



Visions Release Events

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Into the Aether
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Visions is probably still my favorite set of all time. It had essentially unspectacular but effective cards offered at a reasonable cost, for example [Impulse](#), [Man-o'-War](#), and [Vampiric Tutor](#). I think that these kinds of cards are the most conducive to individual deck design; comparable sets like Ravnica are in a sense similar ([Watchwolf](#), [Lightning Helix](#)), but demand multiple color commitments, so the individual designer has less freedom in how to apply them. – Mike Flores

Info for the upcoming [Visions Release Events](#) (which start next Thursday, April 13) has been posted for over a week now, but in case you haven't seen it or just gave it a quick scan, let me highlight a few things.



There are a couple significant changes from other Release Events you will want to take note of. The 2x Premier Events will **not** feed the Championship. Instead, the 4x Premier Events will invite the Top **Eight** players to the Championship instead of Top Four. Also note that the 4x Premier Events will now only cost 2 Tix instead of 5. Scott Larabee indicates this is an experiment and not necessarily a permanent change, so give it a whirl and then let us know what you think in the forums.

The Championship will be held 1 ½ weeks after the release events on April 29 (due to April 22 falling during the *Dissension* Prerelease weekend). Don't forget, in addition to 6x manual pay to the Top 64, the Top Four players in the Championship get a complete play set of *Visions*, with the winner's being all shiny premium!

Then there are also the Participation and Prize avatars, which look pretty cool and have some fun abilities (note that the abilities weren't 100 percent finalized as I finish writing this).

Participation Avatar: Nekkrateal

All those who play in a *Visions* Release League or a Premier Event (both 2x and 4x) will receive a Nekkrateal avatar.

Starting hand size = 7

Starting life total = 16

Creature spells you play cost 1 less to play. This effect reduces only the amount of colored mana you pay.

There are a couple different options to go with here. One way is to look for Black creatures that only have a single Black mana in their mana cost and “splash” them into other color decks without worry about actually fixing your mana for it. In Extended, you could run a Black/White cleric deck with the stability of just using White mana (and with Edgewalker things can get downright silly). Cards like [Orzhov Euthanist](#), [Gravedigger](#) or [Hell's Caretaker](#) could be just what your deck needs to pull things together, especially for a colored mana less. [Grave-Shell Scarab](#) looks even better at 2. You could build a deck around the four Black Nephilim and only have to worry about providing for the non-Black mana. Another way is to try and play as many “free” creatures as possible, and restock with things like [Dark Confidant](#) or [Slate of Ancestry](#).

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Kobolds and Jackal Pups by Bennie Smith (Standard Vanguard)

Avatar - Nekrataal
60 cards

4 Caves of Koilos	3 Bile Urchin	
4 Godless Shrine	4 Blind Hunter	0 other spells
1 Mikokoro, Center of the Sea	4 Dark Confidant	
1 Miren, the Moaning Well	4 Festering Goblin	
10 Plains	2 Nezumi Cutthroat	
3 Quicksand	4 Nezumi Graverobber	
	4 Orzhov Pontiff	
23 land	4 Paladin en-Vec	
	4 Plagued Rusalka	
	4 Soul Warden	
	37 creatures	

Prize Avatar: Chronatog

All those who achieve a 5-0 record in a *Visions* Release League, make Top Two at a 2x Premier Event or Top Eight at a 4x Premier Event will receive a Chronatog avatar.

Starting hand size = 6

Starting life total = 21

You have no maximum hand size.

☛: Draw three cards. You skip your next turn. Play this ability only once each turn.

I figure at the end of your opponent's first turn, you go ahead and activate the ability so your actual starting hand size is 9, and giving your opponent 1-2 turns provides you a better idea what to call with your first turn [Pithing Needle](#).

[Ivory Crane Netsuke](#) is obviously pretty nuts with Chronatog, buying you time from beatdown decks, as does [Descendant of Kiyomaro](#). [Presence of the Wise](#) can completely erase an aggressive deck's entire early-to-midgame plays, just like [Gerrard's Wisdom](#) used to do back in the day. Finishers are Kiyomaro himself (hooray for Vigilance!) and the absolutely silly [Jushi Apprentice](#), who will very likely flip at the first activation. [Exhaustion](#) kind of gets you back the extra turn you give your opponent here and there.

