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Roving Reporter

Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, March 9, 2006



There was so much going on over the week that caught my interest, between the [Standard Pro Tour in Hawaii](#) and all the *Guildpact* release action, that for this week I decided to put on my virtual reporter's hat and see what people have to say about a variety of topics. First, let's check in with rabble-rouser Ken Krouner, who's taken a break from release events to learn a few things about *Ravnica/Ravnica/Guildpact* draft.

RAV/RAV/GPT Draft

Ken Krouner: "So I think this is the first time my limited writing will be a *break* in controversy. Of course, maybe I am going out on too far of a limb assuming my limited strategies won't be a topic of controversy. Regardless, I am going to drop some knowledge on you so you'll be equipped to do battle in the *Ravnica/Ravnica/Guildpact* draft queues.



"First and foremost, don't believe the hype, some of what you're reading on the net. Pros love their controlling decks. You've probably heard a lot of noise from the Pro community about drafting Dimir/Izzet. This is bad advice. There's nothing out and out *wrong* with the archetype, but it isn't what you should be looking out for. Ideally you want to be Green/White/Black, or Green/White/Red. Why? Well the simplest answer is that they are the only 2 combinations of 3 colors that are represented by 3 guilds.

"It goes a bit deeper than this, however. As it turns out these colors are also the deepest and most powerful. I'm not really sure why Pros think that U/B/R is the way to go. I can only assume it is an inability to adapt and they loved Dimir in triple *Ravnica*. The other possibility is that U/B/R is very flashy. I don't need to look pretty when I win, as long as I win.

"Green has the best mana fixers. It has arguably the best commons in both sets (*Civic Wayfinder* and *Wildsize*). Those three colors have access to tools that can deal with any threat. However, the most important part about drafting in this sort of environment is that just because you are drafting the same colors as your neighbor doesn't mean your deck will be hopeless. At [Grand Prix Richmond](#) I found myself sharing at least 2 colors with 2 players on either side of me and I still managed to 2-1 the table with some artful drafting.

"Here are some of the less intuitive things I have discovered while drafting (and many of these go for sealed as well)."

- **Signets are not all that.** "I'm not saying they are bad. They are very useful in fixing your mana, but tread carefully. The downside to Signets is that they facilitate both mana screw and mana flood. When you play them you want to cheat on land, but you still need to draw mana to cast them in the first place so they increase your mulligan frequency by counting as a fraction of a land in your final count."
- **Those double lands aren't coming back around.** "So don't bank on it. The secret is out on these little gems, so don't be shy about taking them where they should be taken. If one of these is your third pick, you should be happy."
- **Fliers are at a premium.** "You may have pooh-pooed that *Screeching Griffin* in the past, but these days fliers are great no matter the size. Blue, which is normally rich with fliers has only really *Snapping Drake* to fill that role, and while he may be the most powerful of the commons, you should try to get your hands on all you can. This holds true for any type of evasion."
- **Don't let yourself fall into color combinations that don't feature exactly 1 guild from *Guildpact*.** "You want to have a guild in the last pack so you aren't robbed of gold cards. While the single-colored cards are closer in power to the gold cards, you are still cutting yourself off from an entire class of powerful

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commons, not to mention the enhance cards (like [Ogre Savant](#)), which are so much more powerful in *Guildpact*.”

- **Try not to play more than 3 colors.** “3 colors is the new 2 colors. Since all the cards in this format are so powerful and there is little disparity in power among the commons, there is no need to risk your mana consistency for power. Everyone will have good decks. The decks with good mana are the ones that will rise to the top.”

Thanks for the insights, Ken!

Band of Brothers: Checking in with Clan Cymbrogi

Apparently the murmurs started mid-way through Day 1 of Pro Tour Honolulu. Called “The Shoal Deck” or “the [Tallowisp Deck](#)”, and eventually known as Ghost Dad, the *Magic Online* concoction surprised opponents every step of the way. I've had some [personal experience succeeding](#) with cards others dismiss as draft fodder, so it made me smile to read about [Thief of Hope](#), [Enfeeblement](#), [Pillory of the Sleepless](#), and [Strands of Undeath](#) adding some color to the offbeat [Tallowisp](#) deck that made some noise during Kamigawa Block. Of course, no one's doubted the power of [Ghost Council of Orzhova](#), but one bit of text gives it a little extra juice with [Tallowisp](#), that all important “Spirit” creature type.

