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Have Deck, Will Travel

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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A few weeks back we saw the introduction of *Planar Chaos* into high-level Limited play at [Pro Tour-Geneva](#). While the cards became street legal on Tuesday, this weekend marks the first time that the new set will be available for a Constructed premier level event at Grand Prix-Dallas. Before entering the brave new world that is filled with *Damnation*, furious angels, and extirpation, players all around the world scurried to scoop up the last few blue envelopes in the known metagame from the past several weekends with a little help from some writers of this very website.

In a previous interview with Bill Stark in which he discussed his back-to-back PTQ Top 8s with Affinity, it became obvious that there is a dedicated contingent of lowa-based players who are doing their best to make the jump to the game's next level. While Bill's consecutive elimination-round finishes were quite impressive, two players from his local scene did him one better this past weekend.

Jordan Weber and Brandon Scheel both qualified for Yokohama, with Jordan winning Saturday and Brandon winning Sunday with the same deck - the same physical deck, no less. Jordan, who qualified for the Pro Tour for the first time, had been playing TEPS for some time but a suggestion by our very own Online Technician helped him get to the next level.

"I initially played the deck in Minneapolis earlier this year, playing a version used at Worlds by Raphael Levy," explained the excited Weber. "I Top 8'd that PTQ, but lost in the first round of the Top 8. I recently read an article by Frank Karsten and his version cut *Plunge Into Darkness* from the maindeck, and used 4x *Infernal Tutors* instead. I really liked this change, and decided to run it."

LATE-BREAKING 2HG NEWS

Late Thursday afternoon as my deadline drifted by, word got to me about a change to the Two-Headed Giant format. DCI Program Manager Scott Larabee [shared this statement](#):

"The DCI has made a **Magic: The Gathering** Floor Rule update which affects all tournaments run in the Two-Headed Giant format. Effective immediately, the starting life totals in Two-Headed Giant will be 30 life (instead of the previous 40 life). This change is being made to address the problem of long round times and games which tend to bog down. This change will be in effect for the upcoming Two-Headed Giant State Championships, Grand Prix-Amsterdam, Grand Prix-Massachusetts, and the Pro Tour-San Diego Qualifier round. After these tournaments have been run, the DCI and R&D will evaluate feedback with an eye towards making this a permanent change."

Tune in next week for a more in-depth discussion of the rule change and the Two-Headed Giant format, just in time for [2HG States/Champs](#) on March 3.

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RULES

Jordan Weber - winner, TEPS		
Pro Tour-Yokohama Qualifier - St. Louis		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
3 Gemstone Mine	4 Burning Wish	2 Chain of Vapor
3 Geothermal Crevice	4 Cabal Ritual	1 Channel the Suns
2 Irrigation Ditch	3 Channel the Suns	3 Duress
4 Sulfur Vent	4 Chromatic Sphere	3 Empty the Warrens
3 Tinder Farm	4 Chromatic Star	1 Hull Breach
15 lands	4 Chrome Mox	1 Mind's Desire
	4 Infernal Tutor	2 Orim's Chant
	4 Lotus Bloom	1 Pyroclasm
0 creatures	3 Mind's Desire	1 Tendrils of Agony
	4 Rite of Flame	15 sideboard cards
	4 Seething Song	
	2 Sins of the Past	
	1 Tendrils of Agony	
	45 other spells	

Jordan began playing **Magic** with the release of *Odyssey* but did not seriously endeavor to qualify until last year's Extended season. Including his other Top 8 appearance this season, Jordan played in a total of four Yokohama PTQs before finally earning his first airplane ticket to play **Magic** in the far-off land.

"It feels great to finally earn the invite. It's been a goal of mine, and, I'm glad to have achieved so quickly," added Jordan who then handed the deck off to his teammate Brandon Scheel for a Sunday PTQ in Kansas City. He even piloted the five-hour car ride in support of lowa **Magic**.

"The lowa **Magic** scene is growing more and more every day. Players like Brandon Scheel, Matt 'Cheeks' Hansen, Bill Stark, Kyle Mechler and others who have been to the Pro Tour, some going multiple times, and putting up quality finishes at Grand Prix as well. I sincerely believe that the lowa community has the potential to have a really great season this year, even on the next level, and I hope to be able to contribute to that," said Jordan before turning the Sunday portion of the story over to Brandon.

