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Living a Double Life: Life Support (Part 2 of 3)

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Building on a Budget
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Dear Deck Doctor:

Hello! My name is Ben, and I've been playing a lot of **Magic Online** lately. I've been trying to build a budget **Extended** deck around **Beacon of Immortality**, but I just can't get it to work. The goal of the deck is to buy a lot of time with the **Beacon**, and then kill your opponent with **Goblin Charbelcher** or **False Cure**. Here's the deck:

Double Life 4

Main Deck
60 cards

4 Mountain	3 Descendant of Kiyomaro	2 Beacon of Immortality
14 Plains		4 Duress
6 Swamp	3 creatures	1 False Cure
24 lands		3 Journeyer's Kite
		2 Pulse of the Fields
		4 Pyroclasm
		2 Reito Lantern
		4 Sensei's Divining Top
		4 Wayfarer's Bauble
		4 Coldsteel Heart
		3 Hide // Seek
		33 other spells

I thought this deck should be a powerhouse, but I keep getting destroyed. I had a 1-7 record with this deck, and I think the record should be 7-1! Where am I going wrong? Help me Deck Doctor!

Well Ben, I like the concept of your deck, but I'm not going to lie – you've got some problems going on! Let's take a look at my handy-dandy five rules of deckbuilding.

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

You say your goals are to win with **Goblin Charbelcher** or **False Cure**, yet you have zero copies of **Goblin Charbelcher** and only one copy of **False Cure** in your deck! In addition, you pretty much need **Beacon of Immortality** to get **False Cure** to work, and you only have two **Beacons**. Even with the **Sensei's Divining Top/Journeyer's Kite** engine letting you see multiple new cards a turn and thinning your deck out, you aren't going to get your combo ever. We need to up your count on these two cards.

In: 1 **Beacon of Immortality**, 2 **False Cure** (63 cards)

In addition, why do you even have Red in this deck? It isn't a required color for your combo (**Beacon of Immortality/False Cure**), and it isn't essential to have for **Hide // Seek** (which can easily be replaced by **Disenchant** or **Terashi's Grasp**) or **Pyroclasm** (replaceable by **Kirtar's Wrath/Final Judgment/Infest/Hideous Laughter**, etc).

Out: 4 **Pyroclasm**, 3 **Hide // Seek**, 4 Mountain (52 cards)

Now that there's no Red in the deck, that brings us to Rule #1:

Rule #1: Fix your mana base.

Now that I've taken out Red from your deck, let's see how your mana base works. I still like the **Journeyer's Kite/Sensei's Divining Top** engine as a way to draw extra cards and then see new cards for each turn, but I'm not sure we need so many lands/so many basic lands. In addition, **Coldsteel Heart** isn't great in a two-color non-Snow build – **Orzhov Signet** is almost strictly better at this point.

In: 4 **Orzhov Signet** (56 cards)

Out: 4 **Coldsteel Heart** (52 cards)

That leaves the deck with the following mana base:
14 Plains
6 Swamp



Update on Rain Delay



4 Orzhov Signet
4 Wayfarer's Bauble

There's no need to be so heavily disproportionate on the White and Black mana. **False Cure** costs two Black mana to cast, so it's going to be tough to get that mana under the current configuration. Here are some land choices that might be appropriate for the deck:

Barren Moor
Orzhov Basilica
Orzhova, the Church of Deals
Quicksand
Secluded Steppe
Stalking Stones
Tainted Field
Temple of the False God

If this wasn't a budget deck, I would definitely recommend **Caves of Koilos** and **Godless Shrine**. Since we're operating on a budget, and **Beacon of Immortality** already costs you five tickets each on **Magic Online** (and remember, all decks in this column have an upper maximum ticket cost of thirty tickets total), those rare lands are straight out.

I figure we can try a straight swap of four Plains for four **Orzhov Basilica**. In addition, let's trade two Plains for two Swamps, to even the land count between colors. We don't want to remove too many basic lands, because we want to be able to get a land a turn with **Journeyer's Kite** for as long as possible.

Twenty lands is a bit land light for a deck that needs eight mana to combo (six for **Beacon** and two for **False Cure**), even with three mana fixing elements (three Kites, four Baubles, and four Signets). What happens if you get stuck at three mana? You lose. I'm going to suggest adding two Orzhova to the deck – it gives you an alternate (albeit slow) win condition, and another life gain method for the deck.

