

Brian David-Marshall
Friday, April 11, 2008

For the past fifteen years of my life, a lazy Saturday morning has been a rare occurrence. Between coverage assignments, organizing tournaments, various tradeshow, and—with the inevitable last but not least proviso—family gatherings, I don't have many chances to sleep in like the opportunity I had last Saturday. I love me a lazy a Saturday morning.

So when Saturday rolled around, why was my alarm clock blaring at 5:30 in the morning? I guess it has something to do with loving gaming even more. I wrote a few weeks back about the Barron's Memorial Draft Tournament taking place in Connecticut. Aided and abetted by a couple of other local players, I planned on attending to remember a man who fostered a love of gaming in the players from his store: Barron Vangor Toth.

The event was organized by Kevin An, a current Neutral Grounder who hailed from Connecticut and began playing in Barron's Cards and Comics. Kevin was bringing everything full circle by hosting the tournament in the store in Milford, Connecticut where he first became enamored with **Magic**, and was expecting a solid turnout from the players he came up with as well as a handful of players coming from the New York metro area. (Cue alarm clock)

With the tournament scheduled to start at noon, the plan was to meet new Limited Information columnist Steve Sadin, Jim Halter (a long-time NY area player who had teamed with Barron for a couple of tournaments), and Pro Tour–San Diego winner Jacob Van Lunen at Grand Central to catch the 10:07 train to Milford. Steve, who was coming into Grand Central on a train, was going to have an hour to kill and suggested we all have breakfast at the historic train station before departing. I suggested pie.

The Little Pie Company has a kiosk in station's food court which makes it so that I can't help but think of pie when I think of food in Grand Central Station. Their Sour Cream Apple Walnut Pie is pretty much the Tarmogoyf of dessert pastries; there are some people who say it is not the best but they are flat-out wrong. I had been kidding with Steve when I suggested the pie, but he is hard pressed to pass up on a silly idea. A plan was formed to meet by the Little Pie Company and individual-sized Sour Cream Apple Walnut Pies were purchased for everyone.

Well, almost everyone. Jacob had some drama to contend with his regarding his girlfriend's car and could not make the train, although he said he would drive up and see us there. The three of us hopped on the train, dug into our pies, and were off to the event. Everyone agreed that pie was, in the word of Michael Bay, "awesome." Pie-talk dominated our train ride and we began to fantasize about different ways to incorporate pie into **Magic**, including (but in no way merely limited to) implementing a pie-eating contest as a means of determining who goes first for a match. This somehow led to the notion that I would challenge Tomoharu Saito to such a pie-eating contest in Hollywood, which I guess I am game for if he is. Steve certainly would not be up to the challenge... he could only half finish his pie and saved the rest for Jacob.

Happy and full of pie, we arrived in Connecticut and got a ride to the venue from Kevin's co-organizer for the tournament, Tim Moran. Tim said the turnout was in the mid-teens—if you included the three of us—but was expecting more people as the tournament start time approached. By the time we

arrived at the store (which had moved from its original location to an office park location under its most recent owner Andy Reed), the attendance was in the high twenties with more people pulling into the parking lot.

By time everyone had signed up, there were 40 players which meant a tidy five draft pods of eight players each. Notable players included Jacob Van Lunen (who has arrived right behind us and quickly caught up to Steve in pie consumption, former store owner and frequent draft partner of Barron's Dan McNeill, another Barron's draft cohort Mike McGlinchey, Grand Prix-



Philadelphia Top 8 competitor Paul Serignese, Kevin An himself (as the event was not sanctioned), local judge Jeremy Smith, Van Lunen and Fabiano were a few of the familiar faces at the tournament. Grand Prix-Philadelphia winner Gerard Fabiano, recently qualified on rating Dredge-ster Jason Imperiale, and Grand Prix-Dallas Top 8 competitor Jim Davis.

