

A crash course in evolving the four *Planar Chaos* precon.

Preconstructing *Planar Chaos*

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I love preconstructed decks. I have a collection of every precon back through *Invasion*, with a smattering of earlier ones as well. When my wife and I play **Magic** at our dining room table or out at a restaurant, it's precon versus precon, always and every time. Just look at my Building on a Budget [archives](#) – I revamped that entire column to focus on evolving preconstructed decks. One of my greatest career highlights is the opportunity to [create a Mirage precon](#).

I love preconstructed decks. If I wasn't already married, I would marry a precon. If I was going to have more children, I would name them Sparkler, Snowscape, or Stampede. Love precons. Love them. Adore.

Why? Three big reasons.

First, preconstructed decks are theme decks, and I love themes. My first Constructed decks as a **Magic** player were 100-card theme decks called "The End of the World" or "Bears" or "Kobold Army." I would choose cards for these decks based solely on their name, art, and flavor text. I first came to Mark Rosewater's attention when Wizards held an Auction of the People and I submitted theme decks for *every single creature type in Magic*. Read old articles of mine like [Clash of the Empires](#) and you'll get a glimpse into how much I love theme decks.

Second, preconstructed decks are designed to be new-player friendly and out-of-the-box balanced.

While many players "graduate" to an extremely nuanced and cerebral appreciation of Magic, I have

for some reason continued to be very self-conscious that **Magic** must first and foremost be fun for the new player. I still remember my eyes lighting up when I saw my first two-card combo or saw some neat way in which two mechanics played off of one another. Preconstructed decks highlight these interactions for new players. Although surely not powerhouse Constructed decks, they can be played right out of the box to show someone new why some cards are good, some are situational, and how cards build on one another. For me, precons remind me what discovering **Magic** is all about and why this game is so dangd fun. The fact that they're balanced to play against one another is a huge perk.



Which brings me to the third big reason I love preconstructed decks. Precons are launching pads for deck ideas. A single preconstructed deck can inspire a dozen different deck ideas, usually without stretching your budget. Indeed, a core purpose of my article today is to tickle your deckbuilding brain to get you thinking about the many different ways a precon can evolve. One of the most common ways for newer players to build constructed decks is to start with a precon and slowly add cards over time. As I've demonstrated with my past writing, I still think that's one of the most fun ways to build decks whether you're new to the game or a veteran. Modifying precons to see what they become is both rewarding and cool. What's even better is the variety these evolutions can take.

So that's why I love preconstructed decks: They're built around themes, they remind me of what being a new player is all about, and they are a deep well of deckbuilding inspiration. These are the reasons I also jumped when Scott Johns asked me if I would be willing to give an overview of *Planar Chaos*'s four preconstructed decks.

Whether you're a new player or veteran, whether you love precons or consider them useless, I'm here today to try and make you smile. I'll be giving an overview of each deck, talking about what's to like and not to like in each one, then brainstorm about diverse and fun ways to evolve each deck. This should be a guide and/or cookbook for newer players, and hopefully a deckbuilding laboratory for us all.

It's also yet another gargantuan article from me (I seem to be incapable of writing a normal-length article these days), so let's get to it.



Endless March

Our first deck today is a white-red, creature-based deck. As with every preconstructed deck, it's a mess of 1-of and 2-of cards with a jumble of themes represented (which is, I would argue, part of precon's charm). Nevertheless, the basic idea of Endless March is to play quick creatures with either vanishing, comes-into-play, or leaves-play effects, then play them *again* by returning them to your hand. Because many of the creatures have flash, the deck includes tricky combat maneuvers like [Brute Force](#) and [Dawn Charm](#). Because many of the creatures have vanishing, the deck also includes a theme of time counters a la [Jhoira's Timebug](#) and [Timecrafting](#).

