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Blue Snow Aggro

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Building on a Budget
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Welcome back to Building on a Budget! How often do I start my column with those words? I have no clue, but I like welcoming everyone back to my column. If you're a first time reader, I offer you a welcome to Building on a Budget. You don't get a back, so I'll put back in the back and back up the introduction.

Grammar...sense...tingling....

I'll get to this week's deck in a few minutes, but I want to share some poll results with y'all.

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

Junk Rare Builds	1526	32.3%
Preconstructed Deck Evolutions	1046	22.2%
Budgetizing Pro Decks	846	17.9%
Deckbuilding Theory/Exploration	705	14.9%
Deck Doctoring	597	12.6%
Total	4720	100.0%

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

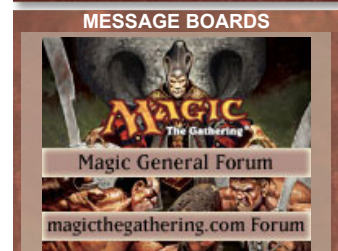
Budgetizing Pro Decks	1151	32.9%
Deckbuilding Theory/Exploration	657	18.8%
Preconstructed Deck Evolutions	649	18.5%
Junk Rare Builds	600	17.1%
Deck Doctoring	443	12.7%
Total	3500	100.0%

By and far the most popular type of column is the Junk Rare build – and that so happens to be the subject of today's column (Look, continuity with the previous paragraph. Scandalous!). In addition, it's the second least-popular column. Let's look at the spreads.

Junk Rare Builds: 1526 "Yay!" versus 600 "Nay" = 926 votes
 Preconstructed Deck Evolution: 1046 "Yay!" versus 649 "Nay" = 397 votes
 Deck Doctoring: 597 "Yay!" versus 443 "Nay" = 154 votes
 Deckbuilding Theory/Explanation: 705 "Yay!" versus 657 "Nay" = 48 votes
 Budgetizing Pro Decks: 846 "Yay!" versus 1151 "Nay" = *Negative* 305 votes

For the record, my favorite type of column to write is Deckbuilding Theory/Explanation, followed closely by Junk Rare Builds. Apparently nobody really cares about deck doctoring in general (it's not your deck), so I'm going to shy away from that type of column in general – if nobody likes or dislikes it, it's not worth doing. I don't plan on doing a theme deck evolution until *Time Spiral* becomes *Magic Online* legal, because all of the Coldsnap theme decks are Classic legal only.

I don't get the chance to preview cards from the new set on magicthegathering.com, but I've been lucky enough to be handed the sole preview card at StarCityGames.com for multiple sets now. One card I previewed was [Vexing Sphinx](#), and I thought it had a lot of potential in an aggressive build. I've been mired in esoteric combo decks for the past few columns, and ol' Sphinxy has been relegated to the junk bins, overshadowed by [Ohran Viper](#), [Scrying Sheets](#), and [Dark Depths](#). Now seemed like a great time to dust it off, throw it in a deck, and beat some face in... Blue Stylin'.



Main Deck		
60 cards		
20 Snow-Covered Island	4 Dimir Guildmage	4 Halcyon Glaze
20 lands	4 Mistblade Shinobi	4 Mana Leak
	4 Ninja of the Deep Hours	4 Remand
	4 Martyr of Frost	4 Rune Snag
	4 Rimewind Taskmage	16 other spells
	4 Vexing Sphinx	
	24 creatures	

The concept of this deck is simple – drop a couple of guys, protect the board with cheap Counterspells, and smack your opponent about the head until they're dead. Let's examine the creature curve:

1CC

Martyr of Frost: The quickest beater in the deck. He enables a turn-two **Ninja of the Deep Hours** and also acts as a fourth Counterspell in the deck.

Mistblade Shinobi: Ideally, I'm never going to cast **Mistblade Shinobi** in the three slot. Instead, he'll slip on out and knock a guy back to my opponent's hand.

2CC

Rimewind Taskmage: With all the ninjutsu going in on in the deck, I wanted a way to tap down blockers for a swift attack. **Rimewind Taskmage** is that guy, enabling both offense (tapping blockers, tapping lands) and defense (no sir, Mr. **Rumbling Slum**, you stay home today!).

