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Tribal Wars Raging

*Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, September 22, 2005*



Before I get to exciting news for Tribal Wars fans and detail my Week 2 Natural Selection match, I'd like to point out some awesome information I received from Scott Larabee, DCI Program Manager that fans of both paper and Online **Magic** will be pleased to hear about. In case you haven't heard yet, here's the official info.

2005 World Championship Qualifier for *Magic Online*

The 2005 **Magic: The Gathering** World Championship will take place November 30 – December 4, 2005 in Yokohama, Japan. The World Championship is the highest-level competition that **Magic** has to offer.

The **Magic Online** World Championship qualifier is a one-time opportunity which gives **Magic Online** players a chance to qualify and compete in the most exciting **Magic: The Gathering** Tournament of the year. Not only will the winner of the qualifier receive an invitation to compete, airfare and hotel stay in Japan is included in the prize!

World Championship Qualifier Preliminary Tournaments

Dates: Thursday, September 29, 2005 through Wednesday October 12, 2005.

Thirty-two (32) Premier Events will be designated "Worlds QT Prelim" events. Each Worlds QT Prelim will invite the Top 8 finishers to play in the 2005 World Championship Qualifier Tournament on Saturday October 15, 2005 at 9:00 AM PST. See the [Magic Online Event Schedule](#) for a complete schedule of Worlds QT Prelims.

Formats: Various (Limited and Constructed)

Cost: Constructed Formats – 10 Tix
Limited Formats – 5 Tix (plus Product)

All Worlds QT Prelim events will have a maximum attendance of 128 players. 3x Prizes, manual pay to Top 16. Top 8 finishers of each Worlds QT Prelim are invited to the 2005 World Championship Qualifier on October 15, 2005, 9:00 am PST

The winner of the World Championship Qualifier receives an invitation to the 2005 World Championships in Yokohama, Japan, including two round-trip economy-class tickets from the winner's location to Japan and five nights hotel accommodation during Worlds.

Additional details will be posted next Monday, so make sure to check it out!

Tribal Wars Gets a Boost

In case you missed the [Saturday Open Events – October, 2005](#) posted Monday, there's something of interest to those of us who like to get in touch with our more primitive side...

Tribal Wars Open

START TIME: Saturday October 1, 2005, 9AM PDT
4x prizes given down all the way to 64th place.

Yep, Tribal Wars gets a premier event, and I might even be able to make this one! For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the format, [I talked about it here two weeks ago](#), and there's a link there to the full rules.

Natural Selection: Week 2 IntoTheAether (Bringers) Vs SuicidDragon (Spirits)

[Last week](#) I received a lot of suggestions for tuning my deck, including a wide variety of solutions to my mana woes. One card that was mentioned a lot was **Pentad Prism**, a card that I tried in the initial few builds of Bringers. Yes, the card can insure an early Bringer, sometimes as soon as turn 3. What I discovered in playtesting though was that a single early Bringer was rarely enough to win the game. Tribal Wars players know they're going to be facing creatures, so there is usually some sort of creature removal available to nullify an early threat. Then I'd find myself struggling to try and topdeck some more mana fixers while my opponent swarmed me with his tribe of much easier-to-cast critters. This taught me an important lesson: my mana fixers need to pretty much permanently fix my mana, so that once I can cast my first Bringer, I can crank out Bringer after Bringer after Bringer. One suggestion I decided to try was the *Odyssey* filter lands and I've been very happy with them so far.

A couple of readers suggested trimming a few of the big, bulky, hard-to-cast Bringers and "cheat" the Bringer count with some copies of **Mistform Ultimus**. The theory was that Ultimus could come out at least a turn earlier and stop the bleeding from quick aggressive opponents. As an added



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bonus, it was *Mistform Ultimus*—He Who Walks With All Tribes! I decided to give him a try in some test games and was happy with the results (except when one opponent dropped multiple Shepherds of Rot and took advantage of Misty's Zombie type).

I've also been struggling with removal cards. I ran *Pyroclasm* for a while, but kept running into decks where the card was just ineffective. Then I ran against two decks with *Ensnaring Bridge* and one deck that featured pingers and *Death Pits of Rath*. *Naturalize* jumped into the deck until I went on a streak of opponents that made me wish I had *Pyroclasm*s again. It seemed that, no matter what my removal package, it was never adequate against my opponent.

