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# Some Tribal Decks from the 4x Open

Bennie Smith  
Into the Aether  
Thursday, January 19, 2006



## Tribal Wars 4x, January 14, 2006

**T**wo weeks back, I listed cards from *Mirage* sorted by creature types to help those looking to enhance their Tribal Wars decks. Just this past Saturday was a 4x Tribal Wars event, so I was naturally curious to see how that went. *Lion's Eye Diamond* has made a small splash, enabling the Human tribe's *Auriok Salvagers*' combo to generate infinite mana, and *Goblin Tinkerer* has given the Goblin tribe a solid answer to *Umezawa's Jitte*. 104 players showed up and when the smoke cleared, Wizards and Clerics split in the finals. *Wizards and Clerics*? Since when do studious bookworms rule Tribal battlefields?



- 1st Place: SmokesMcCloaks, Monowhite Clerics
- 2nd Place: sibist, U/W/B No-Stick Wizards
- 4th Place: sti, Tooth and Nail Shaman
- 4th Place: klaejin\_1, Elves
- 8th Place: Brusher, Wizards
- 8th Place: Brainbug, Goblins
- 8th Place: Kenobe, Goblins
- 8th Place: Jose Guillermo, Tooth and Nail Shaman

SmokesMcCloaks and sibist split in the finals, so who knows how the battle between the arcane and divine would shake out? I was able to get decklists for three out of the Top 4, but for some reason was unable to contact klaejin\_1. I'm hoping he might be willing to post his elves deck in the forums.

I've heard from a few people who've expressed concern about the format and whether that banned list needs to be updated. Currently we have banned *Unnatural Selection*, *Engineered Plague*, *Tsabo's Decree*, *Circle of Solace*, *Endemic Plague*, *Peer Pressure*, and *Skullclamp*. Looking at the decks that did well, I don't really see much of a problem—there are six different tribes in the Top 8. Yes, there are some powerful cards being played (*Umezawa's Jitte*, *Tooth and Nail*, *Pithing Needle*), but there doesn't appear to be anything grossly unbalancing. You've got the *Onslaught*-juiced tribal build approach represented (old-school tribal), and you've got the Broken Deck With A Tribe Shoe-Horned In approach (er, new-school tribal) represented too.



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**"Clerks" (Tribal Wars - Clerics, 1st Place) by SmokesMcCloaks**

60 cards

14 Plains	4 Soul Warden	3 Disenchant
3 Secluded Steppe	4 Beloved Chaplain	4 Glorious Anthem
1 Eiganjo Castle	4 Master Apothecary	2 Worship
18 land	2 Benevolent Bodyguard	4 Battle Screech
	4 Weathered Wayfarer	2 Chrome Mox
	4 Auriok Champion	3 Umezawa's Jitte
	2 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails	
		18 other spells
	24 creatures	

"My name is David Howard, and I go by either SmokesMcCloaks or Mr. Perfect on MTGO. I'm 20, a student, and I live in Boston, MA. My Online clan is TheGhetto.

"I've made money at a couple Grand Prix and played in one Pro Tour (Boston) and also made Top 8 at a Gainesville PTQ. My favorite formats online and in real life would have to be Limited. My Limited rating on MTGO peaked at 1978. And you can sometimes find me in the casual room drafting. I started playing casually during *Tempest* and then moved into playing competitive magic around *Apocalypse*. I started playing *Magic Online* when beta was just released.

"After noticing that there would be a Tribal 4x, I began brainstorming and trying to find the best tribe to play. I tried wizards, Kavv and others until I finally realized goblins would be the best tribe since the deck could basically be the same deck from Pro Tour LA, but with *Aether Vial*. But after testing

against the other decks in the format in the casual room I learned that goblins just couldn't cut it, there's just have too much hate for it.

"Then I turned to the best deck builder in the United States, Lucas Glavin, who directed me to his WW list from the [Grudge Match](#) (the final showdown of Neutral Ground and Your Move Games champions). We decided on a copy of this deck updated for the current Tribal Wars format. It seemed to us that **Worship** was pretty hard for any deck to deal with.

"The deck beats down or is a control deck, depending on the matchup. My matches with most decks were not even close. The goblin, knights and most other creature decks stood no chance as I would just have tons of life and could simply play the Master and sit behind as I beat down.

"The only bad matchup was **Tooth and Nail**. If they resolve a **Tooth and Nail** you are done unless **Worship** is in play. The fact that there was no sideboard in Tribal Wars really made the **Worship** plan strong. In multiple rounds my opponents simply scooped to the enchantment and a creature (usually **Beloved Chaplain** or **Auriok Champion**).

"Looking back on the deck and the tournament, I think I should have included **Hokori, Dust Drinker** into the deck as a foil to **Tooth and Nail**."

