

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

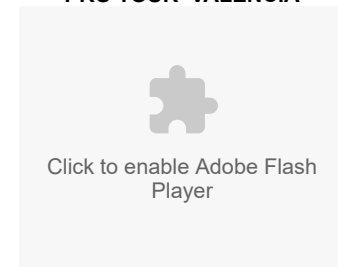


# I Heart Sky Swallower

Ben Bleiweiss  
Building on a Budget  
Monday, May 8, 2006



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA



Update on Rain Delay



Great Googley Moogley! There sure are a lot of swell rares that haven't seen a lot of love in *Guildpact!* Which one should Ben build a deck around?

Sky Swallower, and if you choose this one Ben will weep openly	4640	32.4%
Djinn Illuminatus, the big guy in the sky who will double your trouble	3850	26.9%
Earth Surge, the lord of making you animate your lands	3224	22.5%
Killer Instinct, and please print Street Fighter to go with Mortal Combat	2607	18.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14321</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

I've spent the last week running through all the tissues in tissueville. Seriously folks, if you wanted to fill canal Bleiweiss with my moist, salty tears, you could have just taken a crowbar to my kneecap instead.

Sky Swallower?

\*Cries\*

Well, a deal's a deal, and so here is my Sky Swallower deck.

## Sky Swallower

**Main Deck**  
232 cards

116 Island	4 Sky Swallower	4 Battle of Wits
100 Swamp	4 creatures	4 Brainspoil
216 lands		4 Diabolic Tutor
		12 other spells

My oh my, what a mighty fine Sky Swallower deck. You see, here's how it plays....

*Ben, that's cheating. You can't do that.*

Boab, is that you?

*No Ben, this is your conscience. The people voted, and they want an honest-to-goodness Sky Swallower deck. You can't fudge your win condition.*

\*Cries\*

All right, so there's this great new card in *Dissension*, *Simic Sky Swallower*. It's a 6/6 flying, untargetable trampler for only seven mana.....

AHEM.

\*Cries\*

All right, all right – here's my Sky Swallower deck. Please don't be too harsh.

## Sky Swallower 1.0

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

4 Dimir Aqueduct	3 Dimir House Guard	3 Brainspoil
9 Island	4 Sky Swallower	3 Eradicate
10 Swamp	3 Stinkweed Imp	3 Last Gasp
23 lands	3 Vedalken Dismissor	3 Mana Leak
	13 creatures	1 Night of Souls' Betrayal
		4 Time Ebb
		3 Voyager Staff
		4 Zur's Weirding

I was looking through all of the cards available in Standard (and don't worry, I'll be playing other formats eventually!), and I wanted to find as many cards as possible that didn't care if they changed owner. After a long search, I finally hit upon **Zur's Weirding**. I say a long search, because alphabetically speaking it's dead last, give or take Zybleiweiss's Intuition (coming in *Coldsnap!*).

You see, there are three huge problems with building a deck around **Sky Swallower**:

1. Once you cast **Sky Swallower**, you have virtually no way of protecting it from being killed/bounced/neutralized. The last thing I wanted to do was to cast **Sky Swallower**, only to have it hit by **Pillory of the Sleepless**.
2. Once you cast **Sky Swallower**, you've probably doubled your opponent's mana. This means they can pull off all sorts of nasty things such as, say, **Blaze** for 20.
3. Once you cast **Sky Swallower**, your opponent gets everything on your side of the board - so if you've got creatures you were beating down with, suddenly you're being beat down.

**Zur's Weirding** solved all two of these problems at once. With a **Weirding** on the board, I could see when it was safe to drop a **Swallower**, and make sure that it stayed safe. It didn't matter that my opponent gets the **Weirding** once the **Swallower** comes into play - it works equally well on either side of the board. An active **Weirding** also prevents my opponent for drawing any action spells for the rest of the game (or until I run out of life, but with a **Sky Swallower** on the board, I tend to win that race).