Finally, in desperation I turned to the Ultimate Solution, one that only a lucky few have access to: *Pernicious Deed*. I've been in The Aether long enough to realize that IPA rares, especially the powerful ones, are worth their digital weight in pure gold, and flopping one across the virtual board is seen as gaudy and cheesy in some play circles. When testing the new configuration one opponent got so bent out of shape and nasty about it that I had to concede the game and put him on my ignore list. Still, until I figure out something at least close as effective in the early-mid game, I'm going to use it for now. This is the list I eventually settled on to play my Week 2 match:



(Tribal Wars) Bringers v2.1 by Bennie Smith txt

60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Llanowar Wastes 3 Karplusan Forest 2 Mossfire Valley 2 Shadowblood Ridge 1 Polluted Delta 1 Windswept Heath 1 Wooded Foothills 1 Yavimaya Coast 1 Brushland 1 Forest 1 Mountain 1 Plains 1 Island 1 Swamp 1 Miren, the Moaning Well 1 Contested Cliffs <p>22 land</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Birds of Paradise 4 Sakura-Tribe Elder 3 Mistform Ultimus 1 Duplicant 3 Bringer of the Black Dawn 4 Bringer of the Blue Dawn 4 Bringer of the Green Dawn 4 Bringer of the Red Dawn 2 Bringer of the White Dawn <p>29 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Rampant Growth 1 Terminate 1 Damping Matrix 3 Pernicious Deed 1 Exile into Darkness 1 Mindslaver <p>9 other spells</p>
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Surprisingly, the mana worked pretty well, thanks in large part to the filter lands. *Contested Cliffs* was a last minute inspiration considering that *Mistform Ultimus* is a beast and the green Bringer often churns out quite a few beasts over the course of a game. I never drew it so I'm not sure how effective it will actually prove to be (though there have been some games I wished I'd rip it off the topdeck). *Damping Matrix* was a suggestion from an observer who watched me get dismantled by the pinger deck, and it seemed like a nice silver bullet to have access to even if it shut down my Tribe-Elders and *Mindslaver*.

I finally catch up with SuicidDragon on Sunday, the last day of the campaign week. I knew he was part of one of the white kingdoms, and I knew he was with spirits. In the back of my mind, I suspected I'd see *Tallowisps* churning out Cages of Hands while small white spirits pecked mercilessly away at my life total. Sadly for me, SD's deck was white and red, with fast red spirit beatdown that quickly overwhelmed me in game 1. Game 2 SD had to mulligan down to five cards, I drew *Damping Matrix* to shut down his special abilities of his spirits, and an early Bringer held down the fort long enough for me to gain control of the game. So it came down to Game 3 to see whether I'd lose yet another territory, or whether I'd be able to regain what I'd lost last week.

My opening hand looked like this:



Ouch. One green-mana producing land away from a keeper. One thing I've tried to practice more lately is being less fearful of the Mulligan. After all, a smaller hand that can win is much better than a full hand that's going to have a hard time winning. I toss this one back and get this:



Oof. I can't keep that. Next...



Oh come on.



Yes, this is the point when I'm glad none of my kids are in the room to hear me.



Sadly, I'm right back in the position I was in with my opening hand, but with four less cards to work with. Was I right to mulligan to begin with? Hindsight is 20/20, but I think I made the right call. What do you think?

I keep this hand with the idea that either I draw a land (and the odds are it will produce green mana) or I lose anyway. So naturally I draw a **Shadowblood Ridge**. And then a **Miren the Moaning Well**. Luckily for me, SD's draw is relatively slow so I'm not bleeding too quickly. I debate conceding in disgust, but figure what the heck, the (bad) luck of the draw has already nailed me, why not see how it turns out?

I next draw a **Bird** and a **Duplicant**. Sigh.



Mossfire Valley finally comes to my rescue after my opponent drops an Innocence Kami, sure to be a living nightmare with that Glittering Fang he's got. So much for my Sakura-Tribe Elder doing the block/sac thing to save me a few more life points.

Then I rip the Ultimate Solution: Pernicious Deed. Suddenly I see a possible light at the end of the tunnel.



I quickly work out a plan of action. Blow away the little guys with Deed, take a hit from the Innocence Kami and go to 3 life, then follow up with Duplicant on the Kami. I've got the Exile into Darkness in hand to handle smaller creatures he may subsequently draw. Turns out I get extremely lucky as my opponent accidentally plays his Glitterfang into the Deed. So I stabilize at 3 life, right?



Wrong. **Blind with Anger** smacks me with my **Duplicant** and leaves me at 1 life since his **Glitterfang** isn't able to join in the fun. I need to get the **Bird** out there in order to have a blocker for when he steals my creature again and tries to smack me with it, so I float 6 mana including one green from the filterland, play **Exile** to get rid of **Frostling**, then drop down the **Bird**. I next get my first **Bringer**, one of the **Red** variety. My opponent then drops **Oni of Wild Places** and swings.

At first I consider trading with my **Bringer**, but then I note that the **Oni** doesn't trample... and I've got a **Miren** in play. **Miren** was put in the deck for this express purpose of stealing creatures with the red **Bringer** and then sacrificing them for life.



So I block with the **Duplicant** and sacrifice it for life. Then during my turn I steal the **Oni**, swing with him and the **Bringer**, figuring that between the **Bird** and going back up to 9 life, I can be pretty well safe from dying during his next turn, and this makes it easier for me to try and win, if nothing else, by two attacks from the **Bringer**.

