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Thursday, August 21, 2003

As is often the case, I've blindly stumbled into a theme this week. I have two themes, in fact: one intentional, one accidental. My intention this week was to highlight some of the very clever decks that I've encountered in the course of my own goofy deck crusading. The bizarre side effect is that each deck has 8 billion rares.

I'll get complaints for that. I know it. The point of this column (besides being an outlet for subliminal anti-McDonalds propaganda—go back eight weeks and read every 53rd letter of the column) is to present interesting casual decks that you, gentle reader, can try out yourself. When one of these decks contains Decrees of Justice, Eternal Dragons, Wraths of God, and Riptide Replicators (and one of them does), it's not particularly accessible for most players to reproduce. Oops. I'd suggest that these decks be something to aspire to, but then the message boards will be flooded with people accusing me of \*gasp\* trying to promote the sale of **Magic** cards, almost as if I \*double gasp\* work for Wizards of the Coast. So instead, let me present these decks for entertainment purposes only, kind of like a psychic hotline. Madame Zenda said that doing so would lead me to true love and financial security.

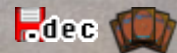
## Alpha Bits

My first deck of the week comes from Duane Primc, whose last name is so interesting I have no idea how to pronounce it. While I was online playtesting my Zombie deck from a couple of weeks ago, he sat down for a duel. I built up Zombies while he did seemingly typical Enchantress shenanigans. But when I was being attacked by a flying, untargetable, 20/20 Mistform Ultimus, I asked Duane for the decklist. He was gracious enough to send it to me.

The bulk of the deck is the Enchantress card-drawing engine, which we've seen before. What sets it apart is the ridiculously cool payoff. Alpha Status gives Mistform Ultimus +2/+2 for every creature on the board! The other creature enchantments (Pemmin's Aura, Blanchwood Armor) are also very strong, and any of them can turn previously mild-mannered creatures like Birds of Paradise or Yavimaya Enchantress into forces to be reckoned with. Forgotten Ancient seems a little out of place, but since you'll play a few spells a turn with this deck, the Ancient also helps convert early game card- and mana-enablers into late game attackers. I haven't changed a single card in Duane's deck.



## Primc-Time Enchantress



Main Deck  
60 cards

13 Forest	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Alpha Status
10 Island	2 Forgotten Ancient	4 Blanchwood Armor
-----	3 Mistform Ultimus	3 Enchantress's Presence
23 lands	4 Verduran Enchantress	4 Fertile Ground
	4 Yavimaya Enchantress	4 Pemmin's Aura
	-----	1 Words of Wilding
	17 creatures	-----
		20 other spells

17 rares!

I have to begrudgingly admit that Yavimaya Enchantress is good in this deck; I attacked for the win with a pair of 11/11 Druids (thanks, Blanchwood Armor) a few days ago. But when you folks had the chance to vote on *Eighth Edition* cards, you really dropped the ball on this one. How—HOW—could you not vote in Rabid Wombat instead?!

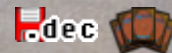
### UrZeb Lands

I don't enjoy losing. No one does. But sometimes it can be fun. When I play in the Casual Constructed room in *Magic Online*, I do battle with the same old decks over and over: Astral Slide-Lightning Rift, Goblins, blue-green madness. You know the gauntlet. Bo-o-oring. But when a crazy rogue deck shows up, that's a fun game. And when that crazy rogue deck wins, I feel good about it.

Zeb Wheeler had such a deck. It was the first deck I saw that used the Urza lands reprinted in *Eighth Edition*. Unlike what seems to be the majority of people, I don't like the Urza lands. I have bad memories of opening both *Antiquities* and *Chronicles* boosters and drowning in the sea of Urza lands that poured out. Every third card was an Urza land. [warning: exaggeration] There were multiple versions of each, most of them were common, and they were genetically engineered to reproduce themselves inside the packs. [warning: lie] I once opened an 8-card *Chronicles* booster to find one Elder Dragon Legend and 17 Urza lands. [warning: insanity] Anyway, I got sick of them. Now that they're back, with just one version apiece, all of which are uncommon, I can learn to live with them. Maybe.

