

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



10 Decks in 10 Weeks: Sheer Pandemonium (W/R)

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Building on a Budget
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Welcome back to Building on a Budget! My name is Ben Bleiweiss, and we're rounding the corner towards the tail end of 10 Decks in 10 Weeks! In last week's article, I finished up with a white-blue deck centered around **Momentary Blink**, creatures with a comes-into-play ability, and the rescue creatures from *Planar Chaos*. In this edition of 10 Decks in 10 Weeks, I take out the blue and move to the **Mountains**.



Pandemonium is one of those cards that everyone gives consideration to, but that rarely works out in practice. The reason why **Pandemonium** often fails to

achieve the desired results is because it is a very potent double-edged sword. Your opponent can use **Pandemonium** just as well you can, and often will do so first since you have spent the majority of your mana to cast **Pandemonium** itself.

- 10 Decks in 10 Weeks! Each week, I evolve a two-color Standard-legal deck that costs 30 tickets or less. At the beginning of the next week, I keep all of the cards of one of the two colors, and then switch to a different color combination, and begin Building from there!
- Week 1: G/W - [The Two Ladies](#)
- Week 2: G/R - [A Wild Pair](#)
- Week 3: R/U - [Aeon in Flux](#)
- Week 4: U/B - [Grim Outlook](#)
- Week 5: B/W - [Rescue Me](#)
- Week 6: W/U - [A Blink In Time](#)
- **Week 7: W/R - Sheer Pandemonium**
- Week 8: R/B - See End of Article for Poll Results!
- Week 9: B/G - Profusion Confusion
- Week 10: G/U - [Fungal Behemoth](#)

Traditionally, there have been two successful types of decks that have employed **Pandemonium**:

1. Straight Combo: **Pandemonium**, when it was first released, worked quite well with the Nemesis enchantment **Saproling Burst**. If you play a **Pandemonium** and then a **Burst**, you can deal 21 damage immediately by making a 6/6 creature, letting **Pandemonium** resolve, making a 5/5 creature, letting **Pandemonium** resolve, and repeating this until you get down to having six 1/1 creatures in play at once.
2. Aggro-Combo: This is the typically the red-green deck that has **Primal Forcemage**, **Norin the Wary** and haste creatures. Strike hard, strike fast, and get double immediate damage out of your haste creatures. This way, they can definitely hit for damage before they die to **Pandemonium** from creatures on the other side of the board.

Each of these deck types has had mixed success, for the reason that **Pandemonium** cuts both ways. For every game that you get the **Norin the Wary** / **Primal Forcemage** / **Pandemonium** draw (and keep the **Forcemage** alive), you have a game where you drop **Pandemonium**, and your opponent responds by dropping ten power worth of creatures to the board and either burns you or all of your creatures out of the game.

With that in mind, let's take a look at how the deck looks this week:

Out: 4 Azorius Chancery, 4 Azorius Signet, 3 Azorius First-Wing, 3 Court Hussar, 3 Draining Whelk, 6 Island, 4 **Momentary Blink**, 3 Riftwing Cloudskate

The typical removal of all the cards from the departed color of the week. In this case, I also yanked out the **Momentary Blinks** – without the Blue flashback ability, they would be a lot less efficient in the deck.

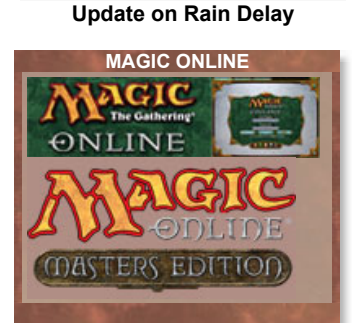
A Blink In Time -- No Blue		
f.dec		
Main Deck 34 cards		
8 Plains	1 Akroma, Angel of Fury	4 Momentary Blink
4 Terramorphic Expanse	3 Aven Riftwatcher	4 other spells
12 lands	4 Calciderm	
	3 Jotun Grunt	
	4 Stonecloaker	
	3 Whitemane Lion	
	18 creatures	

First, I added in bouncelands, signets and basic lands for red or red-white.

In: 4 **Boros Garrison**, 4 **Boros Signet**, 6 **Mountain**

Next, I put in four copies of **Pandemonium**. The deck is going to be built around the card, so I mightaswell get 'er in there.

In: 4 **Pandemonium**



Next comes the creature base. Here's the tricky part! As mentioned above, the main uses for **Pandemonium** are in Combo or Aggro-Combo. This deck is not a combo deck in any shape, way or form. As you've seen from **Rescue Me** and **A Blink in Time**, this deck is just pure aggro – I drop creatures, swing, save my creatures from dying in combat with other aggressive creatures, and just keep going to the fences until those fences are smashed down. There are plenty of fancy tricks, but those tricks are based around coming into play and leaving play, and not around built-in **Giant Growths** or broken enchantments that make huge creatures.

