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Brains for Thanksgiving

*Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, November 24, 2005*



Wizards of the Coast is out of the office for the Thanksgiving holiday, and will return with new articles beginning Monday, November 28. In case you missed it, what follows is the article that ran in this slot last week. Have a great weekend, and we'll see you Monday!

Scott Johns, *magicthegathering.com* Content Manager



Announcements (and [Links](#)) Galore!

As the Holiday Season rapidly approaches, Wizards of the Coast has been as busy as Santa's elves putting together some awesome things for us *Magic Onliners* to enjoy... provided we have been good little boys and girls! If you've been naughty, your Thursday update will take from now until the New Year to finish loading, which is the virtual equivalent of a lump of coal in your stocking. So make sure you're nice! Here's a quick rundown of all the special events coming up in case you've missed the news.

First, in case you haven't seen it yet: [IPA IV is here!](#)

For those who are unfamiliar with the IPA events, MTGO has periodically set up events that are qualifiers for a special Sealed Deck (with Booster Draft Top 8) event where the hard-to-find and often-expensive *Invasion/Planeshift/Apocalypse* sets are used. What is particularly nice is that paper **Magic** Extended (which is the current Pro Tour Qualifying format for [PT Honolulu](#)) now synchs up with Extended on MTGO, so Pros and aspiring Pros alike will want to playtest Extended on *Magic Online*. These cards will be in demand, either for your own decks to practice with, or as quality trade bait.

Some of the IPA Qualifiers will be Extended so you can practice for the paper **Magic** PTQs with your Extended decks... and if you manage to win the coveted blue envelope, you can also practice for the Pro Tour on MTGO... because Honolulu will be using the Standard format!

IPA Qualifiers

Dates: Thursday, November 17, 2005 through Wednesday November 23, 2005.
Approximately one half of all Premier Events will be designated "IPA Qualifier Events". Each IPA Qualifier will invite the Top 8 finishers to play in the Invasion Block Sealed Deck Tournament on Saturday November 26, 2005 at 9:00 AM PST. See the [Magic Online Event Schedule](#) for a complete schedule of IPA Qualifiers.

Invasion Block Sealed Deck Tournament IV

Dates: Saturday November 26, 9:00 am PST – FREE for those who Qualify
PRODUCT: Invasion Tournament Pack, 1 Planeshift Booster, 1 Apocalypse Booster. Top 8 Booster draft. The booster draft format will be 1 Invasion, 1 Planeshift, 1 Apocalypse booster per player.

Speaking of Extended, don't forget the [Extended 6x Open](#) this Saturday November 19, 2005, starting at 9AM PDT.


Also, in case you haven't stumbled across it, you can [now download](#) all of the Extended .dec files from Pro Tour Los Angeles! Just looking at the Top 8, there are a few decks you can assemble without having to dip too deeply into IPA already. If you've played 'Tog online, then you probably have most of Ruel's winning deck already together, ready to storm the Extended PEs! If you love combo and tend to have engine cards already in your collection, Chris McDaniel's Heartbeat Combo deck shouldn't put you out too many tix to finish it off. If you already have the fetchlands and are working on the Ravnica duals, Ervin Tormos's PT Jank deck doesn't have too many more high-dollar cards.


If Extended isn't your thing, you can also download the 2005 Champ decks at that page too!

Secondly, Announcing the Saturday Open Events for November & December


Amongst the great limited events, Singleton gets an Open, as does Classic, which will allow *Mirage!* Ring out 2005 by giving your Standard [Vanguard](#) deck a run in the 4x Open.

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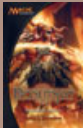
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NOVELS



Dissension
Ravnica Cycle, Book III
by Cory Herndon

Singleton 4x Open: Saturday November 26, 2005, 10AM PDT
Standard 4x Open: Sunday November 27, 2005, 9AM PDT
Ravnica Sealed 4x Open: Saturday December 3, 2005, 9AM PDT
Classic 4x Open: Saturday December 24, 2005, 9AM PDT (Mirage and all Promo cards are legal)
9E Sealed 4x Open: Sunday December 25, 2005, 9AM PDT
Standard w/ Vanguard 4x Open: Saturday December 31, 2005, 9AM PDT
Ravnica Sealed 4x Open: Sunday January 1, 2006, 9AM PDT

Thirdly... Nix Tix for Xmas!


All you draft fans get three 5-day holiday weekends where drafts cost zero tickets!

Thanksgiving: starting Thursday, November 24 9:00 AM, through Monday, November 28 9:00 AM
Winter Holidays: starting Thursday, December 22 9:00 AM, through Monday, December 26 9:00 AM
New Year: starting Thursday, December 29 9:00 AM, through Monday, January 2 9:00 AM

Lastly: No Pumpkin Pie for me-- pass the Brains!

