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MTGO Gumbo: A Little of This, A Little of That

Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, June 9, 2005



Hear ye! Hear ye!

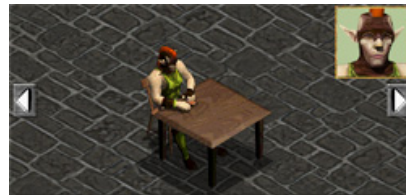
Before we get going, I thought you might like to hear some announcements from Scott M. Larabee, MTG:O Tournament Coordinator:

- Starting June 6, Vanguard events will be added to the Premier Events schedule (2 days per week)!
- The OTJ (*Onslaught-Torment-Judgment*) Qualifying Tournament events have been moved up a week. They will now run June 9 through June 15 with the OTJ Sealed Deck Tournament on June 17. Yep, the QTs start *today*!
- June 24 is the 3-year birthday for MTGO! On that day, we will run all drafts as "Nix Tix", which means drafts will cost *zero-zilch-nada* tickets the whole day! In addition, we will run a **6x Prize** Open CHK Block Constructed event on the same day!

Also, in case you missed it, Vanguard changes were announced in [Aaron Forsythe's column last week](#). These changes take effect June 23, 2005 (after the regularly scheduled Thursday downtime); I've reprinted them here so we can go over them.

Elvish Champion – 7 cards, 15 life (from 8, 21)

I still find it funny that I didn't even think too deeply of the combo applications of this avatar; silly me, [I just wanted to build a faster Elf deck!](#) I had no idea Elvish Champion would turn into the Ravager Affinity of the format, but I have to say bravo to Wizards for moving on the problem. Knocking down a card and 6 life is a pretty huge swing, and while I have no doubt that Elvish Champion combo will still be strong, it feels that things might be a little more fair now. What do you think?



Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni – 6 cards, 17 life (from 6, 13)

I'm sure it will surprise no one to hear how thrilled I am about this change! Each point of life is crucial to this deck's survival; in nearly every game I lost (and I lost *a lot* with Ink-Eyes, haha), I always felt I was *this* close to taking momentum and control of the game if I could have had just one more turn. I would have loved to see the starting hand size tick back up to seven, but I think it's a testament to the power of this avatar that you still get saddled with a double drawback. The abilities are very potent. Will the additional life points be enough?

Arcbound Overseer – 7 cards, 23 life (from 6, 23)

As I learned playing Ink-Eyes, starting down a card is a pretty tough drawback. Arcbound Overseer's abilities are loads of fun but slow rolling, so it's nice to see the adjustment balance moved from the negative to the positive.

Goblin Warchief – 7 cards, 22 life (from 7, 17)

Will the boost in life help bring Goblin Warchief to the forefront of aggro Vanguard cards? Perhaps, though it's hard to beat Akroma...

Seshiro the Anointed – 7 cards, 19 life (from 7, 25)

In Aaron's column, Paul Sottosanti mentions that there were a number of combo decks built around Seshiro that can kill quickly and consistently, and with Elvish Champion being taken down a peg there was some worry that Seshiro would step in. I somehow missed those Seshiro combo decks... anyone care to share?

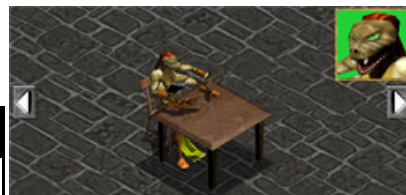
It's been a while since last I had a poll for you all, and these changes in Vanguard seemed the perfect opportunity to pick your collective brain! I'll post the results next week so we all have something to think on leading up to the changes taking effect.

Do you think they went far enough in fixing Elvish Champion?

Too far

Far enough

Not enough



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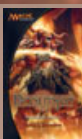


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Yes
 No

Submit my Vote

Do you think Ink-Eyes is playable now?

