



Rounding out the deck, **Clearwater Goblet** seems like a good option in a five-color deck, especially to offset the life loss from the Black Bringer. For utility it's hard to beat **Engineered Explosives**, **Aura Shards**, **Aura Mutation** and **Artifact Mutation**. Well, **Pernicious Deed** would beat them all (assuming you have them), but that seems like too much of a blunt object, lacking in finesse and style. A single **Oversold Cemetery** plus **Eternal Witnesses** gives the deck some recursion if needed. **Magic Online** expressed concern over my lack of a sideboard but I told it not to worry.

So I took my creation down to the Multiplayer room and queued up a game. Unfortunately I didn't realize that the default was "attack left" only until after the game had started and somebody wanted to get froggy and was forced to attack into InfiniteFogs.dec, which sat to my right so I didn't have to

worry about any offense anytime soon. My prey was the Sliver deck that was having some issue busting through his prey, whom I kept feeding Orchard Spirit tokens (the prey of my prey being my Friend and all).

One thing I found annoying from the get-go was **Aura Shards**, especially when I didn't necessarily want to nuke the **Howling Mine** one of my opponents was game enough to play on turn two. Every time I played a creature everyone had to wade through the **Aura Shards** trigger. In the spirit of smooth play I think I might replace the Shards, possibly with boring but potent **Pernicious Deed**.

One of our group had to leave early due to some family issue, and another ended up quitting once I had the black Bringer and the Goblet in play. The last opponent gamely waited for me to take the game with **Mindslaver** recursion, so I ended up winning my first online group game but I didn't feel particularly great about it. Having two people suddenly drop out of the game dramatically shifts the balance to whomever has the power at the time, suddenly forcing my opponent to one-on-one defense. There was also a small bit of grumbling about my plethora of rares, which made me realize that my opponents were playing much more casual decks, much less stocked with choice rares. So I decided to go back to the multiplayer drawing board.

When working on **Champions** block and the Vanguard decks one thing really hit home: **Kamigawa** snakes are a hoot to play. Mana acceleration, token generation, creature boosters, flavorful legends... they may be reptilian but there's plenty to love when they're on your side. Porting Snakes over to a casual mode had me searching for snakes in other sets; **Tangle Asp**, **Voracious Cobra** and **Mystic Snake** jumped out as quality members of the Snake tribe. Since I didn't necessarily want to try and make the mana work to run **Voracious** and **Mystic Snake**, I decided to follow my Vanguard lead and go with **Voracious** along with **Tangle Asp**, especially since both of them benefit from the aggressive powers lent by **Seshiro the Anointed**. Here's what I put together:



Kamigawa Snakes		
60 cards		
14 Forest	4 Voracious Cobra	4 Sosuke's Summons
1 Mountain	4 Tangle Asp	3 Time of Need
4 Karplusan Forest	4 Matsu-Tribe Sniper	
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Orochi Sustainer	7 other spells
23 land	1 Patron of the Orochi	
	1 Sachi, Daughter of Seshiro	
	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	
	4 Sakura-Tribe Springcaller	
	4 Seshiro the Anointed	
	30 creatures	

Nothing fancy, no instant-death combos, no recursion outside of **Sosuke's Summons** (and that's hardly unfair). The idea is to build up an army of snakes and crush whoever first gets froggy at the game table.

So I queue up a game and muster up three other players. By turn 5 we were all dead from this nitwit's Desire storm combo deck. I have a question for those who bring those sorts of decks to multiplayer tables: do you really have fun playing solitaire **Magic** against multiple opponents simultaneously? While I respect the Desire deck and certainly understand why folks will run it in a competitive setting, I don't understand why anyone would choose it for a fun group game.



Not doing too badly

At any rate, I try again, this time specifying "No Desire combos pls" and soon get four other players ready to roll: rat128, Natedogg, chakka, and Malkoth_. I smile when everyone leads with a forest-- good times! The nice thing

is that everyone has very different decks. rat128 is running what I'll call "Charging" Beasts (more on that later); Natedogg has a big deck of "randomness" (his words), chakka is running Lifespinner with Fecundity, and Malkoth_ has a Skeleton/Crystal Shard deck with Solemn Simulacrum and Duplicants. Malkoth_ also makes the mistake of playing Sun Droplet on turn 2, which evidently is as hated in the Aether as it is in real life.

Let me say that Natedogg's Traproot Kami became the biggest wall I've ever seen. At one point early in the game I hovered my mouse over it and it had a 15 toughness. Fifteen?! A quick glance at Natedogg's five lands confused me briefly until I realized that Traproot gets a toughness boost by all forests in play, not just his. Nice!