Chronomancer by Bennie Smith (Standard Vanguard)

Avatar - Chronatog
61 cards

1 Miren, the Moaning Well	4 Jushi Apprentice	4 Pithing Needle
1 Mikokoro, Center of the Sea	4 Descendant of Kiyomaro	4 Ivory Crane Netsuke
1 Eiganjo Castle	3 Kiyomaro, First to Stand	4 Remand
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	11 creatures	4 Shining Shoal
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds		2 Disrupting Shoal
4 Adarkar Wastes		4 Exhaustion
4 Tendo Ice Bridge		4 Presence of the Wise
5 Island		26 other spells
6 Plains		
24 land		

The delicate balance here is figuring out how best to “cash in” your next turn for cards; you don't want to do it too often, and yet if you only envision activating your avatar once or twice, then you should probably play one of the other avatars that already gives you an increased starting hand size.

One deck idea I plan on developing a bit more is using [Seedborn Muse](#), [Elvish Piper](#) and [Sakura-Tribe Scout](#), drawing extra cards and just living on your opponent's turn. I'm not sure how in the world that

would work out yet, but it's intriguing! Extended opens things up a bit, since this avatar would fit perfectly into a deck with [Final Fortune](#), [Isochron Scepter](#) and [Platinum Angel](#). Early [Final Fortunes](#) could function as [Ancestral Recalls](#) for to help you draw into your combo. Speaking of combos, this is what crazy Chris Millar had to say about the *Visions* on [Magic Online](#):

*I'm sad to say that I was on a bit of a hiatus from **Magic** at the time of *Visions*' release, so I don't really have any memories of the period to share. I have, of course, played with cards from *Visions*, so here are a few thoughts:*

1. *The very first time one of my friends played his [Skyshroud Behemoth](#) in a multiplayer game, someone slapped a [Death Watch](#) on it. I don't think the Behemoth was ever played again.*
2. *Mundungu = Best. Name. Ever.*
3. *[Kaervek's Spite](#) used to be the bottom card of all my [Doomsday](#) piles. Mise well.*
4. *[Man-o'-War](#) is one of my favourite cards of all time. I used to have a couple of very fun, rare-free decks with four of these guys, [Wormfang Drakes](#), [Cavern Harpys](#), [Scriveners](#), and [Nightscape Familiars](#) (plus a bunch of annoying [Instants](#) like [Memory Lapse](#)). I think it's the card I'm most excited about being available online.*

Visions Precons

Monday will also mark the debut of the first ever *Visions* preconstructed decks! While the *Mirage* precons were made in a variety of ways, R&D put all four of these together as they do the precons for any new set, making them ideal for playing against each other in a casual league with your friends or online clan. Periodically buy a booster pack of *Mirage* or *Visions* and “evolve” them like they do over on [Building on a Budget](#).

Savage Stompedown

If you like the Red/Green beatdown flavor of *Guildpact's* Gruul guild, you'll love this old-school spin. [Viashivan Dragon](#) is a fun card that can be fetched out with the special ability of [Kyscu Drake](#) so long as you have a [Spitting Drake](#) out too. You can also use [Natural Order](#), a “Tinker” for big creatures that has fetched out [Verdant Forces](#) galore at kitchen tables and Pro Tour red zones over the years. With [Verdant Force](#) in *9th Edition*, you can do the same online. Another card of interest is [Unyaro Bee Sting](#), the only real direct damage ever given to Green. It's slow, it's expensive, but it's *Green!* [Granger Guildmage](#) is a fine little gem to get too. You can also get the original Suq'Ata insult “*Mold could catch you*” on the very first appearance of Core set staple [Creeping Mold](#).