Yes
 No

Submit my Vote

Once the changes take effect, which avatar do you think will be the best in the Vanguard metagame? (in alphabetical order)

Akroma, Angel of Wrath
 Arcbound Overseer
 Birds of Paradise
 Bosh, Iron Golem
 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails
 Elvish Champion
 Erhnam Djinn
 Etched Oracle
 Fallen Angel
 Flametongue Kavu
 Goblin Warchief
 Grinning Demon
 Higure, the Still Wind
 Ink-Eyes, Servant of the Oni
 Karona, False God
 Phage the Untouchable
 Platinum Angel
 Prodigal Sorcerer
 Raksha, Golden Cub
 Royal Assassin
 Serra Angel
 Seshiro the Anointed
 Two-Headed Giant
 Viridian Zealot

Submit my Vote

What Happens in The Aether, Stays in The Aether

[When I was playing 2 Headed Giant with Anthony Alongi](#), one of the games was with lucastrout and he said something that was one of those *thank God I didn't have a mouthful of soda or my computer screen would have been soaked* moments. I believe the exchange went something like this:

supermindpowerman: watch out for SeriousFun's Opposition

lucastrout: I'm looking at IntoTheAether's Vicious Cobra

IntoTheAether: hey, stop staring at my snake!

lucastrout: what happens in the aether stays in the aether

If you happen to have not seen any of the Las Vegas commercials that inspired that quote, I apologize if that flew over your head. At any rate, lucastrout impressed me with his good nature and his utter dominance of that game with what appeared to be a motley collection of mostly commons and uncommons. I thought it would be fun to share his deck with you all as an example that you don't need a huge stack of expensive rares to have fun and compete in the casual rooms. And while we're at it, who is the man behind the trout?

MTGO handle? lucastrout

Real name? Lucus Trout

Age? 25

Where do you live? Orlando, Florida

How long have you been playing Magic? Since *Ice Age*—10 years now!

How long have you been playing MTGO? Since Christmas time, 2004

Percentage-wise, how would you consider yourself more of a casual or competitive Magic player? 75/30 casual/competitive (*I'm unsure whether Lucas is being funny here or if his math skills leave something to be desired* – Bennie)

What's your favorite online format(s)? I love drafting, which is the main reason I got onto MTGO. My self-dictated budget keeps me to one online draft every week or two and that's very affordable. Those are pretty much the only cards I have purchased besides the first 2 starter decks I bought. 2HG is cool, and Vanguard is really sweet as well. Some of the other formats sound really nifty but I don't have the volume of cards to support the kind of decks I would want for them yet.

What do you think of the changes to some of the avatar's Vanguard abilities? I was surprised at the original power of the Elvish Champion, obviously Wizards was too. I think it was a good idea to make the changes. Also I like the idea of being able to use Ink Eye's ability more. (*yay, Ink-Eyes! –Bennie*)

How many multiplayer games have you played with Anthony Alongi? I can't seem to shake that guy; he seems to think he's famous. His buddy Crawler is the real star ;)

What's the coolest win you've seen him pull off? It seems like one game he managed to blow up the world like 46 times with **Pernicious Deed** and Crawler was playing with some really great fatties-- *Invasion* block stuff-- that makes me giddy. I play a lot of small creatures so it worked great against me.

What's the coolest win you've pulled off against him? I tell everyone about the **Trinket Mage** joke you told in your article. I would say that makes that game the best win. Albeit your mana problems also helped!

Is there a particular card you have a difficult time NOT putting into every multiplayer deck you build?

Lately I have a problem not putting **Jitte** in every deck I build. In casual decks I never put more than one. It's not as evil in multiplayer because there are more people to answer it. In older sets it's **Seedborn Muse** and offline it has to be **Land Tax**.

Trout's Flying Thieves

60 cards

<p>8 Island 14 Plains</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>22 land</p>	<p>1 Blinding Angel 1 Thieving Maggie 2 Slith Ascendant 2 Auriok Glaivemaster 3 Leonin Squire 1 Skyhunter Skirmisher 3 Trinket Mage 2 Kami of False Hope 4 Kitsune Blademaster 1 Lantern Kami 1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror 1 Mothrider Samurai</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>22 creatures</p>	<p>1 Coastal Piracy 1 Confiscate 1 Steal Artifact 4 Bonesplitter 4 Mask of Memory 3 AEther Spellbomb 1 Terashi's Grasp 1 Umezawa's Jitte</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>16 other spells</p>
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Comments on the deck: My deck is all about hitting the opponent in the air and drawing into more creatures or other toys with the Mask. This deck is definitely casual; instead of search cards I just plan to draw a lot until I find one of my (hopefully) game swinging cards. Aside from Meloku, Jitte, and the quite annoying **Blinding Angel**, I don't have a lot of power so I have the **Confiscate** and **Steal Artifact** to take your goodies. If you liked them enough to put them in your deck I am sure I'll like them too!

