

Introduction:

If you are not aware of what Sylvan Ascendancy is, it's a 4-colour combo deck based around the interaction between [[Sylvan Awakening]] and [[Jeskai Ascendancy]]. You animate your lands with the Awakening then cantrip through your deck, untapping your lands on each spell cast making your lands big enough to kill in one combat step. I fell in love with this deck at the very start of the Pioneer format and I truly believe that, with some refinement, it could really be a player in the metagame.

The deck got mostly pushed out of the meta by the rise of Lotus Breach. The two decks are a lot alike. They're both spell based combo, looking to kill on turn 4 and only have a small amount of interaction. The truth is Lotus Breach is the better combo deck in game 1. Breach is slightly more consistent in getting its fast kills, whereas Ascendancy is better at reloading if the games go long. The reason to play Ascendancy over Breach is the sideboard. Breach has to dedicate enough of the sideboard to its wishboard that it can't access the transformational sideboard that Ascendancy can. Ascendancy can also get away with playing more interaction than Breach. For example before the Copter ban, Ascendancy used to run [[Supreme Verdict]] in the mainboard to sure up the mono-black matchup and that's the sort of flex afforded to you by the deck.

The Decklist:

https://archidekt.com/decks/429225#Sylvan_Ascendancy_0103

The deck has fallen out of the metagame to the point where there is no "stock" list. This is my personal list, and is definitely the one I am happiest with so far. Here are some points of note in my card selection:

- 6 Mana dorks
 - The difference between having a dork on turn 2 and not is huge. It smoothes over the sometimes sketchy mana this deck has while also opening up a lot of the deck's most explosive draws.
 - The reason for 6, over 8, is that they are low velocity cards that don't trigger Ascendancy. Drawing one, or even two, in the opening turns ups your winrate massively but they are dead cards from about turn 5 onwards.
- [[Fiery Impulse]] as the interactive spell of choice
 - We don't care about burning face, we're looking to OTK with one big hit, so the ability to deal with 3 toughness creatures is worth more than a small amount of chip damage.
- But [[Unbridled Growth]] is a bad card
 - You're right, but it is a noncreature spell that replaces itself for one mana. It also can fix our mana which helps out the [[Aether Hub]] manabase.

The Goldfish:

The base combo is Awakening + Ascendancy + the first spell to untap and start the combo. That is the end goal of all the goldfish lines I am about to go through. It's important to remember that it's not a 2 card combo, it's a 2.5 card combo. It is often correct to slowroll your cantrips once you start setting up to combo, so you can use them for that first untap.

Here are some potentially unintuitive setups that should lead to a kill:

- 2x Ascendancy + 1x Mana dork
 - Dork on turn 2, followed by Ascendancies on 3 and 4.
 - This makes your [[Opt]] into a ritual that also loots 2. So you can dig deep through your deck, using the 1 mana cantrips as rituals and setting up for the combo
- 1x Ascendancy + 2x Mana dork
 - Very similar to the last setup, but doesn't dig as deep so is more likely to fizzle.
 - Dork on turn 2 and 3, then Ascendancy on 4 and go to town
 - It has the advantage of not exposing the Ascendancy to sorcery speed removal, or letting them untap while you have an Ascendancy down.
- [[Underworld Breach]]
 - This isn't a kill setup in quite the same way, but Breach management is a very important part of the goldfish.
 - With also running [[Dig Through Time]], our graveyard is an important resource.
 - When delving you always leave [[Strategic Planning]] behind if possible. When comboing off with a Breach down it lets you flip your deck and make your lands as large as you want them.
 - Planning puts 2 cards in the bin on its own, plus the loot from Ascendancy.
 - The same loop can be created with [[Izzet Charm]]. This doesn't add cards to your hand on each cast, so Planning is the preferred option of the two.
 - In grindier matchups, Breach also acts as copies 5 and 6 of Ascendancy.
 - Using Breach to cast the same copy of Strategic Planning three times in the same turn can pull you far enough ahead to win in grindier matchups.

