

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Rogues of Kamigawa and Introducing Survivor Magic IV Contestants

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Into the Aether
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2005



Rogues of Kamigawa

I was sad to see that the only *Kamigawa* Block Constructed tournament here in Richmond VA was being held on my son's three-year birthday, and since it was unlikely I'd be able to travel to any out of town PTQs, KBC in the world of paper **Magic** was over for me before it started!

Thankfully, there's always *Magic Online*. Anytime, anywhere, anyhow. You want **Magic**? You got it!

I was initially intrigued by the archetype that's now been dubbed "Black Hand", but since week 1 the deck has exploded onto the scene. Indeed, it seems that 75% of the pickup games of KBC I play are against that deck. I wasn't necessarily interested in exploring the finer nuances of the Black Hand mirror matchup.

So I started poking around deeper into the [PTQ top 8 decklists](#) my daymate Flores has been summarizing for us to see if I could find any decks off the well-beaten path. The first one that caught my eye was this one from a Houston PTQ:

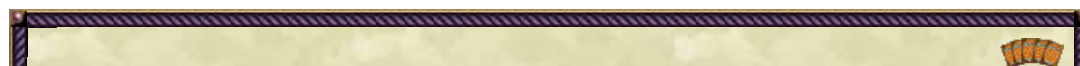
Robert Chow - Infinite Sachi
2nd Place - Texas - Houston - 7/9

Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Waterveil Cavern 4 Tendo Ice Bridge 3 Island 2 Swamp 10 Forest 1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers <hr/> <p>23 land</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Sachi, Daughter of Seshiro 1 Maga, Traitor to Mortals 1 Kumano, Master Yamabushi 4 Orochi Leafcaller 1 Keiga, the Tide Star 4 Sakura-Tribe Elder 2 Kagemaro, First to Suffer 1 Myojin of Seeing Winds <hr/> <p>18 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Sensei's Divining Top 4 Freed from the Real 4 Time of Need 4 Kodama's Reach 4 Hisoka's Defiance <hr/> <p>19 other spells</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Keiga, the Tide Star 3 Splinter 3 Overwhelming Intellect 3 Cranial Extraction 1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror 4 Hideous Laughter <hr/> <p>15 sideboard cards</p>

With only a cursory glance this deck looks like any other green-based legend deck, unless your eyes trip over **Freed From the Real**. If you're like me, you had to click on the card to remind yourself what it does... and then your eyes go wide. Holy smoke, with Sachi and **Orochi Leafcaller**, that's infinite mana! I had to give this a try.

Anyway, after about five matches against Black Hand (doesn't anybody play any other deck anymore?) and getting annihilated in almost every single game, the "coolness" blush had worn thin. I'd imagine the deck would perform decently against white weenie, which isn't typically as bone-crushingly fast as many of Black Hand's openers, and perhaps the matchup against black isn't so bad with a lot more practice, but I was ready to give something else a try.

One thing I was itching to see is any decent deck built around the Epic spells. **Enduring Ideal** in particular seemed viable as one of the less expensive mana costs, and since *9th Edition* is going to feature **Form of the Dragon**, it might be good to go ahead and get some playtime in with a block version of the deck. I found this decklist from a Kansas City PTQ:



PRODUCTS

DISSENSION **GUILDPACT**

Dissension *Guildpact*

All Magic products

RULES

Magic Core Game
Basic Rulebook
Comprehensive Rules
All Magic Rules

RULEBOOK

MESSAGE BOARDS

Magic All Magic message boards
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forum

Rules Q&A forum
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NOVELS

Dissension
Ravnica Cycle, Book III
by Cory Herndon

Cody Snowberg - Honden

7th Place - Kansas - Kansas City - 7/16

Main Deck 61 cards		Sideboard
10 Forest	3 Pithing Needle	2 Ghostly Prison
5 Plains	1 Genju of the Realm	3 Kodama of the North Tree
1 Island	4 Final Judgment	3 Cranial Extraction
1 Mountain	3 Honden of Infinite Rage	3 Meloku the Clouded Mirror
1 Swamp	3 Honden of Cleansing Fire	4 Empty-Shrine Kannushi
4 Tendo Ice Bridge	1 Meishin, the Mind Cage	
22 land	4 Enduring Ideal	15 sideboard cards
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	4 Sensei's Divining Top	
4 Orochi Sustainer	4 Kodama's Reach	
8 creatures	1 Reverence	
	1 Honden of Night's Reach	
	2 Honden of Life's Web	
	31 other spells	

Sadly, the first handful of pick up games were against—can you guess?—Black Hand. And it kept crushing me, game after bone-crunching game. Finally I find a game with Chechete playing White Weenie! Perhaps I have a chance to actually see this deck in action?



