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The Kitchen Sink

Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, January 12, 2006



I know many of you clicked here hoping that maybe, just maybe, we might finally be giving up some more information about *Magic Online* 3.0, and I hate to disappoint you—again! Scott asked me to leave some space at the end of this week's article for him, as he felt he had a possible way to speed up the preview schedule and start getting stuff to us now. I can't wait. Actually, I *have* to wait. I don't know what he's going to write!

Hometown Throwdown

The man in black fled across the desert and the gunslinger followed.

Stephen King kicked off one of my favorite book series with those words in 1965. I first read *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger* in 1982 and was immediately hooked. The combination of spaghetti Western, fantasy, and horror was a heady brew from which I drank deeply and thirsted for more. I had to wait over 20 years for him to complete the saga, and thoroughly enjoyed devouring each book, though turning that very last page of Roland's epic quest was bittersweet indeed.



Whenever I hear the word "gunslinger" now, I always think back to Roland, King's Cowboy as Knight Errant; King Arthur meets Clint Eastwood. So when Star City's Pete Hoefling pulled me aside at a local PTQ and asked me whether I was interested in gunslinging at [Grand Prix Richmond](#), I instantly heard that whistling cowboy theme music. You know the piece I'm talking about.

Whooie-whooie-wooo... wa, wa, waaaaa...

"Ah reckon so," I drawled to Pete.

Richmond's my hometown, and I have to admit I'm still trying to wrap my brain around having a **Magic** Grand Prix right here in little ol' Scuffletown. Grand Prix events are held at, you know, exotic places like Bilbao or Hiroshima, or big cities like Philadelphia and Beijing. Richmond? *Richmond?*

I just double-checked the link, and it's true. Richmond!

At any rate, since **Magic's** competitive community will be swooping onto my turf the weekend of February 4th and 5th, I wanted to make sure I *represented*, you know? The problem is the format: Grand Prix Richmond is Limited, and as Teddy Cardgame once so kindly put it:

"Bennie and Limited goes together like oil and water." – Ted Knutson

Some of you all have been a little less kind in the forums, but no less true. I was not necessarily relishing going 0-2 at my hometown Grand Prix. So I was already thinking of devoting my energies on the constructed side events, and now I get to be a gunslinger, protecting Pete's booster packs from the hordes of Ronin card players looking for an easy victory!

Pete's asked that I have the following weapons available for dueling: a Standard, Extended, Legacy and "casual" deck (Pete suggested Highlander for the casual deck). I thought it might be fun to get you all involved in choosing my decks, so if you have any suggestions please send them in! Guildpact will be released on paper by then, so feel free to include any Guildpact cards too. Over the next couple weeks I'll be checking out decks from what you've sent in and combing the net to find decks that are fun and competitive, and then presenting some choices to you all to help me decide. Full props and credit to those who knock my socks off with their deck idea!

Speaking of sending in decks... I think it just might be that time again!

Into The Aether's Deck Challenge II!

My [first Deck Challenge](#) back in August (with [Greater Good](#)) was a lot of fun, and I've been itching to do it again. In [last week's column](#), I talked about some key cards from *Mirage* and mentioned plotting a Zombie deck featuring [Tombstone Stairwell](#).



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Comprehensive Rules
All Magic Rules

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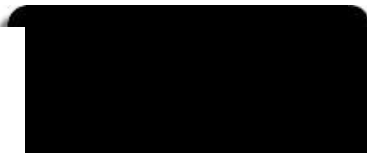
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NOVELS

Dissension
Ravnica Cycle, Book III
by Cory Herndon





To start with, I took a basic *Onslaught*-fueled Zombie deck and simply added **Tombstone Stairwell**:

Tombstone Zombies (Classic)

By Bennie Smith
60 cards

<p>20 Swamp</p> <p>3 Cabal Coffer</p> <p>1 Unholy Grotto</p> <p>24 land</p>	<p>4 Lord of the Undead</p> <p>4 Festering Goblin</p> <p>3 Nantuko Husk</p> <p>4 Shepherd of Rot</p> <p>4 Carrion Feeder</p> <p>2 Gempalm Polluter</p> <p>4 Twisted Abomination</p> <p>3 Vengeful Dead</p> <p>4 Withered Wretch</p> <p>32 creatures</p>	<p>4 Tombstone Stairwell</p> <p>4 other spells</p>
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The first few games I won with just plain ol' Zombie beatdown without even drawing the eponymous enchant world. Finally in some games with Comedy AI things started coming together.



The cycling Zombies are both good cards on their own, but work particularly well with **Tombstone Stairwell** by giving you an easy way to dump zombies in the graveyard. **Gempalm Polluter** goes the extra mile though by being good after a Stairwell is in play, potentially unleashing a ridiculous amount of life drain.