The next turn I draw a **Bringer of the Green Dawn** and play it after I attack with the red **Bringer**, so even if he plays two creatures I should be okay. My next turn I attack with the **Bringers**.

Darklings: Often overlooked in the tribal format is the role that the supporting cards can play in your deck. I'll be covering some of the best artifacts that can be used to fill any of those precious few slots left over after you've filled the deck with tribal cards and mana.

There are various categories that the best artifacts fall under. Since we're in the midst of various pennant races in baseball, I thought it would be thematic to group the categories into a line-up.

1. Good starts – These cards are quality leadoff batters. There should be no doubt about their utility when leading off.
2. The role of the second hitter is to make sure the runners get moved along. Equipment offers a way to improve the situation.
3. In baseball strategy, when there are runners on base, that typically limits your opponent's options. The 'your opponent can't' category is analogous to this.
4. The fourth hitter in the lineup is known as the cleanup hitter, responsible for driving the runners home, thus 'cleaning up' the bases. The fourth category is short and reserved for resets, naturally.

#1 Good starts

Aether Vial – We've already seen how good the Vial is in other constructed formats, so it's no surprise it's a natural inclusion in many Tribal decks, easing colored mana concerns and allowing you to use your mana for other spells. Any deck that can spare the spot for it should.

Sensei's Divining Top – Gives all tribes, not just wizards, the ability to dig deeper. Bonus points obviously if you shuffle your deck enough.

Chrome Mox – More of an accelerant than a support card. But if you can spare that high casting cost creature in your opening hand, the one mana head start can come in handy.



#2 Improving your creatures (i.e. Equipment)

Skullclamp is banned in the format, but three notable pieces of equipment are solid in the tribal format... *Umezawa's Jitte*, *Sword of Fire and Ice*, and *Sword of Light and Shadow*. All of the above are best used with aggressive weenie decks that can slap on the equipment and go riding into battle.

Lightning Greaves is the next notch down the scale, but useful when you want to say 'don't touch my creature' or 'I want to use it/attack right away'.

#3 Your opponent can't attack the way he wants or use his creatures as planned

In some decks I like to use, *Ensnaring Bridge* is king. Many people would argue it goes against the spirit of the format, creatures and attacking. As a control player, I'd rather the attacking be done on my terms. Best used with defensive tribes, tribes that don't need to attack until board advantage is established.

Caltrop – A three mana artifact that says all one-toughness creatures can't attack? Best used with slower tribes that need a way to slow down a weenie horde.

Meekstone / Juntu Stakes / Silent Arbiter – Either you're using weenies, or you're using beef. If you fear dragons, angels, and beasts, Meekstone is the card. If elves, birds or zuberia are too fast for you, *Juntu Stakes* puts a ... stake in their plan. If you like one-on-one combat, *Silent Arbiter* keeps things fair.

Damping Matrix – Another meta-game (or meta-format if you will) card that is really good at hosing a majority of the tribes. Best used with Samurai, Angels, Spirits, and creatures without activation costs for their abilities.

Pithing Needle – *Oblivion Stone* or *Pernicious Deed* have a way of wrecking your plans? Needle puts an end to that. This one is like a one-card *Damping Matrix* that can also affect lands such as *Unholy Grotto* and *Contested Cliffs* (not to mention my *Miren, the Moaning Well* – *Bennie, hoping to not get shut down by a Needle*).

#4 Blow stuff up

Oblivion Stone & *Engineered Explosives* are obvious choices. When things look like they're getting out of hand, it's useful to have a nice reset button.

In Summary

If I were to rank the top five artifacts in terms of utility in a properly built deck, it would like this:

- *Aether Vial*
- *Umezawa's Jitte*
- *Ensnaring Bridge*
- *Damping Matrix*
- *Pithing Needle*

Note that *Damping Matrix* is the oil to Vial and Jitte's water. Other than that, used wisely, these cards can throw a wrench in your opponent's plans in the tribal format.

(Thanks Darklings for the tips on cards to keep in mind when fleshing out those slots in Tribal decks. I know that many of these are rares and/or expensive and hard to get. If any Tribal fans care to share some good budget cards that also go great in Tribal decks, post them in the message boards for this article.)

Channeling the Forsythe

I thought I'd emulate Aaron and slip a poll on you all down here at the bottom of the column. I dusted off my Vanguard Sakashima deck this past weekend for fun, and got bombarded by people expressing concern about the Hell's Caretaker avatar's Vanguard abilities being way too overpowered. So I thought a poll would be a way to check to see if this was a large concern or one bothering a few vocal players.

What do you think the Hell's Caretaker avatar's Vanguard abilities?

- BAH-ROKEN!
- Powerful but not any more than some of the other avatars
- All hat but no cattle (or, Don't Believe The Hype)

*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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