In: 4 **Orzhov Basilica**, 2 Swamp, 2 Orzhova (60 cards)
Out: 6 Plains (54 cards)

All right, let's consider the mana base fixed for now. Back to Rule #3: Focusing your theme. What in God's green earth is **Reito Lantern** doing in the deck? **Beacon of Immortality** allows you to keep yourself from being decked – maybe when you were running two Beacons and one **False Cure**, you needed a way to recycle your win conditions in case they were countered or milled. With more redundancy in your deck, this measure is wholly unnecessary.

Out: 2 **Reito Lantern** (52 cards)

Right now, the deck is at a cost of exactly thirty tickets: 15 for **Beacon of Immortality** (3 at 15 each), 3 for **Descendant of Kiyomaro** (3 at 1 each), 2 for **Duress** (4 at .5 each), 1 for **False Cure** (3 at .33 each), 1 for **Journeyer's Kite** (3 at .33 each), 4 for **Pulse of the Fields** (2 at 2 each), 4 for **Sensei's Divining Top** (4 at 1 each). I'd like to get another **Pulse of the Fields** in the deck, to add consistency. Of the higher-dollar cards left in the deck, the Descendants seem to be the least necessary – let's take out all three, and add in another **Pulse of the Fields**, which leaves us with two more open slots, and one more ticket of breathing room to build with.

In: 1 **Pulse of the Fields** (53 cards)
Out: 3 **Descendant of Kiyomaro** (50 cards)

Let's assign the rest of the commons/uncommons in the deck a value of one ticket total – you can probably get things like Swamps and **Orzhov Basilicas** at 32-64 for a ticket, or have friends who draft a lot donate them to you to get you started on **Magic Online**. This leaves us with 10 slots left, and zero tickets to put towards premium Commons/Uncommons/Rares. We have two choices:

1. Add filler cards to the deck. These won't necessarily be bad cards (we can put in things like **Terror**, or **Terashi's Grasp**), but they might not fill the needs of this deck (no efficient mass-removal or **Wrath of God**-type effect)
2. Remove money cards from the deck, and swap them with other money cards.

There aren't really any cards available that will duplicate the effects of **Beacon of Immortality**, **False Cure**, or **Sensei's Divining Top**. **Journeyer's Kite** is the best effect available to Black/White for deck shuffling, so I don't want to get rid of that either. This leaves us with two possible cards to swap out for substitution:

Duress (.5 tickets each): **Castigate** and **Distress** both are fine budget-oriented choices to replace **Duress** in this deck. The main focus of **Duress** is to remove countermagic from your opponent's hand, allowing you to get your combo off unmolested. While both **Castigate** and **Distress** cost one mana more than **Duress**, they both are able to remove creature threats from your opponent's hand as well.

Pulse of the Fields: **Beacon of Immortality** might be the only card which can strictly double your life total, but there are many other life gain cards. **Pulse of the Fields** is reusable, which makes it ideal against aggressive decks. However, it's possible for other players to play around **Pulse of the Fields**. The best method for doing this is to mana burn intentionally. That way, **Pulse of the Fields** won't return to hand.



If we wanted to take **Pulse of the Fields** out of the deck, there are other lifegain cards around. Efficient means of lifegain are hard to come by, as gaining life in-and-of itself is often a losing proposition. You don't win the game by having 100,000 life – you win the game by getting your opponent to zero life, decking them, or by having a card set up with an alternate win condition. I'll get to this idea later in the article – suffice it to say that gaining four life from **Sacred Nectar** isn't going to save you from a horde of angry goblins.

I took a look through the list of Extended-legal black, white, artifact and land cards, and found quite a few budget lifegain spells that I'd consider running in this deck. They include **Bottle Gnomes**, **Consume Spirit** (doubling as creature removal/a kill condition), **Faith's Fetters**, **Genju of the Fields**, **Ghost-Lit Redeemer**, **Honden of Cleansing Fire**, **Martyr of Sands**, **Peace of Mind**, **Presence of the Wise**, **Ribbons of Night** (with a splash of maybe an Island in the deck, which is entirely doable with **Journeyer's Kite** and **Wayfarer's Bauble** already in the deck), **Skullmead Cauldron**, **Starlight Invoker**, **Sun Droplet**, **Terashi's Grasp**, **Tower of Eons**, and **Words of Worship**.

