Boilerworks* and prevalence of Rakdos fixers in Diss, I went with the red burn spell, on the assumption that I could make it a free include. I wasn't positive it was the right call until the *Guardian of the Guildpact* tabled. *Dissension* was a real shot in the arm for the build, giving me a lot of confidence for the two rounds ahead. Here's the deck:



Main Deck
40 cards

1 Azorius Chancery	1 Absolver Thrull	1 Azorius Signet
3 Island	1 Azorius Guildmage	1 Cackling Flames
1 Izzet Boilerworks	1 Benevolent Ancestor	1 Carom
1 Orzhov Basilica	1 Conclave Phalanx	1 Consult the Necrosages
6 Plains	2 Guardian of the Guildpact	1 Grifter's Blade
1 Rakdos Carnarium	1 Minister of Impediments	1 Peel from Reality
2 Swamp	1 Oathsworn Giant	1 Pillory of the Sleepless
15 lands	1 Orzhov Euthanist	1 Remand
	1 Orzhov Guildmage	1 Withstand
	1 Poisonbelly Ogre	9 other spells
	1 Roofstalker Wight	
	1 Shrieking Grotosque	
	1 Spawnbroker	
	1 Torch Drake	
	1 Veteran Armorer	
	16 creatures	

I particularly liked the **Spawnbroker/Grifter's Blade** combo, although with only two rounds, it didn't actually come up. This was a tight package, with a lot of early aggression and two Guildmages to win in case of a late game stall. With tricks and removal to round things out, I had a potent collection in my hands.

Round 1 - Blaine Kuskie

Blaine was an affable 30-something gentleman who seemed happy to be there. Blaine was also gracious enough to let me in on the fact he thought his deck was very strong, and I might have a tough time "keeping up." Hmm, I was thinking the same thing.

Game 1: Blaine was interestingly playing the same color combination as me, with generally the same theme of cheap, evasive creatures. The first game he came out blazing with a **Mourning Thrull** enchanted with **Might of the Nephilim** and **Infiltrator's Magemark**. I didn't actually have an answer available, although **Benevolent Ancestor** was stemming the flow somewhat. Instead of trying to contain the big Thrull, I just kept playing creatures of various sizes and abilities. A mid-game **Conclave Phalanx** gave me a lot of breathing room. Despite Blaine gaining three life a turn, I was still doing considerable damage with my air force. Blaine's **Sky Hussar** bought him a turn, but the next draw step yielded **Absolver Thrull**. With his major guy shrunk, my creatures swarmed all over what was left. Hussar took out a guy, but my creatures killed the rest of his. Next turn it was over.

The second game was a lot less swingy. Blaine was short Blue mana, which allowed threats to come through unimpeded. The game was over rapidly. Blaine seemed genuinely annoyed with his loss, but shrugged it off to "the whims of the mana gods." We shook hands and I wished him good luck on the rest of day. We played another game for fun, to similar results. His deck just couldn't sustain prolonged aggression.

1-0

Despite the three games we played, my match was over pretty quickly. I wandered around the room, looking for amusing game situations to capture. Eric Reasoner's turn 4 **Niv-Mizzet, the Firemind** seemed like a nice one. At least it looked good until I saw this rather incredible play. This man's opponent was floored. I could only imagine how he'd react if he saw the rest of the guy's hand.



Turn 3!

As the round was wrapping up, the energy in the room started to rise. People started waking up, getting excited by the incipient amount of **Magic** that was about to be played. It wasn't a very large change, but it was noticeable. People were starting to find their groove and get into the spirit of the event. The general mood shifted from sleepy trepidation to confidence and anticipation. It was going to be a good day.

Round 2 - Josh Laff

Josh has this appealing yet troubling aspect of appearing as a pretty woman if you catch him out of the corner of your eye. It was flummoxing. You would come into a room and see a person with tresses, tresses that could only be described as flowing, in the flimsiest of shirts. You could only assume this lady had entered the tournament room by accident, picked up a deck by accident and started shuffling it by accident, even somehow, because she was so accident-prone I guess, started playing a game of **Magic** by accident. But no, it's your mistake. It's *Josh*.

