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Five More Avatars

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Into the Aether
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Rainbow Stairwell Land Base

I know many of us Rainbow Stairwell fans are eager to see how the poll on land bases shook out. Here are the results:

When you Play Rainbow Stairwell, Which Land Base Do You Use?		
4 non-basic lands of your choice + 4 of each basic land (another version of "RS Singleton")	466	38.3%
2 of each Invasion dual land + 3 of each basic land	344	28.3%
1 non-basic five card cycle + 4 non-basics of your choice + 3 of each basic land (4/2 or "RS Singleton")	303	24.9%
Other land configuration	104	8.5%
Total	1217	100.0%

The poll results make a good bit of sense. "RS Classic" represents an evolution from the original real-life/Apprentice decks that utilized the old dual lands to easily play out spells of all colors. MTGO doesn't have the original duals so the Invasion block tap duals were a compromise solution. MTGO supports the "Singleton" format, and those initial Rainbow Stairwell decks were Singleton decks besides the land base, so it makes sense that the "RS Singleton" style of decks represents the next step in the format evolution.

Personally, I prefer the "4/2" land base since that gives the deck a much less chance of getting mana screwed. For a format that's supposed to be about fun, having one player go down in flames due to the inevitable mana issues of a five-color deck isn't very enjoyable. The 4/2 decks did come in third, but I can certainly see the reason for that: collecting the ideal lands for that base can be tough and expensive.

Some of you may be asking, "So, what's the official format rule for Rainbow Stairwell?" My answer is... I don't know. My goal here isn't to step in and arbitrarily rewrite the rules. This is a player-driven format and it's up to the fans of RS to work out the kinks. I wanted to use my column to shine a spotlight on this fun format and to provide you with the poll information to gauge what your fellow fans are doing. I hope this helped!

Vanguard! Avatars from the More Distant Past

This week we'll continue unveiling the Vanguard abilities and start working our way further back amongst the avatars. We're almost done, so let's jump in and see what we have:

Vanguard Abilities			
Name	Hand	Life	Ability
Bosh, Iron Golem	7	18	X, sacrifice an artifact of converted mana cost X: Deal X damage to target creature or player.
Platinum Angel	6	11	If you control an artifact, a creature, an enchantment, and a land, you can't lose the game and your opponents can't win the game.
Viridian Zealot	7	22	②, Sacrifice a creature: Destroy target artifact or enchantment. Search your library for a card with the same name as the creature you sacrificed, reveal it, and put it into your hand. Then shuffle your library.
Flametongue Kavu	7	14	When a non-token creature comes into play under your control, it deals a random amount of damage between 0 and 4 to target creature.
Arcbound Overseer	6	23	At the beginning of your upkeep, you may put a +1/+1 counter on target creature you control. At the beginning of your upkeep, you may put a charge counter on target permanent you control.
Raksha, Golden Cub	8	29	Creatures you control get +0/+1. Equipped creatures you



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NOVELS

Dissension
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Bosh, Iron Golem

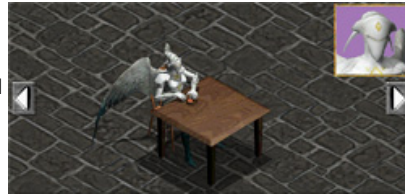
Bosh is quite powerful, but the mana requirement forces you to make sure you have artifacts up and down the mana curve. I also thought artifacts that give you mana along the way (like **Talisman**) or when they die (like **Cathodion**) would be handy. Of course, no self-respecting Bosh deck would not include **Solemn Simulacrum**, the artifact that was born to die. Comes into play, fetches out a land to help eventually pay for his sacrifice to deal four damage, and draw a card. That's a seriously hard-working card! **Myr Servitors** provide a steady stream of cheap pings once you draw into two of them, and **Myr Retrievers** also chain together. **Tooth of Chiss-Goria** will likely cost a lot less to cast at instant speed than it will to sacrifice. Since there's going to be a lot of artifacts being played and dying, I thought **Moriok Rigger** and **Skeleton Shard** would both find good homes in the deck.



