

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Beginning of the End

Bennie Smith
Into the Aether
Thursday, July 20, 2006



PRO TOUR-SAN DIEGO

In his recent column, [Taking You To The Beginning](#), [magicthegathering.com](#) editor Scott Johns gave notice on some upcoming changes to this site, with the main thrust introducing the switch in the Saturday content lineup. He also tossed out this little tidbit: "I will announce here that there will be two more changes in the columnist lineup between now and the release of *Time Spiral*. The first I expect to happen in August, where we'll be taking one of the existing columns and giving it a new writer, then changing the angle of what that column deals with. So, though the overall topic will be the same under the new writer, how it's approached (and which audience it's aimed at) will be changing significantly."

Today we get to reveal that Into The Aether is one of the two columns getting the overhaul, and I will be passing the baton to a new writer in the coming weeks. When and to whom, you may ask? You'll just need to stay tuned. I've got a couple more columns to go before the new guy steps in; I'll also need to have fun with the Into The Aether "god account" while I can. It's going to be quite the shock going from being able to build whatever wacky deck idea I dream up, and instead switching to a collection where I can count the number of rares on one hand. I pulled up my personal account over the weekend to take stock, and it wasn't pretty.

I've made a lot of MTGO friends in the past year and a half, and I hope to continue that friendship after IntoTheAether changes hands. My personal account is "blairwitchgreen," so feel free to /addbuddy me! It's been a privilege and an honor to be a part of the wonderful and vibrant *Magic Online* community, and I just wanted to thank all of you who have gone above and beyond to help make this column what I hope was an interesting window into the world of MTGO.

In My (Snowy?) Tribe

*The weather outside is spiteful
And global warming is downright frightful
But with Yeti and Angels on the go
Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow...*

When I was tapped to join in the Snow Week festivities, I figured it would be pretty easy to tie it into *Magic Online* by building a Tribal Wars deck. Snow is a type after all... but then I realized "snow" is a supertype and, after confirming with Rules Guru and archvillain Mark Gottlieb that supertypes can't be used as a "tribe," had to give up my dreams of Snowy tribal decks.

Or did I?

There are some good quality Snow creatures scattered throughout the colors, and I could utilize another prominent MTGO format - *Vanguard* - and the Birds of Paradise avatar to pick the best of them and throw them together in one deck. Birds of Paradise enables all my lands to tap for any color mana, so I could even use a full boat of *Mouth of Ronom* and *Scrying Sheets* and not get mana hosed. Here's my "Snow Tribe" deck:

Snow Tribe (Vanguard Standard), by Bennie Smith .txt

Birds of Paradise Avatar - Starting Hand +0, Starting Life -3; Lands you control have 'Tap: Add one mana of any color to your mana pool.'

60 cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge 1 Miren, the Moaning Well 3 Skarrg, the Rage Pits 4 Mouth of Ronom 4 Scrying Sheets 10 Snow-Covered Plains <p>23 land</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Boreal Druid 4 Karplusan Wolverine 4 Boreal Centaur 4 Ohran Viper 4 Stalking Yeti 4 Heidar, Rimewind Master 4 Adarkar Valkyrie 2 Rimefeather Owl <p>30 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Skred 3 Coldsteel Heart <p>7 other spells</p>
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Poison at the Pro Tour

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It's hard to argue with the power of *Ohran Viper*, *Stalking Yeti*, *Heidar*, and *Adarkar Valkyrie*. I was a little torn between *Karplusan Wolverine* and *Rimebound Dead*. I liked the defense the Dead could provide, but I ended up going with the Wolverine as early removal against things like *Birds of Paradise* or the ubiquitous *Dark Confidant*. *Skred* just seems like an insanely good removal spell in a heavy snow deck. *Rimefeather Owl* is obviously the big

finisher, and I'm hoping between the Viper and **Scrying Sheets** to be able to draw into him by the time I'd be able to cast him.

Why Snow-Covered Plains? I thought about just running two of each Snow-Covered basics just for kicks, but then I figured I might be randomly hosed by someone with Mountainwalk, Forestwalk, or Swampwalk, and I think I'd be more prone to see a random **Boiling Seas** than **Flashfires**.

Sadly, I won't get to test this deck out before I have to give up my god account, but if any of you Snow fans end up having the cards and the time, let me know how it performs.



