



THE MANILA MAJOR

THE NEW, BEEFY DOTA META

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The Manila Major is over, and we have new champions! Or old champions, as the Overweight Gorillas confirmed themselves as masters of adaptability, being the first team to win two Valve Major events. Furthermore, it was heart-warming to see that Grand Finalists, OG and Team Liquid, had teams that they kept together for over a year. In an age when Dota teams are increasingly roster based, constantly kicking out and replacing players as they look to get a better line-up, the best two teams were, largely, a collection of friends. Familiarity increases the chances of success it seems.

With three majors down and Dota's premier event, The International or TI, edging ever closer, it is time to take a look at how the game has changed in the most recent patches. With the ever changing, cyclical nature of e-sports, as developers strive to balance a game that has far too many variables to be balanced, avid fans are always wondering which heroes are strong and what team will have that winning strategy. The latest tournament to give us some indication of the current meta was the Manila Major, where we caught a

snapshot of patch 6.87 as well as, to an extent, 6.88.

You may wonder why the Manila Major could give an indication of 6.88 when the entire tournament was played on 6.87, and the answer is simple. With qualifiers for TI 6 nearly upon us, Icefrog could not make any game changing alterations. Such changes would throw a spanner in the works of all the teams that have diligently prepared their line-ups and strategies for the tournament, which is no small matter as the prize pool already exceeds \$12 million. As such, 6.88 only contained slight number changes, while all the interesting bits were already released in 6.87.

One of the most prominent aspects of the current meta has been brawn over brains, with the return of the strength carry. With 6.87 having changed hero statistics to ensure that all heroes get just that little bit more health from each point of strength, heroes with high strength gains can be nearly unkillable. Perhaps the best example of this can be seen in the resurgence of mid-lane Dragon Knight, who provides teams with that option of having a hero you can leave alone and not really worry about. If the enemy tries to kill him, at least with physical damage, he'll just walk away...and there is nothing they can do about it.

Of course, the rise of the strength carry isn't solely related to a minor change in how hero stats work. Item changes also play a crucial role. One of the most important in this respect is the mechanics of blademail. The way blademail used to work is that it would reflect pure damage after reductions. So if you have 50% damage reduction because of armour and a Phantom Assassin gets a 1000 damage critical strike, you would reflect 500 damage. New blademail is different, in that you reflect the attack itself.

Therefore, taking the example above, you would take 500 damage but reflect the full 1000 physical damage. If the Phantom Assassin only has 25% damage reduction, she would hence take 750 damage. See the pattern? You actually tend to reflect more damage than you take!

Furthermore, pure damage is blocked by spell immunity while physical damage is not. So, for right-click carries like our poor phantom assassin, a Black King Bar will not counter blademail.

This new blademail mechanic is advantageous for many heroes, but one towers above them all. One hero terrorized the Manila Major and continues to do so. He's back, and you better be ready for twenty hacks from the axe of Axe. With his berserker's call forcing other heroes to hit him, while giving him an insane armour bonus so he takes almost no damage, Axe can ensure that many heroes simply kill themselves. In addition, by changing his counter helix so that the axe spin does pure damage, which ignores armour, an Axe with a good call and blademail can destroy entire teams in an instant.

However, Axe is not unbeatable, and he was not the only terror of the Manila Major. Another melee hero has insidiously crawled his way back into the metagame, in particular due to how well he deals with Axe. Not many melee heroes can do it, but Lifestealer can. With his lifesteal being based on a percentage of the target's health pool, and Axe having a lot of health, Lifestealer can essentially pound into a blademail with near impunity. In addition, his enrage ability blocks the spin damage, so he can stay close while others cannot.

Another reason Lifestealer has made a comeback is due to changes to the Armlet of Mordiggian. With the armlet now giving an obscene amount of armour, it has become a staple for almost all strength carries. In conjunction with the new Echo Sabre, which essentially gives you attack speed with the double strike, a Lifestealer can get out of hand fast. Both items are very cheap, and once he has them he can almost do whatever he wants in a match.

The thing about 6.88 which makes it almost inconsequential is that all of these things remain true. Lifestealer attacks a little slower so he's slightly easier to run away from, but Echo Sabre pretty much negates that. Axe will still destroy your soul. Beefy carries are still very much the order of the patch, and it seems far too reasonable to buy armlet and blademail on everybody.

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