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# Azorius Ascendant: One Piece At A Time (Part 3 of 3)

Ben Bleiweiss  
Building on a Budget  
Monday, July 24, 2006



Welcome back to my little corner on MTG.com I call Building on a Budget. Actually, this column is way larger than a corner, and I didn't get to name it. In fact, my vote goes out to renaming this column "Savin' Monies for the Honeys" and having it be the only link on the front page every Monday.

If wishes were fishes, my breath would smell like Merfolk sushi.

This is the last installment of the U/W Azorius Ascendant theme deck evolution, with an eye on the control tip. You can find the previous installments by [clicking on my archives here](#). To sum up, we started with an unfocused theme deck, you voted that I should turn it into a control deck, and I've changed the deck over the past couple of weeks. Now, it focuses on board control, card advantage, and the big finisher.

We left off last week with this deck:

**U/W Precon 6.0** dec

**Main Deck**  
60 cards

10 Island	1 Myojin of Cleansing Fire	4 Confiscate
10 Plains	3 Tidewater Minion	4 Faith's Fetters
4 Azorius Chancery	3 Azorius Herald	4 Hinder
24 lands	3 Beacon Hawk	3 Icy Manipulator
	4 Court Hussar	15 other spells
	3 Isperia the Inscrutable	
	3 Sky Hussar	
	1 Tidespout Tyrant	
	21 creatures	

I piloted the first control version of the Azorius Ascendant deck to a 5-3 record two weeks ago, and improved that record to 7-3 last week. While a 12-6 record is fine, there was still room for improvement. Let's cross-examine the current build with [my five rules of deckbuilding](#).

### Rule #1: Fix your mana base

The mana base for this deck is fine, with ten Islands, ten Plains, and four Azorius Chancery. I rarely have color problems, or issues with drawing enough lands to cast my spells. This is aided by the amount of card drawing in the deck (Court Hussar, Isperia the Inscrutable, Sky Hussar) – seeing more cards per game means having more lands means never missing a land drop means I love you!

### Rule #2: Keep close to 60 cards

Done and done!

### Rule #3: Focus on your goals, but don't be a slave to your theme

The goal of this deck is to gain card advantage and board control, and then to win with the Big Finisher. Myojin of Cleansing Fire, Isperia the Inscrutable, Sky Hussar, and Azorius Herald help with card advantage. Beacon Hawk, Confiscate, Faith's Fetters, Icy Manipulator, Hinder, Myojin of Cleansing Fire, Isperia the Inscrutable, Tidespout Tyrant and Tidewater Minion help with board control. Isperia, Myojin, Sky Hussar and Tidespout Tyrant are the big finishers.

Last week, I tried to fit in cards which worked with the untap abilities of Beacon Hawk and Tidewater Minion. These included Ghost-Lit Redeemer and Archivist. Neither card worked out, and they were removed. They are a great example of not focusing my goals – instead of working on the big three (card advantage/board control/the big finisher), I tried to shoehorn in subthemes that detracted from the overall power of the deck.

You might also notice that the deck is a lot heavier on board control than on card advantage. That's a situation that needs some addressing. More on this in a couple of paragraphs!

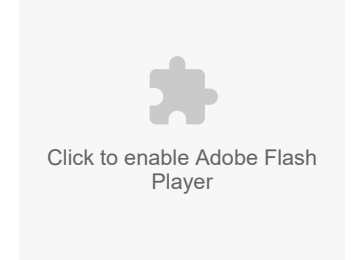
### Rule #4: Have a curve!

This is where the deck falls a little flat, but not as much as it appears. The deck has fourteen spells which cost three or less, and twenty-two spells which cost four or more. That is definitely top-heavy, and not necessarily healthy. Is it all doom and gloom though? Will our hero be able to cast a spell before being run over by the unwashed hordes? Will Timmy fall in a well?

No, yes, and who is Timmy? in that order.



### PRO TOUR-VALENCIA



### Update on Rain Delay



Sky Hussar costs zero most of the time, as I often want to not cast it, but just use it to tap two creatures and draw a card. Ispertia helps tutor out high-cost cards (Sky Hussar, Tidespout Tyrant) so that I get them once I need them. I also have seven cards which help me play catch-up on life totals (Faith's Fetters and Azorius Herald), so I can recover from early beatings.