Dimir Guildmage: This easily could have been any other of the Blue Guildmages in *Ravnica* block, as I just wanted a 2/2 for two. The ability to draw cards in a pinch seemed better than countering an activated effect (**Azorius Guildmage**), moving an Aura (**Simic Guildmage**), or copying an Instant (**Izzet Guildmage**, although this might be a good substitute if you envision needing to copy **Mana Leak/Rune Snag/Remand** late game).

Ninja of the Deep Hours: It's a shame that this Ninja won't be in the same Standard environment as **Flying Men** and **Sage of Epityr**, because those two creatures were what **Ninja of the Deep Hours** always wanted to play with. Still, **Ninja of the Deep Hours** usually hits the board one of two times: turn two (if I get **Martyr of Frost**) or turn four (when I can Ninjutsu a two-drop, and still have two mana up to cast a counterspell). Drawing into more countermagic/threats has never felt so sneaky.



3CC

Vexing Sphinx: You've gotta love a 4/4 flying creature for three mana. On the turn it drops, it'll stop pretty much anything on your opponent's side of the world from attacking. Most likely, **Vexing Sphinx** will then swing for eight damage, and then allow you to draw three cards. Let's do the math:

Turn three: **Vexing Sphinx** hits the board.

Turn four: Discard one card. **Vexing Sphinx** swings for four.

Turn five: Discard two cards. **Vexing Sphinx** swings for four.

Turn six: Put a cumulative upkeep counter on **Vexing Sphinx**, and then decline to discard. Draw three cards.

In essence, you're trading four cards (**Vexing Sphinx** plus three cards discarded) for three cards plus eight damage. Last I checked, that means you're spending one card to do eight damage – and even Red doesn't get anything that good for three mana (see **Ball Lightning**).

Halcyon Glaze: If one 4/4 flyer for three isn't good enough, why not run two? **Halcyon Glaze** feeds off all the Ninja bounce in the deck (because I can now recast creatures), so it'll almost never run out of fuel to turn on for the attack. In addition, **Halcyon Glaze** ducks sorcery-speed removal, meaning that I'll have alpha-strike a go-go after a **Wrath of God**-type effect.

Blue doesn't have too many good one-drops pre-*Time Spiral*, but I did consider **Drowned Rusalka** and **Teardrop Kami**. The spell suite is what really sells this deck. Who needs **Counterspell** when you have...

Mana Leak: When you plan on beating your opponent within the first 6-7 turns of the game, they aren't going to be able to get around **Mana Leak** easily. **Wrath of God** turns into a turn-seven spell, and **Pyroclasm** a turn-five. You can keep blockers off the board, or couple up **Mana Leaks** for double-countering action the last couple turns of the game.

Rune Snag: Just as good as **Mana Leak** early, and better than **Mana Leak** in multiples. Essentially **Mana Leaks** five through eight.

Remand: In a tempo-based aggressive deck (aggro-control, if you will) such as this, **Remand** will buy you all the time in the world you need to win, plus it draws a card to boot.

A Special Note about Remand

Remand currently sells at a price of two for one ticket on **Magic Online**. Here's the dirty little secret about **Remand**: It's going to be the most played Uncommon in Standard after *Time Spiral* becomes legal. **Remand** was



already a staple of all blue decks, and now it has a second strength – hosing Suspend. What’s an opponent to do after they wait four turns for that **Ancestral Vision**, only to have you **Remand** it back to their hand on their fifth upkeep? Cry, most likely.

Remand is going to be played in Extended, Standard, and any other format it’s legal in on **Magic Online**.

Just go ahead and get yourself a set of four for two tickets before it goes up in price. You’ll notice that I’ve used **Remand** in almost every Blue deck I’ve built in this column, and for good reason – it’s an amazingly usable delay mechanism. It’s a **Time Walk**: You tap two, you draw a card, and your opponent effectively skips his or her turn.



Enough of the chitter-chatter – on with the game logs!

Game 1: Esojiro (Mono-U Urzatron)

I drop a couple of quick creatures, and then hold Esojiro off with multiple Counterspells while the creatures do their thing.

Record: 1-0

Game 2: Eleventeen999999 (U/B/R Arcane)

See game one. There’s not much interesting to say about these games – I drop a guy on turn two, drop **Vexing Sphinx** turn three, and then sit behind a wall of Counterspells while I beat for six every turn for three turns.

