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# Azorius Ascendant: Thank you Sir, May I Draw Another? (Part 2 of 3)

Ben Bleiweiss  
Building on a Budget  
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Welcome back to the Azorius Ascendant theme deck evolution! As you may have noticed, this series has been expanded to a third week. Originally I had slated the evolution to take only two weeks, but this U/W deck has taken a lot of love to get going, and there's still a lot of room for improvement.

There were many good questions and comments made on [the forums of my last article](#), and I'd like to address them. Answering these questions will help explain my thought process regarding many of the changes I did (or didn't, or will eventually) make to the deck.

We started here:

### Azorius Ascendant

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

9 Island 12 Plains 2 Azorius Chancery 1 Prahv, Spires of Order <hr/> 24 lands	2 Benevolent Ancestor 3 Tidewater Minion 1 Zephyr Spirit 2 Azorius First-Wing 1 Azorius Guildmage 3 Beacon Hawk 1 Isperia the Inscrutable 2 Minister of Impediments 2 Mistral Charger 1 Paladin of Prahv 2 Sky Hussar 3 Soulsworn Jury 2 Stoic Ephemera 1 Wakestone Gargoyle <hr/> 26 creatures	1 Faith's Fetters 1 Halcyon Glaze 1 Sinstriker's Will 1 To Arms! 2 Ocular Halo 1 Palliation Accord 2 Plumes of Peace 1 Steeling Stance <hr/> 10 other spells
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And ended up here:

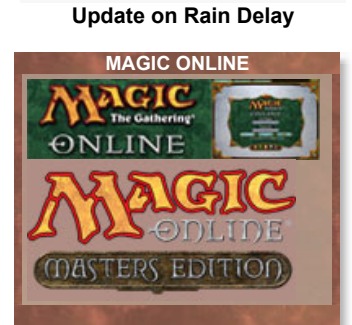
### U/W Precon 4.0

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

9 Island 10 Plains 4 Azorius Chancery 1 Prahv, Spires of Order <hr/> 24 lands	3 Ghost-Lit Redeemer 1 Myojin of Cleansing Fire 3 Tidewater Minion 1 Azorius Guildmage 4 Azorius Herald 3 Beacon Hawk 4 Court Hussar 1 Isperia the Inscrutable 3 Sky Hussar 1 Tidespout Tyrant <hr/> 24 creatures	4 Faith's Fetters 4 Hinder 4 Icy Manipulator <hr/> 12 other spells
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Holland said: "I'd like to see a budget deck with less creatures than spells, seeing that it's supposed to be control and all."

Last week, I gave the three basics of control decks: Card Advantage, Board Control, and The Big Finisher. As long as you're following those premises, you've got a control deck. Traditionally, many versions of control have run creature-light, as board sweepers such as *Wrath of God*, *Rout*, or *Final Judgment* can provide card



advantage. Not all control decks need to be light on creatures though, especially if those creatures provide card advantage, board control, or are the big finisher.

Sestze said: "I 100% agree that *Ghost-Lit Redeemer* is a terrible, terrible card to be playing. At worst, it's a *Sacred Nectar* at instant speed. Everyone knows that's terrible, right? At best, it's a 1/1 for W that does not net you card advantage or give you options. It's terrible, and too slow against aggro decks."

I'd like to point out the dangers of being dismissive towards a card without due reason. Sestze calls *Ghost-Lit Redeemer* terrible three times in five sentences, and then gives minimal reasons about why it is bad: too slow against aggro decks (my testing proved otherwise), at worst a *Sacred Nectar* (which is, in his own words, at worst). I often found it to be quite perfunctory) and that it does not net you card advantage or give you options (half-true – adding six to twelve life per game gives you more turns, which gives you more options).



I don't mean to single out Sestze here, but part of deckbuilding is keeping your mind open to all sorts of different options. You should never be immediately dismissive of any idea, especially if you haven't tested that idea yourself. Don't always believe the hype about cards – cards that were considered bad have often been turned into constructed powerhouses once they find the right home. *Food Chain*, *Ichorid*, *Donate*, and *Dream Halls* were all cards that were considered trash rares once upon a time. Nowadays, they are all staples of various formats, and are worth a premium.

**Magic** is ever-growing, and there are new cards being added to the overall card pool of the game with each expansion. New cards put new perspectives on old cards, and therefore it is at the very least unwise to dismiss anything out of hand, given the ever-changing nature of the game. Sure, I wouldn't linger too long on trying to find a use for *Zephyr Spirit*, but I often had situations with *Ghost-Lit Redeemer* out where I was gaining six life a turn off of him, while keeping an entire ground force at bay (*Ghost-Lit Redeemer*, *Tidewater Minion* and *Beacon Hawk*).

