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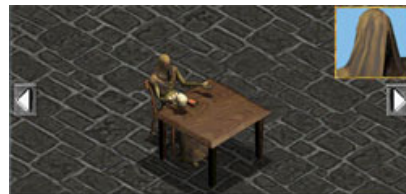
Whoever Won That *Mirage* Precon Contest?

Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, September 29, 2005



Vanguard Poll Results!

Last week I slipped a poll at the bottom of the column in response to the growing buzz I've been getting from fans of the Vanguard format regarding the Hell's Caretaker avatar. Since it was the participation avatar given away during the 9th Edition release events, it's pretty ubiquitous, and most anyone with a decent collection can make a pretty gross reanimation deck that can often set up a lock as early as turn 3 or 4 with *Yosei, the Morning Star*, eventually switching places with *Kokusho, the Evening Star* for the kill. I was curious whether the metagame would rise up to fight the Tier 1 menace or whether people felt the abilities were just too powerful, so I put it to a poll and here are the results:



What do you think the Hell's Caretaker avatar's Vanguard abilities?		
BAH-ROKEN!	688	44.1%
Powerful but not any more than some of the other avatars	670	42.9%
All hat but no cattle (or, Don't Believe The Hype)	203	13.0%
Total	1561	100.0%

It was close, but in the end it was BAH-ROKEN! by a nose! So is Wizards going to do anything about the menace? I don't know, but there are several things I think we can be reasonably assured of. First, Wizards will likely give it some time to see if the players can work it out. (Just because people think something is broken doesn't always mean it is, particularly with something new...) There's a horde of creative problem-solvers out there playing the game, allow them time to work on a solution, assuming one is even needed. Second, if the problem proves to be insurmountable, Wizards will step in and fix it. They fixed some of the avatars not too long ago, I'm sure they will do it again if they have to.

Me, I'm still having a good time with my *Sakashima Eater of Days* deck! It's not exactly Tier 1, but it's loads of fun and does some pretty crazy things. I can't wait to tinker with the decklist once *Ravnica* hits.

Whoever Won that *Mirage* Thing?

Back in August, RandyB revealed that *Mirage* would be coming to *Magic Online*, and since *Mirage* didn't have preconstructed decks, there would be some interesting twists to the *Magic Online Mirage* precons. The honor of helping to design one of the four precons would be extended to whichever MTGO player qualified for and won the "*Design a Mirage Theme Deck*" Tournament. The Championship was held on Saturday August 20th, and the winner was... Markus P

MTGO handle? MarkusP

Real name? Markus Pettersson

Age? 17

Where do you live? Sweden

How long have you been playing Magic? 7 years (since *Urza's Saga*)

How long have you been playing MTGO? 15 months

Percentage-wise, how would you consider yourself more of a casual or competitive Magic player? About 5% casual and 95% competitive, the 5% are for the matches I play with my playtesting team before the tournaments. I get the best training or practice when I compete at mtgo.

What's your favorite online format(s)? I like Extended the most, but draft and Standard are also exciting.

What is your favorite Magic card? *Sway of the Stars*, a new version of *Shahrazad*!

When did you win a *Mirage* Theme Deck Qualifier Event? I think it was an Extended Vanguard tournament. I played *Balancing Things*.

What deck did you use to win the *Mirage* Theme Deck Championship? Rats!

Who in R&D are you working with on designing the theme deck? Frank Gilson

What's your initial idea for designing a *Mirage* deck? Well, I wanted to create a deck with Mythological Beats. Creature types like Knights, elephants and clerics were boring. I started playing *Magic* because I liked the fantasy feeling in the game. I would like to share that feeling with new players. I'd like things like griffins, atogs, centaurs, and elves in my deck.

For those that are interested, here are the two decks MarkusP won with.