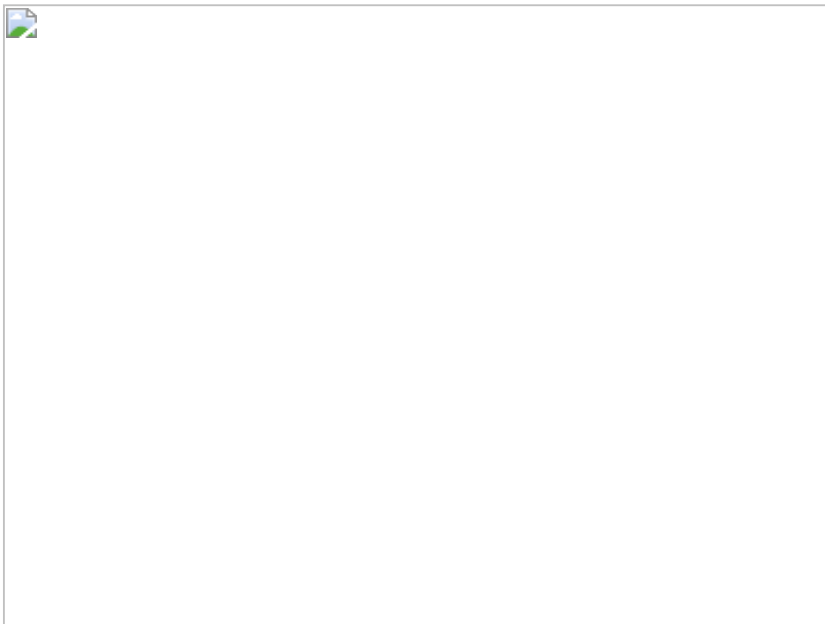
The plan for the event was to travel back in time for each draft starting with *Onslaught/Legions/Scourge* followed by *Odyssey/Torment/Judgment* before cutting to a Top 8 of *Invasion/Planeshift/Apocalypse*. I argued that if we were traveling back in time the draft should actually kick off with the pack of *Scourge* but (wisely) everyone ignored me.

On the way up to the tournament Jim Halter and I were reminiscing about the Clerics archetype in this format, which could put assemble some Akroma-like Vile Deacons with little difficulty. Jim was not a happy camper when the seating for draft one went up and he was seated immediately to my left. Kevin An, a known lover of Clerics, was also seated at the table although he was several seats away from Jim.

When my first pick came the choice was between a pair of soldiers: Ascending Aven and Gustcloak Harrier. I have always been a big fan of three-mana 2/2 fliers but I decided I was a bigger fan of blue and all the tricky morphs that lay in the coming packs. For my second pick I flipped through a rather unimpressive assortment of cards and shrugged, windmill-slammng a pristine new Flooded Strand—it was so minty fresh I opted not to play it despite ending up in those two colors.

The rest of the pack went okay with some white Soldiers finding their way into my army, including Glory Seeker and a different Gustcloak Harrier, after briefly considering blue-red for a late-pick Lavamancer's Skills. While the other Harrier did not come back around I did manage to snag Piety Charm with my ninth pick.

Pack two seemed kind of thin for me and two of the seven cards I played from *Legions* came out of the same opening pack. I was not happy to take White Knight out of what I thought was a weak pack and was surprised when Mistform Ultimus came back around. Willbender is one of my all-time favorite cards and I was happy to have him but my deck was sorely in need of an Echo Tracer or three, which I never saw.



Scourge was very kind to me and started out with Wing Shards, which was my only actual removal spell. I did manage to wheel Karona's Zealots out of that same pack, which has the potential to be a removal spell, but that and a sideboard bound Lavamancer's Skills was all I had for removal. The third pack went well and I had enough cards that I was able to pick off a late zombie card from Jim, whom I was sure had been passed an already nutty assortment of the undead. Here is the deck that I ended up playing along with my sideboard cards.