If there's one lesson I want you to take away from this column, it's that you should always be willing to try new ideas out while building a deck, because there's always room for innovation and improvement in any **Magic** deck.

Mellowmight said: "Darn. I voted for U/W control because I wanted a straight forward control deck. 4 *Mana Leak*, 4 *Remand*, maybe 4 *Overrule*, a couple of *Hour of Reckoning*, the works. I wanted a straight forward budget deck. Why can't it just be a normal deck? I mean, I wanted U/W control, not a combo deck that controlled the board through untapping effects."

Multiple people posted or e-mail me this sort of sentiment, that they wanted a more "traditional" U/W control deck. Then they'd go on to list half the deck in their posts. Guys, you've already built that deck yourselves! Me, I prefer to head into uncharted waters, see if they lead to new lands, and make my way back to shore if there's nothing to be found elsewhere.

Staple said: "Did anyone else find it a little odd that Ben basically said, 'This deck seems to be working. Now I'll add some stuff that costs 8 mana!' Until that update, I really liked where he was going with this."

Saying that a deck seems to be working is different than saying a deck is good. By the end of the last article, I had a 5-3 record – a winning record, sure, but not one that will turn heads. The U/W control deck was coming together, but still needed improvements to get going.

Ok, so playtesting time. At the end of last week's column, I took out many of my defender creatures, and added in three *Ghost-Lit Redeemers*, a *Tidespout Tyrant*, a *Sky Hussar*, and a *Myojin of Cleansing Fire*. How did these changes play out? Let's see!

#### Game 1: Rosequist: (Hondens)

Rosequist gets down a *Honden of Infinite Rage*, and follows it with a *Honden of Cleansing Fire* and a *Honden of Seeing Winds*. This allows him to draw four cards a turn, gain six life, and do three damage to any creature/player he chooses. Yikes! I lose this game, right?

No sir!

I drop *Isperia*, and get in a hit. I name *Honden of Infinite Rage* (Rosequist is holding multiple cards, so I figure at least one of them is a *Honden* that is already on the board), and lo and behold, there is that particular *Honden* in his hand! This allows me to tutor for *Tidespout Tyrant*. I drop *Tidewater Minion* the following turn, and use it to power out *Tidespout Tyrant* on turn 7.

From there, I cast two spells a turn, bouncing his Blue and Red Hondens. I am able to find multiple spells a turn, thanks to *Isperia* tutoring a creature a turn. I have to do enough damage to kill Rosequist twice over thanks to his White *Honden*, but I have control of the board, and eventually get enough damage through to win.



***This allows him to draw four cards a turn, gain six life, and do three damage to any***

Well, that's one change that worked out for the deck already. I wanted **Tidespout Tyrant** in the deck as The Big Finisher that Isperia could tutor for, and they worked like a charm. I also want to explain my gameplay choice that game. I had several opportunities to bounce all three of his Hondens, or to bounce different Hondens. I decided to leave him the White Honden, because I was hitting him for seven to twelve damage a turn, and so his ability to gain two life a turn was negligible. I didn't want to run out of spells to cast to bounce his Red (killing my creatures) or Blue (drawing more cards for more options) Hondens.

**creature/player he chooses. Yikes! I lose this game, right?**

### Game 2: Adilsinho (G/U Sway of the Stars)

I have complete control of the game, and Adilsinho does nothing except play lands and mana accelerators all game. Then, at eleven mana, he casts **Sway of the Stars**. I haven't drawn a **Hinder**, and get Swayed into a hand with no lands. I end up losing, even though **Beacon Hawks** and **Ghost-Lit Redeemer** had gotten me to 54 life before the Sway. I completely misread this deck as a **Natural Affinity** deck, and so I had been gaining life instead of swinging with the Redeemer. If I had gotten in the Redeemer damage, I might have won.

1-1

### Game 3: AForgottenTome (Battle of Wits)

I draw six Plains this game, no Blue sources, and die on turn 8 to **Battle of Wits** with two **Hinders** in my hand.

1-2

AForgottenTome had props for my **Battle of Wits** build from [a couple of weeks back](#), so that was cool. It was frustrating to lose to mana issues, and I had been having minor problems drawing double Blue in previous games. It was time for some minor changes.

First of all, I wanted to get another Island in the deck. I didn't necessarily want to change the number of lands in the deck (I was having color problems, not mana-shortage problems). Easy enough - taking out Prahv for Island seemed like a fine choice. Prahv costs seven to activate (six plus Prahv itself), making it prohibitively expensive for a deck that wants to at least bluff keeping mana open for countermagic.