Brandon is no stranger to the Pro Tour scene. You may remember him as a member of the team /wrist, which narrowly missed out on a Sunday appearance in Charleston (they were as high as third going into the final two rounds), and he played on every Pro Tour last season except for the World Championships.

"I borrowed the physical deck after changing a minor thing in the sideboard and manabase (-1 *Tinder Farm* +1 *Irrigation Ditch* -1SB *Empty the Warrens* +1SB *Sins of the Past*.), I played 3-6 games against Jordan playing Flow Rock, then slept in a rather comfortable recliner," explained Brandon as he picked up the narrative from Jordan. "I used the same black Dragonsshield sleeves and all."

Brandon Scheel - winner, TEPS Pro Tour-Yokohama Qualifier - Kansas City		
Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard	
3 <i>Gemstone Mine</i>	4 <i>Burning Wish</i>	2 <i>Chain of Vapor</i>
3 <i>Geothermal Crevice</i>	4 <i>Cabal Ritual</i>	1 <i>Channel the Suns</i>
2 <i>Irrigation Ditch</i>	3 <i>Channel the Suns</i>	3 <i>Duress</i>
4 <i>Sulfur Vent</i>	4 <i>Chromatic Sphere</i>	2 <i>Empty the Warrens</i>
3 <i>Tinder Farm</i>	4 <i>Chromatic Star</i>	1 <i>Hull Breach</i>
15 lands	4 <i>Chrome Mox</i>	1 <i>Mind's Desire</i>
0 creatures	4 <i>Infernal Tutor</i>	2 <i>Orim's Chant</i>
	4 <i>Lotus Bloom</i>	1 <i>Pyroclasm</i>
	3 <i>Mind's Desire</i>	1 <i>Sins of the Past</i>
	4 <i>Rite of Flame</i>	1 <i>Tendrils of Agony</i>
	4 <i>Seething Song</i>	15 sideboard cards
	2 <i>Sins of the Past</i>	
	1 <i>Tendrils of Agony</i>	
	45 other spells	

Brandon was also looking forward to Iowa mounting a challenge to Wisconsin's claims as the most exciting **Magic** community: "The Iowa **Magic** scene has matured within the past five years due to www.mtgiowa.com, Bill Stark being a community leader, and players striving to take their game to the next level."

Next up for the Iowa duo is Grand Prix-Dallas. Wait, did I say duo?

"Eight players from Iowa will be going that I know," Brandon tallied, including himself. "Jordan Weber, Kyle Mechler, Steve Locke, Dan Skinner, Jack Ewing, Peter Martinez, and Jordan's friend Matt (was going to be Matt Hansen until he got sick)."

While there may be some *Planar Chaos* sleepers lurking in Dallas, Jordan was counting on seeing one card in particular: "I believe *Damnation* will see lots of play. *Psychatog* has been looking for an answer to creatures, and it has finally found it."

BESTS of SWS

On Thursday Mike Flores [wrote about the Top 8 success of Daniel Rowand](#) with the BESTS deck that Mike had created. Not all the decklists had come in yet due to the U.S. holiday on Monday and Mike missed out on talking about the success of Michael Le, who actually won the Mobile, Alabama PTQ with the same deck. Le, who turns 18 in just a few weeks, qualified for his first Pro Tour.

"I've been playing **Magic** competitively since I won my first JSS in 8th grade four years ago, but I've been playing since the third grade," explained Le while doing his best to make me feel ancient. "I played BESTS because I hate every deck in Extended yet I have a burning desire in me to compete. Plus I thoroughly enjoy Mike's articles and decks - and I miss *Contested Cliffs*."

One of the stronger arguments Flores made in favor of his BESTS list was the deck's overwhelming matchup against the increasingly popular *Mirrodin*-themed decks. Le agreed with that assessment as his matchup in the finals was the first time he felt confident all tournament long.

"I thought I was going to qualify the moment I played Affinity in the finals, but during the entire tournament I didn't want to expect much since I started 0-1."

Although Le was heading to Dallas for this weekend's tournament he was already looking forward to the Pro Tour in Japan: "I plan on playtesting as much as possible with people at my local store, The Gaming Pit and bothering random pros online for tech, advice, and the like."

As far as his assessment of the impact of *Planar Chaos* on the Extended metagame, Le seemed to share the same opinion as other players regarding high-profile



cards but thought there might be a surprise card lurking in the wings: "Damnation might get played in Burning Tog, Akroma seems inferior to the real Akroma, and Extirpate might see play as a wish target but I think Fatal Frenzy might see some crazy play in Affinity with Atog."



