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Rise of the Sliver Surfers

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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Just after the start of Round 3 of [Pro Tour-San Diego](#), I came across an ebullient Jacob Van Lunen loitering near the retail booth. I assumed the Pro Tour rookie was looking down the barrel of a game loss for missing the start of the round but little did I know he had just made history.

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"We already won this round," beamed Jacob as he fanned a sextuplet of **Virulent Sliver** before what he knew would be an appreciative audience. "We poisoned Eugene Harvey on turn three."

As near as anyone can tell, that victory marked the first time anyone had ever won a Pro Tour match with poison counters. And to make that mark against Eugene Harvey and John Fiorillo was no small feat since Chris Lachmann had done the same against Eugene in a practice draft back in New Jersey before the event...only to be told that a poison victory would never happen on the Pro Tour. From there they would go on to rack up wins in all their Day One matches with wins over Rookie of the Year Sebastian Thaler, Hall of Famer Jon Finkel, and fellow HoFer Dave Humpherys.

The team stumbled a bit on Day Two but was still sitting in fifth place going into Day Two, and after going 3-3 on Saturday, they swept their Sunday morning pod over teams led by Ben Rubin and Shingou Kurihara to land in the Top 4—where they went on to win two more times and hoist their trophies in a toast to victory. Early on in the coverage they were referred to as "relative unknowns" but by the time it was all over everyone was calling them The Sliver Kids.

How did the 22-year-old Chris Lachman (a zombie assassin, if his profile page is to be believed) and 21-year-old Jacob Van Lunen manage to win a Pro Tour in their very first try? I caught up with the pair after the event and sat them down for a Two-Headed interview.

Chris has been playing the game for about 10 years, but only in the last three years has he decided to take it more seriously. Jacob has been playing the game since he was the proverbial small child way back in 1994.

"There was a kid Zach who lived three houses down from me and he brought **Magic** cards over and we started playing," explained Jacob, who said he didn't really start playing seriously until last season. "Even though I had played PTQs before, I never playtested for formats before last year. Since I started playtesting I have wanted it real bad."

Neither player was incredibly clear on when they first played in a PTQ. Chris could barely recall the season: "Maybe an Extended one a couple years ago. I didn't do too well in that one."

Jacob was able to narrow it down a little more but could only guess at how he did himself: "*Invasion* block Limited. I must have done horribly. It was my friend Steve's first PTQ and he made the Top 8. We were really excited."

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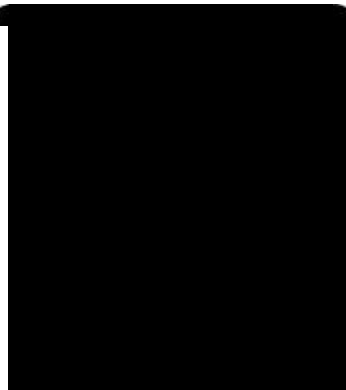
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Both players hit a handful of events this year, more than they had in any previous year, with an eye toward finally breaking into the major leagues.

"I played in maybe five PTQs this season," Chris estimated. "Which is a lot."

"I made it to one Extended, five *Time Spiral* Limited PTQs, and exactly one of the 2HG PTQs," grinned Jacob.

"We played in a bunch of PTQs together," said Chris when asked how the duo fared head-to-head in the PTQs. "We never played against each other as he mainly PTQ'd out in Indiana—how lucky!"

"We played on MTGO a lot," offered Jacob, but he refused to offer a match record between the two. As Chris mentioned, Jacob had been attending school in Indiana and as a result dodged the tough Northeast PTQ scene most of time. Both players were extremely grateful that their newfound Level 3 Players Club status meant they won't have to attend an area PTQ anytime soon for anything other than a victory lap.

"I think there is a



Jacob Van Lunen (left) and Chris Lachmann left San Diego with some serious hardware.

greater concentration of good players in the Northeast than anywhere else in the country making these PTQs quite hard," said Chris.

"It is definitely harder than the average Indiana or Ohio PTQ is," agreed Jacob. "I've gotten sixth-pick *Fathom Seer* in Ohio."

I was curious if either player had developed a nemesis from the PTQ ranks that they wanted to take a moment of nose-rubbery with but neither player wanted to indulge—kind of...

"There is no one in particular," laughed Jacob, "but you can write Steve Sadin if you think it would be funny."

