

CZ0578: HOW TO PLAY BLACK (WITH LADEE DANGER)

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CLAP AND SLATE AND DANCE

ROOM TONE

- 1) INTRO LADEE & RACHEL

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ATTENTION: BLACK MAGES. Today, we're talking about Magic's most opportunistic color, it's most powerful, it's greediest. We'll break down the strengths, the weaknesses, the strategies, and the staples that support them. And who better to do that than Ladee Danger? BUT FIRST:

****CARD KINGDOM** **ULTRAPRO #1** **PATREON: BRYAN TIMLIN****

- 2) **MAIN TOPIC: HOW TO PLAY BLACK**

The first thing you have to understand when building your own Commander deck is the color pie. Commander players are limited by our deck's color identities, so we should know what each color is good and bad at, and how they work best when they're the primary focus of a deck, or as an additional way to power it up and enhance. That way we're not relying on a color to do something it simply isn't designed to do. And we know what weaknesses to shore up when we're playing mono- or two-colored decks.

Today we're talking about BLACK.

DESIGNING BLACK

If you want to know how to play black well, you first need to understand how black is being designed. Black's color identity is well defined. It's greedy and ambitious, sacrificing life and creatures for cards and mana.

This informs how you should play black! Don't be afraid to trade resources for power. Don't shy away from death. Embrace your destiny!

What's your favorite thing about playing black, Ladee?

WHAT IS BLACK GOOD AT?

At this point, every color in Magic has SOME way of doing all of the important things: ramp, card draw, removal, board wipes, etc. But each color has its restrictions. Some things it's great at. Others it's just ok.

When building a primarily black deck or just splashing black, it's good to know the answers to: What can black effectively add to your strategy? When should you turn to black cards? How can you maximize black's efficiency?

TUTORING

Find anything > Demonic Tutor; Vampiric Tutor

CREATURE REMOVAL

Targeted > Defile; Infernal Grasp; Go for the Throat; Deadly Rollick

Edict Effects > Plaguecrafter; Grave Pact;

Board Wipes > Damnation; Toxic Deluge

**Notice a lot of black's removal uses -X/-X. This means it can get around indestructible and regeneration*

PLANESWALKER REMOVAL

Targeted > Bitter Triumph; Murderous Rider; Baleful Mastery;

**Black and white have been given removal for planeswalkers. Red can use burn and green has some fight spells.*

CARD DRAW

Little Draw > Sign in Blood; Read the Bones; Village Rites; Night's Whisper;

Repeatable Draw > Phyrexian Arena; Necropotence; Morbid Opportunist;

EXPLOSIVENESS

Big Mana > Cabal Coffers; Cabal Stronghold; Crypt Ghast

Rituals > Dark Ritual

Life for Mana > Bolas's Citadel;

REANIMATION

Targeted > Reanimate; Animate Dead; Victimize

Bring Back Now > Malakir Rebirth; Kaya's Ghostform;

Mass > Living Death; Rise of the Dark Realms;

SELF MILL

Stitcher's Supplier; Golgari Thug; Corpse Churn;

GRAVEYARD HATE

Dauthi Voidwalker; Bojuka Bog; Callous Bloodmage;

DRAINING LIFE

Big Drain Effects > Gray Merchant of Asphodel; Exsanguinate; Torment of Hailfire;

Aristocrats > Blood Artist; Zulaport Cutthroat; Ayara, First of Locthwain; Mirkwood Bats;

BLACK'S CREATURE TYPES

Every color has creature types it effectively supports. Black has many popular creature types, but none moreso than...

- Zombies and Vampires
- *But also...*
 - Demons; Faeries; Shades; Horrors; Rats; Skeletons;
 - Clerics; Assassins; Ninjas; Pirates; Rogues; Warlocks;
- *Generic Type Support* > Kindred Dominance; Patriarch's Bidding; Pact of the Serpent; Cover of Darkness; Species Specialist; Haunted One; Raise the Draugr;

*****MIDROLL POINT #1*****

WHAT DOES BLACK STRUGGLE WITH?

This is important to know when you're building mono-black or mostly black. It helps you anticipate some of your deck's problems before they happen in game. But it's also helpful to know when you're building 3+ colors, so you're not relying on black cards to do something they aren't good at. What are the pitfalls of the color? What cards should you add to patch some of those holes?

NON-CREATURE REMOVAL

Enchantments > Feed the Swarm; Ghastly Death Tyrant; Shatter the Oath; Debt to the Kami;
Artifacts > Gate to Phyrexia;

STACK INTERACTION

Black can remove a lot, but struggles against lethal spells (Craterhoofs, Torments of Hailfire, etc.)

- Imp's Mischief; Darkness; Withering Boon; Malakir Rebirth; Stunning Reversal;
- *Black's plan is to win faster, better. But sometimes that greed catches up to it.*

LAND RAMP

Black can make a lot of mana repeatedly, but depends on specific cards to do so. And generally requires a real devotion to the color to use it optimally. Otherwise it has no land ramp to speak of.

- *Specific Cards* > Cabal Coffers; Urborg, Tomb of Yawgmoth; Nykthos, Shrine to Nyx; Crypt of Agadeem

THAT'S IT?

