

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Draft Extravagance: Part 2

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Limited Information
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The conclusion from last week. Even the most competitive of players should remember to have fun once in a while. Happy holidays!

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You can read part 1 [here](#).

Lunch comes and the tourney players break up into small groups. All the attendees are laughing and swapping stories, talking about upcoming strategies; generally having a good time at a very relaxed Magic tournament. I'm sitting at a table with Mark Gottlieb, Eric Reasoner and Devin Low and the conversation, appropriately, turns to food. Most of us are eating chicken teriyaki, as that has the nearest take-out. MaGo is eating something else entirely. When asked, Mark explains that he's a vegetarian. This prompts some discourse on how food tastes better when it's well prepared, as opposed to just being representative of what you're eating. For example, I like tuna and I don't like mushrooms, but a well-made mushroom dish will beat any overcooked or low-quality tuna. The conversation turns to scallops, where Mark mentioned that all that scallops he had eaten pre-vegetarianism tasted terrible. I make a slightly flippant remark about how Mark might not be a vegetarian today if his family had ever made well-prepared scallops.

Eric: "Wow, that's pretty offensive."
 Devin: "Nah, it's just Noah being Noah."
 Me: "Ouch Devin. That's pretty low."
 Devin: "I've never heard that one before..."



Mark Gottlieb and Devin Low

So it was clearly a very good lunch. Break time was soon over though, there was more drafting to be done. Up next on the block were the incredibly popular *Invasion* sets. For those of you haven't played with *Invasion* cards before, think *Ravnica* block except the sets were not nearly as balanced. It's definitely a wild ride and I think it was the most anticipated format overall. Even though IAC had people curious, it was IPA which had folks rubbing their hands together in anticipation. There were some people there, though not many, who hadn't ever played with *Invasion* before. They'd press someone for strategy, to little effect. How in the world do you condense the nuances of IPA drafting in 10 minutes? What I told them, as I'll say now, is that Blue is great and try to avoid G/W/X. Also try to be flexible and be willing to do unusual things. Not very helpful I know, but my IPA drafts always had a lot of spontaneity. In straight *Invasion*, I was convinced tight two-color packages (usually U/B or R/B, sometimes R/G) were the way to go; *occasionally* branching into a third color. This was kind of incorrect, although before I realized it, I managed to get my Tuesday friend/disciple Anthony Alongi to pass a *Treva, the Renewer* in the Top 8 of a PTQ ([alluded to here](#).) Sorry bro!

Planeshift made multi-colored decks far more likely. *Apocalypse* was the green light to go completely nuts with any and all three-color combinations and above. The power level of IPA was roughly analogous to *Ravnica* block, but with far fewer fixers available. We would have *killed* for bounce lands, although Lairs weren't bad. The point is that if you think RGD mana bases are a pain, IPA blew them out of the water. Half-math and half-prayer was how it worked, and that was just with the *lands*. It should be obvious why IPA remains so popular.

Opening up an *Invasion* booster, I'm looking for *Repulse* or *Agonizing Demise* at common, or any number of crazy uncommons (*Fact or Fiction*), or a *Dragon*, or a *Rout*. *Faerie Squadron* or *Scorching Lava* would do in a pinch. There were none of these cards in the first pack. It was a pretty weak booster actually; I had the choice of *Smoldering Tar*, *Fires of Yavimaya*, or *Tribal Flames* - a bad signal no matter what, although that's not necessarily devastating in IPA. *Fires of Yavimaya* was, in the abstract, probably the strongest card in the pack, but I took the *Tribal Flames* first. *Flames* is still a very good card, and I liked a first pick that didn't lock me

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into two colors, or any color really. Not only did Tribal Flames not necessitate a R/X/Y build, it actually got better in a X/Y/Z/r deal. That wasn't the necessarily the plan, but the option was nice.

Then things got a bit weird. The signals coming from my right could only be described as confused, as powerful cards came from across the spectrum. There was a general theme of non-Green, but beyond that it was anyone's guess. We had Urborg Emissary into Ordered Migration into Smoldering Tar into Reviving Vapors. In my head I kept switching around my color schemes; R/B/U splash White for Migration, W/B/U splash Red for Tribal Flames, etc. The cards were certainly strong, although who knows exactly what deck they went into. Sadly, there was no Dream Thrush, a personal favorite and a real superstar in this kind of deck.