At that last [PTQ in Connecticut](#), the duo opened up a solid card pool that had such hits as *Damnation*, *Spectral Force*, and *Body Double* but they quickly found their backs against a wall.

"We actually lost the first round when we had the board stabilized but our opponents ripped *Phthisis*," Chris recalled. "We won out the rest of the day to make the Top 4."

"From there we drafted slivers," Jacob picked up where his teammate left off. "We won the semifinals on turn five and the finals on turn four. We had double *Bonesplitter* and triple *Sinew*. Nobody was even touching slivers—we had free reign."

"It felt really good since I really wanted to qualify this year," explained Chris in his low-key style. Jacob on the other hand was bursting out of his skin.

"It was great, one of the best experiences of my life. I called all my friends and we all went out—and that was just for qualifying." (Apparently Jacob had a legendary evening on Sunday at the Pro Tour as well, losing his cell phone and sharing a "Welcome to the Pro Tour, kid" moment curbside with Mark Herberholz near dawn.)

With the Pro Tour looming, the duo got down to practicing and were geographically positioned to have some top-shelf playtest partners.

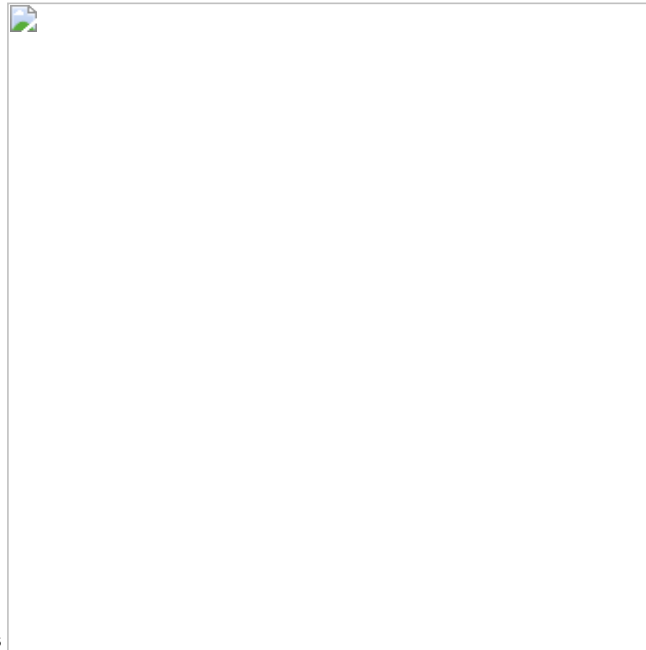


"I did most of the practicing for us since Jake always had to work," said Chris. "We ran a bunch of drafts with Gerard [Fabiano] and some with Osyp [Lebedowicz] and I knew we would do well if no one else was drafting slivers at our tables."

"I thought we were going to do really well based on the testing that Chris had done," said Jake of the Lachmann draft blueprint. "I was pretty sure that slivers was the best strategy and that it was an undervalued strategy which gave it more thunder. Chris thought **Virulent Sliver** could have been a first pick but knew that we could get them 15th and we did get one with the very last pick of the second draft. People just refused to respect the strategy."

While Chris may have been the architect of their plan, Jacob wanted to be sure and credit another New Jersey player with inspiring their tactics for the Pro Tour. "It was actually Gerard Fabiano who got us started on slivers—I am pretty sure he is one of the best 2HG players in the world. He was not too into the poison but he got us started down that road. We figured out the poison thing but we would never have gotten there without Gerard getting us looking at slivers."

Once all the playtesting was out of the way and the duo sat down for their first draft pod at their first Pro Tour, I was curious what was going on their heads.



Got poison?

"Our table was Mike Hron and partner, two Australian women, and Stuart Wright and partner I believe," Chris said. "I wasn't really worried about anyone especially after we drafted our decks."

"I remember thinking two things," Jacob added. "I hoped there were no **Empty the Warrens** at the table. I also looked at Mike Hron and thought about how he won Pro Tour—Geneva by drafting black and how we were going to win San Diego by drafting slivers. I swear to God that is what I was thinking."

After getting off to a 4-0 start to the day, they sat down for the final draft of Day One and saw two Hall of Famers, some old friends, and a dreaded figure from the aforementioned Northeast PTQs. While most players might be filled with dread at the prospect of playing Jon Finkel or Dave Humpherys, Jacob and Chris weren't backing down from the challenge.

