

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Johnny Come Lately

Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, March 24, 2005



Greetings and welcome to the new incarnation of Into The Aether, now on Thursdays! As you know by now, [Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar](#) has jumped ship to [Building on a Budget](#) and has left his rather daunting size 14 high top tennis shoes behind here in the Aether. Never fear, my friend—I pledge to do my best to pick up the... eh, shoe and run with it.

Weekly Columns
WHO WRITES WHAT AND WHEN

Pic	Author	Column Name	Schedule
	Bennie Smith	INTO THE AETHER	Thursdays

Welcome to the team Bennie!

Get Magic Invitational Wallpapers & Sign Up for Messaging!
www.mtgmobile.com

So, a little about who I am. I've got a long history playing **Magic**. 2005 marks my eleventh year playing Dr. Richard Garfield's insanely addictive pastime. I first heard about the game reading an old White Wolf magazine, and fell in love when I cracked open my first Unlimited starter deck and saw **Force of Nature**—which looked like an incredibly buff Swamp Thing—staring back at me, urging to be shuffled up into a deck and given the opportunity to smash my puny opponents. And who am I to argue with a Force?

In the intervening years I've gone from casual gamer to winning the Virginia State Championship in 1999. Since then my tournament competitive urges have diminished a little bit, but not my love for the game or my obsession with thinking and writing about it, and as you can see from my previous writing I enjoy both the casual side of **Magic** as well as more competitive formats. From the early days of writing for Usenet with occasional appearances on the Dojo, to being a featured writer for Star City and Contributing Editor for *Scrye* magazine, to working on Single Card Strategy and [magicthegathering.combos](#) right here on this site, I've enjoyed exploring this wonderfully complex and evolving game, and sharing my thoughts along the way.

Close friends of mine might be wondering, "Since when did Bennie get on **Magic Online**?" Well, since I was offered the opportunity of moving from the [occasional magicthegathering.com contributor](#) to regular weekly columnist, that's when! As I write this, I've been playing **Magic Online** for a little over a week now. I've gotten in some pickup games of post-banning Standard and played in two drafts. I think I've gotten the hang of the program fairly well, and even though I'm an online newbie I'm already so hooked that I know I'll have plenty to share in no time at all. For newer players or even those who still haven't made that leap to online play (what are you waiting for?) I hope that I'll be able to offer a unique perspective as I make my own journey through **Magic Online**. Thanks to the other content I'll be able to cover, including lots of exclusive inside information you can't get anywhere else, I'm hopeful that there will be plenty here for more experienced players as well.

Which brings me here, to uncharted waters for Mr. Smith, the Aethereal vastness of **Magic Online**. I have to admit, for someone who's been following the game a long time, the opportunity to experience a whole new dimension of **Magic** thrills me. And I really look forward to bringing you along for the ride.

Ooooookay. So really, when is Jay coming back?
Seriously, Jay's moved on. I'm your Into The Aether go-to man now.

No, seriously.
Yes, seriously. C'mon, give me a chance!

Sigh. All right, so what's going to be different now under your administration?
I thought you'd never ask! First, while I'm still going to be doing plenty of writing on the casual side of **Magic**, one of the things I hope to bring to the table is a higher interest in what **Magic Online** can offer the more competitive and tournament players out there as well. In truth I'm both [a Johnny and a Spike](#) at heart, so I think I can give you plenty to chew on from both worlds.

Oh no, there you go with Rosewaterisms...
What can I say, I'm a sucker for effective buzzwords! But to get back to the subject at hand, my vision for Into The Aether is to capture the heartbeat of **Magic Online**, the buzz, the feel of the play environment and share it both with fellow Onliners and with those who have not yet come aboard. And for that I'm going to need your help. **Magic Online** covers a lot of ground, whether you're into constructed, limited, tournament play or casual games. I'm going to put up polls here to keep in touch with what you all are looking for in terms of **Magic Online** content. I'm going to look for your feedback on the message boards and the email link at the bottom of these articles. I'm going to look for people in the trenches willing to share with me what they're observing in whatever formats they enjoy the most—hot decks, trends, differences between the online metagame as compared to what's being played in the brick and mortar game shops and tournament halls, and that's just the start.

