

Two Decks from Two Grand Prix Search

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There were a few moments on the Friday night before the Grand Prix in Philadelphia where I had an ominous feeling about the event. I took the train from New York to Philly and hopped in a cab when I reached the 30th Street Station. I gave the driver the address of my hotel expecting a quick ride to somewhere near the Convention Center. When he hopped on the expressway my New York cab hackles went up and I more or less implied that the driver was attempting to cheat me.

"I have been to the Convention Center before," I told him as the meter ticked past the \$15 mark. "And this is not remotely close to the way I remember going."

"But sir," he chuckled as we pulled into the parking lot of the hotel where I had my reservation, "The address you gave me is nowhere near the Convention Center."

The hotel was in the shadow of the home of the Philadelphia Phillies, and if you peered into the distance you could make out the silhouette of downtown Philly on the horizon. It turns out that there were multiple large conventions in town that weekend—larger than even a 970-person Grand Prix—and hotel rooms were at a premium. I felt pretty aggravated about the whole thing and it seemed like a bad way to kick off a long weekend of coverage.

By Saturday morning my aggravation was more or less drowned in a four-shot coffee and the mounting excitement about whether or not the event would cross the 1000-player mark. With Vienna tipping the scales at 1,100+ players there were well over 2,000 players signed up to play Extended across the two events by the time Philadelphia registration closed with 970 participants.

Coming into the tournament it felt to me like many players were easing up on the sideboard hate against Dredge to accommodate the countless other match-ups you could face in the wildly wide open Extended metagame. Tim Willoughby did a feature on Dredge from the Vienna coverage in which Bram Snepvangers explained the dilemma he faced in preparing for Dredge.

"I have zero percent against Dredge in Game 1, and a Wish sideboard. Even if I could find space for the hate in my sideboard (which I can't), I would be making my deck terrible and then need to get lucky in the next two to win."

It seemed like it could be both the perfect weekend to actually play Dredge and the right weekend to cross your fingers, tighten up other match-ups post-board, and toss away the Dredge pairing entirely. And that seemed to be how it played out—depending on what continent you were on.



In Vienna there were more Dredge decks (20) on Day Two than any other archetype and at least twice as many as all but two other archetypes; Enduring Ideal (13) and Next Level Blue (12). The deck would go on to infect half the berths in the Top 8 and came within one game of winning everything. If you judged solely by the Vienna results it appeared that Shuhei Nakamura's statement, from the same Willoughby feature, was correct.

"For me, this deck is the second most powerful deck of all time, behind Academy."

Meanwhile, across the pond there was almost no sign of zombie activity. If you do a quick CTRL-F for "Bridge" through the 26 decklists of the players who posted an 8-1 record or better on Day One the only one that shows up is of the Ensnaring variety. In fact the only two players I noticed having any success with the deck were Jason Imperiale and Worlds 1999 Top 8 competitor Jamie Parke. There was one pivotal round where either Jason or Gerard Fabiano would eliminate the other—and we all know how that story ended—but Jamie posted a Top 16 showing and earned a return trip to the Pro Tour.

Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
4 Cephalid Coliseum	4 Breakthrough	1 Akroma, Angel of Wrath
4 Flooded Strand	4 Bridge from Below	1 Cabal Therapy
1 Island	3 Cabal Therapy	4 Chain of Vapor
2 Polluted Delta	4 Careful Study	1 Crippling Fatigue
4 Watery Grave	2 Darkblast	1 Darkblast
15 lands	3 Dread Return	4 Leyline of the Void
	2 Tolarian Winds	3 Pithing Needle
	22 other spells	15 sideboard cards
1 Akroma, Angel of Wrath		
1 Cephalid Sage		
1 Flame-Kin Zealot		
4 Golgari Grave-Troll		
1 Golgari Thug		
3 Ichorid		
4 Narcomoeba		
4 Putrid Imp		
4 Stinkweed Imp		
23 creatures		

"I'm VERY exited about Hollywood... like VERY VERY excited for Hollywood," said the veteran gamer after locking up his invite. "Right now I have one of the biggest **Magic** fevers I've had in a LONG time—like pre-21st century type of fevers. I'm definitely looking forward to testing the current format and then preparing for the addition of *Shadowmoor*."

Jamie, who finished Day One with a 7-2 record, seemed to encounter fewer and fewer Dredge sightings as his tournament progressed.