Getting wacked by Beasts/Aether Charge

Everyone plays and passes and plays and passes and soon I've amassed a force of Snakes to be reckoned with. Nobody has attacked yet to warrant a massive beatdown, but I get some good-natured chiding that I should get aggressive. Unprovoked aggression has never been my multiplayer style, but I do have Seshiro in play and a horde of snakes. So I swing... and evidently cement the image as "Big Threat On Table" in everyone's mind. Most everyone gangs up to "defang" me shortly thereafter; chakka starts ripping my hand to pieces with He Who Hungers and Ashen-Skin Zubera, Malkoth_ stops my Summons recursion with Withered Wretch and kills my Seshiro and Cobra with Dregs of Sorrow, and rat128 makes a bunch of beasts with Hunting Pack and starts slamming into my now puny snake army with 4/4 beating sticks. I pretty much struggle the rest of the game to try and stay relevant before rat128 starts taking over the game with multiple Aether Charges and an apparently endless supply of Beasts. He ended up winning the game at a very comfortable life total and since he indicated he was fairly new to the online multiplayer scene also I asked him to share his deck in honor of his stellar performance.

Rich Tate AKA rat128		
68 cards		
14 Forest	4 Ember Beast	4 Aether Charge
10 Mountain	4 Longhorn Firebeast	4 Hunting Pack
2 Shivan Oasis	4 Krosan Tusker	4 Kodama's Reach
26 land	4 Thoughtbound Primoc	
	4 Wirewood Savage	12 other spells
	4 Branchsnap Lorian	
	2 Totem Speaker	
	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	
	30 creatures	

After playing a Thoughtbound Primoc I joked with him that he's lucky there aren't any Snake Wizards or he'd be in trouble. I thought the Longhorn Firebeasts were a nice touch with Aether Charge, since the Charge still triggers whether somebody takes the hit to destroy the Longhorns, and if you stick your neck out like that you're bound to start taking Aether Charge activations to the face. Natedogg chided Maloth_ "Sun Droplet Boy" for being the one who should take the hit on the Longhorn since he'd get the life back but I could understand being reluctant to draw the attention. Red's got a handful of spells like that, letting an opponent choose to take damage or else allow an undercosted spell to resolve, and I think they're really great multiplayer cards for the political element they add.

A Quick Stop in Champions of Kamigawa Block

With Pro Tour Philadelphia this week, all the Magic community will soon be very aware of which decks are the best and which are also-rans. I thought about doing some more research and presenting one more power deck of the format this week, but how many pro players have not already picked their decks for the tour? I've decided instead to present a cool little fun deck from a gentleman who was kind enough to stay up late and answer a bunch of questions I had when I first began to explore the block. I never got the chance to work the interview into subsequent columns, but as a "thank you" to Steven Tran (Silverbolt64 on the forums) for his efforts I'd like to share his deck with you. It looks like a lot of fun. I fully admit to having a weak spot for Lifespinner decks!

Lifespinner		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
13 Forest	4 Kodama's Reach	4 Blessed Breath
9 Plains	3 Glimpse of Nature	4 Terashi's Grasp
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	3 Baku Altar	4 Cleanfall
1 Eiganjo Castle	10 other spells	3 Shining Shoal
24 land		15 sideboard cards
4 Kami of False Hope		
4 Lifespinner		

4	Dripping-Tongue Zuberá
4	Traproot Kami
3	Child of Thorns
3	Loam Dweller
2	Oyobi, Who Split the Heavens
2	Iname, Life Aspect
26 creatures	

These were Steven's comments on it:

"The idea behind this deck is to use **Lifespinner** to bring **Iname, Life Aspect** into play. Then use **Lifespinner** again, this time sacrificing Iname as well to bring in Oyobi. You get a handful of cheap spirits back to your hand, giving you the opportunity to create a massive army of 3/3 flyers."

Tips & Tricks

Ryan Spain wrote in to share this tip:

An online tip on how to use your collection as a **Magic** encyclopedia:

Go to the collection tab, and set "Version" to "Regular" (so you don't show any foils), and "owned" to ">= 0.

This will show you every **Magic** card online. Click "Show Pre-Invasion card sets" to show offline cards all the way back to Alpha.

From there you can use color filters and the "Search for" field to do things like search for all red online cards containing the word "Goblin," if you want to make a shopping list for your goblin deck before heading to the Trading Post.



Thanks for the great tip Ryan!

Ryan also wrote in another letter a while back that I wanted to address:

Dear Bennie Smith,

Regarding your article "Johnny Come Lately":

Of all the "coverage" choices you offered up, none of them was League Play! League play is not just sealed deck; it's much deeper than that.

League play is easily the most under-covered aspect of MTGO, I don't think I've seen a single article on it anywhere. When I was runner-up in Jay's "You Write The Column" thingy and he told me he would probably do it again in the future, I suggested he make the topic League play, as it needs coverage, and because I would certainly win THAT guest columnist contest.

I'm not expecting you to run a guest columnist thing, I'm just saying you should get Leagues onto your MTGO radar, and realize what untapped potential for articles it has.

Join a league and find out what I mean...

Good luck with your new column!

I've heard a lot of good things about league play and have recommended it to several new online players who were looking for tips on getting started on MTGO. Rest assured I will be covering leagues in the not too distant future!

I'll wrap things up by tossing down a gauntlet: anybody who wants to duel me with their Vanguard creations, bring it on! I've got all of the Vanguard decks I presented in my preview columns saved and ready to roll. If you see IntoTheAether on MTGO, feel free to issue a challenge and if I'm not already otherwise engaged I'll gladly accept! I also intend to play in some of the upcoming Vanguard premier events, so hopefully I'll see you there!

*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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