With that lead-in, why don't we go ahead and kick things off with a poll?

Which format would you like to see covered more on Into The Aether?

- Online Standard
- Online Extended
- Kamigawa Block Constructed
- Booster Draft

PRODUCTS

DISSENSION **GUILDPACT**

Dissension Guildpact
All Magic products

RULES

Magic Core Game
Basic Rulebook
Comprehensive Rules
All Magic Rules

RULEBOOK

MESSAGE BOARDS

Magic All Magic message boards
COMMUNITY magicthegathering.com
forum
Rules Q&A forum
Magic Online announcements

MAGIC ONLINE

Magic The Gathering
ONLINE

Download Now!
Magic Online Academy
Magic Online FAQ

NOVELS

Dissension
Ravnica Cycle, Book III
by Cory Herndon

- Sealed Deck
- Rochester Draft
- Casual: Singleton
- Casual: Prismatic
- Casual: Tribal
- Casual: Rainbow Stairwell
- Multiplayer ("Battle Circle")
- 2- or 3-Headed Giant
- Teams (2on2 or 3on3)
- Emperor

Submit my Vote

A lot of this Jay has already gone over to varying degrees, and based on your feedback I'll be able to judge whether I need to go back over some topics and dig a little deeper, sooner rather than later. But don't worry—I intend to cover all of these at various points. So even if your favorite format ends up dead last on the poll results, Into The Aether will get there eventually, and maybe even sooner than you think. Stay tuned.

Behind the Curtain: Notes from MTGO's Developers

Into The Aether will continue to be your source for behind-the-scenes scoops, news, and interviews, and with Vanguard and the pending launch of the new version of MTGO, this year promises to bring a slew of information you're going to want to know about. We'll be kicking things off next week with an amusing note on one *Betrayers* card's functionality in 2-Headed Giant, so check back for that and more!



From the Trenches: The Standard Online Metagame

The question on every tournament player's lips around the world is "what is Standard's metagame going to look like now that Ravager Affinity has been banned out of existence?" The recent Extended PTQ season has been so wide-open that players have naturally been hopeful that things will open up in Standard. I've been poking around this past week trying to see how things are shaping up, but the bannings aren't taking effect until... well, today... so the sanctioned tournaments I've peeked in on are still hostage to the Affinity/anti-Affinity polarity. But over in the Casual Play/Constructed Play/Tournament Play area, people are gearing up for a brand new world. From what I've seen and heard from some active players, Ponza, "Classic" Tooth & Nail, B/G Tooth & Nail (with maindeck *Cranial Extractions*), Monoblue Control, B/G Death Cloud, and White Weenie decks have all been putting up decent performances.

I played some games against and chatted with Will Barnett AKA Ragewielder and was thoroughly impressed with his version of B/G Tooth & Nail. Despite the presence of *Cranial Extraction* and the recent reprint of *Sowing Salt* in the metagame, the former #2 deck in Standard appears to be fighting hard to take it's rightful spot at the top of the food chain.

B/G Tooth & Nail		txt
Main Deck	Sideboard	
61 cards		
10 Forest	3 Cranial Extraction	2 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
2 Swamp	3 Night's Whisper	1 Mephidross Vampire
4 Urza's Mine	2 Mindslaver	1 Triskelion
4 Urza's Power Plant	3 Reap and Sow	1 Sundering Titan
4 Urza's Tower	4 Sylvan Scrying	3 Choke
24 land	2 Sensei's Divining Top	3 Naturalize
	4 Tooth and Nail	3 Sacred Ground
	21 other spells	1 Plains
1 Darksteel Colossus		15 sideboard cards
1 Duplicant		
1 Sundering Titan		
1 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker		
1 Platinum Angel		
3 Solemn Simulacrum		
4 Eternal Witness		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
16 creatures		

Sharp eyes will note that the maindeck is 61 cards, so the deck still requires a little tightening up. As much as I love the robot in decks like this, my current thought is to try cutting the three Simulacrums and using your two empty slots on a fourth **Reap and Sow** and a third **Sensei's Divining Top**.

