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1) Deck Details

Deck Flavor Name: Dragon Express

Deck Meta Name: Spike:TBAG/Yellow/Purple/Pink/White Mailbox Combo

Deck Link: [decklist](#)

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2) Introduction

Hello again! This is my second primer in two days, so I hope you're not sick of me yet.

In the previous primer I hinted at yet another combo deck, a new one that we in IRC are kind of proud of. This is that deck, folks! And it's a bit of a killer.

I also mentioned that some of you might have already found it yourselves. Well, [孔令亨](#) got really close on Facebook earlier today (or so people tell me, I can't actually see the page myself)! So kudos to her/him! However, I think there's a few tweaks in our version that make it a fair bit more reliable, substantially faster, and considerably more formidable. Whether or not that's actually true, well... I'll leave that up to you guys to decide. Either way, much acclaim to 孔令亨!

That's actually a large part of why this primer is being posted today and not next week, like originally promised. 孔令亨's decklist prompted Niko to make a similar deck. And with talking to him about it, well, I figured the secret was out so there's no sense dawdling. So I rushed this out for tonight, for better or worse.

Thankfully, this deck is much, much simpler than the previous one, so you won't have to listen to me ramble for nearly as long. However, there's still a fair bit to get through, so let's hop to it!

3) Deck Summary

Dragon Express, or DE, is a combo deck, much like One Pace. Also like One Pace, the combo more or less relies on just one card: Magical Mailbox.

From there, the deck tries to play a bunch of 0 cost cards until it can get out a Princess Luna: The Setting Moon, allowing the deck to not just draw plenty of cards, but acquire loads of AT as well. And once it has Luna out, it tries to win 5 mass showdowns with 3 Rarities involved for a total of 15 points.

In one way, it's very similar to One Pace in that you need one key card, use a lot of zero cost cards to draw two, gain AT in unconventional ways, and use showdowns to score points. In another, it's incredibly different as you don't require the opponent to be running specific cards, the mechanism for drawing creates a completely different rule set for the pilot to follow, and there's no back up way to draw cards should you not draw well.

Oh, and this deck needs only 7 AT to win. That's a rather significant difference as well.

Yeah, this deck can go off as early as turn 3 assuming the opponent confronts before then, and has a rather solid chance of going off turn 4.

The deck is less reliable than One Pace to get started due to not having Vinyl Mane or Parties to draw with, but makes up for that by being potentially faster, having less moving parts, not requiring the opponent to play a particular strategy, and being insanely simple to play. All in all, it's potentially significantly more competitive. But whether it actually is or not? We'll see what the meta has to say about that.

4) The Cards

4a) Mane Character

Spike: The Brave and Glorious (Spike): Don't let the cute umbrella fool you. This is a beast of a Mane.

What, his boosted ability? Yeah, that's okay... but the real power of this card comes from his front side. Every card you play puts a counter on him. A counter that you can use for something far better than simply flipping your Mane.

The Downside to Spike is that he flips at only four counters and it's a must. This means playing no more than three cards before having a way to remove counters.

So basically the rule of thumb is: don't play cards. The only time you actually want to Flip Spike is against combo, and even then not until a specific point. Yeah, that's right, this is a Mane where the correct strategy is to do nothing... until you win.

The only downside to Spike is he's Orange, which is otherwise pretty useless to the deck. But he makes up for that by providing us with the tools we need to win ASAP.

4b) Problems

As this is a combo deck and we're winning without confronting, the problems are unimportant to us. Thus instead of picking problems that help us, we pick problems that delay the opponent. Hence the weird little package we have here. The Problem deck is almost identical to One Pace's, so I'm just copy/pasting the identical problems here.

Deep Dark Forest: The starting problem, and the only one we're guaranteed to see. This is a nice problem since it prevents the opponent from even playing Troublemakers to it, preventing them from opening with NMM + YPS. It doesn't help you protect specific cards, like Ancient Research does, but you go off so much faster and with so much fewer AT it winds up not mattering as much.

Outside of that, it's just a starting problem. You're unlikely to confront it yourself.

