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Bruce Banner and Barry Allen Walk into a Bar...

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, May 11, 2007



In little over a week there will be two Grand Prix tournaments taking place in two wildly divergent formats. [Grand Prix—Strasbourg](#) will be a Block Constructed format event with the same deck construction parameters that were in place for Pro Tour—Yokohama, which means there will be no *Future Sight* cards as those cards don't become legal for Constructed play until Sunday.

At first I was disappointed that we would not be seeing the game's top pros applying the new cards to the format. After thinking on it for awhile I reversed position as the new format will be reserved almost exclusively for players in the PTQ ranks. I look forward to checking the Tournament Center every week for the latest Top 8 decks to emerge from the giant laboratory that is the Pro Tour—Valencia PTQ season.

Back here in the United States, [Columbus, Ohio](#) will be playing host to the third Legacy Grand Prix—and the first one since the end of 2005. Legacy has gone by some other aliases in the past, such as Type 1.5 and Classic Restricted (the latter being quite the misnomer, since there are no restricted cards in the format—just a banned list that can be found [here](#)).

The banned list was at one time tied to the fate of Vintage—then called Type 1 or Classic—with any cards on the Vintage restricted list being banned in Legacy. That was eventually changed, and while the two lists are almost identical they are not bound to one another anymore. As Columbus looms there have been an inordinate number of eyes on the Legacy Banned list waiting to see if there would be a change, even though it is not due to be updated until June 1st when announcements are traditionally released.

Flash has been very much on the mind of potential visitors to the Columbus area (and fans of Legacy worldwide) since it was returned to its original wording as part of the recent power level errata rollbacks. *Flash* came out in *Mirage* and was apparently designed to allow players to play creatures any time you could play an instant. The card was worded with the intent of obligating players to pay full price; if you didn't pay the difference between the creatures casting cost and the two mana reduction from *Flash*, the creature would be put in the graveyard.

The only problem with putting the creature in the graveyard was that it was put there from play by sacrificing the creature. The card sat around rather unassumingly for about a year but just before U.S. Nationals 1999, power-level errata for the card was issued that said the creature card never hit play if you didn't pay the balance of the creature's cost when powered out by *Flash*. The reason? *Academy Rector* and *Yawgmoth's Bargain* were about to hit the tournament scene. And when I say "hit the tournament scene," I mean that players were going to be able *Flash* out *Academy Rector* on turn one or two and have the ability to draw cards at will.

Flash was consigned the bulk rare box and everyone went about their business as usual. People found other ways to abuse *Academy Rector* over the years. *Phyrexian Towers* were activated, *Cabal Therapy* was cast and *Flashed* back, and clerics were *Reprocessed* but at least people had to pay full price to get the Rector out there. When the recent decision to reverse power-level errata made it so that a creature played off of a *Flash* did hit play as its designers originally intended, it sent ripples throughout deck building communities worldwide. Obviously they were figuring out what cards to Rector into play in Legacy on turn one or turn two, right? *Bargain* is banned in the format but how about *Form of the Dragon*? What about *Aluren*? Was there some super-degenerate CAL variant waiting for Rector?

As it turns out, Rector was not even on the radar. The *Flash* target of choice was actually the *Ravnica* Block fattie *Protean Hulk*. By *Flashing* out *Protean Hulk* with the *Mirage* instant you can search through your deck for any combination of cards with a combined casting cost of six and put them into play—which in a card pool as wide open as Legacy just has to be a disaster. Hulk *Flash* was born, and just like the Hulk of Marvel comics fame, there were many versions.



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RULES

The earliest versions—akin to the original dumb angry version of Bruce's alter ego—featured a spread of four **Disciple of the Vault**, one **Arcbound Ravager**, and any number of **Shield Spheres** and **Ornithopters** to sacrifice to the Ravager. Of course that version was vulnerable to **Sudden Shock** taking out the Ravager or, more importantly, **Engineered Plague** on Clerics which would kill the Disciples as a state-based effect before there was an opportunity to use the Ravager.

The community went back to the drawing board to come up with a smarter—and presumably grayer—Hulk deck. The next one featured a kill that could not lose to either **Plague** or **Sudden Shock**. The deck parlayed the Hulk into four Disciples and seven or eight copies of **Phyrexian Marauders** and **Shifting Walls**. The latter are artifact creatures with casting costs of X , which meant they would die as a state-based effect when they came into play. There was nothing to **Sudden Shock** and no window to do it, and even if the Disciples were going to hit the bin from a **Plague** they would still trigger from the artifact creatures and deal 28 or 32 damage.

The problem here is that there are 12 cards that you just don't want in your hand—they need to be in your deck in order to be effective. You want Disciples and X-creatures in your deck and **Flash** and Hulk in hand. Plus, at this point in the deck's development it seemed like every single group was working on either a copy of this deck or a deck to beat it.