Here's the decklist:

Endless March



Main Deck

60 cards

10 Mountain	2 Brute Force
11 Plains	1 Dawn Charm
3 Terramorphic Expanse	1 Dead // Gone
_____	1 Fatal Frenzy
24 lands	1 Sunlance
	2 Timecrafting
1 Avalanche Riders	_____
3 Aven Riftwatcher	8 other spells
2 Calciderm	
1 Children of Korlis	
1 Dust Elemental	
2 Errant Doomsayers	
2 Icatian Javelineers	
2 Jhoira's Timebug	
1 Keldon Marauders	
2 Lavacore Elemental	
2 Mogg War Marshal	
1 Riftmarked Knight	
1 Soltari Priest	
2 Stonecloaker	
2 Stormfront Riders	
3 Whitemane Lion	

28 creatures



Cards to Love

Whether you play the deck as-is over and over again or start evolving it towards your own home-cooked monster, my guess is that a few cards will consistently stand out. Here are the cards that, generally speaking, you are going to want to keep as part of the decklist. They are also the cards you want to get more copies of, either by buying a second copy of Endless March or some other way. Keep in mind that this list isn't meant to be exhaustive. If you want to argue for another generally useful card from the deck, feel free to fire up the message boards to do so. I'm also assuming that you can find four copies of any common, so my focus here is on the uncommons and rares.

[Calciderm](#) : If you've ever play [Blastoderm](#), you need absolutely no convincing as to why [Calciderm](#) is so good. If you started playing **Magic** after Blasty's heyday, then you should realize that [Calciderm](#) is an incredibly efficient 5/5 untargetable monstrosity for four mana. Sure it has vanishing, but a) your opponent is either dead or well on their way there by the time [Calciderm](#) disappears, and b) you're playing a deck that can replay it once it gets low on counters. Get extra copies of [Calciderm](#). You won't be sorry.

[Stonecloaker](#) : This one is also efficient (a consistent theme for the "Cards to Love" sections today) as a 3/2 flier for three mana. With no other rules text alone it would be worth a look in aggressive decks. Thankfully, it has a load of rules text. [Stonecloaker](#) can be a surprise blocker. It can save a creature from death. It can reuse cards like [Calciderm](#) and [Avalanche Riders](#). It can mess up graveyard-focused decks, and it can even be a graveyard-killing instant with buyback by returning itself. [Stonecloaker](#) is one of those versatile cards that I absolutely love and that will make its way into a surprising number of decklists.



[Soltari Priest](#) : Efficient and usually unblockable, [Soltari Priest](#) is one of white's best weenies. The fact that it can ignore red removal like [Shock](#) or your own cards like [Pyrohemia](#) is just gravy.

[Avalanche Riders](#) : Endless March doesn't have a strong land-destruction theme at all, but you could certainly push it in that direction by getting yourself more copies of [Avalanche Riders](#). The reason you would do this is because for just one more mana than [Stone Rain](#), you get a 2/2 creature that can attack or block at will. The Riders have been popular since they debuted in Urza's Legacy because they're just really, really good. If you can replay them as this deck allows you to do, the Riders can get truly scary.

Cards to Drop

Those are several cards to love. Which cards you dislike in the deck is going to depend partly on your play style, partly on the kind of deck you want to make, and partly on which other cards in the deck you want to keep. Generally speaking, though, every preconstructed deck has a few stinkers in the decklist that get dropped quickly no matter which way you evolve the deck. Again, this isn't an exhaustive list, but rather a starting point. Also again, feel free to add your own thoughts to this list on the message boards. Active debate is part of the fun of lists like these.

Caveats aside, no matter which way you take the deck I'm guessing you'll eventually tire of cards like...

[Children of Korlis](#) : Okay, the good news is that it gives you something to do on the first turn. I can also imagine a situation in which [Children of Korlis](#) helps you extend a game by a turn or two. The problem is that it's an incredibly situational ability that will almost never be timed perfectly. I can see Children in a deck using [Ageless Entity](#) or something, but in today's Standard I can think of several cards I would rather use here. Get more copies of [Icatian Javelineers](#). Use [Soul Warden](#), a card that screams Endless March. Use Order of Stars. If you have a decent budget, use [Savannah Lions](#) or [Weathered Wayfarer](#). Heck, for a similar-but-better effect use [Martyr of Sands](#). Just don't use [Children of Korlis](#).

Errant Doomsayers : It's not that Errant Doomsayers will be useless in your deck, it's just that a) it doesn't really match up well with the rest of the deck's themes, and b) cards like Master Decoy, Squall Drifter, Azorius Guildmage, and Minister of Impediments are just better at what the Doomsayers try to do. Personally, I think your two mana are better spent on something other than a tappity-tap guy, but even if you want to go that route there are better options.