Planeshift opens are all about one card: Flametongue Kavu. FTK is one of the most overpowered cards of modern Limited. It's no Jitte, but its splashability and power, in a set that was designed to return creatures to their owner's hand, makes FTK absolutely incredible. The classic hypothetical was having to decide between Magma Burst, Flametongue Kavu, and Tahngarth, Talruum Hero in a booster; the strongest Planeshift Red cards of each commonality. Flametongue Kavu was always the right

pick.

Sadly my Planeshift pack had no FTK, but the Magma Burst wasn't a bad pull at all. And look, a Terminate to call my very own. Nothing was particularly memorable after those, although I was happy with a Cavern Harpy and Nightscape Familiar. Two surprisingly late Darigaaz's Caldera were also very welcome. While I clearly wasn't going to be anywhere near playing Green, their dual-color production was still going to be helpful.

Then came Apocalypse, also known as the Monkey Wrench Set. Jilt was an easy and lovely first pick, but things went askew after that. For some bizarre reason, now Green was the color to be in. It took me a bit of time to figure out, and along the way I let one of two Gaea's Skyfolk slip past. The clues were mostly deciphered in time though, allowing some semblance of a deck to emerge. It was later as were making and comparing our decks that I realized I got caught in a classic "five-color ripple". This occurs when player drafts the best card out of each color; signals are completely incomprehensible. The player on his left has to take cards in each color to compensate, and so it goes in a chain reaction. There were no less than five players at this end of the table who were drafting at least four colors. There's really not much you can do here, except try to adhere to a couple base colors and take fixing when you can. My deck actually looked decent, and the groans of players around the room seemed to confirm it as well. In a land of disastrous decks, the deck that's merely half-terrible is king, or something like that. Here's the final build.



Draft 3-Invasion/Planeshift/Apocalypse		
Main Deck 40 cards		
2 Darigaaz's Caldera	1 Caldera Kavu	1 Jilt
4 Forest	1 Cavern Harpy	2 Lay of the Land
4 Island	1 Gaea's Skyfolk	1 Magma Burst
3 Mountain	2 Glade Gnarr	1 Ordered Migration
1 Plains	1 Goham Djinn	1 Smoldering Tar
1 Sulfur Vent	1 Grave Defiler	1 Terminate
2 Swamp	1 Minotaur Illusionist	1 Tribal Flames
17 lands	1 Nightscape Familiar	8 other spells
	1 Phyrexian Bloodstock	
	1 Sea Snidd	
	1 Shoreline Raider	
	1 Sunscape Battlemage	
	1 Urborg Elf	
	1 Urborg Emissary	
	15 creatures	

Strength it has, but at the cost of a continuous supply of colored mana. I wouldn't call this deck a success, but perhaps my opponents failed worse.

Round 5 - Alex Hughes

In the beginning of this round, Alex and I were having a little verbal back and forth on whose deck was the most foul. This is a rather common debate among experienced players (see round 7). Alex is one of the more consistent players on the local scene, so he's aware of the protocols, but in this case it was all honesty. Even had he been sandbagging a bit, his draws were completely uncooperative.

Game 1: Alex takes a mulligan and musters a **Coastal Drake**. We're trading hits for a few turns until my four basic lands become five off a **Sea Snidd**. This is certainly relevant for **Ordered Migration**, which spits five birdies directly into play. Alex does a laughing slump at how small his chances are. At 10 life facing four birds with nothing on the board, Alex scoops.

Game 2: Again Alex mulligans, while projecting a very concessionary veneer. One got the impression that Alex was quite resigned to the loss, although whether it's due to my deck or Alex's poor draft is anyone's guess. Regardless, Alex's first move is a turn 5 **Stone Kavu** off of Forests, Islands, and a Swamp. At this point I'm holding **Magma Burst**, **Terminate**, and **Tribal Flames**. **Urborg Emissary** gets some tempo and a threat on the board, and the plethora of removal quickly wrap up the match.

4-1

In between the round, I amble over to table one to watch Ricky do his thing with IPA. Here's a photo of him in action.



A player doesn't need particularly strong powers to open, or even cast, **Rith, the Awakener**. However, to summon Rith on turn 6, with perfect mana and a **Coalition Honor Guard** as backup, requires a very high level of talent and expertise.

