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RandyB Reveals More on *Mirage*

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Into the Aether
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We all know what you're dying for; so let's jump right into it, shall we?

IntoTheAether: Since [the announcement](#) of *Mirage* for *Magic Online*, the buzz has been huge and overwhelmingly positive. Have you all started looking at any other classic sets to follow up *Mirage*?



RandyB: If this works out, we'll work our way forward in time.

IntoTheAether: Did R&D decide that development needed to revisit the set and make any adjustments?

RandyB: We talked a fair amount about the general question of how to reprint sets. Should we reprint them as they were or extract a *Chronicles*-style "Greatest Hits" set from each block? Did we need to skip over cards that were too hard to code? Would we really print cards that we knew needed to be banned if our experiment is successful and it comes time for the Urza-block?

My point here is that we didn't talk specifically about whether development needed to revisit *Mirage*, but instead we focused on what precedents we might be setting that would affect potential future releases. It turns out there are no cards that are "too hard" to code, so we weren't forced to go the greatest hits route. In the end, we decided we really wanted to recapture the full experience of playing with these blocks. We wanted long-time players to be able to revisit old draft formats and we wanted to give new players the chance to fully experience these blocks the way they were originally released. That means that if/when we do *Urza's Saga*, people will be busting open booster packs that contain cards that development now acknowledges as "mistakes," but at the end of the day that's better than trying to rewrite history.

IntoTheAether: I understand there's going to be some changes to the way phasing works?

RandyB: Yeah, this was actually a pretty tough decision because, as I pointed out in the previous answer, we have a lot of respect for history. However, the details of phasing are fairly arbitrary and make no sense if you think about them. Phasing out **does** trigger "leaves play" abilities, but phasing in does **not** trigger "comes into play abilities." So it leaves play but doesn't come into play? Huh?! We've decided that was just too counter-intuitive to leave in place, so we're cleaning things up. Phasing will no longer trigger leaves play abilities. (The other potential change – having phasing trigger "comes into play" abilities – might have had a little better flavor, but it's way too big of a functional change to way too many cards so we're not doing that.) This change will be part of the *Ravnica* update to the *Comp Rules*, so it will go into effect on approximately October 1st.

IntoTheAether: We've seen some adjustment in creature types for *9th Edition*; are there going to be any changes to creature types in *Mirage*? (*Here's hoping Cobras become Snakes!*)

RandyB: Our current policy with creature types is to update them whenever we print new cards. This counts as us printing new cards, so yes we are going to modernize the creature types. Your last article actually generated a bunch of feedback – it's amazing what a good campaign poster can do – and we're listening. You can tell the Cobras to stop picketing ... they will get to play with the *Kamigawa* snakes this winter! (*Snake fans can send their fan letters to the talented Jen Page for said campaign poster*)

IntoTheAether: Are all these changes going to affect paper **Magic** or does it just apply for MTGO?

RandyB: There is just one version of **Magic**. There happens to be two platforms you can play it on, but we have always treated them as the same game and we will continue to do that moving forward. That means these changes affect paper **Magic** too. I'm not sure what date the *Mirage* creature types will hit Oracle, but when they do, they will apply to the paper game as well.

IntoTheAether: Everyone is dying to know whether there will be any foils in *Mirage*. What can you tell us about that?

RandyB: Yes, there will be foils.

IntoTheAether: What about preconstructed decks?

RandyB: This is probably the coolest thing I get to talk about in this interview – we've decided to do theme decks for *Mirage* and we've decided to let the public make them!

Theme decks weren't "invented" until *Tempest*, but just like foils (and expansion symbols color-coded by rarity) we feel like they just plain make the game better and there was no good reason not to add them.



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One of our plans for making a *Mirage* theme decks is to host a tournament series on **Magic Online** where the winner wins the right to work with R&D to build the deck. It will still have to follow our normal guidelines for theme decks and we will have to approve the card choices, but we will do our best to make sure that the theme deck we put on sale will be true to the spirit of the design of the tourney winner.

Basically, we're going to treat this the same way we treat the cards that Invitational winners submit. I expect to exchange a lot of e-mails with whoever wins the tournament. [Click here](#) to read the details of the event – qualifiers begin next week. Our plans for the other 3 are still secret, but I can say that each deck will be built in a completely different way. Keep your eyes glued to magicthegathering.com for more details!