Cheering up a Friend: This used to be the one I've historically been happiest to see flip because unless you were playing against Blue aggro, most decks had trouble confronting it quickly/cheaply. Needing 4 characters there isn't easy to do quickly.

Which Pinkie is Which & Impress the Inspector: These are in here as they're the only problems with 9 wild power and worth only 2 bonus points (The OCR for Timber! says it's 8 WP, and the OCR takes precedence), making them difficult to confront without providing as much benefit as a 3 bonus problem. Inspector cannot be confronted by our deck, but we don't actually care all that much about that.

Wonderbolts Reserve Exam: Wow, what a problem! Not only does it have 0 bonus points, meaning it can't be RTOed and provides no benefit in a face-off, the opponent needs to pay an extra 3 AT if they want more than 1 point from it the turn they confront. This is easily the best problem in the deck as it's the most likely to stall the opponent out an extra turn, but it can mess up math if going for a DFO finisher.

I Need Answers: I'm not 100% sold on this problem at the moment because it's simply not necessary, and it might be replaced with more difficult to solve problems soon. But it helps with the AT engine of the deck (pay 0, get 1 is always appealing). Sadly, Spike's ability can't replace a cost, so it doesn't help unflip Spike in an emergency.

4c) Main Deck

The Main Deck this time around is focused on one thing and one thing only: Getting out a Mailbox. From there, the rest should click smoothly.

The deck is so simple, a lot of cards will be dealt with together.

4d) Resources

Magical Mailbox (Mailbox): What did we learn from One Pace? That paying 0 to draw 2 cards a million times in one turn wins games. And, well, that's pretty much exactly what this card does.

This is the deck's lynchpin. The card you want to get out. And, once you do, you've very likely won the game. In playtesting so far, playing Mailbox has only led to a failure twice in our 30+ games with it. The card is that powerful. Well, with Spike.

The best part is that it doesn't even need to be played until the turn you attempt to go off, meaning the opponent won't even have a chance to remove it from play unless you fail.

Remember, you want this to be the second or third card you play.

Seabreeze's Flower (Flower) and Boneless: Our resource fixers, or keys if you will. The deck needs them both something awful.

Flower is essential for two reasons. Firstly, it makes Spike Yellow, and we need him to be Yellow and 3 power to play a Mailbox. Secondly, it destroys Pile of Presents and Study Session, should the opponent have them.

Boneless is a bit weirder. The deck needs Pink for Juggling Act (and to a lesser degree, Party Bomb), but there's no Orange/Pink or Yellow/Pink fixer. So the easiest way to get Pink is through Boneless.

Boneless' secondary ability is a lot less notable than Flower's, but still worth mentioning. Worst case scenario, Boneless can be one of the three cards you play to let you pay 2 AT to draw 3 cards. Not necessarily a good deal, but it's there. Also, when comboing off, Boneless is pay 2 to draw 5, which is rather reasonable.

Party Bomb (Bomb): This is a rather strange card as we're not using it for its likely intended purpose. It's almost never going to hit the opponent's friends, but rather your own. When you use it at all. More often than not, it's going to be a way to draw 2 cards for 0 AT.

If you do set up us the bomb, it'll be because you're either trying to unflip Spike, or you're running low on AT for some reason and need to get a ton of Breezies back in your deck. Either way, you'll never be putting a counter on Bomb.

In some rare circumstances, it may be prudent to drop one turn 1 and slow down an aggro strategy, but it's incredibly rare this is useful and will set things back for you since it'll be impossible to play Mailbox without Flipping Spike.

Pile of Presents (Pile): Yes, Pile of Presents. The card that is supposed to be anti-combo... is being maindecked in the new combo deck.

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Why? Because it's a 0 cost, 0 req card. That's it. Yeah, the reason it's supposed to be good against Combo actually made it even more appealing for Combo. The fact that it's also anti-combo makes things even better.

Feel free to commence facepalming now.

Ponyville Mailbox (PMB): PMB is likely not going to be played much. It's here just as a backup win condition in case too many of your cards get Souped/Destiny Drained as it'll let you confront problems rather easily. If you're in such a situation, you probably won't be able to get too many charges out of it, sadly, but you should be able to DFO at the very least. Hopefully that'll be enough to win you the game.