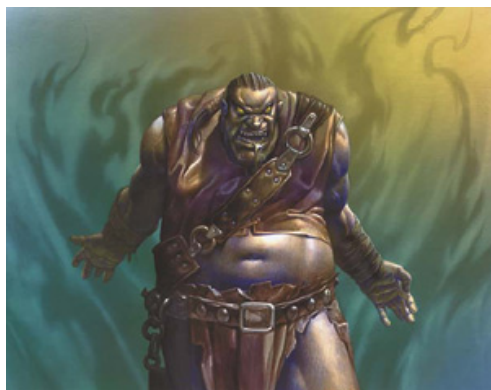


Nice guy. He's become a much stronger player recently, mostly by playing more and asking questions. While he hasn't reached top tier status yet, it's clear he's doing something right. The amusing part was Josh consulting me about his mana base before the round started. Sure, I gave him some tips. It's a casual event, and what are the odds it would come back to bite me?

Game 1: The reason Josh asked for help with his mana was because it was so difficult. **Borborygmos**, **Bramble Elemental**, **Leap of Flame**... his colors were dedicated and divided. Josh wanted so badly to play his **Wild Cantors**, but I disabused him of that notion. Because his mana was better, and his cards were better, game 1 was a remarkably engaging affair. Of particular annoyance was Josh's **Novijen**, **Heart of Progress** and his uncanny ability to find auras for his **Bramble Elemental**. On the one hand, I had the Minister of impediments for tapping down Bramble Man, but the multiple batches of 2/2s required their own attention.

My job was to stem the tide of tokens. Barring that, my plan was to make playing tokens an unappealing option. **Poisonbelly Ogre**, you are so underrated. Despite the Poisonbelly's ability and 3/3 largess, Josh continued to play out creatures. I was trying to go on the offensive as well as I could, but most of my creatures were needed for defensive duty. **Guardian of the Guildpact** was really the only creature I could safely push forward, and even that attack wasn't reliable. One sequence that went well was Josh revealing a **Leap of Flame** off **Coiling Oracle**. That trick held me off for a few turns, until I inexplicably attacked into some smaller creatures with the Poisonbelly. Sure enough Josh, attempted a **Leap of Flame**-enabled block, but my **Withstand** negated it nicely. Yet I still couldn't punch through! It was actually getting frustrating; I would find some advantage, a little chink in the armor to crawl through, and Josh would play some series of creatures that prevented any kind of exploitation. I was drawing a lot of lands at this point too, apparently not following my own mana advice.

Finally there came the point, after much trading of spells and creatures, where we were both on empty. As the board stood, if there was a "freeze" on playing anything new, I would win the game at 2 life. I just needed for Josh to draw nothing for two turns, or if he did pluck something, for me to have the counterbalance. Josh drew his card, grimaced, and did his necessary attack. I took my lumps and Josh passed without playing anything new. During his end step I studied the board long and hard, going over the math and confirming my original assessment. Indeed, if Josh had nothing for just a little bit longer, I would win. Two life isn't much of a cushion, but it's better than nothing. With a sigh (the game had been going on for some time) I untapped. Off the top of the library was **Azorius Guildmage**. With the dozen lands currently in play, I won the game on the spot. Nice catch!



Game 2: This game was about the race, pure and simple. My fliers versus his ground creatures. It sounds like a poor matchup, but I had speed and **Conclave Phalanx** on my half.

We traded blows for a little while, to a roughly even position. The game swiftly turned lopsided when I cast **Peel from Reality**, targeting my Phalanx and his **Siege Wurm**, in response to the Wurm about to receive a **Flight of Fancy**. The massive tempo shift swung things heavily, and Josh conceded a turn later.

2-0

Shortly after, it was time for the draft we were all waiting for. I suppose I technically had an advantage, having played with **Ice Age** and **Alliances** before, but it was a *very* long time ago. Still, I could recognize a **Dire Wolves** image off the front of my **Ice Age** booster, and I think that counts for something.