Stormfront Riders : Stormfront Riders, on the other hand, matches up very well with the deck's themes and has a relatively unique effect. It's only liability – which is a killer in **Magic** – is that it's so darned expensive for what it does. I like the Riders a lot, but can you really justify paying for it over, say, Belfry Spirit, Blinding Angel, Magus of the Disk, or extra copies of Calciderm? Besides, if you want to generate tokens, I'm guessing that Jötun Owl Keeper and Selesnya Guildmage will generate a lot more a lot more often.

Endless March Deck Ideas

As I said in my introduction, the primary fun of preconstructed decks is that they are springboards for other decks. Here are just a few of the many, many ways I can see taking Endless March in a deck evolution...

White, Red, or White/Red Weenie: The most obvious (and some would say boring) way to take Endless March is to turn it into a weenie deck, focusing on cheap, hard-hitting creatures that try to get an opponent to zero life as quickly as possible. In this scenario, more Icatian Javelineers, Soltari Priests, Brute Forces, and Calciderms enter the fray in place of cerebral tricksters like Jhoira's Timebug and Dawn Charm. What makes this direction interesting to me is the ways that starting from Endless March would make a deck different from a typical Boros Aggro deck. Would the deck still retain Whitemane Lion? Lavacore Elemental? Sunlance? I'm interested in the answers here, and how much of the vanishing-rescue theme such a deck would keep. I also think going mono-white or mono-red opens interesting doors to what Endless March might become from a weenie rush standpoint.



Rescue A-Go-Go: The other obvious (but some would say fun) way to take Endless March is to dive heavily into the theme of rescue and playing creatures again and again. Stonecloaker and Whitemane Lion become the backbone of the deck, probably alongside a second copy of Dust Elemental. After that, things get wacky. Maybe more Avalanche Riders and Mogg War Marshals show up. Calciderm is

certainly there, alongside more copies of [Dead // Gone](#) and [Keldon Marauders](#). What about other cards, though? Does [Soul Warden](#) sneak into the back door? [Stalking Yeti](#)? [Flame-Kin Zealot](#)? [Sparkmage Apprentice](#)? [Stingscourger](#)? There are a lot of fun directions to go here, and I doubt it would involve a huge overhaul of the deck's core.

In fact, Chris Romeo recently wrote an [Endless March evolution article](#) along these lines. Incidentally, if you like preconstructed deck evolutions, you should check out Chris' stuff on a regular basis.

Time Travel: In those previous two decks, [Jhoira's Timebug](#) and [Timecrafting](#) take a back seat. It's easy to imagine making these two cards the core of the deck, however. With four copies of each (along with, I'm guessing, [Fury Charm](#)), [Riftmarked Knight](#) becomes a bigger player, while a lot of the rescue-based weenie guys probably disappear. This opens the doors for gems like [Benalish Commander](#), [Detrivore](#), [Greater Gargadon](#), [Pardic Dragon](#), [Wheel of Fate](#), [Restore Balance](#), etc. Yes, that is a big pile of rares; I'm not saying that you would use all of them, but rather base the deck around the interactions of time counters and one or more of these. This still makes the time-based deck a bigger monetary investment, but the payoff is huge if you find a deck that works.

Fatal Frenzy : Finally, I'm always conscious of the two rares each preconstructed deck contains. In several different evolutions, I can see [Dust Elemental](#) playing a prominent role because it aligns so well with the deck's themes. [Fatal Frenzy](#) is more of a head-scratcher, since it seems to support a different kind of deck. I wonder, though, what happens if you make it a deck centerpiece. How scary are [Keldon Marauders](#) and [Lavacore Elemental](#) with [Fatal Frenzy](#), especially if you throw in a [Brute Force](#)? Pretty scary. Could you add [Shivan Wumpus](#) or [Flamecore Elemental](#)? Cards like [Griffin Guide](#) and [Taste for Mayhem](#) could supplement the deck to make [Fatal Frenzy](#), you know, fatal. Because [Fatal Frenzy](#) is less aligned with Endless March's themes, this direction takes the deck pretty far afield. If you have both the patience and budget, though, I can imagine a lot of fun here.