The “Transformational” Sideboard:

Here's the big secret of the deck, the sideboard is not transformational. In most matchups, the most common way of killing postboard is still the Ascendancy/Awakening combo. The real goal of boarding in all the extra threats is to stretch the opponent's interaction so thin that they can't stop the combo and if they happen to kill them instead, that's a bonus.

There is a deliberate lack of countermagic in the sideboard. Countermagic is low velocity and completely dead once you are going off. With that in mind, I chose to get my threats through by sheer density of threats rather than interacting on the stack. It is also of note that one of the key removal spells in the format is [[Abrupt Decay]] which further weakens the effect of countermagic.

[[Damping Sphere]] is by far the most important card to sideboard against. If you don't consider it when boarding, you will lose to it. This is the main reason for 4x [[Teferi, Time Raveler]] in the board. It is a high velocity answer to Damping Sphere. We can typically do all of our setup turns unimpeded by the Sphere then drop Tef, bounce the Sphere, and go to town. [[Abrade]] is the fifth answer that comes in for the more aggressive matchups, where 4x Tef is somewhat heinous.

When sideboarding, you have to account for how well your opponent appears to know how your combo works. If they don't seem to be fully aware of the combo and/or you killed them with an Underworld Breach loop then be cognizant that they could be boarding in graveyard hate. While not great against you, it can randomly get you by slowing your Digs and making Underworld Breach dead.

Matchups:

These are general overviews of matchups. The sideboard guides are very flexible, you don't have to follow them to the letter and often should be changed depending on what you do/don't see and what they do/don't see.

- Dimir Inverter:
 - In this matchup we slam and we jam. They can't interact with a resolved Ascendancy, so while they often mainboard [[Mystical Dispute]] we still race to land the Ascendancy. They're more likely to have a [[Thoughtseize]] than a Dispute, so it's better to play the Ascendancy out.
 - Playing around [[Narset, Parter of Veils]] does make things slightly harder. It makes combo turns a bit harder to navigate but the cards we have that specifically 'draw' cards can all be made to draw at instant speed (bar Ascendancy triggers).
 - In:
 - 3x Monastery Mentor
 - 4x Teferi, Time Raveler
 - Out:
 - 4x Fiery Impulse
 - 1x Sylvan Awakening
 - 2x Unbridled Growth
- Mono White Devotion:
 - It's a drag race. Game 1 chances are they can not interact with Ascendancy in any way, so slam it as soon as you can. We do not respect their combo at all, we just go as fast as we can.
 - Postboard their answers are generally sorcery speed, so prioritise the setups that resolve Ascendancy and kill in the same turn. We typically board into a more controlling setup so we don't have to drag race in game 2.

- In:
 - 1x Abrade
 - 3x Radiant Flames
 - 1x Supreme Verdict
 - 2/3x Teferi, Time Raveler
- Out:
 - 2x Paradise Druid
 - 1x Dig Through Time
 - 2x Underworld Breach
 - 2x Unbridled Growth
- Mono Green Walkers:
 - Honestly, I do not have enough experience in this matchup to comfortably comment on it, and with them having a double wishboard it's a matchup that can change a lot depending on how much the Mono-G player knows your deck.
- Bant Spirits:
 - Their most relevant cards are [[Mausoleum Wanderer]] and [[Spell Queller]]. Those are the points of interaction for you, nothing else really matters.
 - If they have a [[Selfless Spirit]] down, you still point the Impulse at the Mausoleum or the Queller. Whether or not they sac to protect their dude is a key point of information in the matchup for when you board in the wraths (note: you care less about Mausoleum post board when you have Supreme Verdict in the deck).
 - Postboard, you have to be aware that they may have [[Settle the Wreckage]] in the board. If/when you go off, attack with the minimum number of lands possible and make sure you end the combo turn set up to go off again the following turn. Or have a Tef down, that works too.
 - In:
 - 2x Radiant Flames
 - 2x Supreme Verdict
 - 4x Teferi, Time Raveler
 - Out:
 - 2x Paradise Druid
 - 2x Izzet Charm
 - 1x Dig Through Time
 - 2x Underworld Breach
 - 1x Attune with Aether
- Mono-Black Aggro:
 - Thoughtseize aggro with a lot of dead cards game 1. They have no interaction for Ascendancy game 1, so slam it and race. [[Knight of the Ebon Legion]] is the key target for Impulse.
 - Postboard you have to be aware of [[Lost Legacy]] and Damping Sphere, but if they're spending their early turns on that, they're not clocking you.
 - In:
 - 1x Abrade