IntoTheAether: Some people have expressed some concern about **Dark Ritual** being injected into the environment, fueling Storm decks and bringing back the dreaded turn 1 **Hypnotic Specter** (reprinted in *9th Edition*). Do you think it could be a problem that might need to be addressed by banning?

RandyB: Well, it's only going to be legal in the Classic format. Since the whole point of Classic is that no sets ever rotate out of it, the power-level of that format is going to inevitably rise over time. A couple years from now Ritual-Hippie might be the only way a cutthroat, competitive Classic deck has a chance against an Academy deck. I'm not sure exactly what the long-term fate of that format will be. It's nice to have a format where you can play with every card ever released online, but it's also nice to have a format where broken stuff doesn't happen. My best guess is that we'll eventually start restricting cards in Classic (making it the online equivalent of "Type 1"), but first we'll watch the format and ask around to try to figure out what players actually want.



IntoTheAether: Similarly, what about **Lion's Eye Diamond**?

RandyB: Same basic answer ... we're publishing sets with cards that we know are "too good" because we believe people want to get their hands on the old sets exactly the way they originally were. That means we'll have to make sure there are formats where people can enjoy all these cool cards without running into truly degenerate decks.

IntoTheAether: Does any particular *Mirage* card stand out to you as particularly well designed and developed, standing the test of time all these years later?

RandyB: Well I've always been a big fan of card advantage strategies, so I have returned many a **Hammer of Bogardan** to my hand over the years. That'd probably be my pick. It's simple and elegant and it's also at a cost where it's good without being too good.

IntoTheAether: Do you have any good stories about *Mirage* from your early days as a player?

RandyB: I first qualified for the Pro Tour at a *Mirage*-block Constructed PTQ. I was playing a **Sands of Time – Equipoise** lock deck that used **Desolation** to blow up all it's own lands, and had no creatures, thus it could phase out every permanent the opponent had (except for enchantments and one artifact). Since **Sands of Time** makes you skip your untap phase and that's when creatures phase back in, their stuff is permanently trapped in phase-land. Anyway, the match that clinched my invitation to Pro Tour Chicago (which I won, which changed my life forever) was all about an obscure *Mirage* rare. I knew my opponent had the ability to drop a land and then **Dark Ritual** out a **Haunting Misery** even after I locked him. Before I blew up all our land I played the **Soul Echo** that I had sideboarded in. He executed his plan and pointed the lethal spell at me and then I pointed to **Soul Echo** and told him he might want to read what it does. Halfway through reading he stuck out his hand and congratulated me on going to the Pro Tour!

Thanks, Randy! Wow, lots to think about as the sands of time carry us closer and closer to the *Mirage* release... Speaking of **Sands of Time**, for those of you curious about what a "Sandsipoise" deck might look like, I scared up a very basic decklist to give you a feel for what the deck looks like.

Sandsipoise
 4 **Impulse**
 2 **Disrupt**
 2 **Sage Owl**



- 4 Dark Ritual
- 4 Vampiric Tutor
- 2 Desolation
- 4 Equipoise
- 2 Mangara's Blessing
- 1 Gerrard's Wisdom
- 4 Enlightened Tutor
- 4 Sands of Time
- 2 Miser's Cage
- 2 Wand of Denial

For those looking for a little more information, [Aaron Forsythe described the Equipoise lock this way](#): *The way phasing works is that "before your untap step," phase out all permanents with phasing, and phase in everything that is phased out. With Sands of Time in play, no one gets an untap step, so nothing naturally phases. Equipoise causes things to phase out at other times, though, so each turn it would phase out all of your opponent's creatures (as you'd have none) and all or most of his land (as you'd have sacrificed yours to the effect of a card like Desolation). With the board locked up, you'd win with something like Miser's Cage, which you could play off a Dark Ritual. Wacky, to be sure.*

9th Edition Deck Challenge: Greater Good

Okay, let me just say I'm thrilled about *9th Edition*. I think it's the best Core set of all time, and since I've been playing **Magic** since Unlimited, I've experienced each one. There's just so much to get excited about for fans of the game, for both casual and tournament players. Toeing that line between casual and tournament quality is perhaps one of my top 5 favorite cards of all time, **Greater Good**! Our own Adrian Sullivan did a Single Card Strategy for **Greater Good** [earlier this year](#).