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NOVELS

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Ravnica Cycle, Book III
by Cory Herndon



Rats by MarkusP (Standard)		 	
Winner – Mirage Theme Deck Championship			
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
12 Swamp	4 Aether Vial	3 Terror	
1 City of Brass	3 Night's Whisper	2 Razormane Masticore	
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	3 Pithing Needle	4 Cranial Extraction	
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	3 Rend Flesh	3 Distress	
4 Tendo Ice Bridge	3 Umezawa's Jitte	3 Hideous Laughter	
1 Tomb of Urami			
	16 other spells		15 sideboard cards
23 land			
3 Nekkaraal			
4 Ravenous Rats			
4 Viridian Shaman			
4 Chittering Rats			
2 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni			
4 Nezumi Shortfang			
21 creatures			

Balancing Tings by MarkusP (Extended Vanguard) - Qualifying Tournament		 	
Avatar – Prodigal Sorcerer			
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
4 Ancient Spring	4 Chromatic Sphere	1 Recoup	
3 Archaeological Dig	3 Obliterate	3 Blood Moon	
4 Geothermal Crevice	3 Balancing Act	1 Undying Flames	
4 Irrigation Ditch	4 Moment's Peace	1 Obliterate	
2 Sulfur Vent	4 Burning Wish	1 Purify	
4 Tinder Farm	3 Gifts Ungiven	1 Pyroclasm	
3 Seafloor Debris	3 Fire/Ice	1 Balancing Act	
4 Timberland Ruins		3 Condescend	
	24 other spells	3 Kataki, War's Wage	
28 land			15 sideboard cards
4 Nimble Mongoose			
4 Terravore			
8 creatures			

In case you missed it, there is another promotion for the *Mirage* precon [going on right now](#) in Jay Moldenhaur-Salazar's column, where JMS gets to design his own theme deck with the help of the readers. The last deck will be built by Wizards R&D, so that leaves just one precon of the four still in question. How will that one get built? Stay tuned to magicthegathering.com and soon you'll know the answer!

Dirty Deeds



One of the perks to writing this column is access to a wizards MTGO account with four copies of everything. The downside to this is that these aren't my cards, I can't trade them for mad tix, and whenever Wizards and I may part ways down the road "my" collection goes with them (*which is pretty good incentive to try and stay with them forever and ever, haha!*). Of course, the upside more than makes up for it, allowing me to play whatever decks strike my fancy. When Scott Johns recruited me for this gig, he wanted me to be able to fully explore any and all facets of **Magic Online**, and not have the limits of my collection hold me back from that.

At the same time, I'm aware that the vast majority of online players have had to accumulate their collection by popping packs and trading, and that there are some cards that are simply unattainable for many newer players, such as the **Pernicious Deeds** I ran in my Tribal Wars deck last week. Many folks don't consider those cards – especially in multiples – fair and sporting, especially in casual pickup games. I suppose in the world of paper **Magic** it would be equivalent to dropping in a casual pickup game at a local game shop and pulling out a fully powered Vintage Stax deck to run against their Honden deck.

But Scott has made it clear that we already have a column [dedicated to "budget" Magic](#), written by the wonderful Jay Moldenhaur-Salazar, and that column contains wonderful tidbits for both paper and digital **Magic**. My task is to build fun and interesting decks with which to explore **Magic Online**. While this has certainly led me to play with some seriously blinged-out decks, I have also explored some less-powered formats such as the [Pauper Deck Challenge](#) and [Rainbow Stairwell](#) (which *can* technically get loaded up with high-tix cards but can also be built on a budget).

That said, I also realize that most **Magic Online** players weren't around during IPA and even *Odyssey* block is "old-school" to some. That's why I do tend to try and build cards from the newer sets – even if many of them *are* blinged-out with new moneyed cards – in order to make sure most of you have at least been exposed to the cards I'm using. The Aether is a great big place, and I try to cast as wide a net as possible, but I know sometimes I'm going to leave some of you in the cold. Hopefully I'll catch you on the next cast!

At the Top of the Natural Selection Food Chain

Instead of recounting my match-up this past week in the Natural Selection (Tribal Wars) campaign, I thought I'd share with you some of the players and decks that have risen to the top of the heap, taking down all tribal challengers so far after the first three weeks.

