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Big News from Alan Comer

*Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
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Rumor had it that Alan Comer had some big news to share with the **Magic** community, and Into The Aether was lucky enough to be the place to do it.

IntoTheAether: I hear you have some big news to share with the **Magic** community?

Alan Comer: Yes, I do. Effective Aug 31st, I will have stepped down from my position at Wizards of the Coast.

IntoTheAether: Wow! I imagine a collective dropping of jaws across the web... How long was your tenure with Wizards?

Alan Comer: I was there just over 3 years, starting July of 2002

IntoTheAether: I imagine you were thrilled when you were one of the four inaugural people selected into the [Pro Tour Hall of Fame](#) recently. I'm sure there's bound to be plenty of speculation that the lure of being on the Gravy Train for life was too much for you to handle so you just had to leave Wizards to resume your Pro career. Did getting into the Hall have any weight in your decision to leave?

Alan Comer: Nope. I was absolutely thrilled and honored to get voted into the Hall of Fame, but that wasn't the reason I decided to leave. There have been problems for me since as far back as April, and I knew that something would have to change. For me, the main issue was a personality conflict that I was never really able to get around. In the end, Wizards of the Coast and I just couldn't find a solution.

IntoTheAether: What kind of work did you do for Wizards, and (I'm sure one of the main questions on people's minds) what will be the future for **Magic Online** in your absence?

Alan Comer: Well, I started by programming the rules for **Magic** cards into **Magic Online**. I learned the codebase while in Maryland at Leaping Lizards, and the first set I worked on was *Onslaught*. I then skipped *Legions*, and came back to set programming with the very tail end of *Scourge*. (Taking it through beta testing.) I did all of *8th Edition* & *Mirrodin*, and most of *Darksteel*. After that, [Rachel Reynolds](#) came on, and we shared the work for *5th Dawn* & *Champions*. After that, I did very little of *Betrayers*, and from there on I was really only around in an advisory position for **Magic Online**. Rachel was already doing so well that she could handle everything herself, and then she had [Elf](#) to back her up as well. The truth of the matter is that I haven't been a mainstay of the **Magic Online** team for quite some time. Instead, I've been working on a special project at Wizards of the Coast. At this point it's still secret enough that I'm not even going to give you a codename for the product, but I'm sure people will have fun speculating. As far as the future of **Magic Online**, Rachel & Elf have already proven that they can handle the cards for **Magic Online**. They are both good friends, and if they were to need help, I would certainly help them out. I don't think there is really any chance that they will need it, however.



IntoTheAether: What did your family think about your decision to work at Wizards?

Alan Comer: My family was pretty supportive, although sad to see me go. My father almost turned pro racing bicycles, so he understands what competition is like. Having seen how well I did on the **Magic** Pro Tour, he thought it would be a very good fit for me, and it did turn out that way. My parents adopted four foster kids who are now 8-5. I think in all, it was hardest on them having me leave San Diego, California, to move to Washington. I feel very out of touch with my brothers and sisters now.

IntoTheAether: Have any of them come to see where you work? Do any of them play **Magic**?

Alan Comer: Yeah, my family came up two years ago for Christmas. They have a nice RV, which they drove up. Towards the end of the trip, it snowed. Now, I have only ever seen it snow here in the Seattle area once, and that time it was gone by lunch. However, this time we got enough snow to keep them snowed in for a week, with the mountain passes to the south totally blocked. Ever since, my mother refuses to come and visit because she hates the snow.

IntoTheAether: The envious public hears all the time about what a wonderful place Wizards is to work for. Care to share some of your "only at Wizards" stories?



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NOVELS

Dissension
Ravnica Cycle, Book III
by Cory Herndon

Alan Comer: Yeah, there are a great number of perks for working at Wizards. As a game company, there is *always* an opportunity to test out new or potential games and expansions. My favorite activity actually turned out to be playtesting and helping develop **Avalon Hill** games. I got to help with pretty much everything from *Betrayal at House on the Hill* all the way through some games that you have yet to hear about. I believe I had the most influence on *Nexus Ops*. My favorite upcoming game is *Vegas Showdown*, which was designed by [Henry Stern](#). It is, as I'm sure you can imagine, also very cool to be able to walk down to R&D whenever you want and talk with other fanatical gamers and get some serious gaming in with cards that may not be available to the "real world" for a year or even more! There is also a great benefit where employees get a generous number of "product points" every few months which can be used to "buy" Wizards of the Coast products from the product room. You should see how big my D&D miniatures collection has gotten now! The funniest part is that, when I took the job, my wife Julianne was scared that she would never see me again. Instead, she found that I wound up playing enough at work that when I came home, I was playing much less, and she got to see more of me. It worked out well for everybody.