Tombstone Stairwell served as a nice second chance at unlife for my Zombie horde in the face of Comedy AI's flurry of removal spells.



Hooray for **Cabal Coffers**, which lets you keep the enchantment around a lot longer than any human or zombie has a right to!

As I was playing the deck, it occurred to me: **Tombstone Stairwell** is one of those wacky but powerful enchantments that can really do some crazy things... much like one of my other all-time favorite enchantments, **Greater Good**. So why not open up the deckbuilding challenge to all of you for fun and prizes, this time featuring **Tombstone Stairwell**? I'll run it much like I did last time; first, email me your decklists, along with tips on playing the deck and what you had in mind when building it. Make sure the decklists are legal for **Magic Online** testing (which means either Classic format or Classic with Vanguard), and must include 4 copies of the signature enchantment. I'll then select the cream of the crop and submit the decklists to you all for a vote. I will then playtest the top four vote-getters and pick the one that I have the most fun with. The winner will get a playset of foil **Tombstone Stairwells**, and the three runners-up will get a draft set of **Ravnica/Ravnica/Guildpact** when it releases online (or three packs of just **Guildpact**, if they prefer).

Checking in on **Ravnica Block Constructed**

On Tuesday, January 3rd thirty-four players gathered for the 2x **Ravnica Block Constructed Premier Event**. While the turnout was relatively small, I thought it might be interesting to check in and see what people are running currently in the days before **Guildpact** kicks things wide open.

2x **Ravnica Block Constructed 1-3-06**

- 1st Place: Justin Stiles, Green/White/Red/Black Goodstuff
- 2nd Place: zykhone, Green/White/Black/Blue **Glare of Subdual**
- 4th Place: dawnyoshi, BUG Dozer
- 4th Place: Adronchik, Green/White/Red/Black Goodstuff
- 8th Place: J Vinluan, Green/White/Black **Glare of Subdual**
- 8th Place: Smokey Sez, Green/White/Red **Searing Meditation**
- 8th Place: Sheitan, Green/White/Red/Black Goodstuff
- 8th Place: C Allen, Black/Blue Dimir Glimpse

Holy shades of **Invasion**, Batman! Give a block plenty of good dual lands and mana fixers and you get three- and four-color decks coming out the woodwork. People obviously couldn't get enough of **Sakura Tribe-Elder** and **Kodama's Reach**, so many of these decklists begin with 4x **Farseek** and 4x **Civic Wayfinder**. Much like **Invasion** Block Constructed, many top decks are born from splicing together the strongest cards across three or four colors. I have to say I'm a tiny bit sad not

to see any Dredge strategies in place at the top tables.

Will **Guildpact** and **Dissension** budge people from their base green mana fixers? It's going to be an interesting ride, that's for sure!

I asked the winners and runners-up to send in their decklists and their thoughts:



4ColorGoodstuff (1st place, Ravnica Block Constructed) by Justin Stiles		dec
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
3 Forest	2 Boros Signet	1 Island
2 Mountain	3 Brightflame	3 Dimir Doppelganger
1 Plains	2 Faith's Fetters	2 Firemane Angel
1 Swamp	4 Farseek	1 Grave-Shell Scarab
3 Overgrown Tomb	4 Lightning Helix	1 Nightmare Void
4 Sacred Foundry	1 Plague Boiler	2 Plague Boiler
3 Selesnya Sanctuary	2 Putrefy	2 Putrefy
4 Temple Garden	2 Rolling Spoil	1 Rolling Spoil
2 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree	2 Seed Spark	1 Seed Spark
23 land	22 other spells	1 Watery Grave
4 Carven Caryatid		15 sideboard cards
4 Civic Wayfinder		
2 Firemane Angel		
1 Grave-Shell Scarab		
4 Loxodon Hierarch		
15 creatures		

"Hi, I'm Justin Stiles, 30 years old. I have been playing magic for about 12 years. I did some PT's back in 1994, the first year the pro tour existed in fact. I didn't pursue it too much because I was starting a family. Now I play on a competitive, local level and much more so on **Magic Online**. I have been playing **Magic Online** since it started and really enjoy the online community; there are a lot of good people on there. **Magic Online** has come a long way. I don't do Limited much; I am more of a Constructed format player, that's what I love.

