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The Second Inning Stretch

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Swimming With Sharks joins you three weeks into the 2007 Extended PTQ season. As such, we've got several PTQ Top 8s to cover and quite a bit of catching up to do. We might as well hit the ground running and go to the Top 8 tallies.

Week One:

NO Stick	■ ■ ■ ■
TEPS	■ ■ ■
Aggro Loam	■ ■ ■
G/W Haterator	■ ■ ■
U/W 'Tron	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Flow Deck Wins	■ ■ ■ ■
Gaea's Might Get There	■ ■ ■ ■
Affinity	■ ■ ■ ■
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Flow Rock	■ ■ ■ ■
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Week Two:

TEPS	■ ■ ■ ■
U/W Post	■ ■ ■ ■
The CAL	■ ■ ■ ■
JunkFires	■ ■ ■ ■
Toolbox Junk	■ ■ ■ ■
U/G Opposition	■ ■ ■ ■
U/W 'Tron	■ ■ ■ ■

Week Three:

There was only one North American PTQ this past weekend (Week Three) due to the, um, massively pervasive and successful **Planar Chaos** Prerelease tournaments (and Las Vegas didn't report to the Tournament Center), so we don't have any Week Three data yet.

How to Read These Numbers:

Frank Karsten over at [Online Tech](#) has some kind of crazy "popularity" system using a massive amount of **Magic** Online Adept labor and one thousand supercomputers (rumor has it he and Richard Garfield went back to the University of Pennsylvania and burgled ENIAC itself) to tabulate his boxes... but that's okay. He's *Online Tech*. Here at *Swimming With Sharks*, we are old school. One blue box for every PTQ winner, and one white box for every PTQ Top 8. We don't have complete tournament data, and unlike on **Magic** Online, can't watch a million matches to break down the exact metagame. However, you can just look right to left and count boxes to figure out what the most popular decks are. You should make sure that you prepare for these decks the most, because with

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incomplete data, the most popular decks are the ones you are most likely to have to beat in the Swiss rounds. I tend to respect minority decks that show up in smaller numbers and finish first more than decks that "merely" graduate to Top 8 pins, and group them, graphically, accordingly.

There are many decks in this format. It might actually be the most diverse format we have ever seen... It is varied like Standard, but with *five more years* of blocks tacked on, Invasion and forward, to intersect and combine with *Ravnica's* unbelievable mana options. Some of the decks are well known transplants from other formats, the Boros Deck Wins and Affinity ports from Standard and even Block formats past and present, and there are the decks unique to the format, created by the combination of specific cards from, say, *Invasion* and *Mirrodon*, *Onslaught* and *Ravnica*.

There are, in fact, far too many decks to analyze all of them exhaustively in a single article. So this time, I am going to just go over the absolute elite or most popular decks in the format, this time all the PTQ winners and the many variants on powerhouse **Hallowed Fountain** decks.



TEPS

"TEPS" stands for "The Extended Perfect Storm." You may know the style of deck by another name; most Pros refer to it merely as "Ritual Desire," because that is just pretty descriptive.... TEPS plays a bunch of "Rituals" (*Rite of Flame*, *Seething Song*, and so forth), creating a critical mass of mana and spells, then rides the storm count to play and break *Mind's Desire*. *Chromatic Star* and its like play a twofold role in TEPS. First of all, they are high-velocity spells that essentially *Opt* or cycle through the deck while simultaneously fixing the deck's mana. Red is easy. Black is pretty easy. ♣♣ for the *Mind's Desire*? Not a cake walk. TEPS can borrow a little from *Channel the Suns* and a little from *Chromatic Sphere* or *Darkwater Egg* to pay the necessary costs to get the big Storm going.