Here's where the choices for the deck get very complicated. Here's the deck as it stands at this point, with fifty cards:



Double Life 5 (Base)		Main Deck 50 cards	
2 Orzhova, the Church of Deals		3 Beacon of Immortality	
4 Orzhov Basilica	0 creatures	4 Duress	
8 Plains		3 False Cure	
8 Swamp		3 Journeyer's Kite	
22 lands		4 Orzhov Signet	
		3 Pulse of the Fields	
		4 Sensei's Divining Top	
		4 Wayfarer's Bauble	
		28 other spells	

As I see it, there are three distinct possible builds to this deck:

Build #1: Test of Endurance

Test of Endurance would give this deck a second win condition outside of **Beacon/False Cure**. **Test of Endurance** cost two tickets each on **Magic Online**, meaning that if I wanted to run three (the correct number for this deck), I'd need to jettison six tickets worth of cards. Those cards would most likely have to be the **Pulse of the Fields**. This would be the most extreme combo-build of this deck, as I wouldn't have room left for an efficient mass-removal spell.

In addition, I can't only rely on **Beacon of Immortality** to get my life total over fifty if I go with this build. I'd need to focus on cards which can steadily increase my life total, or could increase my life total by a large amount in one swing. This build would want **Presence of the Wise** or **Genju of the Fields**, and wouldn't as much need **Sun Droplet** (which can only recover life, unless you have multiples) or **Consume Spirit**.

Build #2: Wall of Shards

The best way to play around **Pulse of the Fields** is to intentionally reduce your own life total. What if you gave the opponent a ton of life, so you could always return **Pulse of the Fields** to your hand? **Wall of Shards** can allow for this! This **Coldsnap** wall will cumulatively add to your opponent's life total – and in a deck where the win condition doesn't care about your opponent's life total (they can have any amount of life and die to **False Cure/Beacon**), giving your opponent life doesn't matter at all.

This version of the deck would have a lot of versatility in what it could run outside of **Beacon of Immortality** and **False Cure**, but would not be able to add any other money cards. This means that mass removal is out of the question, but the **Pulse of the Fields** would stay.

Build #3: Control

The other two builds don't allow for an efficient Black/White mass-removal spell, due to cost restraints. The third option is to have a deck that buys time long enough to draw the combo, but doesn't as actively focus on gaining life. The budget choices available are **Kirtar's Wrath**, **Final**



Judgment, and **Sunscour** (2 tickets each). **Sunscour** seems like the worst of the three cards, given how few White cards are in the deck to begin with – it'll never be pitched, and it allows regeneration.

In general, this version of Double Life would focus more on lifegain that doubles as removal (**Ribbons of Night**, **Terashi's Grasp**), and would eschew the “big gain” effect outside of **Beacon of Immortality**. **Pulse of the Fields** and **Duress** would come out, so we could add a full four copies of either **Kirtar's Wrath** or **Final Judgment**.

Ribbons of Night?

One big question is whether or not any build of this deck can support adding blue to the deck to splash for the card-drawing effect of **Ribbons of Night**. The short answer is yes. There are seven cards in this deck that can fetch an Island, and all we need is one Island to get **Ribbons of Night** working. In addition, there are very few colored cards in this deck, meaning that there is very little chance of one-to-two Islands in the deck coming back to cause color screw. While I wouldn't advocate adding a third color to every deck built – it can significantly weaken your chances of drawing the right mana at the right time – this deck can safely run a third color of mana without complications.

Why Wayfarer's Bauble?

We're still working off of the fifty-card base of Double Life, but there's one card that I haven't explained. That card is **Wayfarer's Bauble**. I kept it in this deck for a few reasons. It is mana acceleration in two colors which do not normally have mana acceleration, it can color-fix, it gives the deck an early card to drop to the board, and it acts as a shuffle effect for **Sensei's Divining Top**. I am not married to the idea that **Wayfarer's Bauble** absolutely has to be in the deck, but it seems like a fine choice overall.



Let me throw out the base decklist for each of the three builds.

Double Life 5 (Build 1 – Test of Endurance)		
Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Orzhov Basilica	0 creatures	3 Beacon of Immortality
10 Plains		4 Castigate
8 Swamp		3 False Cure
22 lands		4 Genju of the Fields
		3 Infest
		3 Journeyer's Kite
		4 Orzhov Signet
		4 Sensei's Divining Top
		3 Test of Endurance
		3 Tower of Eons
		4 Wayfarer's Bauble
		38 other spells

In: 3 **Test of Endurance**, 4 **Genju of the Fields**, 2 **Plains**, 3 **Tower of Eons**, 4 **Castigate**, 3 **Infest**
Out: 2 **Orzhova**, 3 **Pulse of the Fields**, 4 **Duress**

In the **Test of Endurance** build, I concentrated on effects that allow for large gains of life at a time. I jettisoned eight tickets worth of cards, and added eight (3 **Test of Endurance** at 2 tickets each, 3 **Tower of Eons** at .33 tickets each, and 4 **Genju**/3 **Infest** at 8 for a ticket). I also shifted out the **Orzhova** in favor of more **Plains**, as **Genju of the Fields** requires **Plains**, and a ping a turn is not going to get me to fifty life.