Round 6 - Eric Guitierrez

Eric was the drafter on my left and was (of course) five colors. Eric freely admitted his inexperience with this format, and it showed with his attempted land destruction deck. **Razing Snidd** just isn't worth the effort, although it does look a bit better alongside **Implode** and two **Frenzied Tilling**. That sub-theme was a bit scary to this deck however, and I knew if Eric had a stream of accelerated land destruction, this precarious deck was going to be in trouble.

Game 1: This game started out strangely, with a hand that I probably should have mulliganed. Three lands of various types, plus three pieces of removal and an **Urborg Emissary**. Against a normal deck, that's a fine draw. Kill their early stuff and draw lands or creatures as needed. Against a deck that had land destruction and no pressure, it's pretty vulnerable. Perhaps I should have thrown it back, but six cards (or worse) against an LD deck is also scary. Luckily, Eric had no land destruction anywhere near his deck in the game. He simply established defenses with **Horned Kavu** and **Jungle Barrier**, while I mucked around with the occasional removal spell and **Caldera Kavu**. Eric's deck wasn't bad actually; he had a solid mix of creatures and spells. His main weakness, aside from the disjointed land destruction element, was too much gating. These **Planeshift** creatures are powerful, but they get a lot worse the more you have. Through some bounce and removal, I was able to keep Eric's creatures to a reasonable number, while Eric searched for a guy that didn't require another guy in play to use. Spending four mana to cast **Sparkcaster**, only to bring back a **Horned Kavu**, is not ideal. Again though, my real blessing was Eric not finding any land-affecting spells, allowing me to develop and diversify my mana. Things were going back and forth a bit at this point. While I was in control, it wasn't by any means a sure thing. Eric's **Horned Kavu** and **Tundra Kavu** were preventing me from attacking with **Glade Gnarr** or **Sea Snidd**, while those creatures stopped Eric's. Finally I drew a Blue spell, **Gaea's Skyfolk**. After playing the Skyfolk, I attacked with **Glade Gnarr**, which had Eric double blocking in a rote manner. We agreed damage was ready and I assigned it all to his two creatures. Eric looked confused for a second, but realized the Blue ability of the Gnarr and sheepishly tossed his creatures away. At that point, the game was over.

Game 2: This was possibly the most one-sided game I played all day. My opening hand was Plains, Forest, Swamp, Mountain, **Ordered Migration**, **Tribal Flames**, and **Caldera Kavu**. Clearly the Red spells alone made it wonderful, but adding in that Ordered possibility...

The first four turns go by and I haven't drawn an Island. My other spells are doing fine, but those birds want to fly! On the fifth turn I slide the top card off the deck and peek under it. A land, but just a Forest land. I pass back while Eric looks confused over the dramatics. Next turn, slide, peek:

Lay of the Land.

Boo-yah, turn 6 Ordered for five. What could Eric do? What could anyone do? I'd be gritting my teeth at whoever had that kind of draw against me, but since I was the beneficiary this time, it seemed alright somehow. Eric was a good sport though; he knew how it goes. Sometimes it's just **Magic** being **Magic**.

5-1

Next on the drafting roster was *Mirrodin* block, or MD5. Of all the environments on the day, I felt this one required the most practice and expertise to excel in. *Invasion* or *Ravnica* decks' problems with enabling can be offset somewhat by adding the right basic lands. Myr or Artifact Lands rankings, *Mirrodin*'s enablers, change dramatically, and a mistake there is a permanent thing. This is what ended up happening. The deck was divided between Affinity and U/B control, so much so that it ended in a poor place, right in the middle. The first pick was **Blinding Beam** over an **Electrostatic Bolt**. That's a debatable pick, but **Blinding Beam** is potentially stronger than E Bolt, and at table 1, I felt like taking some chances. Except for a second **Blinding Beam** in pick four, the White went nowhere. As for affinity, the second pick was a **Myr Enforcer** over a **Silver Myr**, and third pick was a **Lightning Greaves** over a **Moriok Scavenger**. The Scavenger actually tabled, which should have been a clue but, due to a pair of **Wizard Replicas**, I was set on affinity. The real gift was a fifth pick **Looming Hoverguard**, an incredible card in general and the deck's MVP.