Brian David-Marshall		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
<i>40 cards</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 Island 9 Plains _____ 17 lands _____ 1 Ascending Aven 1 Aven Liberator 1 Daru Warchief 1 Glory Seeker 1 Gustcloak Harrier 1 Karona's Zealot 1 Lowland Tracker 1 Mistform Seaswift 1 Mistform Ultimus 1 Mistform Wall 1 Raven Guild Initiate 1 Slipstream Eel 1 Swooping Talon 1 White Knight 1 Willbender 1 Wingbeat Warrior 2 Zealous Inquisitor _____ 18 creatures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Essence Fracture 1 Piety Charm 1 Read the Runes 1 Rush of Knowledge 1 Wing Shards _____ 5 other spells 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Aphetto Alchemist 1 Aven Envoy 1 Backslide 1 Cephalid Pathmage 1 Covert Operative 1 Daru Sanctifier 1 Dispersal Shield 2 Dragon Shadow 1 Flooded Strand 1 Gustcloak Runner 1 Ixidor's Will 1 Lavamancer's Skill 1 Mistform Wakecaster 3 Mountain 1 Peer Pressure 1 Recuperate 1 Starlight Invoker 1 Temporal Fissure 1 Timberwatch Elf 1 Unburden 1 Uncontrolled Infestation 1 Undead Warchief 1 Wall of Hope _____ 26 sideboard cards

Round One: Jim Halter

Sigh. I was pretty disappointed to be playing Jim, who I assumed had a crazy zombie deck. Jim jokingly gave me a hard time about the Undead Warchief I showed him from my sideboard but I was seriously happy he did not have it—besides, there was something like three good black cards left in the pack at the time.

Jim came out fast in Game 1 but I slowed things down with White Knight on turn three. Jim was monoblack and had multiple Skintanners as it turned out. On top of that he also had Lingering Death, which I am glad he drew against me instead of the morph zombies—Piety Charm to the rescue! We were both hovering at about 10 life when Jim played Sheppard of Rot, cast Dirge of Dread and attacked for what would have been lethal damage. I flashed him the Wing Shards and he put all three of his attacking creatures into the bin.

In Game 2 he started out slow with a pair of four-drops while I had plays on turn two and turn three. Essence Fracture sent both of his four-cost zombies back to his hand and I was off to a 1-0 start in the tournament.

Round Two: Kevin An

Kevin ended up with the Gustcloak Harrier that had gone AWOL during the draft along with an assortment of other soldiers that included Daru Warchief, Lowland Tracker, and the infuriating Deftblade Elite. Kevin gave me a quick refresher course in the provoke mechanic in Game 1 when he put Crown of Fury on it and picked off my whole board.



Kevin An, organizer of the Barron's Memorial Draft Tournament.

For Game 2 I decided to side in some Mountains, an Aphetto Alchemist, and Lavamancer's Skills. The game was an ugly one with both of us randomly throwing away cards and advantage as we tried to remember all the tricks and interactions of the format. In the end I managed to stick the red enchantment on my Mistform Wall and win the second game.

In the third game I mulliganed and kept a hand with two lands (a Plains and a Mountain), Lavamancer's Skill, and Mistform Ultimatus. The remaining two cards were morphs. I never found the Island and Kevin made short work of me with an aggressive draw that culminated in the unmasking of a Blistering Firecat.

Round Three: Kean Handy

I recognized Kean as a long-time East Coast PTQ player who had gotten the better of me the previous times we had played. Kean ended up with all the fat beasts at the table and was blue-

green. I assumed he had been the guy mopping up all the Frozen Solids I had seen in the early packs.

I double mulliganed on the play in Game 1 and resigned myself to losing as he came at me fast with a mana-accelerated draw into one of the many fatties in his deck. I pulled out of my mulligan with Read the Runes and Rush of Knowledge—drawing six cards on the latter thanks to Swooping Talon. I was clinging to the game at 3 life when I started to go to work with my Ascending Aven. Once again Piety Charm pulled things out for me as I was able to unlock my Frozen Solid flier at the end of Kean's turn for the win.