"As for *Ravnica* block: It was fun the first week establishing what would win in an undefined environment, but now things have settled. That is always the case with an approximate 300 card pool. This deck I posted won quite well out of the gates. I designed it with help from a local friend Michael Hilton (Mikehil on MODO) and Brad Nelson (Ffreak on

MODO). The next set will liven things up significantly and I hope they get *Guildpact* released fast online. I am so glad Dr. Richard Garfield got back into designing **Magic** again. This set and block is so flavorful and full of options and you know what, I can even pronounce the cards! You can use your imagination to design decks again, I like that. Being able to create in **Magic** is what makes it one of a kind, and is why I love it."



Glare of Subdual (2nd place, Ravnica Block Constructed) by zyklone

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
7 Forest	4 Compulsive Research	3 Bathe in Light
2 Island	2 Devouring Light	1 Devouring Light
3 Plains	3 Farseek	2 Faith's Fetters
3 Overgrown Tomb	4 Glare of Subdual	3 Nightmare Void
2 Temple Garden	4 Putrefy	1 Plague Boiler
4 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree	4 Ribbons of Night	1 Rolling Spoil
2 Watery Grave		4 Seed Spark
23 land	21 other spells	15 sideboard cards
3 Birds of Paradise		
4 Carven Caryatid		
3 Dimir Guildmage		
2 Loxodon Hierarch		
4 Selesnya Guildmage		
16 creatures		

zyklone preferred to let his deck speak for itself.

BUG Dozer (4th place, Ravnica Block Constructed) by dawnyoshi

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
9 Forest	4 Farseek	2 Dimir Doppelganger
2 Swamp	4 Last Gasp	3 Nightmare Void
2 Dimir Aqueduct	4 Putrefy	2 Recollect
2 Golgari Rot Farm	4 Ribbons of Night	4 Remand
4 Overgrown Tomb	4 Rolling Spoil	2 Shred Memory
4 Watery Grave	2 Sundering Vitae	2 Sundering Vitae
23 land	22 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Carven Caryatid		
2 Dimir Doppelganger		
4 Dimir Guildmage		
3 Grave-Shell Scarab		
2 Helldozer		
15 creatures		

"My name is Mike Rosenberg (aka dawnyoshi), I'm 20 and I live in San Diego. I got into MTG casually around *Onslaught* block. Started looking at the game competitively with *Champions of Kamigawa*. I am currently a student and freelance writer.



"The deck name I have liked the most for this is BUGdozer. The general idea came from **Rolling Spoil**, mainly because it's a ridiculous sorcery that blows up key lands and can usually take out a creature or two (or a saproling or 10). I got some of the ideas from Renappel's success with a B/U/G deck, but I felt it could use a few modifications. My deck tends to be less aggressive in order to cater to my preference for control. This included the addition of **Dimir Doppelganger**, which I think is one of the best creatures to come out of *Ravnica*. It also wrecks things like **Firemane Angel** and **Grave-Shell Scarab**. Outside of a couple of bomb monsters and some stabilizing walls, the deck is based primarily on blowing up your opponent's cards while you use cards that capitalize off of your opponent losing their creatures and resources."

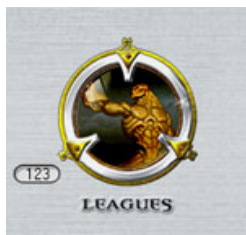


4ColorAngel (4th place, Ravnica Block Constructed) by Adronchik		Red Dec
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
5 Forest	3 Brightflame	3 Cleansing Beam
1 Mountain	4 Faith's Fetters	4 Devouring Light
1 Plains	4 Farseek	4 Disembowel
1 Swamp	4 Plague Boiler	2 Junktroller
3 Boros Garrison	4 Putrefy	2 Nightmare Void
3 Overgrown Tomb	19 other spells	15 sideboard cards
3 Sacred Foundry		
1 Selesnya Sanctuary		
4 Temple Garden		
3 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree		
25 land		
4 Carven Caryatid		
4 Civic Wayfinder		
4 Firemane Angel		
4 Loxodon Hierarch		
16 creatures		

Adronchik also preferred to let his deck speak for itself, though he indicated he's made some changes so hopefully he'll post an update and thoughts on the deck in the forums.

And now, ladies and gentleman, our content manager, Scott Johns.

Let's Get This Party Started



So, as some may have heard (one or two of you), we're getting pretty close to 3.0, the next version of **Magic Online**. We're ready to start letting some teasers out on the new game, but one of the problems we've been running into is the difficulty in scheduling something like this around the demands of a weekly column. The MTGO team is, obviously, very busy right now, which makes something like repeating previews on the web tricky for them to deal with.

With that in mind, I'm going to try something new. Rather than have Justin Ziran or Scott Larabee write these, I'm going to try doing most of it for them (at least for now).