"The funny thing we actually wanted Finkel/Ravitz to prove to ourselves we could do it," explained Chris. "I felt really confident against Steve and Dave since Dave hadn't taken over yet and Steve had to make all the decisions."

"Chris and I both know Ravitz from way back when," Jacob elaborated. "Both of the teams with Hall of Famers had players we had played against lots and in some cases known since we were 12. It felt great. We were hoping to play against Finkel and Ravitz because we kept shipping them the slowest, most expensive bombs we could pass. We knew their mana curve had to start at four."

After their 6-0 start the pair went 3-3 over the next six rounds, but did not let it dampen their confidence.

"I think we drafted our best decks of the tournament in the first pod of Day Two," Chris shrugged, "but in our first match I mulliganed to four and never saw a second land which was unfortunate. We knew we made top 16 after the fifth round that day so we were still feeling pretty confident."

With a camera over their shoulder, the pair had no trouble following through with the sliver plan when they opened **Bonesplitter Sliver** and **Telekinetic Sliver**.

"It was a really close call between the **Rift Bolt** and Telekinetic," admitted Chris.

"The two cards we opened were better than anything we opened in the entire Swiss rounds. **Bonesplitter** is better than **Might** [Sliver]. We considered the **Rift Bolt** over Telekinetic but we did not want to send that signal."

The most interesting pick of the draft may have been in pack five when they decided to try lapping **Virulent Sliver** around the table and took **Sliversmith** instead.

"That is possibly one of the best cards against our deck and for our deck," explained Chris. "The pack was deep enough that there was a good chance the **Virulent** would come back."

But the sliver didn't return, swiped by Eugene Harvey and John Fiorillo in one of the rare moments of sliver hate-drafting all weekend.

"We were hoping to play against Finkel and Ravitz because we kept shipping them the slowest, most expensive bombs we could pass. We knew their mana curve had to start at four."— Jacob Van Lunen

"I thought that was a pretty bad beat," Jacob said. "It was a pretty good pack and it meant that we were the only white players at the table. I can't imagine that anyone would take **Virulent Sliver** over a playable card for their deck. If we had realized that nobody was white we would have taken **Sliversmith** and **Virulent Sliver**."

One of the more controversial aspects of this tournament was the fact that the matches were played out with only one game—even in the finals. I was curious what the tournament winners thought about the decision and how they might have fared in a three game set.

"In hindsight the matches could have been two of three or maybe even three of five but going into this tourney people were used to playing games that always last at least 30 minutes. I think the outcome would have been the same," said Chris.

"I think it would have helped us actually," explained Jacob despite the existence of a **Rough // Tumble** in Yuuta Takahashi's deck. In fact, he thought that they were slightly disadvantaged by the one game set because of that board-sweeping card. "Had he had the Rough/Tumble, it would have been a problem."

Jacob went on to explain that he felt confident they could have played around the card due to a physical tell he had noticed when they played the same team in the Swiss. The Japanese team had Rough//Tumble in that match, too.

"He was pretty easy to read actually. We played him earlier in the Swiss and when he was strong he would lean back in his chair and spread his shoulders apart."

Jacob puts a lot of faith in his and Chris's ability to read the body language of their opponents. Sometimes it was even easier than that for Jacob...he just had to listen to what they said: "There was a lot written about me being 'the talker' but if you can get people talking before the match you can learn how people talk normally—when that changes during the game you can detect strength or weakness."

So what does the future hold for the so-called Sliver Kids with no PTQs to occupy their weekends?

"I will actually be at the Neutral Ground PTQ this weekend drafting," laughed Chris. "But other than that I will be doing a lot of testing for Nats and future PTs."

"I actually work seven days a week but I put in my two weeks and am going to play **Magic** and be a student this year," Jacob revealed. "Hopefully I will win some more money this year."