As I mentioned before, one of the drawbacks of **Pandemonium** is that your opponent often gets to drop the first set of creatures after **Pandemonium** hits the board, since the enchantment itself costs four mana to play. This deck already has several good interactions with **Pandemonium**:

- **Calciderm** can't be targeted by **Pandemonium** (when an opponent plays a creature).
- The white rescue creatures can save your other creatures from being hit by **Pandemonium**.
- The white rescue creatures can bounce themselves and recur **Pandemonium** damage. Six mana with either a **Stonecloaker** or **Whitemane Lion** is 6 damage a turn, at instant speed.

When approaching the puzzle that is **Pandemonium**, I felt that working around the "it costs four mana to play **Pandemonium**" drawback was essential. To this effect, I already have **Jötun Grunts** in the deck – guys that can easily be played the same turn as **Pandemonium**, and who deal 4 damage for two mana under those circumstances. This left me wanting to stack the deck with more high-power, low-cost creatures.

Keldon Marauders immediately came to mind. I faced a red-white-blue **Rescue / Blink** deck featuring these guys a few weeks back, and it struck me how efficient the Marauders were in that deck. This build can use the Marauders as a recurring **Lava Axe** (one damage when it comes into play, plus three for an attack, plus one when it leaves play – preferably with a **Rescue** creature).

I also wanted to try out **Volcano Hellion**. Six power for four mana is huge, and **Volcano Hellion** can kill virtually any creature that my opponent can put into play. Sure, I won't often be able to pay the echo on this monster, but I can always bounce it back to my hand during my upkeep with **Stonecloaker** or **Whitemane Lion**, and then reuse it to kill another creature later. Plus, it's great with **Pandemonium** – it can do six to my opponent's dome, plus kill an opposing creature, plus survive virtually anything my opponent can drop back with **Pandemonium** the following turn!


To round out the deck, I included 3 copies of **Sparkmage Apprentice** (which I had alluded to last week when I took out **Icatian Javelineers**) and 2 copies of **Stingscourger** (to replace the departed **Riftwing Cloudskate**).

In: 4 **Keldon Marauders**, 3 **Volcano Hellion**, 3 **Sparkmage Apprentice**, 2 **Stingscourger**





RW Sheer Pandemonium 1		
		
Main Deck		
60 cards		
4 Boros Garrison	3 Sparkmage Apprentice	4 Boros Signet
6 Mountain	1 Akroma, Angel of Fury	4 Pandemonium
8 Plains	3 Aven Riftwatcher	8 other spells
4 Terramorphic Expanse	4 Calciderm	
22 lands	3 Jotun Grunt	
	4 Keldon Marauders	
	2 Stingscourger	
	4 Stonecloaker	
	3 Volcano Hellion	
	3 Whitemane Lion	
	30 creatures	

Game 1: Cloyd (B/G **Thallids**)

Cloyd starts out by dropping a couple of early **Thallids**, but I get **Aven Riftwatcher** on turn three and **Stingscourger** on turn four to bounce one of his guys. He drops down **Sporesower Thallid**, and I use **Stonecloaker** during my upkeep to bounce **Stingscourger** (and avoid paying the  echo cost). After playing another land, I drop **Stingscourger** again, bounce his guy. He drops **Sporesower Thallid** again, and follows him with **Arena**. I get a second **Aven Riftwatcher**, and drop **Pandemonium**. On his turn, he uses **Arena** and kills my **Stingscourger**, and then drops a two-power **Thallid** to kill my **Stonecloaker**. On my turn, I swing with **Aven Riftwatcher**, drop a second **Pandemonium**, and drop **Jötun Grunt** to burn him for 8 and win the game.
Record: 1-0

Rules Aside: In this game, Cloyd used **Sporesower Thallid** to kill one of my creatures during his main phase. After the game, I pointed out that **Arena** can be used after attackers are declared. As written:

", : Tap target creature you control and target creature of an opponent's choice he or she controls. Each of those creatures deals damage equal to its power to the other."

Note that costs for using a card are always before the colon—these are what must be paid for a card to work. "Tap target creature you control" is written after the colon, so it is an effect of the card. That means that once you pay the cost of "3, 1" part of the effect is "Tap target creature you control" just as much as "Each of those creatures deals damage equal to its power to the other." This also means that you do not need to have an untapped creature to use this on! **Arena** does not say "Tap target untapped creature you control," so it is fine to declare an attacker, have your creature tap to attack, and then throw it into the **Arena**!