With Ted Knutson joining the team next week I've got more time for special projects like this, which means we can devote more time to things like previewing 3.0, rather than trying to find time for Justin or Scott to add the work on top of everything else they're already busy with. Since I'm the one getting the info up on the web anyway, this saves at least a step or two in the process, and the easier that process is, the more we should be able to get to you. As the readers, what I'm sure you'll get out of this is more previews, earlier. Let me know what you think in the forums (if only the **Magic Online** audience were willing to use the forums more!) and we'll see how it goes. Ready?

Ok, first some background to make sure we've got everyone caught up. When **Magic Online** goes to 3.0 the plan is for it to happen in two stages. The main goal of 3.0a is to recreate the existing functionality of **Magic Online** v2 (the current version) but using the new code base, which was created from the ground-up to fix the issues in the current version. After that comes 3.0b, where we start adding new functionality to the game as well. That's the basic plan, but things are going well enough that it looks like we'll be able to actually add in some improvements

with 3.0a rather than waiting until 3.0b to get anything new. We won't get everything we want right off the bat, but we're going to be able to do more than just recreate the current version on a better code base.

So, with all that in mind, a couple caveats. This is all still preliminary. We wanted to let you know what we could nice and early, but the downside to that is that much of this isn't set all the way in stone yet. Some things may get moved between version a and b, some things could change between now and then (though probably only in minor ways) etc. I'm sure there will be some people that would rather only hear about stuff we're positive we can do and positive we know when it will happen, but to do that means any previews would come much later in the process. For now, I'm guessing that more people would actually rather hear what our goals are and where we believe things will be going, so that they can get an early first look at the future of **Magic Online** now.

To start things off, rather than something graphical, I'm going to give you a peek inside an internal document listing the changes to leagues, an issue that many of you have been asking about. The document is titled "Magic the Gathering: Online v3.0, League Play Implementation" (snazzy, no?) and it lists all of the changes the tournament team would like to see incorporated in the new **Magic Online** as we move forward across the new versions. For this week, I'm going to share some bullet points you may find of interest when it comes to how players are paired against each other in leagues.

- Players who are playing for league standing points should be paired only with other players who are playing for league standing points. Players should not be paired with players who are playing for tiebreaker points.
- Players playing for tiebreaker points should be paired only with other players playing for tiebreaker points. They should not be paired with players playing for league standing points.

Two little bullet points, but it's a world of difference for how leagues run on **Magic Online**. Under the current system, players can be matched up where one is playing for standings, but the other is playing for tiebreaker points. This leads to all sorts of problems, not the least of which is players later in the week looking for a game against someone of similar record for standing points but just getting matched up against one of the league leaders who is just padding their tiebreaker score. Under the proposed system, players are only matched up against other players who are in the same situation. If you still need standings points, you get matched up with others playing for standings points. If you need tiebreaker points, you get matched up with others playing for tiebreaker points.

An important exception is when you are looking to play for standing points, but there isn't another player available who is also looking for standing points.

Exception: If a player who is playing for **standing points** cannot be matched with another player who is playing for standing points and the time specified by the tournament coordinator has elapsed (time TBD) the player should be asked if he or she would accept a match with a player playing for **tiebreaker points**, assuming that another player is available who wants to play a match for tiebreak points. If the player declines, the player remains in the queue to be paired for a **standing points** match. If the player agrees, he or she is paired with any player who is waiting to play for **tiebreaker points** but that match is played for **tiebreaker points** only.

That's a very big change as well. Now, you have the option to just play someone in the same status as you (looking for standings points or looking for tiebreaker points). However, if you're looking for standings points and you can't get a match, you have the *option* to play a tiebreaker player instead. But, and this is the key, you're playing for tiebreaker points in that scenario.

Now, the way tiebreaker points add up over the course of a league is a whole other issue. Next time I'll let you know the changes on that, as well as other changes coming to leagues and online events.

- Scott

Magic Clan Summit

As a public service announcement, I wanted to point out that a **Magic Clan Summit** for Clan leaders is going to be held Wednesday, Feb 1st at 1:30 PST. Hosts of the Summit are CK (a growing multi-chapter clan dedicated to unity throughout the clan community, captained by meuslix), OnlyHellWillFillYourVoid (captained by NeoNetGen), and FFA Non Quitters (captained by SirAvatar). It will be held in /join clan summit and the teamspeak server will be posted there for anyone that wishes to use it.

Goals and Topics of the summit are as follows:

- Promoting unity throughout the clans and opening a dialogue of how we can work together to achieve that.
- Discussing functionality of the clan feature that we would like to see in v3.0 and beyond.
- Improving relations between the clans and the Adept team
- Improving relations between the clans and the wizos that work online.
- Anything else that the other clan leaders or their representatives think is important enough to talk about in the company of their fellows.



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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