TEPS is an extremely simple deck to play in the abstract. You should definitely test it, or at least against it, because some version is *also* almost certainly the best deck in the format. The Hall of Fame's Raphael Levy called his version the best deck he had ever played after an awesome performance at the World Championships. The glory of TEPS is that it wins on the fourth turn essentially every game. My personal testing says that Levy's version will win on the second turn as many as two games in ten. It is extremely good against beatdown decks, and can overpower certain control decks, even the popular U/W Tron / big mana school.

Mark Dean		
1st Place - Texas - Forth Worth - 1/6		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
3 <i>Gemstone Mine</i>	4 <i>Burning Wish</i>	3 <i>Chain of Vapor</i>
4 <i>Geothermal Crevice</i>	4 <i>Cabal Ritual</i>	1 <i>Channel the Suns</i>
4 <i>Sulfur Vent</i>	2 <i>Channel the Suns</i>	3 <i>Dark Confidant</i>
4 <i>Tinder Farm</i>	4 <i>Chromatic Star</i>	1 <i>Empty the Warrens</i>
15 lands	4 <i>Chrome Mox</i>	1 <i>Hull Breach</i>
	4 <i>Darkwater Egg</i>	1 <i>Mind's Desire</i>
	2 <i>Infernal Tutor</i>	3 <i>Orim's Chant</i>
0 creatures	4 <i>Lotus Bloom</i>	1 <i>Pyroclasm</i>
	3 <i>Mind's Desire</i>	1 <i>Tendrils of Agony</i>
	2 <i>Plunge into Darkness</i>	
	4 <i>Rite of Flame</i>	15 sideboard cards
	4 <i>Seething Song</i>	
	3 <i>Sins of the Past</i>	
	1 <i>Tendrils of Agony</i>	
45 other spells		

This version is very much in the Levy camp. With four copies of *Burning Wish*, TEPS can play "seven" copies of *Mind's Desire*, even with only three physical copies of the key card in the main. Dean's deck is fast and consistent. The main kill is *Tendrils of Agony*, but there is an alternate kill with Goblin tokens thanks to *Empty the Warrens* should the opponent be playing *Ivory Mask*, *True Believer*, or something similar.

I actually *like* that Dean removed Raph's *Duresses* entirely from the sideboard (Frank Karsten moved two copies to the main over *Plunge into Darkness*). *Duress* is actually kind of bad in this deck. I've played games where the opponent had a double *Duress* hand to "disrupt my disruption" in the early turns, but then didn't have enough storm to win, even when he hit third- or fourth-turn *Mind's Desire*. *Plunge into Darkness* is actually pretty absurd in this deck. The opponent taps out, you pay eighteen life at the end of his turn, untap, and win.

Ryan Gin		
1st Place - Oklahoma - Oklahoma City - 1/13		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		

60 cards		
4 Ancient Spring	4 Burning Wish	1 Channel the Suns
4 Gemstone Mine	4 Cabal Ritual	3 Defense Grid
4 Geothermal Crevice	1 Chain of Vapor	3 Duress
4 Sulfur Vent	4 Chromatic Sphere	3 Empty the Warrens
16 lands	4 Chromatic Star	1 Hull Breach
	4 Chrome Mox	1 Mind's Desire
	2 Infernal Tutor	1 Pyroclasm
0 creatures	4 Lotus Bloom	1 Sins of the Past
	3 Mind's Desire	1 Tendrils of Agony
	4 Rite of Flame	15 sideboard cards
	4 Seething Song	
	3 Sensei's Divining Top	
	2 Sins of the Past	
	1 Tendrils of Agony	
	44 other spells	

Ryan's deck is based on a Japanese list from The Finals. While fundamentally similar to the Levy deck, the main difference here is **Sensei's Divining Top**. Ryan won more than once by tapping Top into Top, drawing and replaying the same two artifacts, to jack his storm count and set up Tendrils or **Mind's Desire**.