Ixidor's Legacy

Our second deck is definitely the weirdest of the *Planar Chaos* preconstructed decks, largely because it is built around the thematic idea of shapeshifting. This means that some cards have morph, some cards change their shape in other ways, some cards change other creatures' power and toughness, some cards – like [Pongify](#) and [Ovinize](#) – change everything about a creature. In fact, a smattering of pretty much everything blue can do – except, notably, counterspells – is present in Ixidor's Legacy. This makes the deck feel incredibly random, but also incredibly unpredictable, full of interesting two-card interactions.

Here's the decklist:

Ixidor's Legacy



Main Deck

60 cards

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Desert | 2 Erratic Mutation |
| 23 Island | 2 Ovinize |
| <hr/> | 1 Piracy Charm |
| 24 lands | 1 Pongify |
| | 2 Unstable Mutation |
| | <hr/> |
| 1 Aeon Chronicler | 8 other spells |
| 2 Aquamorph Entity | |
| 1 Brine Elemental | |
| 2 Coral Trickster | |
| 1 Crookclaw Transmuter | |
| 2 Dream Stalker | |
| 3 Fathom Seer | |
| 2 Fledgling Mawcor | |
| 1 Jodah's Avenger | |
| 1 Merfolk Thaumaturgist | |
| 1 Ovinomancer | |
| 2 Primal Plasma | |
| 2 Riptide Pilferer | |
| 1 Serendib Sorcerer | |
| 2 Shaper Parasite | |
| 1 Slipstream Serpent | |
| 2 Tidewalker | |
| 1 Willbender | |
| <hr/> | |
| 28 creatures | |



Cards to Love

I've already set up the sections I'll be walking through for each deck. As a reminder, here is where I highlight the uncommons and rares that, generally speaking, you will want more copies of to use in a wide array of decks...

Desert : I was so excited by Quicksand's reprint until Desert showed up in Standard. Now I throw Desert into almost every monocolored deck I make, and some two-color decks as well. The reason is that Desert is an incredibly effective deterrent to weenie-rush strategies. Think of Endless March and Ixidor's Legacy dueling: A single Desert can shut down seven of a March player's creatures. If you were able to get a second copy and put both on the table, you could now kill *seventeen* of your opponent's creatures after a single attack. Desert is reusable and can help any color. If you play monochromatic decks, get extra copies right away.

Willbender : I'll go out on a limb and say that Willbender is the single most useful morph creature in Standard today for the widest variety of decks. I can't count the number of times I've been on the receiving end of Willbender when playing Mwonvuli Acid-Moss or Lightning Helix. And, of course, whilst Willbender is lying in wait it's a very respectable 2/2 creature that can dig into an opponent's life. Every morph deck I've ever seen uses Willbender as a staple.



[Aeon Chronicler](#) : Easily the best things about Ixidor's Legacy are the timeshifted and rare cards. [Desert](#), [Unstable Mutation](#), [Ovinomancer](#), [Willbender](#)... These are fun cards to own, and perhaps the most fun card of the bunch is [Aeon Chronicler](#). It's a blue [Maro](#) with a very impressive extra rules clause. Decklists have been flying all over the internet trying to "break" [Aeon Chronicler](#), and my guess is that you'll join the pack once you've had a chance to see it in action.


Cards to Drop

As before, I have a hard time making an argument for why you should keep some of the cards in Ixidor's Legacy around, no matter how you evolve your deck. Some examples...

[Slipstream Serpent](#) : I'm guessing that [Slipstream Serpent](#) is the first card you replace when you start changing Ixidor's Legacy. In a deck with no mana acceleration, you will never find the mana to cast an eight-mana creature before you're dead. What's depressing is that you also won't reliably find the six mana to un-morph [Slipstream Serpent](#), and if you do what you likely get is a 6/6 defender. This makes [Slipstream Serpent](#) effectively a 2/2 vanilla creature for three mana that every once in awhile will become a big wall. That's, well... That's just bad.

[Crookclaw Transmuter](#) : The good news about [Crookclaw Transmuter](#) is that it's an honest-to-goodness threat as a 3-power flier with flash. The bad news is that it costs four mana, it's incredibly fragile, and its ability is a one-shot effect. Even in a power-toughness switcheroo deck, I don't think [Crookclaw Transmuter](#) makes the cut.