4e) Friends

AJ, Twi, Flutters, and Rarity Breezies: Breezies make playing this deck a, uh, snap? They cost 0 and they're friends. That's really all this deck cares about.

IRC was confident 0 cost friends would never happen because, once they did, the game would break. And then they did. And then it did.

To make things even worse, Rarity scores you points when you win a faceoff. And with the introduction of the new mass-faceoffs, this means you only need to win 5 faceoffs to win. And to help you win Faceoffs, Twi lets you stack your deck with a 6.

Flutters and AJ may as well have no game text, but they're the easiest breezies for the deck to play, so we're running a full 3 of each.

Princess Luna: The Setting Moon (Luna): This is the card that other versions of this deck so far lacked. I Need Answers is great, but... relying on problems is difficult. Luna just needs to be drawn for the deck to come together.

Luna turns each Breezy into "draw 1, gain 1 AT." And if you don't play her until after you've already played a bunch of breezies, you can still use them to get AT as well. Basically whenever you can gain an AT with Luna, you should.

5 req is no problem for this deck, meaning the only real problem is her 4 cost, which is the deck's biggest weakness aside from not finding a Mailbox in the first place.

Snips and Snails: Problem Solvers (S&S): Yup, this guy again. They're here this time because there's no better way to clear out a problem so there's no friends there at all (necessary for winning the mass-showdowns). And he can also get rid of problematic troublemakers.

They can also create a fresh problem in the rare event you're going for a DFO finisher.

4f) Events

Sweet and Kind (S&K), Apples and Oranges (A&O), Royal Guidance (RG), Rock Solid Fashion (RSF): Have you ever seen so many fixers in one deck? We've got 10! And that's not even counting the six keys. Basically they're all here to get out Mailbox and Luna (with the exception of RSF, which is just for Rarity, hence the singleton copy).

Royal Guidance is the only one that can't affect Spike off the bat. It's there to make dropping Mailbox just a little easier as A&O → RG → Mailbox is still just 3 cards and brings Spike to the reqs we need him to be at.

As an added bonus, they make Spike get bigger, allowing him to crush the opposition in a mass face-off.

Spell Off and Stay Quiet The Longest: If you were following the tweetchat where the first one of these was spoiled, you might remember me saying that I didn't think IRC would break the mass faceoffs. Well... we were wrong.

Involving all characters at the problem means two very important things for us. First, we can get all 3 Rarities (and a Twilight if needed) involved. Next, we can play this unopposed and more or less guarantee a win, scoring 3 points each time.

The actual benefits for winning the faceoff are irrelevant. These two were picked because they hurt us the least if somehow you lose (moving characters is minor and drawing friends accomplishes almost nothing if you never get another turn).

And why do we have 2 different ones? Destiny Drain. If the opponent destiny drains one, the other won't be affected.

And their flip of 6 means you can use Twilight to put the one you don't play on top of your deck. $0+6 \vee 0+x$ is almost always a win, after all.

Juggling Routine (Juggle): The deck's only deck reset, and it's only running 2 because it only needs 2. Running 2 also makes it harder to get Destiny Drained as you're less likely to discard one to a rogue NMM/YPS.

As with One Pace before it, you use this to refill your deck with your combo pieces. In this case, you'll play it immediately after resolving a mass-showdown to get your Rarities back.

5) Playing the Deck

Playing the deck is surprisingly and perhaps frustratingly simple. Your goal is to get to 7 or 8 AT, play a Mailbox (the Magic kind, not the Ponyville kind) in fewer than 3 cards, and then win.

Because this is your entire strategy, the rules for Mulliganing are very simple: “Does this hand have a Mailbox in it?” If you do, keep it. Otherwise, mulligan.

You will more or less do absolutely nothing until you’ve got 7 or 8 AT, which is turn 3 at the earliest and turn 4 at the latest. If you have a Mailbox and the ability to play it without spending too much AT, do so now. Otherwise wait another turn if doing so won’t cause you to lose the game.

