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BoaB Unplugged: Budget Cards To Think About, Part 2

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Building on a Budget
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hello everyone, and welcome back to Building on a Budget! We're currently in intermission for the Building on a Budget Round Robin, which will resume in two weeks (hooray for **Magic Online III!**). In [last week's article](#), I went over some cards that I had *thought* about using in decks over the past couple of years, but had not found time to either include or build around. In this week's article, I take a look at cards from *Time Spiral*, *Coldsnap*, and *Tenth Edition*, and give my thoughts on each!

Time Spiral

Celestial Crusader: For just one more mana than **Glorious Anthem**, you get a 2/2 high-uncounterable evasive body that can be played as a combat trick or at the end of an opponent's turn. This seems like a great deal for a creature, but **Celestial Crusader** has really fallen off of my (and everyone else's) radar. I briefly touched on using him in a Soldier deck, revolving around four **Crusaders**, four **Glorious Anthems**, four **Wizened Cenn**, and four **Field Marshal** (to pump up various Kithkin, Soldiers, and other white weenies). This would be similar to the Oh my Lord! Deck discussed last week, except in mono-white. Would this be a viable strategy? Each creature would make the one before it (and often, the one after it) just that much larger, so it would be a build-your-own-monster strategy for sure. This is also a deck I've been kicking around for a while, and you might see it down the road (or heck, as a double-feature with the Merfolk / Elf Lord decks!)



Evangelize: **Evangelize** is one of those cards that looks like a *blast* to play with, but always ends up getting cut from my white decks. My control decks use the more reliable **Persuasion** (or **Confiscate**, in the past), whereas my white decks tend to be more aggressive. Nine mana is a lot to ask to buy this spell back, and five mana is a lot to pay to have your opponent give you their worst creature. There are a lot of token creatures around the casual rooms of **Magic Online** right now (not to mention **Bitterblossom** and **Imperious Perfect** in more competitive environments), so often a fifth-turn **Evangelize** will end up with you owning a 1/1 token creature.

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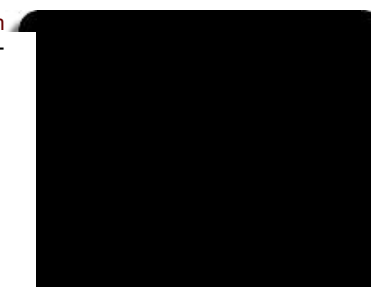
Gaea's Blessing: I loved, loved, loved **Gaea's Blessing**, back in the day. I played Prison (a deck centering around **Winter Orb**, **Icy Manipulator**, and **Armageddon**) at the first Pro Tour—Chicago, and **Gaea's Blessing** was an integral part of that deck's strategy—kill every permanent you can kill, lock down your opponent's mana, and then use Blessing to recur your most important cards or keep from being decked. The problem right now is that there really aren't any viable control strategies that require you to recur your key spells in order to win—sure, an extra **Shriekmaw** here and there never hurt, but it's not like you need to draw **Swords to Plowshares** fifteen times in one game to win. Still, **Gaea's Blessing** is a cantrip, and maybe there is a viable green-X (black? blue?) control deck that can end up winning one game by decking your opponent.



Pentarch Paladin: There's a lot of white cards here, aren't there? **Pentarch Paladin** is the ultimate extension of the directionally motivated Paladin cycle (**Eastern Paladin**, **Western Paladin**, **Northern Paladin**, **Southern Paladin**—we're not counting **Spinal Villain** here as the blue killer!) by letting the white mage choose the exact color of creature (or permanent, to be exact) they want to kill. The power level of **Pentarch Paladin**'s ability is very high. However, the cost is very white-intensive (WWWW to cast, WW to activate), and the body is small for a five-drop creature (green gets **Spectral Force** as an 8/8—white gets **Pentarch Paladin** as a 3/3) plus the flanking is irrelevant (because you've killed everything on your opponent's board, right?). Very versatile though, and I'd like to see the Paladin in possibly a white-based control deck that doesn't involve blue or countermagic.