[Ted Knutson gave some background](#) on the deck after it had [generated some buzz](#) (including on Randy Buehler's pod casts), and mentioned it as the brainchild of *Magic Online* clan **Cymbrogi**. Online clans are one feature on *Magic Online* I don't get to touch on much, so I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to learn about how this MTGO clan helped put together one of the more successful rogue archetypes to percolate to the top of the standings. The deck posted a solid 56.72% win percentage (thanks Star City for the complete breakdown and analysis of the field), and earned Benjamin Goodman 22nd place and \$2,200.

I tracked down clan elder Karl Kahn (AKA NicotineJones) to give me the lowdown on his guild and the cool deck Ghost Dad.



Goodman, entertaining the crowd with deck and wit at PT-Honolulu

Q. When was clan Cymbrogi formed? Who started it up? What was the clan's goal?

The clan grew out of Missetings, actually, when a bunch of us 'Tinger MTGOers decided that we wanted to focus a little bit more on constructed play. We haven't had too much turnover in the roster since; the members you see now are pretty much the people who were there at the start, with a couple of additions like Benjamin Peebles-Mundy and Ben Ashman. It's a pretty relaxed group, which is what you'd expect from a clan that includes blisterguy and Ridiculous Hat (AKA Ben Goodman).

JoINrbs, another member, had this to add on the subject: “As soon as we were all in agreement that we wanted to make a clan we got together and spent several hours brainstorming some of the most terrible one-liners ever produced. The problem was that, as funny as they might have been at first, none of us could see them still being funny after a month or more. A one-liner just wasn't something we could identify ourselves with for the long run. With “19 Guys and 1 Shaver” a close second to “Probably in boxers,” somebody suggested “Cymbrogi,” a Celtic word meaning *brotherhood of the heart*, and it stuck. Every single one of us is a funny guy on the surface, but it isn't jokes that keep us together, it's that we're a family.”

Q. For those who have not joined one, what would you say are the benefits for being in an online clan?

I'd say that that really varies by clan, but the main thing is that being part of a clan makes *Magic Online* a much more social experience. As far as clan functionality goes, we basically just use clanchat as an IRC channel. It can be a good way to get to know some other players who you might not run into normally.

Also, sometimes you have the opportunity to take advantage of a wider pool of resources. We lend each other cards all the time, and that's particularly helpful with the offbeat MTGO formats like Tribal Wars or Vanguard where you might want some pretty obscure rares to build a deck.

Q. How does clan Cymbrogi stand out from other clans?

We take a pretty rigorous approach to the *Magic Online* metagame, including maintaining a match-up database so that we can get out ahead of metagame swings and also come up with live data to supplement whatever in-house playtesting we do. We've got a bunch of talented players and deckbuilders on the roster, and our clan forum is consistently pretty active.

Finally, I think we take clan membership a little more seriously than a lot of other clans do; our application process is designed to be difficult, and most other clans basically have no app process.

Q. If someone were interested in joining Cymbrogi, how would they go about doing so?

We actually have a pretty formal process for this, because we've been in clans before where the members don't really all know each other and we wanted to avoid that. To join, you need to find a current member who wants to

- **Storm Herd** - A rare which will be cheap really fast, probably sell for 0.5 tix within a month, but still useable in the slow Multiplayer environment. Both 2HG and FFA will get use of this. The life gaining deck in FFAs will get a more effective finish. Even the cleric decks might play this to get use of their massive amount of life from **Daru Spiritualist**
- **Haunt cards** - Is there any better defense than something that makes your opponent get really sad each time he/she attacks you? If you pull out a haunt card, just something as simple as **Cry of Contrition** and let it haunt your own creatures, the player attacking you will know "If I attack him I will discard a card!" This kind of defense is what will make you invisible in tough games.
- **Djinn Illuminatus** - A card that can make you powerful enough to control the game. If you make sure to have enough DD on hand and lands in play, you could end the game with a simple shock. Of course, if you play this card while having 0 cards on hand you will get crushed before you can say Lhurgoyf.
- **Ink-Treader Nephilim** - This card is really powerful. Just make sure to use it for whatever combo you want to use it for (**Lightning Helix**), and then kill it, or else your opponents will do the combo instead.
- **Leyline of the Void** - Bye, Bye Kokusho. No enchantment removal in the B or RB decks will make this card into a favorite to use, just to keep all the annoying Kokusho decks at distance. Expect to see at least one of these in most FFA games, even if nobody is playing Black.
- **Quicken** - Play a creature with high power. While it is on the stack, play **Quicken** and **Decree of Annihilation**. Win the game. This card has great potential; especially in FFA games where you get some time in the start to collect enough mana to pull these wicked things off.