The high mana-curve is a little troublesome, but I'll address that situation in a paragraph or so. Ah, the foreshadowing! And you thought it was only for groundhogs in February...

#### Rule #5: Enchant creature cards are not your friends

This deck has eight enchant creature cards. All of them go on your opponent's permanents, which makes them fine additions to the deck, instead of life-leeching, drawback-inducing, card-disadvantage-making pieces of cardboard death.

After reviewing my five rules of deckbuilding, I see that I could use a couple of fixes. I want to get the mana curve of the deck down a little, and I want to add a couple more ways to get card advantage at the expense of a smidgeon of board control. Youze guyz (as we liked to say in my native New York) have been clamoring for a certain addition to the deck for weeks now, so here it goes:

**Out:** 3 Tidewater Minion  
**In:** 3 Ninja of the Deep Hours



U/W Precon 7.0		Main Deck 60 cards	
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24 lands	3 Beacon Hawk	3 Icy Manipulator	
	4 Court Hussar	15 other spells	
	3 Ispertia the Inscrutable		
	3 Sky Hussar		
	1 Tidespout Tyrant		
	21 creatures		

The choice for this slot came down to **Ninja of the Deep Hours** and **Thieving Magpie**. The focus of this change was to add another way to draw cards, and both of these are fine, time-tested creatures that fit the description of "card-drawing machine!" Why choose the Ninja over the Magpie? Let's compare:



1. **Ninja of the Deep Hours** will often cost two mana to get into play, thanks to Ninjitsu. **Thieving Magpie** always costs four.
2. **Thieving Magpie** has a higher toughness, meaning it will make a better blocker on defense. No, I don't want to hold back a Magpie to block – but on the turn it hits play, it will be able to block a one or two power creature without dying. **Ninja of the Deep Hours** can only block guys with one power on the nose without dying. I'm not counting zero power creatures here, just for the record.
3. **Thieving Magpie** flies, and therefore will hit more often, and can be tutored for with Ispertia.
4. **Ninja of the Deep Hours** works marvelously well in conjunction with comes-into-play creatures. If I drop the ninja in on the back of **Azorius Herald**, I'll gain an additional four life when I replay the Herald. If I drop the Ninja in with **Court Hussar** (which can poke in for a damage surprisingly often), I'll get to look at another three cards. The math:

**Azorius Herald + Ninja of the Deep Hours** = +8 life, +1 card, 2/2 creature, 2/1 unblockable creature

**Court Hussar + Ninja of the Deep Hours** = +3 cards, 2/2 creature, 1/3 creature.

In the end, #4 above tipped the scales in favor of **Ninja of the Deep Hours**. Let's see how these changes played out!

#### Game 1: Frontman (Mono-Red Burn)

He hits me with a pair of quick **Lava Spikes**. I hard-cast a turn 4 **Ninja of the Deep Hours**, but it dies to **Yamabushi's Flame**. I then play **Isperia**, the sphinx of "Oh no you're not going to burn my big butt!" **Isperia** gets in there for a couple of hits, allowing me to start tutoring for flyers. I get a pair of **Beacon Hawks**, and continue coming in with my flyers.

After a couple of turns of this, **Frontman** draws **Flames of the Blood Hand**. Among the cards in my hand I have **Hinder** and **Azorius Herald**, and I decide it's time to put the game away. **Frontman** is getting low in life, and it's my first main phase. I cast **Azorius Herald**, expecting him to cast **Flames of the Blood Hand** in response, which he does. I then **Hinder** **Flames of the Blood Hand** to the top of his deck, assuring he won't draw any burn that can kill my creatures within the next turn. I ride that play to victory.

1-0

### Game 2: Rahjzo (B/G Dredge)

He gets down **Golgari Guildmage** and then **Greater Mossdog**. I've only drawn **Plains** at this point, but have a **Faith's Fetters** in hand, which I use to neutralize his **Guildmage**. I then drop **Beacon Hawk** to stall his **Mossdog**, and follow it with **Icy Manipulator**. He drops **Golgari Rotworm**, but has to tap out on Black mana to do so. I take the opportunity to **Fetters** the 5/4 beater.