Will gave some thoughts on the deck and his build of it:

"Ok... in this deck four Witnesses are a must. Cranial plus Witness is sick and broken at the same time. If you don't know why the Vampire and **Triskelion** are in the sideboard, it's a 2-card combo that's a permanent **Wrath of God** on the opponent's side of the table. Very good against white weenie and any other purely offensive deck. In the sideboard, Boseiju and **Choke** are for blue and sacred ground is for Land Destruction or **Death Cloud**.

"**Night's Whisper** is great card advantage, as many Tooth decks rip their hand of land and acceleration on the table and then wait it out for a Tooth or other threat to pop up. **Mindslaver** is an instant win against many metagame decks. **Arc-Slogger**, Meloku, Shackles, LD, anything that you can sacrifice, Witnesses and Simulacrums (cast them and choose not to use the ability), **Mindslaver** is just awesome right now. Also, any deck running more than one color, like Rock (B/G) or whatever, are very weak against **Sundering Titan**. If they run green and another color, Sundering plus Kiki is basically a one sided **Armageddon**.

"Three Cranials main gives you a lot of power. On the other hand, Cranial cast *against* you makes it very hard for you to win, although it is possible. But yeah, if they run black, they do run Cranial in either the main or side, absolutely no exception to that rule. You can Cranial their Cranial away on turn three, and also see what their deck is all about for future Cranials. **Plow Under**, **Sowing Salt** and Cranial are the three major cards that consistently give Tooth problems."



I am certainly looking forward to giving this deck a try and will report back to you on my own experiences with it!

Tips & Tricks

I thought I'd wrap up each column with a quick Tips section conveying useful nuggets of information that I've come across that makes things easier, faster, or more convenient. While this is geared mostly for newer players, even long-term players might find something useful here. I know in my full-time job I'm considered an Excel "power user" and I'm still running across tricks and shortcuts that other people tip me off to that I hadn't known about previously. (If you've got useful tips you'd like to share, please send them to me using the email link at the bottom of this article and if you like I'll be happy to give you credit for the tip if it makes it into the column.)

I'll kick things off with this tip:

"Get cozy with your Stops."

One of the first decks I played online used the awesome Sensei's Divining Top, and the game kept skipping the times when I'd want to be able to use it, particularly during my upkeep *before* I drew my card. By default, MTGO only stops and checks with you during your main phases on your turn and during your opponent's end of turn phase. And that normally works just fine until you start using things like the Top. I ended up turning on **all** the stops just to make sure I didn't miss any crucial opportunities... but that ended up eating a lot of time when I was later playing in a draft tournament where your time is clocked. So I clicked some of the stops back off again... and then realize I'd stranded my ninja in my hand when I couldn't stop during the declare blockers phase. D'oh!!

For more on stops, make sure to check out [Let's Talk About Stops](#) by Daniel Myers. The moral of the story though is this: when you play in events (or when you play cranky, impatient people), think about what deck you're playing and make sure to set the right stops ahead of time, but only the ones you're really going to need.



Which brings us to the end of this first article. A bit short for how I expect this column will normally come out, but this one's just an introduction of course. I have to say I'm really looking forward to getting the poll results back and reading what you all have to say in the Forums, in email, and chatting online. You'll see me around online as **IntoTheAether** or as **blairwitchgreen** (my personal account). And don't forget to drop me a line if you're interested in being a contact for online metagames of the various formats. I'm especially looking for people who are doing well in the constructed events and are willing to share their decklists for the column (with full credit and props, of course!).

*Bennie Smith has been playing **Magic** since Arabian Nights, and writing about it nearly as long. Several of his early musings appeared on the Magic Dojo, and from there he became a featured writer for Star City Games and a Contributing Editor for Scrye Magazine before he started writing for [magicthegathering.com](#). While a casual gamer at heart, Bennie also thoroughly enjoys the competitive side of **Magic** and won the Virginia State Championship in 1999.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Bennie Smith](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