Game 2: UNCIVLIFE (R/B Control)

I double mulligan and get stuck on a one-land hand until turn five. Once I draw a second land, I am able to make a run at the game with **Keldon Marauders**, **Jötun Grunt**, and **Whitemane Lion**. However, he gets down **Kaervek the Merciless**, and I have no way of recovering from my slow start at that point. I do manage to get UNCIVLIFE down to 6 before he kills me.

Record: 1-1

Game 3: Lowpressure68 (Mono-Red Storm)

Once again I take a mulligan, but this time my six-card hand is pretty juicy.

Well, Lowpressure68 begins the game on the draw, and casts **Rite of Flame** (2), **Rite of Flame** (2), pitches double **Simian Spirit Guide** (2), and then plays **Empty the Warrens** with storm of two to make six Goblins. He then proceeds to take two points of mana burn.

Rules Aside: Removing **Simian Spirit Guide** from the game to get mana is an activated ability of the card, and is not a spell!

On my turn, I drop **Jötun Grunt**. He attacks with all six Goblins, and I block one putting me at 14 life. I pay the upkeep on my Grunts (thanks to his double **Rite of Flame**!), attack for four, and drop **Keldon Marauders** (15-14). He attacks with all five goblins (15-11 – another block), and passes the turn. My **Jötun Grunts** die, and I attack with my **Marauders** (12-11) and drop another **Jötun Grunt**. He attacks with his four Goblins (12-8). During my upkeep, I stack the upkeep on **Jötun Grunt** first, and **Keldon Marauders** second. The **Marauders** resolve, die from Vanishing, and deal a point of damage to Lowpressure68 (11-11). I've now got the first **Jötun Grunts** and the just-deceased **Keldon Marauders** in my graveyard, allowing me to upkeep my second Grunts! I swing in (11-7), play my third land of the game, and drop **Aven Riftwatcher** (13-7). A second **Aven Riftwatcher** the following turn seals the game in my favor.

Record: 2-1

Notice when I dropped land #3 that game – around turn five! So far, I've taken three mulligans in three games and been short on mana one game. In addition, I've drawn double **Pandemonium** two of the three games (never got up to four mana to play it Game 3). To solve these mana issues, I decide to take out one **Pandemonium** and add in one **Mountain**.

Out: 1 **Pandemonium**

In: 1 **Mountain**

RW Sheer Pandemonium 2		
dec		
Main Deck		
60 cards		
4 Boros Garrison	3 Sparkmage Apprentice	4 Boros Signet
7 Mountain	1 Akroma, Angel of Fury	3 Pandemonium
8 Plains	3 Aven Riftwatcher	7 other spells
4 Terramorphic Expanses	4 Calciderm	
23 lands	3 Jötun Grunt	
	4 Keldon Marauders	
	2 Stingscourger	
	4 Stonecloaker	
	3 Volcano Hellion	
	3 Whitemane Lion	
	30 creatures	

Game 4: James227 (Slivers)

I get **Sparkmage Apprentice** and deal a point of damage to James227. He drops **Spined Sliver** and **Spinneret Sliver**. I attack with my **Apprentice**, and he blocks with his **Spinneret Sliver**. I stack damage, bounce **Sparkmage Apprentice** with **Whitemane Lion**, and then drop it back down to kill his previously-blocking sliver. I drop **Stonecloaker** to bounce my **Sparkmage Apprentice** and to get some flying damage in, and he answers with **Might Sliver**. I bounce it with **Stingscourger** and then drop another **Stonecloaker**. He lands **Might Sliver** to the board again and follows it with **Fury Sliver** and **Fungus Sliver**.

In the end, I'm facing down three 4/4 double-striking creatures and a 5/5 double-striking creature. My plan of attack is to come in through the air and use rescue creatures to buy time. This plan works perfectly—on the next-to-last turn of the game, I'm at 13 life facing down those four creatures. I play **Aven Riftwatcher** to go to 15, attack with a **Stonecloaker** (bringing him to 4), and pass the turn. James227 attacks, and I block with my **Aven Riftwatcher** and my **Sparkmage Apprentice**. His first strike damage kills the **Riftwatcher**, bringing me to 17 life. I then take 16 points of double strike damage, go to 1, untap, attack for 3, and use **Whitemane Lion** to bounce my

Sparkmage Apprentice. When the littlest 1/1 that could comes back down, the Sliver threat is ended!
Record: 3-1

Game 5: BigLandoz (B/W Rescue Me!)