Savage Stompedown

Rares (2)

1 [Viashivan Dragon](#)

1 [Natural Order](#)

Uncommons (13)

2 [Kyscu Drake](#)

2 [Spitting Drake](#)

1 [Creeping Mold](#)

2 [Hulking Cyclops](#)

1 [Volcanic Geyser](#)

2 [Unyaro Bee Sting](#)

1 [Locust Swarm](#)

2 [Jungle Troll](#)

Commons (21)

1 [Hearth Charm](#)

1 [Emerald Charm](#)

3 [Feral Instinct](#)

2 [Giant Caterpillar](#)

3 [Raging Gorilla](#)

1 [Bull Elephant](#)

1 [King Cheetah](#)

2 [Rock Slide](#)

2 [Quirion Elves](#)

1 [Crash of Rhinos](#)

1 [Granger Guildmage](#)

3 [Ekundu Cyclops](#)

Land (24)

12 Mountain

12 Forest



Wild Eyed Frenzy

Ah, a deck for the Red purists out there! [Kookus](#) was one of those flavorful cards that were also highly

playable, and I remember many a beatdown delivered with my trampling, fire breathing Djinn. Watch out if his Keepers weren't around, he'd go nuts and "break loose!" Keeper of Kookus was actually not bad tech for the old Sligh mirror match. Let's not kid ourselves though, the real goldmine here are two copies of Fireblast, a card that struck fear in the hearts of mere mortals whenever staring down a mage packing Mountains. Two Mountains on the board meant that four points of damage could spring forth from nowhere, even if they were tapped out. Four on the board could mean eight to the noggin. Lightning Bolt, Incinerate, Fireblast, Fireblast takes you from 14 to zero in a hurry! Now Red mages have this awesome weapon available to them in the Aether. It reminds me of an apt description by Alan Webster, one of Jamie Wakefield's old **Magic** buddies:

I've decided I want to form an unofficial team called the Marauders, after the armored suits in Starship Troopers. If you've only seen the movie you don't know what I mean, but in the book the Mobile Infantry wore powered armor suits like Iron Man (but with nuclear (or as Homer would say 'Nukular. It's pronounced nukular') weapons), and instead of swarms of them they were like 10 man squads. There were 3 different kinds of suits; scout, command, and marauder.

'Marauders were worn by the guys in the ranks with the sleepy look, the executioners.'

The guys with the sleepy look.

The guys playing Burn.

To me the funniest thing in the world is the 'playah' who says 'I want to play against sligh all day long'. Beating those guys is uh, satisfying. It's not fun, nothing about playing Sligh is fun. Sligh is the blue-collar deck, the workmanlike task of reducing your opponent's life total to 0 as quickly and humanely as possible. Good players don't want to play against burn, no matter how well they think they match up to it.

There's something about sitting down across from one of those guys with the sleepy look and having him play a mountain that makes you go 'damn'. If he dropped any other land type your mind would start racing wondering which fave archetype he's playing, and thinking about how good (or bad) your deck is against it.

But he played a mountain. And he's staring at you, occasionally looking at his cards. You can see your image reflected in his dead, sleepy eyes, and it ain't pretty. It looks sort of like you, but with great big gashes everywhere and all the hair burned off and little wisps of flame still coming off of your charred flesh. And now he's reaching down and tapping the mountain.....

'Jackal Pup. Go.'

Damn.

The Marauders. Yeah, I like that.

Starship Troopers the movie was fun, but the book rocked! Beware of Mauraders online; you might recognize them from their Goblin Warchief avatars. Then again, you might not.

Last, but surely not least, is the amazing Song of Blood. Since I've been dipping into the old Usenet days lately, Song of Blood inspired me to check out John Shuler's classic 1997 tournament report, How I won the Mid-Atlantic Regionals with my Song of Blood Deck. Check it out, you'll be glad you did.

Wild Eyed Frenzy

Rares (2)

1 Kookus

1 Ogre Enforcer

Uncommons (13)

2 Goblin Recruiter

2 Goblin Soothsayer

2 Talruum Piper

2 Mob Mentality

2 Goblin Scouts

1 Flame Elemental

1 Viashino Sandstalker

1 Unerring Sling

Commons (22)

3 Keeper of Kookus

3 Goblin Swine-Rider

3 Chaos Charm



2 [Goblin Elite Infantry](#)
3 [Flare](#)
2 [Fireblast](#)
2 [Goblin Tinkerer](#)
2 [Talruum Champion](#)
2 [Song of Blood](#)
Land (23)
23 Mountain