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NOVELS

Future Sight
Time Spiral Cycle, Book III
by Scott McGough and John Delaney

Invasion Block Sealed Deck Tournament V

Saturday July 15, 9:00 am PST

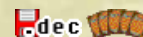
Magic Online's Invasion Block promotion continues to be a huge draw, with 249 qualifying players making the tournament last Saturday. I thought it would be nice to show the winning Sealed deck and Draft deck, along with some feedback from Ken Krouner (further down) for those interested in improving their game in anticipation of *Invasion* Block Sealed Deck Tournament VI sometime down the road. It's not like there are a lot of *Invasion* Sealed deck or drafts around to practice in.

- 1st place – SYLVESTER THE PUSSYCAT
- 2nd place – _LondoMolari
- 4th place – Here Lies
- 4th place – PinoPlayer
- 8th place – CardsRUs
- 8th place – AMMP
- 8th place – Negush1
- 8th place – MikeMcD

Congratulations to the Top 8 players, I hope your prize packs were bountiful!



IPA Sealed, by SYLVESTER THE PUSSYCAT, Winner

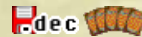


Main Deck 40 cards		Sideboard
2 Island	1 Dead Ringers	1 Armadillo Cloak
5 Mountain	1 Exotic Curse	1 Aura Blast
2 Plains	1 Foul Presence	1 Aura Shards
1 Sulfur Vent	1 Manacles of Decay	1 Barrin's Unmaking
6 Swamp	1 Reckless Spite	1 Bog Initiate
1 Treva's Ruins	1 Recover	1 Ceta Disciple
17 land	1 Rushing River	1 Crown of Flames
1 Ancient Kavu	1 Shackles	1 Crusading Knight
1 Caldera Kavu	1 Tribal Flames	1 Disciple of Kangee
1 Cinder Shade	1 Vindicate	1 Dragon Arch
1 Duskwalker	10 other spells	1 Dwarven Landslide
1 Halam Djinn		1 Falling Timber
1 Kavu Scout		1 Fertile Ground
1 Nightscape Apprentice		6 Forest
1 Phyrexian Reaper		1 Gerrard's Verdict
1 Razorfin Hunter		1 Glade Gnarr
1 Shivan Zombie		1 Glimmering Angel
1 Stalking Assassin		1 Guard Dogs
1 Treva's Attendant		1 Holy Day
1 Volcano Imp		1 Horned Kavu
13 creatures		1 Index
		4 Island
		1 Keldon Mantle
		1 Liberate
		1 Llanowar Knight
		1 Llanowar Vanguard
		1 Maggot Carrier
		1 Maniacal Rage
		1 Metathran Transport
		2 Mountain
		1 Necra Disciple
		1 Orim's Touch
		1 Pincer Spider
		4 Plains
		1 Prison Barricade
		1 Prohibit

- 1 Putrid Warrior
- 1 Quirion Explorer
- 1 Quirion Sentinel
- 1 Rogue Kavu
- 1 Samite Pilgrim
- 1 Saproling Infestation
- 1 Savage Offensive
- 1 Searing Rays
- 1 Shoreline Raider
- 1 Skyship Weatherlight
- 1 Sparkcaster
- 1 Spirit Weaver
- 1 Standard Bearer
- 1 Strength of Night
- 1 Sunscape Apprentice
- 1 Tainted Well
- 1 Traveler's Cloak
- 1 Vodalian Hypnotist

66 sideboard cards

IPA Draft, by SYLVESTER THE PUSSYCAT, Winner



Main Deck 40 cards

- 6 Forest
 - 6 Mountain
 - 5 Plains
-
- 17 land
- 1 Aurora Griffin
 - 1 Bloodfire Colossus
 - 1 Flowstone Charger
 - 1 Kavu Aggressor
 - 1 Kavu Recluse
 - 1 Rith's Attendant
 - 1 Serpentine Kavu
 - 1 Sparkcaster
 - 1 Thornscape Apprentice
 - 1 Thornscape Familiar
 - 1 Thunderscape Apprentice
 - 1 Urborg Elf
 - 1 Verduran Emissary
 - 1 Voracious Cobra
 - 1 Yavimaya Barbarian

15 creatures

- 1 Gaea's Might
- 1 Gerrard's Command
- 1 Harrow
- 1 Hobble
- 1 Magma Burst
- 1 Orim's Thunder
- 1 Squee's Embrace
- 1 Tribal Flames

