



Bat Flapping the Tribal Beat

Bennie Smith
Into the Aether

Thursday, February 16, 2006



Ah, Valentine's Day week! A time when young lovers' minds turn to thoughts of... gleaming white fangs and flying through a moonlit night. *Blood! Blood! Blood!*

Vampires in February bring to mind an old Stephen King short story "One for the Road" from *Night Shift*. It's a sequel of sorts to the terrifying *Salem's Lot*. There's a blizzard, and vampires floating across the top of the snow, people getting bitten and embraced by the undead... Yeah, I know I've revealed myself to be a bit of a King fan recently. I've got a copy of *Cell* right here beside me, ready to be cracked open. The dead of winter can be downright creepy if you let it get to you.

Anyway, for Into The Aether to be on-theme this week, I figure we could talk about Vampires in the Tribal Wars format. Now, *Onslaught* block has turbo-charged a handful of select creature types like Goblins, Zombies, and Beasts; some tribes like Snakes, Humans, Shamans, and Cats are deep enough and filled with quality members to also compete in the format. When you start looking at less populous tribes, things get tough (take for instance my excursion with the Bringer tribe in the Natural Selection league). If you want to make a tribal deck around one of the newest types on the creature block – Weirds – you're in real trouble with just three actual creatures (or four if you count Mr. Everytype, Mistform Ultimus). Vampires are a little deeper, sporting 12 different bloodsuckers to choose from. Let's take a look at 'em.

Available Vampires in Classic

- 4 mana—Moroii
- 5 mana—Sengir Vampire, Treacherous Vampire, Repentant Vampire, Soul Collector, Ravenous Vampire
- 6 mana—Stalking Bloodsucker, Mephidross Vampire, Skeletal Vampire (once *Guildpact* releases),
- 7 mana—Szadek, Lord of Secrets; Shauku, Endbringer
- 8 mana—Vampiric Dragon

Vampires come to the party fashionably late, starting on the rare occasion at four mana, but really hitting the runway at five and six mana. So how in the world do we survive long enough for our vamps to swoop in and start to win the game for us? Those non-Vampiric 15-16 cards are going to be crucial. Since this is tribal, I imagine a good chunk of those should be creature removal. I'm thinking Chainer's Edict, Infest, or maybe Hideous Laughter. I imagine we're also going to want some mana acceleration too.



Okay, let's look at our Vampire clans and figure out which twenty make the cut for our deck. Moroii seems a shoe-in, giving us a large body as early as possible. At five mana, original gangsta Sengir and Soul Collector seem to be the best of the bunch. At six mana things get interesting - I really like Skeletal Vampire, but for this exercise I'm sticking with pre-*Guildpact*, since it hasn't been released online yet. Tooth and Nail has shown the potential of Mephidross Vampire, but I think we're already going to be too stocked with Vampires at the upper ends of our mana curve for Triskelion. I think we'll stick with Stalking Bloodsucker as our large, blunt instrument of mass damage dealing. Higher up the scale are two legends: Shauku, Endbringer from *Mirage*, trading life for permanent creature removal and working spectacularly well with Minamo, School at Water's Edge. Who knew vampires were so into learning? There's also Szadek, Lord of Secrets, who grows exponentially larger and feeds on libraries instead of life totals. Our Vampire theme probably wouldn't be complete without these two. To round it out, I decided Bloodletter Quill was too in-theme to resist in addition to being in color.

I thought about getting cute with Walking Desecration, provoking little dudes into running into my Sengir Vampires and Soul Collectors, but I think it more necessary to find space for early mass removal like Infest. There are so many things you'd like to add to this deck, but so few available non-Vampiric slots. I decided to give this a whirl:

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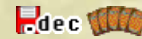


Time Spiral
Time Spiral Cycle, Book I
by Scott McGough

Valentine's Tribal Vampires

By Bennie Smith

60 cards



16 Swamp	4 Sengir Vampire	4 Infest
4 Watery Grave	2 Shaku, Endbringer	2 Bloodletter Quill
2 Cabal Coffers	4 Stalking Bloodsucker	4 Dimir Signet
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	4 Festering Goblin	2 Hideous Laughter
1 Miren, the Moaning Well	4 Soul Collector	12 other spells
24 land	4 Moroi	
	2 Szadek, Lord of Secrets	
	24 creatures	