There are four ways to play a Mailbox without flipping Spike:

- 1) S&K → Mailbox. The easiest and most optimal way as it’s just 2 AT and 2 cards, giving you the most breathing room.
- 2) A&O → RG → Mailbox. A little more clunky, but still viable and still just 3 cards. You’ll also go to 5 req in Purple and it doesn’t make you waste any AT when trying to play Luna later.
- 3) Flower → A&O/RG/RSF → Mailbox. An undesirable route as it means spending one more AT to get Luna out (meaning you’ll need a total of 8 rather than the optimal 7), and you’ll have one fewer flower should you need to destroy a Pile.
- 4) Boneless to draw cards → S&K → Mailbox. The worst case scenario, but it lets you draw 1 card further than if you just paid 2 to draw. Like the Flower route, you need to spend an extra AT to play Luna, and you can only safely do this with S&K. Ideally you’ll never use this way, but it’s there if you need it.

If you manage to successfully play the Mailbox without flipping Spike... congratulations, you’ve almost guaranteed yourself a victory.

Spend the counters on Spike immediately (this’ll be an extra 4 to 6 cards), then check if you have the means to get 5 Purple Req (if you don’t have it already), and a Luna in hand. If you can Play Luna, your chances of losing are almost nil if the opponent doesn’t have a Pile out.

If you can’t play Luna yet, play any breezies and piles you can, (and a card to get you to 5 Purple req if not already there) to draw a ton of cards for free. If you have spare AT due to waiting past turn 3, you can also play Boneless to let you play Party Bombs, or play RSF to let you play Rarities. You’re just digging for Luna at the moment, and remember, there’s no way to gain AT without Luna. Also remember: every single card you play is 2 cards in addition to their

normal effect, so it can sometimes be worth playing Fixers just to pay 1 to draw 2. So remember to use your Dragon counters immediately after every card you play.

Once Luna is in play, your AT worries are over. Whenever you can draw a card and have a Breezy you can exhaust, you probably should. And every breezy in hand becomes a card and an AT, or 2 AT if you've got a spare breezy to exhaust. You can exhaust Luna for AT as well, if you feel the need to, but sometimes it's better to have her unexhausted to help with winning faceoffs.

You'll be drawing your entire deck soon. Play Rarities to the same problem, along with a Twilight. If both problems have any opponent's friends, you may want to S&S them all away to let you pave a way.

Ideally once your deck is empty, you'll have 10+ AT. At this point, make sure your Rarities and a Twilight are all at the same problem, possibly with Luna as well. If you really want to ensure victory, move Spike to the problem as well (though whatever you do, do *not* move him if the opponent is playing Orange!). Then play one of your mass showdowns. Use Twilight to put a 6 back on the deck, and you should win unopposed. When you do, use all three Rarities to score 3 points.

Now Juggle immediately. Your deck'll be pretty small, so you should be able to draw it pretty quick. Put Twi and the Rarities at the same problem again, and play another mass showdown and score another 3 points the same way. Repeat this process until you're at 15 points. Congratulations, you've won.

This final loop has the added benefit of using 4 Breezies (thus 4 AT) and only costing 4 AT (3 for the showdown, 1 for the Juggle), making it relatively stable. If for some reason you're running low on AT, you can always use a party bomb to reshuffle all the breezies back into your deck and reaccumulate AT that way.

And that's more or less it. You now know how to play Dragon Express.

6) Problematic Cards

Crystal Games introduced quite a few new cards that, if you're unaware of, can be very problematic to Dragon Express. So I'm going to list the biggest offenders and ways to play around them.

Apple Juice Break and Plum Tuckered Out: Two rather minor hiccups. If playing against Orange, they mean that no matter what you do, do not Move Spike in any way. If Spike gets exhausted, you'll be unable to use Mailbox on him since Mailbox only affects readied characters.

Outside of that, these cards aren't really problems at all.

Study Session: This card's pretty annoying. Breezies coming into play exhausted means not getting AT off of them. So you'll have to Flower the opponent's Study Session and possibly use a Party Bomb later to replenish your AT supplies. The good news is that if the opponent played a Study Session, they probably can't win the game for at least one additional turn, meaning you'll have some spare AT to spend on Flower.

Rarity: Mover and Shaker: Rarity's boosted side makes fixers cost more, which means you'll need a bit more AT to successfully play both a Mailbox and Luna. However, Mover and Shaker strategies are typically pretty slow, so you'll likely make up that extra AT before going off anyway.