The Son of George W. Bosh		
60 cards		
4 Tendo Ice Bridge 4 Waterveil Cavern 7 Swamp 8 Island <hr/> 23 land	4 Myr Servitor 4 Myr Retriever 4 Cathodion 4 Moriok Rigger 4 Solemn Simulacrum <hr/> 20 creatures	4 Talisman of Dominance 2 Thirst for Knowledge 4 Tooth of Chiss-Goria 3 Skeleton Shard 4 Thoughtcast <hr/> 17 other spells

Platinum Angel

Platinum Angel looked quite tough to pull off at first glance; with a starting life of 11 you didn't have a whole lot of time to assemble your required parts. But then I realized a couple things; first, the land requirement was a gimme. Second, the artifact and creature part could be knocked out simultaneously by running a good number of artifact creatures. That leaves just some enchantments to round things out. But what to choose? **Spirit Link** seemed like a good bet, since it's going to live on your opponent's biggest threat and stall out their attack. **Artificer's Intuition** also sounded good, letting you dig for **Myr Servitors** to keep a steady stream of artifact creatures in play. Of course, **Artificer's Intuition** led me thinking about setting up an **Auriok Salvagers** recursion plan with Spellbombs, and that led me to adding **Leonin Elder** for some valuable life gain. To top it off, **Zur's Weirding** to lock out the possibility of your opponent breaking your precarious set-up seems like a nice spicy addition.



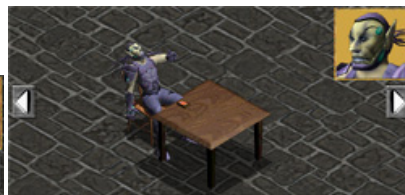
Zur Can't Lose		
60 cards		
3 Glimmervoid 4 Tendo Ice Bridge 4 Cloudcrest Lake 6 Island 6 Plains <hr/> 23 land	4 Leonin Elder 4 Myr Servitor 4 Steel Wall 4 Myr Retriever 3 Auriok Salvagers <hr/> 19 creatures	1 AEther Spellbomb 2 Sunbeam Spellbomb 1 Pyrite Spellbomb 1 Chromatic Sphere 3 Sensei's Divining Top 4 Spirit Link 3 Artificer's Intuition 3 Zur's Weirding <hr/> 18 other spells

Viridian Zealot

Viridian Zealot appears to be the "metagame" avatar, designed to be able to break up any artifact- and enchantment-based Vanguard decks. And seeing how many of them I've cooked up so far, I can see his value. Still, I wanted to make his ability matter even if my opponent wasn't playing many artifacts or enchantments (or even none at all). This led me to doodling around way too much with **Neurok Transmuter**, **Mycosynth Lattice**, and **Memnarch**. Nothing really came together that felt right to me, so I thought I'd open this up to you all. Got any good ideas? [Send me your](#) Viridian Zealot Vanguard deck in whatever MTGO format you want and I'll publish the best next week!

Flametongue Kavu

What a beating! It makes sense that FTK would be just heck on creatures. The main drawback is the randomness that will sometimes not deal lethal damage to the creature you want to kill. How can you



plug up this hole? While I briefly toyed around with some ideas using [Cowardice](#) and [Horobi, Death's Wail](#), I decided to instead pick some pinger creatures that could pile on extra damage if they needed to after they did their initial comes-into-play hit. Of course, the biggest weakness with this sort of build is if your opponent buck-eyes you with a creature-light or even creatureless deck but I don't think that will happen too much with Vanguard. Still, with a nod to that possibility I've included some Genju, [Stalking Stones](#) and [Arc-Sloggers](#) as threats that won't kill themselves when they come into play.