No-Stick (Tribal Wars – Wizards, 2nd place) by sibist			F.d.ec 	
60 cards				
1 Island	4 Meddling Mage	4 Fire/Ice		
1 Plains	4 Stormscape Apprentice	3 Orim's Chant		
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Shadowmage Infiltrator	4 Chrome Mox		
4 Underground River	4 Trinket Mage	4 Isochron Scepter		
4 Flooded Strand	4 Dark Confidant	1 Pithing Needle		
1 Seat of the Synod	20 creatures	1 Sensei's Divining Top		
4 Watery Grave		4 Umezawa's Jitte		
19 land		21 other spells		

\*The decklist sent to me by sibist contained only 52 cards; watching the replays, I saw both **Chrome Mox** and **Umezawa's Jitte** so I am assuming sibist played four of each

Tooth and Nail (Tribal Wars – Shaman, 4th place) by sti			F.d.ec 	
60 cards				
7 Forest	1 Triskelion	3 Chrome Mox		
4 Urza's Mine	4 Troll Ascetic	4 Sylvan Scrying		
4 Urza's Power Plant	1 Viridian Shaman	4 Tooth and Nail		
4 Urza's Tower	1 Sundering Titan	2 Reap and Sow		
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	4 Eternal Witness	4 Sensei's Divining Top		
20 land	1 Mephidross Vampire	17 other spells		
	1 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker			
	3 Orochi Sustainer			
	3 Sachi, Daughter of Seshiro			
	4 Sakura-Tribe Elder			
	23 creatures			

Stuart Wright (sti) had this to say about his deck:

"Someone suggested that it was possible to build a Tooth deck using shamans, so I used **Magic Online** to filter 20 shaman and then added the basic Urza search spells and creatures to Tooth for. I just played in this as a fun format. Any sort of passive creature deck like clerics or beasts is pretty much a bye. Other fast combo decks are more of a problem and might well be better than my deck. People were playing Elemental Bidding, Salvagers/**Lion's Eye Diamond** and Scepter-Chant, which I wasn't even close to beating. In paper **Magic** I'm a sort of pro player with money finishes at some PTs and GPs last year."

By the way, Tribal Fans, you may want to take note that the Sunday FFA following this next one will be Tribal (on January 28th)! Check out the [Player Run Events](#) forums for details.

## Help Bennie Not Suck At Limited Project

If you've followed this column or have seen me at PTQs, it's been readily apparent that I'm not exactly ready for Prime Time when it comes to **Magic's** Limited formats. I enjoy casual drafting and occasional sealed decks (and especially like Team Limited events) but it's not something I've tended to focus on over the years. I've gravitated more towards the Constructed events... but then I ran across the announcement from **Magic: The Gathering**

Assistant Brand Manager Jake Theis about the expansion of the yearly Champs tournaments in Brian David Marshall's column [Three Times the Champs](#). Now we'll also be getting two Limited Champs Event to compete in, Two-Headed Giant (March 18) and regular Limited (June 24). I've been a staple at Virginia Champs for many years now; how could I not try and strive to add a Limited Champs plaque next to my Constructed one?

*"The three events also allow for the possibility of a Triple Crown Champion. How cool would that be?" – Jake Theis*

Way cool. Obviously, I need to do something about my very limited Limited skills. I need a plan. The most direct route would be to quit my full-time job and spend the next several months playing in sealed deck and drafts daily, inundating my memory banks with what cards work, what cards don't, and what synergies to look for through sheer repetition. Sadly, that plan collides headfirst into Life, My Wife (and Kids), so it will not be the best approach for my health and well-being. I'm willing to bet there are others of you out there in a similar boat: having only dabbled at Limited, but have had the fire ignited in your belly now at the prospect of competing in a Limited Champs. So I'm going to look to others for help and guidance, to jump-start me on the path of Not Sucking At Limited. As before, I opened a Sealed card pool and constructed a deck, and pro player Ken Krouner was kind enough to give me some feedback on my choices. Here's my card pool:



**White**

- 1 Bathe in Light
- 1 Leave No Trace
- 1 Suppression Field
- 1 Faith's Fetters
- 1 Benevolent Ancestor
- 1 Caregiver
- 1 Dromad Purebred
- 1 Nightguard Patrol
- 1 Screeching Griffin
- 1 Veteran Armorer
- 1 Votary of the Conclave
- 1 Wojek Apothecary

**Green**

- 1 Life from the Loam
- 1 Dryad's Caress
- 1 Scatter the Seeds
- 1 Sundering Vitae
- 1 Moldervine Cloak
- 1 Bramble Elemental
- 1 Elves of Deep Shadow
- 1 Greater Mossdog
- 1 Ivy Dancer