Darksteel saw a **Vedalken Engineer** over a **Chittering Rats**, when the deck moved to Sunburst/Affinity. Some Ingots and a Behemoth continued this, but the real tragedy was passing a pair of Emissaries of Despair fairly late, again missing a Black entry. *Fifth Dawn*'s first pick was an easy **Relic Barrier**, a cheap artifact the deck sorely needed. Sadly there were no **Skyreach Manta** or **Etched Oracle** to take advantage of all the color fixing the deck had taken before. *Fifth Dawn* filled things out as best they could, but I had to wonder what this would have looked like had Black been more thoroughly explored.

Draft 4-Mirrodin/Darksteel/Fifth Dawn		
Main Deck 40 cards		
8 Island	1 Duskworke	2 Blinding Beam
3 Plains	1 Ebon Drake	2 Darksteel Ingot
5 Swamp	1 Juggernaut	1 Energy Chamber
16 lands	1 Looming Hoverguard	1 Engineered Explosives
	1 Lunar Avenger	1 Lightning Greaves
	1 Moriok Scavenger	1 Relic Barrier
	1 Myr Enforcer	1 Vulshok Morningstar
	1 Neurok Spy	
	1 Quicksilver Behemoth	9 other spells
	1 Synod Centurion	
	1 Thermal Navigator	
	1 Thought Courier	
	1 Vedalken Engineer	
	2 Wizard Replica	
	15 creatures	

The deck was strictly mediocre. Considering what MD5 decks can and should produce, that meant this one was actually quite bad. Of all the drafted decks on the day, this one seemed the worse. I don't know whether it was poor packs, bad pick evaluations, or just general malaise as the day wore on. I was just happy I had to endure a mere two rounds with it.

Round 6 - Mike Gurney

Mike Gurney is one of the more accomplished and respected players in the Northwest. Multiple Pro Tours are nice, but even more impressive is a lovely wife, tournament attendee, who has some serious game. I've known Mike for a number of years now and I have a lot of respect for his talents.

Game 1: Mike's opening is a **Bonesplitter**, followed by a **Neurok Prodigy**. Let's see, answers to that combination? Ah yes, block with Replicas and hope he's not playing any artifacts in his *Mirrodin* deck. What happened to my life total?

Game 2: Mike again had an early Prodigy, but this time wielding a pair of **Bonesplitters**. Unlike the last game, this time I had a bit of pressure to throw back, including a **Lightning Greaves** and **Myr Enforcer**. Mike's deck was clearly better than mine, but I was able to trade my **Myr Enforcer** with his Prodigy, than return it via **Moriok Scavenger**. It was a nice effort, but Mike was still loaded with efficient creatures. I reached a point in the end

where **Blinding Beam** would win the game *if* Mike were out of cards in hand and *if* he had nothing at the top of his deck. As it turned out, wrong on both counts. Two turns later, Mike got to untap and that was definitely that.

5-2

Round 7-Ben Konrady

Ben was a player I had never met in person, although he's a steady poster on the Northwest message boards. Before the round, we started chatting about our respective decks. Ben said he was fond of his, while I gave an analysis similar to the one above. No details or anything like that, I just said it was pretty poor for an MD5 deck. Ben seemed to accept this and we began our match.

Game 1: This game was one of the tightest of the tournaments. Ben had an extremely aggressive R/B/U deck that was certainly faster than anything my concoction could produce. However Ben's deck seemed fairly short on removal. While I took some early damage, a **Wizard Replica** equipped with **Vulshok Morningstar** did slow things down. Ben's **Neurok Spy** was coming in unhampered though, which had me scrambling for some offense of my own. **Relic Barrier** was tapping an **Iron Myr** each turn, Ben's only artifact and only source of Red mana, but what really did the job was a **Looming Hoverguard**. Suddenly Ben was set back while I had a board presence I could attack with. After a few turns, there was even enough mana to move the Morningstar back and forth between attackers and defenders. Ben seemed clearly annoyed with the Morningstar's effect on the board, but he was still doing damage when he could. A second Replica from this end allowed just enough defense that I was able to do deal lethal damage the exact turn before dying.