Record: 2-0

Game 3: TheRealKnapster (W/G Spirits)

I counter his first three spells, drop **Dimir Guildmage**, and then ninjutsu out **Ninja of the Deep Hours** off the Guildmage. The Ninja gets in a hit and allows me to drop **Vexing Sphinx** and **Rimewind Taskmage** in a single turn. The Taskmage keeps the way clear for the Ninja, who in turn allows me to draw cards for **Vexing Sphinx**.

Record: 3-0

Game 4: Oremetro (R/G Burn)

I drop **Dimir Guildmage**, and he drops **Elvish Champion**. I swing, he doesn’t block, and I get **Ninja of the Deep Hours**. He hits me with **Flames of the Blood Hand**, I get **Vexing Sphinx**. He trades creatures and then hits me with seven more points of burn. I drop the Guildmage back down, with five counterspells in hand post-Sphinx. That’s game, folks.

Record: 4-0

After getting my head beat in the past three weeks, it’s nice to pick up a deck that can deliver the beats so effectively. However, **Halcyon Glaze** isn’t working that terrifically in the deck. Technically, I’m running twenty-four creatures in the deck, but eight of them are really never cast – they are put into play. I decide to swap out **Halcyon Glaze** for another beater.

Phyrexian Ironfoot enters the building. Why should red/green get all the **Burning-Tree Shamen** of the world? I believe in a world where blue can have a 3/4 thug for only three mana, and this world is reality. I can untap the Ironfoot whenever I feel like it, and for half-cost with **Rimewind Taskmage**.

Blue Snow Aggro 2 .dec

Main Deck
60 cards

<p>20 Snow-Covered Island</p> <hr/> <p>20 lands</p>	<p>4 Dimir Guildmage 4 Mistblade Shinobi 4 Ninja of the Deep Hours 4 Martyr of Frost 4 Phyrexian Ironfoot 4 Rimewind Taskmage 4 Vexing Sphinx</p> <hr/> <p>28 creatures</p>	<p>4 Mana Leak 4 Remand 4 Rune Snag</p> <hr/> <p>12 other spells</p>
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Out: 4 **Halcyon Glaze**
In: 4 **Phyrexian Ironfoot**

Game 5: Dudjiro (Zur.dec)

He gets Zur, and puts **Pacifism** and **Pillory of the Sleepless** on my first two creatures. I drop **Rimewind Taskmage**, tap down Zur himself, and then drop multiple creatures to the board with **Counterspell** backup. That phrase seems to happen a lot "I drop guys with backup." It's the boys in blue going in with backup! Rat-a-tat-tat.

Record: 5-0

Game 6: Atomik (U/G/B Control)

I get the perfect curve – first turn **Martyr**, second turn **Dimir Guildmage**, third turn **Phyrexian Ironfoot**, fourth turn sacrifice **Martyr** to counter his **Boomerang**, cast **Rimewind Taskmage**, **Rune Snag** his next **Boomerang**, and beat him to death with **Remand** still in my hand.

Record: 6-0

Game 7: Alfio1976 (Elves)

He gets three **Llanowar Elves** and throws **Moldervine Cloak**, **Moldervine Cloak** and **Blanchwood Armor** on them. I stabilize the board by getting **Rimewind Taskmage** and multiple **Mistblade Shinobi** online, but he drop **Hissing Miasma** and stops me from attacking! It gets to the point where I'm at five life, and my only way to win is to attack four times with **Vexing Sphinx**. I don't draw a **Sphinx** soon enough to race, and I lose.

Record: 6-1 (Nobody wins forever.)

Game 8: Papamach (Mono-Blue Flyers)

I get down **Rimewind Taskmage** plus **Mistblade Shinobi**, and that locks down the board. He attempts to cast **Jetting Glasskite**, but I **Remand** it on consecutive turns, all the while dumping **Phyrexian Ironfoots** in the board.

Record: 7-1

Game 9: Merlinsghost (Snow.dec)

I get **Rimewind Taskmage**, and he drops **Boreal Druid** and **Skreds** my guy. I drop **Phyrexian Ironfoot**, and he **Skreds** it. Double **Vexing Sphinxes** hit my side of the board, and they are trailed by **Phyrexian Ironfoot**. He pitches **Sunscour**, clearing out my board. Frown! That'll teach me to overextend.