Game 1 he gets a pretty decent start, with a **Lantern Kami**, **Samurai of the Pale Curtain** and 8.5 Tails in play before I buy a breather by playing my one copy of **Reverence**. So naturally **Celestial Kirin** comes to play, and this randy spirit is none too reverent. Luckily, I've accelerated enough to cast a turn 5 **Enduring Ideal**, putting into play **Meishin, the Mind Cage**. Yeah, now *everyone* is reverent! Since I've had the misfortune of drawing the big bad golden Genju, it looks like I have to go plan B. Hondens, to me!



When I go and fetch the second Honden with the epic effect, I forget to stack it correctly. The proper way to do it is to put any in-play Honden effects on the stack first, and then put the epic ability on top of the stack. That way, when the epic effect resolves, I put another Honden in play that feeds any of the in-play Honden effects waiting to resolve. Sloppy play aside; I do manage to win this one.

Game 2 I draw a ton of lands while my opponent goes with a quick offense. I try and clear the board with **Final Judgment** but 8.5 steps out on an **Otherworldly Journey** and comes back with a +1/+1 non-reverent attitude and wants to beat me over the head with a **Manriki-Gusari** for the sin of not playing any Jittes for him to destroy.



My Top manages to cough up a couple Hondens but then my opponent reveals his trump card—the dastardly **Nikko-Onna**! This pesky spirit makes short work of my enchantment-fueled dreams and I suddenly realize what the **Cranial Extractions** in my board are for.

An odd thing happens during the course of this match. I get a few spectators dropping by, lured no doubt by my inconspicuous user name IntoTheAether. Two of the spectators separately send me a PM asking me basically the same question: *are you an mtg insider?* At first I'm figuring it's a way of asking if I work for Wizards... but then I make the connection. MTG Insider is... well, let's just say it's a paid **Magic** service offered by one of **Magic's** most notorious players and leave it at that. I guess the deck got released for public consumption once someone made Top 8 with it, though it's also entirely possible that someone developed this particular decklist on his own.



At any rate, nope, I'm not an Insider.

I asked one of the questioners how in the heck does this deck beat Black Hand, and as you can see his answer was basically a wave of the hand, as if to say *ah, that's no problem at all*. The reply seemed a little suspect to me, however, being basically to survive long enough to cast your seven-mana epic sorcery, fetch out the **Mind Cage** and have enough cards in hand to dilute your Black Hand opponent's offense to manageable levels. Typically, I'm getting hit by at least one equipped Ogre sporting 6 power. Maybe I'm missing something, something that only MTG Insiders know? Could be.

The last game is a route, with turn 1 Hound, turn 2 Jitte, turn 3 kill my Sustainer and beat me down. Meanwhile I'm drawing nothing except the Epic spell, and by the time I cast it there's nothing I can get that will save me, not even the **Mind Cage** (note the empty hand).



So I just go ahead and get **Genju of the Realm** and anoint one of his all-powerful Plains with it. All hail mono-white!

At any rate, though I lost a lot, both of the decks were enjoyable detours from the pack of Tier 1 juggernauts. I'm looking forward to injecting *9th Edition* into *Kamigawa* Block Constructed decks to see what might be worth

developing for this fall's Standard rotation. There are a lot of great cards coming into the format, and that's not even counting the unknown goodies from *Ravnica!*

Checking Back in with PDC

PDC Worlds was last weekend, with the top point getters earning the right to compete for prizes and bragging rights. When the last common card was flopped it was Zahori and the dread Affinity deck that stood atop a pile of defeated contenders. Details can be found [here](#) (including a tournament report), but I wanted to go ahead and put up the winning decklist and Zahori's comments here for my readers.

PDC Worlds 1st place		Affinity by Zahori	
Main Deck 57 cards		Sideboard	
1 Ancient Den	3 Scale of Chiss-Goria	4 Confound	
1 Darksteel Citadel	2 Tooth of Chiss-Goria	4 Unsummon	
1 Great Furnace	4 Thoughtcast	3 Circle of Protection: Black	
1 Seat of the Synod	4 Chromatic Sphere	4 Circle of Protection: Red	
1 Tree of Tales	4 Conjuror's Bauble		
1 Vault of Whispers	2 Rush of Knowledge		
1 Plains	2 Neurok Stealthsuit		
13 Island	1 Choking Tethers		
20 land	22 other spells		15 sideboard cards
4 Frogmite			
4 Somber Hoverguard			
4 Myr Enforcer			
3 Quicksilver Behemoth			
15 creatures			

Zahori: "I think some cards probably warrant some explanation. I don't think I need to explain why I played the core cards. I do see some people running cards like *Arcbound Worker* and *Myr Servitor* in their Affinity builds. I think that is a mistake. Neither of those cards is particularly good, they are just 1/1 dorks that will end up killed. If you are running some kind of build with DoV's and Grunts, then sure, go ahead and abuse the modular and return from the graveyard abilities, but if you are playing affinity, you want to play undercosted creatures, such as 4/4s for 0 casting cost, not 1/1s for 1. Instead, I chose to run the baubles, which double up as affinity enablers, and once you had a good amount of artifacts in play, would draw a card for free. One of the problems you can run into is running out of gas with the deck, by running so much card draw, you really minimize this.