G/W Haterator

Trevor Jones 1st Place - Minnesota - Minneapolis - 1/6		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
8 Forest	4 Call of the Herd	3 Krosan Grip
4 Plains	2 Orim's Chant	1 Orim's Chant
4 Temple Garden	2 Sword of Fire and Ice	4 Plow Under
2 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree	3 Umezawa's Jitte	3 Rule of Law
4 Windswept Heath	3 Worship	3 Tormod's Crypt
22 lands	14 other spells	1 Worship
		15 sideboard cards
4 Boreal Druid		
4 Eternal Dragon		
4 Exalted Angel		
4 Llanowar Elves		
4 Loxodon Hierarch		
4 Troll Ascetic		
24 creatures		

I actually built this deck to beat the top decks from Worlds and Online Extended (at least they were tops at the time): Boros Deck Wins and TEPS. G/W aggressive decks are hell on Boros Deck to begin with.... The tricky part was beating TEPS. In my version, I played four copies of **Gilded Light**; Trevor removed these for an extra **Umezawa's Jitte**, a third **Worship**, and two **Orim's Chants**. **Gilded Light** will usually beat TEPS, but with enough mana, the opponent can theoretically fall back on his **Empty the Warrens** plan... In that case, you usually need **Worship**, though probably not **Troll Ascetic**. **Orim's Chant** is better to play *while* the opponent is going off. I liked **Gilded Light** because it counters **Gilded Light** and kept saving me from the third consecutive **Shrapnel Blast** in testing.

Troll Ascetic plus **Worship**, if not a hard lock in Game 1, will usually buy a deck this aggressive deck sufficient time to race another creature deck. Most of the known decks in the format are actually byes for G/W Haterator. Flow Rock and Flow Deck Wins are easy to beat because the G/W has so many basic lands.... The Flow decks don't have any big button they can push to create massive card advantage. Affinity is favorable with or without **Troll** + **Worship**, but without **Disciple of the Vault**, it can't really break that combo. Trinket Angels, one of the strongest "anti-" decks in the format, is just not lined up to properly beat G/W. It has no seven for **Counterbalance**, and one of the four **Eternal Dragons** will eventually eat all the **Exalted Angels**. The problem for G/W is that its few bad matchups happen to be among the statistically strongest or relatively weak, yet *popular*, wings of the metagame. G/W can beat either of the two schools of **Hallowed Fountain** decks, but can't really be tuned to hate out both consistently during the same tournament. I played G/W in a PTQ and only lost to NO Stick decks, won when I drew **Krosan Grip**, and lost every Game 1. My conclusion was to cut **Plow Under** to increase artifact hate (I

actually hit all four **Plow Unders** one game and still lost, believe it or not). However, Trevor needed **Plow Under** to win his PTQ: His finals opponent was a U/W big mana deck. Unlike the U/W decks, which are difficult to beat, but *can* be beaten, the next PTQ-winning wonder deck is essentially impossible for G/W to beat:

Aggro Loam



Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
1 Blood Crypt	4 Burning Wish	1 Chainer's Edict
3 Bloodstained Mire	4 Cabal Therapy	3 Darkblast
3 Forest	3 Devastating Dreams	1 Devastating Dreams
4 Forgotten Cave	3 Life from the Loam	3 Duress
2 Mountain	2 Putrefy	1 Hull Breach
1 Overgrown Tomb	4 Seismic Assault	3 Krosan Grip
3 Stomping Ground	20 other spells	1 Life from the Loam
4 Tranquil Thicket		1 Nostalgic Dreams
3 Wooded Foothills		1 Shattering Spree
24 lands		15 sideboard cards
4 Birds of Paradise		
4 Terravore		
4 Wall of Roots		
4 Werebear		
16 creatures		

This deck is based on the 5-1 deck from Day Three of the 2006 World Championships. Though we call it Aggro Loam, it isn't really that aggressive, just more aggressive than The CAL.