One problem with playing the Rescue versus Rescue match is that both of you know the other will be using rescue creatures to keep your guys alive during combat. We both sit for a while, playing vanishing guys (including a life-pad with **Aven Riftwatcher**) and building up forces with rescue creatures every third turn. After I build up a lot of mana, I drop **Pandemonium**. He drops double **Jötun Grunt** to take me down to 8, but I drop **Volcano Hellion** and **Calciderm** on the same turn to smash him for 11 to the head! On his attack, I play **Stonecloaker** to bounce my Hellion, kill his **Stonecloaker**, and set myself up for a massive attack. On my turn, I swing in with **Stonecloaker** (he still had the Grunts, so attacking with **Calciderm** was futile), drop **Volcano Hellion** to knock BigLandoz down to three, and pass the turn. He draws, gets **Whitemane Lion**, and uses it to bounce itself three times to deal 8 damage directly to my head, killing me with my own **Pandemonium**.

Record: 3-2

Game 6: bigjim80 (Green Fat)

He suspends **Durkwood Baloth** on the first turn. I have him dead before the Baloth unsuspects! I play **Sparkmage Apprentice**. He plays **Llanowar Elves**. I swing, he doesn't block, and when he attacks I drop **Stonecloaker**. My turn, I drop face down **Akroma, Angel of Fury** and swing for 3. On turn four, I drop **Sparkmage Apprentice**, swing for 5, and end-of-turn drop **Stonecloaker** bouncing my Apprentice again. On turn six I turn Akroma face up and kill him.

Record: 4-2

Game 7: Manxset (R/G Aggro)

He gets a fast start with **Kird Ape**, **Dryad Sophisticate**, and **Mire Boa**. I end up at a stalemate at 4 life and drop **Pandemonium** to clear out his board. **Calciderm** knocks Manxset to 10, and I'm set up to recur **Stonecloaker** the next turn to finish off the game. Unfortunately for me, Manxset draws **Lightning Serpent** and plays it for 5, dealing enough damage to me with **Pandemonium** to win the game.

Record: 4-3

Out of the three games I've lost, two of them have come down to last-second damage races where I lost the exact turn before I was going to untap and win. Because of this, I want a card that will help me race against both creatures and life totals. Luckily, red-white has the perfect tool for this – **Lightning Helix**. To make room for the Helix, I take out three **Jötun Grunts** and a **Keldon Marauders**.

I also have liked **Stingscourger** when I've drawn him, but I haven't gotten him often enough. I add in a third copy and take out a **Terramorphic Expanse**.



RW Sheer Pandemonium 3		
Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Boros Garrison	3 Sparkmage Apprentice	4 Boros Signet
7 Mountain	1 Akroma, Angel of Fury	4 Lightning Helix
8 Plains	3 Aven Riftwatcher	3 Pandemonium
3 Terramorphic Expanse	4 Calciderm	
22 lands	3 Keldon Marauders	11 other spells
	3 Stingscourger	
	4 Stonecloaker	
	3 Volcano Hellion	
	3 Whitemane Lion	
	27 creatures	

Out: 1 Terramorphic Expanse, 3 Jötun Grunt, 1 Keldon Marauders
In: 4 Lightning Helix, 1 Stingscourger

Game 8: dcrichards2 (U/G/R Wildfire)

I get **Aven Riftwatcher**, then **Calciderm**, then a second **Aven Riftwatcher**. He casts **Annex**, then **Wildfire**, killing my entire non-**Calciderm** team and my entire board aside from a **Boros Signet**. I swing him down to one, drop a **Plains**, and pass the turn. He plays **Mwonvuli Acid-Moss** on my **Plains**, and I respond by playing **Whitemane Lion** and bouncing my one-counter **Calciderm**. He has no answer to my 2/2 creature, and I go on to win.

Record: 5-3

Game 9: Spookytooth (G/W Aggro)

I drop early creatures, and he uses **Utopia Vow** to neutralize them. I use rescue guys to neutralize his neutralization methods, and eventually I am using **Stingscourgers**, rescue creatures and Akroma all over the place to run over his forces.

Record: 6-3

Game 10: Colintology (Modified A Blink in Time)

We both get stuck around four mana, but Sheer **Pandemonium** can make a lot more efficient use of no mana than

A Blink in Time. He plays creatures, but I keep bouncing them back with **Stingscourger** and **Whitemane Lion**. This allows me to build up several creatures to the board against his none, and eventually I overwhelm him with guys and **Lightning Helix**.