IntoTheAether: Did you get into any other Wizards games while you were there?

Alan Comer: Of course. I love almost all games. In addition to all the Avalon Hill games mentioned above, **Duel Masters** is a particularly good game that I enjoyed playing in for several of the organized leagues that occur within the company.

IntoTheAether: What accomplishments are you most proud of from your time working at Wizards?



Alan Comer: *Mirrodin*. While *8th Edition* was my first set on my own, *Mirrodin* had a lot more cards that needed to be done. Getting that done in time was an insane amount of work, and it all came off very well.

IntoTheAether: When are you planning on first taking advantage of your new "civilian" status and getting into sanctioned tournaments? What Pro Tour will mark your return to the Big Show?

Alan Comer: I am first qualified for the World Championships at the end of this year. Being an ex-Wizards/Hasbro employee, I am not allowed to play tournaments for 30 days after my last day. This will take me past all the qualifiers for Pro Tour Los Angeles except the last chance Qualifiers, and the Hall of Fame invites don't kick in until Worlds. With how rusty my skills are, I need more time than that to get good anyway, so I will just give myself until Worlds. On a funny side note, as many of you know Zvi Mowshowitz recently began his internship with **Magic** R&D at Wizards of the Coast. Because he just moved to the Seattle area, I offered to let him stay with Julianne and I until he found his own place. The funny thing is that, since he works at Wizards, he impacts my eligibility to return to the Pro Tour since anyone living with a current employee is ineligible to compete. We're now putting a lot more priority into helping Zvi find a place of his own!



Alan and Zvi, at Worlds '01

IntoTheAether: What's next for Alan Comer? Retirement to some exotic island beach with your laptop and a cool tropical drink always in hand?

Alan Comer: Hehe, that does sound good! My personal favorite is going on one of the big cruise ships, sitting up top, watching the boat cut through the ocean, and yes, with laptop, either playing games or programming. In fact, I am getting on a boat September 3rd, so I will be doing just that! Afterwards, I am sure I will take up programming again, and very likely games. Programming is really as much a part of me as playing games, and I often find myself doing it just for fun. After that, I plan on looking for a new job, and practicing **Magic** for Worlds. To get started, I took the last of my product points and got \$350 in **Magic Online** gift certificates to help populate my old acomer account on **Magic Online**. (Once I am no longer an employee, they take back my free account.) However, I still have my original account, with a few old cards in it. It is pretty bare, so I will need to grow it up so I can playtest for Worlds with it. I may have left Wizards, but I will not be leaving **Magic Online**!

IntoTheAether: Alan, I know a lot of people are going to miss the incredible work you did at Wizards of the Coast, but we wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors and hope that this next chapter of your life's journey proves to be as fun and memorable as the previous!

Greater Good Deck Challenge Results!

The Aether has spoken and made clear which four decks you think are worthy of final consideration and playtesting. Here are the poll results:

Which is the coolest Greater Good deck?		
Deck #1: The Greatest Succession	509	14.8%

Deck #4: Great Goryo Goryo	480	14.0%
Deck #2: Greater Genju of the Good (G^3)	428	12.4%
Deck #8: Ensnaring Good Lockdown	401	11.7%
Deck #10: Enchanting Good	354	10.3%
Deck #5: Isao Daisho	331	9.6%
Deck #7: Gigahertz	292	8.5%
Deck #9: Greater Heartbeat	267	7.8%
Deck #6: Verdant Engine	245	7.1%
Deck #3: Ember Marogeysar	132	3.8%
Total	3439	100.0%

Okay, so between thee and me we've trimmed the decklists from 150+ to just these four, and each of these four have a distinct unique style. With *9th Edition* releasing this week on *Magic Online*, I managed to give each of the decks an initial spin.

Deck #1: The Greatest Succession, by Xepel

60 cards

<p>23 Forest</p> <hr/> <p>23 land</p>	<p>4 Battlefield Scrounger</p> <p>1 Centaur Chieftain</p> <p>4 Llanowar Elves</p> <p>4 Maro</p> <p>2 Masumaro, First to Live</p> <p>4 Sakura-Tribe Elder</p> <p>2 Nantuko Tracer</p> <hr/> <p>21 creatures</p>	<p>3 Kodama's Reach</p> <p>4 Greater Good</p> <p>3 Verdant Succession</p> <p>2 Empyrial Plate</p> <p>4 O-Naginata</p> <hr/> <p>16 other spells</p>
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Xepel had this to say about his deck submission:

"When I look at [Greater Good], I see a maw that wants to eat creature after creature. Creature in, cards out. The bigger the creature, the greater number of cards. Therefore, to get the best use out of this, you want 1) Big Creatures and 2) Lots of Big Creatures. Number one isn't so hard - there are lots of cards that have power greater than their cost. Number two is harder. That's where Verdant Succession comes in. Every time a big (green) creature goes away, another pops up. To maximize the greatness, there should probably be four of each big creature in the deck - which means you get four times as much use out of each creature.