8 other spells

Sideboard

- 1 Archaeological Dig
- 1 Bloodfire Dwarf
- 1 Darigaaz's Charm
- 1 Dralnu's Crusade
- 1 Forest
- 1 Frenzied Tilling
- 1 Heroic Defiance
- 1 Ice Cave
- 1 Implode
- 1 Index
- 1 Insolence
- 1 Orim's Thunder
- 1 Orim's Touch
- 1 Quicksilver Dagger
- 1 Savage Gorilla
- 1 Savage Offensive
- 1 Shield of Duty and Reason
- 1 Shriek of Dread
- 1 Soul Link
- 2 Squee's Embrace
- 1 Surprise Deployment
- 1 Traveler's Cloak

23 sideboard cards

Ravnica Block Sealed 4x Open

Saturday July 15, 2006, 10AM PST
165 players

Invasion and *Ravnica* 4x Limited events on the same day? Two blocks where multicolor runs wild? It seemed like a good chance to compare and contrast the two, so I asked the top performers of the RAV 4x to send in their decklists. Dancing Scimitar was kind enough to send his along, so I also forwarded that to Ken Krouner to see what he thought of the sealed pool.

- 1st place – Urashima.Keitaro
- 2nd place – pirogov
- 4th place – Dancing Scimitar
- 4th place – kb86
- 8th place – SleepWalking
- 8th place – foogla
- 8th place – al8ert.dk
- 8th place – Chrislong



Dancing Scimitar: "My name is Alexander Rathcke, aged 17 and from Denmark. I'm sometimes called "mini Oots" due to my friendship with Rasmus "Big Oots" Sibast. I've played the PT a few times and made Day 2 in both my

Limited PT's, but lost playing for Top 8 in London (frown). I made Top 4 at Grand Prix--Copenhagen '05. Below is the sealed deck I ended up with."

Ravnica Block Sealed by Dancing Scimitar (4th place)

Main Deck 40 cards		Sideboard
5 Forest 4 Mountain 5 Plains 1 Selesnya Sanctuary 1 Swamp <hr/> 16 land <hr/> 1 Elvish Skysweeper 1 Ghost Warden 1 Golgari Rotwurm 1 Razia, Boros Archangel 1 Screeching Griffin 1 Selesnya Evangel 1 Siege Wurm 1 Silhana Starfletcher 1 Skyknight Legionnaire 1 Sunhome Enforcer 1 Tin Street Hooligan 1 Ogre Gatecrasher <hr/> 12 creatures	1 Bottled Cloister 1 Char 1 Faith's Fetters 1 Fists of Ironwood 1 Galvanic Arc 1 Izzet Signet 1 Pillory of the Sleepless 1 Scatter the Seeds 1 Spectral Searchlight 1 Carom 1 Rakdos Signet 1 Supply/Demand <hr/> 12 other spells	1 Barbarian Riftcutter 1 Bathe in Light 1 Boros Swiftblade 1 Caregiver 1 Carrion Howler 1 Consult the Necrosages 1 Cry of Contrition 1 Dimir House Guard 1 Dizzy Spell 1 Dogpile 1 Droning Bureaucrats 1 Feral Animist 6 Forest 1 Greater Mossdog 1 Grifter's Blade 1 Incite Hysteria 6 Island 1 Ivy Dancer 1 Lionheart Maverick 1 Lurking Informant 1 Mnemonic Nexus 1 Mortipede 6 Mountain 1 Mourning Thrull 1 Nightmare Void 1 Orzhov Euthanist 1 Peel from Reality 6 Plains 1 Primeval Light 1 Quicken 1 Repeal 1 Runeboggle 1 Seeds of Strength 1 Seismic Spike 1 Sell-Sword Brute 1 Sundering Vitae 1 Surge of Zeal 6 Swamp 1 Terraformer 1 Thoughtpicker Witch 1 Thrive 1 Vedalken Entrancer 1 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree 1 War-Torch Goblin 1 Wojek Siren 1 Assault Zeppelin 1 Bond of Agony 1 Delirium Skeins 1 Experiment Kraj 1 Gobhobler Rats 1 Haazda Exonerator 1 Overrule 1 Rakdos Ickspitter 1 Stomp and Howl 1 Whiptail Moloch <hr/> 80 sideboard cards

Dancing Scimitar: "The removal spells in the deck were fantastic and I had some good big creatures, but the manafixers were pretty much non-existent. I wouldn't see it as a typical 7-1 deck, but I guess I just got lucky. Below was the deck I drafted."