I also took a fair amount of beats in Game 2, this time 'stabilizing' at 5 life before my card drawing started to pull me ahead. Kean had a handful of Frozen Solids by the end of the game but found a second blue source too late. He needed the one he did play to stick but by that time I had the Piety Charm in hand

OLS Record: 2 -1

The next draft format has always held a special place in my heart and produced some of my all-time favorite cards, including Beast Attack, Upheaval, Werebear, Centaur Chieftain, Grizzly Fate, Mental Note and many, many more green and blue cards. I am pretty sure there were fourteen other cards in my opening pack, but beyond the Beast Attack that I took I could not possibly recall what they were.

I have heard countless people say they would never pass an Upheaval, but in my history of drafting this format that is all people seem to do. I am sure they must be taking Wild Mongrel and Psychatog over the six-mana sorcery but virtually every time I have had this card in a deck it has come to me as a second or even third pick. Whatever people are taking, I am perfectly happy to take their leftover Upheavals every time. After the second-pick sorcery I did not have that many choices to make and took pretty much every card that was green or blue and had the word "Threshold" on it.



Brian David-Marshall		
Main Deck		Sideboard
40 cards		
8 Forest	1 Beast Attack	1 Careful Study
7 Island	1 Breakthrough	1 Cephalid Aristocrat
1 Seafloor Debris	1 Compulsion	1 Cephalid Snitch
1 Swamp	1 Far Wanderings	1 Crypt Creeper
	2 Mental Note	1 Demoralize
17 lands	1 Syncopate	1 Ember Shot
	1 Toxic Stench	1 Flaring Pain
	1 Upheaval	1 Innocent Blood
2 Anurid Barkripper	9 other spells	2 Krosan Constrictor
1 Aven Fogbringer		1 Last Rites
2 Basking Rootwalla		1 Phantom Whelp
1 Battlefield Scrounger		1 Psychotic Haze
1 Cephalid Scout		1 Ray of Revelation
		1 Sonic Seizure

1 Hydromorph Gull	1 Trained Pronghorn
1 Ironshell Beetle	2 Treacherous Werewolf
1 Nantuko Calmer	1 Words of Wisdom
1 Nantuko Cultivator	
1 Nantuko Tracer	19 sideboard cards
1 Scrivener	
1 Seton's Scout	
<hr/>	
14 creatures	

Round Four: Ray Clavette

Ray mulliganed in Game 1 and I promptly made a full-sized Anurid Barkripper thanks to two Mental Notes. His deck did not seem to get started at all and we were quickly on to Game 2. In that game he made a pair of four-drops that each gained him 4 life and added a couple of fair-sized monsters further up the curve. I waited as long as I could before sending everything back to both our hands and deploying a pair of creatures on that same turn.

Round Five: Jeremy Smith

Jeremy is a local judge and veteran East Coast player. Game 1 against him was a frustrating game as I had the Upheaval in hand and plenty of lands but no plays to make subsequent to the sorcery. I waited as long as I could, and finally down to 1 life I had to make a move and defensively cast the spell knowing I had a Syncopate ready for his first play. After I played my second land and sent the turn back expecting a two-drop, I was stymied by a Hapless Researcher. I still had no creatures but laid my third land and played Breakthrough for zero hoping I would hit a Basking Rootwalla ... and have enough mana to pump it if/when the Researcher attacked/blocked.

In Games Two and three things went long enough each time that between Compulsion and Breakthrough I was able to find the right mix of lands, spell (a.k.a. Upheaval) and creatures to easily take down both games.

Round Six: Steven Sadin

We intentionally drew this round and guaranteed that we would both have a shot at cracking *Invasion* packs.


OTJ record: 2-0-1

After six rounds of Swiss the Top 8 draft was made up of the following brackets—in no particular standing:

	Quarterfinals	Semifinals	Finals	Champion
1	Brian David-Marshall			
8	Chris Draeger			
4	Kevin An			
5	Jim Halter			
2	Steve Sadin			
7	TJ Palton			
3	Jacob Van Lunen			
6	Jim Davis			

I was not sure what I wanted to do in the draft, having had poor results in my last draft in this format with blue-red-black (mostly due to having almost no blue). I was thinking about the green-black zombie archetype that can get paid off with late Llanowar Dead and the Overrun-esque Strength of Night while you are snapping up Consume Strength with your early picks.

