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# Slacker, Trendy, Challenge, or Insanity?

Bennie Smith  
Into the Aether  
Thursday, May 11, 2006



If you haven't checked out [May's Open Events](#), you may not know that a 4x Tribal Wars Open is coming up this Saturday at 9am PST. If you're curious about the metagame, I [recapped the last big Tribal 4x Open](#) back in January, which featured Mono-White Clerics, No-Stick Wizards, Tooth and Nail Shaman, Elves, and Goblins. A recent 2x event (on April 9th, with 27 players) was a little less diverse, featuring No-Stick Wizards, Clerics, Tooth and Nail Shaman, and Goblins. If your deck can tussle with these currently dominating tribes, then you have a good chance at bringing home the bacon (er, packs).

For those who are new to the Tribal Wars format, here are the basics:

1. 1/3 of your deck must be creatures of a particular type.
2. Banned Cards: [Circle of Solace](#), [Endemic Plague](#), [Engineered Plague](#), [Peer Pressure](#), [Skullclamp](#), [Tsabo's Decree](#), [Umezawa's Jitte](#), [Unnatural Selection](#)

Towards the end of my [Tribal Wars Raging](#) column, I listed some tips new players may find useful (though note this was written before [Umezawa's Jitte](#) was added to the banned list). In particular, [Aether Vial](#) seems to be quite underutilized and may be key to making the more color-intensive tribes more viable.

As another helpful tool, I went into Gatherer and did some Excel and Access tricks in order to produce a list of all the Tribes (Creature Types) currently available for MTGO Tribal Wars, and their current (pre-*Dissension*) populations. I've also grouped and color-coded them according to how challenging each Tribe is for building decks around.

## Tribal Slacker

Challenge? What challenge? These are the easy tribes, who propagate like bunny rabbits and have hordes of candidates for whatever deck floats your boat. Many of them have had full expansions – or even whole blocks – dedicated to pushing them to the top of the food chain. You could make a Tribal Wars deck with one of these tribes in your sleep. Yes, many of these Tribes are just dominating.

Tribe	Population
Human	233
Spirit	222
Wizard	187
Soldier	133
Beast	129
Cleric	107
Zombie	99
Goblin	98
Elf	87
Warrior	78
Bird	75
Shaman	61
Druid	47
Elemental	45
Golem	45
Cat	44

## Tribal Trendy

Okay, so you don't have the tools available to the Tribal Slacker, but you've still probably got at least some small set support (Samurai, Rat, Snake) and plenty of quality creatures to choose from. Everyone has a Dragon deck, or an Angel deck! The key to breaking out of the pack here are the non-Tribe cards you round out your deck with. You'll have room for style points.

Tribe	Population
Insect	42
Dragon	41

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*Dissension*  
Ravnica Cycle, Book III  
by Cory Herndon

Horror	40
Kavu	38
Knight	37
Wall	36
Samurai	35
Snake	31
Ogre	29
Rat	27
Angel	26
Drake	26
Dwarf	23
Wurm	23

## Tribal Challenge

Ah, now here we go! Just picking one of these Tribes gives you style points right off the bat. Tribal Challengers don't usually have even small set support, and a full roster of candidate creatures don't immediately leap to mind. There might even be some sub-par creatures you're forced to pick just to make up the 1/3 of your deck requirement. Making these decks competitive is a worthy challenge and something to be proud of!

Tribe	Population
Centaur	20
Illusion	20
Merfolk	20
Mutant	20
Barbarian	19
Giant	19
Minion	19
Myr	19
Nightmare	19
Nomad	18
Demon	17
Djinn	17
Elephant	17
Fox	17
Monk	17
Rogue	17
Sliver	16
Cephalid	15
Moonfolk	14
Berserker	13
Griffin	13
Archer	12
Assassin	12
Lord	12
Vampire	12
Atog	11
Avatar	11
Hound	11
Imp	11
Viashino	11
Ape	10
Dryad	10
Minotaur	9
Shapeshifter	9
Spider	9
Troll	9
Vedalken	9
Lizard	8
Ninja	8
Skeleton	8
Specter	8
Treefolk	8
Incarnation	7

Mercenary	7
Plant	7
Scout	7
Serpent	7
Shade	7
Zubera	7
Advisor	6
Artificer	6
Drone	6
Efreet	6
Faerie	6
Gargoyle	6
Lhurgoyf	6
Slith	6
Wolf	6

## Tribal Insanity

Danger! You're traveling in rough waters here; only the most creative or insane deckbuilders need apply! Picking a Tribe from this list gives you zero creature flexibility, since the entire population will need to be in your deck. A few of these can only be legal if you recruit the dashing and handsome uber-conformist, Mr. (or Ms.) **Mistform Ultimus!** I'd love to see Ultimus sporting Chimera enhancements...