"The stealthsuit also proved amazing. Some decks just have no answer to a stealthy hoverguard, and in the late game, when you have plenty of mana, it pretty much means that your opponent's targeted removal is useless.

"My X-factor card was the Tethers. Many times, and especially in the mirror, you end up with a stalemate. This usually happens when you both have big guys such as enforcers holding the ground. I have seen players run *Magnetic Flux*, which is certainly a fine finisher, but I figured that the Tethers was just as good, and thought that the cycling ability (which can't be countered) could be relevant as well. It was a great call, since the tethers, hard cast and cycled, won me several games.

"The sideboard is fairly straightforward. Against decks with creatures, you bring in the *Unsummons*, against decks with removal, you also bring in *Confound*. And the COPs are for the corresponding match-ups."



Survivor Spotlights on Into the Aether

[Last week](#) I put the spotlight on Survivor Magic and the upcoming Survivor Magic IV, being organized and run by the Herculean Gathion. Even [Mark Rosewater got inspired by the Survivor theme!](#) Today and next week I thought it might be fun to introduce to you some of the eighteen players (*those of you who sent me their answers but didn't make it this week, don't worry—you'll be in next week's!*). So far none of the players yet strike me as naked Machiavellis, but you never know what the weeks may bring.

MTGO screen name? Istanbul.

Real name? Only the Shadow knows.

Age? Old enough to know better, young enough not to care.

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? Nope, total newbie. Can you hear the cringe?

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? I'll take **Oblivion Stone** for the win.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Necropotence**. No single card has been responsible for more degenerate decks, unbalanced formats, and repetitive tournaments.

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Sora of the PS2 game *Kingdom Hearts*. Always direct, always honest, got a good heart in him. Doesn't always do the right thing, but always tries.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? It is the perverse nature of our universe that things that really should not happen, do. Therefore, since I have no right to win Survivor Magic IV, I will.

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Mmmmm...Graham crackers. No fair, now I'm hungry.

MTGO screen name? Howitzer

Real name? Ed Haag

Age? Old enough to know better

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? A few people that I made friends with (mostly though meeting them over at the *Magic Online* community boards) participated in SMIII, and I eagerly watched that one from the first week, but this is the first time I'll be a contestant myself.

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? I suppose it really depends on what format is being played on that particular week, but good old **Sparksmith** is always solid.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** I suppose the current "card to hate" is **Umezawa's Jitte**, but I've found it surprisingly easy to deal with, at least in constructed formats. The one card I really think that should never have been created is **Skullclamp**, but as it's banned in every format under the sun now anyway, it really doesn't matter. What I'm really dreading is the fact that **Hypnotic Specter** is being reprinted in 9E, and then we're getting **Dark Ritual** online when *Mirage* hits in December. The turn one Hyppie deck nightmares are reborn!

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? I'd have to go with Batman. I love the idea of a superhero that has no super powers.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? I'm not even thinking about winning at this point. My goal right now is just "don't get voted off on the 2nd week."

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Graham Crackers. Do you even have to ask?

MTGO screen name? Ununnilium

Real name? Andrew Perron

Age? 22

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? Nope! My friend and compatriot, Seraya, pulled me into it.

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? **Black Lotus**, definitely. The fact that I've neither owned a **Black Lotus** nor played in a format where it's legal has no bearing on the matter.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** Any card with italics in the name. Damn you, Gatherer!

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Hmmm... this one's tough. I'd have to say Osaka, AKA Kasuga Ayumu, from the anime and manga series *Azumanga Daioh*. She's wonderfully weird.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? I'll swing it on pure cuteness!

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Graham crackers... with wasabi on them.

MTGO screen name? The Phantom of the Opera (perhaps better known as ChainMaster)

Real name? Jordan Kronick

Age? 24

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? Nope, this is my first time, though I've followed the action on the message boards in the past.

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? Island.

Everything else is just details.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** All white-bordered copies of **Necropotence**. It's an abomination against nature.

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Too many to count, but off the top of my head I'd say Lucas Corso from the book *The Club Dumas* (later adapted to be the character Dean Corso in the movie *The Ninth Gate*).

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? I don't tend to lose.

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Wasabi. Though I'm now struck with the incredible desire to combine the two.

"You've got your wasabi in my graham crackers!" "You've got your graham crackers in my wasabi!"

MTGO screen name? alanzed

Real name? alan zed

Age? 25

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? nope

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? **Umezawa's Jitte** :)

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Cranial Extraction** :P

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Chandler Bing (Friends)

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? I need those packs ;)

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? ...