On the eighth turn, I finally catch sight of the **Islands**. I immediately play **Court Hussar**, which powers me into a second **Island**. The **Hussar** comes in, but never hits – instead, it is replaced by **Ninja of the Deep Hours**. I recast the **Hussar**, and ride the **Hussar**, **Beacon Hawk** and **Ninja of the Deep Hours** to an **Icy Manipulator** and **Hinder**-aided victory.

2-0

### Game 3: Rahjzo (B/G Dredge)

In our second game, **Rahjzo** casts **Infectious Host**, and follows it with **Woodwraith Corrupter**. I cast **Azorius Herald**, **Icy Manipulator**, and **Sky Hussar** in sequence. My air force comes in, but is answered by **Drooling Grootdion**. He uses the **Grootdion** to kill my **Herald**, and attempts to **Last Gasp** my **Sky Hussar**. I have **Hinder** to stop that, and finish him in the air with my 4/3 guy.

3-0

### Game 4: Weynu (W/R Haste)

**Weynu** hits me with double **Ronin Houndmaster**, **Skyknight Legionnaire**, and **Sunhome**. I get stalled at three mana, and draw a fourth too late to catch up with **Faith's Fetters** and **Isperia**. I get burned out quickly.

3-1

### Game 5: Jakel Magic (B/R/W combo)

I cast **Icy Manipulator**, and follow it with **Isperia the Inscrutable**. He casts **Loxodon Gatekeeper**, and then **Horobi**, with my **Icy** on the board. He cast **Vigilance** on **Isperia** to kill it, thanks to **Horobi**.

I kill his **Gatekeeper** with my **Icy**, and drop a **Beacon Hawk**. He casts another **Gatekeeper**, but I kill **Horobi** to keep from getting too low on life from the 4/4 flyer. He drops **Wakestone Gargoyle**, but I **Fetter** it and drop **Court Hussar**. **Jakel Magic** then concedes, as he has one card in hand to my six, and I already have superior board position (**Icy Manipulator**, **Beacon Hawk** and **Court Hussar** to his **Loxodon Gatekeeper**).

4-1

### Game 6: ShaybShay (Mono-G beatdown)

**ShaybShay** casts two **Orochi Leafcallers** and a **Nullmage Shepherd**. I get stuck at two mana, discard from having eight cards in hand, and then play a **Azorius Chancery**. He **Creeping Molds** it! I drop a second **Chancery**, and he gets **Scion of the Wild** down.

I cast **Faith's Fetters** on his **Shepherd** (if I put it on the **Scion**, he would have just destroyed the **Fetters** with the **Shepherd**), and then cast **Court Hussar**, getting **Azorius Herald**. He hits me to nine, I cast the **Herald** to go to thirteen. He hits me to nine, I attack with the **Herald**, **Ninja of the Deep Hours** it, and recast the **Herald** to go back to thirteen.

He hits me down to nine for a third turn in a row, and then casts **Moss Kami**. I **Confiscate** the large, trampling spirit, and follow that a turn later with **Icy Manipulator**. With the tide turned, I ride my **Ninja of the Deep Hours**, **Moss Kami**, and **Azorius Herald** to another win.

5-1

### Game 7: Andrews1234 (Stampeding Serow)

**Andrews1234** challenges me to a game against his **Stampeding Serow** deck, and who am I to refuse? He gets a first turn **Sensei's Divining**



Top, and sets up **Wood Elves** on turns 3 and 4. I cast **Azorius Herald**, Ninja it, cast it again, and then drop **Isperia**.

He brings out **Gleancrawler**, but I hit him for another five. He discards **Shinen of Life's Roar** to make my **Ninja of the Deep Hours** block his **Gleancrawler**, but I draw **Faith's Fetters** the next turn, neutralize his only real threat, and win with my 2/1 and 3/6.

6-1

**Ninja of the Deep Hours** has worked out really well in the deck, enough so that I want to make more changes. Bounce spells have always been a mainstay of U/W decks. **Boomerang**, **Eye of Nowhere**, **Temporal Adept** and the like have had a place in this strategy, because they allow U/W to deal with cards that hit the board.

My build of the deck doesn't have many problems with the board – **Icy Manipulator**, **Confiscate**, **Isperia**, and **Faith's Fetters** can usually stop anything from getting through. However, my deck is short on instant-speed responses – if my opponent plays a spell on his turn, **Hinder** or **Icy** are my only real responses.