Zeb's deck gets out lots of mana (hopefully the whole Urzatron), then plays gigantic spells. He beat me by playing Time Stretch after creating 11 Soldier tokens with Decree of Justice. I was impressed. Here's his deck.

### Wheeler and Deal



#### Main Deck 60 cards

3 Coastal Tower	-----	1 Akroma's Vengeance
2 Island	0 creatures	1 Aladdin's Ring
3 Skycloud Expanse		2 Ancestral Tribute
4 Temple of the False God		4 Decree of Justice
4 Urza's Mine		2 Deep Analysis
4 Urza's Power Plant		2 Ivory Mask
4 Urza's Tower		2 Jayemdae Tome

24 lands

4 Pacifism  
2 Planar Portal  
3 Renewed Faith  
4 Riptide Replicator  
3 Time Stretch  
4 Urza's Armor  
2 Wrath of God

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36 other spells

30 rares!

I played the deck myself, and found it frustrating. Zeb described it to me as “just a fun-based theme deck,” so I felt it was time to take matters into my own hands. For a deck based around its mana base, its mana base needed an upgrade. Playing a two-color deck is difficult when 16 of the lands produce only colorless mana. I rarely got the colors I needed for my spells, especially those with double color requirements. Also, 24 lands aren't enough to support 4 Temples of the False God. I don't count them as lands in my opening hand because they don't produce mana right away. I found myself frequently mulliganing hands containing the Temple and one other land.



Once I decided to make my own version of Zeb's deck, I cut the blue entirely. I added three more lands, as well as a couple of plainscyclers. The most important addition was the wee Weathered Wayfarer. Of all the cards in the Standard card pool, this is the only one that allows you to search your library for a land—not just for a *basic* land. The Wayfarer will let you pull out the missing piece (or pieces) of your Urzatron puzzle. Speaking of which, I added the dubious Teferi's Puzzle Box for the same reason: It will let you filter through your deck and pluck out the lands you want. I admit that in my playtesting, I've never successfully used it for that reason . . . but it seems like a fine use for a nutty card. It's worth going to extremes to find the Urza lands, because without them, the deck just rolls over and dies.

I kept the key cards from Zeb's original deck: Decree and Replicator as victory conditions, Wrath to clear out the creatures that may have infested the board while you were setting up, Planar Portal because you can afford it, Jayemdae Tome for the same reason, and one lone Aladdin's Ring. It feels so good to win a game with Aladdin's Ring because it's something you should never, ever be able to do.

## Main Deck

60 cards

11 Plains	4 Weathered Wayfarer	1 Akroma's Vengeance
4 Temple of the False God	4 creatures	1 Aladdin's Ring
4 Urza's Mine		4 Decree of Justice
4 Urza's Power Plant		2 Eternal Dragon
4 Urza's Tower		2 Jayemdae Tome
		2 Planar Portal
27 lands		4 Renewed Faith
		4 Riptide Replicator
		3 Teferi's Puzzle Box
		3 Urza's Armor
		3 Wrath of God
		29 other spells

29 rares!

## Breach for the Stars

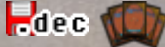
Back in early July, I asked anyone who had figured out what to do with Dimensional Breach or Grip of Chaos to write to me. Seemingly, their main uses are to wreak havoc in multiplayer games, but I wanted to use them in duels. I haven't seen anything earth-shattering about Grip of Chaos, but many of you wrote in with Dimensional Breach ideas.