Now that we've outed your deck, do you worry about being hated out? With my tight mana curve and optimal redundancy (do I need to give Maro's disclaimer on sarcasm? *Nah, but maybe some royalties will keep him quiet -- Bennie*), I am afraid that people may start using **Cranial Extraction** to get rid of my 4 **Bonesplitters**...or my 3 **Leonin Squires**... Another strategy would be playing all horrible cards so that my **Confiscate** is useless, I think I like that one most!

Fired Up

Last week I asked if you had any good 2HG "Fire" decks that you cared to share? I was hoping for a better **Heartless Hidetsugu** build than the one I put together, and while I wasn't sent any particular builds I did get a few good suggestions for the deck. The best thoughts were about adding some mana acceleration to the build, either **Talismans** or **Seething Song**. Considering the number of times I've sat waiting around with the Hide in my hand, that certainly sounds like good counsel. Michael Carey did send in a different burn deck that I found to be quite nifty. I especially liked the **Ion Storm/Talon of Pain** synergy, though I'd want to add some more cards that accumulated charge counters to fuel the Storm, such as **Mirrodin's Core**. **Jinxed Choker** might be a great "rock and a hard place" card; people will typically want to keep giving you your Choker back but if you have **Ion Storm** in play, do they want to give you charge counters to work with?

Multiplayer Burn by Michael Carey

60 cards

<p>4 Karplusan Forest 4 Sulfurous Springs 2 Great Furnace 14 Mountain</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>24 land</p>	<p>0 creatures</p>	<p>4 Sensei's Divining Top 3 Talon of Pain 3 Ion Storm 4 Sulfuric Vortex 4 Magma Jet 4 Shrapnel Blast 4 Pulse of the Forge</p>
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4 Browbeat
 4 Flamebreak
 2 Beacon of Destruction

36 other spells

Comments on the deck: Here is a burn deck I often use when playing in 2 Headed-Giant games online. This deck works wonders in multiplayer games! I can't say enough about the Vortex. It is the single best source of repeatable burn a Red Mage could ever ask for, especially for a multiplayer game.

The best way to play the deck is to let the Vortex trim everyone's life totals to much more manageable levels, while saving your big finishers for when the opponent is within striking distance.

The Tops and **Magma Jets** work wonders in helping you find exactly what you need and also making sure you don't miss crucial land drops, while the **Flamebreaks** help hold the line against the weenie hordes, often by sweeping them all right away and dealing damage to your opponent's dome to boot. Also, you would be amazed how often opponents in multiplayer do not take the 5 damage from **Browbeat**, instead letting you fill your hand up again.

Often times, careful manipulation of your own life total with the painlands can net you multiple uses from your Pulse(s), with **Shrapnel Blasts** and Beacons as other tasty finishers. I have dealt upwards of 30 damage in a single turn with this deck.

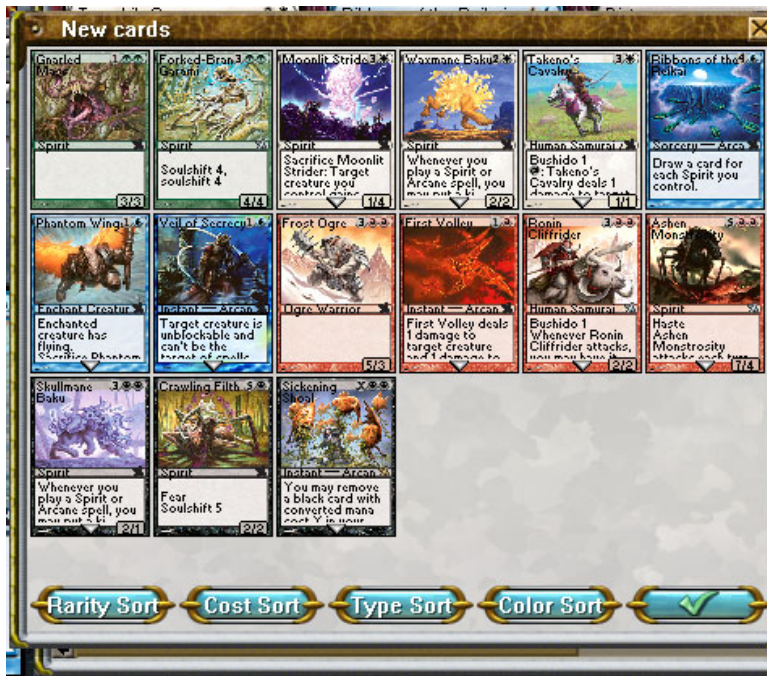
Also of note is the nice synergy between the Talon and the **Ion Storm**. Activate the **Ion Storm**, pulling a counter off the Talon to deal 2, just to watch the Talon get another counter right back on it! Another great source of repeatable damage, even if your hand is empty.