Once I decided that the deck would be built around **Sky Swallower/Zur's Weirding**, it was time to find support cards. **Zur's Weirding** works both ways, so your opponent can prevent you from drawing action spells. However, **Zur's Weirding** does not strictly stop you from getting new cards into your hand through alternate means - an important fact to keep in mind. There were three cards that went into the initial build above that abuse this. They are **Dimir House Guard**, **Brainspoil**, and **Stinkweed Imp**. **Brainspoil** allows me to tutor up a **Sky Swallower** under a **Weirding**, and **Stinkweed Imp** can dredge back to my hand in lieu of a **Weirding**-draw step. **Dimir House Guard** served two purposes - it would let me tutor up one of several spells, or it would serve as an outlet to sacrifice all of my creatures right before I cast a **Swallower** - which solves problem #3 above.

I also added **Time Ebb** and **Vedalken Dismissal** due to their interaction with **Zur's Weirding**. Both set my opponent back a draw, buying me time to get the pieces of my deck in place. With a **Weirding** on the table, both of those cards double as removal - **Time Ebbing** a **Loxodon Hierarch** with **Zur's** favorite enchantment in play is akin to paying  $\{2\}$  and two life to deny your opponent board position and their next draw.

The other two cards of note in the deck are **Eradicate** and **Voyager Staff**. The Staff was there so that I could remove my own creatures from the game before dropping **Sky Swallower**, allowing me to have more than one permanent post-**Swallower**. If I used Staff on **Vedalken Dismissal** and then played **Sky Swallower**, I could return a second creature to my opponent's top-of-deck, and have both the 8/8 flyer and the 2/2 wizard in play at once. **Eradicate** served both removal and a peek at my opponent's hand - I wanted to make sure that it was safe to drop a **Weirding** before going for the kill!

**Mana Leak** and **Last Gasp** are self-explanatory.

**Mana Leak**: *I leak the mana!*

**Last Gasp**: *Horrrrrk....I can't breathe. Where is Urza's Inhaler? Vitamins!*

Never mind - that's the last time I let them speak for themselves. I'll just say that the two of them serve as early-to-mid-game removal.

Coming into the **Sky Swallower** exercise, I expected only pain and suffering... on my part. After building the deck, I saw a lot of promise and a light of hope at the end of the tunnel. It was quite a tricky deck, and was quite a bargain at only eight tickets to build.

### Game #1: Full\_Collapse (R/G)

His opening plays include **Birds of Paradise**, followed by **Scion of the Wild** and **Sosuke, Son of Seshiro**. I play **Stinkweed Imp**, transmute **Dimir House Guard** into my one **Night of Souls' Betrayal**, and then **Last Gasp** his **Sosuke**. This kills both his **Birds** and his **Scion** (his **Birds** die, turning his **Scion** into a 1/1, which dies to my enchantment).

When **Full\_Collapse** spends two turns doing nothing threatening, I cast **Zur's Weirding**. This reveals his hand of triple **Rally the Horde**, **Doubling Season**, and **Wild Cantor**. It seems like my **Night** pretty much shut down his deck. I cast **Sky Swallower**, and the rest of the game is elementary.

Record: 1-0



That's about one more win than I expected to get with a **Sky Swallower** deck, coming into this exercise. In practice, I felt like I was in control the entire game, had a plan, and ran with it.

### Game #2: OriginalScreenName (**Biorhythm**)



The beginning game goes relatively uneventfully, with OriginalScreenName (or OSN) ramping up his mana with **Wood Elves**, and doing little else. I cast **Zur's Weirding**, and his hand is double **Biorhythm**, triple **Ornithopter**, **Repeal**, and **Time Ebb**.

I cast **Eradicate** on his **Wood Elves**, but he **Repeals** it. The second play of the **Wood Elves** bring OSN to seven mana, but that's all I'm going to let him get – if he gets to number eight, I'm going to die to **Biorhythm**. He **Time Ebbs** his Caryatid, hoping to draw more cards. This finally gives me the chance to win – I transmute the **Brainspoil** I'd been holding all game for a **Sky Swallower**, and go for the kill.

I then make a huge mistake – I let OSN draw **Reclaim**. I figured that whatever he put on top of his deck, I would just deny him the draw via **Weirding** since I had plenty of life left. The problem was that he could simply cast **Biorhythm** – and while that would leave him at a scant four life, it would leave me at one – even though he couldn't kill me that turn, I would not be able to deny any further **Weirding** draws. This was his plan – he cast his first **Biorhythm**, chumped my **Swallower** with an **Ornithopter**, and then **Reclaimed** **Time Ebb** for the second **Biorhythm**-assisted win.