White Weenie decks were packing **True Believer**, **Meddling Mage**, and **Samurai of the Pale Curtain**. **Leyline of the Void** was going to be seeing play maindeck. That 12-card combo was eating up valuable real estate in the deck that was needed to fight through all the hate that was going to be out there. Plus there was the mirror match to contend with—Hulk **Flash** decks were even running maindeck **Leyline** in anticipation of the deck.

Other versions of the deck have emerged recently that favor a smaller set of combo cards in order to play a more controlling game that can fight through all the hate. The more discrete combo features **Karmic Guide**, **Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker**, and **Carrion Feeder**. In this version **Protean Hulk** fetches **Karmic Guide** and **Carrion Feeder**. The **Karmic Guide** returns **Protean Hulk** to play and it is sacrificed to the **Carrion Feeder** to bring out the breaker of mirrors. **Kiki-Jiki** then copies **Karmic Guide**, and with the copy's return-a-creature from the graveyard ability on the stack, the legend gets sacrificed to **Carrion Feeder** and is returned to play untapped by the copied **Guide**. This process is rinsed and repeated until there is a nigh-infinite army of hasty **Karmic Guide** copies to fly over for the win.

Interestingly this version seems to have the same, if not more, vulnerabilities of the first version but it seems to be gaining ground due to the decreased likelihood of drawing cards that are better left in your deck. As for the rest of the deck ... well this is where the deckbuilders will have their room to play. One of the appeals—or is appalled more appropriate?—of the deck, according to people posting the original lists, was that it could win the game on the draw during an opponent's first upkeep. The Holy Grail of victories required **Gemstone Caverns**, either **Elven** or **Simian Spirit Guide**, the two-card combo of **Flash** and **Protean Hulk**, AND for the opponent to not be holding **Force of Will** and another blue card.

While that seems like it is pretty unlikely to happen with any kind of consistency—and requires you to play with some unexciting cards—it did set off warning bells. While the prices of **Flash** continued to climb in the secondary market, they did so cautiously as everyone seemed to expect an emergency ban or re-errata of **Flash** to be coming. With each Latest Developments that came and went without an update, the price ticked higher—hitting \$10 for many online retailers.

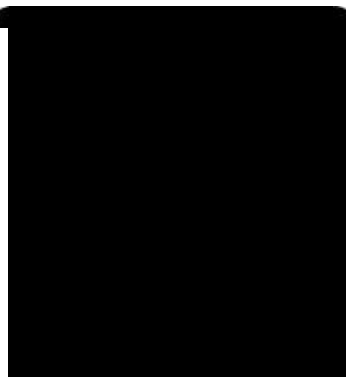
Any questions regarding an emergency ban were officially addressed by Aaron Forsythe in an [Ask Wizards that appeared May 9](#). I checked in with Aaron for a little more clarity on the subject. He may be the Director of **Magic** R&D, but fortunately that did not leave him too busy to answer five questions...

BDM: *When the power level erratas were rolled back did you guys look at **Flash** and think "uh-oh"? Isn't it better to let sleeping dogs lie?*

AF: No, we're generally not going to let sleeping dogs lie. All of the cards we changed in the previous wave (**Cloud of Faeries**, **Priest of Gix**, etc.) did things considered too ridiculous at the time, we rolled them back, and nothing bad happened. So we didn't expect **Flash** to be different, especially since part of the combo that led to the initial errata—**Yawgmoth's Bargain**—isn't legal in Legacy.

BDM: *What scenario would need to be in play for **Flash** to get banned outside of the existing banned and restricted dates?*

AF: I don't know what that scenario is for **Flash**, or if there even is one, but I know we aren't there yet. **Memory Jar** was banned because it impacted every Constructed format, and had proven itself in tournaments. That isn't the case for **Flash**. Most of **Magic** is untouched by it, but it certainly has shone the spotlight on the part of the community that is.



BDM: Is this a case of "The sky is falling!" or will *Flash* crush Chicken Little's dream house?

AF: It probably is the best deck in the format and will put up numbers accordingly. Something gets to be the best. As to just how good, we'll have to see. I don't want anyone to think we're happy with how this has played out, though, but I think the system still works. Sometimes the timing of stuff will make it far more relevant than we hoped, but we're going to keep approaching errata and the B&R lists the same way in the future.

BDM: Has there ever been a situation where R&D braced themselves for the impact of a card on a format with an eye toward banning only to see it not materialize?

AF: No, we're generally not the ones panicking. It usually comes from players—they want *Quiet Speculation* banned, *Skirk Prospector*, *Goblin Lackey*, you name it. We try to be the conservative group.

BDM: What deck would you play at Grand Prix—Columbus?