The most popular thought was to combo Breach with Day of the Dragons. See, first you play a bunch of weenie creatures. Then you play Day of the Dragons, a  $1\text{GGGG}$  enchantment, to remove them all from the game and replace them with a fleet of 5/5 flying Dragon tokens. Finally, you play Dimensional Breach, a  $5\text{***}$  sorcery, to remove all permanents from the game! When Day of the Dragons leaves, you get your original creatures back onto an empty board. Beauty, eh? If you want, the first permanent you bring back from the Breach could be Day of the Dragons, re-Dragonifying your creatures. I was surprised how often this combo was suggested to me because there's a weensy flaw in its concept. If you have five 5/5 Dragons in play, you really don't need to cast a 7-mana spell to shore up your board position. Just attack and win already!

A similar idea in both popularity and feel was to combine Breach with Worldgorger Dragon. I wasn't sold on this one either: Since the Dragon removes all your lands from the game, the only way to make this combo work is to cast both spells on the same turn. That would cost a painful  $8\text{***GGGG}$ , but it would leave you with a full board against an empty table. Other *Judgment* Nightmares, like Wormfang Turtle and Wormfang Crab, were suggested as well. When they leave play via Breach, the permanents they removed will come back into play, leaving you with a decided advantage. But while you're playing those Wormfang creatures, they're gobbling up your land, making it increasingly difficult to get to the 7 mana you need for Dimensional Breach. I also passed on the Dimensional Breach-Phage the Untouchable-Stifle combo.



The one deck that hit the nail on the head was sent in by Josh Sanders. I read it, and it just felt right. He uses Dimensional Breach in tandem with Astral Slide. He gets out some creatures, Slides them out, then plays the Breach. Breach misses the Slid-out creatures, removes everything else, then Slide pops those creatures back in. You have attackers, and your opponent has absolutely nothing.

**Where'd Everyone Go?** 

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

11 Forest	4 Elvish Aberration	4 Akroma's Blessing
5 Plains	3 Fierce Empath	4 Astral Slide
4 Secluded Steppe	1 Krosan Cloudscrafer	4 Dimensional Breach
4 Tranquil Thicket	4 Krosan Colossus	<hr/>
<hr/>	4 Krosan Tusker	12 other spells
24 lands	4 Llanowar Elves	
	4 Wirewood Channeler	
	<hr/>	
	24 creatures	

9 rares!

Unfortunately, between the time Josh sent me this deck and now, Llanowar Elves rotated out of Standard. That propelled me to start fiddling around with the deck. The Elf can't be easily replaced with something that doesn't mess with Wirewood Channeler, which needs Elves to work right. Then, since I'm unfathomably sick of Astral Slide, I wanted to toss it . . . and I started thinking about using Dimensional Breach as a giant Astral Slide! My version of the deck squeezes out massive amounts of land, plays very large creatures in face-down form—including some that I can't possibly flip up—and then Breaches Dimensions. Each upkeep after that, in comes a 9/9 Krosan Colossus or a 6/6 Imperial Hellkite. Anurid Brushhopper can sidestep the Breach in the same way Josh's creatures could via Slide. The last additions to the deck were a couple of Planar Guides, suggested by no less an authority than the lauded Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar while I was playing him online.

**Contract of Breach** 

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

3 Elfame Palace	3 Anurid Brushhopper	4 Dimensional Breach
9 Forest	3 Elvish Aberration	4 Explosive Vegetation
1 Krosan Verge	1 Eternal Dragon	2 Ray of Revelation
7 Plains	4 Exalted Angel	<hr/>
1 Secluded Steppe	2 Hystrodon	10 other spells
1 Tranquil Thicket	2 Imperial Hellkite	
2 Windswept Heath	4 Krosan Colossus	
<hr/>	4 Krosan Tusker	
24 lands		

2 Planar Guide  
1 Silent Specter

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26 creatures

25 rares!

The best Breach combo of all was sent to me by jesterjoe20. It's just a two-card combo, both cards are in the same color, and it leads to near-immediate victory. Play Dimensional Breach the turn after you play . . . The Cheese Stands Alone!!!

Until next week, have fun with rares.

Mark

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