"Near the top tables I saw hardly ANY Dredge," he continued. "I only saw it sporadically throughout the tournament (mostly in the first day). I played 2 mirrors (in rounds 3 and 4), and then I may have sat next to 1 or 2 others playing the deck throughout the rest of the tournament."

Despite the fact that there was very little Dredge to be seen that did not mean there was a shortage of hate for the deck as evidenced by Jamie's match in round two.

"I beat my opponent Game 1," relayed Jamie. "We start boarding for Game 2 and my opponent says, 'You know what we decided last night?..... we just HATE dredge!' And then sideboarded in 11 cards! There was other standard hate throughout the tournament (Leyline of the Void, Extirpate, Crypt, etc). The thing about some of the Dredge hate is that it isn't all that effective. Like Extirpate for example... It can be annoying, but it doesn't totally cripple the Dredge deck like an active Tormod's Crypt can. Even an active Mogg Fanatic on the board to take care of Bridge from Below can be just as annoying."

While Jamie was happy with his result there were some minor changes he would have made to his deck: "Pithing Needle was definitely the most useful and I probably should have had four of those. They deal with the obvious Tormod's Crypt... but also could be used to name other things like Mogg Fanatic, Skirk Prospector, or Gargadon—when they didn't have Crypt—so that they couldn't disrupt my Bridges. Crippling Fatigue was good to deal with Gaddock Teeg. Leyline of the Void was obviously good for the mirror but was also good sometimes against Goblins—so that their Fanatics etc. wouldn't kill my Bridges—and also good against decks with Sakura-Tribe Elder and Moment's Peace."


In the end the Top 16 was the closest that Dredge managed to get to the bracketed rounds. With eight different deck archetypes in the Top 8 that meant there were at least nine different decks that qualified players for Hollywood in Philadelphia. If you look through the coverage there were Deck Tech pieces written about both Adam Yurchick's RetroTron and Matt Hansen's Spirit Stompy deck.



Tom LaPille also did a video interview with Magic Show creator Evan Erwin about his Zoo deck that put him into the Top 16 and his friend Ben Wienberg into the Top 8. Also featured in a video—and a text piece as well—was Patrick Chapin's deck that hybridized Next Level Blue and the Couterblance control deck that won Valencia. The two players piloting the deck—Patrick and Steve Sadin—went a combined 17–1 (11–1 in played matches) on Day One. Steve—this week's guest author for Limited Information—felt that he had locked up a Top 16 finish at minimum when he drew with Luis Scott-Vargas in the penultimate round but was disappointed to learn the math of 1000-person tournaments is a lot tougher to calculate than at Pro Tours and PTQs. Chapin's hybrid blue deck should definitely be on your list of playables if have any PTQs remaining.

There were a couple of decks from Vienna and Philadelphia that did not do especially well in the final standings but were intriguing to me. With a new Extended format looming once *Shards of Alara* is released in October either of these could be the base for a new archetype despite losing a couple of pieces.

The first deck I became aware of several weeks ago as Andre Coimbra and I began joking with the idea of putting Shrapnel Blast on an Isochron Scepter in a Trinket Mage-themed deck. Andre took the joke deck into his laboratory, added some more traditional Scepter spells, and added the Draco Explosion combo and arrived at the following Top 64 finishing monstrosity:

Andre Coimbra's Scepter Explosion 	
Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard 2 Ancient Grudge

4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Chrome Mox	4 Gaddock Teeg
1 Blood Crypt	1 Erratic Explosion	3 Genju of the Spires
4 Bloodstained Mire	4 Insidious Dreams	3 Krosan Grip
2 Mountain	4 Isochron Scepter	3 Tormod's Crypt
4 Mutavault	4 Lightning Helix	15 sideboard cards
3 Sacred Foundry	4 Orim's Chant	
1 Stomping Ground	4 Sensei's Divining Top	
4 Wooded Foothills	3 Shrapnel Blast	
<hr/>		
23 lands	28 other spells	
<hr/>		
1 Draco		
4 Grim Lavamancer		
4 Mogg Fanatic		
<hr/>		
9 creatures		

"I played the Scepter Chant / Draco Explosion hybrid because I thought it would be really good for this metagame as it would get some free games based on damage from fetch/dual lands plus Draco Explosion or Scepter Chant lock," explained Coimbra of his unusual looking construction.

He went on to describe how he came to add the Draco combo to the deck: "I started with a burn Scepter Chant deck, but it was missing a good finisher so I added Draco Explosion and it was just great."

Drawing your one Draco is usually considered to be bad when playing that particular combo, but for Andre it ended up being the difference in whether or not he made money at this event. Of course it helps if you are playing in the Domain-friendly Extended environment...

