

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Saviors Release Events

Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, June 23, 2005



Many of you might be heading out for [the Regional Championships](#) this Saturday. I'm hoping to do the same (provided I can catch a ride). If any of you attend the Mid Atlantic Regionals at the University of Maryland, come by and say hello, wish me luck and a happy birthday!



Once you get back from a day full of **Magic** fun (and if you're lucky, an invite to Nationals for your trouble), you'll get a full day's rest before Monday rolls around. What happens Monday? *Saviors of Kamigawa* releases on **Magic Online** Monday, that's what! It becomes available to buy from the **Magic Online** Store, and it becomes legal in all casual rooms and constructed queues. You can bet trading for the rares that made appearances at Regionals will be red *hot*!

Things really get cooking next Thursday, June 30th; that's when the [Saviors Release events](#) start to roll!

In it for the Fun? You Got It!

Anyone who's played in paper **Magic** prerelease tournaments knows that these sorts of events are all about having fun. Most people are laid back; many are playing with these cards for the very first time and are looking for some games to get used to what the new set has to offer. Even the more competitive events feel more casual and fun, with players of all stripes jumping in to acquire new cards and see how they run.

If you have not run in a Prerelease event or one of MTGO's Release events, check out [Brian David-Marshall's column on attending a Prerelease](#). Most of what he suggests applies to these events as well.



Release Leagues

These special leagues run for just 1 week; pick up a tournament pack of *Champions*, three *Saviors* boosters, two tix and jump in. Up to 256 players can play in each league, and 2x prizes are awarded.

Draft Queues

Playing draft with three packs of the smaller expansions is definitely an interesting experience! While drafting three packs of the base expansion (such as *Champions-Champions-Champions*) feels more balanced, things get kooky with just *Saviors-Saviors-Saviors*! Expect Channel, Sweep, and "hand-size matters" cards to play a much larger role than in *Champions-Betrayers-Saviors* drafts! For the purists out there though, there will be CHK-BOK-SOK drafts as well. 3 packs, 2 tix, and the same queues (8-4 or 4-3-2) will be available for both.

In it for the Competition? You Got It!

Those looking to whet their competitive appetites have plenty of opportunity in the Premier event flights offering 2x and even 4x in prizes!

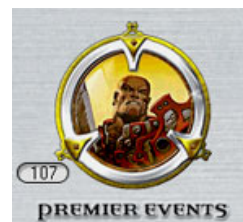
Premier Event Flights 2x prizes

Starting on June 30th at 3pm, 2x flights of 24-32 players will start up every hour on the hour. The winner gets 24 boosters of *Saviors*, with payout down to 4 packs for eighth place. These smaller flights are a good place to get your feet wet for tournament play if you're new to the game, or if you don't have all day to spend on it.

Premier Event Flights 4x prizes Starting on June 30th at 3pm, 4x flights of 24-128 players will start up every hour on the hour. The winner gets 48 boosters of *Saviors*, with a payout down to 6 packs for eighth place. This is where the big dogs roam for the full tournament throwdown experience!

Release Championship 6x prizes

You've got to play in one of the Premier events and do well (getting 1st place for the 2x events, or getting Top 4 for the 4x events) in order to win an Invite, but playing in the Championship is free once you've earned your slot. The winner of the event gets 72 boosters (that's two boxes of booster packs!), and the payout continues down to 6 packs for 32nd place. That's on top of the *Champions* tournament pack and three *Saviors* packs you get for free in the sealed deck portion, along with the cards you draft in the Top 8.



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In it for the Prizes? You Got It!

All those who participate in a League Event or a Premier Event will receive the Participation Avatar: Oni of Wild Places. The winner of each League Event, the Top 2 players in each 2x Premier Event, and the Top 8 players in each 4x Premier event will receive the Prize Avatar: Sakashima, the Impostor! With Vanguard available to us now, receiving new Avatars is even more incentive to get in some games at Release Events.