Plague Sliver: Let me set the record straight here—**Plague Sliver** is **Juzam Djinn**. Yes, it is worse in multiples (4 damage a turn instead of 2), but solo-a-mio, you're putting down a 5/5 smacker for four mana and a point of damage a turn. Since when did a 5/5 creature for four mana with a negligible drawback become a bad deal? When's the last time you sat down and faced a **Plague Sliver**? Maybe it's that **Korlash** is so off-the-charts that **Plague Sliver** has fallen by the wayside, but **Plague Sliver** seems like a fine budget alternative to be the finisher in a mono-black control deck. In addition, you know all those horribly pesky Sliver decks that always pop up in the casual rooms in **Magic Online**? Yeah, they're dead once you drop one of these.





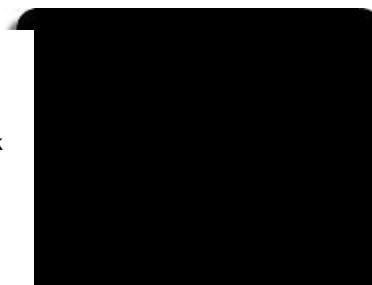
Scion of the Ur-Dragon: This is the only card on this list that hasn't been used because the deck it needs costs too much. First, you've got a five-color Dragon. That requires a good investment into a mana base in order to pull off—and ideally, you're going to want at least **Gemstone Mines** to reliably play Scion on turn five—if not pain lands, tribal lands, or other mana-fixers. Then, Scion requires other Dragons to work—and the majority of Dragons are also rare cards. I could see myself making the Scion of Ur-Dragon deck, and making it work, and making it work *on a budget*—but would people complain when I put out a 40-50 rare deck (that still costs under 30 tickets) as a "budget" deck? This would be the extreme in me pushing price versus rarity when determining "budget." If I have a deck that potentially has 40-50 rares, but costs under 30 tickets, would anyone believe me when I said it was a budget deck? I've avoided playing this card for that reason.



Stonebrow, Krosan Hero: You'll notice that I'm a sucker for **Crusade** / lord effects—Stonebrow gives all your trampleers +2/+2 on the attack the turn he comes down, and every turn thereafter. The only problem with Stonebrow is not his size (on the attack, he gives himself the bonus, making him a hefty 6/6 trampler for five mana) or his cost (five for a 6/6 trampling attacker is fine), but his lack of support—there simply aren't enough good trampling creatures to put in a deck with him in Standard right now. I'm all for including a slightly worse card if it'll make your overall deck better, but I'm not going to run **Bull Aurochs** as a two-drop in my green deck when I have a lot more powerful (and interesting!) choices to put in the deck right now.



Walk the Aeons: I played against a deck that used **Walk the Aeons**, **Rites of Flourishing**, **Howling Mine**, **Gaea's Blessing**, and **Beacon of Tomorrows**, and tried to go infinite taking turns after a certain point in the game. If I had played that deck in the Round Robin, it almost certainly would have been one of the decks I switched to in order to tune! This was B.R.R. (before Round Robin), so I filed the deck in the back of my head as a deck I "might do, at some point in the future). It seems like a fun combo deck where the basic problem isn't what to do once you hit six mana, but how to stay alive until that point.





Coldsnap

Commandeer: This is another **Shunt / Imp's Mischief**-type card, where 50% of the time it won't do anything, 25% of the time it'll have a good effect, and 25% of the time it will completely wreck your opponent and you will win the game on the spot. The biggest drawback to **Commandeer** isn't necessarily the three-for-one card disadvantage you get from alternate-playing it, but that it can't grab creature spells! I'd gladly trade this for a third-turn Doran (on the other side of the board) if that would buy me a win, or multiple turns of setting my hand back up—but it's not as easy to justify trading three-for-one to grab an **Incinerate** (which will probably end up being a two-for-one) or a **Coalition Relic**.



Deepfire Elemental: Too much mana to play, too much mana to activate—but isn't this guy the dream? Pay X (or, technically $X \times 1$) to kill anything your opponent could throw in your way? Sure, he can only kill two-drop creatures or artifacts based on the mana it takes to play him, but he *looks* good on paper! As a side note: if your opponent activates **Mutavault** or **Treetop Village**, you get to kill his creature / land for one colorless mana.