"Usually people think that a Draco in the hand is one card dead, but in the last match for Top 64 I got three different dual lands, tapped 8 mana, and was able to attack with Draco for the win!!!"

As to whether or not the deck would be effective in the future-shifted Extended format Andre was quick to point out that in addition to losing the Orim's Chant, the Draco component—as well as Insidious Dreams—would be rotating out. That is not to say there still would not be plenty of reasonable spells to put on the stick.

"I think it is possible," said Andre. "You have lots of goodies, like Lightning Helix, Incinerate, Magma Jet, and Shrapnel Blast for example. Maybe some sort of Flores Red with Isochron Scepter for the long game."

Another deck that really stood out for me was Zeilend Powell's Kiki-Jiki / Pestermite deck. At first blush the deck sounds pretty silly but it is a two-turn combo that can play through disruption—assuming the disruption is represented by a couple of untapped lands. At the end of your opponent's turn you tap down one of their lands with a Pestermite. When you untap Kiki-Jiki hits the board and copies the Pestermite, untapping Kiki-Jiki, and so on. Zeilend, who attends school with Steve Sadin, posted a solid Day One finish with the deck and created quite a buzz about the deck. Day Two was not as kind to her, though, and she dropped from the tournament with an impending Deck Tech unwritten.



Zeilend Powell's Kiki Mite Get There



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 2 Breeding Pool | 4 Fire // Ice |
| 3 Flooded Strand | 3 Mana Leak |
| 4 Island | 3 Spell Snare |
| 4 Mountain | 2 Umezawa's Jitte |
| 1 Polluted Delta | |
| 2 Steam Vents | 12 other spells |
| 3 Stomping Ground | |
| 4 Wooded Foothills | |

23 lands

-
- | |
|-----------------------------|
| 4 Grim Lavamancer |
| 3 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker |
| 4 Kird Ape |
| 4 Ninja of the Deep Hours |
| 4 Pestermite |
| 4 Tarmogoyf |
| 2 Venser, Shaper Savant |

25 creatures

Sideboard

- | |
|-------------------------|
| 2 Flametongue Kavu |
| 3 Krosan Grip |
| 2 Molten Rain |
| 2 Stifle |
| 2 Threads of Disloyalty |
| 4 Tormod's Crypt |

15 sideboard cards

"I love playing oddball decks and I love Ninja of the Deep Hours, so it seemed like a perfect fit," said Zeilend on choosing the deck, which she had first seen piloted by Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa.

"I more or less copied it card for card, the only maindeck changes being the substitution of an Island and Mountain for the pair of Steam Vents; I had heard that Flow decks were making a bit of a resurgence and I wanted a bit more defense against them. The sideboard is a little off, with Stifle as a nod to combo (which I didn't face at all) and Molten Rain for Tron—the latter put me into Day 2 as I managed to draw both on the play against mana-screw."

"I won my first round, then lost against Gerard Fabiano, and then lost another in extra turns against Death Cloud," she continued after being asked about the contrast in her Day One and Day Two records. "After that my mental game fell apart and I started making even more mistakes than usual. After keeping a one-land hand while down a game against Goblins in the hope that I 'might get there' it was definitely time to drop."



While she was very happy with the main deck configuration there were some minor adjustments to the sideboard that she would recommend to anyone else playing with the deck in the coming weeks: "Having access to more Threads of Disloyalty and Krosan Grips in the sideboard would have made a big difference in several my matches."

As for how the deck will fare post-*Shards* rotation, Zeilend pointed out that the two-card combo would still be available.

"This deck translates really well to post-rotation Extended, the only losses being Grim Lavamancer and Fire // Ice. I think that this will be able to adapt and definitely survive into the next season."

Check out the Finals

In addition to the Quick Question and Deck Tech video segments, Evan Erwin pointed his camera at the finals of Grand Prix Philadelphia and caught all the plays on tape. Over at Top8Magic.com I did a podcast interview with Gerard Fabiano about his victory in Philadelphia. During the interview Fabiano explained that he was looking forward to seeing the footage of himself playing because he has never had the opportunity to judge his play style from the outside before. Here you go Gerard...

I will attempt to catch up with Gerard next week and see what he thought of how he played.

Firestarter: On Deck...

What decks do you think will thrive in the new Extended once *Shards of Alara* triggers the rotation of *Invasion* block and *Odyssey* block from the format in October? Head to the forums and share your opinions and decklists.

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