Ravnica Block Draft by Dancing Scimitar (4th place)

Main Deck 40 cards	Sideboard

1 Dimir Aqueduct	1 Brainspoil	1 Barbarian Riftcutter
1 Forest	1 Douse in Gloom	1 Cry of Contrition
1 Island	1 Golgari Signet	1 Farseek
1 Orzhova, the Church of Deals	1 Putrefy	1 Mortipede
7 Plains	1 Strands of Undeath	1 Rabble-Rouser
5 Swamp	1 Withstand	1 Roofstalker Wight
	1 Azorius Signet	1 Schismotivate
16 land	2 Carom	1 Shattering Spree
	1 Plumes of Peace	1 Skyrider Trainee
1 Blind Hunter	1 Simic Signet	1 Viashino Slasher
1 Ghost Warden		1 Votary of the Conclave
1 Harrier Griffin	11 other spells	1 Wizeden Snitches
1 Mourning Thrull		1 Wreak Havoc
1 Orzhov Euthanist		1 Zephyr Spirit
1 Selesnya Guildmage		1 Delirium Skeins
1 Shrieking Grottesque		1 Enemy of the Guildpact
1 Tattered Drake		1 Overrule
1 Demon's Jester		1 Pain Magnification
1 Freewind Equenaut		1 Valor Made Real
1 Guardian of the Guildpact		
2 Mistral Charger		19 sideboard cards
13 creatures		

Dancing Scimitar: "The draft started out pretty well, first picking **Putrefy** and getting a second pick **Selesnya Guildmage**. I moved into Orzhov second booster with first pick **Blind Hunter** and getting passed a **Harrier Griffin**. The last booster gave me 2 **Caroms**, which I think is fantastic, and 2 **Mistral Charger**."

Once More With Feeling: Ken Krouner

"I love *Ravnica* block, it's the arguably the best Constructed set of all time, but for sealed and draft it's been a tough nut to crack. I think perhaps the most frustrating part of the format is how hard it is to draft and build a Limited deck while dealing with the subtle ways of mana screw, random draft cutting, or packs that don't go your way. I remember another Limited format that was a lot like this... *Invasion* Block Limited! So for my last Team-Up with Bennie Smith here on Into The Aether, I am going to give some comments on two of the sealed decks that did well in this weekend's big events. One in each multi-colored format.

"I'm going to start with the *Ravnica* deck. While the deck seems incredibly powerful, it had a big hole. There was no good way to run a healthy amount of creatures. It's somewhat ironic that with all the other ways a pool of cards could go wrong, this age old problem would be the one to rear its ugly head. When I first glanced at the deck, I tried to figure out ways to perhaps weaken the power level of the deck to squeeze more creatures in, but it isn't all that viable. The only changes I think I would make are cutting **Carom** and **Fists of Ironwood** for some combination of **Bathe in Light**, **Greater Mossdog**, **Droning Bureaucrats**, or **Ivy Dancer**. I thought for sure that the **Bathe** would be an auto-include, but with the low number of creatures, it's not all that easy to justify it. **Ivy Dancer** is an incredible sealed card as we are green with big creatures and that's the default sealed deck in this format. **Ivy Dancer** can give us a huge edge in those matches.

"This deck is extremely close to what I would have built. Kudos to Alexander Rathcke for a great build.

"Now a little foray into the past. You kids today don't know how good you actually have it. Signets and Karoo lands have you spoiled, playing whatever cards you want. Any 3 or 4 colors is just dandy, but it wasn't always that way. There was a time when if you wanted to fix your mana, you pretty much had to play Green. That time was called *Invasion* Block. They put a good number of Blue fixers in that block, but not nearly enough to compensate.

"This particular deck couldn't play Green, and the 2 color fixing lands don't exactly go hand in hand. In this block, I feel you are a much bigger slave to your mana, since it so rarely will just be there for you. To this end, I would cut the white out of the IPA deck. I cut **Vindicate**, **Shackles**, and **Manacles of Decay** for **Shoreline Raider**, **Rogue Kavu**, and **Maniacal Rage**. I also would cut the 2 Plains and the **Treva's Ruins** for 2 Islands and a Mountain. This will shore up the mana and make your deck more streamlined, capable of winning with an aggressive early game or a potent late game. Trust me, I would want to play my **Vindicate** as much as the next guy, but I don't think it's worth the risk to go full three colors in this deck. If you want to play the 1 **Vindicate** and the 1 **Treva's Ruins**, I wouldn't object too much, but I love me some good mana in this format.



"Contributing to Bennie's columns has been one of my favorite activities as a writer. He is truly one of the great ambassadors to the game. I'll miss working with him, but we'll be friends for a long time

to come.”

Thanks, Ken—I appreciate the kind words. Got any questions or comments about either Sealed deck? Post your thoughts 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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