"Well, those are the ones which I think stand out most from the crowd, when it comes to FFA. And remember to leave your **Spelltithe Enforcer** at home when you play FFAs. If you'd like any other opinions about FFA cards or any other thing which involves FFA, send me a mail."

Musteval: PICK ME PICK ME

IntoTheAether: you're in!

Musteval: ^ ^

Musteval: I've always wanted to be on American idol

Musteval: wait crap this isn't Simon Cowell, I clicked the wrong buddy

"I think **Poisonbelly Ogre** could become part of some weird combo deck, with **Forbidden Orchard** and stuff. **Skeletal Vampire** seems quite nice if you have a billion turns and mana... Ooh, especially with **Seedborn Muse!** **Cryptwalling** might be incredible in some decks, we'll see. **Sky Swallower** seems combolicious, but it's only an 8/8 so I don't think it'll be too broken except with **Sway of the Stars**. **Vedalken Plotter** demolishes Tron, which is nice, but it costs too much for the ability I think **Mimeofacture** would be insane if it was an instant, but it isn't – hel-lo, **Quicken!** **Petrified Wood-Kin** seems combolicious with things like **Second Rites**, but the high mana cost might hurt it. **Earth Surge** will have decks built around it-- bad decks. **Ghostway** is really nice because it gives you a huge edge over the people whose stuff was just destroyed. It helps medium aggro decks run **Wrath of God** too, which is nice.

"**Spelltithe Enforcer** is decent, but it will lead to everyone beating on you so I don't think it'll see much play. **Storm Herd** might see play, but the ten mana is likely too much really.

"**Goblin Flectomancer** is a really nice card for making people decide not to hit you with things, as is **Hissing Miasma**. Niv-Mizzet will see play with **Curiosity** and everyone will groan. **Burning-Tree Shaman** eats some combo decks for lunch, and he's a 3/4 for three to boot, so I think he'll see play. **Invoke the Firemind** is also good in infinite mana decks because it helps you dig if you aren't infinite yet, and also gives you the win sometimes. **Cerebral Vortex** will be in those annoying Owl/Mine/**Underworld Dreams**/etc decks that Only Hell (the online clan) members always play.

"Somebody will build a deck with 20 Nephilim... and everybody else will laugh at them. (*Hey! I was thinking of building a Nephilim deck!* – *Bennie*)

"**Savage Twister** is a Wrath for Green/Red, so it will see play in those decks, maybe. **Debtor's Knell** is obviously insane. Teysa is making Johnnies drool.

"**Gruul War Plow** is the first card that allows any deck to give all its creatures trample, and it will see play for that reason; the second ability is just gravy. **Mizzium Transreliquat** is very nice because somebody always has a good artifact out. It also destroys legendary artifacts at instant speed. (*Bye bye Legacy Weapon! --B*)

"Of course the dual lands are all great and will see play. There will also probably be **Izzet Guildmage** combo decks, and then someone will play **Shock** and the Guildmage player will be sad."

There you have it, some **Guildpact** cards to be on the lookout for around the **Magic Online** multiplayer tables! Personally, I'm looking forward to using **Skarrg**, **the Rage Pits** to get involved in the creature combat of other players if the need arises. I will also personally guarantee anyone attacking with **Dune-Brood Nephilim** will get my assistance breaking through to generate ultra-cool Sand tokens!

Coming up...

Next week we take a weird and wild detour, and also get the next look at *Magic Online III!*



*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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