I was also having great success with **Isperia the Inscrutable**. Isperia serves multiple purposes in the deck. First off, Isperia is a 3/6 flyer. Not many creatures can get past a 3/6 blocking creature, nor can many removal spells deal with a six-toughness creature, least of all Red's removal. Second, Isperia can tutor out other creatures. Given that several key creatures in my deck are flyers (especially **Sky Hussar**, which draws cards), this is important. Third, Isperia allows me to see my opponent's hand. This gives me an idea of their game plan, which is essential knowledge for a control strategy - if I know what they are going to do, I can start planning my moves turns ahead. Last, Isperia beats for three in the air. This means Isperia can play both offense and defense when called for.

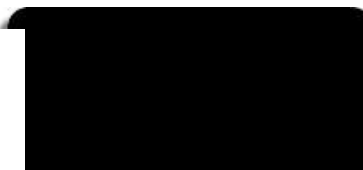
I wanted to try out **Archivist** in the deck, given the multiple untap effects still present in the deck. I took out **Azorius Guildmage** from the deck (which hadn't really served much of a purpose except as an early blocker or an overcosted **Icy Manipulator**), an **Icy Manipulator** (three seemed fine for now), and an **Azorius Herald** (as a choice between Herald and Hussar, I'd rather draw a card than gain four life, especially with multiple Redeemers and **Faith's Fetters** in the deck).

**Out:** Prahv, **Azorius Guildmage**, **Icy Manipulator**, **Azorius Herald**  
**In:** Island, **Archivist**, 2 **Isperia the Inscrutable**

U/W Precon 5.0		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
10 Island	1 Archivist	4 Faith's Fetters
10 Plains	3 Ghost-Lit Redeemer	4 Hinder
4 Azorius Chancery	1 Myojin of Cleansing Fire	3 Icy Manipulator
24 lands	3 Tidewater Minion	11 other spells
	3 Azorius Herald	
	3 Beacon Hawk	
	4 Court Hussar	
	3 Isperia the Inscrutable	
	3 Sky Hussar	
	1 Tidespout Tyrant	
	25 creatures	

### Game 4: Clockwork Orange (Wildfire/Vore)

Clockwork Orange (one of my favorite movies of all time, even if Mr. Kubrick did change the ending from the original book) counters a couple of my early creatures, and kills my **Azorius Chancery** with a **Stone Rain**. I cast two **Beacon Hawks**, and then proceed to use them to draw four extra cards with **Sky Hussar**. Eventually, I get down a pair of **Court Hussars**, begin drawing three cards a turn off of my normal draw plus a pair of **Sky**



Hussars, and get Iserpia to hit the board. I set up my hand with multiple Hinders – I've seen over twenty extra cards this game thanks to the Court Hussars, and Sky Hussar-drawn cards – and start swinging in with my creatures for the win.

2-2

This demonstrates why I'd rather draw cards with Sky Hussar than get in two damage, when faced with a neutral (read: no creatures threatening me on the board) position. Sure, I could get in two damage now, but my goal is to put my opponent in a position where they simply can't win the game, no matter what they do. Even if I got my opponent to six life with the Hawks and Hussars, what happens when they cast Wildfire, with mana left to counterspell my counterspell? I lose, because I haven't set myself up for a long-term plan.

Someone in the forums commented that it felt like this U/W deck was always trying to race against the opponent, especially with Azorius Herald. They also wondered if they were playing the deck wrong. Possibly. There are draws with this deck where you'll get set up for early beats, and use your Hinders and Faith's Fetters to get your attackers through/prevent a defense from mounting. However, you aren't the beatdown deck. Forsake that early damage if it means preventing damage/drawing cards. You might have a 50/50 chance of winning a damage race against aggressive/tempo-based decks. In the same games, you will have a much higher percent chance of winning if you refuse to try to race, and make the game go at your own, slowed-down pace.

### Game 5: Kavile (B/G Dredge)

Kavile gets down Gristleback and Golgari Guildmage, but I control the board with Icy Manipulator and two Court Hussar. I tap down his bloodthirsty pig, and tap down my own Court Hussars to play nice with cousin Sky. Kavile plays Stinkweed Imp, but I trump his board with Iserpia. Iserpia plus Icy Manipulator allows me to push through for Tidespout Tyrant, but I am able to win without dropping my big flyer just by swinging with Sky Hussar (hard-cast) and Iserpia.