[Jodah's Avenger](#) : Once it hits the table, [Jodah's Avenger](#) is actually a very respectable creature. I can easily see it taking over games as your opponent looks on helplessly and curses your one-eyed shapeshifter. So why does it make my "no-no" list? Yep, it's that  sitting in the top right-hand corner. For that mana I would rather have [Cerulean Sphinx](#), [Draining Whelk](#), or [Mahamoti Djinn](#). Honestly, though, I just don't think this deck is going to get a lot of use out of six-mana finishers.

Ixidor's Legacy Deck Ideas

Since Ixidor's Legacy is in many ways the least coherent of the four preconstructed decks, there are also a frightening number of ways to evolve it. My guess is that any one of these directions eventually changes a big chunk of the decklist, which is the downside here.

Mono-blue Weenie: One direction to take the deck is to find the best cheap weenies that blue has to offer – loading up on [Coral Trickster](#), [Riptide Pilferer](#), and [Unstable Mutation](#) – and adding blue bounce/tempo effects like [Boomerang](#), [Snapback](#), and [Remand](#). You could also notice that the cards I think make the backbone of such a deck are all Merfolk, and you could focus on adding [Lord of Atlantis](#) into the deck. In either case, [Tidewalker](#) seems like a juicy creature to keep as part of the decklist.

Here's an example of a way I might eventually evolve Ixidor's Legacy along these lines, keeping in mind that it took me a long while to get from there to here...

Ixidor's Angry



Main Deck *60 cards*

20 [Snow-Covered Island](#) 4 [Boomerang](#)

20 lands

4 [Halcyon Glaze](#)
4 [Unstable Mutation](#)

4 [Drifter il-Dal](#)
4 [Looter il-Kor](#)
4 [Phyrexian Ironfoot](#)
4 [Riptide Pilferer](#)
4 [Sage of Epityr](#)
4 [Tidewalker](#)
4 [Voidmage Prodigy](#)

12 other spells

28 creatures



Morph: Every deckbuilder has to try at least one morph deck in their lifetime, it seems to me. Ixidor's Legacy helps push you in that direction, especially if you add more copies of [Willbender](#), [Fathom Seer](#), [Fledgling Mawcor](#), and [Brine Elemental](#). Of course, [Ixidron](#) and [Vesuvan Shapeshifter](#) become fun additions to a deck like this. Thanks to [Ixidron](#) and [Serendib Sorcerer](#) (if you choose to keep him part of the deck), removal like [Erratic Mutation](#) and [Shaper Parasite](#) become a lot more reliable. The trick with morph decks always seems to be how to compensate for the fact that they're so slow, but I'm sure you can figure out a way to handle this in the color of tricks and control.

Aeon Chronicler : As I said, [Aeon Chronicler](#) is a fun, fun creature. To truly take advantage of him, you'd have to meld the deck a bit, maximizing cards like [Fathom Seer](#) and [Dream Stalker](#), while adding more blue card-drawing, defense, and artifact-based mana-acceleration. Again, this takes the deck pretty far a field, but the result sounds awesome.

Incidentally, check out Ben Bleiweiss's ten-week experiment over on [Building On A Budget](#). Very cool stuff, and he even recently made an [Aeon Chronicler](#) deck from which you can mine ideas!



Rituals of Rebirth

If Ixidor's Legacy is the most random of *Planar Chaos*'s crop of preconstructed decks, Rituals of Rebirth is the most focused. The idea here is fairly straightforward: Dump big monsters into your graveyard, pull big monsters from your graveyard directly into play. Rinse, repeat, smash face. It's more interesting than that, of course, with some comes-into-play effects, some defense, token generation to fuel [Dread Return](#), and a lot of mana-fixing (since it's rare to find a three-color precon), but for the most part it's a good primer for how any "Reanimator" deck should work. Here's the decklist:

Rituals of Rebirth



Main Deck

60 cards

11 Forest	3 Dread Return
4 Plains	3 Evolution Charm
7 Swamp	2 Harmonize
2 Terramorphic Expanse	2 Rebuff the Wicked
_____	1 Resurrection
24 lands	2 Search for Tomorrow
_____	_____

- 1 [Bog Serpent](#) 13 other spells
2 [Essence Warden](#)
3 [Fa'adiyah Seer](#)
2 [Greenseeker](#)
2 [Havenwood Wurm](#)
2 [Icatian Crier](#)
1 [Jedit Ojanen of Efrava](#)
2 [Jedit's Dragoons](#)
3 [Phantasmagorian](#)
1 [Sengir Autocrat](#)
1 [Spike Feeder](#)
1 [Teneb, the Harvester](#)
1 [Twisted Abomination](#)
1 [Wall of Roots](#)

23 creatures



Cards to Love

In general, you'll find that Rituals of Rebirth has the highest card quality of the four preconstructed decks. That is, the cards all work together in a way that helps its central strategy, and most of the cards are good in other strategies too. For this reason, I think if you're going to buy two copies of any *Planar Chaos* precon, it's probably Rituals of Rebirth. That said, there are a few staples you'll particularly enjoy owning...

