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Azorius B.I.G.

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Latest Developments
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When talking about the development of the Azorius guild, I feel that I must acknowledge public perception.

The *Ravnica* block was a weird animal. After the first set came out, the structure of the block—and each of the six as-yet unrevealed guilds—was known to the masses. And the speculation began in earnest.

In a few instances, design and development took the obvious path for a guild, and that guild met all of players' expectations. The Gruul is a great example of this. You want fast fat beaters? You got 'em! (What other path could we have chosen? Did you know that Red is the color of art and music and passion? Combine that with Green, the color of nature, spiritualism, and community and you get a hippie commune of drum circles, dreamcatchers, and recreational drug use. Let's see *that* win a Pro Tour.)



In other instances, we matched the predicted feel, but threw players for a few twists along the way. The Izzet was one such case—most players expected trickery and a spell-based theme, but the mana-hungry replicate mechanic and the goofy card names and flavor caught a few people off guard.

In other instances, players had no real idea what to expect, and had to base guesses off of flavor hints, obscure old deck types, and personal preference. The Orzhov fall into this camp. We delivered a guild that was part bleeder, part haunt, part religious, and part mafia, which is probably not what people had in mind. I'm pleased that the Orzhov has grown to be one of the most popular of the seven guilds released thus far.

And then we come to Azorius. Ah, Azorius... the "control colors." Everyone had an idea about what this guild would look like, and those ideas were all basically the same. Cards like these were dancing about in people's heads...

Wrath of Leknif



Sorcery

Destroy all creatures. They can't be regenerated. You may untap up to four lands.

Absorb



Instant

Counter target spell. Gain 3 life.

Nice Creature N00b



Instant

Remove target creature from the game. Draw a card.

Prahv, Griefers' Paradise

Land

☞: Add 1 to your mana pool.

☞: Add 1 to your mana pool. ☞: Target player cannot play spells this turn.

Isperia, Azorius Win Condition



Legendary Creature – Sphinx

3/4

You may play Isperia, Azorius Win Condition any time you could play an instant.

Flying, vigilance

Isperia is indestructible.

Whenever Isperia deals damage to an opponent, you may draw a card.

That stuff's supposed to be funny, folks. Every card on that list other than **Absorb** is unprintably insane. I don't mean to offend people that had actual realistic views of Azorius control prior to the set's release, but I simply want to make the point that reality cannot often live up to expectations.

What exactly was the reality of the Azorius? Flavor descriptions on this very website made it very clear that the guild was fond of the law and control. "Action through inaction" and all that. Design did its best to follow through on that vision, including a powerful **Wrath of God** variant with the forecast ability to make a creature indestructible (*Get it?!*), a weird White/Blue board sweeper that had card drawing mixed in, and a powerful counterspell that cost . So those trappings were all in place at the beginning.



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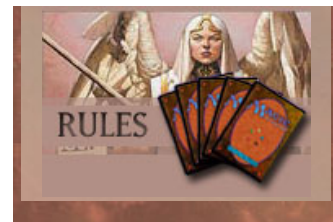
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RULES

Additionally, design included some of the more flavorful control-oriented creatures like **Court Hussar**, **Grand Arbiter Augustin IV**, and **Minister of Impediments** (check out [Matt Cavotta's article this week](#) for a wonderful explanation of how Azorius' creatures execute the law). And, of course, there were a bunch of little fliers that filled out the guild—a great mechanical fit, since white and blue are the top two flying colors in the game.

Of course, funny things happen on the way to the Forum(s). Development discovered that, in our prior attempts to keep Standard balanced, we had already seeded the environment with many, many good cards for White/Blue control decks: **Wrath of God**, **Mana Leak**, **Remand**, **Hinder**, **Faith's Fetters**, **Meloku**, **Keiga**, **Yosei**, **Tidings**, **Telling Time**, **Compulsive Research**... There just weren't that many holes for *Dissension* to fill for that archetype.



