

A powerful alternative for the current metagame Astral Slide in the New Standard

Gabe Walls

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Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the new Standard. Not since the days of *Urza's Destiny* and *Masticore* has an expansion set changed the face of a format so much. The old format we were all playing a month ago was dominated by *Dragons* and *Angels* as well as over-costed artifacts. Now we are being bossed around and told what to put in our decks by the new kid on the block, *Skullclamp*. With all that in mind, I'm here to update you on my personal favorite deck, *Astral Slide*. I'll be going over my latest deck list and why it makes sense in the current environment, as well as covering the most important match-ups you can expect with the deck. Before I go any farther let me familiarize you with what exactly I am talking about.

When *Onslaught* was released Wizards didn't just bring back cycling, they also released two extraordinarily powerful enchantments to go with it: *Lightning Rift* and *Astral Slide*. Both of these cards offer powerful answers to creature-based strategies. In addition to their power, both enchantments are also flexible. *Astral Slide* doubles as protection for your own *Exalted Angels* and *Lightning Rift* provides a path to victory once you have stabilized the game. In combination with all of the great cycling options printed in *Onslaught*, *Legions*, and *Scourge*, a new archetype was born. I took this archetype to a second place finish at U.S. Nationals and an eighth place finish at Worlds. Needless to say I have some faith in the deck.

But what I played at those two tournaments pales in comparison to what the newest version of *Astral Slide* looks like. Without further ado here is my most recent list:

Astral Slide



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Forgotten Cave	2 Akroma's Vengeance
8 Mountain	3 Astral Slide
9 Plains	4 Damping Matrix
4 Secluded Steppe	4 Lightning Rift
2 Temple of the False God	3 Renewed Faith
_____	2 Slice and Dice
27 lands	4 Spark Spray
	2 Starstorm
3 Eternal Dragon	3 Wrath of God
3 Exalted Angel	_____
_____	27 other spells
6 creatures	

Sideboard

3 Echoing Ruin
1 Obliterate
2 Pulse of the Fields
2 Scrabbling Claws
4 Shatter
1 Temple of the False God
2 Weathered Wayfarer

15 sideboard cards



If you have followed the deck much at all you can see how drastic the changes are. At Nationals I played a version with green for [Krosan Tusker](#), [Nantuko Monastery](#), and [Moment's Peace](#) in the sidebar. At worlds the deck received some more powerful cards from the *Scourge* set and finally started to cut out the other color and play a more powerful version that abused [Burning Wish](#). With the release of *Mirrodin* the affinity deck was born and had to be dealt with. [Burning Wish](#) was no longer legal and the deck needed some answers to the environment's new threats. It turned to [Shatter](#) and [Akroma's Vengeance](#). Finally, we have what I just posted above. Through each of these phases I was right there riding my pet deck's evolution as best I could.

Contents

Now that you have some background on the deck let's get down to business. The obvious cards to make the cut in the deck are [Lightning Rift](#) and [Astral Slide](#). They both serve similar purposes. They control the board while allowing you to get ahead of your opponent. The reason you get so far ahead is because each card you use to deal with one of theirs in this way effectively becomes a cantrip.

The next element is the cyclers

themselves. [Secluded Steppe](#) and [Forgotten](#)

[Cave](#) both serve the same purpose. Early in the game they are used to make crucial land drops and then later on are cheap efficient cyclers that don't sit in your hand while waiting for business spells.

They also allow you to play a higher land count in your deck because of their versatility. [Renewed Faith](#) and [Spark Spray](#) are both utility cards. Life gain is really important to any control deck. Affinity and Goblins, the two biggest decks in Standard right now, both pack some type of burn which means you need to be able to gain some of your precious life back after you have stabilized the board with



the other powerful cards in your deck. It also cycles early in the game if you need something else to help deal with the threats that have been put in front of you. [Spark Spray](#)'s main use is to cycle. However, on the first few turns of the game [Astral Slide](#) really doesn't have a lot business spells so [Spark Spray](#) has to do the dirty work. It takes down opposing [Skirk Prospectors](#) on the first turn as well as [Arcbound Workers](#) and [Disciples of the Vault](#).



Next we have the board sweepers. [Wrath of God](#), [Akroma's Vengeance](#), [Slice and Dice](#), and [Starstorm](#) all serve similar purposes, but they each have important characteristics that need to be weighed in order to get the best mix for the current environment. [Wrath of God](#) is the only non-cycler of the bunch, which obviously means that it is the most powerful. Against a non-aggro deck having too many of the non-cyclers can really clog up your hand when you are trying to make land drops and cycle through your deck, but four mana to kill every creature in play has been one of the most powerful cards in the standard environment for years now, and it's one that fits well with the controlling aims of this archetype. But, since it doesn't cycle, having four in the deck isn't possible anymore given other non-cycling cards that now need to be included (at the top of that list is [Damping Matrix](#), which I'll be discussing a bit later).

[Akroma's Vengeance](#) is there primarily for mirror matches and the affinity match-up. The deck really only has room for two in its current form. Though game-breaking against affinity and powerful in the mirror, it costs six mana to play and three to cycle. With other expensive wrath effects already in the deck the numbers have to be cut given the current speed of the format.