Greater Good is a potent card-drawing engine that had the misfortune of being printed in *Urza's Saga* and thus was pretty much eclipsed by cards like **Tolarian Academy**, **Morphling**, **Time Spiral** and **Yawgmoth's Will**. This was a time when casting a four mana spell better win you the game, and that's if you got lucky enough to actually get to four mana.

Greater Good first caught my attention as a multiplayer solution card to the problem of pesky blue mages always trying to take my good creatures (being the green mage) with **Control Magic**, **Treachery**, and **Ray of Command**. With a **Greater Good** out there ready to sacrifice the target of their thievery (and drawing cards to boot), the enchantment worked as a deterrent, encouraging them to cast those spells at other targets while leaving my creatures alone.



Then one day I sacrificed a **Weatherseed Treefolk** with a **Rancor** on it, drawing seven cards, discarding three... and getting the Treefolk and **Rancor** back to cast again.

Holy card-drawing engine, Batman!

Using **Greater Good** to keep my hand chock full of spells I suddenly realized how good **Maro** would be in the deck, both as a beneficiary of the high hand size but also as a mana efficient way to nearly double your hand size.

Let's look at a fairly common situation I found with the deck, with a **Greater Good**, **Weatherseed Treefolk** (with **Rancor**) and a **Maro** on the board, and seven cards in hand. I'd sacrifice the Treefolk to draw seven cards, discarding three and getting back the Treefolk and **Rancor** (13 cards in hand). I'd cast **Rancor** on the **Maro** (12 cards in hand) and sacrifice it to draw 14 cards, discarding three and getting back the **Rancor** (24 cards in hand). By that time I'd probably have drawn another **Maro**, which I could drop, cast **Rancor** on it (22 cards in hand), and then sacrifice to draw 24 cards, discarding three and getting back the **Rancor** to end up with 44 cards in hand and only six mana spent that turn.

Needless to say, cards like **Spontaneous Generation** and **Firestorm** ended up finding their way into my deck, and cards like **Storm Seeker** and **Sudden Impact** ended up finding their way into my friends' decks.

As I focused more on "breaking" **Greater Good** in multiplayer (one game I'd cast **Spontaneous Generation** for 20-odd tokens, then tapped **Gaea's Cradle** and cast **Vitalizing Wind** and started sacrificing 8/8 tokens and drawing more cards), I couldn't help but wonder if I actually could get it to work in tournament decks. I ended up cooking up this little decklist:

Marogeyser, circa August, 1999		
60 cards		
2 Gaea's Cradle	4 Pouncing Jaguar	4 Rancor
3 Treetop Village	3 Llanowar Elves	4 Scent of Ivy
19 Forest	3 Albino Troll	4 Greater Good
24 land	3 Rofellos, Llanowar Emissary	
	4 Yavimaya Elder	12 other spells

4 Maro
 3 Weatherseed Treefolk
 24 creatures

I was capable of some spectacular plays, such as attacking with 26/24 trampling Jaguars on turn 6 or so. But that still wasn't good enough for the times.

Thankfully, **Greater Good** returns to considerably different times by showing up in *9th Edition*! There are plenty of decks that spend the mid-game setting up spectacular end-games. We also just got *Saviors of Kamigawa*, where "hand size matters" and a whole host of Maro variants have hit the scene, and we still have **Maro** himself. Naturally, my wheels have been turning on various ideas centered around **Greater Good**; here's one idea I'm looking forward to trying out:

Vanguard Marogeysr 2K5

Avatar - Raksha, Golden Cub
 60 cards

4 Karplusan Forest	4 Llanowar Elves	4 Bonesplitter
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Werebear	3 Empyrial Plate
3 Mountain	4 Seton's Scout	4 Ronin Warclub
12 Forest	4 Spikeshot Goblin	4 Greater Good
23 land	4 Maro	15 other spells
	2 Masumaro, First to Live	
	22 creatures	

Raksha seems the perfect avatar, starting with a bonus +1 to hand size right off the bat. Equipment is a perfect complement to **Greater Good**, serving the **Rancor** role as a way to boost creature power to enhance card-drawing without really losing cards to do it, and Raksha granting an additional +1 power to equipped creatures is just gravy. I'm a little unsure about **Ronin Warclub**, but being able to equip for free could be crucial. If it doesn't work so well I'm sure swapping for various Swords would be decent (particularly the card-drawing Fire and Ice).