Flametongue Broiled		
60 cards		
4 Stalking Stones	4 Frostling	3 Genju of the Spires
20 Mountain	4 Grim Lavamancer	3 other spells
24 land	4 Ember-Fist Zubera	
	4 Slith Firewalker	
	4 Goblin Sharpshooter	
	4 Vulshok Sorcerer	
	2 Initiate of Blood	
	3 Jeska, Warrior Adept	
	4 Arc-Slogger	
	33 creatures	

Arcbound Overseer

Okay, I admit it: I'm one of those guys that have been constantly trying to figure out how to make a good Energy Chamber deck. Of course, I have failed miserably since the deck falls apart if you don't draw your Chamber or it meets an untimely [Oxidize](#). Much like [Etched Oracle](#) helped [Fist of Suns](#) fans, [Arcbound Overseer](#) steps in to help folks like me! What I found kind of fun is some of the implications of being able to get those counters flowing from the beginning, so your turn 1 [Ornithopter](#) or [Arcbound Worker](#) can quickly get out of hand.



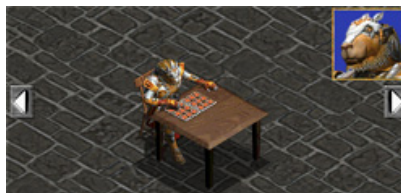
[Clockwork Beetle](#) can keep his Grizzly Bear status indefinitely if you need him to. Even unequipped, [Umezawa's Jitte](#) with some charge counters from your Vanguard ability or [Coretapper](#) can become some awesome creature control (or life gain in a pinch). [Chimeric Egg](#) can provide some large attacks much more often than normal in this deck, and the [Hatchery](#) can dominate the late game with a horde of snakes. [Etched Oracle](#) becomes a card-drawing engine in this deck and lastly [Clearwater Goblet](#) with an ever increasing number of charge counters can quickly put the game out of reach of your opponent.

Mirridon Block's Non-Affinity Goodness		
60 cards		
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Ornithopter	4 Umezawa's Jitte
3 Mirrodin's Core	4 Clockwork Beetle	3 Chimeric Egg
3 Glimmervoid	4 Arcbound Worker	3 Orochi Hatchery
4 Tendo Ice Bridge	4 Arcbound Stinger	2 Clearwater Goblet
2 Cloudcrest Lake	4 Coretapper	12 other spells
2 Lantern-Lit Graveyard	4 Etched Oracle	
2 Pinecrest Ridge	24 creatures	
2 Tranquil Garden		
2 Waterveil Cavern		
24 land		

Raksha, Golden Cub

So what would another week of Vanguard previews be without another White Weenie deck? How about 2/2 [Savannah Lions](#) right out the gate, and with a [Bonesplitter](#) he's a 5/2 first striker? Yeowch! Raksha gives you

plenty of incentive to jam pack your deck with Equipment cards, and **Steelshaper's Gift** gives you a toolbox capacity. Your high starting life total gives you plenty of buffer to get aggressive early on, leaning on your evasive offense to take down your opponent and not worry too much about the damage you'll be taking from his counteroffensives. **Aether Vial** helps conserve mana to allow you to both play creatures and pay the equip costs.



Da Cubs		
60 cards		
1 Eiganjo Castle	4 Lantern Kami	4 AEther Vial
18 Plains	4 Suntail Hawk	4 Steelshaper's Gift
19 land	4 Savannah Lions	4 Bonesplitter
	1 Isamaru, Hound of Konda	1 Lightning Greaves
	4 Leonin Skyhunter	1 Mask of Memory
	1 Leonin Shikari	2 Sword of Fire and Ice
	4 Skyhunter Skirmisher	1 Sword of Light and Shadow
	22 creatures	2 Umezawa's Jitte
		19 other spells

A Sneak Peek at Next Week Preview

Okay, I've already put out the call for some ideas on this week's Viridian Zealot deck. I thought it might be fun to give you all a sneak peek at the Vanguard ability of one of next week's avatar and let you all guess which one it is in the forums. Yeah, I know it's pretty easy, but the rest were actually more obvious. Also, if you all would like to send in your deck ideas for the mystery avatar, I'll publish my favorite of the bunch next week!