The other nice thing is that Mover and Shaker is not likely to be played as many consider her a non-competitive Mane at the moment. But in case this changes, now you know how to potentially deal with her.

Fruit Bat Roundup: Potentially game ending as it can cause you to discard your whole hand before you try and go off, making things a lot harder. Nothing you can do about it if the opponent DFOs into it but hope to draw well afterwards. The bigger thing to be aware of is not to use S&S on the opponent's problem if they're playing Orange, because this might pop up and cause you to discard your last deck reset, causing you to lose.

Fluttershy: Guidance Counselor: Losing AT each turn is no fun and can set you back. But if the opponent has played this, they may very well have set themselves back as well. Try to amass whatever AT you can and just ignore her.

There is pretty much nothing you can do about Flutterlock, however. The best you can do is try and shape your hand and deck reset the turn before they try and win, but it's probably still too late.

Bubbly Mare: Good news and bad news here. The good news is to flip Bubbly Mare is incredibly slow. The bad news is that if she somehow does flip, you've lost, almost guaranteed as you'll need to actually confront problems. And watch out for Finger Snaps!

There's also the possibility Bubbly Mare will never see play. Her slowness to flip offsets her powerful back ability considerably, and is very unappealing. Still, I expect someone somewhere to at least attempt making a competitive Bubbly Mare deck, so be careful.

Tatzlwurm: A minor annoyance, Tatzlwurm means that if you use Bomb to destroy your breezies, they're simply gone for good. So the easy way around this is simple not to use the

bomb while Tatzlwurm is in play. If one is in play and you must bomb, just S&S it away first, problem solved.

Nightmare Moon and Yellow Parasprite: The first of the significant problematic cards. Nightmare Moon can cause you to discard your entire hand, and both NMM and YPS can cause you to randomly discard key cards. This can sometimes make it a lot harder to play Mailbox.

Try and keep your hand full and play Mailbox ASAP. Chances are once you have, you'll be fine, but watch out for resource dismissal. Other than that, continue as normal, amassing AT until you feel you're ready to go off.

Nightmare Moon plus Monstrous Manual: Very annoying as you'll be losing 4 cards every turn. Juggle whenever possible. Try and destroy the manual with a flower. Otherwise treat it like a normal NMM and stay calm.

Destiny Drain: This card is very annoying. There are a several cards that, if destiny drained, can really make things harder for you, if not impossible. So you'll have try as hard as you can not to discard anything that will prove fatal should it remain in the discard for too long. You will possibly have to Juggle to keep those cards from being Desitny Drained as well. The good news is Destiny Drain isn't terribly easy to pull off quickly, so it's entirely possible you'll win before they can hit anything. But, just in case, be very, very careful of what you discard when you get to decide what to discard.

Pile of Presents: Pile of Presents is generally a problematic card for Combo, and DE is no exception. However with 3 Flowers, you've got a reasonable chance at simply dismissing it away (keeping in mind this will increase your AT requirement by 2).

Pile won't give the opponent points until your 4th draw that turn (3rd in the main phase), so if you don't feel confident in your ability to win, but think your opponent can't win next turn either, you can always just draw to your limit and pass turn until next turn.

Also, don't worry about giving the opponent points unless it's the 15th one if you need to draw a little to get your flower.

Pile of Presents + Silver Spanner: A fair bit more annoying as you need to use an extra flower for each Silver Spanner, which means 2 more AT. And if they have 3 Silver Spanners, that's impossible!

However hope's not lost yet. A party bomb with 2 counters on it can take out all the Silver Spanners for you, meaning you only need one Flower. The problem with this plan, of course, is you'll need to pass 2 extra turns.

Pile of Presents + Spike: The Brave and Glorious: A flipped Spike can protect Presents very nicely, meaning you need 2 Flowers. And unlike Silver Spanner, there's no way to dismiss Spike. Your only hope is 2 flowers.

The Soup Incident: Unless they have 2 Soups, you're pretty much fine. They have to either Soup both Juggles, or both Showdowns for you to be close to losing. And even then, you'll still have plenty several points and a Ponyville Mailbox backup. Chances are Soup won't wind up mattering much to you.