*Record: 1-1*

I absolutely do not mean to take anything away from OriginalScreenName's win, but I should have won that game if I had played correctly. This definitely bolstered my confidence in the deck!

### Game#3: NoOz (R/G)

Neither of us has a play until the fourth turn. He casts **Anaconda**, and I **Eradicate** it. His hand? Another **Anaconda**, three lands, **Kodama's Reach**, and **Scab-Clan Mauler**. I have **Vedalken Dismissal**, **Mana Leak**, **Last Gasp**, **Time Ebb**, **Dimir House Guard**, and **Zur's Weirding**. This gives me three removal spells to his one creature, allowing me to safely drop **Weirding** the next turn. He drew **Streetbreaker Wurm** during the one turn gap between the **Eradicate** and the **Weirding**, but I use **Vedalken Dismissal** to put it out of play, and then attack with my two guys for the win, denying him every threat left that he'd otherwise draw.

*Record: 2-1*

### Game #4 Martialstudy (Spirits/Arcane)

I get down an early **Night of Souls' Betrayal**, which kills multiple X/1 Kamis. Unfortunately, I'm down to twelve due to taking a couple of hits. I cast **Zur's Weirding**, with **Sky Swallower** ready to go, and his hand ends up being five burn spells, including **Glacial Ray** with plenty of spice targets. Frown! I get burned to death long before I get to attack three times.

*Record: 2-2*

### Game #5 SkylerGray (Boros)

I kill a couple of his early creatures, transmute for **Zur's Weirding** after he has a turn with no plays, and lock down the board. I end up racing him with **Stinkweed Imp** and **Vedalken Dismissal**, and decline to cast the **Sky Swallower** in my hand, since I have no way of dealing with my own **Stinkweed Imp**, once it turn traitor.

*Record: 3-2*

By this time, there's a small crowd watching my matches, and everyone can see my hand once I cast **Zur's Weirding**. As each new person comes to watch my game, they exclaim "**Sky Swallower**?!?!". My reply?

"You people made me do this! You have nobody to blame but yourselves!"

It's time for some changes.

I had envisioned **Voyager Staff** as a way to keep my creatures in play once **Sky Swallower** hits, but so far it hasn't really done a whole lot. On the other hand, **Zur's Weirding** has been my absolute MVP – I've dropped it in all five games, and I should have won four of the five because of it. The four-drop transmute spell (**Dimir House Guard**) has been runner-up MVP, because it has gotten me both **Zur's Weirding** and my single **Night of Souls' Betrayal**.

I decide that I want to move to a silver-bullet strategy. For those unfamiliar with the term, it refers to a style of building a deck where you have a lot of cards that are present as singletons, but with ways to tutor them to meet a specific threat/game state. My silver-bullet point is at four mana, and I want to have the other four-drop transmute card in my deck. This means that four copies of **Clutch of the Undercity** come in, to complement the **Dimir House Guard**.

With eight ways to transmute my four-cost spells, I can drop a couple of the **Eradicates** and **Weirdings** from the deck. It might seem strange to drop two **Weirdings** when I just said it was the best card in my deck so far,

but A) drawing two Zur's Weirdings in a game is wasteful, and B) with eight ways to transmute for it, I'm running an effective ten Weirdings in this build, as opposed to eight in build 1.0.

I add in a few silver bullets, including a **Gravedigger** (which works well under **Zur's Weirding**, and gives me the potential play of transmute House Guard, get **Gravedigger**, bring back House Guard), a **Nekrataal** (as removal and a kill condition), a **Seize the Soul** (to act as great creature kill against Red, Green and Blue decks), a **Ninja of the Deep Hours** (which works well with **Dimir House Guard**, **Nekrataal**, **Gravedigger**, and **Vedalken Dismissal**), and a **Hideous Laughter** (as mass-removal).