I took this baby into the casual room, and in my first game mulligan into two lands, a [Festering Goblin](#), and an [Infest](#). I figured I'd be ok. Turn 8 I still had not drawn my third land and was overwhelmed by White weenies. Game two was against Angels, in a classic battle of iconic Good versus Evil. Unfortunately, Good had Boros on its side along with [Sunhome, Fortress of the Legion](#), hardly a fair fight! I thought good ol' [Shaku, Endbringer](#) could turn things around with Minamo out there, but Angels also packed [Oblivion Stones](#) out the wazoo.

In my final game, Vampires put up a better showing, though when my opponent ghost_collector started dropping Zuberass, I started getting vicious flashbacks from the massive beating Zuberass inflicted on me during the Natural Selection (Tribal Wars) league last year. I kept waiting for a [Phyrexian Altar](#) to hit the board, signaling that [Second Sunrise](#) would soon put the final nail in my Vampiric coffin.



I started off fairly well, with an early [Festering Goblin](#) holding back early beatdown, and then a turn 4 [Moroi](#) letting me go on the offense. Instead of [Phyrexian Altar](#), my opponent played [Perilous Forays](#), which was an interesting way to sacrifice Zuberass while rounding out your colors.



A [Wrath of God](#) halted my offense, restocking his hand while wiping out mine. Luckily, I had a Quill in play to help me recover. Soon, I found out that [Perilous Forays](#) wasn't just fixing mana for Zuberass sake; ghost_collector had a more nefarious plan in mind.



[Door to Nothingness](#)! Wow, that certainly blindsided me, and actually got me off my game enough that I screwed up and didn't kill him that very turn with [Stalking Bloodsucker](#). Up until that point, I had been using mana to remove the counter from my Quill before drawing a card to keep my life total as high as possible (I just didn't want double [Ember-Fist Zuberass](#) coming out of nowhere and stealing the game from me). If I had just taken the life hit from the Quill to draw that extra card, I would have had the mana to pitch all three cards in hand to the Bloodsucker and swing for a lethal 10 points of damage. ghost_collector even tipped me off, but I wasted mana taking off the counter anyway, not figuring that mana would be precious this turn. I end up taking him down to 2 life, but he gets another [Moment's Peace](#) to buy a few more turns, ramping up to 10 mana and shutting the Door on me. Good game!

Yes, this is me. Aaaaaaaaaa.....



So what do you think? Can Vampires be made competitive in Tribal Wars? Will [Skeletal Vampire](#) bring the added oomph needed? How would you build Vampires for Tribal Wars?

And now a word from **Magic** Assistant Brand Manager... Jake Theis!

MTGO Goes Mtgmobile

Our loyal [magicthegathering.com](#) viewers may have noticed that we have been offering **Magic** mobile phone wallpapers over the past several months. We have gone to great lengths to select and offer great, current **Magic** iconic art pieces, while also providing *Ravnica* and *Guildpact* images with their releases.

Now, for the months of February and March, we will be broadening our focus to include the universe of *Magic Online* into our offerings.

What does this mean to you, the *Magic Online* fan?

First and most importantly, we will be offering *Magic-Online*-specific wallpapers via mtgmobile.com. Our first batch will include such *Magic Online* favorites as [Pernicious Deed](#), [Vindicate](#), [Reya Dawnbringer](#), and [Platinum Angel](#). The new wallpapers will hit the market on Friday, February 17.



Secondly, we will be running an exclusive mtgmobile.com promotion from February 16, 2006 – March 9, 2006. As part of this promotion, purchasers of any *Magic* wallpaper on the mtgmobile.com storefront will receive a \$.99 coupon to the *Magic Online* Store. That's right, if you buy an ultra-cool \$1.99 *Magic* wallpaper, you can get \$.99 off of your next *Magic Online* purchase. Not a bad deal, eh?