Scorponok wrote:

Hi Bennie, it's nice to see that you're having fun playing the tribal format. I'm a fan of the format myself. Below is my undefeated shaman tribal decklist from Ith's Natural Selection tribal wars campaign. (Note: At the moment on the standings, I only have 5 pts rather than 6 due to my week 1 match not being reported to Ith) So far, I have defeated Soldiers, Minions, and Dragons with this list.

MTGO handle? Scorponok

Real name? John Coley

Age? 26

Where do you live? Angleton, TX

How long have you been playing Magic? Since *The Dark*

How long have you been playing MTGO? From the beginning

Percentage-wise, how would you consider yourself more of a casual or competitive Magic player? I'd consider myself 80/20 competitive/casual.

What's your favorite online format(s)? I like to draft a lot. For constructed formats, I like extended, singleton, and prismatic.

What is your favorite color? Black

What is your quest? To destroy all Autobots and figure out the airspeed velocity of a coconut-laden African swallow.

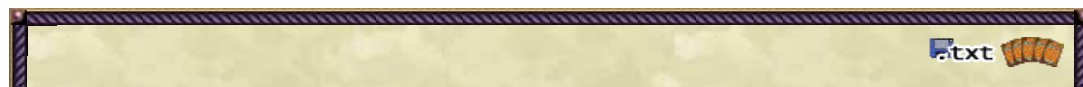
Do you play Tribal Wars a lot? What is/are your favorite tribe(s)? Not as much as I'd like to. My favorite tribe at the moment is Shaman, but I'd like to make a Specter deck.

Do you think there is a defined metagame for Tribal Wars? There isn't really a metagame for Tribal Wars at the moment. You pretty much have to be prepared for anything.

Are you going to try and play in the Tribal Wars Open Premier Event coming up? If so, are you going to stick with what you have for Natural Selection or are you going with one of the "broken" tribes? I'd like to play in the Tribal Wars premier event, but I really fear people playing Goblins or Elves will just overrun the tourney. If I do play though, I'll stick with my Shaman deck.

What do you think of Natural Selection so far? Seen any unique or interesting decks? Ith is running the Natural Selection campaign really well. The banning of Goblins, Elves, and Zombies for this made it a lot easier for people to play whatever they want and still have a chance at it. During week 2, I was paired up against a Minion deck. I've seen a few people playing a Wall deck too.

How did your deck come about? I started the deck out as just a Standard-legal Kiki-Jiki/Witness deck. When I looked over the list, I noticed most of the creatures were Shamans already. I only had to change a few cards to make it a Tribal Wars-legal deck. I want to abuse Kiki-Jiki as much as possible with the deck. Since the format is a creature-oriented format, you'll need plenty of creature removal. Making Kiki-Jiki copy a **Flametongue Kavu** or **Duplicant** gives you an endless supply of removal that doubles as an attacker or blocker for the turn.



Sneaky-Jiki by Scorponok (Tribal Wars - Shaman)

60 cards

7 Forest	1 Duplicant	4 Magma Jet
4 Karplusan Forest	1 Elvish Bard	1 Time of Need
7 Mountain	4 Eternal Witness	
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	4 Flametongue Kavu	5 other spells
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep	3 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker	
4 Wooded Foothills	2 Kumano, Master Yamabushi	
	1 Sachi, Daughter of Seshiro	
24 land	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	
	4 Troll Ascetic	
	2 Viridian Shaman	
	1 Viridian Zealot	
	4 Vulshok Sorcerer	
	31 creatures	

MTGO handle? Seraya

Real name? Still Seraya Shadowharper. ;P

Age? 22

Where do you live? During the **Magic** season, on Ohio State University (in Columbus) campus. The rest, rural Ohio.

How long have you been playing Magic? I first learned to play during the *Tempest* days, but found out my friends and I didn't play the game too well.

How long have you been playing MTGO? Ever since I came home from the *Fifth Dawn* prerelease, my first games of **Magic** in years after playing for about a year back in those learning days.

Percentage-wise, how would you consider yourself more of a casual or competitive Magic player? 90/10 casual/competitive, because I do like to play sealed PEs from time to time (especially at release events and paper prereleases).

What's your favorite online format(s)? Two-Headed Giant, and I can't wait to see the new rules be implemented online.