As we were shuffling up for game 2, Ben seemed offended that I had called my deck poor; that I had in some way deceived him. It was an interesting observation actually. Not that my intent was to deceive him precisely, but because it does me no favors to call a deck "good". Personally, I'm rather down on my decks in general. This isn't pessimism exactly, but rather a motivator to play better. Perhaps the reader has a different mindset, but I play a little more fiercely when my back is against the wall. Often a player will claw and scrap all the harder when they're scrambling uphill, or at least the very competitive ones.

Have you seen this? A player will mulligan a few times, miss a few land drops, and his opponent will start cruising and playing on auto-pilot, certain the game is already in the bag. Sometimes, often even, this will be true and the player who mulligans to four gets destroyed. But once in a great while, that same player will have the perfect cards and his seven-card opponent will actually need to direct some mental energy to winning the match. Will that player actually devote that energy to a game they've already labeled an auto-win? Oftentimes no, and that costs rounds.

This is a topic that's worth exploring in more detail, but for the match with Ben, the argument is pretty simple. If I believe my deck is great and games should be easy, my play (or lack thereof) will reflect that. The truth is, that first game was a nail-biter and if I had played any of the turns differently, I most certainly would have lost. If the price of focus is saying, and believing, your deck is underwhelming, then so be it. In my experience, this is a common and effective tactic. If anyone would like to chime in with their thoughts on this issue, please do so.

Game 2: A little less tense this time, **Looming Hoverguard** again made an appearance. While there was no Morningstar, Ben's lack of removal was still enough to guarantee the 3/3 flier to come through for lethal damage. We shook hands, although Ben still seemed a bit rueful over my "obviously" powerful deck. I admit, if you draw your best card each game, decks do tend to look decent.

6-2

Finally, finally, we were at the last draft of the day. Endurance was starting to wane as we entered hour 11 of this marathon session. As for 789 drafting, no one had much of a clue what to do with it. It was simply an experimental format, a test to see if it should be included in future extravaganzas. The answer turned out to be "maybe". It wasn't bad at all, truly, but it wasn't exactly stimulating either. The cards in base sets are a little more simplistic than expert productions, although to be honest, that wasn't a bad trait this late into the day. As far as base set strategy goes, strength matters more than synergy. There are fewer opportunities to take roads less traveled, because the cards work in the same way each time.

I cut my teeth on **Magic Online** with 777 drafting, staying up into the wee hours of the morning, drafting over and over again. Was it some future sight for this event? From what I could recall, opening and drafting **Opposition** seemed to win games, although **Mawcor** and **Equilibrium** weren't bad choices either. Should I focus on getting all three?

The plan of relying on drafters next to me disconnecting didn't pan out, but I was able to put together something decent nonetheless. The opening 7th pack had the simple choice of either **Pacifism** or **Dark Banishing**. This is a Black and White decision, and taking the cue from *Mirrodin*, I chose the dark side when the opportunity presented itself. The fact that **Dark Banishing** was a much more efficient, much more reliable card in a color that was more powerful over all three sets was merely a happy coincidence. Black cards in general were flowing quite well, including a late treat in *7th Edition*, the almighty **Corrupt**. A second pick **Volcanic Hammer** was the only genuine deviation from the mono-Black scheme.

8th Edition had no Red at all, just the choice of a **Looming Shade** or **Concentrate**. Having seen zero Blue up to this point, I took the creature that fit mono well, although even then it was a little painful. Base set drafts

are often slow affairs, and raw card advantage plays very well in those types of games. I cried some silent tears when the next pack had a **Temporal Adept** in the rare spot, but it was a little late now. The triple Blue was a touch ambitious for the way this deck was shaping up anyway. Besides, this pack had one of my favorite cards of all the 7-8-9 sets: **Hollow Dogs**. I adore **Hollow Dogs** for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that they win games. A 5/3 attacker is simply larger than most other creatures in that casting class. At best, they'll trade a card for it, but often it requires two creatures blocking in tandem. That gives you the opportunity for a vicious **Dark Banishing**, but it's not really necessary. Black, as it turns out, is also the color of **Raise Dead** and **Gravedigger**, both of which pair nicely with **Hollow Dogs** (and each other).