One Week to Magic Game Day

Does the tale of Lachmann and Van Lunen get you excited about playing **Magic**? Then join thousands of other players across the world on July 14 at [Magic Game Day](#). You've seen it mentioned frequently here, but here's one more rundown of what you can expect:

- **Reya Dawnbringer** foil card: Yours just for showing up, while supplies last.
- **Sealed Deck Tournament**: Build the best deck you can out of five *Tenth Edition* boosters and battle through a 32-player field.
- **League Play**: Build your deck out of five *Tenth Edition* boosters and square off against other players in the league. You get two tick marks on your scorepad for each win and one for a loss, and the player with the most marks at the end of the league is the winner.
- **Mini Master Flights** (not sanctioned, North and Latin America only): The quickest way to get playing. Rip open a *Tenth Edition* booster, shuffle in three of each basic land and start slinging spells. If you win, you move on in the flight by swapping in a new booster pack, replacing the cards you used in the previous round.
- **Win a trip to Worlds** (North America only): How would you like two plane tickets and four nights in a hotel in New York City? It's your chance to see the best in the world play, plus you can take part in all the great open events over the four days. For more details, [click here](#).
- **Show off your Magic Collection** (North America only): Bring the most number of items from the list below to Game Day and you can win a **Magic** backpack. How many do you have? For more information, [click here](#).



1. <i>Arabian Nights</i> Fishliver Oil card	11. <i>Onslaught</i> Festering Goblin card	21. <i>Urza's Legacy</i> Treetop Village card
2. Empty booster display box of any expansion from Alpha to Mirage	12. <i>Visions</i> Nekrataal card	22. <i>Ice Age</i> Adarkar Wastes card
3. An <i>Alpha</i> , <i>Beta</i> , <i>Unlimited</i> , or <i>Revised Starter Pack</i> deckbox	13. <i>Lord of the Pit</i> card illustrated by Mark Tedin	23. <i>Apocalypse</i> Caves of Koilos card
4. Booster pack wrapper of <i>Arabian Nights</i> , <i>Revised</i> , <i>Unlimited</i> , <i>Beta</i> , or <i>Alpha</i>	14. <i>Tempest</i> Mogg Fanatic card	24. Largest collection of 1 single card (basic land excluded)
5. Magic rulebook with <i>Bog Wraith</i> on the cover	15. <i>Alliances</i> Guerilla Tactics card	25. Duelist Issue Number 1
6. Magic rulebook with <i>Shivan Dragon</i> on the cover	16. <i>Scourge</i> Siege-Gang Commander card	26. Entrant with Lowest DCI Number
7. <i>Arabian Nights</i> vMountain card	17. <i>Giant Growth</i> card illustrated by Sandra Everingham	27. An officially licensed Magic comic book
8. <i>Legends</i> Rules card	18. <i>Visions</i> Stampeding Wildebeests card	28. Clothing with Magic artwork on it
9. <i>Invasion</i> <i>Reya Dawnbringer</i> card	19. <i>Mirrodin</i> Platinum Angel card	29. Four different Friday Night Magic cards
10. <i>Exodus</i> <i>Paladin en-Vec</i> card	20. <i>Fifth Dawn</i> Crucible of Worlds card	30. Three spin down Magic life counters with different expansion symbols on them

- Kick off the Summer of **Magic**: **Magic** Game Day is only the beginning. There are hundreds of stores that will be supporting the Summer of **Magic** tournaments, where you can win exclusive foil promo cards *Treetop Village* and *Faerie Conclave*. The tournaments are all Limited format (either Sealed or Booster Draft), and run from July 21 to September 22. Look for more information soon, right here.

If you're still looking for a place to play, find your location from one of these many links:

[North America](#) | [Latin America](#) | [Europe](#) | [Italy](#) | [France](#) | [Russia](#) | [Great Britain & Ireland](#) | [Asia](#) | [Australia & New Zealand](#)

Magic Invitational: Crowning a Constructed Master

Gabriel Nassif took down the [Constructed Master](#) ballot by one of the narrowest margins I can recall in Invitational balloting, edging out Mark Herberholz by less than two percentage points. Mark can only appear on one more ballot, and will likely be looking for the North American vote to get him to Germany. Also earning an Invitational invite this week was Jelger Wiegiersma, who was voted in by his peers in the [Players Vote](#).

This week we seek a [Limited Expert](#). Go here to find this week's ballot and vote for the most accomplished drafter from the bunch.



Firestarter: Poisonous thoughts

I don't know if anyone seriously considered a poison kill in the semifinals of a Pro Tour—much less a turn-four poison kill. Should the number of poison counters be increased for 2HG proportionate to the increase in life total for future 2HG events? Head to the forums and share your opinions on the subject.

*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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