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Jhoira Goes Up (Part 1 of 2)

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Building on a Budget
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hello everyone and welcome back to Building on a Budget! A couple of weeks ago, I polled you, the reader, about which of four cards I should build a deck around. It was a close vote, but in the end, the card chosen was *Jhoira of the Ghitu*. Jhoira is what was wanted, and so Jhoira will be gotten!

Which card would you most like to see Ben build a deck around in two weeks?		
<i>Jhoira of the Ghitu</i> - The real Suspended Sentence!	2663	33.3%
<i>Barren Glory</i> - Look ma, no hands!	2456	30.7%
<i>Pyromancer's Swath</i> - Pure 100% Octane Burn!	1641	20.5%
<i>Cloud Key</i> - Combing you out since aught-seven!	1233	15.4%
Total	7993	100.0%

- Building on a Budget is dedicated to making decks that cost 30 tickets or less on **Magic Online**. Weekly deck testing is done using **Magic Online**.
- This week's format? *Time Spiral* Block Constructed. This means only *Time Spiral*, *Planar Chaos* and *Future Sight* are allowed!
- The Jhoira Vanguard avatar-get it now!

As you may have noticed in the sidebar, I've decided to make this build a *Time Spiral* Block Constructed deck. Why is this? Well, there are two good reasons:

- 1) We're in the middle of Block Constructed season on the [Pro Tour Qualifier](#) circuit. There was no *Ravnica* Block Constructed season last year, so this is my first timely opportunity to delve into the Block Constructed format.
- 2) Block Constructed is both an easier and harder format to build in. It is easier, in that you have fewer cards you need to consider when building a deck. It is harder, because there are fewer cards that you can consider when building a deck. Yes, this is both a blessing and a curse!

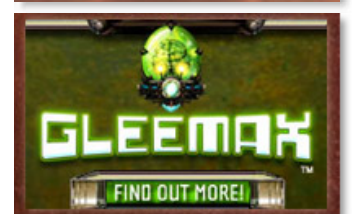
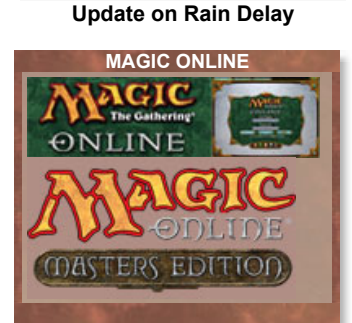
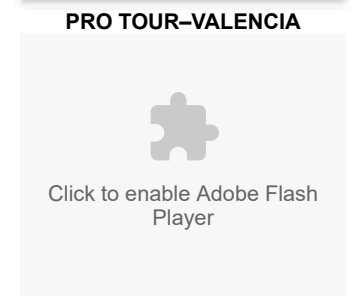
In Standard, you have eight sets worth of bounce, countermagic and burn to fill in the holes for a Red/Blue deck. In Block, you only have three. You only have three sets worth of mana fixing, kill conditions, and pieces of your combos. In Standard, it is easy to just throw in the good ol' staples (*Mana Leak*/*Shock*/*Volcanic Hammer* anyone?). In Block, you really have to find ways to improvise - or throw out everything you know and start from scratch!

Since this deck is being built around *Jhoira of the Ghitu*, we should take a look at Jhoira herself.



Jhoira has one use-suspending nonland cards. For most cards, this is a disadvantage-who wants to suspend a spell for four turns when they can just cast it straight-out early? It costs two mana to suspend with Jhoira, so there's an investment of time and mana. This means that there are three main uses for Jhoira:

- 1) Big Mana Spells: What's the difference between *Shock* and *Searing Wind*? Eight mana... and 8 damage. It's extremely difficult to get up to nine mana in a Constructed game of **Magic**, unless you're building your deck around mana acceleration. Jhoira allows you to circumvent unwieldy (some would say impossible) mana costs to cheat out spells early.



2) Suspend on the Sly: Some cards have a suspend countdown of more than four to begin with—**Greater Gargadon** immediately springs to mind. Jhoira allows you to suspend a Gargadon for four turns rather than ten, which is a huge advantage. That's six turns (or permanents) that you can shave off the cost of a Gargadon.

3) Coordinate Storm: Since all spells suspended with Jhoira gain four time counters, you can suspend multiple spells on the same turn, and then have one large storm spell. This is a little less stable than the other spells, because generally waiting four (or three) turns for multiple storm spells to resolve is a bit slow, and you're better off going for mana acceleration and low-cost spells for the Storm route.

Sometimes it is best to start out with the most basic build of a deck you can think of, to see the strengths and weaknesses of the deck. From there, you can take out pieces and add in pieces to strengthen the deck—but if it is not viable in its most primal form, how can you continue to work with the deck? So, for my Jhoira build, I decided to go with a one-for-one relationship: Jhoira and **Greater Gargadon**.