What is your favorite color? GREEEEEEEN! Oh, if you meant in general and not **Magic** color, blue. :D

What is your quest? To have, and give, as good a time as possible. The game's much more fun when you're talking to your opponent, after all.

Do you play Tribal Wars a lot? What is/are your favorite tribe(s)? Not really, Natural Selection is the first time I've gone and specifically built a Tribal Wars deck. I do like my kitties but I'm really fond of the tribes that can cross five colors: Bringers, Zuberu, Slivers, etc.

Do you think there is a defined metagame for Tribal Wars? I think there probably is in the murky realm of 100% competitive player circles, but I have no idea as to what it looks like. I'm sure there'll be a clearer picture after the PE.

Are you going to try and play in the Tribal Wars Open Premier Event coming up? It's a Saturday, right? Can't make it, working. :(If I were though I'd play my kitties just because I like 'em.

What do you think of Natural Selection so far? Seen any unique or interesting decks? I believe it was Mana War that I saw a kick-butt druid deck. Used all the best druids to power out a ton of mana and Tooth and Nail on turn 4 or so. As to NS (Natural Selection) I like it, but that might be because a) Jitte isn't banned yet and b) I'm 3-0. :D

Share with the readers some thoughts you have on your deck: overall game plan you had when building it, cool combos and synergies, etc.

It's a white weenie deck, through and through. It wants to pump out lil white creatures by the half-dozen, throw them at the opponent's head and draw more with *Mask of Memory* to keep on throwing. Handing a Jitte or Mask to Skirmisher is of course a great use of natural double strike. 4 Jitte counters or draw 4, discard 2 are both powerful effects. I've been getting some remarks from my opponents saying my deck is a little too cutthroat for just a casual format, but I have fun playing the deck.

White Weenie by Seraya (Tribal Wars - Cats)



60 cards

18 Plains	4 Leonin Den-Guard	4 Chrome Mox
18 land	3 Leonin Elder	3 Sensei's Divining Top
	4 Leonin Skyhunter	4 Bonesplitter
	1 Savannah Lions	3 Mask of Memory
	4 Skyhunter Cub	4 Arrest
	4 Skyhunter Skirmisher	4 Umezawa's Jitte
	20 creatures	22 other spells

This is v3.0 of my deck, v1.0 was really bad... I was using *Angel's Feathers* for Urza's sake. v2.0 introduced the *Chrome Moxen* and the Jittes, seriously upgrading the deck's overall power once I reduced it to a white weenie deck. (This, sadly, was also where I had to remove my kitty lord Raksha as he just cost way too much.) As I was doing that I realized I needed some way to keep filtering and filling my hand, so I brought in another piece of equipment: *Mask of Memory*.

v3.0 saw a couple other rare Cats leave along with fourth copies of Top and Elder, to put in the Arrests. I got sick of Master Decoy from AJ_Impy's deck (he's joining NS soon I believe) keeping me unable to do anything.

MTGO handle? graveltongue

Real name? Dustin Fehr

Age? 34

Where do you live? Salt Lake City, UT

How long have you been playing Magic? 6 Years (June 1994-June 1997 and June 2002-Present)

How long have you been playing MTGO? 3 Years (June 2002-Present)

Percentage-wise, how would you consider yourself more of a casual or competitive Magic player? 65 casual/35 competitive

What's your favorite online format(s)? 1) Tribal Wars 2) Vanguard Ext. 3) Ext.

What is your favorite color? BLUE! (Bring back the Merfolk!!)

What is your quest? To see **Lord of Atlantis** gain his just rewards! Give this Lord his Merfolk! Let his people go!

Do you play Tribal Wars a lot? What is/are your favorite tribe(s)? I'm always on the lookout for a Tribal Wars game. I'll usually play at least one a day and often more depending on how much time I have with which to avoid homework. My favorite tribes are the "off" tribes, by which I mean anything that I haven't already seen a thousand or more times. Basically, stuff like Treefolk, Spiders, Dwarves and so on. I also love to see any tribe used in creative combinations with its non-creature cards. For example, I once played an opponent who was running a deck with blue Beasts of the cycling variety along with **Scrabbling Claws** and **Mist of Stagnation**. It's that kind of groovy synergy in Tribal Wars I'm most happy to see.