"It is that combination of cards - Greater Good and Verdant Succession - which I have built this deck around. Llanowar Elves, Sakura-Tribe Elders and Kodama's Reach all accelerate out the larger pieces of the deck - most of the important parts of the deck have a converted mana cost of four or more. Maro, Masumaro (Maros number 5 and 6), and Battlefield Scrounger provide the card draw. Empyrial Plate and O-Naginata provide more card draw. The single copy of Centaur Chieftain is the kill condition (giving all your huge creatures trample is wonderful). Nantuko Tracers can restock your library with creatures for Greater Good."





Xepel's deck is closest in style to the "Marogeyser" deck I used to run in my multiplayer games, though I never used *Verdant Succession* since so many other players ran green creatures too. In a duel though, the Succession works great! I used a *Llanowar Elves* to get the Succession in play on turn four, and then blocked with a steady "succession" of *Elves* to keep me alive long enough to play *Maro* and get enough cards in my hand to start equipping with *O-Naginata* and then going nuts with *Greater Good*. I'm looking forward to playing more games, that's for sure!

Deck #4: Great Goryo Goryo by DeadEternity .txt

60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tendo Ice Bridge 4 Llanowar Wastes 4 Yavimaya Coast 3 Underground River 3 Forest 2 Swamp 2 Island <hr/> <p>22 land</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Llanowar Elves 4 Sakura-Tribe Elder 1 Eternal Witness 1 Kagemaro, First to Suffer 1 Viridian Shaman 4 Yosei, the Morning Star <hr/> <p>15 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Thirst for Knowledge 4 Gifts Ungiven 2 Ideas Unbound 1 Reclaim 4 Greater Good 4 Footsteps of the Goryo 4 Goryo's Vengeance <hr/> <p>23 other spells</p>
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DeadEternity had this to say about his submission:

"This is the standard *Greater Good* deck I've been working on. It is actually a lockdown deck, featuring recurring Yosei sacrifices to *Greater Good*, along with *Footsteps of the Goryo*, *Goryo's Vengeance* and *Eternal Witness*. This locks your opponent by never letting him or her untap again while you bash for 5 damage every turn and dig deeper into your library. *Thirst for Knowledge* and *Ideas Unbound* are there for additional ways for getting Yosei into the graveyard and for searching for the rest of the pieces. *Eternal Witness* also helps in setting up the combo with *Gifts Ungiven*, and with *Gifts* you can run silver bullets for things that would be bad for you. *Viridian Shaman* trumps *Pithing Needle* on *Greater Good* and *Samurai of the Pale Curtain* gets slain by *Kagemaro*.

"The lockdown is achieved by casting *Footsteps* for the *Eternal Witness* in the graveyard, and splicing *Goryo's Vengeance* for Yosei at the same time. *Eternal Witness* returns the *Footsteps* to your hand and *Greater Good* sacrifices Yosei, so you end up with +2 cards and your opponent ends up with -5 life and losing his or her untap step for hopefully the rest of the game."



DeadEternity's deck has a more competitive vibe working, since sitting under a Yosei lockdown isn't much fun for your opponent but there's no denying its effectiveness. I was in a bit of a bind with this opponent since he had gained a ton of life with **Overgrown Estate/Second Sunrise** and still had the Estate out. I had him locked but he wisely chose to make me play it out, which proved problematic because I'd end up decking myself from drawing cards to **Greater Good** (I had to sacrifice the Dragon for it to not be removed from the game by **Goryo's Vengeance**). I actually found a solution in Kagemaro, but I had only kept one copy of Vengeance in my hand unfortunately—if I could have spliced two Vengeances onto the Footsteps with five cards in hand, I could attack with Yosei and Kagemaro, and then sacrificed Kagemaro to kill Yosei to perpetuate the lockdown.