I can't wait to test this out!

In the meantime though, I'm curious what sort of **Greater Good** decks you all can come up with, so I've cooked up a "Deck Challenge." Here's the deal: create some decklists featuring **Greater Good** and email them to me (using the link below). The decks need to be playable on **Magic Online** once *9th Edition* releases (either Standard or Online Extended), and you can use Vanguard if you want. I'll pick a couple that stand out to me as either good, fun, or if I'm lucky both good and fun, and give them a try after the *9th Edition* release. The best of the bunch (in my humble estimation) will earn the deck creator a featured interview and published decklist here on Into The Aether, along with a playset of four foil **Greater Goods** for their **Magic Online** account. (Make sure to include your email address so I can get back to you if you win, and feel free to post your ideas to the message boards to share with the other readers.)

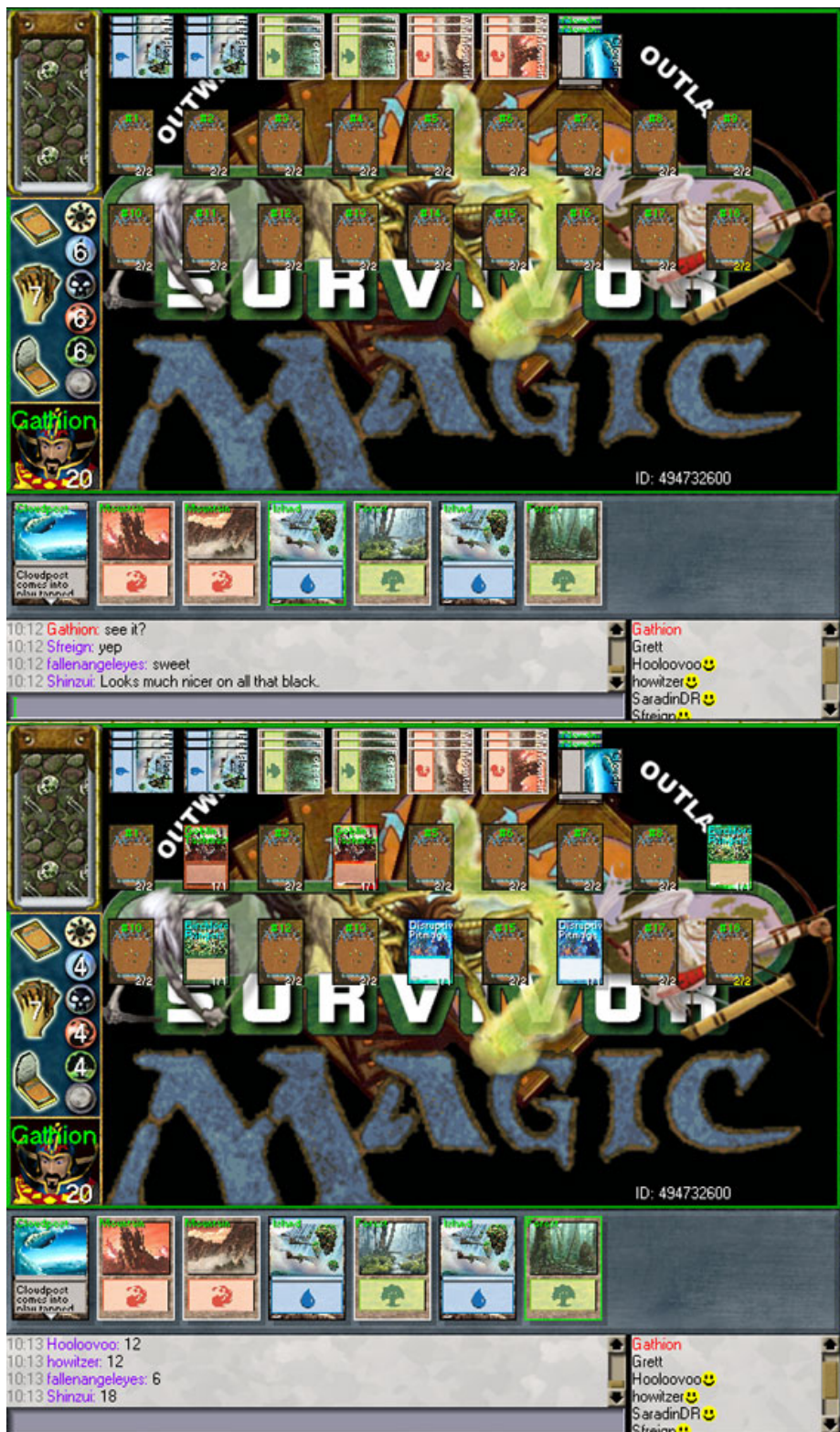
Deckbuilders, start your (card-drawing) engines!!