The plan with this deck is pretty simple, just keep playing Dogs and keep bringing them back to life. They're big enough to require answers, which brings right into the Black player's hands. This is a highly consistent strategy, especially when you're apparently one of the very few Black players at the table. *9th Edition* saw a slight dip in the Black cards, so I moved a little into White. **Aven Cloudchaser** in particular was a nice grab, a maindeck answer to random Circles of Protection that float around 7th and 8th boosters. Here's the deck:



Draft 5-7th Edition/8th Edition/9th Edition		
Main Deck 40 cards		
2 Mountain	1 Aven Cloudchaser	2 Angelic Blessing
3 Plains	1 Deepwood Ghoul	1 Coercion
12 Swamp	1 Foul Imp	1 Corrupt
17 lands	1 Giant Cockroach	1 Dark Banishing
	1 Gluttonous Zombie	1 Diabolic Tutor
	2 Gravedigger	1 Pacifism
	2 Hollow Dogs	1 Raise Dead
	1 Looming Shade	1 Vicious Hunger
	2 Serpent Warrior	1 Volcanic Hammer
	1 Will-o'-the-Wisp	
13 creatures		10 other spells

The **Angelic Blessings** made things slightly more aggressive than average, but there really wasn't any reason not to play them. The mana was fine, and they could randomly steal games. Left in the sideboard were a **Razortooth Rats**, **Mind Rot**, **Naturalize**, and **Fugue**.

Round 9 - Noah "McSexy" Sandler



No one likes to fight against a namesake, but DCIR knows no compassion. Mr. Sandler expressed disquiet with his draft, but since he's a natural competitor, who knew how accurate that was.

Game 1: Noah2 was Green/Black, anti-Green. His first few turns were spent making a **Zodiac Monkey** and **Rushwood Dryad**. I tried not to look pleased. **Serpent Warrior** and **Will-o'-the-Wisp** shut things down well. My hand was **Diabolic Tutor**, **Hollow Dogs**, **Pacifism**, **Giant Cockroach**, and some lands. Not needing the mana for regeneration, and certainly not wanting to cast a 4/2 against that board, I played **Diabolic Tutor**. The options of what card to grab came down to either **Corrupt** or **Gravedigger**. In the abstract **Corrupt** looked like a nice choice, but it didn't really do anything in relation to the board. I took the **Gravedigger**, on the assumption that Mr.

Sandler would simply have to deal with the upcoming **Hollow Dogs** or perish. With a G/B deck, that probably involved blocking. Why not make him do it twice?

It was the right decision, as indeed **Hollow Dogs** took down some creatures a couple of turns later. **Gravedigger** brought it back, where **Hollow Dogs** again took down multiple guys. Things were going fine until Noah played a **Hunted Wumpus** when I was out of creatures in hand, although the **Gravedigger** and **Serpent Warrior** were still very much in play.

NS: "Any creatures to put out?"
 Me: "Nope."
 NS: "Going to kill my Wumpus?"
 Me: "Pretty much."

Hunted Wumpus took the **Pacifism** and we went to game 2.

Game 2: Mr. Sandler started off slow on the play, giving me the time to cast a second turn **Foul Imp** and a third turn **Coercion**. I allowed Noah to keep his **Howl from Beyond** and **Naturalize** and **Dark Banishing**. In fact, I even

offered him a second one, hoping it would make him feel better about the incipient loss. He graciously accepted but more relevant was Noah having no answers to the 2/2 Black flier. The little Imp dealt 16 points of damage, before a flying Cockroach finished off the match. Noah admitted his deck was decent, while accepting his deck was a terrible matchup against a near-mono Black one. We wished each other good luck for the final round.

7-2

Round 10 - Brian Wong

Brian's a good man and a fine drafter, one of the core members of our local drafting group. He's usually a pretty calm guy, but for this final round, the 13th hour, he was getting a bit goofy. To be honest, so was I. Because of all the punch-drunkery, or maybe because the end of a long day was in sight, this was one of the more enjoyable and animated matches of the tournament. Brian was the drafter on my right side, whom I had sent the excellent Blue cards to, just like the person on *his* right.