Operationally, Aggro Loam has one big plan: **Life from the Loam**. It doesn't really matter what else is going on when you are playing **Ancestral Recall** every turn. **Forgotten Cave**, **Tranquil Thicket**, **Wooded Foothills**, and **Bloodstained Mire** all team up to give Scott three more cards in hand. All the **Dredge** makes **Werebear** big, and sets up **Cabal Therapy** as an extra "card in hand" from the graveyard (as if Aggro Loam needed any more card advantage).

The deck has two different endgames, both of them superb. One is the "A" from The CAL, (Seismic) **Assault**. With a ton of lands in hand, Scott could, you know, discard for two damage per. It doesn't take very many **Werebear** hits and dropped lands to go lethal. The super-exciting endgame is based on **Devastating Dreams**. **Devastating Dreams** requires you to discard several cards... No problem if you have been abusing **Life from the Loam**. Aggro Loam will usually play **Dreams** for six or more, for **Wrath of God** + **Armageddon**. One creature will generally be left over, **Terravore**... who is now huge thanks to all the lands in graveyards (from Loam, from hand, from both boards). This end game is very 2002 **Psychatog**-like, a functional **Upheaval**, though more synergistic given **Life from the Loam** as a potential post-**Dreams** backup plan.

Aggro Loam is another one of the decks that makes **Burning Wish** look good. Three copies of **Devastating Dreams** and three copies of **Life from the Loam** main are virtual sevens. One modification I would make to Scott's sidebar would be the inclusion of three or even four copies of **Ancient Grudge**, specifically for the next and last of our PTQ-winning archetypes:



NO Stick

John Alesi-Mullen		
1st Place - Pennsylvania - Philadelphia - 1/6		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
1 Academy Ruins	3 Chrome Mox	3 Condemn
4 Flooded Strand	4 Counterspell	3 Descendant of Kiyomaro
2 Hallowed Fountain	3 Cunning Wish	1 Disenchant
4 Island	3 Fact or Fiction	4 Dwarven Blastminer
1 Mikokoro, Center of the Sea	4 Fire // Ice	1 Fact or Fiction
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	4 Isochron Scepter	1 Lightning Helix
1 Plains	3 Orim's Chant	1 Muddle the Mixture
2 Polluted Delta	4 Spell Snare	1 Orim's Chant
1 Sacred Foundry	4 Thirst for Knowledge	
4 Seat of the Synod	3 Wrath of God	15 sideboard cards
1 Steam Vents		
	35 other spells	
22 lands		
3 Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir		
3 creatures		

This deck is the great grandson of Nick West's Top 8 effort from Pro Tour Columbus some years past. It is a control deck that can play like a combo deck. The combination is **Isochron Scepter** + **Orim's Chant**, a soft lock that can also void the combat phase. The addition of **Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir** from *Time Spiral* allows NO Stick to transition into a full hard lock. With Teferi in play, the opponent can't play anything on his upkeep, or on the NO Stick player's turn. That means that there will be no response to **Orim's Chant** played during the opponent's upkeep... Not even **Krosan Grip** can get out of this unless the NO Stick player screws up... and quite badly.


Fact or Fiction is a virtual six here (fourth copy in the side) and teams up with **Cunning Wish** and **Thirst for Knowledge** for some serious card draw. The generally inferior **Fire // Ice** + **Isochron Scepter** can also make for a personal **Howling Mine** while helping to control the board. One innovation I quite liked out of this version was the inclusion of **Descendent of Kiyomaro**. Most beatdown decks will try to max out on artifact removal to break up or pre-empt the lock, at the expense of any way to fight the Descendent.

NO Stick is anything but a settled archetype. Alesi-Mullen went with **Lightning Helix** as a sideboard bullet for his **Cunning Wish**, but it is not uncommon to fight decks with access to all four Helixes. **Lightning Helix** is actually the best card to imprint on **Isochron Scepter** after **Orim's Chant** (and sometimes just better than **Orim's Chant**) in a variety of matchups. There are versions with more Angels, no main deck **Wraths**, and different counter mixes, including **Force Spike** and even **Absorb!**

All that said, the most popular big slice of the metagame pie to play against in this format seems to be U/W big mana, the aggregate of U/W UrzaTron and U/W **Cloudpost** variants. Like most archetypes in the wide-open Extended, there are no default lists here. Almost all of the ten recorded U/W 'Tron and Post decks will have innovations and peculiarities that you will not see in another deck in even the same Top 8!