Record: 7-3

Game 11: Icculus (Stuffy Doll)

He gets double **Rite of Flame** / **Stuffy Doll** on turn three. I use **Stingscourger** to put the **Stuffy Doll** back in his hand, and then bounce my goblin with **Stonecloaker** and follow it with **Calciderm**. He plays **Volcano Hellion** to kill **Stonecloaker**, and I bounce his 6/5 guy with **Stingscourger** and get in there with my 5/5 untargetable dude. When he comes back with the **Hellion**, I **Whitemane Lion** my **Stingscourger**, bounce his dude again the next turn, and finish the game with **Lightning Helix**.

Record: 8-3

Game 12: Bkton (Slivers)

He is playing the **Dormant Sliver** / **Firewake Sliver** build, but I kill his **Firewake Sliver** with **Sparkmage Apprentice**, use **Stingscourger** and rescue creatures to bounce his key Slivers, and then drop **Pandemonium** with him at 9 life. He kills a couple of my guys with **Dormant Sliver** and smaller Slivers, but I play **Stonecloaker** (bouncing itself) at the end of his turn, and then double **Stonecloaker** in my turn to finish him off.

Record: 9-3

After this game, in which I drew **Volcano Hellion**, I realized that the big guy just wasn't working out all that great in this deck. I really could never pay the echo on him, and since he could never attack, he was a wasted slot in a deck that wanted to be all aggro. To remedy this, I put back in **Jötun Grunt**—I missed the Grunts the past few games, and realized that I had taken the wrong creature out of the deck for the Helixes.



RW Sheer Pandemonium 4		
Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Boros Garrison	3 Sparkmage Apprentice	4 Boros Signet
7 Mountain	1 Akroma, Angel of Fury	4 Lightning Helix
8 Plains	3 Aven Riftwatcher	3 Pandemonium
3 Terramorphic Expanse	4 Calciderm	11 other spells
22 lands	3 Jotun Grunt	
	3 Keldon Marauders	
	3 Stingscourger	
	4 Stonecloaker	
	3 Whitemane Lion	
	27 creatures	

Out: 3 **Volcano Hellion**

In: 3 **Jötun Grunt**

Game 13: Drahcirone (G/R Aggro)

I get a quick start with **Keldon Marauders** and rescue creatures. When he's at 10 life, I drop **Pandemonium**, allow him to drop his smaller creatures, and then untap and drop **Jötun Grunts** and **Keldon Marauders** to deal 8 to his head. He can't deal with the bruisers, and dies after a turn of chump blocking.

Record: 10-3

Game 14: Ktafin (R/U Suspend)

He gets multiple **Riftwing Cloudskates**, and I get multiple **Aven Riftwatchers**. He suspends **Deep-Sea Kraken**, and I engineer the game to a point where it has one counter left. I then cast **Stingscourger**. This puts the **Stingscourger** on the stack (not in play yet!), which triggers removing a counter from his Kraken. His Kraken unsusponds, and comes into play. Then, my **Stingscourger** comes into play and bounces his Kraken! This ends his hopes of coming back, and I end the game at 40 life to nothing.

Record: 11-3

Game 15: 1cube1wheel (U/B Control)

He gets double **Last Gasp**, double **Darkblast**, and **Dark Banishing**. Targeted removal is a huge problem (for its user) against a deck packing multiple rescue creatures—every time he tries to kill a guy, I use **Whitemane Lion** or **Stonecloaker** to save my creature. On the sixth turn, he uses his last card in hand (**Mana Leak**) to counter **Pandemonium**, and that leaves me open to play **Jötun Grunts** with my last two mana. The Grunts get rid of his **Darkblasts**, and my creature force comes into to win the day.

Record: 12-3

Sheer **Pandemonium** was a lot of fun to play—probably the most fun of the three rescue-creature based decks from the past three weeks! All three decks were definitely aggro-oriented, but this one was just all-out burn-your-opponent dead aggro. Because I have several two-drops with three and four power, it was not unusual to drop **Pandemonium**, untap, and then burn out half my opponent's life total with creatures!

Next week, we say goodbye to white for good – all four W/X decks have been built, have come, and are now gone! And as white leaves, black comes back for our red-black build. But what deck will it be? Last week I ran a

poll to determine that deck. Here are the results!

What should be the focus of the black-red deck for Week 8 of 10?		
Madness – In demand since <i>Time Spira!</i>	2053	30.3%
Null Profusion – It flows well into Week 9!	1648	24.3%
Pyrohemia/Circle of Affliction – The family that damages together stays together!	1262	18.6%
Haakon and Friends – Now fortified with Blood Knight!	1010	14.9%
Greater Gargadon – Just add one part Mindslicer and two parts Phyrexian Totem!	806	11.9%
Total	6779	100.0%

See you all next week!

*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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