Black can do anything, if you're willing to pay the cost > Paying life, discarding cards, sacrificing creatures

DRAWING HATE

Black can do a lot and can do it well. Your opponents know this and will be trying to interact with you. Prepare to be the bad guy.

- *Protect from graveyard hate*
 - *Not many ways in mono-black, but player hexproof is strong* > Shalai, Voice of Plenty; Leyline of Sanctity;

- Just don't mill all at once and get yourself blown out before you're ready to use it.
- I like Blood tokens for reanimator strategies
- *Try not to run TOO far out in front if you're not prepared for heat*
- *WATCH your life total*

Is there anything else that you run into, when you're playing black that is frustrating for you?

POWERFUL PIE BREAKS

Darkness; Imp's Mischief; Koskun Falls; Sudden Spoiling; Withering Boon; Gate to Phyrexia;

MIDROLL POINT #2

PRIMARY COLOR VS. SUPPORT

Black has things it's good at and others that it isn't. Remember not to fall back on black staples when another color could handle things better.

- *Black as a Mono Color* > If black is your only color, you're in great shape. Black does it all! Still, you're going to have to pay a lot of life. Pack some life gain to keep your engine online. Pips are your friend, so play permanents and use your devotion to power! Run a couple more board wipes than you normally would. Your deck should be great at recovering.
- *Black as a Support Color* > If black is your second color, then shore up black's weaknesses with the other colors' strengths. Use white's life gain and non-creature removal to balance out black's greed. No need for Feed the Swarm now. Use blue to protect your combos and ward off your opponents' win cons. Lean on green for non-creature removal, massive creature threats and overruns to win the game in multiple ways. Red gives you even more acceleration and lots of little bodies to sacrifice. It amplifies black's power rather than shoring up any holes.
- *Black as a Tertiary Color* > If Black is your third, fourth, or fifth color, then you really want to focus on just using the cards that synergize the most or give you the most bang for your buck.
 - *Tutors* > Demonic Tutor; Vampiric Tutor;
 - *Removal* > Infernal Grasp; Deadly Rollick; Baleful Mastery;
 - *Reanimation* > Living Death; Reanimate;
 - *Drain Effects* > Blood Artist; Zulaport Cutthroat

GOLD CARDS

We talked a lot about cards that are purely black today, but you'll find that being in more than one color means access to Gold cards / multi-colored cards. Black always adds on some level of the spice we have discussed today. So keep an eye out next time you're looking to build a Commander deck - maybe some gold cards will push you in a direction to make you want to include more black. Here are some two-color cards that show how black can really add to another color and help push a deck in a certain direction:

- *Orzhov*: Merciless Eviction; Kambal, Consul of Allocation; Primevals' Glorious Rebirth;
- *Golgari*: Assassin's Trophy; Deathrite Shaman; Culling Ritual; Deathspout;
- *Dimir*: Baleful Strix; Notion Thief; Thief of Sanity;
- *Rakdos*: Mayhem Devil; Chainer, Nightmare Adept; Last One Standing

WINNING WITH BLACK

If you want to play black, then you're best off relying on black's strengths and building with synergy.

LARGE DRAIN EFFECTS

Ex > Exsanguinate; Torment of Hailfire;

These are usually combined with a huge amount of mana

- Cabal Coffers + Urborg, Tomb of Yawmoth; Crypt of Agadeem; Culling Ritual; Bubbling Muck;

Ex > Gray Merchant of Asphodel; Kokusho, The Evening Star; Massacre Wurm;

These are usually combined with multiple targeted removal spells and a sac outlet.

- Reanimate; Animate Dead; Dread Return

SMALL DRAIN EFFECTS

Ex > Zulaport Cutthroat; Nadier's Nightblade; Disciple of the Vault; Syr Konrad, the Grim;

These are usually combined with mass token creation and a sac outlet

- Abhorrent Overlord; Plague of Vermin; Sengir Autocrat;

MASS REANIMATION

Ex > Rise of the Dark Realms; Living Death; Lich-Knights' Conquest

ONE SHOT KILLS

Ex > Tainted Strike; Hatred; Skithiryx, the Blight Dragon;

COMBOS

These are not ALL the combos in mono-black, but some of the more common ones

Ex > Exquisite Blood; Sanguine Bond or Vito, Thorn of the Dusk Rose

Ex > Bloodchief Ascension; Mindcrank

Ex > Leyline of the Void; Helm of Obedience

Ex > Phyrexian Altar; Gravecrawler

Any advice for future black players to play their best?

3) **TO THE LISTENERS**

Black mages! What's your favorite thing about playing black? Did we miss any of the color's pitfalls?

What's your favorite tech to shore up those weaknesses and pilot your black decks to victory?

****CARD KINGDOM #2** **ULTRA PRO #2****

4) **THE END STEP**

Something cool outside the world of Magic

5) CLEAN-UP STEP

Big thanks to our amazing team here at The Command Zone! **Damen Lenz; Eric Lem; Megan Yip; Gaurav Gulati; Jordan Pridgen; Jamie Block; Arthur Meadowcroft; Manson Leung; Josh Murphy; Jake Boss; Sam Waldow; Evan Limberger; Katie Cole; Mitch Trafford; Josh Lee Kwai; and Jimmy Wong.**

And to Ladee Danger!