Survivor Magic IV: Week 0

Recap by SMIV's organizer Gathion— "This first night we only picked tribes. The 18 players would be placed in 3 tribes, Kashi Tribe, Matsu Tribe, or Sakura Tribe. The way the tribes were determined is I made a solitaire game with 18 morphs. The morphs were 6 copies of 3 different morph creatures. The players would pick a number, 1-18, and I would flip the morph. Whichever creature was turned up would indicate which tribe the player was in. A red morph for Kashi Tribe, a green morph for Matsu Tribe, and a blue morph for Sakura Tribe. To determine the picking order, I would tell the players to GO in the game window and the first person that selected a number would be the one to pick. That person would be placed in the tribe, then the rest of the players would GO again. This continued until all the players were in a tribe. The final part of all this is that one of each color morph was a foil. Whoever picked the foil morph would be designated the Tribal Elder. The Tribal Elder has special powers, which will be disclosed as the game progresses."

The final tribes (*italics* indicates Tribal Elder):

Kashi Tribe - Jimwolf2, LordoftheCherubs, Howitzer, Shinzui, fallenangeleyes, *Secret Santana*
 Matsu Tribe - Crucible, Gyrogearloose, *Hoolooovoo*, Ununnillium, Sfreign, alanzed
 Sakura Tribe - Lacutis, Istanbul, *Ka Tet*, superpriest, SaradinDR, The Phantom of the Opera



Survivor Spotlights on Into the Aether

[Last week](#) I presented half of the Survivor Magic IV contestants, and this week we meet the remaining nine.

MTGO screen name? SaradinDR

Real name? Aaron Lewis

Age? 26

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? I haven't played before, originally heard about the event by reading the recaps during Survivor Magic III. It sounded like a lot of fun, so I was happy to see a fourth installment roll around.

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? I've always had a soft spot for [Rofellos](#), [Llanowar Emissary](#). I got a lot of use out of the insane mana acceleration he provided. More recently, [Sensei's Divining Top](#) and [Sakura-Tribe Elder](#) are always good to see early.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** Tough call, but I think I'd go with **Arcbound Ravager**. Other candidates were **Tooth and Nail**, **Memory Jar**, Lin-Sivvi, and just about anything with Yawgmoth in the name.
Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Too many to name all of them, but I'll say Arya Stark from George RR Martin's Song of Ice and Fire series in the hopes that it'll get more people reading it.
Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? A deadly combination of my political cunning, savage play skills, and my tech luxury rare - One With Nothing. ;) Honestly, I don't think I'm going to win. I'm sure going to have fun trying, though.
Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Graham crackers. Definitely graham crackers.

MTGO screen name? Sfreign
Real name? Jarrod Rutledge
Age? 16
Have you played in Survivor Magic before? Nay
If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? **Myr Moonvessel**, for victory is much sweeter when your opponent is laughing at you :)
If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Worldgorger Dragon**
Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Terry Bogard from Fatal Fury
Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? Frankly I will be happy if I am not voted off week two.
Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Jello