Game 1: I mulligan to five, which was no fun in and of itself, but it made Brian exceedingly confident in the game's outcome. His deck really was a monster too, featuring burn, bounce, the aforementioned Blue cards, **Confiscate**, **Opportunity** and **Mahamoti Djinn**. Despite the mulligans, this deck wasn't out of it. My creatures were overall larger, and they didn't stay dead. What they did do was drain life points upon casting, which had Brian casting a few **Boomerangs** and a painful **Time Ebb** on a **Serpent Warrior**. This sounds bad, but 12 life wasn't that much to pay to put us on equal status card advantage-wise. **Vicious Hunger** against his **Prodigal Sorcerer** helped too, allowing my Wisp to stave off his tougher creatures. We trade damage a bit back and forth, and while I am dealing points, Brian's end step **Opportunity** puts him far ahead in cards.



Nice deck...

Near the very end of the game, we came to an interesting situation. I had out the Wisp and a **Gravedigger** at 3 life, against a **Coral Eel** and Cinder Wall. Brian is at a single life point, but he's stabilizing well and is going to kill me shortly. I've used a lot of my best cards at this point, but there are still two **Angelic Blessings** and a **Volcanic Hammer** left. If I cast the **Foul Imp** in my hand, I go down to one life, but with a topdecked **Angelic Blessing**, I win the game with my pair of fliers. This play sets me up for **Shock** though, a card I know is in Brian's rapidly shrinking deck. If I don't play the **Foul Imp**, I need to find a **Volcanic Hammer** in whatever window of time I have left, but it does leave me slightly safer. I decide to play the math and run out the **Foul Imp**, going down to a single life. Brian draws and plays **Concentrate**, then casts **Shock** right at me. Next card: **Angelic Blessing**.

Brian's deck was certainly better than mine, so it was my task to even the odds. This meant two things, out-carding him and out-lucking him. Luckily, these two paths converged at the same point. Side in all the discard spells and choose to draw first. Brian's deck, while excellent, was not overly fast. By forcing him to play first, I maximize the discard effects while increasing his chances of mana troubles. After seeing all the bounce, the **Angelic Blessings** and a **Serpent Warrior** were easy to remove.

Game 2: Things start out well for the plan, as Brian took a mulligan and missed a couple of land drops. Unfortunately, I too miss some mana, although a **Coercion** and **Mind Rot** do good things. Brian is pure confidence, talking about his destiny of all things in winning the match. It was highly amusing to the crowd who had gathered to watch. Brian pulled out of his land shortage about the same time I did, and we were off to the races. Brian's **Prodigal Sorcerer** was doing great damage to my life total and my development. One complicated turn from both of our ended had Brian studying the board, then quickly untapping minus a Tim ping. This ended up being somewhat relevant. Soon after, the **Prodigal Sorcerer** got killed and I was back in it. My deck produced **Zombies** and **Dogs** as fast as it could make them, while Brian was stuck with a lowly 5/6 Djinn. Barring something tragic, I was supposed to win the game just slightly before Brian would. Things played out as planned, and his final 'Moti hit brought me down to exactly one life, before **Gluttonous Zombie** ended game 2.

Game 3 (the first game 3 of the tournament, for those paying attention): Brian, still exceedingly sure in his deck and his destiny, chose to play first. I pointed out how badly that went for him in the second game, as well as a missed Tim costing him the win also. Maybe his decisions were off? Nope, it was a minor fluke in the cosmos.

Well that little reverberation happened again, as Brian stopped playing lands after number three. I also was stuck on three, but this time both of our decks were producing solid threats despite the slight shortage. This actually was good for me, as Brian played his hand out while I found some mana. At land #5, with Brian at three cards, a vicious Fugue wiped his hand away. Out went **Shock**, **Opportunity**, **Confiscate**. Not bad at all. Then of course my bigger creatures and recursion started doing their thing while Brian started drawing only lands. A few quick hits plus a **Volcanic Hammer** and it was all over.

Fate: 1
Atropos:2

Final record: 8-2

Eight wins and two losses was good for third place, behind Mike Gurney's better tiebreakers and Ricky Boyes' 9-1 performance. Here's a picture of the champ, with his best cards and his prize for taking first.



The champ

After everything was handed out, Ricky suggested another draft at his house. We chuckled and eyed each other nervously. "Was he kidding?" "I don't know!" In the end, fatigue won out, although not before we stopped for drinks on the way back. We chatted and shared stories about an exceedingly casual, exceedingly *fun* event. There's not a whole lot better than doing something you enjoy surrounded by friends and generally cool people. The tournament took a very long 14 hours. We all agreed, it was a great day. Thanks for reading.

-Noah



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