You should really give this deck a whirl, as it is very fun to play, and, for a mono red deck, does actually require a bit of thought when tapping mana and deciding when to go for broke.



My League, Week the Fourth

For my final pack, the **Magic** gods smile on me. Check this out:



I just happen to still be playing the [black/white build advocated by Ken Krouner from last week](#), so popping both a **Sickenning Shoal** and **Waxmane Baku** is just nuts. I dump the good stuff over into my main deck and then go about the hard task of trimming back to 40 cards. After much deliberation and agonizing over my terrible mana curve, this is what I end up with:

IntoTheAether League Deck

40 cards



9 Plains	1 Gibbering Kami	1 Blinding Powder
9 Swamp	1 Indebted Samurai	1 Honden of Cleansing Fire
18 land	2 Kami of False Hope	1 Horobi's Whisper
	1 Kitsune Blademaster	1 Hundred-Talon Strike
	1 Kyoki, Sanity's Eclipse	1 Rend Spirit
	1 Nagao, Bound by Honor	1 Sickening Shoal
	1 Nezumi Cutthroat	1 Swallowing Plague
	1 Okiba-Gang Shinobi	
	1 Seizan, Perverter of Truth	7 other spells
	2 Takenuma Bleeder	
	1 Throat Slitter	
	2 Waxmane Baku	
	15 creatures	

It was tough cutting the 41st card, which ended up being **Moonlit Strider**. Keep in mind, this tweak is without any outside guidance, so I may very well not be playing the optimal build here. But playing a couple more league games and the deck feels quite potent, picking up some wins and some close losses.

So, did I actually come up with the right build this time? Luckily for me (and you!), Ken Krouner stopped back in to check to see how I was doing and shared some of his Limited wisdom!

[21:14] IntoTheAether: I got a killer pack week 4
[21:15] IntoTheAether: wanna see it?
[21:15] Krouner: sure
[21:16] *** Krouner has received league1_week4 booster.bmp.
[21:17] Krouner: holy crap
[21:17] Krouner: that pack is awesome:)
[21:17] IntoTheAether: I had to pick my jaw off the floor lol
[21:18] Krouner: you must have been almost as happy as when I got a Jitte week 2:)
[21:18] IntoTheAether: lol almost yeah
[21:18] IntoTheAether: the fact that two bombs were in my colors was pretty darn great
[21:18] Krouner: 3 in my opinion
[21:19] Krouner: I think moonlit strider is very close to waxmane baku
[21:19] IntoTheAether: lol that card ended up cut as the 41st card when I rebuilt my deck with the pack
[21:20] Krouner: I would never ever cut that card
[21:20] Krouner: under any circumstances
[21:20] Krouner: even if I were only splashing white
[21:21] IntoTheAether: I didn't want to, but my curve was already so high and I couldn't find something better to cut
[21:21] IntoTheAether: I'll send you what I ended up with
[21:22] *** Krouner has received League1_week4.txt.
[21:22] Krouner: I don't consider 4 drops to effect the curve really
[21:23] IntoTheAether: it annoys me that I only have one two drop!!
[21:23] Krouner: yeah that was my least favorite part of your deck
[21:24] Krouner: I would cut one of the false hopes, other than that I like the way you did it
[21:24] IntoTheAether: :)
[21:24] IntoTheAether: maybe I'm learning
[21:25] Krouner: :)
[21:25] IntoTheAether: the false hopes though-- I've been really happy with them
[21:25] Krouner: they are good
[21:25] Krouner: but the 1/4
[21:26] Krouner: just makes it look like a joke
[21:26] IntoTheAether: lol
[21:26] Krouner: what were the 3 cards you cut?
[21:26] Krouner: the 2 bigger kamis
[21:26] IntoTheAether: yeah
[21:26] Krouner: oh
[21:26] Krouner: and the strider
[21:26] Krouner: ok
[21:27] Krouner: hrm
[21:27] Krouner: its sorta tricky
[21:27] Krouner: b/c you dropped your creature count by 1
[21:27] Krouner: I think that maybe with the way the deck is shaping up
[21:27] Krouner: you can let the blinding powder go
[21:27] Krouner: and 1 kami of false hope
[21:28] Krouner: and bring back the kami of honored dead
[21:28] Krouner: and moonlit strider
[21:28] Krouner: it's tough
[21:28] Krouner: the creatures in b/w are critical
[21:28] Krouner: and the big kami give you a solid victory condition
[21:29] IntoTheAether: interesting
[21:29] IntoTheAether: I'll give that a try
[21:30] Krouner: it's tough
[21:30] Krouner: it could go either way
[21:45] Krouner: I think you should try it without the powder and with the kami at first
[21:45] Krouner: if you feel yourself having too much expensive stuff
[21:45] Krouner: then switch it back
[21:46] IntoTheAether: I think it's hilarious to have so much good stuff now that you have to cut the blinding