Teneb, the Harvester : Both rares in Rituals of Rebirth are excellent, but Teneb is the star of the deck. It's huge, it's efficient, it can swing a game wildly in your favor, and it's a freakin' cool Dragon. Teneb has made the eyebrows of several Pro Tour players rise off of their head, so you should covet your

copies. Teneb is six mana so well spent that any mana-fixing and mana-acceleration you include to accommodate it in your deck is well worth it.

[Dread Return](#) / [Resurrection](#): The bad news is that these two cards really only help reanimation strategies. The good news is that if you have a reanimation strategy you probably want four copies because they are absolute staples for reanimation. Black-based decks should use [Dread Return](#) and [Zombify](#). White-based decks should use [Resurrection](#). Four copies for your chosen color, no less.



[Harmonize](#) : [Harmonize](#) might look like it doesn't fit particularly well into this deck because it a) isn't a big fattie, b) doesn't drop a big fattie into your graveyard, and c) doesn't bring a big fattie back to life. The thing is, though, that [Harmonize](#) is the card-drawing spell that Green mages have been dreaming about for years. Any slower, control-based deck using a lot of Green will want to use [Harmonize](#). Check out [my latest "Going Rogue" adventure](#) as an example of how great I think this card is.

Cards to Drop

It is a testament to Ritual of Rebirth's card quality that you really can argue for keeping almost every card in the deck. Reanimator decks in general tend to look like precon anyway, with lots of one- and two-copy cards. In fact, I see only two really obvious cards you would want to eventually drop...

[Bog Serpent](#) : [Bog Serpent](#) is a black version of Sea Serpent. You know what? Sea Serpent isn't good in decks either. A 5/5 defender that can't block fliers is just a bad deal for six mana, and you can't rely on [Bog Serpent](#) being able to attack. I would make comparisons to creatures like [Gleancrawler](#), [Helldozer](#), [Nightmare](#), and [Skeletal Vampire](#), but that's almost too easy. Heck, even in this deck specifically, [Twisted Abomination](#) is exponentially better.

[Havenwood Wurm](#) : I'm torn on [Havenwood Wurm](#), because a 5/6 trampler with no drawbacks other than its cost is scary. I can even imagine casting it with flash every now and again in this deck thanks to Ritual of Rebirth's mana acceleration. The problem is that, again, there are way too many creatures that are superior. Use extra copies of Teneb and Jedit. Use [Panglacial Wurm](#), [Spectral Force](#), or [Arctic Nishoba](#). If that's too many rares for you, use [Twisted Abomination](#) or [Siege Wurm](#) instead.

Rituals of Rebirth Deck Ideas

As I've said repeatedly, Rituals of Rebirth is a pretty decent reanimation deck right out of the box. As a result, it's the precon in *Planar Chaos* that requires the least work to be a "tight" deck. You can also do a lot of tinkering with the card choices while still keeping it a pure reanimation deck. How much discarding, reanimation, creatures, and other cards you use will really be up to you if you go down this path.

That said, there are a few other ways I can see to steer Rituals of Rebirth away from reanimation into other territories...



Green-Black-White "Good Stuff": A "Good Stuff" deck tends to be three or four colors and tries to use the best cards it can find in those colors. Any G/B/W Good Stuff deck is going to rely heavily on Teneb, and you have a lot of what a deck list like this would need already in [Terramorphic Expanse](#), [Greenseeker](#), [Search for Tomorrow](#), [Wall of Roots](#), [Twisted Abomination](#), and [Harmonize](#). You probably need to invest in some expensive lands to make this sort of deck work, but once you have the manabase covered you can literally do anything with the decklist here, using your favorite cards in three colors.