- 3x Radiant Flames
 - 3x Teferi, Time Raveler
 - 3x Monastery Mentor
- Out:
 - 2x Paradise Druid
 - 1x Sylvan Awakening
 - 2x Unbridled Growth
 - 1x Attune with Aether
 - 1x Dig Through Time
 - 2x Underworld Breach
 - 1x Izzet Charm
- Sultai Delirium
 - Game 1 is generally pretty favoured for us. Sultai generally attacks on an axis that means that they don't meaningfully interact with what you're doing. It generally takes at least 2 Thoughtseize effects (including flipping Baby Jace) in the first 3 turns plus them developing a solid clock. Generally game 1 their clock ends up too slow and gives you time to rebuild and go off.
 - Postboard gets a lot harder, and if your sideboard is wrong is fundamentally unwinnable for Ascendancy. They'll be adding in more Abrupt Decay, adding more Thoughtseize effects in [[Agonizing Remorse]], adding extraction in [[Unmoored Ego]], countermagic in [[Mystical Dispute]], and Damping Sphere to top it all off. So we have to diversify our threats; then go wide and go fast.
 - In:
 - 3x Monastery Mentor
 - 2x Young Pyromancer
 - 4x Teferi, Time Raveler
 - 0-2x Supreme Verdict (Depending on the specifics of their build)
 - Out:
 - 4x Fiery Impulse
 - 2x Izzet Charm
 - 2x Unbridled Growth
 - 1-2x Sylvan Awakening
 - 0-2x Paradise Druid
- UW Control
 - This matchup is good for us UNTIL they get Tef and Narsset on board together. We can work through one or the other fairly well but with both on board it shuts down a large portion of our velocity.
 - The key to the matchup is using Dig Through Time to create openings for yourself, and getting the read on when to push your advantage. To use fighting game terminology, it's a matchup of nickle and diming in neutral and then once you find yourself in the advantage state you have to push it as much as you can.

- Be aware of Settle the Wreckage, it's not really stock but if you can play around it you really should. Azorius Charm can put a land back on top so you need to play around that too, which makes playing around Settle much harder.
- Postboard their plan doesn't shift, they mostly just refine their suite of interaction. We up our threats but notably they have to be very heads up to have answers to Mentor postboard.
- In:
 - 3x Monastery Mentor
 - 2x Young Pyromancer
 - 4x Teferi, Time Raveler
- Out:
 - 4x Fiery Impulse
 - 2x Paradise Druid
 - 2x Unbridled Growth
 - 1x Sylvan Awakening
- Lotus Breach
 - This matchup is the definition of a drag race. Neither of you have a significant amount of interaction pre or post board. If you somehow get a window where Izzet Charm counters something relevant as they're trying to go off then go for it but those opportunities are so rare that you shouldn't slow yourself down holding it up.
 - In:
 - 3x Monastery Mentor
 - 1x Young Pyromancer
 - Out:
 - 4x Fiery Impulse

Where we go from here:

The deck has flex so there is definitely room for innovation. In particular, the numbers of Izzet Charm and Unbridled Growth can flex. The manabase would likely need refining in some form for Unbridled Growth to be cut entirely, and might potentially need a new rainbow land to be printed for that to happen (Mana Confluence isn't good enough due to it being unusable in combo turns when you're low on life).

The deck is very swingy depending on play/draw in game 1. A way to sure up game 1s where we're on the draw would be a big help for the deck.

There is also potential for whole new sideboard plans. I have explored things like [[Thing in the Ice]] and [[Niv-Mizzet, Parun]] and wasn't massively impressed by either, but that isn't to say that the current sideboard plans are optimal.