Unnatural Forces

The rares in Unnatural Forces go together like peanut butter and sauerkraut, but both are kind of neat. I talked about [Necrosavant](#) last week, and his special ability is a little mana intensive, so it seemed a bit odd to team it up with [Flooded Shoreline](#). Ever wonder where the Moonfolk from Kamigawa hailed from? Probably not far from this card. The interesting thing about [Flooded Shoreline](#) now compared to when it first saw print is how the rules changed and “damage on the stack” entered our lexicon. Now your blocker can deal its damage and then ride the Shoreline back to your hand (along with a couple Islands). Just watch out for those pesky Owl decks that have been popular online lately! This deck is chock full of bouncy effects to have fun with, including the amazing [Man-o'-War](#); you also can't go wrong with [Impulse](#). Strange pairing or no, there are some great cards in this deck and some fun interactions to explore.

Unnatural Forces

Rares (2)
1 [Necrosavant](#)
1 [Flooded Shoreline](#)
Uncommon (13)
2 [Waterspout Djinn](#)
2 [Brood of Cockroaches](#)
2 [Necromancy](#)
1 [Nekrataal](#)
1 [Coral Fighters](#)
2 [Ether Well](#)
2 [Sealed Fate](#)
1 [Zombie Mob](#)
Common (21)
2 [Man-o'-War](#)
2 [Impulse](#)
2 [Inspiration](#)
1 [Shrieking Drake](#)
1 [Vision Charm](#)
2 [Coercion](#)
1 [Funeral Charm](#)
1 [Boomerang](#)
2 [Kukemssa Serpent](#)
1 [Ray of Command](#)
2 [Enfeeblement](#)
2 [Fetid Horror](#)
2 [Restless Dead](#)
Land (24)
12 Island
12 Swamp



Legions of Glory

I remember sweating [Zhalfirin Crusader](#). Late game, with plenty of mana lying about, this guy could just walk into creature combat and lay waste to the red zone. [Retribution of the Meek](#) was no slouch either, bringing big creatures down so your white weenie legion could keep up the pressure. Legions of Glory is pretty straightforward, so if you like your dudes charging into the red zone and your tricks combat-related, give this deck a whirl!

Legions of Glory

Rares (2)
1 [Retribution of the Meek](#)
1 [Zhalfirin Crusader](#)
Uncommons (13)
1 [Longbow Archer](#)
2 [Vigilant Martyr](#)
2 [Magma Mine](#)
2 [Miraculous Recovery](#)
1 [Afterlife](#)

1 Blinding Light
 2 Favorable Destiny
 2 Zhalfirin Commander
 Commons (22)
 3 Infantry Veteran
 2 Jamuraan Lion
 2 Knight of Valor
 2 Remedy
 1 Resistance Fighter
 2 Sun Clasp
 1 Warrior's Honor
 1 Hope Charm
 2 Femeref Healer
 3 Femeref Scouts
 2 Pacifism
 1 Ward of Lights
 Land (23)
 23 Plains



Of course, let's not forget Magma Mine, which enjoyed notoriety briefly in early 1998 as a key component in the weird "Wall of Boom" combo deck; from a February 2005 Card of the Day: *In one of the most bizarre rules issues ever, a deck showed up at a PTQ in '98 built around using Wall of Roots infinite times "between turns". Because it was nobody's turn, you could use the ability as many times as you wanted (or so the argument went). Stasis was used to skip your untap phase, at which point Magma Mine was used to kill off the bewildered opponent. The deck was named "Wall of Boom" - and was quickly killed off by rules clarifications.* Magma Mine makes a fine multiplayer card, laying around quietly gathering counters, all the while making your opponents less and less eager to attack you for fear of taking shrapnel to the dome.

What cards are you looking forward to picking up and playing with from *Visions*?

Substantial Followup

Okay, apparently a few of you out there have paid more attention than I did and knew all about the addition of "substance" in the rules (I brought it up last week). I dug around and found some more information about it:

From City for Sale (John Carter's Saturday School):

"Substance" is a new keyword added when the Comp Rules were updated for Ravnica. [CR 502.49] Substance isn't much—it's basically a placeholder. In order to figure out why substance exists, you have to look at the Oracle's most recent revisions. There you'll see Mirage block enchantments that you could play at any time that would blow up if you played them at odd times. These instant-ments give themselves substance until end of turn and then are sacrificed when the substance wears off. The key is that the card loses substance at the same time as damage wears off, and then losing substance causes it to be sacrificed. "At end of turn" would sacrifice the enchantment before damage wears off—a bad thing when Armor of Thorns is the only thing keeping your creature alive.