I wanted to add in some bounce, and so I took up the reader suggestion of adding **Peel from Reality** to the deck. My deck runs quite a few creatures, so I'll usually have a target for **Peel** on my side of the board. **Court Hussar** and **Azorius Herald** are quite juicy targets for **Peel**, and **Peel** can save my guys from dying to damage (in combat or otherwise), save my guys from removal, stop his guys from being tricky (see the **Lure** game above), and generally stall the game until I can get control.

Here are the last changes I made to the deck:

**Out:** -1 **Court Hussar**, -1 **Confiscate**, -1 **Sky Hussar**  
**In:** +3 **Peel from Reality**

Cutting a **Confiscate** was an easy choice, because it is a high-cost card, and three seems like it should be plenty for this deck. **Sky Hussar** was diminishing in usefulness, since more of my creatures want to attack now (**Ninja of the Deep Hours**), and I have fewer ways to untap them. The last card to cut was the hardest, and I decided to cut a copy of **Court Hussar**, because it was one of the last four-ofs in the deck. My other choices were **Faith's Fetters** and **Hinder**, but I didn't want to drop the **Hinder** count, and I found **Fetters** to be useful as a catch-all answer to pretty much everything.

#### Game 8: duh\_xx (U/W Control)

Ah, the mirror match! He casts **Vedalken Plotter**, trading my land for his, and then drops **Azorius Chancery**, returning my land (that he had stolen) to my hand! I get down double **Azorius Herald**, and he answers with **Droning Bureaucrats**. I cast **Beacon Hawk**, and he casts **Belltower Sphinx**. I **Peel from Reality** his **Bureaucrats** and my **Beacon Hawk**, then **Hinder** them to the top of his deck with him at four life.

7-1

#### Game 9: OckAdox (G/B/W Roxodon Hierarchy)

OckAdox was quite a courteous gentleman, and he attracted quite a crowd (including his girlfriend) when we played. He immediately let me know that I would be facing his non-budget **Loxodon Hierarch** deck, except "without the Hierarchs". This was the last game I played with the U/W Azorius deck, and the account of the game is as follows, in detail:

My opening Hand: Island, Plains, 3x **Azorius Chancery**, **Confiscate**, **Icy Manipulator**

His turn 1: Forest, done. (6 cards in hand).

My turn 1: Draw (**Tidespout Tyrant**), Play Island, done. (7 cards in hand).

His turn 2: Forest, **Sakura-Tribe Elder**, done. (5 cards in hand).

My turn 2: Draw (**Peel from Reality**), **Azorius Chancery** (return Island), done. (Discard **Azorius Chancery**, 7 cards in hand).

His turn 3: **Godless Shrine** (tapped), attack with **Sakura-Tribe Elder** (19-20), done. (5 cards in hand).

My turn 3: Draw (Island), Island, go. (7 cards in hand).

His turn 4: Forest, attack with **Sakura-Tribe Elder** (18-20), **Farseek** (**Godless Shrine**), done. (4 cards in hand).

My turn 4: Draw (**Faith's Fetters**), Plains, **Icy Manipulator**, go. (6 cards in hand).

His turn 5: **Godless Shrine** (Untapped, 18-18), **Kokusho the Evening Star**.

Attack with **Sakura-Tribe Elder** (17-18), done. (3 cards in hand).

My turn 5: Draw (**Azorius Herald**), **Azorius Herald** (21-18), **Azorius Chancery** (return Plains), go (6 cards in hand).

His turn 6: **Vitu-Ghazi**, the City-Tree, **Putrefy** **Icy Manipulator** (tap **Kokusho** in response). Attack with **Sakura-Tribe Elder** (20-18), go. (2 cards in hand).

My turn 6: Draw (**Icy Manipulator**), play Island. Attack with **Azorius Herald** (20-16), **Icy Manipulator**, go. (5 cards in hand).



His turn 7: Tap Kokusho, attack with **Sakura-Tribe Elder** (19-16). Play **Grave-Shell Scarab**, play **Godless Shrine** (untapped, 19-14), go. (1 cards in hand).

My turn 7: Draw (Island). Play Island, **Confiscate** Kokusho. Attack with **Azorius Herald** (19-12). He Mortifies **Confiscate**, go. (4 cards in hand).