Of course, the really cool prize is winning the *Saviors* Release Event Championship Grand Prize: the framed, original artwork for the *Saviors* card **Sakashima, the Impostor** by artist rk post. Check it out!



I realize the odds are slim that you won't like this awesome artwork, but if you win it and don't want it, please contact charitable donations@intotheaether.com and I'll be happy to take it off your hands!

New Avatars, New Vanguard Abilities!

Okay, so you've procured a new Avatar or two from the Release Events; what are their Vanguard abilities? Glad you asked!

Oni of Wild Places

Hand +1, Life -2

Creatures you control have haste. At the beginning of your upkeep, return a creature you control to its owner's hand.

Giving all your creatures haste is a pretty potent ability that brings back memories of Fires of Yavimaya decks stampeding across the Standard landscape a few years back. Of course, the "drawback" of returning a creature to your hand each turn can slow down your assault somewhat by effectively tying up your mana recasting a creature each turn. You can get around that with mana-saving cards like **Aether Vial** and playing plenty of low mana creatures. **Cosmic Larva** seems tailor made for this avatar, since he gets to hit immediately and you can bounce him back rather than having to sacrifice lands or the card itself.

One approach that sprung to my mind though is some of the recent red cards that temporarily steal your opponent's creatures. **Cunning Bandit**, when flipped, typically is used just to move opponent's blockers out of the way since you gain control of the creature but they don't have haste so they can't attack. The new **Skyfire Kirin** has the same limitation. With Oni of Wild Places, you get to attack with the stolen creatures as well (assuming they're untapped).

The "drawback" of the Oni can be used as a positive thing as well, by bouncing and replaying a spirit in order to charge up the Bandit or reuse the Kirin. You can also bounce back the flipped Bandit in order to replay it and accumulate ki counters. I added **Genesis Chambers** to the deck in order to give you a buffer creature in case you don't want to bounce one of your other creatures back to your hand. It's also nice that these tokens can attack along with the creature you just summoned that triggered the Chambers.

Avatar – Oni of Wild Places		
60 cards		
4 Tendo Ice Bridge	4 Frostling	4 Genesis Chamber
2 City of Brass	4 Soilshaper	4 Glacial Ray
8 Forest	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	

9 Mountain	4 Cunning Bandit	8 other spells
1 Miren, the Moaning Well	3 Kodama of the South Tree	
24 land	3 Adamaro, First to Desire	
	4 Skyfire Kirin	
	2 Masumaro, First to Live	
	28 creatures	

Sakashima, the Impostor

Hand +0, Life +1

2: Choose a creature you control. It becomes a copy of target creature except for its name.

Building a deck around Sakashima is a bit trickier. To "clone" a creature you've got to pay the casting cost of your creature plus the two mana to activate it. I quickly realized that **Ornithopter** would be perfect, effectively a two mana **Clone**. If you run your deck with cheap creatures you could then use your mana to transform them into the best creature your opponent has to offer. **Genesis Chamber** (again!) works well since your token creatures will inevitably become much better than the ones your opponent gets.

Then I started thinking about Arcbound artifact creatures, since the +1/+1 counters will stay on the creature card no matter what it becomes. So you can change it to a better version of the best creature of your opponent! **Clockwork Beetle** is particularly nefarious since it comes into play with two +1/+1 counters for just one mana, spend two more and he can become a huge version of something else. **Steel Wall** plays defense until he's called to become something better.

I thought it would be fun to finish things off with **Eater of Days**. Sure, you're going to lose your next two turns, but assuming you have two or four (or more) mana available when you cast it, simply clone the Eater a few times with whatever you already have in play and swing with 9/8 flying, trampling, monsters that may have a couple +1/+1 counters too! Your opponent can't take advantage of the extra turns if he's dead.