Fury of the Horde: Remember the **Skullclamp / Goblins** decks I built for [my foray into Classic online](#)? I wanted to fit **Fury of the Horde** into that deck so badly! I figured that if my hand was stuffed full with a ton of Goblins, I would have no trouble pitching two cards (plus **Fury of the Horde**) to speed up my kill by a full turn. Sadly, I couldn't find the room for **Fury of the Horde**. It's not likely I'll end up using this card in the future, because its best place would have been in a red deck that constantly

refills its hand (which I've already done, twice), but I wanted to note that I almost used it, back in the day.



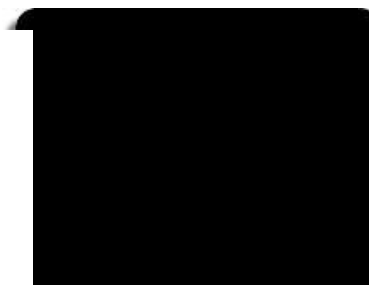
Glacial Plating: Creature enchantments are not your friend—that's my Rule #5 of deckbuilding. **Glacial Plating** is no exception to this rule—four mana for an Aura that literally does nothing the turn it comes into play. However, the growth potential is tremendous—after one turn, you're committing one mana to permanently **Giant Growth** the creature, and that same creature gets a full **Stonewood Invocation's** worth of resizing on the next turn. Considering Plating gives the creature +12/+12 by the time you hit the mana cost of the Plating itself, it is conceivable that putting a Plating on any random creature can result in that creature singlehandedly winning the game. While I don't particularly care for creature enchantments that can lead to card disadvantage, the growth potential of **Glacial Plating** is above the curve of virtually any other creature enchantment ever printed in **Magic**.



Hibernation's End: Another card I really wanted to build a deck around, but never did. **Hibernation's End** seems like it's capable of garnering massive card advantage—you're paying a mana (cumulatively) each turn to tutor your deck straight for a creature! You still draw your regular card for the turn, you still have mana free to do other things, but you're *searching your deck for a free creature a turn and putting it straight into play!* How is this NOT good? How come I don't see **Hibernation's End** being played more casually? All right, that's it—I'm definitely building a **Hibernation's End / Cream of the Crop** deck once the Round Robin is over.



Jötun Owl Keeper: You know that **Kinsbaile Borderguard**? This is like that card, but on a clock—you get a 3/3 for three every time, you get 1/1 flying creatures when the Owl Keeper dies, and you tie up a little mana each turn you want to keep it in play. I'm actually very surprised this hasn't seen a lot more play in the casual rooms, since it is a good body, has a decent effect, and seems like fun to play with.





Phyrexian Etchings: In Extended, I'd rather use **Phyrexian Arena**, since it is budget enough to run, and more consistent than Etchings. In Standard, there might be a place for Etchings—its life loss only triggers if it goes to the graveyard, so if you can return it to hand (blue bounce) or remove it from the game (**Return to Dust**), you don't lose life. The other problem Etchings has is that it's very slow—you draw one card the turn after it comes into play, two cards the third turn, and three cards the fourth turn—so while you end up a few cards, it's not as immediate as other black card-drawing mechanisms (such as **Hoarder's Greed**).

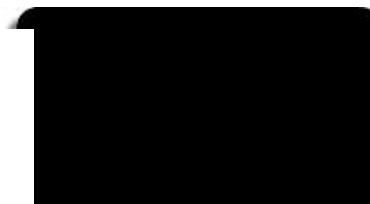


Vanish into Memory: The winner of a reader-fuelled "You Make the Card" feature, starting from the reader-submitted artwork itself. The dream is to hit an opponent's **Groundbreaker**, allowing you to kill the creature, net five cards (draw six, discard one), and profit. The reality all too often is that you **Momentary Blink Wren's Run Vanquisher** for a turn, draw three cards, and then discard three cards, leaving you down a card (the Vanish itself).