Sky Swallower 2.0		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
4 Dimir Aqueduct	4 Dimir House Guard	1 Brainspoil
9 Island	1 Gravedigger	4 Clutch of the Undercity
10 Swamp	1 Nekrataal	1 Eradicate
23 lands	1 Ninja of the Deep Hours	1 Hideous Laughter
	4 Sky Swallower	3 Last Gasp
	3 Stinkweed Imp	3 Mana Leak
	3 Vedalken Dismissal	1 Night of Souls' Betrayal
	17 creatures	1 Seize the Soul
		3 Time Ebb
		2 Zur's Weirding
		20 other spells

**Out:** -3 Voyager Staff, -2 Zur's Weirding, -2 Brainspoil, -2 Eradicate, -1 Time Ebb

**In:** +4 Clutch of the Undercity, +1 Dimir House Guard, +1 Gravedigger, +1 Nekrataal, +1 Seize the Soul, +1 Ninja of the Deep Hours, +1 Hideous Laughter

#### Game #6: Remy\_Lebu (B/G/W)

I kill a couple of his early creatures, and then drop a turn 5 **Sky Swallower**, since I have no other action. He uses my mana to cast both **Gleancrawler** and **Bramble Elemental**, and I end up losing the damage race as he drops more creatures and overruns me, before I can build up enough mana to kill his guys.

**Record:** 3-3

#### Game #7: Anonymous (G/W)

I transmute **Dimir House Guard** for **Zur's Weirding**, and cast it the following turn with **Gravedigger**, **Sky Swallower**, and **Eradicate** in hand. His only card of note in hand was **Nightsoil Kami**, and after I **Eradicate** it, he drops his connection. The crowd watching the game votes that this should count as a win.

**Record:** 4-3

You'll notice that I've edited out my opponent's name from this round. I don't want to embarrass him (or her) in public, but I have to say something about dropping link intentionally during a match on **Magic Online**:

Don't do it.

It's really a low-class move, because it's just as easy to concede or give a GG (good game) to your opponent, so that both of you can move onto the next match. Dropping link intentionally when you're about to lose just says to people, "I'm not mature enough to handle losing, so I'm going to try to spite you since I couldn't win." The only purpose it serves is to try to "get back" at your opponent – but trust me, the person dropping link is the only one getting hurt. Word eventually gets around, and people will begin to refuse to play against a bad sport, just like in real life.

#### Game #8: One Piece (U/R)

One Piece plays double **Frenzied Goblin**, but gets stuck at a single Mountain. I cast a third turn **Time Ebb** on a Goblin to set him back significantly, and then cast **Night of Souls' Betrayal**. I follow it with a 1/1 **Ninja of the Deep Hours**, and proceed to draw quite a few cards. His only play is **Halcyon Glaze**, which I **Clutch of the Undercity** when he plays a 1/1 (now 0/0) creature to the board. Eventually I draw **Zur's Weirding**, **Last Gasp** his Glaze, drop **Dimir House Guard**, sacrifice my House Guard and Ninja, and drop **Sky Swallower** for the win.

**Record:** 5-3

### Game #9: Kreetch (B/W Control)

I end up conceding this match due to a technical problem in the game. I was in a losing position anyhow, but I made sure to enter a bug report about the details of the issue and hopefully it will be fixed sometime soon.

Record: 5-4

### Game #10: Brajr2002 (U/G Spirits)

Brajr2002 casts **Vinelasher Kudzu**, and I answer it with **Stinkweed Imp**. He then drops **Elder Pine of Jukai**, and I **Nekrataal** it. His next play consists of **Vinelasher Kudzu** and **Loam Dweller**, but I **Last Gasp** the Kudzu before it gets out of hand.

On his turn 6, he drops **Keiga, the Tide Star**. I transmute for and cast **Zur's Weirding**, and get hit down to fifteen. I cast **Vedalken Dismissal**, and pay two life the following turn to deny Keiga. I then begin recurring **Stinkweed Imps** (which lead to more **Stinkweed Imps**), holding down the ground with **Nekrataal** and beating in the air with an army of 1/2 flying imps.