Five Questions with Ted Knutson: A Grand Prix Dallas Preview

As a coverage reporter, it kills me to miss a Constructed event on the brink of major upheaval to the metagame. While I will not be on hand to usher in the post-*Planar Chaos* era in Dallas, Ted Knutson - a.k.a. Teddy Card Game - was kind enough to sit down for five questions about which players he will be following, what the impact of the new set will be, and his personal preferences in formats as a writer and a player.

1. *What are you expecting attendance-wise this weekend? Any idea how many international players will be attending?*

TCG: I'm expecting about 450 players to show up in Big D. The weather down there this time of year is usually pretty nice, the Tex-Mex food is hot, and it's the first GP in the brand new Extended format. It also doesn't hurt that Dallas is a major airline hub, so getting there from far away should be pretty easy. As for those attending, the race for Player of the Year and the chase for points is already on. Guys who unexpectedly did well in Geneva (like Mike Hron) suddenly have to think to themselves, "If I just make 15 more points this year - 8 of which will come from PT attendance - I could make bank just from showing up in 2008." I expect to see Kenji, Osawa, Mori and a few other traveling Japanese as well as the Dutchies, possibly some French, and likely the Brazilians, who will be welcome sights.

2. *As a coverage reporter, which do you enjoy more - Limited or Constructed formats?*

TCG: I gotta tell you, despite the fact that I have grown a deep and abiding love for Limited over the years (to be fair, they hadn't even invented the concept when I started playing), I still love Constructed more. This is especially true when it comes to working events because:

- A) Constructed events are much shorter, and;
- B) The early season GPs set the stage for the rest of the PTQs, which is exciting.

3. *For Constructed formats, do you prefer new formats or established formats?*

TCG: As a reporter, I prefer new formats, while as a player my opinion is a bit more mixed. I love creating decks for new, open formats, but I think I do my best when I am attacking an established set of decks. As a reporter though, there is nothing like scouring the field for crazy new archetypes that are either smashing faces, or ones that are cool, but not quite ready for primetime, and then seeing them appear on PTQ Top 8 lists a couple of weeks later.

4. *Do you think Planar Chaos will have a big impact right away or do you think that it will take a few weeks for the cards to find their way into decks?*

TCG: I think *Planar Chaos* has been out long enough for people to incorporate it into their Extended decks, the questions is whether it fits and whether people will have done the work to figure that out.

Minus some minor innovations (mostly failures), the Extended format we got from Worlds was very lazy. I mean, 30 percent Boros decks in the field? Ugh. Then the stats showed what the sensible world knew all along - that Aggro Loam was still probably the best deck, but incredibly, no one chose to play it. Anyway, judging from PTQ results thus far, the GP metagame will be much more exciting. Seriously, who doesn't get excited about Elvish Opposition beating down with *Spectral Force*? It's also interesting to see a resurgence of everyone's favorite atog near the top of the online metagame. I wonder if that will be reflected at Dallas or if the GP will post results closer to the PTQ metagame. I just hope there are enough Katakis running around to keep Affinity decks in check and enough *Sudden Shocks* to keep certain toothy monsters and mongrels down as well. Otherwise I expect to see plenty of interesting cards and archetypes - *Planar Chaos* or not - running around Dallas.



Who wouldn't want to watch Kenji in action? Well, maybe his opponent...

5. What player are you most looking forward to following this weekend and why?

TCG: The easy answer is Kenji Tsumura because he's one of the greatest **Magic** players of all time, he's in his prime, and he's just plain awesome, but I think the real answer is an American named Shaheen Soorani. Shaheen is one of the quiet American deckbuilders that has been designing really cool decks for years, but finally made it big on the PT with a ninth-place finish at Worlds last year. Rumor has it that he's been working with "Wegies" Oyvind Andersen and Chris Flaaten (they of the Domain Zoo and Panda Connection) as part of a new deck design team, so I'm excited to see what they come up with.

Firestarter: Dallas Dominators

Which cards from *Planar Chaos* will be the most played this weekend in Dallas? Will **Damnation** hover like a black cloud over Texas or will **Mana Tithe** have everyone waiting a turn to make their big play. Or will something else be the surprise breakout star of the Texas tournament? Go to the forums and do that thing you do!



*Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is [Top8Magic.com](#), the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.*



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