Tribe	Population
Bringer	5
Crocodile	5
Kirin	5
Leech	5
Mystic	5
Nephilim	5
Ooze	5
Thrull	5
Volver	5
Chimera	4
Cyclops	4
Guardian	4

## Darwin Award

Sadly, these fellows fail to muster the minimum Tribal quorum, and are doomed to stand on the outside looking in until the day that another member is added to their Tribe by R&D. Might *Dissension*, *Coldsnap*, or *Time Spiral* lift a few of these poor fellows into the realm of Tribal Insanity? Are two more Antelopes too much to ask? We'll have to see!

Tribe	Population
Basilisk	3
Bear	3
Gnome	3
Gorgon	3
Leviathan	3
Mongoose	3
Nightstalker	3
Phoenix	3
Rebel	3
Ship	3
Unicorn	3
Weird	3
Antelope	2
Bat	2
Construct	2
Crab	2
Flagbearer	2
Fungus	2
Hippo	2

Hydra	2
Orc	2
Orgg	2
Ouphe	2
Sphinx	2
Squirrel	2
Townsfolk	2
Wraith	2
Archon	1
Badger	1
Brushwagg	1
Carrier	1
Dreadnought	1
Eel	1
Egg	1
Elf Druid	1
Fungusaur	1
Hyena	1
Jellyfish	1
Kraken	1
Lammasu	1
Manticore	1
Monster	1
Octopus	1
Pegasus	1
Phelddagrif	1
Pirate	1
Rhino	1
Sage	1
Scavenger	1
Thopter	1
Thundermare	1
Toad	1
Turtle	1
Yeti	1


I'll certainly be curious to see how things shake out for this Saturday's Tribal Wars 4x Open! Will Tribal Slackers storm the Top 8 once again, or can a rogue tribe ambush the metagame and make a big splash, claiming style points *and* booster packs?

## Vanguard Invades the Magic Invitational!

The Magic Invitational kicked off yesterday, so make sure you [check out the coverage here](#), or you can go to the special **Magic** Invitational area on MTGO and watch replays of all the action! I'm particularly interested in seeing how the Auction of the Geniuses goes, featuring [Classic Vanguard decks by noted Magic personalities](#). I have to admit to being a bit partial to Mark Gottlieb's cool Seshiro "Dragon" deck, which looks like an absolute hoot to play. I'm also obviously grooving on Rizzo's Tombstone Stairwell deck. Conversely, Stephen Menendian's 8 Land Tendrils deck makes me cringe, realizing that not even MTGO is safe from Vintage-style shenanigans - of course, what else would we expect from Menendian anyway? If you haven't dabbled in the craziness that is [Vanguard](#), make sure you stop in and watch some of the replays!

I was actually lightly penciled in as a backup in case a Genius or two decided they couldn't be bothered to get their decks submitted in time. Obviously, I was excited at the chance to build something around my assigned Avatar (Platinum Angel), but I wasn't going to hang my hopes of inclusion too high. I mean, who's *not* going to submit decks to be featured at the **Magic** frickin' Invitational? I tried purchasing some "insurance," but sadly my hired muscle was unable to find even a few of these slippery guys to "persuade" a change of heart in time for my benchwarmer deck to get picked for the big game. Sigh.

This is what I had on tap:

**Bennie Smith/Platinum Angel (-1 hand/-9 life)** 

If you control an artifact, a creature, an enchantment, and a land, you can't lose the game and your opponents can't win the game.

60 cards

4 Darksteel Citadel	3 Vigilant Martyr	4 Spirit Link
4 Ancient Den	4 Steel Wall	4 Sterling Grove
4 Tree of Tales		4 Ghostly Prison

7 Plains	4 Soul Warden	4 Sacred Mesa
4 Temple Garden	4 Auriok Champion	4 Faith's Fetters
1 Forest		1 Privileged Position
24 land	15 creatures	21 other spells

You can potentially set up quick, turn 1 **Steel Wall**, turn 2 **Sterling Grove** and you've got your "can't lose" combo. Artifact lands are a great "two-for" in covering both the land and artifact bases. The Mesa's instant-speed creature creation is also very helpful in maintaining the combo and is your eventual win condition. How would this compete with the other builds in the Auction? Do you think it would appeal to some of the Invitationalists?