MTGO screen name? Lordofthecherubs
Age? 16
Have you played in Survivor Magic before? If yes, how did you do? I think I'm the one person here who will answer yes to this, as normally you aren't allowed to play twice (at least in a row). However in SM III I got kicked out in 3rd round because I couldn't show up due to extenuating circumstances (despite having won my match in round 2). It appears that most agreed I wouldn't have been their pick if they'd known of said circumstances, and as such Gathion felt it would be fair to give me a second chance in the game as I hadn't gotten much of a chance in SM III.
If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? In the game? Well my luxury rare of course... but you'll just have to wait and see what that is (Pst... it starts with Laquatus' and ends with 'ampion).
If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** I have never had such a problem with any one card. I guess any card that makes a format too stale.
Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Tough question, I really couldn't say, although probably one of my favorite protagonists is Yossarian from Catch 22 (probably an answer you weren't expecting).
Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? Eh, we'll see what happens, but I don't wanna sound like a cocky jerk.
Wasabi or Graham Crackers? I don't like wasabi.

MTGO screen name? superpriest
Real name? Mike Ring
Age? 23
Have you played in Survivor Magic before? It's my first time, but I've read the transcripts of the others.
If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? **Sakura-Tribe Elder**
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**. Every multiplayer game seems to have at least one copy of this overpowered card.
Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Special Agent Dale Cooper (Twin Peaks)
Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? I compare Survivor to the board game Diplomacy, which I kinda hate and kinda like. I'm good at the strategy part, but I hate breaking alliances and being betrayed myself. Right now I'm just hoping to make the halfway point.
Wasabi or Graham Crackers? My favorite food is chicken fingers...

MTGO screen name? GyroGearloose
Have you played in Survivor Magic before? No
Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Corran Horn
Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? me
Wasabi or Graham Crackers? GC

MTGO screen name? Ka Tet
Real name? Brian
Age? 30
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? Tough question with too many variables. I don't think I could narrow it down.
If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** None – all cards have a purpose in the **Magic** universe....
Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Roland from the Dark Tower Series by Stephen King. /me points to his screen name
Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? Who knows if I'll win - but I will have fun!!
Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Celery & Cream Cheese :)

MTGO screen name? Hoolooovoo

Real name? Robert S.

Age? 25

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? Nope...I'm a Survivor Magic Virgin...I am really looking forward to playing though!

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? **Vulshok Morningstar**...it's a simple, unassuming piece of equipment that has a job and does it well.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Karma**...it's WAY too heavy-handed of a color hoser, and it happens to hose my favorite color...

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Dirk Gently...my personal philosophies and worldview are very similar to his...

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? It's all about the luxury rare. I get to use the MVP from my 2003 Regionals deck that nearly qualified me for U.S. Nationals. (I went 7-2 and missed it by one match)

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Definitely digestive biscuits

MTGO screen name? fallenangeleyes

Real name? Tracy Graff

Age? 21

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? Hm, not sure on this one. I like to roll with what I get, so I can have a great game experience and learn more about how to play well. So there's no one particular card I'd prefer really; I just want to go with the flow.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Krosan Tuskers**. It'd give the hoof prints on my back from the last match I played some time to fade.

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Hannibal Lecter. I'll leave interpretations up to you.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? It's not so much about the game itself as it is how you work and interact with the people playing the game. I'd like to think pure skill at the game only won't be enough to get one out on top. Though I could be drastically and horribly wrong!

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Wasabi, because saying "graham crackeeeeeeeeers" just isn't quite as fun as saying "wasabiiiiiiiiiiiiii."

MTGO screen name? Crucible (Had it *long* before YMTC)

Real name? Damon Terry

Age? 25

Have you played in Survivor Magic before? Never before.

If you could pick one card you're most happy to see in your opening grip, what would it be? Hey. We can't spoil the surprise, now can we? It has 13 letters.

If you could **Cranial Extraction the entire Magic universe and remove all copies of one card from existence, what would that card be?** **Counterspell**. Imagine a world free from the fear of two untapped islands! My second pick would be for **Cranial Extraction**. Just for the irony.

Favorite movie, tv, book or video game character? Sephiroth from Final Fantasy. I'm no video game fanboy, but I swear, they don't make bad guys cooler than that.

Why do you think you're going to win Survivor Magic IV? Because everyone else is going to lose?

Wasabi or Graham Crackers? Nilla Wafers (and milk).

That's it for this week. I'm still looking out for some good Tips and Tricks to share from you **Magic Online** card sharks out there! Stay tuned next week as I venture back out into the multiplayer trenches looking for a few good group game players willing and able to teach me a few things.

*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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