3-2

Here's another lesson – don't feel obligated to cast spells just because you can. Between Sky Hussar, Iserpia, Court Hussar, and Azorius Chancery, I've had several games where I've ended the turn with over eight cards in hand. Rather than cast a spell I don't need to cast (or tap myself down on mana so I can't cast Hinder), I just discard the least important card in my hand.

If I'm not being threatened by a creature on the board, why cast Faith's Fetters on it? There might be a creature the next turn I need to Fetters. Likewise, in that last game, why cast Tidespout Tyrant if I already have a win condition on the board? I'd rather sit behind untapped Blue mana and have a back-up plan in case all my creatures die (Hex/Plague Wind anyone?) than overextend and lose.

### Game 6: Tuginowa (G/R Beats)

I cast Ghost-Lit Redeemer and Court Hussar, and start drawing cards off of Sky Hussar. Tuginowa drops some mid-range Green and Red creatures, but I stop them all with Tidewater Minion. Stuck at five mana, Tuginowa clears off all the non-defender creatures with Savage Twister, in part to prevent me from gaining four life a turn against his aggro deck, or to stop me from drawing extra cards a turn off of Sky Hussar.

This gives me time to drop Iserpia, which is too big to turn out. Iserpia and Tidewater Minion start going on the offense, and I draw a Hinder to seal it.

4-2

### Game 7: T. Mingda (U/G/W)

I put up a good fight, but this is a version of a Top 8 Regionals deck, which is highly competitive in competitive circles – Meloku, Jitte, Loxodon Hierarch, Kodama of the North Tree, several dual lands, countermagic, etc. The game goes on for quite a while, and I gain over thirty life with Ghost-Lit Redeemers and Tidewater Minions. In the end though, I run out of Hinders for his good spells, and I get run over by Jitte and Meloku.

4-3

Back to Sestze's comment in the beginning of the article about Ghost-Lit Redeemer; I found the Redeemer to be satisfactory for gaining life, but overall not a good fit for this deck. Remember, my goal is to try to take control of the game, and I said above that Sestze was half-right: it does not net me card advantage. It also does not give me board control, and it certainly is not the big finisher. I had two games where I gained obscene amounts of life from a single Redeemer, but still lost (the Sway of the Stars game, and the U/W/G game) because I did not have control over the game.

In addition, I was becoming more disillusioned with the untap part of my deck. There aren't a whole lot of good U/W creatures that have tap effects, and Archivist had just sat in my hand against the U/G/W deck (thanks to Jitte) and the G/R deck (due to multiple Seals of Fire). I already can draw cards with this deck – a 1/1 creature (fragile) that relies on other cards (Beacon Hawk, Tidewater Minion) to be passable does not work.

So what to put in? Well, if you look at this week's article and last week's article, here's what I lost to:



- 1) Meloku/Umezawa's Jitte
- 2) Battle of Wits
- 3) Sway of the Stars
- 4) Golgari Rotwurm/Moldervine Cloaked 5/5 creatures.
- 5) Milling
- 6) Ninjas

Four of these six games had been decided by permanents, and a heavier mana-denial strategy couldn't have hurt in the two that were not decided primarily by permanents. Part of the traditional Blue strategy is taking what your opponent has and using it against them – so why not try that out?

To this effect, I added four **Confiscate** to the deck. **Confiscate** allows me to turn my opponent's best permanent into my best permanent, acts as land destruction (especially important with the amount of bounce-lands being played right now, such as **Azorius Chancery** – there's nothing better than accelerating two mana while setting your opponent back two mana!), and takes away a tool from my opponent.

**Out:** -1 Archivist, -3 Ghost-Lit Redeemer  
**In:** +4 **Confiscate**

U/W Precon 6.0		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
10 <b>Island</b>	1 <b>Myojin of Cleansing Fire</b>	4 <b>Confiscate</b>
10 <b>Plains</b>	3 <b>Tidewater Minion</b>	4 <b>Faith's Fetters</b>
4 <b>Azorius Chancery</b>	3 <b>Azorius Herald</b>	4 <b>Hinder</b>
24 lands	3 <b>Beacon Hawk</b>	3 <b>Icy Manipulator</b>
	4 <b>Court Hussar</b>	15 other spells
	3 <b>Isperia the Inscrutable</b>	
	3 <b>Sky Hussar</b>	
	1 <b>Tidespout Tyrant</b>	
	21 creatures	

### Game 8: Zevinar1 (U/G Snakes)

Zevinar1 gets **Birds of Paradise**, and then **Shisato, Whispering Hunter**. I cast **Court Hussar**, and then **Hinder Orochi Eggwatcher** (I don't want Zevinar1 to make infinite snakes to feed to Shisato). He casts **Seshiro the Anointed**, and I chump block his now 4/4 Shisato with my Hussar. I've bought enough time, however, to get to six mana, allowing me to **Confiscate** his Seshiro. This causes Shisato to die – no Snakes left on his Plane (cue the laugh track. Thanks! I'm here all week!), and start swinging for three and a card. He drops blockers, I drop blockers, and eventually I get to eight mana to drop **Myojin of Cleansing Fire**.

