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# Having Serious Fun in Two-Headed Giant

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Into the Aether  
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## 2 Headed Mtg.com Writers

I've been playing **Magic** a long time, and one thing I've always wanted to do was play a multiplayer game with our own Serious Fun columnist Anthony Alongi. I started out in **Magic** being a group game enthusiast, and when I first ran across Anthony's stuff years ago on the venerable **Magic Dojo**, I was intrigued. In the midst of all the hard-core tournament player strategy was this guy writing about group games. But what was really interesting about Anthony's approach to casual play is how downright competitive he is! Sure, they may be "fun" or "casual" decks, but the fact that they were lean 60 card concoctions that paid attention to mana curve and such blew my mind. Where I came from, group games were played with 200 or more cards in your deck, with multiple antes flying nearly as frequently as the trash talking. It was messy, chaotic and fun. You'd have no idea how many cards were in your deck by the end of the night as you lost several antes before scoring a big haul in the group game you won, shuffling a few choice new cards into your deck before starting the next game. I initially viewed Anthony as an exotic bird, playing very nearly by the same rules as tournament **Magic**; that wasn't *real* group game **Magic**! It wasn't until later that I realized *my group* was more of the anomaly; most people didn't play 200 - 300 card decks with ante at the group game table.



Over the years, Anthony and I circled around in similar orbits. We were both early writers for Star City. When I got the job of Contributing Editor for Scrye Magazine, I knew who I wanted to work on set evaluations with, giving parallel Top 10 picks for both tournament and casual play. Now, here we are both writing for Wizards of the Coast, and both playing **Magic Online**. I had 2 Headed Giant on my radar to try out and I wanted to give it a whirl with Anthony since I knew he really enjoyed the format. This past week I finally got my chance!

I signed onto **Magic Online**, checked my buddy list and saw that he was on. *Can I jump in a game with you when you're done?* I asked. *Sure*, he replied. Great! My intention was to then work on a deck while he finished up, but before I could do much of anything his message popped back on, *are you ready now?* Um, *okay!*

The only real group game decks I had built currently were the Bringer and Snakes decks from [Giving Multiplayer A Try](#). So for the first game I picked the Bringer deck, but with a little apprehension. See, Anthony likes his games *timed*, and those of you who've followed me for the past few weeks know that the clock is not my friend. Not yet anyway. For someone like Anthony, a veteran of the Aether who is trying to squeeze in as many games in as he can, it makes perfect sense. For me, it's a problem, because I like to have *lots* of things going on in my casual decks. Lots of permanents, lots of cards, lots of options. Too many really, since I often will get brain locked going round and round trying to figure out the best play. Longtime paper **Magic** friends will certainly vouch that I'm nearly as bad out at the local game shop or tournament. It's sad but true.

Anyway, Anthony's setting up a game and we gotta roll! So Bringers it is. What's rather funny is that one of our opponents Tookson is also playing a five-color deck with Bringers!



As you can see, I'm already two minutes behind everyone else! Anthony... is playing a Graceful Antelope deck. Which actually should be quite disruptive to 5 color man across from him. What's also quite helpful is that Anthony is playing something like 12 **Vindicates** in his deck apparently, much to the chagrin of the opposition! (*just kidding, though he did draw all four in the course of the game*)

I start out pretty strong, with a turn 5 **Bringer of the Red Dawn**. My turns are rather busy casting spells, fixing mana. Then, in a cruel twist of fate, when Anthony's Antelope Plainswalks on Tookson, turning a mountain into a plains, he gives Tookson the right colored mana he needs to cast **Myojin of Cleansing Fire**, who soon thereafter gives up his divinity to be the only creature on the board. Anthony rewards him by playing yet another **Vindicate #7** and kicking the legendary spirit to the curb.



Unfortunately, Tookson ends up being the smokescreen. While he's playing some dangerous spells turn after turn, his partner bkool69 is busy thinning out every land in his deck with **Explosive Vegetations** and such, and has a ton of mana at his disposal. He plays **Blatant Thievery**, stealing Anthony's **Blinding Angel** and my **Bringer of the Black Dawn**. With **Arcanis the Omnipotent** and **Myojin of Seeing Winds** already in play, Anthony decides the last thing he needs is a **Vampiric Tutor** each turn, so he whips out **Vindicate #19** and sends the black Bringer packing back to my graveyard. At this point though it's really too late, as is soon demonstrated by bkool69 dropping two Heartbeats of Spring, floating tons of mana and casting **Sway of the Stars**. Our 2-Headed life dwindles from a respectable 41 to 7, and I float a little mana in case I draw into an instant. Of course I don't so I take mana burn after bkool69 plays **Hunting Pack** for around six or seven Beast tokens on an empty board. Yeah, that game was over, but even if it wasn't, I ended that game with under 2 minutes left on the Infernal Clock of Doom! Does

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**NOVELS**

*Dissension*  
Ravnica Cycle, Book III  
by Cory Herndon



anyone else think the clock sounds downright *evil* once you get down to less than 2 minutes? The numbers turn red, and the tick-tock sounds like a chain gang imprisoned in Freddy Krueger's boiler room.