Tokenator: A lot of the tokens in Rituals of Rebirth are there first and foremost to feed [Dread Return](#)'s flashback cost. I don't see why you couldn't beef up this theme, though, to include cards like [Hour of Reckoning](#), [Leyline of the Meek](#), [Selesnya Guildmage](#), [Twilight Drover](#), and Thelonite Druid. As you can see, this probably means adding more white to the deck and lessening the black, which maybe opens the door to using both [Essence Warden](#) and [Soul Warden](#). What you do with all of those tokens is up to you, whether it be to fuel convoke costs or something more sinister. Whatever happens, I still like the idea of [Dread Return](#) in a deck like this.

Dead and Loving It: Not to steal the Unraveling Mind deck's thunder too much, but it occurs to me that a lot of Rituals of Rebirth involves discarding for fun and profit. To me, it's relatively straightforward to dilute – or even remove – the reanimation aspects of the deck and add in other ways to take advantage of cards like [Greenseeker](#), [Fa'adiyah Seer](#), [Icatian Crier](#), and [Phantasmagorian](#). Some ideas include madness spells, flashback, and dredge, to name a few.



Unraveling Mind

Our fourth and final *Planar Chaos* preconstructed deck is built around the madness mechanic. This means that the deck tries its darnedest to use one of its many discard outlets like [Lightning Axe](#) and [Undertaker](#) to discard one of its fourteen madness cards like [Reckless Wurm](#). The deck also focuses on a few fast, aggressive creatures and definitely carries an undertone of to-the-face burn, making Unraveling Mind able to play aggressively if it wants to do so. Thanks to some informal polling online, I would say that Unraveling Mind is the favorite *Planar Chaos* precon for many, many folks. Here's the decklist:

Unraveling Mind



Main Deck

60 cards

7 Mountain	1 Browbeat
14 Swamp	1 Dark Withering
3 Terramorphic Expanse	1 Disintegrate
_____	1 Fiery Temper
24 lands	1 Kor Dirge
2 Big Game Hunter	2 Lightning Axe
	1 Treacherous Urge

- 2 [Brain Gorgers](#)
1 [Dauthi Slayer](#)
2 [Gorgon Recluse](#)
1 [Magus of the Arena](#)
4 [Mindlash Sliver](#)
1 [Mirri the Cursed](#)
2 [Muck Drubb](#)
2 [Nightshade Assassin](#)
2 [Phantasmagorian](#)
2 [Reckless Wurm](#)
1 [Ridged Kusite](#)
3 [Trespasser il-Vec](#)
3 [Undertaker](#)
-
- 28 creatures



Cards to Love

Interestingly, neither of the deck's rares – [Mirri the Cursed](#) and [Magus of the Arena](#)--really support the deck's main theme of madness. They are both solid rares, though, and should make you happy. So which uncommons and rares do I think will get used again and again in a wide variety of decks? To me, Unraveling Minds has an interesting feature...

Every "timeshifted" card: That's right, I think all seven of the deck's *Time Spiral* timeshifted cards are terrific. [Undertaker](#) is the backbone of a madness-inspired deck and can get used in all sorts of reanimation strategies. [Browbeat](#) gives red some conditional card-drawing. [Fiery Temper](#) is decent burn in any red deck and superb in any deck that discards cards. Finally, [Disintegrate](#) is flat-out better than [Blaze](#) and argues with [Demonfire](#) about who is Standard's best X-spell. Any and all of these cards are going to sneak into your decklists, so feel free to get more copies and enjoy.

Cards to Drop

Like any preconstructed deck not named Rituals of Rebirth, Unraveling Mind does have a few stinkers lying in wait for you. No matter how you change the deck, I'm guessing that you'll eventually drop these cards...

Ridged Kusite : The nice thing about Ridged Kusite is that it comes down on the first turn and has an ability that can be used on the second turn. In a madness deck, though, that's not very impressive since you also want to have mana for paying madness costs. The Kusite's effect – a small power increase and first strike – is just too small for two mana and a card. I would use Flowstone Channeler(which can sometimes be creature removal), Jaya Ballard, Task Mage, Lightning Axe, Macabre Waltz, Rakdos Guildmage, Trespasser il-Vec, Undertaker, Delirium Skeins, Mindlash Sliver, Mindslicer, Phantasmagorian, Smallpox, or Wheel of Fate before I would use Ridged Kusite. Besides, the art is gross.