[Aaron Forsythe wrote here](#) that he believed an **Ice/Alliances/Coldsnap** draft would be "underwhelming." Truly, the designers back in the day didn't work out the kinks of their sets for Limited play. Something's probably flawed when **Imposing Visage** and **Lava Burst** are at the same commonality. Yet there's a pleasure in working with the dregs. After the **Incinerates** and **Folk of the Pines** are snatched up, you're forced into some mediocre action. **Foxfire**, **Adarkar Unicorn**, **Aurochs**... The cards that would be at the bottom third of a booster in a modern evaluation look like all-stars in the **Ice Age** realm of yore. It's way more engaging when you have handicaps and

have to think a little outside the box to get a synergistic deck. Old-school military action with cavalry and infantry and terrain is far more interesting than which country has more ICBMs. Or as another writer on this site likes to put it, "restrictions breed creativity."

As we were sitting down to draft, I figured things would be kind of slow. For a lot of the players, *Ice Age* cards were being seen for the very first time, at least non-marquee commons. This was true for maybe the first five picks, then things started moving at a brisk pace. It wasn't that those people had memorized all the IA cards by that point. It was just anything left past pick five was probably garbage, and often confusing besides. No one wanted to waste mental energy figuring out exactly what degree of suck a particular card fell into. As were drafting, gentle utterances escaped, wafting on the air like so much auditory perfume.

"Veldt is rare?"
 "These packs are so bad!"
 "How could there be nothing playable by pick three?"
 "I don't understand what this card does (frequent)."
 "White Scarab does nothing..."
 "Seriously, Veldt!?"

It was terribly amusing. From this end, I was shooting for a *Jokulhaups* or *Lava Burst*, or maybe *Swords to Plowshares* or *Stormbind* or the *Bone Crank*. A quick shuffle to the rare position revealed the always enchanting *Chromatic Armor*. The hunt for playables landed me exactly two: *Soul Burn* and *Soldevi Simulacrum*. I'm not kidding at all, there was nothing left even remotely at the same level as those two cards. Neither card was that bad actually; *Soul Burn* was slightly better but required more of a commitment. I went with the more powerful card and was rewarded with a steady supply of Black cards throughout *Ice Age*, and a late gift of an actual *Counterspell*. My picks were remarkably simplistic; I seemed to be the only Black drafter nearby. Blue was probably going to be the second color, although there seemed to be a slight possibility of White as well. Not surprisingly, Red and Green were completely dry.



Veldt is rare?

Going into *Alliances*, I was looking for either *Contagion* or the ultimate brass ring, *Thawing Glaciers*. *Ivory Gargoyle* would have been nice too, although far nicer with that missing 'Haups. 11 cards to look at, and the best I could take was *Benthic Explorers*. I needed guys, but not that bad! *Storm Elemental* was a far more pleasing second pick, and I was loving my third pick of *Feast or Famine*. Things filled out as best they could, including an ironically 6th pick duplicate *Benthic Explorers*. *Coldsnap* wasn't bad for me, but not particularly exceptional. The triple *Chill to the Bone* was great of course; they kill practically everything in the environment. I was still short on creatures though, and aside from *Drelnoch*, didn't get anything I was truly happy to attack with. Here's the deck:

Draft 2-Ice Age/Alliances/Coldsnap		
Main Deck 40 cards		
7 <i>Island</i>	1 <i>Adarkar Sentinel</i>	3 <i>Chill to the Bone</i>
1 <i>Snow-Covered Plains</i>	2 <i>Benthic Explorers</i>	1 <i>Counterspell</i>
1 <i>Snow-Covered Swamp</i>	1 <i>Chilling Shade</i>	1 <i>Feast or Famine</i>
9 <i>Swamp</i>	1 <i>Drelnoch</i>	1 <i>Soul Burn</i>
18 lands	1 <i>Gutless Ghoul</i>	1 <i>Stench of Decay</i>
	1 <i>Hoar Shade</i>	1 <i>Thermal Flux</i>
	2 <i>Insidious Bookworms</i>	8 other spells
	1 <i>Keeper of Tresserhorn</i>	
	1 <i>Kjeldoran Dead</i>	
	1 <i>Lim-Dul's Cohort</i>	
	1 <i>Storm Elemental</i>	
	1 <i>Zuran Enchanter</i>	
	14 creatures	

Lots of removal and really bad creatures. A relentless attack of two damage a turn, with hopefully enough removal to clear away everything. My creatures were so bad. Even when they had six power, they were attacking for two. Into the breach!