Name	Hand	Life	Ability
?	6	28	At the beginning of your upkeep, exchange control of a random permanent you control and a random permanent target opponent controls.

Behind the Curtain: Notes from MTGO's Developers

Paul Sottosanti, Devin Low, and John Carter were the team that developed Vanguard for MTGO, and Paul continues to offer some of their perspectives on how it all shook out:

"I had an extra goal in my head while designing **Bosh, Iron Golem's** potential abilities: make sure it wasn't absolutely broken with Affinity. I was pretty sure that players were sick enough of Affinity in other formats that they wouldn't want it to be the best deck here. The solution was to charge mana based on the cost of the artifact you were throwing, so that Affinity decks wouldn't be balancing **Myr Enforcers** on their pinky finger and then taking out Akromas left and right (and not to mention opponents as well). Bosh is still a fine avatar to use with Affinity, but I'm confident that other decks in the format will be able to handle the resulting onslaught of artifacts.

"We played around with all sorts of alternative protective abilities for **Platinum Angel**, but in the end we had to do it. "Can't lose the game" has a real nice ring to it, doesn't it? You won't have a lot of time to set it up, but if you pull it off, you'll be invincible. Would you expect anything less from Platinum Angel?"

"I wanted **Viridian Zealot** to be the one that players could fall back on if they were sick of losing to artifacts, or in fact, to the *Mirrodin* block in general. Letting you sacrifice creatures to **Naturalize** something was easy, but then we had the problem that against straight creature decks, your avatar would be entirely useless. (I forgot to mention it in the last article, but this was the seventh goal. We wanted to minimize the number of games where a player's avatar was useless because his opponent wasn't playing the right kind of deck.)

"The solution was to add an effect to the ability that would occasionally give you a reason to use it on your own permanents. If one of your creatures is about to die, you can pay two mana and throw it at your own **Myr Retriever** to dig up an artifact and then search your deck for a new copy of the creature. Doesn't sound that great, but remind yourself that is the worst case; when it's your opponent who has the artifacts, you'll be glad you picked this avatar.

"In keeping with the tradition of **Flametongue Kavus** around the world, this is the only avatar that can actually be a drawback if your opponent isn't playing the right type of deck. Flametongue is a creature that is ridiculously powerful against other creature decks, but mediocre to the point of being suicidal against non-creature decks. We followed the same path, although during development we improved the whole idea greatly by making the damage random. For a long time it had been a guaranteed two damage, but now there's always a chance that the targeted creature will live through the fiery breath to fight another day. This, it turns out, increases the fun factor of this avatar by about a hundred times, and it's now one of my favorites of the entire bunch.

I imagine **Arcbound Overseer** as the general who's powerful but far too important to risk in actual combat. Instead he stands in the back and orders his troops into battle, yelling "Charge!"—only this time he means it

in two different ways. This avatar is for all the players who enjoyed building the **Energy Chamber** and **Coretapper** fueled Sunburst decks back in the days of *Fifth Dawn* (I was one of them). The +1/+1 counter is no jokes, either; it can go on any of your creatures, so feel free to come up with ways to abuse it. **Spikeshot Goblin** anyone?

"In the beginning of development, the phrase "you control" wasn't on either of the abilities, and if you wanted to use one of the abilities you were forced to use both of them. This led to people having to give their opponent's creature a +1/+1 counter if they wanted a charge counter. Cute. We fixed the abilities up, tested it, and quickly realized that our initial guess for hand size had been well, rather off. It quickly lost two cards and ended up in its current form, powerful but fair.