Record: 6-4

I decide it's time for a couple of more changes. I never really need to transmute for **Sky Swallower**, so I drop another **Brainspoil** from the deck. **Seize the Soul** has been less than optimal (you'll notice a majority of my opponents play Black and/or White), so it also gets the cut. I haven't really needed to play **Mana Leak**, since most of my creatures and spells can get pretty much anything off of the board if I need it gone, and I'd prefer to spend turn 3 transmuting, rather than holding back two mana for a counterspell.

In return, I add in two more silver bullets (**Bottled Cloister**, to help me break a stalled game, and **Nightmare Void**, to help me strip an opponent's hand under **Zur's Weirding**), plus **Distress**. **Distress** serves two purposes – it's a proactive spell to cast early in the game, and it also lets me see my opponent's hand before I drop a **Weirding**.

Sky Swallower 3.0		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
4 <b>Dimir Aqueduct</b>	4 <b>Dimir House Guard</b>	1 <b>Bottled Cloister</b>
9 <b>Island</b>	1 <b>Gravedigger</b>	3 <b>Clutch of the Undercity</b>
10 <b>Swamp</b>	1 <b>Nekrataal</b>	3 <b>Distress</b>
23 lands	1 <b>Ninja of the Deep Hours</b>	1 <b>Eradicate</b>
	4 <b>Sky Swallower</b>	1 <b>Hideous Laughter</b>
	3 <b>Stinkweed Imp</b>	4 <b>Last Gasp</b>
	3 <b>Vedalken Dismissal</b>	1 <b>Nightmare Void</b>
	17 creatures	1 <b>Night of Souls' Betrayal</b>
		3 <b>Time Ebb</b>
		2 <b>Zur's Weirding</b>
		20 other spells

**Out:** 1 **Seize the Soul**, 3 **Mana Leak**, 1 **Brainspoil**, 1 **Clutch of the Undercity**

**In:** 1 **Last Gasp**, 1 **Nightmare Void**, 1 **Bottled Cloister**, 3 **Distress**

### Game #11: Moebiwian (R/W Boros)



I get stuck at two mana, but I've got three **Last Gasp** in my hand. I discard **Clutch of the Undercity** with **Swamp** and **Island** on the board, but then draw a second **Island** – leaving me with an untransmutable **Dimir House Guard** in my hand. Oops! This further goes to show that even the smallest of mistakes can come back to bite you later in the game.

Moebiwian drops a third-turn **Glorious Anthem**, and follows it with a fourth-turn **Skyknight Legionnaire**. I **Gasp** the Legionnaire, draw a fourth mana, and pass the turn. He drops **Serra Angel**, which I **Eradicate**. His hand? **Cage of Hands**, **Reciprocate**, double **Boros Fury-Shield**, and double **Faith's Fetters**.

It looks like it's time for super-**Nightmare Void**! I use the sorcery to strip his hand out card by card, while using the **Weirding** to deny him any creatures. Since I'm at 20, the plan is that he will draw at least six lands before spells, and I'll be able to use the **Void** over and over again to take his removal out of his hand, eventually allowing me to drop **Dimir House Guard** for the win.

Unfortunately, the bug hits again when I dredge up a **Stinkweed Imp**, but Moebiwian sees that, even though the game is not yet over, I have an inevitable win on the board. He concedes the game graciously.

Record: 7-4

If you had told me that I'd be 7-4 with a budget build of a **Sky Swallower** deck, I'd have told you that you were crazy – but here I was, with a winning record. Not only that, but this deck was a lot of fun to play – I had a lot of

options every game thanks to transmute, and I could only imagine the look on my opponent's faces each time I dropped **Sky Swallower** with Zur's Weirding on the board! The real MVP of this deck was definitely the Weirding – I'm going to have to revisit this card again in the future once the kinks are worked out of the system, but for now I'll say – **Sky Swallower** for the win!

**Did you say Battle of Wits? Can there be a budget Battle of Wits deck?**

- Not only can there be, but I demand it!
- I don't think you can build a budget 250-card deck, but I'd like to see it if it exists.
- There's no way a 250-card deck can be budget....so don't even bother trying.
- I hate **Battle of Wits** and will pay Ben not to build a **Battle of Wits** deck.

*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by [StarCityGames.com](#), where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Ben Bleiweiss](#) archive

---

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

---

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