Extra*: Why bother with tweaking cards from nine years ago that haven't been reprinted since? Because Mirage is scheduled for release on **Magic Online later this year, and now is the perfect time to brush off some of the dust and debris while the set gets prepared for its cyber debut.*

Mark Gottlieb, Magic Rules Manager had this to say in a recent Ask Wizards:

"Useless??? Adam, just because substance doesn't do anything-or mean anything-doesn't mean it's useless. And as for appearing on no cards, well, I suggest you type it into Gatherer and see what pops up.

"Substance is the newest Mirage block keyword. Mirage and Visions each had a cycle of 'insta-chantments'-enchantments that you could play at the time you could play an instant. If you played one that way, though, you'd have to 'bury' it (we now say 'sacrifice' it) at end of turn. They worked great! Then a funny thing happened: The entire rules system was yanked out from under them. When the Sixth Edition rulebook was released, it reworked the end phase, and these cards didn't work so well anymore. Let's look at the difference:

"Mirage functionality: You play Shock targeting my Squire. I play Armor of Thorns on the Squire in

response. Armor of Thorns enchants the Squire, it becomes 3/4, and 2 damage is dealt to it. At the end of the turn, the damage wears off and the Armor of Thorns goes away. The Squire lives another day.



"Sixth Edition functionality: You play Shock targeting my Squire. I play Armor of Thorns on the Squire in response. Armor of Thorns enchants the Squire, it becomes 3/4, and 2 damage is dealt to it. At the end of the turn, the 'sacrifice Armor of Thorns' ability triggers. It resolves, and Squire becomes a 1/2 creature with 2 damage on it because damage hasn't worn off yet. Squire dies. All Armor of Thorns did was delay the Shock damage, but it didn't save the creature.

"Why did this happen? Because the end phase is broken into two steps: the end of turn step (when all 'at end of turn' things happen), then the cleanup step (when all 'until end of turn' things stop happening). Damage that's been dealt to creatures wears off at the same time as the 'until end of turn' things stop happening. Armor of Thorns and friends worked under the new rules (they just worked differently and poorly), so they weren't changed.

"So these 10 Mirage block enchantments worked the first (good) way from 1996 to 1999, and they worked the second (crappy) way from 1999 to 2005-twice as long as they worked the original way. And no one noticed or cared. But then Mirage was released for **Magic Online**. Suddenly the functionality of these cards became relevant again, especially in Mirage limited formats. These cards were significantly worse than they were when they were first printed, they didn't work the way they were originally intended to work, and (worst of all) they didn't work the way players would think they worked.

"I was tasked with making these cards work the way they worked in Mirage, despite the fact that the rules don't support that kind of functionality. Various options were considered. Maybe the sacrifice ability triggers at the beginning of the next upkeep? Too much of a functional change, especially with phasing in the same set. Maybe these cards would only get their 'enchant creature' ability temporarily, so these Auras would fall off at the same time damage cleared, then be put into the graveyard as a state-based effect? Parapet (a Visions insta-chantment) isn't an Aura, so this solution wouldn't work for all of these cards. The 'sacrifice' ability needed to trigger during the cleanup step. My solution was to give these enchantments a dummy keyword ability until end of turn and an ability that would trigger when it lost that dummy ability. The dummy keyword is substance. And the result is that the sacrifice ability triggers and resolves during the cleanup step, after damage has cleared from the enchanted creatures.

"Current functionality: You play Shock targeting my Squire. I play Armor of Thorns on the Squire in response. Armor of Thorns enchants the Squire, it becomes 3/4, and 2 damage is dealt to it. During the cleanup step, Armor of Thorns loses substance and damage clears from Squire. Then the 'sacrifice Armor of Thorns' ability triggers. The Aura goes away, and Squire lives another day.

"The best part is that you can ignore everything I just wrote and just play these cards like you think they work... and you'll probably be right."

Okay, so now we all better armed to handle one of Mark Rosewater's possible trivia questions at a future Nationals one day!

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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