I briefly consider begging Anthony to add a few more minutes to the clock for the next game, but then decide to buck up, play tighter **Magic**... and switch decks. Snakes ought to be a bit more straightforward, letting me burn up less time contemplating my next move. That's the theory, anyway.

We kick off the next game with Anthony playing his Samurai deck. Look at us, the Kamigawa Theme Twins! Inferno of the Mind appears to be playing a Dragon deck (naturally!), and his partner is doing some five-color, Domain stuff. One trick he's got working is **Grab the Reins** and **Nantuko Husk** to take out a threatening creature. He does it one time to grab and sacrifice Anthony's Godo. He then does it and snatches his opponent's **Ryusei, the Falling Star**, nuking my horde of Snakes. He then does it again on his opponent's **Kokusho, the Evening Star**. At that point Anthony smells a rat and voices his suspicion of collusion, which is evidently considered bad form if you don't announce that your decks work together ahead of time.



They protest their innocence; apparently the fantastic synergy between their decks is just a happy coincidence. Anthony messages me that we'll work together next time, he's got a Snake deck too, and shows me how you should properly go about advertising the fact that our decks are complementary.

*2HG, two mtg.com writers with complementary decks*

The humorously monikored lucustrout jumps in after watching our last match (he and Anthony are online acquaintances) and we're soon on our way to game number 3. I start off with a pretty good hand that begins to get squeezed a bit when I don't draw any more land than what you see here for several turns.



Still, casting the Summons a few times helps to buy time. All of us but lucustrout seem to be having mana problems actually, but while 'trout has a ton of mana he's mostly just using it on little stuff, trinkets and Spellbombs and **Bonesplitters**. Peck peck peck... well, it does add up after a while.

I had a plan develop around **Patron of the Orochi**, which would actually be quite nasty in conjunction with Anthony's **Opposition**... if only he could keep a couple creatures out there! 'trout keeps bouncing his Sachi with **Aether Spellbomb**.



My game plan is to drop the Patron as soon as Anthony gets another creature out there, but then 'trout drops another **Aether Spellbomb** and starts making noises about Seshiro. Sure enough, when I go to attack with Seshiro-inspired snakes, the Spellbomb gets activated. I go ahead and sacrifice the Legend to play the Patron at instant speed but it ends up being a little too late as 'trout's army of equipped weenies finally does us in with one more **Bonesplitter** (courtesy of the **Trinket Mage**) to barely kill us before we can overtake the game.

Since when is a **Bonesplitter** a trinket, anyway? I imagine this small skinny street peddler, enticing young buyers to come see what trinkets he has in his coat... only to reveal an arsenal of huge hafted weapons clanking in the folds of the cloth. *Perhaps this pretty greataxe for your girlfriend, lad?*

Thanks for the games Anthony! One thing I learned today that I didn't know before, in 2 Headed Giant online you can only attack the "head" that's directly in front of you; I had assumed you could attack either opponent but I found out the hard way when I attacked and the computer didn't ask me which opponent I was going after. Luckily my hapless creature didn't die to that mistake. 2 Headed Giant really is a lot of fun to play and I heartily recommend it (though if you have the good fortune of playing with Anthony, make sure that your deck isn't too time-challenged!)


## My League, Continued

Many of you (and I mean *many* of you) noticed a huge flaw in the decklist I presented last week for my initial league deck build. When pulling together the article, I inadvertently pulled up an early rough build where I had accidentally put too many land in the deck. For those of you who may not have realized the mistake, please make sure you run no more than 17 or 18 land in your own 40 card sealed deck! This is the actual initial decklist I ran (still bad, but not as bad as the 23-land version posted last week):

IntoTheAether League Deck		
40 cards		
1 Tranquil Garden	1 Akki Avalanchers	1 Devouring Rage
1 Forest	1 Battle-Mad Ronin	1 Enshrined Memories
8 Mountain	1 Blademane Baku	1 Honden of Cleansing Fire
8 Plains	1 Indebted Samurai	1 Hundred-Talon Strike
18 land	1 Initiate of Blood	1 Lava Spike
	1 Kami of False Hope	1 Terashi's Grasp
	1 Kami of Fire's Roar	1 Uncontrollable Anger
	1 Kitsune Blademaster	1 Call to Glory
	1 Nagao, Bound by Honor	

1 Pain Kami	8 other spells
1 Shinka Gatekeeper	
1 Silent-Chant Zuberu	
1 Silverstorm Samurai	
1 Waxmane Baku	
<hr/>	
14 creatures	

After playing a few games with this build, I quickly realized that the red was just awful, and the white was okay but hardly stellar. I took another look at black and realized that I was being silly by ignoring that color. With removal and big beats, it should be my base color. I also took another look at green, with its strong color fixing. I hated to admit it, but my card pool really wasn't strong enough to build a good two color deck, and if I was going to go three colors, green should probably be one of them. With black and green fixed, what should be my third color? The answer is obviously white, and so I cooked this up as an improvement over the first deck:

IntoTheAether League Deck		txt 
40 cards		
6 Forest	1 Blood Speaker	1 Enshrined Memories
4 Plains	1 Burr Grafter	1 Honden of Cleansing Fire
6 Swamp	1 Gibbering Kami	1 Horobi's Whisper
1 Tranquil Garden	1 Kami of False Hope	1 Kodama's Reach
<hr/>	1 Kyoki, Sanity's Eclipse	1 Rend Spirit
17 land	1 Nagao, Bound by Honor	1 Swallowing Plague
	1 Nezumi Cutthroat	1 Terashi's Grasp
	1 Order of the Sacred Bell	<hr/>
	1 Orochi Ranger	7 other spells
	1 Petalmane Baku	
	1 Sakura-Tribe Elder	
	1 Scaled Hulk	
	1 Seizan, Perverter of Truth	
	1 Takenuma Bleeder	
	1 Throat Slitter	
	1 Waxmane Baku	
	<hr/>	
	16 creatures	

Interestingly, I had this built a day before last week's article went up, and at least two people in the forums advocated this color combination and one posted a decklist very similar to this. So I felt pretty good with this decision and ran with it some more. In play, the deck performed decent enough, but I still found myself on the losing side of the stick more often than not. For some reason, sealed deck has never been a good fit for me; I stopped traveling to limited PTOs quite some time ago, and the in-town limited events (such as prereleases) I now work instead of play in. At least now I'm guaranteed some product! I was sort of hoping that being on *Magic Online* might turn my luck around in sealed deck. Not so far, but it is still early yet.

But hey—it's Week 2 of the League now, so let's pop a new pack and see what we can add to the mix!



Ugh! I don't know about you, but this booster looks fairly unspectacular to me. There's nothing for white, green gets the risky Iwamori and another color fixer/occasional accelerant **Petalmane Baku**. Black only gets **Call for Blood** (without evasion, the Rat Ninjas are fairly bad). It feels to me the good stuff in the pack lies almost exclusively in blue with three solid fliers. From my initial card pool, blue had a few good cards in it but was too shallow to consider, but with this bumper crop perhaps I need to reconsider my colors.

After thinking over some of my matches and how often I found myself in a losing position due to having zero presence in the sky, I decide to stick to base green and black, but splash blue instead of white. I hate losing the few really golden white cards, but the cards I gain are really good and potentially game breaking.

Here's what I end up with:



Not bad, not bad. Nice curve, some decent cards... but I've got 41 cards in the deck and need to cut one. It takes me about five minutes of consideration but I end up concluding that the second **Petalmane Baku** is the correct choice. What do you think?

I play a couple more matches and, while the games are mostly pretty close, I still lose. Am I really so bad? I don't think I can blame these cards since it feels to me that the deck is pretty solid now. I know that being still a relative novice with the MTGO interface has led to several potentially game-losing mistakes.

An interesting theme popped up on the message board thread to last week's column, kicked off by this post:

**Balerion wrote:**

*I think I'm like a lot of people who really want to play leagues: I'm out of college, have a job, a house, and a family, and am looking to play some **Magic** when I have a spare 45-60 minutes.*

*But leagues just don't work like that. If you want to play some high quality games you have to play all five of your counting matches the day the league opens and on the days new packs are opened. If you don't, you'll end up waiting in the queue \*forever\* only to be matched against some guy who opened every broken card, who is easily leading the points, and is playing for his thousandth tie breaker point.*

*If you can manage to get in all 20 matches and win about 50% you'll probably win a couple packs, but actually finishing the 20 matches and winning 50% is a very shaky prospect under these conditions. It wouldn't be so bad if what I did play were good games, but it's usually the broken pack king versus little ol' me.*

*I think it would be much better if you could only play one or two counting matches in a day. That, and/or let people in one league play against people in another league of the same format and same week.*

This sentiment is echoed by several other posters, one of which actually goes so far as to suggest maybe I'm a "corporate hack" trying to put a shiny happy face on league play when it is actually not very enjoyable. I assure you and everyone else that is not the case; what I write here is how I experience it. Even though I've been getting annihilated so far in the league, I'm still having a good time playing **Magic**. My opponents have all be courteous and the decks haven't seemed to be particularly chock any more full of broken cards than my own. Since I've switched to three colors I've come a lot closer to winning more matches. It's frustrating losing so much but I'm trying to improve my play.

But it is entirely possible that my off-day matches are indeed against some of these alleged sharks that open broken card pools and prey upon those of us cursed with mediocrity. It hasn't felt that way to me so far, though if that changes I'll certainly let you know. My suggestion is this, especially for new players: remember, **Magic** is a fun game, so make sure to have fun whether you win or lose! Adversity is an opportunity to learn.

## Tips & Tricks

JimWolf posted on the message boards:

*Given that you're new to leagues let me suggest something. Post your pool [here](#) (the Leagues and Sealed deck threads on the Wizards.Community Boards). When I bombed out of my first week of OLS league play I found I had no idea what cards were playable in a limited format. By reading this forum I slowly figured out what I should be playing and what I should not. Seriously. Posting your pool to the forums and using their sage advice would be an interesting angle to your column.*

Thanks for the advice, Jim! Given my record so far, I will very likely be giving that a try soon! I'm sure there are readers out there who could benefit from the help as well.

*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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