Double Life 5 (Build 2 – Wall of Shards)		
Main Deck 60 cards		
2 Orzhova, the Church of Deals	4 Wall of Shards	3 Beacon of Immortality
4 Orzhov Basilica	4 creatures	4 Duress
8 Plains		4 Faith's Fetters
8 Swamp		3 False Cure
22 lands		3 Hideous Laughter
		3 Journeyer's Kite
		4 Orzhov Signet
		3 Pulse of the Fields
		4 Sensei's Divining Top
		3 Terashi's Grasp

In: 4 Wall of Shards, 3 Terashi's Grasp, 4 Faith's Fetters, 3 Hideous Laughter
Out: 4 Wayfarer's Bauble

This build takes out the Bauble, as it doesn't need to get combo pieces as much as the other versions of this deck, and it doesn't need a third color of mana. I chose **Hideous Laughter** over **Infest** on the off-chance that you might splice the Laughter onto **Terashi's Grasp** – plus **Hideous Laughter** is an instant, whereas **Infest** is a sorcery.

Double Life 5 (Build 3 – Control)

Main Deck
60 cards

<p>4 Island</p> <p>2 Orzhova, the Church of Deals</p> <p>4 Orzhov Basilica</p> <p>7 Plains</p> <p>5 Swamp</p> <hr style="width: 100%;"/> <p>22 lands</p>	<p>0 creatures</p>	<p>3 Beacon of Immortality</p> <p>3 False Cure</p> <p>3 Journeyer's Kite</p> <p>4 Kirtar's Wrath</p> <p>4 Orzhov Signet</p> <p>3 Ribbons of Night</p> <p>4 Sensei's Divining Top</p> <p>4 Sun Droplet</p> <p>3 Terashi's Grasp</p> <p>4 Wayfarer's Bauble</p> <p>3 Vanish into Memory</p> <hr style="width: 100%;"/> <p>38 other spells</p>
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In: 4 Kirtar's Wrath, 3 Ribbons of Night, 4 Island, 4 Sun Droplet, 3 Terashi's Grasp, 3 Vanish into Memory
Out: 4 Duress, 3 Pulse of the Fields, 3 Swamp, 1 Plains

In the final build, I added in Blue as a third color. This gave me access to **Ribbons of Night**, and **Vanish into Memory**. I've wanted to try out **Vanish into Memory** for quite a while. In this deck, it serves as removal against token creatures, and a way to buy a turn plus draw cards. If I remove a 5/5 from the game for a turn, I'll dig five cards deeper into my deck for a combo piece or answer, plus save myself five damage. That's not bad for a deck that just needs to have enough time to get answers.

Before I sign off for the week, I'm looking for your feedback! At the end of the column are two polls – I'm just curious about which types of columns are the favorites of my readers. In addition, I'd love to get additional input about what you do/don't like about the column. Do you want more game logs? Fewer? Do you want a section about non-budget builds of that week's budget deck? Is Boab the robot a fan favorite? Which of my Building on a Budget Columns has been your favorite, and which your least favorite? E-mail me, or post in the forums, and let me know your thoughts. Don't be shy – I don't bite!

See y'all next week, and hope you had a great *Time Spiral* prerelease!

Feedback Time! Which type of Building on a Budget column do you like the most?

- Preconstructed Deck Evolutions (Azorius Ascendant)
- Junk Rare Builds (Finding my Muse)
- Deck Doctoring (Izzet Pinball)
- Budgetizing Pro Decks (Understanding Tempo with Ghost Dad)
- Deckbuilding Theory/Exploration (This column/Five Tips for Better Deckbuilding)

Which type of Building on a Budget column do you like the least?

- Preconstructed Deck Evolutions (Azorius Ascendant)
- Junk Rare Builds (Finding my Muse)
- Deck Doctoring (Izzet Pinball)
- Budgetizing Pro Decks (Understanding Tempo with Ghost Dad)
- Deckbuilding Theory/Exploration (This column/Five Tips for Better Deckbuilding)

*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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