Finally and perhaps most interesting to sanctioned event competitors, mtgmobile.com will be sponsoring a mtgmobile.com Premier Event Weekend. That means 3x Premier Events this weekend. THREE-EX! Yes, that's right three times the prizes! Now, I don't want to break the code for you all, but if you buy two wallpapers, that's effectively a two-ticket discount and 3x prizes for an event... not too bad at all.

Enjoy!

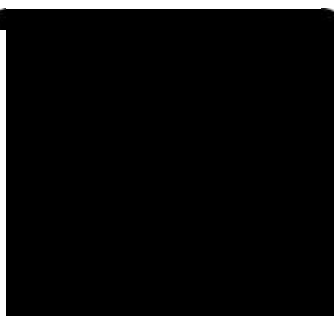
Into The Aether Deck Challenge II: Finalists

The votes are in and the Aether has spoken! The final cut is tough because I liked all of these decks. I will now take these four decks for a spin to see which one feels most consistent, powerful, and fun and have the winner presented to you next week! The winner will get a set of premium (foil) [Tombstone Stairwell](#), and the runners-up will get three packs from whatever expansion is currently available, or [Guildpact](#) when that comes out. I need Bobby Hunter, bateleur, Orderlychaos7 and Leo van Nierop to send me their booster pack preference now so I can make arrangements for the runners-up next week.

Which deck do you think most deserves to make the cut to Final Four?		
Deck #1 by Bobby Hunter	326	16.0%
Deck #10 by bateleur	307	15.1%
Deck #5 by Orderlychaos7	271	13.3%
Deck #8 by Leo van Nierop	241	11.9%
Deck #4 by Redland Jack	205	10.1%
Deck #3 by xepel	187	9.2%
Deck #2 by e42	146	7.2%
Deck #6 by Scott Mills	132	6.5%
Deck #9 by Devin Smith	109	5.4%
Deck #7 by Harris Karsch	108	5.3%
Total	2032	100.0%

4x Standard with Vanguard Saturday, February 11th, 2006

At 93, participation was up nearly twenty players from the previous 4x Standard with [Vanguard](#) on December 31st. There are some other notable differences since a month and a half have passed, not least of which is the rise of Akroma, Angel of Wrath as the powerhouse avatar of Vanguard. Last time there was one Akroma deck in the Top 8 (the winning deck); this time fully half of the decks sport the Ability Queen. It's hard to argue with the extra hand size, the significant life boost, and randomly giving your creatures good abilities for creature decks. One thing I'm curious about is whether Akroma is getting a lot of play volume (and considering



the avatar is three years old, I'm not sure if that's the case), or whether the few who have Akroma are just rising to the top, suggesting that Akroma is clearly the most powerful avatar now.



Green/White Ghazi-Glare decks have definitely come into their own in Standard, and under Akroma's banner dominated this Standard with Vanguard event. Prodigal Sorcerer makes a case for a strong second place overall, and definitely appears to be the strongest of the base avatars.

- 1st place: Patariba (Akroma, Angel of Wrath) G/W Ghazi-Glare
- 2nd place: AikTheOne (Prodigal Sorcerer) R/W "Jank"
- 4th place: Dawkin (Akroma, Angel of Wrath) G/W Aggro
- 4th place: Bird of Paradise (Prodigal Sorcerer) MUC
- 8th place: Damoclez (Loxodon Hierarch) G/B/R Grave Pact
- 8th place: Scott Poganski (Akroma, Angel of Wrath) G/W Ghazi-Glare
- 8th place: Slipkorn84 (Prodigal Sorcerer) G/U Critical Mass
- 8th place: RogueDesigner (Akroma, Angel of Wrath) G/W Ghazi-Glare





I called AikTheOne's R/W deck "Jank" rather than Boros White Weenie because watching the replays there seemed to be more burn in the deck than White weenies, though Genju of the Spires and Savannah Lions made for some efficient beatdown. Damoclez's Hierarch deck had some nice synergies with his avatar, with Dark Confidant feeding happily from the high starting life total, and Grave Pact turning sacrificed creatures into Diabolic Edicts. Necroplasm was particularly fun, with sacrifices keeping him alive early and keeping him from destroying himself at three counters, so that he just keeps growing and growing and growing. Slipkorn84's Green/Blue deck utilizes some nice interdeck synergies with Sakura-Tribe Scout and Meloku, the Clouded Mirror keeping the lands bouncing up and down, turning Vinelasher Kudzu into a gigantic monster. His Prodigal Sorcerer avatar no doubt helped keep the lands flowing.