Avatar - Sakashima, the Impostor		
60 cards		
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Ornithopter	4 Genesis Chamber
18 Swamp	4 Steel Wall	2 Skeleton Shard
1 Mikokoro, Center of the Sea	4 Arcbound Worker	6 other spells
1 Miren, the Moaning Well	4 Clockwork Beetle	
24 land	4 Arcbound Slith	
	4 Arcbound Stinger	
	4 Eater of Days	
	2 Triskelion	
	30 creatures	

Behind the Curtain: Interview with RachelR regarding Programming Saviors

Some of you may remember Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar's interview last fall [Introducing Rachel Reynolds](#), one of the people hard at work programming **Magic Online**. She's back this time to give us the lowdown on programming **Saviors**, and also shares with us a few other changes to the interface: the Phage Vanguard ability gets a tweak, and we get a rundown of keyboard shortcuts you won't want to miss!

IntoTheAether: Any insights for the layperson about what coding a set like *Saviors of Kamigawa* is like?

RachelR: A lot of fun :) With a small set like *Saviors of Kamigawa*, there are usually a little over a hundred cards that don't start working automatically (I believe the number was around 120 for *Saviors*). Each one is a unique puzzle to be solved, and there are many rewarding moments as small goals are accomplished.

IntoTheAether: What was the trickiest card for you to code in *Saviors of Kamigawa* and why?

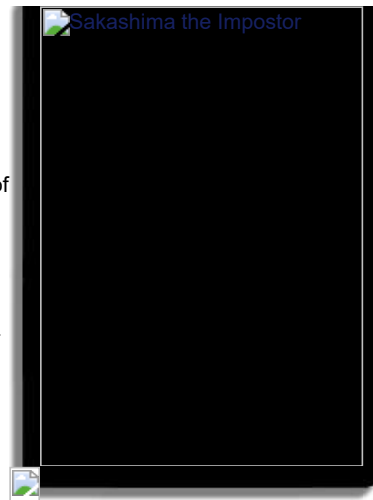
RachelR: **Sakashima the Impostor** was by far the most challenging card to code. When I started programming it, it seemed simple enough. It's just like **Clone**, right? It should be easy enough to reuse the code for that and then change a few things later to make it keep a few characteristics. Well, that was not quite the case. I did use the same code that was in place for **Clone**, added a bit at the end to give it the correct name, make it legendary, and give it the ability. However, there was a slight problem in that somewhere the abilities I added were being removed; somewhere in the thousands of lines I was working with Sakashima was reverted back to the exact same thing it copied.

Once I knew where I needed to add the abilities so they wouldn't be removed again, the card almost worked, except the name remained that of the original card. It turned out that the card had the correct name, it just wasn't displaying correctly. Once I determined what the problem was, it was easy enough to get the client to show the correct name. Nevertheless, my battle with Sakashima was not over. It turned out that

there were numerous tricky interactions with other cards that had to be fixed on a case by case basis as they were discovered during the beta.

The Vanguard card based on Sakashima was fairly simple to program, as I was very familiar with the relevant sections of code after programming Sakashima. However, it unleashed even more possibilities for crazy card interactions. At least 20 unique bugs were reported with Sakashima and the Sakashima Avatar, often involving tokens, morph, or flip cards. Most of the bugs were very trivial, but the quantity is probably enough to surpass even *All Suns' Dawn*. Here are two bugs with the Sakashima Avatar I fixed recently and found particularly amusing:

- If you turned a morph creature into another creature using the avatar's ability, it stayed face down. It was the creature you copied. But if that creature didn't have morph you couldn't turn it face up, so copying it wasn't particularly useful.
- With a creature, *Isochron Scepter*, and *March of the Machines* in play, you could put multiple copies of the creature into play if you used *Duplicant* to remove the creature from the game and turned *Duplicant* into *Isochron Scepter* with the avatar's ability.



IntoTheAether: Back when Jay interviewed you in October, it was mentioned that Alan Comer starts on the "complex" cards, you start on the "straightforward" cards, and then the two of you meet at the middling cards. Has your dynamic changed any since then?