**Blue**

- 1 Mnemonic Nexus
- 1 Muddle the Mixture
- 1 Peel from Reality
- 1 Flight of Fancy
- 1 Stasis Cell
- 1 Drake Familiar
- 1 Drift of Phantasms
- 1 Grayscaled Gharial
- 1 Hunted Phantasm
- 1 Lore Broker
- 1 Snapping Drake
- 1 Surveilling Sprite
- 1 Tattered Drake
- 1 Vedalken Entrancer
- 1 Zephyr Spirit

**Artifact**

- 1 Crown of Convergence
- 1 Golgari Signet
- 1 Grifter's Blade
- 1 Spectral Searchlight
- 1 Terrarion

**Black**

- 1 Nightmare Void
- 1 Last Gasp
- 1 Clinging Darkness
- 1 Necromantic Thirst
- 1 Strands of Undeath
- 1 Carrion Howler
- 1 Roofstalker Wight
- 1 Stinkweed Imp
- 1 Thoughtpicker Witch

**Multi/Hybrid**

- 1 Bloodbond March
- 1 Boros Recruit
- 1 Boros Swiftblade
- 1 Consult the Necrosages
- 1 Drooling Groodion
- 1 Perplex
- 1 Rally the Righteous
- 1 Seeds of Strength
- 1 Sunhome Enforcer
- 1 Gaze of the Gorgon
- 1 Golgari Rotwurm
- 1 Selesnya Evangel
- 1 Shambling Shell
- 1 Tolsimir Wolfblood

**Red**

- 1 Incite Hysteria
- 1 Cleansing Beam
- 1 Galvanic Arc
- 1 Barbarian Riftcutter
- 1 Goblin Fire Fiend
- 1 Ordrun Commando
- 1 Viashino Fangtail
- 1 Viashino Slasher

**Land**

- 1 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree
- 1 Selesnya Sanctuary
- 1 Golgari Rot Farm

The cards that jumped out at me were Tolsimir Wolfblood, Last Gasp, Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree, Hunted Phantasm, Sunhome Enforcer and Golgari Rotwurm. Of course, Stinkweed Imp and Moldervine Cloak held special places in my heart, too! The Green/White and Green/Black "Karoo" lands seemed to spell out my destiny though, so I ended up with this tri-color concoction:

**Bennie's RAV Sealed Deck**

40 cards

6 Forest	1 Elves of Deep Shadow	1 Clinging Darkness
4 Plains	1 Benevolent Ancestor	1 Crown of Convergence
4 Swamp	1 Bramble Elemental	1 Faith's Fetters
1 Golgari Rot Farm	1 Golgari Rotwurm	1 Gaze of the Gorgon
1 Selesnya Sanctuary	1 Greater Mossdog	1 Golgari Signet
1 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree	1 Nightguard Patrol	1 Grifter's Blade
17 land	1 Selesnya Evangel	1 Last Gasp
	1 Shambling Shell	1 Moldervine Cloak
	1 Stinkweed Imp	1 Scatter the Seeds
		1 Spectral Searchlight

1 Tolsimir Wolfblood  
1 Veteran Armorer

11 creatures

1 Sundering Vitae  
1 Terrarion

12 other spells

What mistakes did I make here? What can we learn from it?

## Lesson: Deck Cohesion Over Card Quality

Ken Krouner:

"Well Bennie, let me start off with the good. You've isolated the correct colors for this deck. Green/Black/White is certainly the best combination of colors to play with. You did fall into a common trap when selecting what cards to play. It seems as though you made your card selection strictly by individual power of the cards. This left a lot of holes in your deck. The biggest hole was the creature count of 11. Normally I like to have 16 or 17 creatures, but this was nearly impossible with this pool of cards. Certainly to get the creature count to that level we'd have to sacrifice both power and mana consistency, two things you never want to suffer at the same time.

"I added both Caregiver and **Votary of the Conclave** to the deck. While these cards don't seem that powerful on the surface, they have synergies with many cards in the deck. **Selesnya Evangel**, **Moldervine Cloak**, **Golgari Rot-Farm** and **Selesnya Sanctuary**, Tolsimir, Crown, Scatter, these cards are all made better by the inclusion of those one-drops.

"I also added **Ivy Dancer** to the maindeck. In sealed it's very rare that you won't be playing Green in some capacity. It's certainly true the majority of the time, so the Dancer should always be main deck if you are playing Green yourself. I think it is so good in Sealed it could tempt a Black/Blue or Red/White Sealed player to splash it. Even in Sealed deck there's a metagame.

"**Drooling Grootion** is just a bomb. He's a little rough on your mana, but he is capable of winning games by himself. He should always be included if your deck has Green and Black mana.