In: 4 **Jhoira of the Ghitu** (2 Tickets each), 4 **Greater Gargadon** (1.5 Tickets each)

Which other cards would work well with a deck built around a creature that can suspend other cards? Well, cards that help you cheat the suspend time, of course! Red and blue are chock full of these—**Clockspinning**, **Fury Charm**, and **Jhoira's Timebug** to name a few. The card I settled on for this role was **Rift Elemental**. It comes down on the first turn, it has a symbiotic relationship with suspend cards (it benefits with +2/+0 and it benefits the suspend card by removing counters), and it is a major offensive threat if left unchecked.

In: 4 **Rift Elemental**

What are the major strengths of blue and red? Countermagic, bounce, and card drawing are the hallmarks of blue, and burn, land destruction and mana acceleration are the hallmarks of red. Accordingly, I wanted to add a few staples from these colors to the deck. This brought in **Cancel** and **Delay** (two of the few Counterspells in *Time Spiral* block), **Rift Bolt** (a very solid burn spell, and one we've seen in many red decks in Building on a Budget), **Think Twice** (a good use for mana on turn two for a deck that didn't end up with many two-drops), and **Foresee** (an archetypical blue card-drawing spell). I also added in **Simian Spirit Guide**, so I could potentially play a **Rift Elemental** on turn one while simultaneously suspending a **Greater Gargadon**, or so that I could power out Jhoira on the second turn.



In: 4 **Cancel**, 4 **Delay**, 4 **Foresee**, 4 **Rift Bolt**, 4 **Simian Spirit Guide**, 4 **Think Twice**

The last cards I added were cards for the mana base. The deck was split pretty evenly between blue and red, so I decided to add in an equal amount of **Islands** and **Mountains**. I wanted some permanent mana acceleration, so I chose four **Prismatic Lens** for the deck. This is another two-drop for the deck. This slot might have been better served by **Coalition Relic**, except that **Coalition Relic** has jumped into the 6-8 ticket range over the past week on **Magic Online**, making it far from a budget card!

In: 4 **Prismatic Lens**, 10 **Mountain**, 10 **Island**

Jhoira 1		
Time Spiral Block Legal		
Main Deck		
60 cards		
10 Island	4 Greater Gargadon	4 Cancel
10 Mountain	4 Jhoira of the Ghitu	4 Delay
20 lands	4 Rift Elemental	4 Foresee
	4 Simian Spirit Guide	4 Prismatic Lens
	16 creatures	4 Rift Bolt
		4 Think Twice
		24 other spells

Let's see how the deck did!

Game 1: Steprazor (G/R Suspend)

He gets stuck at double **Forest**, but suspends a **Durkwood Baloth** on the first turn. I answer by suspending double **Greater Gargadon** and plopping **Rift Elemental** to the table on turn three. This allows me to run him down quickly with **Rift Elemental**. I **Cancel** his Baloth and then sacrifice most of my lands to drop a **Gargadon** and win.

Record: 1-0

Game 2: **Magic** Tour (U/G Suspend/Saprolings)

I suspend a turn-one **Gargadon** and play **Jhoira** on turn three. He tries to play **Sporoloth Ancient**, and I **Delay** it, then drop **Rift Elemental** on my fifth turn, along with suspending a second **Gargadon** using **Jhoira** (so it only has four counters). On my next turn, I remove three counters from the various **Gargadons**, sacrifice all of my lands

and my **Rift Elemental** to bring both Gargadons into play, and then swing in for 20 damage with the two 9/7 guys and my Jhoira.

Record: 2-0

Game 3: Digital Logic (U/G Morph)

I get shorted on mana, and he has lands, card-drawing spells, and morph creatures. It gets to the point where he can both drop more creatures and counter my countermagic on the same turn. He ends up winning through card and mana superiority.

Record: 2-1

Game 4: _angeleyes_ (B/R Mid-range)

He gets an early **Skirk Ridge Exhumer** and **Nether Traitor**. I wait for him to make a **Festering Goblin** token, and then kill that token with a **Rift Bolt**. Since the -1/-1 isn't optional, this makes him kill his own **Nether Traitor**. This buys me enough time to get down a **Greater Gargadon** via a **Rift Elemental**, and he is unable to keep up with my 9/7 guy, especially after I **Cancel** a **Damnation**.

Record: 3-1

Game 5: Nekkidcarpenter (U/G **Walk the Aeons**/**Gaea's Blessing**)

I suspend an early Gargadon, and then drop Jhoira and suspend **Foresee**. He takes 4 extra turns with **Walk the Aeons**, but I let those through my countermagic. I counter a key **Mirari** so he can't take multiple turns off of one spell, and get a **Rift Elemental** to speed up the Gargadon. On the next-to-last turn, he brings back **Mirari** with **Academy Ruins**, plays it, and then tries to drop a **Riftwing Cloudscate**. I **Delay** that, untap, and draw a second Gargadon. Jhoira suspends that Gargadon, I use **Rift Elemental** to remove three counters, sacrifice enough lands to bring both Gargadons into play, and swing for 27 damage in one turn (a 7/1 **Rift Elemental**, two 9/7 Gargadons, and Jhoira).