Granted, the set contains the most important piece for that deck's success: **Hallowed Fountain**. On top of that, we gave it **Condemn** (the best one-mana white removal spell since that Plover thingy), **Spell Snare** (a silver bullet against today's efficient aggro cards, as well as a great weapon in a counter war), and a new hard-to-kill finisher in **Windreaver**. It's a start, and much in the way that **Kird Ape**, the Urza lands, and **Dark Confidant** gave form to Gruul, Izzet, and Orzhov respectively, **Wrath of God**, **Mana Leak**, and the rest will give Azorius control some real substance.

Understand that none of this was done to make people unhappy, or to give long-time fans of control decks "what for." It was just a matter of not being able to afford the redundancy that additional versions of a lot of quintessential control cards would create. A second good Wrath would put too much pressure on creature decks. A third two-mana counter would give permission decks critical mass. Another creature on par with Meloku is practically out of the question.

We almost printed the ******* counterspell, though; it wasn't even the archetypal White/Blue control deck that killed it. No, we couldn't make the card because of how insane it was with **Sunforger**. I'm not going to tell you

what the card did, because I want to print it the next time we do a gold set, but suffice to say that it was powerful enough that the somewhat-clunky White/Red hammer reached new levels with it. It greatly saddened me and many others on the team to see the card become **Swift Silence** (with a five-mana price tag keeping it safely out of **Sunforger** decks). I guess it shouldn't have surprised me, though; I remember the day we finalized the numbers on **Sunforger** and Brian Schneider said, "This card is going to prevent us from making stuff we want to make in the next two years." He was right.

Finding ourselves unable to push the stereotypical control angle, we went in a more recent direction with Azorius, taking cues from famous W/U decks like Zvi Mowshowitz's "The Solution" (detailed in Flores' article) and Kamiel Cornelissen's Counter-Rebels. Both of these decks had tons of "answer" cards, yet were still packed to the gills with creatures.

Yes, creatures. Remember, a *guild* is "an association of people with similar interests or pursuits"... and the key word there is "people." This block structure was made to show off all facets of the game through the lens of the ten color pairs, including all manners of creatures—from legends to guildmages to the rank-and-file random commonfolk. Azorius needs its griffins and knights and advisors to feel whole, just like Izzet needs its weirds, Orzhov its thrulls, and Dimir its spirits. Creatures are a big part of each guild, even the "control" one.

In closing, please don't think that "the guild wasn't designed with control in mind," because I can personally attest to that not being true. Also don't think that "R&D doesn't want Blue/White control to exist," because we do. We just didn't need to devote a ton of Azorius cards to make it happen, so we used that space to push some alternative strategies instead. And really, don't think that "Azorius is weak" or "Blue/White control is going to suck," because Regionals will almost certainly prove you wrong.



Multiverse Comments!

As I've done in the previous seven guild development articles ([Selesnya](#) – [Dimir](#) – [Boros](#) – [Golgari](#) – [Gruul](#) – [Orzhov](#) – [Izzet](#)), here are development comments from our Multiverse database from some of the Azorius cards.

Steeling Stance was submitted with a forecast cost of 0, leading to many discussions about the card's viability in non-White decks. The safer version won out in the end.

- MP 5/3: Would be weird if black or red weenie was running this in constructed.
- bs 5/6: i doubt those decks will run this, but worth mentioning.
- MP 5/24: Possible that you run this in most/all non-white limited decks.
- WW 6/14: Agree it seems weird if this ends up in a r/b limited deck as the only white card. Brainwave 0 worth it?
- MT 6/28: This card is very strong. RB should def run it.
- MP 6/28: Now common and has a W brainwave cost.

Proclamation of Rebirth is a weird card that combos very well with **Kamigawa's** version of **Spore Frog**—**Kami of False Hope**. The numbers

on the Proclamation (called "Resuscitate the Children" in design) changed as we monitored the power of that combo.

bs 3/16: is this a theme for del? this card's existence could imply a lot of things (white gets raise dead for small things, the set has a cog-creature theme, etc.). what is this card meaning to do?

MP 3/29: Good with fog frog.

AF 4/25: White is #2 at Zombify, and #1 at small creatures. This seems like a good overlap of the two, and there are lots of 1-mana creatures with sac abilities throughout the block. Team notes this could be rare if it isn't useful in limited.

bs 5/6: it doesn't look useful in limited.