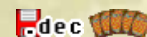
"I cut **Clinging Darkness**, **Gaze of the Gorgon**, **Grifter's Blade**, and a land from your build to accommodate these cards. All those spells are nice, but you have to make some hard cuts to get creatures into the deck. I think this deck can survive just fine on 16 lands. You have a Signet, and **Elves of Deep Shadow**, and two of the Karoo lands all on color.

"The concept of sacrificing card quality for creature count is always a difficult one to put into action. It can really be tough to cut cards that you know, in a vacuum, are more powerful than cards you are including in your main deck. It's just something you need to accept. It's particularly important in this set with abilities like Convoke and Radiance."

Thanks, Ken! Here's the deck revised with his suggestions:



### Bennie's RAV Sealed Deck (Revised)



40 cards

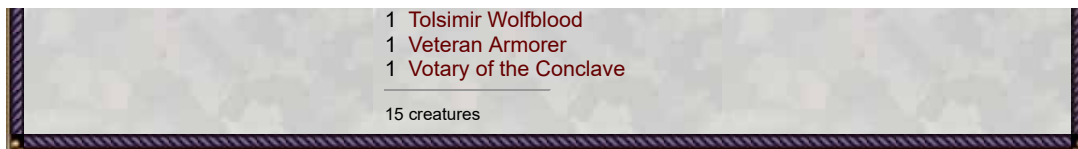
5 Forest  
5 Plains  
3 Swamp  
1 Golgari Rot Farm  
1 Selesnya Sanctuary  
1 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree

16 land

1 Elves of Deep Shadow  
1 Benevolent Ancestor  
1 Bramble Elemental  
1 Caregiver  
1 Drooling Grootion  
1 Golgari Rotwurm  
1 Greater Mossdog  
1 Ivy Dancer  
1 Nightguard Patrol  
1 Selesnya Evangel  
1 Shambling Shell  
1 Stinkweed Imp

1 Clinging Darkness  
1 Crown of Convergence  
1 Faith's Fetters  
1 Golgari Signet  
1 Last Gasp  
1 Moldervine Cloak  
1 Scatter the Seeds  
1 Spectral Searchlight  
1 Terrarion

9 other spells



What do you think? Are the colors correct? Would you build this differently? Also, do you have any suggestions for someone with limited time to improve their Limited game? Please share your thoughts in the forums!

## Into The Aether Deckbuilding Challenge II Update

Last week I kicked off my [second Deckbuilding Challenge](#). The [first was based around Greater Good](#). Part II is based around [Tombstone Stairwell](#). If you missed the announcement last week, go check it out. I'll be taking deck entries for one more week, through Wednesday, January 25th and will have the top decklists to present to you all for voting the following week. Remember, this is for *Magic Online*, so only *Magic Online* sets are legal (yeah, I'd love to be using [Gaea's Cradle](#) in a [Tombstone Stairwell](#) deck too!) and only those with a *Magic Online* account are eligible for prizes.

## Gunslinging at the Grand Prix: You Choose my Weapons

Also last week, I mentioned that Pete Hoefling from Star City has asked me to gunsling at my hometown Grand Prix Richmond, and if any of you had any decklist suggestions let me know. I'll be checking my emails and pouring over the net in the next week to find a few candidate decks for each of the formats I'll be armed for—Standard, Extended, Legacy and Highlander. Then I'll put it to a vote and see which decks you'd like to see me play against all comers. Heck, I'll even play Alan Comer! (I fully expect a groan from the editor on that one)

## Still With Us? Time for More on 3.0

Scott's been out sick this week working from home, so he's moving his follow-up on leagues to next week. Instead, he's got Justin Ziran (*Magic Online's* Brand Manager, if you've been living under a rock) to talk to you about something one or two people have been asking about.

One of the main questions we've been getting is what our release schedule currently looks like. The one thing I want everyone to understand is that we won't release v3 until it reaches the level of quality that we, and more importantly, you, expect. Because of that, we need to talk about our plans in terms of date ranges instead of some arbitrary day.

So, here is the skinny on the release plan for *Magic Online* v3. I'll set the record straight by saying we are targeting Q1 '06 for beta and Q2 '06 for release. Why such wide date ranges? Consider that we have 2 major releases (*Guildpact* and *Dissension*), E3, the *Magic* Invitational, all the respective beta tests, marketing previews, software reviews, press tours and the v3 release all going on in the first half of the year. That's a pretty full schedule and it requires us to be flexible if necessary.

That's where things stand currently, and we believe we can make that schedule. Scott Johns has me on schedule for more specific information after the league review is complete, so I'll be back again later with details on the thinking behind the new client as well as walking you through some of the cool improvements.

See you in game,

Justin  
Username: justin\_ziran

*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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