Tenth Edition

Arcanis the Omnipotent: I remember playing this guy during **Onslaught** block, and he was a lot of fun—who doesn't like to have their personal **Ancestral Recall** each turn? I really want to build a Wizard deck that has Arcanis at the top of the curve, because six mana really isn't too much to pay for repeated card-drawing of this magnitude in a casual environment.





Clone: Once Wizards changed the "legend rule" to allow duplicate legendary creatures to kill one another, **Clone** became a (limited) form of blue creature kill. **Clone** lets you match your opponent's best creature, get a second of your own best creature, or kill a legend. Why not make **Tarmogoyf**, **Dark Confidant**, or any other non-budget creature for four mana and half a ticket?

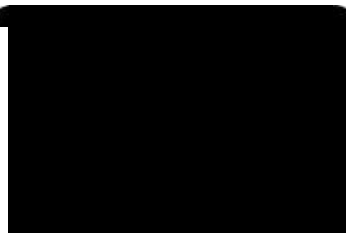


Creeping Mold: "Hi, my name is **Creeping Mold**. You might remember me from *Jamie Wakefield Sings the Greens*. Well, I still freaking exist, folks! Why aren't you playing me? Sure, I'm a little more... robust than **Krosan Grip** or **Naturalize**, but I can kill a freaking land too! What more versatility do you want from a green card? Lands-o-goshen, if I hear one more person mention **Desert Twister**..... fine, I can't kill creatures. Not everything needs to kill a creature! Green doesn't like killing creatures, see? It likes killing lands, or enchantments, or artifacts. I'm good at all three of those! I'm maximum utility! Play me! PLAAAAAAAY MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"



' PLAAAAAAAY
MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!'

Goblin Lore: For only two mana, you dig four cards deeper into your deck, and end up, at the worst, as bad off as you were to begin with! At best, you lose **Goblin Lore** and three cards you weren't going to play anyhow, and have four readily playable cards in your hand—plus the Lore works great with madness cards! I've already done the madness deck too many times (usually in conjunction with hellbent), but I'd definitely consider **Goblin Lore** in a pure-burn build, to trade out lands for spells.





Plague Wind: So every now and then, I look longingly at **Damnation** and think, "What budget card is the closest card that Black has to **Damnation**?" Inevitably, I hit **Plague Wind**—and I look at the more-than-double mana-cost it has over **Damnation**, and think "Holy jumping ouphes on a three-day bender! That's a lotta mana, Scottie!" and then Scottie says to me "Ach! But all yer guys live, Cap'n!", and then all is right in the world. Then I wake up, realize that if I'm getting beat down by creatures I'm not going to hit nine mana, and move on to the next card. But I swear, I always look at this, and think "but... budget **Damnation**!"

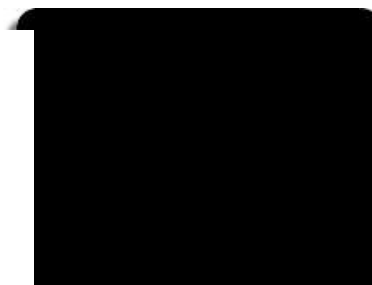
At least white gets the good budget **Wrath of God** alternatives!



Squee, Goblin Nabob: Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Once a very expensive card, Squee can now be had for a scant two tickets online. This was one of those cards that I found while researching this article, and went "Well, let's see how much he costs these days." Two tickets! I can think of at least a dozen uses (discard away!) for a card of Squee's unique effect, so look for me to build a deck with four Squee before *Tenth Edition* rotates out of Standard.



Time Stretch: Would this replace **Beacon of Tomorrows** in a Walk of Aeons / Rites of Flourishing deck? You betcha—because otherwise, you're not going to have ten mana to play this bad boy! Still, like **Plague Wind**, I always look at this card when building a blue deck and dream a little Timmy dream of ten-mana spells that let you take three consecutive turns.





That's all for this week! Next week we'll have the last part of this series, where I take a look at some older sets, and see what cards I've missed playing with in Extended! See you in seven days, true believers!

*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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