Well, I'm quite fortunate to have a third **Vexing Sphinx** in hand, which gets **Faith's Fettered**. I keep it in play for one more turn, discarding a land (I want to draw something other than a land when the **Sphinx** dies), and drop **Rimewind Taskmage**. He casts **Lightning Storm** on the **Taskmage**. I discard a land, making the **Lightning Storm** deal five damage. He discards to send it to seven. I discard to make it nine and direct it at his head. **Rimewind Taskmage** turns into **Ninja of the Deep Hours**, which turns my hand into more countermagic. Since his own **Lightning Storm** cost him two cards and nine damage, finishing the game is quite easy.

Record: 8-1

Game 10: Staxowax (B/G Germination)

I cast turn-one **Martyr**, turn-two **Guildmage**, bounce his turn-three **Zubera** with **Shinobi** (courtesy of the unblocked **Guildmage**), and then **Martyr** it off the board on his way back down. I then drop **Dimir Guildmage** back on turn four with multiple counterspells in hand and drop **Vexing Sphinx** on turn five to put on the clock. He can't get through my wall of countermagic in time, and the **Sphinx** and **Guildmage** go all the way.

Record: 9-1

Game 11: The Goze (U/R Control)

He has a ton of blue card drawing and red removal, but I get down two quick **Guildmages** and a **Taskmage**, and then lock the board with **Counterspells**. It's hard for a control deck to win when you can drop threats before they are set up and then out-counter them once they try to answer your questions.

Record: 10-1

Game 12: BringerofWins (B/W Control)

I lock the board with **Rimewind Taskmage** and two **Mistblade Shinobis**, and he is unable to keep any creatures on the board. **Rimewind Taskmage** has been really amazing with **Ninjas** (especially **Mistblade Shinobi**), as not only do I get to remove a blocker, I get to remove the blocker for good. Once again, I have multiple **Rune Snags**, **Remands** and **Mana Leaks** in hand and just sit on three damage a turn for the win.

Record: 11-1

Game 13: Lexivore382 (U/G Aggro)



Long, long, drawn-out game. He eventually gets the best of me, but I do make one note: if I had drawn a Taskmage, I would have won. My Ninjas are unable to get past his fat, but we eventually get into top deck mode, in which he kills me the turn before I kill him.

Record: 11-2

Game 14: (Name Withheld) (U/W Azorius)

I counter his **Minister of Impediments**, and he concedes and puts me on block.

Record: 12-2

Guys, countermagic is a fact of life in **Magic**. You don't see the New York Yankees refusing to take the field because the opposing pitcher is throwing a good sinker that day. Grit and deal, and learn ways to beat that deck. For the record, I had two other players concede after seeing the first Counterspell in a game, but it would be redundant to list them all in these game logs. Suffice it to say, I stick out any game, be it countermagic, land destruction, or discard. It's satisfying to beat these strategies, and the only way to learn to beat them is to practice against them to see why they beat you and how you can beat them.



Game 15: NDW2004 (U/B Muse Vessel)

NDW2004 is playing a modified version of [my Muse Vessel deck](#) (he tells me as much) with black for more board control. Thankfully, I know how to play against my own deck, because otherwise I would have been destroyed. I get down **Rimewind Taskmage** (the key to this entire match) and proceed to tap down his **Muse Vessel** every upkeep of the game. I let him use his bounce and removal on any creature except the Taskmage, but protect it (and only it) with countermagic. Eventually he runs out of bounce, and I am able to mount an offense to kill him.

Record: 13-2

Game 16: Major Domo (U/R Izzet)

Basically this game comes down to a huge play mistake on my part (no disrespect to Major Domo). He points an **Electrolyze** at the head of my **Martyr of Frost**, and I think I have four mana up, when I only have three. I sacrifice the Martyr to try to tap him out, but he just declines to pay for the Martyr, and then drops **Gelectrode**. I had three Counterspells in hand and would have easily have been able to stop **Gelectrode** otherwise. **Gelectrode** owns the board against me, and I lose the game.

Record: 13-3

This deck was a blast to play. People don't expect you to go aggro with blue weenies, but Blue Snow Aggro is a deck with legs. The cards have a lot of synergy, and you can end the game quickly with a barrage of flyers, Ninjas and Guildmages. This deck clocks in at well under ten tickets, so it doesn't get much more budget than this!

Next Week: [+Coldsnap](#)



Poll Time! I talked a little about *Time Spiral* in this article. What'd you think?

- Choice #1: Great! I love hearing about potential changes to the deck!
- Choice #2: Horrible! Stick only to cards we can play with now!

*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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