Okay, we've had quite a few 4x Opens lately to catch up on, so let's roll through them.

## Standard 4x Open

Sunday, April 30th, 175 players

A huge field of players led to an interesting Top 8, particularly the winning Mono-Blue Control deck, featuring tons of counters and wizards to fuel Azami, Lady of Scrolls. Three Black/White Aggro decks made the cut, with one "Hand in Hand" deck, one that touched on discard for disruption with **Shrieking Grottesque**, **Ravenous Rats**, and **Castigate**, and one that seemed to straddle the two. JoelG's Zoo deck featured many of the usual suspects (**Kird Ape**, **Watchwolf**, **Jitte**), but had a few twists like **Paladin en-Vec** and **Burning-Tree Shaman**. Three varieties of Blue/Red Control rounded out the Top 8, with Vore, Urzatron, and Niv-Mizzet control showing the depth of this color combination.

Here were the final standings:

1st Place: Vainus, Mono-Blue Control (splash black)  
 2nd Place: JoelG, Zoo  
 4th Place: Svyatogor, Hand in Hand  
 4th Place: chen\_ge, Black/White Aggro  
 8th Place: Aegis\_HK2, Vore  
 8th Place: supakitchar, URzatron  
 8th Place: Roris\_RJ, Niv-Mizzet Control  
 8th Place: Russian\_Playa, Hand in Hand

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
1 Dimir Aqueduct	3 Disrupting Shoal	2 Cranial Extraction
9 Island	4 Hinder	3 Keiga, the Tide Star
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	4 Last Gasp	1 Pithing Needle
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds	4 Mana Leak	2 Rewind
3 Quicksand	4 Remand	4 Ribbons of Night
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	4 Repeal	3 Shadow of Doubt
2 Swamp	2 Threads of Disloyalty	
2 Underground River	25 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Watery Grave		
24 land		
2 Azami, Lady of Scrolls		
4 Jushi Apprentice		
3 Meloku the Clouded Mirror		
2 Thought Courier		
11 creatures		

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Caves of Koilos	2 Faith's Fetters	4 Castigate
1 Eiganjo Castle	4 Mortify	1 Cranial Extraction
4 Godless Shrine	1 Phyrexian Arena	1 Faith's Fetters
7 Plains	4 Umezawa's Jitte	4 Last Gasp
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	11 other spells	2 Orzhov Pontiff
6 Swamp		3 Savannah Lions
		15 sideboard cards

23 land
4 Dark Confidant
3 Ghost Council of Orzhova
4 Hand of Honor
3 Hypnotic Specter
3 Isamaru, Hound of Konda
4 Kami of Ancient Law
4 Paladin en-Vec
1 Savannah Lions
26 creatures

## Ravnica/Guildpact Sealed 4x Open

Saturday, May 6th, 167 players

A great turnout for the last pre-*Dissension* Ravnica Sealed Event! Once the Top 8 was determined and players got their draft on, black obviously held the keys to the kingdom, showing up in all Top 4 decks. Even one of the 8th place decks (Midnar) played black, and with *Helldozer*, who can blame him?

Here were the final standings, and some of the cards I saw played:

1st Place: Yhtarod, Blue/Black/Green (see *decklist below*)

2nd Place: Kangoo, Black/ Red/Green/White (*Sunhome Enforcer, Siege Wurm, Selesnya Evangel, Ostiary Thrull, Streetbreaker Wurm, Seeds of Strength*)

4th Place: Island\_Go, Black/Blue/White (*Skeletal Vampire, Harrier Griffin, Telling Time, Compulsive Research, Absolver Thrull, Moroi*)

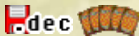
4th Place: Khelben Arunsun, Black/Green/White (*Ursapine, Daggerclaw Imp, Gruul Nodorog, Plague Boiler, Necromancer's Magemark, Strands of Undeath*)

8th Place: Midnar, Black/Green/White (*Helldozer, Sandsower, Root-Kin Ally, Birds of Paradise, Blind Hunter, Bramble Elemental, Gruul Nodorog, Congregation at Dawn*)