Do you think there is a defined metagame for Tribal Wars? I definitely think that Zombies and Goblins are Tier 1 in the metagame, but the Tribal Wars Open will go a long way toward revealing what the metagame actually looks like. I also think it will force some creative builds as players try to metagame against the top tier tribes. I'm thinking that first-striking, protection-laden and equipment-toting Knights might prove to be pretty good. I also expect to see some combo-licious Zuberba builds.

Are you going to try and play in the Tribal Wars Open Premier Event coming up? If so, are you going to stick with what you have for Natural Selection or are you going with one of the "broken" tribes? I was really excited when I heard the news about the Tribal Wars Open, but I really don't think that my beloved Natural Selection tribe would have a chance there. Zombies absolutely own my tribe, and there's sure to be lots and lots of those. I expect to play at the Open, but at this point I don't know what Tribe I will go with.

What do you think of Natural Selection so far? Seen any unique or interesting decks?

Natural Selection has been excellent fun so far. I think that it has really concentrated a lot of the pre-existent interest in the Tribal Wars format, and with the help of your column and the Tribal Wars Open I expect that will not only continue, but that new interest in the format will be generated as well. I'm already noticing this as a matter of fact, and the newcomers to the format certainly aren't proving to be push-overs; quite the opposite. I have only faced three opponents so far in Natural Selection and already I've seen a deck that I'm absolutely in love with. I played HeWhoSpeaksToHimself's Dwarves in week #2 and I think he would have won if he had been able to find some land in the second game of the match (he took the first game in an incredible manner). I don't want to give away his deck's trick, but I just thought it was a wonderfully creative use given the constraints and particularities of the Dwarven tribe.

Share with the readers some thoughts you have on your deck: overall game plan you had when building it, cool combos and synergies, etc.

The basic game plan of my Horror deck is to get some **Ichorids**, **Ichorid** chow, and a **Wonder** into the graveyard as soon as possible. I use **Cephalid Vandal** and **Mesmeric Orb** to do this, because if I can disrupt my opponent a little while filling my 'yard, then all the better. **Carrion Feeder** is there to manipulate the stack when horrors like **Mesmeric Fiend** or **Faceless Butcher** come into play. By sacrificing the Horror to the **Carrion Feeder** with the "remove a card/creature" ability still on the stack, you can essentially "return" the card before you take it, which is to say, take it and not ever give it back. **Carrion Feeder** also likes to get fat munching on fresh **Ichorid**, seeing as the **Ichorid** are going back to the graveyard at the end of the turn anyway. The last Feeder trick involves **Mindslicer**. If I play a turn 1,2, or 3 **Carrion Feeder** and a turn 4 **Mindslicer**, then I can force my opponent to discard his hand and give the Feeder +1/+1 at the same time.



Heart of Darkness by graveltongue (Tribal Wars – Horrors)		
60 cards		
4 Island	4 Frightcrawler	2 Smother
13 Swamp	2 Mindslicer	4 Mesmeric Orb
4 Polluted Delta	2 Boneshard Slasher	
1 Cephalid Coliseum	4 Faceless Butcher	6 other spells
1 Tainted Isle	4 Ichorid	
	4 Mesmeric Fiend	
23 land	3 Wonder	

4 Carrion Feeder
4 Cephalid Vandal

31 creatures

In closing

Before wrapping things up this week, I'd like to welcome eMRaistlin (Zubera), effang (Spirits) and Froish (Zubera) to Natural Selection and the Prismatic Citadel Kingdom! We're currently in 3rd place at 24 total territories, not too shabby! I'd also like to welcome the brand new "artifact" Kingdom, the Clockwork City-States, with three players so far (gastaseven's Myr tribe, along with penguinpoolooza and Ankhling's Golem tribes).

This week my Natural Selection match is IntoTheAether vs. betzj's Shaman deck. I've run across some potent Shaman tribal decks in testing so this could be a rough match!

*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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