"At the end of design **Raksha**, **Golden Cub** was unique in that it was more specific than the other avatars—it actually referenced cats in the first half of its ability. We reasoned that cats were in enough colors that there would be some diversity in deckbuilding, and it would be kind of fun to let Raksha help out his tribe. Turned out it was actually pretty boring, and there was only one deck anybody wanted to build (White Weenie with equipment and cats), so the first ability got changed to help all your creatures and open things up. If your friend is beating you up with **Goblin Warchief**, give Raksha a try; extra toughness on all your guys plus 29 life plus an eventual wall of first strike is quite the hurdle for an aggressive deck to clear.



Didn't Think I Forgot About *Kamigawa* Block Constructed, Did You?

Last time I talked about *Kamigawa* Block Constructed, I mentioned the G/B/x decks that I'd been seeing doing well online. Some people have even been calling them the top decks of the format, and it's hard to argue with the deck's success. Chock full of some of the most powerful cards of the format, these decks ramp up on mana quickly and then start dropping bomb after bomb.

I was having some trouble finding people willing to share their decklists of good performing builds for the world to see in time for the earlier column. The good news is that this week I have two decklists to share!

The first decklist is from Kyle Felter, who recently performed well in a *Kamigawa* Block Constructed premier event with his version of the archetype. He's also won some eight-man tournaments with it, and is qualified for Pro Tour Philadelphia. His success with it makes G/B/u his deck of choice currently.

G/B/u Goodstuff by Kyle Felter		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
9 Forest	4 Kodama's Reach	4 Nezumi Shortfang
6 Swamp	2 Wear Away	3 Cranial Extraction
1 Island	4 Hideous Laughter	2 Wear Away
3 Tendo Ice Bridge	4 Sickening Shoal	1 Ethereal Haze
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	3 Soulless Revival	4 Hero's Demise
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	1 Cranial Extraction	1 Plains
21 land	3 Gifts Ungiven	
4 Hana Kami	3 Sensei's Divining Top	15 sideboard cards
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	1 Umezawa's Jitte	
3 Kokusho, the Evening Star	25 other spells	
2 Kodama of the North Tree		
1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror		
14 creatures		

Kyle mentioned that the idea behind a single copy of Jitte is that you can **Gifts Ungiven** for it and force your opponent to give you what you really need.

I also ran across a more offbeat build by Kazuki Tsuji who goes by DJtim2 online. He'd also done well with G/B/u and was willing to share his deck with us. I got the opportunity to playtest his deck a few times and it was quite powerful.

Flowers by Kazuki Tsuji		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
9 Forest	1 Cranial Extraction	2 Cranial Extraction

1 Island	3 Gifts Ungiven	2 Hero's Demise
8 Swamp	2 Hero's Demise	2 Horobi's Whisper
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	4 Hideous Laughter	2 Nezumi Graverobber
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	2 Horobi's Whisper	4 Nezumi Shortfang
3 Tendo Ice Bridge	4 Kodama's Reach	1 Three Tragedies
23 land	2 Sensei's Divining Top	2 Wear Away
3 Hana Kami	3 Sickening Shoal	15 sideboard cards
3 Kodama of the North Tree	1 Soulless Revival	
2 Kokusho, the Evening Star	1 Stir the Grave	
1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror	1 Wear Away	
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	24 other spells	
13 creatures		

Tips & Tricks

Cody Watts writes in with this handy tip:

"Did you know that can perform Boolean searches in both the deck editor and the collection tab?

"Using and (&), or (|) and not (~) operators, you can perform very specific searches. For example, today I couldn't remember the name of the counterspell with scry, so I just searched for "counter & scry" and found condescend starting back at me.

"Say you're looking for cards to help accelerate your mana? Search for something like "mana | land" to find both "cards that provide mana" and "cards that fetch land".

"Or you could find all the goblins without haste by searching for "goblin & ~haste".

"It's quite helpful in situations when you've got a few parameters in mind, but you don't know exactly what you're searching for."

*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.*



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