Three of the Top 4 players were willing to share their decks with us:

1st Place G/W Ghazi-Glare Standard w/Vanguard by Patariba  

Avatar - Akroma, Angel of Wrath

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
8 Forest	3 <u>Glare of Subdual</u>	3 <u>Greater Good</u>
4 <u>Brushland</u>	3 <u>Seed Spark</u>	3 <u>Sacred Ground</u>
1 <u>Eiganjo Castle</u>	4 <u>Umezawa's Jitte</u>	4 <u>Naturalize</u>
1 <u>Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers</u>	10 other spells	3 <u>Hokori, Dust Drinker</u>
4 <u>Temple Garden</u>		2 <u>Yosei, the Morning Star</u>
4 <u>Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree</u>		15 sideboard cards
22 land		
4 <u>Birds of Paradise</u>		
4 <u>Llanowar Elves</u>		
4 <u>Wood Elves</u>		
3 <u>Arashi, the Sky Asunder</u>		
3 <u>Kodama of the North Tree</u>		
4 <u>Loxodon Hierarch</u>		
4 <u>Selesnya Guildmage</u>		
2 <u>Yosei, the Morning Star</u>		
28 creatures		

4th Place MUC Standard with Vanguard by Bird of Paradise  

Avatar - Prodigal Sorcerer

Main Deck	Sideboard
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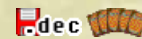
60 cards

18 <u>Island</u>	3 <u>Boomerang</u>	1 <u>Boomerang</u>
4 <u>Quicksand</u>	4 <u>Mana Leak</u>	2 <u>Quash</u>
1 <u>Mikokoro, Center of the Sea</u>	3 <u>Rewind</u>	2 <u>Remove Soul</u>
1 <u>Minamo, School at Water's Edge</u>	3 <u>Disrupting Shoal</u>	1 <u>Rewind</u>
1 <u>Miren, the Moaning Well</u>	4 <u>Hinder</u>	2 <u>Boseiju, Who Shelters All</u>
1 <u>Oboro, Palace in the Clouds</u>	3 <u>Remand</u>	2 <u>Drift of Phantasms</u>
	1 <u>Telling Time</u>	2 <u>Journeyer's Kite</u>
	4 <u>Threads of Disloyalty</u>	1 <u>Overwhelming Intellect</u>
26 land		2 <u>River Kaijin</u>
	25 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 <u>Jushi Apprentice</u>		
2 <u>Keiga, the Tide Star</u>		
3 <u>Meloku the Clouded Mirror</u>		
9 creatures		

Bird of Paradise: "My name is Fernando Escribano and I'm from Madrid, Spain. I started playing Magic when 4th edition came to Spain (about 10 years I think). I've played sporadically in the last 5-6 years with paper Magic, but regularly play Magic Online since beta."



4th Place G/W Beatdown Standard with Vanguard by Dawkin



Avatar - Akroma, Angel of Wrath

Main Deck

60 cards

8 <u>Forest</u>	3 <u>Glare of Subdual</u>
4 <u>Brushland</u>	3 <u>Seed Spark</u>
1 <u>Eiganjo Castle</u>	4 <u>Umezawa's Jitte</u>
1 <u>Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers</u>	10 other spells
4 <u>Temple Garden</u>	
4 <u>Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree</u>	

22 land

4 Birds of Paradise
4 Llanowar Elves
4 Wood Elves
3 Arashi, the Sky Asunder
3 Kodama of the North Tree
4 Loxodon Hierarch
4 Selesnya Guildmage
2 Yosei, the Morning Star

28 creatures

Sideboard

3 Greater Good
3 Sacred Ground
4 Naturalize
3 Hokori, Dust Drinker
2 Yosei, the Morning Star

15 sideboard cards

Dawkin: "My name is David Côté-Robitaille, you'd mostly see me around the draft room on MTGO under the banner of the clan Rare Drafters.