RachelIR: Yes. I am much more experienced programming **Magic** cards now than I was at the time, and I feel confident in my ability to program any of the cards. I was the lead programmer for *Saviors*, and ended up programming most of the cards in the set, including the "complex" ones.

IntoTheAether: What were considered the "complex" cards this time around in *Saviors*?

RachelIR: In general, *Saviors* was pretty easy. As I described earlier, *Sakashima the Impostor* turned out to be the most complicated. The other cards I would consider "complex" are the Epic cards, the new flip cards, and *Hail of Arrows*.

IntoTheAether: Is there a card or cards that the game interface makes a bit tricky to play, and do you have any play suggestions for the card(s)?

RachelIR: The trickiest interface for a *Saviors* card is certainly the one for *Hail of Arrows*. Coming up with a good interface was tough because you have to target before you pay for the spell and you have to assign the damage while you're targeting. After much agonizing about the best way to do this, I programmed the interface so that each card you target has number on top of it that indicates how much damage is assigned to it. The damage assigned to any target can be incremented and decremented throughout the targeting process. Once you are done choosing targets and assigning damage to them, click the OK button and you will be prompted to pay mana based on the damage assigned during targeting. If you can't pay the requested amount or are unhappy with the damage you assigned, you can hit Cancel and cast the spell again.

Other tricky interfaces worth mentioning:

- The selections for the Sakashima Avatar are not in an intuitive order. You must target first, so the creatures are not chosen in the same order they are mentioned on the card. First you select the creature you want to make a copy of, then you choose which creature you want to become a copy of the card you selected.
- When playing cards with *Kaho*, *Minamo Historian*, you have to choose whether or not you want to use the ability and then pay the converted mana cost of the spell you want to play. If there is more than one option with that mana cost, you are prompted to choose which you want to play and must click on the card you want. Regardless of how many cards had the mana cost you paid, you are prompted to "Play the spell", which can be done by clicking on the spell (and selecting an option if there are multiple ways to play it). The spell moves to the stack and you then hit OK to play it. While it seems like there are a lot of steps, they are necessary so that the correct option can be chosen when necessary, such as with split cards, *Entwine*, or *Kicker*. Along those lines, be aware that in order to be able to choose the *Entwine* or *Kicker* options you must have the required mana in your pool first, regardless of your game play settings.
- *Pain's Reward* (and other cards requiring you to bid life) ask for the amount to raise the bid by, not for a new bid. The number you choose during the bidding will be added to the current bid to determine your bid.



IntoTheAether: Since Jay interviewed you, has your job changed any? Any added or new responsibilities?

RachelIR: Yes. I now have more responsibilities in addition to just programming the cards. For example, I handle a lot more of the work that goes into releasing a set, such as incorporating art, adding collation, and changing the formats to include the new set.

IntoTheAether: You mentioned your favorite online format was Prismatic and that you were looking forward to trying it out with the new bannings. Presuming that you have had a chance since then, what do you think of the format now? Is it still your favorite?

RachelIR: While Prismatic is definitely a fun format, I have to say that my favorite format is now Vanguard. Towards the end of last year, I got so excited about the Vanguard format that I took the initiative to program it online. Implementing Vanguard was particularly challenging because I couldn't take the risk of touching the master server code and I had to find creative solutions for many problems. Programming the avatars actually turned out to be the easy part. As a result of all the effort I put into it, I will always be very attached to the Vanguard format, and it will be hard for something to take its place as my favorite.

IntoTheAether: Yay, Vanguard!! Care to share a typical "Work Day in the Life of RachelR"?