[Slice and Dice](#) and [Starstorm](#) are a bit more interesting. Their main uses are to counter [Patriarch's Bidding](#) in the Goblin deck and a cycled [Decree of Justice](#) from an opposing White control player, but they of course cycle as well. Two of each are in the deck for a few reasons. Slice and Dice provides early game answers to some very important threats while netting you a card in the process. Drawing two of a combination of [Akroma's Vengeance](#), [Wrath of God](#), and [Starstorm](#) can be fatal for creature strategies. [Slice and Dice](#) acts like a [Starstorm](#) early in the game (that cantrips), while late in the game offering the option to hard cast it. Versatility and consistency, that's what a deck like this one thrives on. And given all the card drawing power of cycling, you will find the answers you're looking for.



Now we have the big dogs of the deck, the heavy hitters. **Exalted Angel** and **Eternal Dragon** are the sole creatures of the deck. They both have the word creature in their type box, but they are far from just your average run of the mill beatsticks. These two are the best of their kind, the most powerful.

Let's start with the dragon. He spends most of his time in the graveyard, waiting for you to invest five mana to pick him back up again. He's at his best in control matchups, where every land drop is of utmost importance. Once you hit seven mana he will gladly provide you with a **Plains** every turn until there are no more in your deck. Then, once that job is accomplished, it's time to start going to town. At this point you've got a virtually unkillable threat for your opponent to deal with, since you can just regrow him for five mana any time they manage to deal with it.

Exalted Angel has been on the list of almost getting cut from this deck for a while, but in this environment the job she performs is still too important to let her go just yet. She provides you with an early game threat that can race against opposing creatures or burn while also serving as the big finisher later in the game once you've stabilized the table. Astral Slide really shines when **Exalted Angel** is in play as well, providing her all the protection a girl could ever want and not allowing your opponent to ever really get into the game.

Last but certainly not least we have **Damping Matrix**. This is the newest addition to the deck and the most important. Simply put it's your answer to **Skullclamp**. Fortunately, it just happens to provide you with great defense in other matchups as well. Other important cards it also stops to warrant its main deck slots include **Weathered Wayfarer**, **Arcbound Ravager**, **Goblin Sharpshooter**, **Siege-Gang Commander**, and **Mindslaver**, just to name a few. All of those cards have quite an impact on the game and when they just can't be used by your opponent anymore you are in a much more favorable position. Given the price, that's a great deal and one you can't pass up in the face of the Skullclamp threat.



Match-ups and the Sideboard

For the Affinity matchup we have 4 [Shatter](#), 3 [Echoing Ruin](#), and 2 [Pulse of the Fields](#). They replace 4 [Lightning Rift](#), 2 [Eternal Dragon](#), and 3 [Renewed Faith](#). This is one of your roughest matchups. They have [Naturalize](#) as well as a substantial amount of burn. [Pulse of the Fields](#) shines in this matchup if you can live long enough to start abusing it. The main thing you need to remember about this matchup is to not attack their lands with your limited amount of artifact kill. You want to save it for [Arcbound Ravager](#)s and [Skullclamps](#). The best way to learn exactly how to play this matchup is to battle yourself. Regionals are on the horizon and if you are considering [Astral Slide](#) as an option you should get your own games in, as the more you can learn about this match-up from *both* sides, the better you'll do when the time comes.

The Goblin-Bidding match-up is similar to the Affinity one. You bring in 2 [Shatter](#), 2 [Scrabbling Claws](#), and 2 [Pulse of the Fields](#) for 3 [Renewed Faith](#), 1 [Eternal Dragon](#), and 2 [Akroma's Vengeance](#). The reason you only bring in two [Shatters](#) is because you only really need to be able to kill [Skullclamp](#), but if you suspect they are bringing in [Stabilizers](#) as well then you can go ahead and board out 2 more [Eternal Dragons](#) for the last 2 [Shatters](#). This is a bit easier of a matchup. They don't get the explosive starts that Affinity can, which usually allows you enough time for your more powerful and expensive spells to take over. Again, the best way to learn this match-up is to test it for yourself and find out how each of the games play out so you can get the best grasp of the key elements.

The last big match-up in Standard right now is Blue/White control. This is the most complicated matchup out there for the Rift/Slide player. The sideboarding strategy is to take out 2 [Damping Matrix](#), 3 [Wrath of God](#), and 1 [Renewed Faith](#) for 2 [Weathered Wayfarer](#), 1 [Temple of the False God](#), 1 [Obliterate](#), and 2 [Scrabbling Claws](#). When you sit down for this one, be prepared to be there for a while. Typically it comes down to dragon wars; whoever can get ahead in their land count with [Eternal Dragons](#) or [Weathered Wayfarer](#)s usually comes out on top. I used to be playing [Dwarven Blastminers](#) for this matchup, but they got cut for more pressing matters in other matchups. One option is to cut

the **Weathered Wayfarers** from the board and play **Dwarven Blastminers** instead (I'm not sure which is best yet for the current environment). **Damping Matrix** is still useful in this matchup because of the presence of **Mindslaver** and possibly **Tower of Fortunes**, but you no longer need 4 because finding one early in the game isn't as important as it is in other match-ups. Fortunately, this archetype seems to have dipped in popularity as it struggles to hang with the popular aggro decks, which opens the door for Slide to make a run at the current metagame.

All told, it's a powerful deck that's a lot of fun to play. It's a great feeling to mow all those creatures down while happily cycling through your deck for even more cards, and there are an awful lot of creatures running around the Standard environment right now. I hope this article has given you a better feel for what the deck has to offer, and that you'll consider giving it a try.

Good luck in your future cycling adventures!