Round 3 - Eric Schaler

Eric was a fun guy, cracking jokes and overall giving the impression he was having a good time. When I asked him if he had a plan drafting IAC, he looked startled, as if the idea hadn't occurred to him. He had a point; I'm not sure what kind of strategy you could have. "Play less badly," I suppose.

Game 1: Eric appeared to be Black/Blue as well. Early on in the first game, I had out a *Benthic Explorers* versus Eric's *Rimewind Cryomancer* and a random 2/2. With a *Chill to the Bone* in hand, I sneakily attacked. When Eric would double block, I'd Chill away the Cryomancer and let combat take care of the 2/2. Sneaky, and remarkably dumb. Of course Eric blocked my 2/4 with his 2/3, like he should, and I just passed. Next turn he attacked with both of his creatures, of course, and I had to Chill away the Cryomancer while still taking two points. Then he cast *Frozen Solid* on the inexplicably tapped *Benthic Explorers*. Whoops. My other silly mistake came a few turns later. Eric had out a freshly cast *Brine Shaman*, along with three untapped lands. For whatever reason, I thought *Brine*

Shaman's second ability was $2\text{ } \blacklozenge\text{ } \blacklozenge$ not $1\text{ } \blacklozenge\text{ } \blacklozenge$. I'm not sure why I assumed I knew ability costs of cards I hadn't seen in play in ten years. Regardless, that little hubris cost me my second **Benthic Explorers**.

Despite these missteps, the game wasn't actually going that badly. Eric seemed stuck with a lot of cards in hand, presumably because he hadn't drawn his third color. My **Kjeldoran Dead** replaced the Frozen creature with a credible threat. I even had **Counterspell** backup, a rare protection these days. That counter was used a few turns later when Eric dropped Forest and **Scaled Wurm**. Eric showed his *fourth* color a few turns after that, but it still wasn't enough to overcome the Dead plus a **Feast or Famine** token, and **Soul Burn** wrapped it up.

Game 2, Eric took the ultimate IAC hit: losing **Phyrexian War Beast** after already being short land. **Chill to the Bone** had a lot of impact that early in the game and Eric couldn't quite recover. My lumbering **Shock** men were enough to win the match.

3-0

Round 4 - Ricky Boyes

Ricky Boyes is a fun guy and one of the strongest players in the state. He's perennially qualified for Pro Tours on rating, and always gives a good fight. He's got one of the most dangerous talents an opponent can have: he can find the win in a losing situation. A lot of players start looking at how to stay alive when they're on the back end of aggression. Ricky, and the talented players like him, use that time to find ways of dealing damage back, ways to trap an overeager opponent, etc. Ricky certainly has skill, but what's more dangerous to an opponent is that Rick is an escape artist.