"I'm not much of a Constructed player honestly, I built this deck at the last minute with the cards I had available before the premier event with a main plan of going beatdown. I won't go into too much detail since the deck is pretty much straight forward. It's basically a Green/White weenie deck abusing Akroma's avatar ability with a few tricks to keep your creatures safe or get damage through when it's needed.

"The deck was a lot of fun and worked well enough except against the Akroma avatar version of Ghazi Glare which was very hard for the deck to deal with. I'd put copies of Wrath of God in the sideboard to help deal with this match up."

A few weeks back I put up a poll on Vanguard, and here were the results:

Generally, do you tend to build your Vanguard decks by starting with the Avatar and building around that, or do you take an already built deck for the format and add an Avatar to enhance it?

I don't really play Vanguard	2104	56.1%
Start with the Avatar first	1150	30.7%
Start with a deck first, then pick the Avatar	494	13.2%
Total	3748	100.0%

For those who play Vanguard, most players appear to build their decks around the particular avatar, by a 2-1 margin. Yet, looking at the Top 8 results, the most successful decks appear to start with a solid Constructed deck and then pick one of the most powerful Avatars available to enhance it. Akroma and Prodigal Sorcerer both boost hand size and have a positive impact on starting life total, in addition to having a strong special ability. Starting with eight cards is a huge advantage, and there are few hand size boosting avatars that don't have a significant penalty attached to it. I'm surprised Sisters of Stone Death haven't made a bigger splash. What about Rumbling Slum?

In non-Vanguard **Magic**, when Tiers of decks become established enterprising deckbuilders can analyze and exploit weaknesses. Can we do the same with Avatars? Is there a natural foil Avatar + deck that can rock the world of Akroma and Prodigal Sorcerer? What do you think?

Okay, for the 56% of You Who Don't Play Vanguard...

...and for those that do, Scott Johns has been busy working miracles behind the scenes to provide Into The Aether readers a steady diet of *Magic Online* III info, and this week is no exception. Here's the latest from *Magic Online's* producer, Brian Lindley.

Magic Online III Preview – Docking Station

Hello everyone, it's me Brian back to give you another dose of *Magic Online* III preview goodness. This week I'm going to review one of the more unique features of the MTGO III user interface: the Docking Station.

What is the docking station?

The docking station is a multi-purpose component of the *Magic Online* III user interface that allows users to manage the location and appearance of their chat windows, as well as provide convenient access to miscellaneous features like My Buddies, My Games and My Leagues. Like the navigation menu, the docking station was designed to be easy to use and flexible enough to allow for maximum use of the main game screen area.



How does the docking station work?

When logged into *Magic Online* III, the docking station will appear nested in the right side of the window frame. You can navigate through your different dock panels (or tabs if you prefer) by clicking the tabs in the lower right, or by using the drop down menu positioned in the upper right of the window. By clicking the arrow on the middle-right of the window frame, you can hide the docking station completely, and it will reappear by clicking the same button. Here is the fun part: At the click of a button, any panel in the dock can be 'undocked', which essentially makes that panel a floating window on the screen. Undocked items can be repositioned and resized as the user sees fit, providing the user the flexibility to determine what dock items they want on-screen at any point in time. As it stands currently, we have designed the following features to be dockable in *Magic Online* III:

- All Chat
- My Buddies
- My Games
- My Leagues
- My Cart (for the integrated online store)
- Large Card Viewer



What else can it do?

The docking station allows the user to change the color of the panel window and text, as well as change the opacity of undocked windows (so you can see what is going on underneath it). For chat panels, the user list can also be hidden to provide maximum room for chat text.



We're also including another short video demo, which you can download [here](#). Take a look at the video and screenshots to see the docking station in action. For those that are curious, the screenshots and video were taken from the clans room, which didn't have any clans in it at the time it was taken. (Note that because of the capture method all that text comes across a bit blurry, but it's not like that in real life of course!)

I hope you enjoyed this week's preview of the docking station. I will be previewing *Magic Online III* features on a bi-weekly basis for the next couple of months, so stay tuned. See you online!

-Brian

*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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