That plan went out the window when I opened up Exclude and got a second-pick Spite // Malice. Blue dried up pretty fast after that but I have always been a fan of the Treva combination of colors and happily nabbed a pair of Llanowar Knights and solid white kickable creatures. First pick in *Planeshift* was a personal favorite card in Hunting Drake. It was followed by a Silver Drake and a couple of Confounds, but it was not until the third pack when I took back to back Coalition Honor Guard that my deck finally felt like something I was going to be comfortable tussling with.

Brian David-Marshall		
Main Deck		Sideboard
<i>41 cards</i>		
1 Dromar's Cavern	2 Confound	1 Ana Sanctuary
7 Forest	1 Dismantling Blow	1 Bog Gnarr
4 Island	1 Exclude	1 Capashen Unicorn
5 Plains	2 Lay of the Land	1 Destructive Flow
-----	1 Planar Portal	1 Diversionary Tactics
17 lands	1 Rushing River	1 Draco
	1 Spite // Malice	1 Last Caress
	-----	1 Mogg Jailer
1 Ardent Soldier	9 other spells	1 Multani's Harmony
1 Benalish Lancer		1 Orim's Touch
2 Coalition Honor Guard		1 Quirion Sentinel
1 Gaea's Skyfolk		1 Shield of Duty and Reason
1 Hunting Drake		1 Sinister Strength
1 Jungle Barrier		2 Stone Kavu
1 Living Airship		1 Strength of Night
2 Llanowar Knight		1 Temporal Spring
1 Prison Barricade		1 Tranquility
1 Razorfoot Griffin		1 Treva's Charm
1 Silver Drake		1 Vigorous Charge
1 Sunscape Familiar		-----
1 Urborg Elf		20 sideboard cards

15 creatures		

Quarterfinals: Chris Draeger

I don't know Chris but he seemed like a nice guy as we played two quick games that were defined by my Coalition Honor Guard backed up by Confound. With the Honor Guard in play you pretty much can't do anything and I was able to clog up the ground with my collection of walls and 2/4's while flying over for the win. The match was over pretty quickly and I was able to peek at some of the other matches. I expected to be playing Kevin An in the next round as I saw Annihilate, Spiritmonger, Consume Strength, and a handful of other powerful green-black cards. But as Kevin explained later, the green-black was in his splash colors.

Semifinals: Jim Halter

After the first-round loss, Jim went on a tear and did not lose again in the Swiss rounds. He was playing an aggressive red-black deck that was potentially able to close down my aerial assault with first striking black fliers and could make 4/3 Mire Kavu that were as big, if not bigger than most of my walls. Fortunately for me that is not how it played out. Once again the Coalition Honor Guard dominated both games. Jim could have probably killed me with Soul Burn in the first game had he been able to aim it anywhere else. In Game 2 my Honor Guard hit the table while I had two Confound and a Spite//Malice in hand. I was onto the finals against the winner of the Steve Sadin/Jacob Van Lunen match.

Steve won his semifinal match and we decided to share the victory in the name of **Magicthegathering.com**. Steve also ended up with a blue-green-white with a tiny black splash—in his case for a Consume Strength that he played off a Fertile Ground.

Jacob ended up driving all the semifinalists (me, him, Steve, and Jim) home and we all went to a nearby Uno's for dinner to celebrate our dominating finish. Interestingly,

everyone who had eaten the walnut apple dessert in the morning had made the Top 4 and we all had to marvel at the power of pie. I also realized that I had eaten pizza for lunch and decided to complete the unique pie-fecta by having a quesadilla for dinner.

I slept extra late on Sunday.

Firestarter: Your favorite draft block?

What is your favorite draft format of all time? I had thought it was *Champions/Betrayers* but I had forgotten how much I enjoyed *Odyssey/Torment/Judgment*. Head to the forums and share your memories of your favorite formats.



Friends now, but who would win their semifinal match?

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