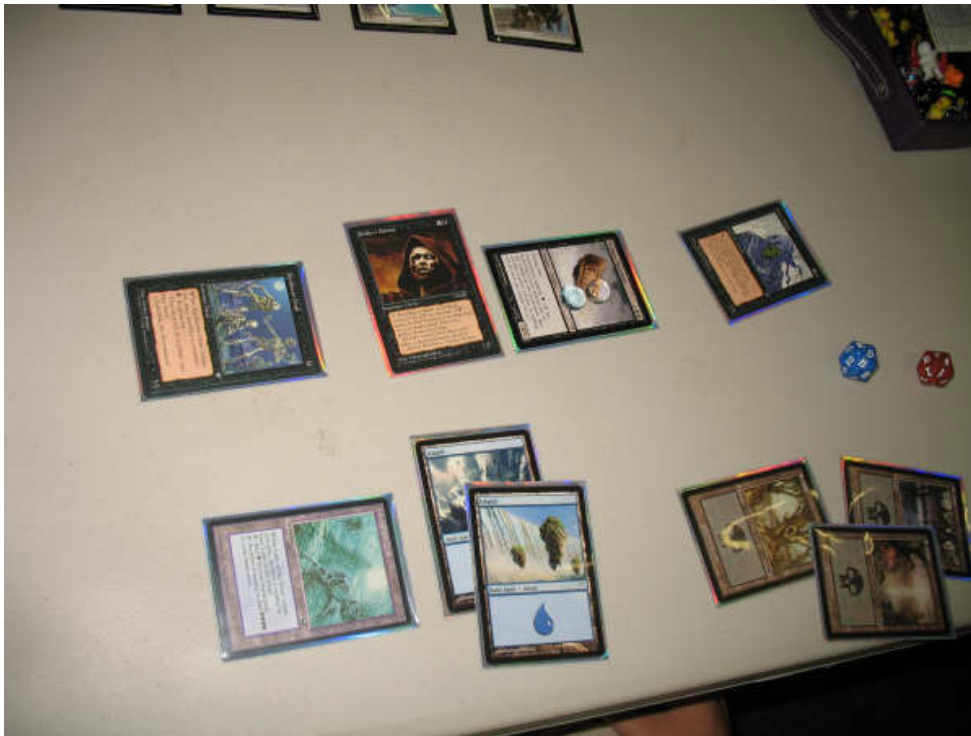
Game 1: Ricky played like he couldn't conceive of the possibility of an IAC deck has as much removal as mine does. A random **Chill to the Bone** gets rid of a **Johtull Wurm** and a **Resize** in the grave. Ricky retorts with a doozy. I have out **Insidious Bookworms**, **Benthic Explorers**, and **Zuran Enchanter**. I cast **Kjeldoran Dead** and in response to the sacrifice trigger, Ricky casts **Stench of Decay!** Wrath, targeting you? Despite the setback, it's going alright for a while. I'm dealing pinks when possible, but it's slow going. That offense doesn't last - Ricky found that **Contagion** I was hoping for in the draft, and we hit the late stages. We've both got a lot of lands out, me with some removal and no good guys, him with some guys in play and nothing in hand. Things spun downward when Ricky cast **Grim Harvest** at the end of a turn. Now **Grim Harvest** I could technically remove, if I could force Ricky into a blocking position, with lots of removal and maybe a **Counterspell**. That simply was not going to happen with this deck, and the Harvest overtakes me.

Game 2: I side in ultimate anti-recover tech: **Leshrac's Sigil**. This card was *awful* back in the day, but in this matchup it made sense. Ricky is heavy Green, with only a little Black. I've got the Swamps to spare, and those Recover cards are far too strong against this deck. Ricky goes aggressive with his **Grim Harvest** here, trying to outrace Sigil and the removal. This is actually totally backwards; if Ricky had waited until he had ten lands out and his Grim was invincible, I don't think I can possibly win. Luckily he tried to go aggro, one thing this deck does quash nicely. Unopposed (finally), I began my own attacks with my little guys. I'm dealing a fair amount of damage after we're both out of cards. Ricky recovers very well and proceeds to draw and play an assortment of threats, while I'm stuck with only lands. I'm still pushing through when possible, but it's getting harder and harder, and the lands continue to come. Finally, I've gotten Ricky down to one life while he's assembled a nice collection of creatures. I've drawn at this point 16 lands. Because Ricky was so low in life, he wasn't able to attack me as fully as he'd like, but drawing and playing a bunch of creatures gave him some opportunity. Finally I'm forced to start sacrificing to **Gutless Ghoul** to stay alive. I hit the point where I'll need either a **Soul Burn** or **Storm Elemental** with a snow land on top to win. It doesn't appear and Ricky takes the match.

3-1

Despite that loss, IAC was an awful lot of fun. I saw some very unusual board situations because this format.





Ah **Lake of the Dead** and **Hoar Shade**, a classic. If you want to throw your Black mana in a different direction, **Phobia Phantasm** appreciates it too.

My favorite image was this one:



The Skull lives

What's more dangerous than **Necropotence**? Why, **Necropotence** combined with **Lim-Dul's Hex** and **Phantasmal Fiend** enchanted with **Fear**! **Necropotence** isn't even particularly useful in Limited, but that permutation was too amusing to pass up.

People had a good time - a really good time actually - but we were ready to go back to power drafting, gold-styles. IPA was next, and it was supposed to be quite a shift from this session's offerings. As the round ended, people were gathering in little clumps to discuss the intricacies of IPA drafting, well-known for its complexity. Tony, perhaps wishing to bone up on IPA himself, declared a lunch break. Or maybe he just saw this shirt:



Seemed like as good a stopping point as any. I'll be back next week with the remainder of this year's extravaganza. Thanks for reading.

-Noah



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