

Allosaurus Rider – A Magic the Gathering Card Review

Allosaurus Rider, a creature from Magic the Gathering's Coldsnap set, was the victim of one of the most infamous card buyouts seen in Magic finance history. Pretty much every copy of the Elf Warrior, including the Coldsnap Prerelease and Duel Deck: Elves vs Goblins printings, disappeared from the internet. While this is a card that's been popular among casual players for years, it seems extremely odd for a seven-mana Elf to be suddenly bought out.

Even with its hefty seven mana casting cost, **Allosaurus Rider** isn't a bad card. It can have pretty high power and toughness, due to the fact these stats are based on how many lands you control as the Rider is in play. But, what makes the Rider actually playable in a competitive deck is its alternate casting cost: exiling 2 cards from your hand instead of paying its mana cost.

While this alternate casting cost makes the Rider playable, the dinosaur riding Elf was pretty much a casual playable, not one that was seen at tournament tables. In fact, until mid 2019, it was pretty much a creature only played at the kitchen table as an out-of-nowhere threat. But, it became suddenly bought out during the June 2016 spoiler season for the Eldritch Moon set. There were two cards in particular that generated a lot of discussion that would inevitably include Allosaurus Rider.

Decimator of the Provinces and Allosaurus Rider

The Eldritch Moon spoilers held a couple of answers to the first price spike. The first is a mythic rare from the set with a mechanic new to the set known as Emerge.

Decimator of the Provinces is a ten mana colorless Boar creature which has an alternate casting cost of six generic and three Green if you Emerge it instead. When you cast Decimator of Provinces, creatures you control get +2/+2 and gain trample until end of turn. The Decimator also has a 7/7 body with trample and haste.

Emerge is an extremely powerful mechanic, letting you sacrifice a creature you already have in play to cover part of the Emerged creature's mana cost. Essentially, the Decimator was a "fixed" version of Craterhoof Behemoth, an often game-ending creature in Modern Elf decks at that point. In some ways, this card seemed to have a chance to be better thanks to Emerge.

By "casting" Allosaurus Rider by removing two 2 Green cards from your hand, you then only have to pay 3 Green Mana and sacrifice the Rider to Emerge a Decimator of Provinces. A 7/7 with trample and haste on turn three is absolutely incredible. Generally speaking, this is a powerful combo, but Decimator of the Provinces never lived up to its hype.

While some other creatures with the Emerge mechanic would prove to be extremely powerful, and continue to see play in the Pioneer format even in 2022, Decimator of Provinces simply

never got a chance to succeed. From a pure mathematical perspective, cheating Allosaurus Rider into play with the sole intention of feeding it to the Decimator wasn't an efficient strategy. Keep in mind you must remove two Green cards from your hand in order to play the Rider for free in the first place. That's a hefty cost that sets you back substantially in card advantage.

Also, this combo was really only good if the situation called for Decimator of Provinces to come down. After all, the real draw of the Decimator was its enter-the-battlefield ability to pump all your creatures for a game-ending romp, just like Craterhoof Behemoth before it. So, while the draw of a turn three Decimator was awesome, and certainly powerful, a simple removal spell could undo all of that work immediately, essentially costing you four cards in exchange for one of your opponent's. That's not a disadvantage most decks can overcome.

In Standard, Decimator of the Provinces only saw extremely fringe play, although he did Emerge (pun intended) in more than a few Commander decks. He'd prove to be one of the more underwhelming Emerge creatures long term, and no decks actually played Allosaurus Rider and Decimator of the Provinces outside of Commander.

But, this interaction was only part of what would cause the buyout. There was a second, much better, and more playable card from Eldritch Moon spoiled around this same time.

Allosaurus Rider and Eldritch Evolution

The moment the sorcery **Eldritch Evolution** was spoiled, there were Modern combo decks being brewed immediately. **Eldritch Evolution** allows you to sacrifice a creature you control, search out a creature from your library with mana value X or less, where X is the mana value of the sacrificed creature, plus two. You then put that creature directly into play on the battlefield.

The basis of the combo starts like this: you to play a land on turn one and cast a **Birds of Paradise** or another one-drop mana dork. On turn two, you play a second land, giving you three mana. This is where Allosaurus Rider comes in: being a seven mana value creature, this meant you could sacrifice it for up to a nine mana value creature.

On turn two, you can easily cast an **Allosaurus Rider** for free if you have two other Green cards to exile. With three mana available, you can cast Eldritch Evolution, sacrificing Allosaurus Rider. Because you can search out a creature with converted mana cost X or less, you can get any creature of converted mana cost 9 or less and put it straight onto the battlefield. And in Modern, what better choice is there to get than the eight-mana... GRISELBRAND?

Yes, a turn two Griselbrand. Yes, you have to essentially give up four cards for this one creature, but this is why you use Griselbrand. His ability lets you pay seven life to draw seven cards. This means while you had to spend your whole hand to make this combo work, Griselbrand more than refills your hand, also giving you a 7/7 flier with lifelink.

There aren't many people who are going to beat a turn 2 Griselbrand. Even if your opponent happens you remove it, you can still stack at least one activation of his ability to draw seven cards. Obviously, there are other things you could do with Eldritch Evolution, and many years later Eldritch Evolution is still among the top cards in Modern. The obvious combo with Allosaurus Rider and Eldritch Evolution was what gave this strategy a deadly, if inconsistent, early way to dominate the game.

There was precedent for this Griselbrand-centered strategy to work, too. Grishoalbrand, a Modern deck built around Goryo's Vengeance, Nourishing Shoal, and the Through the Breach, was a fairly consistent winner in Modern around that time. But, Eldritch Evolution was a clearly more powerful engine to build a similar strategy around.