WW 6/14: I like this, but it scares me a little. (In non-standard formats)

MT 6/17: WW, Any specific cards you can think of?

MT 6/28: Does this work with Dreadnaught?

DAL 7/7: No to dreadnaught.

AF 7/22: Should be tested with False Hope guy.

ps 7/25: oh yeah, i was going to build that deck, and i forgot. seems like a bit of a lock.

AF 8/4: Initial reports are a little scary. What if the cost went down to 2W and the brainwave up to, like, 6W? 5W? The temptation to cast it would be great.

MP 8/7: Changed to above suggestion. Was 3W to cast and 4W to Brainwave.



Dovescape is a great rules-setting card, and may prove to be a headache for unaware opponents in the next few months. The interesting thing in these comments was the point where we decided to let it combo well with Boseiju and other ways to make spells uncounterable.

BB 4/26: cool

Del 6/13: Retemplated so it works. :)

SW 6/20: Should be worded so that the spell has to be countered to get the benefit (Just in case).

DAL 7/7: Good point - should change.

Del 7/8: Should it? Syncopate and Memory Lapse need that extra text so they don't do stupid things with uncounterable spells. This effect isn't doing anything to the spell, so it's not a templating problem. It's up to dev whether Urza's Rage should also get me three Birds. :)

DAL 7/12: Hard to naturalize this...

AF 7/13: Go Go Ancient Law!

MP 7/26: Cost up by 1.

AF 7/27: Ways to remove this in block -- Vindicate Angel, 4G 4/4, Absolver Thrull, 1UG 2/3 flier (probably won't ever hit through the birds), Nullmage.

ps 8/5: strong with the kami of false hope brainwave lock.

Pride of the Clouds was submitted as a much more expensive card, and was more of a random uncommon than the paragon of the guild that it is now. Del Laugel posted most of these comments in an Ask Wizards answer a few days ago, but here are all of them.

BB 4/26: this guy has been fun.

MT 5/22: One of the worst brainwave offenders in my opinion.

DAL 7/7 Johnny potential with Belfry spirit, etc.

bs 7/12: i like this card.

Del 8/9: No amount of fiddling with the name and/or the colors of the tokens would make this rules text fit. I was able to trim the necessary line by changing from a */* with P/T = number of flying creatures to a 1/1 with Radiant, Archangel's ability. Okay?

AF 8/9: Looks good to me. I'm pretty sure the tokens have to be WU birds at this point.

MP 9/2: Cost to cast and Forecast cost down by 1 each.



Last Week's Polls

Did you learn from this article?		
Yes.	6411	75.9%
No, I already understood this stuff.	1633	19.3%
No opinion.	236	2.8%
No, I still don't understand split card rules.	172	2.0%

Total 8452 100.0%

What is your favorite *Dissension* split card?

Research // Development	2323	25.9%
Crime // Punishment	1178	13.1%
Odds // Ends	1080	12.0%
Supply // Demand	951	10.6%
Rise // Fall	844	9.4%
Hide // Seek	839	9.3%
Hit // Run	667	7.4%
Pure // Simple	653	7.3%
Bound // Determined	239	2.7%
Trial // Error	205	2.3%
Total	8979	100.0%

As a follow up to the split card questions I posed last week...

- A **Thought Prison** with **Supply // Demand** imprinted on it will do two damage to a player any time he or she plays a spell that is white and/or blue and/or green and/or has CMC 2 and/or has CMC 3.
- The player that flips up **Serra Angel** gets the next **Timesifter** turn. The CMC of Serra (5) is greater than both those of **Order // Chaos** (4 and 3).
- A reader wanted to know how much damage **Hellhole Rats** would do to him if he discarded **Hit // Run** with **Urza's Armor** in play. The answer is seven, as the "3 and 5" damage is dealt as one unit from the Rats, not split into two sources or events.

This Week's Poll

How happy were you with the Azorius guild?

Overjoyed

Very happy

Pretty happy

Neutral

Mildly unhappy

Very unhappy

Outraged

*Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.*



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