His turn 8: Tap Kokusho, attack with **Grave-Shell Scarab** and **Sakura-Tribe Elder** (14-12), go (1 card in hand).

My turn 8: Draw (**Azorius Herald**), Plains, attack with **Azorius Herald** (14-10, he makes Saproling Token with Vitu-Ghazi). **Faith's Fetters** Kokusho (18-10), play **Azorius Herald** (22-10), done. (2 cards in hand).

His turn 9: Tap **Grave-Shell Scarab** (in response, he Mortifies the Fetters on his Kokusho). Misclicks and misses attack with Kokusho, Elder, and token. Done (1 card in hand). \*Note: This would have put me down seven life from where I ended up).

My turn 9: Draw (**Faith's Fetters**). Play Fetters on Kokusho (26-10), attack with 2 Herald (26-6), he makes another token, go. (2 cards in hand).

His turn 10: Kokusho (kills both Kokushos, 16-16), tap **Sakura-Tribe Elder**, he attacks with Scarab and 2 tokens. I **Peel from Reality** **Grave-Shell Scarab** + **Azorius Herald** (he's tapped down too far to recast it, 14-16), done. (2 cards in hand).

My turn 10: Draw (Island), attack with Herald (14-14). play Island, **Tidespout Tyrant** (Getting ready to recur Heralds against one another), done. (1 card in hand).

His turn 11: **Putrefy Tidespout Tyrant**, attack with 2 tokens + Elder. I tap Vitu-Ghazi during the attack (bringing him down to four mana, 11-14), done. (2 cards in hand).

My turn 11: Draw (**Azorius Herald**). Attack with Herald (11-12), play 2x Herald (19-12), go. (No cards in hand).

His turn 12: Attack with 2 Token, Elder (16-12), I tap Vitu-Ghazi during attack. Swamp, **Grave-Shell Scarab**, go. (1 card in hand).

My turn 12: Draw (**Court Hussar**). Play **Court Hussar** (**Confiscate**/**Faith's Fetters**/**Court Hussar** – I take **Court Hussar**, looking for either **Ninja of the Deep Hours** or **Hinder**). Attack with 3 **Azorius Herald** (16-6). He sacrifices **Sakura-Tribe Elder** to get a Swamp, play **Court Hussar** (Plains, Island, **Hinder** – I take **Hinder**), go. (1 card in hand). (Mistake – should have played second Hussar before the attack, if I was looking for the Ninja. I didn't commit to my plan of either looking for a **Hinder**, or holding back the Hussar in case he had mass-removal).

His turn 13: Play Swamp, attack with 2 tokens + Scarab, I block 2 tokens with **Court Hussars** (12-6). He sacrifices Scarab to draw a card, **Wrath of God** (I **Hinder** it to the bottom of his deck), concedes.

8-1

Whew! That was a hard-fought victory. Overall, my control version of the U/W Azorius Ascendant theme deck had a 20-7 record, giving it close to a 75% winning percentage. I never had a game where I felt like I was just out of it, and I always had a chance to either win, or give myself the opportunity to win.

One last word before I go: **Isperia the Inscrutable** is amazing! For only five mana, you get a creature with evasion, a huge body (very few creatures can get through a six-toughness backend), an ability which lets you see your opponent's hand (very useful if you're control and want to plan out the next few turns or parcel out your creature removal/countermagic), and the ability to gain card advantage/tutor for other creatures. Yes, the mana cost on Isperia is restrictive (double Blue and double White), but I would highly, highly recommend Isperia to anyone who is playing a Blue/White deck. It is quite the sphinx! In honor of this fine, fine creature, I dub this deck "Isperia Controls the World!"



Isperia Controls the World		
Main Deck 60 cards		
10 Island	1 Myojin of Cleansing Fire	3 Confiscate
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4 Azorius Chancery	3 Azorius Herald	4 Hinder
24 lands	3 Beacon Hawk	3 Icy Manipulator
	3 Court Hussar	3 Peel from Reality
	3 Isperia the Inscrutable	17 other spells
	2 Sky Hussar	
	1 Tidespout Tyrant	
	19 creatures	

Next week: Ben finds his Muse, and then steals it.

*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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