powder, when it was such a struggle for me to build a good deck initially
[21:47] Krouner: yeah
[21:47] Krouner: it happens in week 4
[21:48] Krouner: blinding powder is at its worst in decks like this though
[21:48] Krouner: not that it is bad
[21:48] Krouner: but you have so much good defense already
[21:48] Krouner: and 2 baku's for offense
[21:49] IntoTheAether: yeah
[21:49] Krouner: that do similar things

Thanks for the advice, Ken! So, readers, how do you think the final week's deck should look?

Behind the Curtain: Notes from the MTGO team

Want to hear about what came out at E3 regarding MTGO 3.0? We've got some great behind-the-scenes stuff to share with you from **Magic Online** Brand Manager Justin Ziran!

Thanks Bennie, we've been pretty busy with all the follow-up from E3 and I wanted to make sure I carved out a little time to talk to everyone about the event. First of all, I wanted to say congratulations to Terry Soh, the 2005 **Magic: The Gathering** Invitational winner. He beat [some pretty tough competition](#) to squeak out the win.

Moving on.....

Our intention going into E3 was to give the industry (and press) a peek behind the curtain with regard to **Magic Online** v3 development. What we got was a whole lot of coverage by all the gaming press and a pretty sizable follow-up list that will keep me busy for weeks. To be honest, I thought we'd have a pretty challenging time rising above all the noise that Sony and Xbox were making with the new consoles.

So, what did we show, you ask?

We showed the new menu system – (Actual screen shot from the client with extra menu overlays) demonstrating the new cascading menu system. In addition, you get a preview of the new nav bar (“A1” far left).



We also showed the new duel screen – (Actual screen shot except for the cards & the avatars)

The first shot shows the duel screen with both the chat window (B1) and player info box (B2) maximized



The 2nd JPEG shows the duel screen with both the chat window and player info box minimized. We want to provide the option to have as much playing space for the cards as possible.



Everything except the cards and the avatar (head shot) are actual screen assets captured from the v3 client. The cards and avatars aren't quite ready for public consumption.

We also showed off some of the 3D work too.

You probably won't see avatars this close but it will give you an idea of where we are going.



That stuff looks cool, but where's the preview pane?

The screen capture video below is from the actual client, and it's the first time we've published it for the public.

The art and text quality will be improved over v2 and there is a great new mouse-over zoom option. After a short pause, the card will un-tap (if necessary), enlarge itself and then re-tap (if necessary) and return to its original size. It takes a second to get used to it, but the added screen space is well worth it. (Also note that it's a bit choppy from converting it over to the webpage. It's much smoother in person.)



So, when will v3 be released?

I originally announced a Q4 '05 release but the timing of our release schedule and some unannounced plans have made it necessary to move the release into 2006. Our target date is April '06 with a beta in early 2006.

What are the unannounced plans?

We'll leave that for another day...

Tips & Tricks

Eric Pennock/new_abolitionist wrote:

I received a tip from an adept today that was very helpful to me. It was always VERY confusing to me how the time zone thing affected scheduled Premier Events. I received this tip:

10:03 Adept_Wit: If you see a time stated in Magic Online, then that time is adjusted to match your computer clock. That means if an event says it starts at 5am, then that is 'your' 5am. (In contrast, if you see a time on a WotC web site, that time is 'their' time, the Pacific Time zone.)

We both thought it would be helpful to all that play online to know this, especially in the case of release events, in which players of ALL levels participate.

Thanks for sharing, Eric!

A Call for Help

Next week I'd like to start going over trading on *Magic Online*, a topic I've received numerous emails on looking for advice. Since I have yet to explore that facet of *Magic Online*, I'm putting out the call to any of you who consider themselves proficient in wheeling and dealing in the trade areas. What tips would you pass along to new players looking to round out their collection? What pitfalls would you advise them to avoid? If you have any ideas you'd like to share, please email them to me. This will be a big help in getting the topic together!

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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