Brain Gorgers : You will hear experienced players say that giving an opponent choice is a bad thing. If you *have* to give an opponent options, those options should be lose-lose, difficult-to-make decisions. The problem with Brain Gorgers is that the choice will often be easy. Either an opponent will have a disposable creature or he or she can easily handle a 4/2 creature with no other abilities. There are simply a lot more juicy madness cards to use than Brain Gorgers. Besides, the name is gross.

Muck Drubb : I want to like Muck Drubb, I really do. It has an interesting ability and flash. Unfortunately, five mana for a 3/3 creature toting a situational ability is a bad deal. Three mana is a bit better, but also hard to keep open for a reactive trick. For three mana I should get a 4/4 trampler, not a martyred Drubb. Besides, the name... Well, actually, I really like the name.

Unraveling Mind Deck Ideas

Just beefing up the deck's existing theme of madness into a tight decklist would be fun and give you a deck unlike what other people are playing. Maximize Undertaker, Lightning Axe, and Trespasser il-Vec to help out Mindlash Sliver as your madness enablers. Add more Fiery Temper, Reckless Wurm, Gorgon Recluse, and Nightshade Assassin. There won't be a lot left in the deck after that, but plenty of room to be creative.

If for some reason you like the deck but want to develop other themes of the deck, here are some ideas to pursue...



Hellbent: I don't know about you, but when I see a black-red deck that is trying to discard a lot of cards I still think of *Dissension* and the hellbent mechanic. Keep your [Mindlash Sliver](#), [Lightning Axe](#), [Trespasser // Vec](#), etc., drop a lot of the madness stuff, and suddenly you have room for [Gobhobbler Rats](#), Jagget Poppet, and [Rakdos Pit Dragon](#). Madness and hellbent have such synergy, I can see a few *Dissension* cards sneaking into the deck no matter how you evolve Unraveling Mind.

Black-Red Reanimator: Hey, remember how I said you could turn Rituals of Rebirth into a madness deck? No surprise, you could also turn Unraveling Mind into a reanimation deck. Again, keep the discard outlets, add some fatties (in addition to your two legendary rares), and in comes [Dread Return](#) and [Zombify](#). Yes, making a reanimation deck is just that easy.

Sliver-Madness: For some reason, I'm intrigued by those four copies of [Mindlash Sliver](#) in Unraveling Mind. It must be that it's the only 4-of card in all four precon. Whatever the case, it seems a shame not to add more Slivers to the deck, especially when [Sedge Sliver](#), [Plague Sliver](#), [Bonesplitter Sliver](#), [Two-Headed Sliver](#), and [Ghostflame Sliver](#) are so good. Because of [Mindlash Sliver](#), I could easily see keeping a subtheme of madness in this sort of deck, too, especially with something like [Macabre Waltz](#) as a madness enabler. This idea changes a lot of the deck, obviously, but I'm guessing you could keep a good number of the cards intact.

Postconstructed Thoughts

Okay, that should give you a head start in thinking about each *Planar Chaos* preconstructed deck's strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities. Hopefully your deckbuilding brain is tingling, which would be a sign that I've succeeded.

I've said a few times today that it often makes sense to buy two copies of a preconstructed deck if you're planning to evolve it, because doing so gives you a solid nucleus of cards, including two or more copies of your best cards. It's also possible to combine two *different* precon to start a deck evolution. Mark Rosewater took you through a [thought experiment](#) along these lines when he took over Building On A Budget for a day. The possibilities here are literally endless (and obviously not something I have room to cover today). Take, for example, a single copy of Rituals of Rebirth mashed together with a copy of Unraveling Mind. As I suggested, the synergy between reanimation and madness make for a number of really fun options here.

Obviously my intention today is to share some of my enthusiasm for preconstructed decks and transfer a bit of that enthusiasm to you. Have I succeeded? Fire up the Message Boards link at the bottom of the page and let me know what you think of today's article. Is your creativity piqued? Do you want to add your own "Cards to Love" or "Cards to Drop"? Any other deck ideas you have for any of the four decks? I'm always eager for feedback, and I'm always excited when you share ideas on the Boards. Like "Going Rogue," today is a bit of an experiment, so your comments and feedback are invaluable to me.

In the meantime, think hard and have fun with precons!

-jms
(currently GoingRogue on **Magic** Online)