8th Place: Kingka, Blue/Red/Green (*foil Steam Vents!, Torch Drake, Greater Mossdog, Bramble Elemental, Roofstalker Wight, Orzhov Euthanist*)

8th Place: Dengarola, Blue/Red/White (*Flight of Fancy, Skyknight Legionnaire, Convolute, Stasis Cell, Tin Street Hooligan, Goblin Spelunkers*)

8th Place: GamblingSmoker, Blue/Red/White (*Benevolent Ancestor, Steamcore Weird, Divebomber Griffin, Conclave Equenaut, Bloodscale Prowler, Veteran Armorer, Lurking Informant*)

Yhtarod's Sealed Deck (Ravnica-Guildpact)		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
40 cards		
1 Dimir Aqueduct	1 Douse in Gloom	6 Forest
6 Forest	1 Faith's Fetters	6 Island
1 Gruul Turf	1 Farseek	6 Mountain
2 Mountain	1 Fists of Ironwood	7 Plains
2 Plains	1 Galvanic Arc	6 Swamp
4 Swamp	1 Izzet Signet	1 Duskmantle, House of Shadow
16 land	1 Last Gasp	1 Nivix, Aerie of the Firemind
1 Birds of Paradise	1 Mortify	1 Steam Vents
1 Civic Wayfinder	1 Pillory of the Sleepless	1 Svogthos, the Restless Tomb
1 Ghor-Clan Savage	1 Savage Twister	1 Absolver Thrull
1 Golgari Brownscale	10 other spells	1 Bloodscale Prowler
1 Gruul Scrapper		1 Boros Recruit
1 Indentured Oaf		1 Coalhauler Swine
1 Mausoleum Turnkey		1 Crystal Seer
1 Mourning Thrull		1 Dimir Infiltrator
1 Selesnya Evangel		1 Drift of Phantasms
1 Selesnya Sagittars		1 Goblin Spelunkers
1 Stinkweed Imp		1 Greater Forgeling
1 Streetbreaker Wurm		1 Izzet Chronarch
1 Trophy Hunter		1 Nightguard Patrol
1 Vulturous Zombie		1 Ordrun Commando
14 creatures		1 Petrahydrox
		1 Restless Bones
		1 Sewerdeg
		1 Silhana Ledgewalker
		1 Skarrgan Pit-Skulk
		1 Skyrider Trainee
		1 Sparkmage Apprentice
		1 Stone-Seeder Hierophant
		1 Tin Street Hooligan
		1 Torch Drake
		1 Viashino Fangtail
		1 Benediction of Moons

	1 Chant of Vitu-Ghazi 1 Compulsive Research 1 Conclave's Blessing 1 Convolute 1 Dark Heart of the Wood 1 Frazzle 1 Gaze of the Gorgon 1 Killer Instinct 1 Mark of Eviction 1 Mindmoil 1 Muddle the Mixture 1 Necromancer's Magemark 1 Primeval Light 1 Quickchange 1 Runeboggle 1 Seeds of Strength 2 Seismic Spike 1 Sinstriker's Will 1 Smash 1 Wojek Siren
	80 sideboard cards

Yhtarod's Top 8 Draft ( <i>Ravnica/Guildpact</i> )		
Main Deck		Sideboard
41 cards		
1 Gruul Turf 7 Island 4 Mountain 4 Swamp <hr/> 16 land 1 Bloodscale Prowler 1 Dimir House Guard 1 Dimir Infiltrator 1 Ghor-Clan Bloodscale 1 Golgari Guildmage 2 Izzet Chronarch 1 Ogre Savant 1 Petrahydrox 1 Sparkmage Apprentice 1 Surveilling Sprite 1 Tattered Drake 2 Vedalken Entrancer <hr/> 14 creatures	1 Cleansing Beam 1 Consult the Necrosages 1 Disembowel 1 Douse in Gloom 1 Flight of Fancy 1 Golgari Signet 1 Halcyon Glaze 1 Izzet Signet 2 Peel from Reality 1 Schismotivate <hr/> 11 other spells	1 Boros Signet 1 Castigate 1 Caustic Rain 1 Clinging Darkness 1 Coalhauler Swine 1 Convolute 1 Flash Conscription 1 Golgari Brownscale 1 Golgari Germination 1 Guardian of Vitu-Ghazi 1 Induce Paranoia 1 Leap of Flame 1 Leashling 1 Leave No Trace 1 Perplex 1 Pyromatics 1 Rain of Embers 1 Schismotivate 1 Zephyr Spirit <hr/> 19 sideboard cards

Be sure to check out [Pro Tour Prague's coverage](#) to see how *Dissension* shakes up *Ravnica* block Limited! *Dissension* releases on MTGO May 30th, with release events running June 1st – 7th.