Starting Thanksgiving Day and through the end of November, all Premier Events will award the promo card **Braingeyser** to all participants. Each Premier Event will also award a foil promo **Braingeyser** to each of the Top 8. The promotion kicks in again during Christmas. If you can play in 2 events during Thanksgiving and 2 events during Christmas, you'll have a play set of **Braingeysers**.

Thanksgiving: Thursday, November 24 9:00 AM through Wednesday, November 30 9:00 AM
Winter Holidays/New Year: Thursday, December 22 9:00 AM through Monday, January 2 9:00 AM

I think it's pretty awesome that we'll be getting a chance to pick up some **Braingeysers**. This old-school card drawer was in the original Alpha/Beta/Unlimited base set for **Magic**, made the cut for Revised... and hasn't been seen since. Wizards has looked back at **Braingeyser** for inspiration, in some cases the card was considerably weaker, and in some cases arguably more powerful (**Stroke of Genius**, and black's **Skeletal Scrying**). It's hard to beat the original in terms of sheer, simple elegance: , sorcery, "Target player draws X cards" (Oracle Text, the original printing said "Draw X cards or force opponent to draw X cards").

Lump lingered last in line for brains...

Braingeyser was on the [very first Restricted list](#) from the DCI back in 1994. Looking at that list now is amusing; not only did it include the obviously overpowered Power 9 cards such as **Ancestral Recall**, **Black Lotus** and the Moxen, but it also included **Dingus Egg**, **Orcish Oriflamme** and **Rukh Egg**, cards that hardly deserved to be considered too powerful. So where does **Braingeyser** fit on the power scale? Definitely higher than **Dingus Egg**! Drawing cards is inherently powerful in **Magic** and players gravitate towards those cards. All the way back in 1996, Brian Weisman's "The Deck" used **Braingeyser** along with **Library of Alexandria**, **Ancestral Recall** and **Jayemdae Tome** to keep cards flowing (as Mike Flores pointed out [here](#)). Of course, Vintage has changed quite a bit over the years and **Braingeyser** has come to be considered much more fair now than many other newer cards that have come down the pike, and [as of September 2004](#), it has become unrestricted in Vintage. Aaron Forsythe explained, "**Braingeyser** is expensive and slow. If you can generate infinite mana, there are better cards to kill with." Does that mean **Braingeyser** sucks now? Well, Aaron was referring to **Braingeyser**'s role as a kill card in Vintage. Here on **Magic Online**, we've got entirely different environments. I think enterprising online players will find all sorts of fantastic uses for their **Braingeysers**.

A Brain is a Terrible Thing to Waste

Okay, so you got at least one **Braingeyser** promo card. What now? I thought I'd present some things to keep in mind when looking at building a deck around **Braingeyser** or whether to add it to one of your existing creations.

Just one copy? No problem—transmute for it! **Dimir Infiltrator**, **Muddle the Mixture**, and **Shred Memory** can all transmute to find your **Braingeyser**. **Braingeyser** has the advantage of being a "big" spell, but with X in its cost it's only considered to have a converted mana cost of 2.

Howling Maros—with the cycle of "Maro" spirits from *Saviors of Kamigawa* and the other "hand-size matters" cards, **Braingeyser** can function as a sorcery-speed **Howl from Beyond**... that also happens to fill your grip to bursting with cards

Putting the "X" in Geyser—Mana for mana, spells like **Concentrate**, **Tidings** and **Opportunity** are all strictly better than **Braingeyser**. If you really want to abuse the 'Geyser, you'll often need to get a mana engine online first



Don't hold your breath for this one to make promo any time soon...

so that you can pump that X in the mana cost into double digits. Cards like [Heartbeat of Spring](#), [Mirari's Wake](#), [Cabal Coiffers](#), [Early Harvest](#) and [Krark-Clan Ironworks](#) are good candidates for the job.

The Necro Principal—it's okay to overdraw your hand! When people first started using [Necropotence](#), they would often draw just enough to fill up their hand. It wasn't until pioneering players started overdrawing on Necro to sculpt the perfect hand, discarding excess lands and unneeded cards, that Necro truly became "broken" (well, okay, even *more* broken). When calculating X for [Braingeyser](#), keep the Necro Principal in mind.