Unfortunately, back in 2016, the seven-mana Elf just proved to be too inconsistent to be worth running in the deck, thanks to being too reliant on having exactly the cards you needed to pull off the strategy early. Having an Allosaurus Rider, a copy of Eldritch Evolution, and two Green cards you can afford to pitch from the game was simply not going to happen often enough for the deck to rely on the combo. It was going to take another piece to make the combo consistent, with what would sometimes be a seven-mana brick stuck in your hand. Eventually, that very piece would emerge several years later. This was far from the end of Allosaurus Rider's pairing with Eldritch Evolution.

For the next several years, Allosaurus Rider would quickly fade back into irrelevance. On the other hand, Eldritch Evolution would prove to be pretty useful in Modern. But, it mostly took a supporting role alongside other more traditional creature tutors like Chord of Calling in a toolbox style deck.

Someone did manage in April 2018 to top 8 a Competitive Modern League on Magic Online with an [Eldritch Evolution creature toolbox deck](#) which did include the Rider, but that was a clear outlier. After a reprinting in the Duel Decks Anthology, Allosaurus Rider further fell from grace as players realized he just didn't have what it took at that time in Modern competition, Allosaurus Rider fell back to being a \$2 card once again. That is, until it reached new heights with yet another spoiling, nearly three years later.

Allosaurus Rider and Neoform: A First Turn Kill Modern Combo Deck

The reasoning behind Allosaurus Rider's second price spike was much clearer than the first. In May of 2019, a highly anticipated set called War of the Spark was due to release. In this set was a card that would catapult the good, but not top-tier, Eldritch Evolution decks to new heights, This card was a sorcery spell called Neoform, so powerful that it would spawn an entire [competitive Modern deck archetype called Neobrand!](#)

Neoform is a two-mana sorcery (one Blue, one Green) that has an additional cost of sacrificing a creature. When you sacrifice that creature, you search your library for a creature with a mana value of exactly one higher than the creature you sacrificed. This is where Allosaurus Rider would re-emerge. If you put an Allosaurus Rider into play, then cast Neoform, you could search your library for Griselbrand. In many ways, it's just like Eldritch Evolution, but a bit more restrictive in what it can search. In regards to transforming an Allosaurus Rider into a Griselbrand, though, it was just as good.

There are a couple of reasons why Neoform is in a couple ways superior to Eldritch Evolution. First, while Eldritch Evolution is three mana, Neoform is only two. While more restrictive, Neoform being a full mana cheaper makes it much more efficient. Also, it gives the creature you put into play an additional +1/+1 counter. This counter is quite relevant when it comes to Griselbrand in particular. Because Griselbrand has the ability to pay seven life and draw seven cards, you can actually swing for eight damage, and because of lifelink, gain back that an additional one point of life.

The original key to winning with this deck was actually the Laboratory Maniac deck-out win condition. Griselbrand simply was a key piece to draw out your deck, and be a potential alternate win condition. Meanwhile, you could keep your life total up with cards like Nourishing Shoal, allowing you to trade it and a dead Allosaurus Rider in hand for seven life. This way you can draw out your deck, which is why Laboratory Maniac is in the deck. But, you can also starting beating down with Griselbrand as early as turn one, which is what makes this deck so scary.

Some original versions of the Neobrand deck even played a copy of Lightning Storm as an alternate win condition, turning your dead lands into a finishing blow to your opponent. Technically, the deck could even win on turn one, thanks to Simian Spirit Guide, which is what made the deck so scary. Since then, Spirit Guide has been banned, but that only took away the Lightning Storm win-con.

[You can actually still watch this early Neobrand deck in action on YouTube with the legendary SaffronOlive playing the archetype on his Much Abrew about Nothing series.](#) His deck doesn't play the Lightning Storm, but does play the Simian Spirit Guides.

Finally, the Allosaurus Rider and Eldritch Evolution combo received the back-up it so desperately needed. The Rider spiked as high as \$12 in average price, with some copies listed as high as \$20! While it would settle fairly quickly to a TCGPlayer market price around \$7, and over time fade much lower, Allosaurus Rider was to become a permanent option in the Neobrand archetype.

The Neobrand deck can be surprisingly consistent thanks to a few tricky mana producers. The deck plays four Chancellor of the Tangle in the deck to try to consistently start your first turn with at least one green mana in your mana pool. Until it was banned some time later, it also ran four copies of the Simian Spirit Guide to get you free red mana. The instant-speed spell

Manamorphose helps you mana fix, and draws you a card. Early versions of the deck also ran one copy of Wild Cantor, which you can sacrifice to get whatever color of one mana you need in a pinch.

The Neobrand deck proved good enough that it became a 5-0 deck on Magic Online, and back in mid-2019 even made second place at a Star City Games Modern Invitational Qualifier. Would this combo deck last in the Modern format? Indeed, it would. Simian Spirit Guide being banned may have made a deck a bit more fair, but Neobrand has been a viable combo deck in Modern ever since. Allosaurus Rider has never left as a key part of the deck's combo, too, yet it hasn't maintained its value, even though as the deck is still viable in 2022.

While Allosaurus Rider may never again reach the heights in dollar value that it did before, the Elf Warrior's history is a testament to the fact that you just never know when a card will be printed that will make some obscure card sell out across the internet. Basically, if a card has any way that it can be abused, like with the alternate casting cost of Allosaurus Rider, it will eventually get its day in the sun. Sometimes, the spike is short lived, but other times, there's viable interactions that permanently lifts the card's value. In the case of Allosaurus Rider, Neoform suddenly made the card Modern-relevant for the foreseeable future. While once again Allosaurus Rider can be today found in bulk binders, this Elf Warrior is still relevant in its niche, and it will not be soon forgotten.

APD 2022