Deck #2: Greater Genju of the Good (G^3) by NosferatuStuff txt

Avatar – Bird of Paradise
60 cards

24 Mountain	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	4 Greater Good
24 land	4 creatures	4 Genju of the Spires
		4 Grafted Wargear
		4 Empyrial Plate
		4 Inner Fire
		4 Spiraling Embers
		4 Kodama's Reach
		4 Summer Bloom
		32 other spells

NosferatuStuff had this to say about his submission:

“You may notice that this is a **Greater Good** deck with no real creatures to sac to it other than the Tribe Elder. I figured I needed a renewable source of creatures to make **Greater Good** work. The red Genju works great by providing you with a 6 power card draw machine (or more with the equipment), but it returns to your hand to either be recast or count for the other wisdom cards in the deck. **Inner Fire** fuels the mana while everything sets up for the 20+ card single **Spiraling Embers**. The Bird of Paradise Vanguard avatar is important because you want all your lands to be mountains to take advantage of the Genju, but still be able to play the green spells like **Summer Bloom** to give you additional lands to play, tap for mana, Genju, sac, etc. It's always possible to throw down some super fast beatings provided by the Genju and the Equipment.”



I haven't yet gone off with this deck but I had all the pieces in play when my opponent wisely nailed the Genju with enchantment kill and I didn't draw another one or a Sakura-Tribe Elder before he got me.

Deck #8: Ensnaring Good Lockdown by Psykohamster txt

60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Plains 3 Swamp 1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse 4 Tendo Ice Bridge 1 Miren, the Moaning Well 11 Forest 23 land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Yosei, the Morning Star 2 Kokusho, the Evening Star 4 Sakura-Tribe Elder 4 Birds of Paradise 4 Nezumi Graverobber 16 creatures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Greater Good 4 Kodama's Reach 4 Sensei's Divining Top 2 Scrabbling Claws 4 Ensnaring Bridge 2 Time of Need 1 Tatsumasa, the Dragon's Fang 21 other spells
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Psykohamster had this to say about his submission:

"The idea is to get out the Bridge and then sac some weenies to Greater Good to dump your hand. Ha! Didn't see that one coming, did ya? Hopefully, this will keep you alive long enough to set up a loop with Yosei and a flipped Graverobber. After everything your opponent controls is locked down, start attacking with Nighteyes. Yosei should have filled your hand by now via Greater Good.

"The Claws are there to get rid of their graveyard quicker, allowing you to flip the Graverobber faster. The Tatsumasa is there to provide a creature that can be sacrificed for cards repeatedly without the need for reanimation. The Well is there for an extra sacrifice engine."



I had the misfortune of squaring off against someone who got their own Graverobber in play early and flipped soon thereafter. Even still, I managed to keep an **Ensnaring Bridge** locking down his attackers-- despite the efforts of his **Seizan**, **Perverter of Truth** feeding me cards in exchange for precious life. Seizan also fed my opponent enough cards to draw into an artifact destruction spell that broke the lockdown and spelled my doom. The deck is definitely tricky and fun to play.

After getting just a quick initial round of games in, I have to say this is a very entertaining groups of decks to play with! Over the next few weeks I will be giving all four decks a thorough workout before I make my final decision on who wins the Deck Challenge and the four foil **Greater Goods**. Stay tuned!

Survivor Magic IV Recap: Week 4 (Round 5)

This week began with the Magic Decoding game. Gathion picked the flavor text from a card and changed the letters in it into a code. Each letter consisted of two mana symbols, for example, ♣♣ . Using this code, a word could look like ♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ . The players had to figure out the code and determine what card the flavor text belonged to. Once they discovered the card, they had to translate the card name into code and then /join the room that was the coded card name. The first person in a tribe to join the correct room would win reward for their tribe. Reward for this week is to be able to trade 3 cards with their tribemates.

After 35 minutes, SaradinDR /joined the correct room and won the reward for the members of Sakura Tribe. The card was Hum of the Radix. Congratulations Sakura!

Next came the Immunity Games. The deck format was 60 card, 3 color minimum OLS decks. The game format was 1v1 timed matches. Whichever tribe had the fewest game wins would go to Tribal Council to vote off one of their players. As an extra incentive to not go to Tribal Council, the tribes were also playing for the very existence of their tribes. Whichever tribe lost would be dissolved and the remaining players would be put into the other tribes.

The Matsu tribe lost the Immunity Game and went to Tribal Council and voted GyroGearLoose out of Survivor Magic IV.

Gathion asked the existing Tribal Elders for the Sakura Tribe and the Kashi Tribe to join him in a room and they picked new tribe members:

New Sakura Tribe - Ka Tet (Tribal Elder), rfairfield, Ununnillium, howtizer, superpriest, Shinzui, The Phantom of the Opera

New Kashi Tribe - Secret Santana (Tribal Elder), Hoolooovoo, SaradinDR, LordoftheCherubs, Istanbul, Jimwolf2, fallenangeleyes.

Players were then told the Reward Challenge for next week's session. Each tribe has to make a new and unique **Magic: The Gathering** card, just like You Make The Card. The cards will be judged and whichever tribe has the best card-- the card that would be the most likely to become a real **Magic** card-- would win the challenge.

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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