AF: A deck with *Red Elemental Blasts* and *Simian Spirit Guides*.

I will be heading to Columbus next week to cover this event and witness the impact of *Flash* first hand. If you want to catch up on the Legacy format to this point in time, you can check out the coverage of the last two Legacy Grand Prix—[Philadelphia](#), won by Jon Sonne, and [Lille](#), where Helmut Summersberger and Threshold took home the title. If you are looking for something more recent you can find the coverage of the [2006 Legacy Championships](#).

While not necessarily featuring the same level of competition found at these much larger past events, there have been Grand Prix Trials taking place for the past few weeks around North America in preparation for this tournament. Here are the finalist decklists from two of those events. The first one closely mirrors the results from Grand Prix—Philly when Jon Sonne's Goblins overwhelmed Chris Pikula's Deadguy Ale deck. In the second Trial, the 2006 Legacy champion Roland Chang made the Top 8 but did not reach the finals.



Vial Goblins		Adam Yurchick – Winner; Grand Prix Trial – Columbus	
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
3 Mountain	4 Aether Vial	4 Pyrokinesis	
4 Rishadan Port	1 Unknown Card	4 Red Elemental Blast	
4 Wasteland		4 Naturalize	
4 Bloodstained Mire	5 other spells	3 Patron of the Akki	
4 Wooded Foothills			15 sideboard cards
4 Taiga			
23 lands			
4 Goblin Lackey			
4 Mogg Fanatic			
4 Goblin Piledriver			
4 Goblin Warchief			
4 Goblin Matron			
4 Gempalm Incinerator			
4 Goblin Ringleader			
3 Siege-Gang Commander			
1 Goblin Tinkerer			
32 creatures			

Deadguy Ale		Randy Wright – Finalist; Grand Prix Trial – Columbus	
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
4 Bloodstained Mire	4 Hymn to Tourach	2 Engineered Plague	
4 Wasteland	4 Dark Ritual	4 Withered Wretch	
4 Scrubland	4 Duress	3 Pithing Needle	
10 Swamp	4 Sinkhole	4 Swords to Plowshares	
22 lands	4 Vindicate	2 Phyrexian Negator	
4 Dark Confidant	2 Cursed Scroll		15 sideboard cards
	2 Engineered Plague		
	2 Gerrard's Verdict		
	1 Unknown Card		

4 Hypnotic Specter
3 Nantuko Shade

27 other spells

11 creatures

Iggy Pop

Andrew Weinsager – Winner; Grand Prix Trial – New York



Main Deck 60 cards

4 City of Brass
4 Gemstone Mine
1 Forbidden Orchard
1 Tomb of Urami

10 lands

4 Xantid Swarm

4 creatures

4 Dark Ritual
4 Lion's Eye Diamond
4 Burning Wish
4 Plunge into Darkness
4 Rite of Flame
2 Tendrils of Agony
1 Diminishing Returns
1 Ill-Gotten Gains
3 Cabal Ritual
4 Chrome Mox
4 Lotus Petal
4 Brainstorm
4 Infernal Tutor
2 Empty the Warrens
1 Unknown Card

46 other spells

Sideboard

4 Dark Confidant
1 Pyroclasm
1 Hull Breach
1 Tendrils of Agony
1 Duress
2 Empty the Warrens
3 Shattering Spree
1 Ill-Gotten Gains
1 Diminishing Returns

15 sideboard cards

Scepter Gro

Josh Meckes – Finalist; Grand Prix Trial – New York



Main Deck 60 cards

3 Flooded Strand
3 Polluted Delta
3 Tropical Island
3 Volcanic Island
4 Island
1 Mountain
2 Wooded Foothills

19 lands

4 Quirion Dryad
3 Werebear

7 creatures

4 Brainstorm
4 Accumulated Knowledge
2 Serum Visions
2 Isochron Scepter
1 Psionic Blast
1 Merchant Scroll
1 Mystical Tutor
1 Echoing Truth
1 Cunning Wish
2 Counterspell
3 Daze
4 Force of Will
2 Misdirection
4 Fire // Ice
2 Pyroclasm

34 other spells

Sideboard

2 Artifact Mutation
3 Red Elemental Blast
3 Stifle
1 Fact or Fiction
2 Pyroclasm
1 Berserk
1 Echoing Truth
2 Tormod's Crypt

15 sideboard cards

Firestarter: Banned and Predicted List

So should **Flash** be banned in June when the next B&R list is released? What will the deck do at Grand Prix–Columbus? Will it be like **White Weenie** at Pro Tour–Yokohama, hated out of existence on Day One? Or will a two-card, base blue, instant speed combo prove more resilient than **Soltari Priest**? And what happens when you add the blue and green Pacts from *Future Sight* into the mix? Head to the forums and make your thoughts and opinions known!

*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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