Okay, I've tapped out—now what? You've cast [Braingeyser](#) and now you've got a hand chock-full of spells... and no mana to cast them. So who needs mana? Use the Shoals from [Betrayers of Kamigawa](#) and you've got plenty of extra cards to fuel them. The ever-amazing [Aether Vial](#) can dump out a creature for free. Okay, so maybe you do need mana... swarm in with your creatures and get an untap with [Nature's Will](#). If you run a lot of instants, then [Seedborn Muse](#) can untap you during your opponent's turn and give you the opportunity to use your fistful of cards.

Brains! Send more cops... send more paramedics!


Okay, you know I couldn't leave without presenting a fun deck utilizing [Braingeyser](#). I drew inspiration from the *Return of the Living Dead* movie and the board game Give Me The Brain ("Welcome to Friedey's, the Fast Food Restraunt of the Damned. You and your Zombie co-workers have a lot of work to do, and there's only one Brain to pass around."). So, we get one Brain(geyser) and a bunch of Zombies, eh?

Give Me The Brain, Tribal – Zombies		
By Bennie Smith 60 cards		
2 Cabal Coiffers	4 Festering Goblin	1 Braingeyser
4 Watery Grave	4 Withered Wretch	1 Zombie Infestation
3 Underground River	4 Lord of the Undead	3 Shred Memory
16 Swamp	1 Undead Gladiator	5 other spells
25 land	1 Nantuko Husk	
	1 Zombie Trailblazer	
	1 Soulless One	
	3 Vengeful Dead	
	1 Corpse Harvester	
	3 Noxious Ghoul	
	2 Helldozer	
	4 Twisted Abomination	
	1 Gempalm Polluter	
	30 creatures	

[Shred Memory](#) is a handy utility spell that is stellar against some decks, but in this build it's mostly there to transmute for your single Brain once you've got plenty of mana to sink into it. If you've already drawn the Brain, then transmuting for [Zombie Infestation](#) isn't a bad call either. I love that [Lord of the Undead](#) is now a Zombie and goes towards your zombie count for Tribal and he's stellar in this deck outside of just pumping your zombies and bringing back dead guys. He's also a card-drawing engine (with [Undead Gladiator](#) or [Gempalm Polluter](#)) and a dual-land fetcher (with [Twisted Abomination](#)). When [Mirage](#) comes out, I look forward to working [Tombstone Stairwell](#) into the mix!

Behind the Curtain: Tales from Programming *Ravnica*, Part 3

[Rachel Reynolds](#) talked to us the last [two weeks](#) about the challenges and fun behind programming *Ravnica: City of Guilds*. She's baaaaaack!

RachelR: "So [Eye of the Storm](#) caused me the most frustration while programming cards, but the most obnoxious thing to fix during the beta was Convoke. Convoke was certainly the hardest of the guild mechanics to program, but wasn't all that bad. I thought it was working really well, and then I found out about the face down bug. It turned out that sometimes when you played a card with Convoke, you started drawing cards face down. You had to start casting a face down card without knowing what it was, and then your cards would turn face up again." 

"I was pretty mystified by this. There are definitely places in the code that set flags to turn a card face down, particularly with morph cards, and there are some cards that specifically say to turn something face down. I had no idea what about the code I wrote for Convoke could possibly have anything to do with turning things face down. The code could affect some variable that caused something else to be set somewhere else in the code, and I had no idea if the code that was actually turning it face down was located in the client or server or where in either one it would be. Also, I didn't know which cards or circumstances exactly caused this to happen and what the connection among them was. The one thing I could reliably reproduce was that [Gather Courage](#) would consistently cause this problem to happen.

"So I started focusing on [Gather Courage](#) and using the debugger. I eventually tracked it down to code that makes cards face down in your hand after you draw them and are still able to undo the draw, so you can't see what you're going to draw and then undo after getting that information. With Convoke, I was executing certain sections of the cost-paying code multiple times, since I had to bypass the normal step to pay mana costs and prompt you to pay them again after creatures were tapped to reduce the cost. This screwed up the variables that were used to determine whether or not you could undo, and permanently changed whether cards that were drawn

should be visible or not. So I messed around with my Convoke code a bit, and got **Gather Courage**, my reliable test case, to work just fine. Turns out I broke just about every other Convoke card, so cards ended up face down even more than before. But at least I understood the problem, and was able to make a more global change the day after hearing about the new problem that stopped all of the strange behavior with Convoke cards.”

“The tentative release date for *Mirage* is early December.”

--Justin Ziran in [Really Really Big News](#) back on June 30th

Even though we haven't heard much about *Mirage* in a while, I *did* want to point out that early December is right around the corner. In fact, since next Thursday is Thanksgiving and Into The Aether is on vacation, then next time you see me again... will be the very *earliest* of December. I think I can safely say... you will not want to miss that one!

*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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