RachelR: It depends a lot on what I'm working on at the time. When I get to work, I go to the kitchen for some water and hot chocolate, read my email, and check to see if any new bugs have been reported. Then, depending on whether I'm programming a card set or fixing bugs, I either look through the cards in my collection to find one that I feel like working on or look through my list of bugs. I program the card or fix the bug (or get frustrated with it and decide to work on something else and go back to it later). I repeat this process for a while until I have a meeting or workout scheduled. I usually have a meeting at least once a day during a beta, and more like once a week otherwise. Sometimes I wander down to R&D to ask a question, or play in a playtest to get an idea of what to be prepared for in future sets. I heat up soup to eat at my desk for lunch, and often take a break in the early afternoon to go to kickboxing class, jujutsu class, or a workout with a personal trainer. Then I go back to the same process of programming cards or fixing bugs for the rest of the day.

IntoTheAether: Give us an "only at Wizards of the Coast" moment you have experienced recently so we know that Mark Rosewater isn't pulling our leg about how fun it is to work there.

RachelR: Wizards of the Coast got a prescreening of *Star Wars Episode III* last month. Getting to see the movie both for free *and* before it came out was great!

IntoTheAether: Since I took over writing Into The Aether, do you find yourself reading it even more times per week than you did under the JMS regime? How ever do you get any work done?

RachelR: Unfortunately, I've had even less time lately for reading **Magic** articles. In addition to being very busy at work, I've been taking evening classes to finish my Masters degree for the past 6 months, which has taken up all my free time. Since I just finished my last class, hopefully I will finally have a chance to read the articles and play **Magic Online**.

IntoTheAether: Anything else you'd like readers to know? (AKA the Open Mic Question)

RachelR: One of the most interesting parts of programming a card set is the crazy things that can occur while testing a card you haven't finished working on. Here are some amusing things I saw while programming **Saviors**:

- I learned very quickly why copies of Epic spells lose the Epic ability. I tested parts of my Epic code before I had written code to remove the Epic ability from the copies. The exponential growth in the number of Epic triggers each turn and the resulting large quantity of tokens in play (the first Epic card I programmed was **Endless Swarm**) was entertaining.
- In my first attempt to program **Ideas Unbound**, I forgot to make it only trigger at the end of the turn it was actually cast. The player who cast it was forced to discard 3 cards every turn, making the card significantly worse.
- While programming **Sasaya**, **Orochi Ascendant**, I managed to make it so that the wrong person was prompted to discard at the end of the turn. So Player A was forced to discard until Player B had 7 cards in hand, and the game didn't really go anywhere since Player A had a hard time accomplishing that.



IntoTheAether: Thanks, Rachel! In addition to all the hard work you put in to get **Saviors** ready for the public, I understand there were also some interface tweaks, fixes, and additions made that will roll out with the release of **Saviors**.

RachelR: The Phage Avatar interface was fixed with **Saviors**. The text was changed to make it more clear what to target and I changed the way it worked accordingly. I had initially programmed it so that the creature you target is the one that gets destroyed if it deals damage. Starting with the release of **Saviors**, you target your own creature and any creature damaged by the creature you targeted that turn will be destroyed.

Some additional shortcut keys were added with **Saviors**. The following is a list of the shortcuts that will work with the release of **Saviors**:

- F2 – Click OK
- F3 – Remove all autoyields and cancel the effect of F4 and F6
- F4 – I'm done, but give me a chance to plays spells or abilities if something happens I can respond to. If you press it during your turn and have creatures that can attack, the game will pause during the declare attackers phase. Once you attack or respond to something, the effect of F4 is cancelled and you have to press it again if you still don't want to do anything that turn.
- F5 – Lets you briefly look at your face-down cards.
- F6 – I'm really done. Don't prompt me again this turn, no matter what happens. You are still prompted if you have to make choices.
- F9 – Yes
- F10 – No
- Alt+y – Yes
- Alt+n – No
- Alt+u – Undo
- Alt+Page Up – Increase the size of the in-game chat window.
- Alt+Page Down – Decrease the size of the in-game chat window.
- Holding Ctrl while playing a spell or ability lets you respond to it.

Wow, some handy information indeed!

Just Wait Until Next Week!

Before you jump in for the *Saviors* release events next week, *make sure* you check out Into The Aether, where something HUGE will be announced. HUGE, I tell you!

*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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