## Singleton 4x Open

Sunday, May 7th, 83 players

Singleton is one of the lesser-played formats, so it was great to see a pretty good turnout for the Open! Aggressive strategies had a slight edge in the Top 8, with aylon's Red Weenie and Burn concoction rising to the top of the heap. He was nice enough to share his decklist, but unfortunately there was not much time between the end of this tournament and deadline for this week's article, so I was unable to rustle up any others. Hopefully some of them can post their decklists in the forums!

Here were the final standings (special thanks to song420 of [Magic Online Events Calendar](#) who compiled the Top 8 list and deck archetypes)

1st Place: aylon, Monored weenie/burn  
2nd Place: 52047, Blue/white/red Control  
4th Place: \_LondoMolari\_, White/Green/Red Aggro  
4th Place: Papy\_Moustache, Goblins  
8th Place: xkorpio, 5 Color Aggro  
8th Place: noehcmaharbaluap, 5 Color Aggro  
8th Place: Little\_shaves, Blue/Black Control  
8th Place: yorick, Blue/Black Control

## Red Weenie/Burn, by aylon (1st Place, Singleton)



Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
1 Barbarian Ring	1 Char	1 Blaze	
1 Blinkmoth Nexus	1 Chrome Mox	1 Boil	
1 Bloodstained Mire	1 Fireblast	1 Boiling Seas	
1 Forgotten Cave	1 Firebolt	1 Demolish	
1 Great Furnace	1 Flames of the Blood Hand	1 Dwarven Blastminer	
13 Mountain	1 Genju of the Spires	1 Flashfires	
1 Mountain Valley	1 Hammer of Bogardan	1 Goblin Goon	
1 Rocky Tar Pit	1 Incinerate	1 Lava Spike	
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep	1 Jinxed Choker	1 Pyrite Spellbomb	
1 Stomping Ground	1 Lava Dart	1 Pyroclasm	
1 Wooded Foothills	1 Magma Jet	1 Scrabbling Claws	
<hr/>		1 Shattering Spree	
23 land	1 Molten Rain	1 Threaten	
1 Arc-Slogger	1 Pillage	1 Viashino Sandstalker	
1 Blistering Firecat	1 Pulse of the Forge	1 Yamabushi's Flame	
1 Flametongue Kavu	1 Pyrostatic Pillar	<hr/>	
1 Fledgling Dragon	1 Shock	15 sideboard cards	
1 Frostling	1 Shrapnel Blast		
1 Giant Solifuge	1 Stone Rain		
1 Grim Lavamancer	1 Sulfuric Vortex		
1 Gruul Guildmage	1 Sword of Fire and Ice		
1 Hearth Kami	1 Umezawa's Jitte		
1 Kird Ape	1 Violent Eruption		
1 Rorix Bladewing	1 Volcanic Hammer		
1 Scorched Rusalka	23 other spells		
1 Slith Firewalker			
1 Zo-Zu the Punisher			
14 creatures			

Aylon:

"Hi, my name is Aylon Manor, I'm 18 years old from Jerusalem, Israel. I have played **Magic** for about 3 years. I don't have much knowledge of the format since this is the first time I have ever played it - my clan captain handed me this deck 10 minutes before the event started, so I don't have many insights into the deck either. The deck is basically a simple red deck of dudes, burn, and some land and artifact destruction. The deck worked pretty smoothly, though I have been told there are good additions to the deck that my captain didn't have in his collection. I have to say the format was very enjoyable. It's kind of similar to Limited in that games don't repeat themselves due to 4 ofs. I wouldn't suggest this type of deck to someone who has time and skill to play a better control deck, but this deck is basic and fun, and it might just end up winning (obviously). I'd like to thank my clan captain for giving me this deck, and I hope to see you all online!"

## Send Me Your Links!

I am still collecting links to all things **Magic Online**. What web pages do you have bookmarked that specifically relate to **Magic Online**? Drop me an email or post it in the forums!

*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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