Record: 4-1

So far, the deck is working out great, but I need more win conditions.

Simian Spirit Guide has literally done nothing ever time I've drawn it, so it's an easy cut. The Gargadon route has been a great path to victory so far, so I want more cards along those lines. **Deep-Sea Kraken** is another giant monster with suspend, so it seems like a natural addition to the deck.

I also want a couple of more lands in the deck, just to be safe. I cut the four Spirit Guides, a **Think Twice**, and a **Foresee** for two lands, and four Krakens. One of the great things about the Krakens and Gargadons is that neither of them are dead draws in the early game-they can be suspended! Normally, a nine- or ten-drop could gum up your hand, but with suspend, I can always get them going either on the first or third turn.

Out: 4 **Simian Spirit Guide**, 1 **Think Twice**, 1 **Foresee**

In: 1 **Island**, 1 **Mountain**, 4 **Deep-Sea Kraken**



Jhoira 2		Time Spiral Block Legal	
		txt	
Main Deck 60 cards			
11 Island	4 Deep-Sea Kraken	4 Cancel	
11 Mountain	4 Greater Gargadon	4 Delay	
22 lands	4 Jhoira of the Ghitu	3 Foresee	
	4 Rift Elemental	4 Prismatic Lens	
	16 creatures	4 Rift Bolt	
		3 Think Twice	
		22 other spells	

Game 6: Ckech907 (U/B Control)

I suspend triple Gargadon and a **Deep-Sea Kraken**. We go back and forth, with him stopping my Kraken twice (once via **Snapback**, and once with **Tendrils of Corruption**). I sacrifice it to a Gargadon. We go through a back-and-forth, with him trying to drop Teferi. I **Cancel** it; he answers with **Pact of Negation**. I let the Pact resolve, and then re-**Cancel** Teferi. Eventually I get down double Gargadon in one turn with **Delay** backup, suspend a **Rift Bolt**, and kill him.

Record: 5-1

Game 7: Lowpressure68 (Mono-Green Aggro)

He suspends **Durkwood Baloth** and drops **Primal Forcemage**. I suspend double **Deep-Sea Kraken** and drop **Rift Elemental**. I counter a his **Nacatl War-Pride**, suspend **Greater Gargadon**, remove three counters with **Rift Elemental**, unsuspend **Deep-Sea Kraken** and **Greater Gargadon**, and hit him for 22 in one turn.

Record: 6-1

Game 8: Pansy (Jhoira Mirror)

I get stuck on two lands, and he lands a third-turn Jhoira. Next thing I know, I'm facing down a suspended **Aeon Chronicle** and eating **Tarox Bladewing** with grandeur.

Record: 6-2

Game 9: Megabiquette (Mono-Blue Morph)

I get Jhoira, and it dies to **Shaper Parasite**. I drop another, and suspend double **Deep-Sea Kraken** with my favorite lady. He drops another morph, and then I counter a third and suspend **Rift Bolt**. Both of my Krakens come down, and I Bolt his untapped morph-he flips it as a **Fathom Seer**. I suspend Gargadon with Jhoira, sacrifice four lands, and hit him for 23 in one turn (12 from Krakens, 9 from the Gargadon, and 2 from Jhoira).

Record: 7-2

Game 10: Satellite099 (B/G Saprolings)

I get an early **Deep-Sea Kraken**, but I can't deal with double **Deathspore Thallid**, one with **Fallen Ideal** and **Verdant Embrace**. He's able to kill off my Jhoira, and put out enough offense that I can't outpace him even with a 6/6 unblockable creature.

Record: 7-3

So far so good, but the deck is lacking a little something. I'm capable of some really explosive finishes, but I have some definite weaknesses. For one, Teferi completely hoses this deck, and I don't have a good way to kill him. If he's in play, I can't resolve any of my suspended cards during my upkeep, meaning all my ways of winning are useless. For two, definitely had problems with that weenie rush from the Saprolings, so I need a way to clear out creatures en masse.

After I finished playtesting for this article, and before I got to make the next round of change for this deck, I received the following e-mail:

Ben-

*I'm the guy who played you in the Jhoira mirror match tonight, and I thought I would mention something I found very effective in my build. If you don't have any copies, you might consider adding **Riddle of Lightning**. If you're running 4 copies of **Deep-Sea Kraken** and **Greater Gargadon**, that's 10 to the dome if you hit off it. I've found it to be a great finisher combined with **Foresee** and **Mystic Speculation** to set up the draw. Just my 2 cents :).*

Riddle of Lightning, eh? Seems like a good choice... along with the **Sulfurous Blasts** and **Take Possessions** I was about to add to the deck. But that will have to wait until Part 2 of this deck evolution!

Next week: Jhoira goes big! Jhoira Vanguard goes bigger!
Two weeks from now: The results of the B/G/W dredge contest!

*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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