At the end of his turn, I kill all the creatures on the board by removing a divinity counter, and then I **Confiscate** his lone source of Blue mana. **Sky Hussar** joins the party, and my eight damage a turn ends the game quickly.

5-3

I'm glad that **Confiscate** worked out so well in the first game it saw play. Let's hope that keeps up!

### Game 9: Rezurrectionman (R/W Aggro)

He gets **Thundersong Trumpeter** and **Boros Swiftblade**, and I drop **Court Hussar** to try to stop his offense. It dies to **Lightning Helix**, but not before accelerating me into **Faith's Fetters** (three cards down in my deck). I Fetters the Trumpeter, and then drop **Sky Hussar**. The **Sky Hussar** dies to **Lightning Helix**, but Rezurrectionman hasn't dropped anything past the Swiftblade. My hand is triple **Hinder**, so I decide to just sit back and stop anything else from hitting the board, while I wait to draw a creature.

I don't have to wait long, as I get **Myojin of Cleansing Fire** a turn later, and stick it on the board. His deck does not cough up a way to deal with a 4/6 indestructible creature, and an **Icy Manipulator** later, I have the game locked down for good (with three **Hinders** still in hand).

6-3

A brief word about **Hinder**. It is the only counterspell in my deck, but so far I've found that it's enough. If you **Hinder** one spell during a game, suddenly your opponent starts playing differently. They start holding spells in fear of having something countered, which in-and-of itself buys you time to establish board control. Also, having only four counterspells in a deck *will* teach you how to ration countermagic. If you're running sixteen counterspells in a deck, there's the impulse to throw them around willy-nilly, countering everything in sight – but some spells aren't that important to counter. If you only have four **Hinders** and need to make them count, you don't cast them on just anything. Why counter **Boros Swiftblade** when half your creatures can block him, and the other half of your spells can neutralize him?



In short, I've held **Hinder** for one of two occasions: when a spell will absolutely decimate me (read: I wish I had a **Hinder** that **Sway of the Stars** game) or when I am about to win the game, and **Hinder** will keep the opponent from stopping me from winning that particular turn (read: I have eight flying damage on the board, my opponent is at eight life, and they try to Dark Banish my **Sky Hussar**).

#### Game 10: Flipsix (U/R Izzet)

I get stuck with only White mana, and drop down a couple of **Beacon Hawks**. He casts double **Izzet Guildmage**, but has only shown me Red mana. He kills my Hawks with direct damage, but I neutralize one of his Guildmages with **Faith's Fetters**. Finally, I draw an Island, drop **Court Hussar** (it dies to **Shock** after blocking), and then Iperia.

Flipsix attacks into Iperia with his **Izzet Guildmage**, and I immediately smell a trap. With a board of 3 Mountain and a Sunhome, why would he suicide his guy into my flyer unless he could follow it up with a kill spell (or two kill spells) afterwards? I'd rather take two damage and know exactly what's in his hand than gain one card advantage and lose my 3/6 flyer. I take the hit, and then swing with Iperia. Given that he is playing an **Izzet Guildmage** deck and has already shown me **Shock**, I guess **Volcanic Hammer** for Iperia's trigger. I guess correctly, and also see that Flipsix is lacking Blue mana – his hand is Hammer, double **Repeal** and **Electrolyze**.

The next turn, I Fetters his second Guildmage, and drop **Beacon Hawk**. He draws an Island, and kills my Hawk with **Electrolyze**. I **Confiscate** his Island (hurray again for **Confiscate**), tutor up **Tidespout Tyrant**, and pummel him with a 5/5 flyer.

7-3

So far, the changes I've made this week have been good. **Confiscate** has won or helped win two of the three games I've played, and Iperia has acted as a great blocker and Big Finisher. **Ghost-Lit Redeemer** didn't work out as well as I would have hoped, but the deck has posted a much better record than the last revision, and I've felt a lot more in control of games from start to finish. Tune in next week as I finish tinkering with Azorius Ascendant Theme Deck with a control bent in mind... and prepare to have the natural enemy of pirates added to the mix!

*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.*



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