7) Matchups

With the introduction of new cards, the meta has changed. We don't know what it looks like yet. As such, I can't really explain matchups against decks that don't yet exist. However, DE's strategy is so straightforward against both Aggro and Control, you likely won't have to change it much for any specific matchup.

Combo, on the other hand, requires you to play a slightly different game. So let me give you some brief matchup data on the two currently existing combo decks.

One Shot: The opponent needs to Selfie Loop against you, no way around it. And they require so much more AT than you, you'll probably have gone off long before they even get a chance. If for some reason this isn't true, play a Pile the turn before you'll think they'll Selfie, and flip Spike. Now they have to dismiss it twice, that is to say with 2 flowers. That'll set them back quite a bit of AT and also likely cause them to be a lot more cautious with their draws lest they give you too many points. You'll have to reset Spike with a Party bomb at some point.

Note also that Twi is Globe Trotter immune as you can retire her after the first showdown. So if you feel like playing her with your Pile to get you more cards, that might be worthwhile.

Other than that, your game plan is normal.

Dragon Express: Okay, this is a weird matchup.

The key card here if you can't get a Mailbox is Pile of Presents. You'll play Pile and flip Spike the turn before you think the opponent will go off, thus making it harder for them to. This will set you back on several AT and cards, however, so it'll take you longer to go off yourself. Additionally, you'll need to unflip Spike with a Party Bomb, so you need more combo pieces to win.

Since neither of you is going to confront, this means neither of you will have points when trying to go off, providing each player with 14 additional draws past Pile's normal limit to find all of a Mailbox, Luna, ways to play both, and 2 Flowers.

Try and read the situation as best you can and pull the trigger as soon as you feel you have a reasonable shot. Keep in mind, however, if you fail, you've probably thrown the game. But similarly if you take too long, they might go off before you.

8) Conclusion

And that's it, folks. Dragon Express. The five colour combo monstrosity that Crystal Games brought to life.

How reliable is it? We've calculated something like a 70% chance to win on the draw turn 4 if played optimally and against Aggro (AT gains per turn being something like 2+3+3+4). That's pretty solid, if you ask me. And there's a fair chance of winning on turn 3 as well, something no other deck to my knowledge can reliably pull off.

There's no way Enterplay's going to let this deck stick around! Remember The High Ground?

Someone leaked the deck to Enterplay earlier this week, so they already know about it. I wouldn't be surprised if they wind up doing something about this either, and wouldn't really blame them if they do. This deck may be a bit too reliably fast and un-interactive to be good for the game as a whole, though I can't say that with 100% certainty.

But if they do, I don't think they'll do something immediately. I imagine they'd wait and see if the deck is actually a problem, and only attempt to handle it if they're certain it is and it can't be fixed by other cards. Perhaps Pile of Presents will keep the deck honest. Perhaps it won't. We can't know for certain until more games are played.

Either way, it'll be interesting to see what happens. I know I'll be here watching and waiting myself.

You made a deck that's possibly worse than One Pace? Seriously? Aren't you guys ashamed?

No more than we are for making One Pace, which isn't all that much, to be honest. Like I said before, this combo was hiding in plain sight, someone else would have built it if we didn't. And

people have already come pretty close to it. This deck was going to be built by someone eventually. Better sooner than later.

I'm aware Combo is not popular right now, and many are claiming it is actively damaging the game. I can see their arguments too. And, if they're correct, and there's nothing in the printed cards that stop this deck from being a savage force wreaking havoc upon all who lay eyes upon it, I actually do hope EP does something about the deck. I don't want the game to die any more than you guys do.

But until then, well... here's the primer. Have some fun with it if you can! I know we had fun building it.

Anything else from the IRC Crew?

Well, we're toying with various cards here and there, but we're pretty sure there's no more highly abusable combos at the moment =P We'll see.

And there's always the possibility we might stumble upon an aggro deck or a control deck. If we think they're competitive, we'll see about making a primer for those as well.

But for now, this is it. I hope everyone's looking forward to the CG meta as much as I am. I have a feeling it'll be pretty interesting.