MTGO screen name? Seraya, but I'm listed as and will be playing with my Survivor screen name, Shinzui, for the duration of the games

Real name? Call me... Seraya Shadowharper (I prefer a little mystery >:)

Age? 22

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? Nope, first time.

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? I'm always happy to see the card I built a deck around. For instance I've just recently thrown together a deck based on trample damage and **Wine of Blood and Iron**. I have yet to actually cast the stupid thing because I haven't seen the two copies I own.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Counterspell**. Yes, I know control is an important part of the game and blah blah, but a strategy that works best when you turn the game into solitaire goes against everything I believe in.

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Sparks, one of the background characters in Matrix Reloaded/Revolutions ("And could you wash the windshield while you're at it?") and your operator in Enter the Matrix. He's this wonderfully sarcastic guy and some of his quotes are my all-time favorites.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? I believe in playing an honest game and hope that others will know when I say something, I mean it and plan to carry through with it.

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Graham crackers, my girlfriend once gave me a wasabi pea without warning me it was a spicy food beforehand and I about bit my tongue off. Seraya and spice don't get along.

MTGO screen name? Lacutis

Real name? Ryan Roper

Age? 25

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? Nope, this is my first time.

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? I guess that would depend on the format. But just about any removal spell is a good thing.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Counterspell**. It's just not fun to play against.

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? My favorite book series is the Shannara series by Terry Brooks. Really well written stories that mix science and magic, but more importantly they tell a good story.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? Ummm, I'm not going to win, don't look at me, it's going to be him!

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Graham Crackers. Can millions of moms and school lunches be wrong?

MTGO screen name? JimWolf. I'm playing as JimWolf2, which is ordinarily my foils account, in order to keep myself from being confused about what's in my Survivor cardpool.

Real name? Jeremy

Age? 25

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? No. I could have signed up for Survivor III, but I didn't really know what it was all about, and I fear constructed play. Then I watched Survivor III and I said to myself, "I can do that!"

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? 3 land. Ok, that's cheating. And I'm really only answering that because I was manascrewed in my last four games to pick up two losses in my IPA qualifier with a decent deck. I need to prepare another sacrifice to Grog it seems.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Rhox**. I'm a limited player. **Rhox** is my *8th Edition* nemesis. I lost to **Rhox** even when I had a **Rhox** in my deck!

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Gah! I watch too many movies, too much TV, read too many books, and play too many video games to answer this question effectively. Let's say, in order, Forrest Gump, Buffy, Jack Ryan, and Garrett.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? I don't. There are 18 of us. I teach Statistics for a living so I know there are too many variables for me to say I'm going to win. Now if I do win, I won't be surprised. I do have mad skeels after all. I'll certainly play to win. My only goal is to not be the first one voted off the Server. If I can achieve that goal, then I'll set another one. (Warning: this answer may be laced with strategy.)

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Graham Crackers. Uh Oh. I don't think anybody that's done well in Survivor (**Magic** or otherwise) would answer that. Well I dunno. Fujin'd probably answer Graham Crackers. All right I'll stick with that answer. Though I'm not averse to wasabi if I'm in the right mood. . .

MTGO screen name? Secret Santana (RobertHand on the message boards)

Real name? Graeme Hopkins

Age? 28

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? No

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? **Wayfarer's Bauble** - It will help smooth out any hand.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Cabal Coffers** - I have a great idea; let's make perhaps the best mana land ever... and let's make it Black. (?!?) This card is almost as mechanically sound as **Psionic Blast**.

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Matrim Cauthon? Never thought about this before.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? I have two things going for me; I am easy to get along with, and I am easy to forget about.

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? I don't feel right eating something that calls to the same name as I.

Tips & Tricks

I bet you thought I'd forgotten about this segment? Well, truth be told the deluge of great tips and tricks I got in the beginning of the column has pretty much dried up, so please—keep 'em coming, folks. A hearty thanks to Joe (Terror_Me) to come through with this nice multiplayer tip!

"Dear Bennie Smith,

"I'm just dropping off a tip to all those multiplayer players out there: */eject*. Ever had one of those guys that just disconnects from a game for no apparent reason? Just type */eject* and his name and have the majority of the players do the same and MTGO drops them from the game.

"For instance lets say that my computer decides to shut down cause my little sister barges into my room with a baseball bat and starts smashing my computer to bits. Everyone else in my multiplayer game would type */eject Terror_Me* (my user name) to boot me out of the game and keep on playing.

"Granted in 2hg this handicaps the remaining head but in a FFA it's one less person to deal with."

Next Week – More *Mirage* tidbits!

Make sure you check back with Into The Aether next week when I get to pry loose some very juicy new tidbits on the upcoming *Mirage* release for *Magic Online* from R&D's Randy Beuhler!

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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