Just for argument's sake, and because I like hybrid decks, I am going to use Steve Locke's second-place deck from the Minneapolis Top 8 for discussion.



Steve Locke		
2nd Place - Minnesota - Minneapolis - 1/6		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
1 Academy Ruins	1 Azorius Signet	1 Arcane Laboratory
3 Adarkar Wastes	1 Chalice of the Void	3 Chalice of the Void
1 Ancient Den	3 Counterspell	3 Disenchant
4 Cloudpost	3 Decree of Justice	1 Engineered Plague
3 Flooded Strand	1 Engineered Explosives	3 Faith's Fetters
4 Hallowed Fountain	4 Fact or Fiction	1 Pitihing Needle
3 Island	2 Mindslaver	2 Rule of Law
1 Seat of the Synod	4 Spell Snare	1 Tormod's Crypt
4 Vesuva	4 Talisman of Progress	
	3 Thirst for Knowledge	15 sideboard cards
24 lands	1 Tormod's Crypt	
	4 Wrath of God	

2 Sundering Titan	31 other spells
3 Trinket Mage	
5 creatures	

This deck has a lot of interesting things going for it. The sore thumb is clearly those three **Trinket Mages**. The U/W big mana decks can afford their six and seven mana finishers... What's with the Grey Ogres? In this deck, Locke can double up with **Thirst for Knowledge** by playing a small toolbox of **Engineered Explosives**, **Tormod's Crypt**, and **Chalice of the Void** (I'm actually surprised there is no **Pithing Needle** main). **Chalice of the Void** is actually a monster in this format. Try playing Chalice for one against **Ichorid** or for two against Aggro Loam and see how much time you can buy.

Steve's deck is a **Cloudpost**, rather than UrzaTron, deck. There are arguments in favor of both schools of thought. I like UrzaTron because the lands all come into play untapped. The **Cloudpost** decks, on the other hand, have several strikes against. What happens when you draw **Vesuva** before **Cloudpost**? Doesn't it suck that your lands come into play tapped? The biggest incentive, though, and the reason there is debate here, is that for a two color deck, **Cloudpost** just leaves more open slots for mana... particularly important when another **colorless** land in **Academy Ruins** comes essentially spoken for.

The U/W big mana decks are all about power. Most or all will have an end game based on **Mindslaver**. In Extended, *one Mindslaver* will usually be game, but in these decks, U/W can actually just win. **Academy Ruins** puts **Mindslaver** on top, so U/W can't ever deck. Meanwhile, recurring the same threat time and again will make it impossible for an opponent to attack.

The other threats in these decks vary wildly. **Sundering Titan** seems as good as anything, but you will see many kinds of kill cards, including **Exalted Angels**, **Eternal Dragons**, and even **Meloku the Clouded Mirror**.

We've just touched upon the decks that have either already actually won tournaments, or are the most popular opponents that you are almost certain to face, and we are already past the high point in, say, Kamigawa Block. Extended is big, and that makes it hard to predict. Can your favorite deck compete against the monsters included in today's article? If not, may I suggest you revisit a little something my old buddy Worth Wollpert once told me, well before he started at R&D, on the occasion of my first (Constructed) PTQ win: *If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.*



*Mike has been a leading voice in the game's strategy for as long as there has been a **Magic Internet**. He is the former editor of *The Magic Dojo* and a sometime Pro player. Michael J. Flores: *Deckade*, is a compilation of Mike's first ten years of strategy and theory (i.e. before he joined **magicthegathering.com**), and is available at <http://www.top8magic.com>.*



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