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Strictly Anti-Evil

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

So *Torment* is the big, bad, black spooky-scary set. Ooooooh. Undoubtedly your friends are already architecting mono-black decks and laughing maniacally. *Laquatus's Champion* probably slapped you silly yesterday. Evil Amy's discard deck has gotten even better, and now you want to cry.

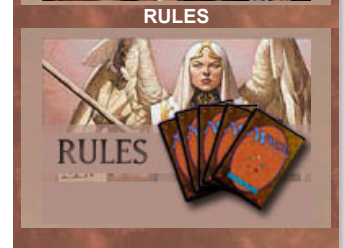
Never fear, this is Color Hoser Week, so it's time to talk about anti-black cards and decks.

Think of this as a half-way point between [Anthony's](#) and [Ben's](#) columns this week. Whereas Anthony preached against using hosers, I'll show off some fun ways to utilize them. And where Ben listed off a hundred ways to punish white, I'll go over the more current options against black.

Color hosers used to be a lot more severe than they are now. Still, there are some very meaty ways in recent (as in Type 2) expansion sets to deal with any color, black included. In tournament play, these cards are usually thought of as sidebar cards. But not everyone uses sideboards when they play **Magic**, so today I look at the different "classes" of recent anti-black cards and how they might make their way into your main decks.

First, consider this Hierarchy of Hosers when evaluating any anti-black cards you might use to frustrate your friends:

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Enchantments and artifacts are better than creatures

Black can do pretty much everything. Everything, that is, except kill enchantments and artifacts. Yes, *Pernicious Deed*, *Vindicate*, *Recoil*, and *Quagmire Druid* are technically black cards that can remove an offending *Compost*, but they need the help of another color. For mono-black decks, an anti-black enchantment or artifact is going to be a headache the entire game. In addition, artifact creatures are sometimes immune to black removal and "Fear" effects. If you can slip through the barrage of black discard, you should be home free with an enchantment or artifact (*Braids*, *Cabal Minion* notwithstanding). Black, meanwhile, slobbers at the opportunity to kill your fragile creatures.

Creatures are better than instants and sorceries

Even though black is loaded with creature removal, its best discard spell – *Duress* – doesn't affect creatures. And an anti-black creature is both an enduring way to frustrate black decks and a win condition. Keep in mind, too, that black creatures are generally better than non-black creatures

Black's enchantment removal is a little... "non-traditional."

because black just doesn't pick on itself as well as it picks on other colors. Instants and sorceries, while fine one-time answers – are by definition temporary and can be easily picked off with discard while you're looking for the perfect opportunity to use them. Besides, a *Starlight* just isn't going to win you a game.

Armed with these guiding principles, here are the recent anti-black cards and some creative ways to use them against even non-black decks:

STRATEGY #1: Protection from Black

A creature with protection from black can't be the target of black spells (including enchantments) or abilities from black sources. Any damage from a black source done to it is reduced to zero. No black creatures can block it. Your pro: black creature can walk unscathed through an army of *Zombies*, and can hold off a *Carrion Wurm* forever. The pro: black creature laughs at *Dark Banishing* and thumbs its nose at *Corrupt*. Ha ha!

Unfortunately, a black mage can make you discard your pretty little creature before it ever gets played. And spells like *Mutilate*, *Chainer's Edict*, and *Innocent Blood* laugh at your laughing creature since they don't target it. Ha ha?

The good news is that protection from black is one of the easiest kinds of anti-black abilities to use against non-black decks. First, since they're creatures, they can attack and block like the rest of their non-protected brethren. And all of us have used spells like [Plague Spitter](#) and [Last Laugh](#) to kill off opposing creatures while leaving our pro: black ones untouched. Finally, you can always turn opposing permanents black ([Shifting Sky](#) and [Darkest Hour](#) come to mind), to ensure that your creatures really kick butt in combat.

Recent cards with pro: black: [Anurid Scavenger](#), [Crusading Knight](#), [Iridescent Angel](#), [Mystic Crusader](#), [Mystic Enforcer](#), [Nantuko Blightcutter](#), [Obsidian Acolyte](#), [Pilgrim of Virtue](#), [Llanowar Knight](#).

Honorable Mentions: [Armored Guardian](#), [Mystic Familiar](#), [Questing Phelddagrif](#), [Resilient Wanderer](#), [Voice of All](#).

Recent cards that can bestow pro: black: [Dominaria's Judgment](#), [Earnest Fellowship](#), [Floating Shield](#), [Pledge of Loyalty](#), [Samite Elder](#), [Shelter](#), [Stormscape Master](#), [Strength of Isolation](#), [Teroh's Vanguard](#), [Thornscape Master](#).



STRATEGY #2: Destroy Black Stuff

Of course, another way to ensure that your critters aren't blocked by black creatures is just to kill off those creatures. Some cards are specifically designed to blow black permanents off of the table. No more black permanents = no more black-induced headaches.

The black mage still has dangerous spells like [Soul Feast](#) and [Morbid Hunger](#) to win the game even without permanents. And black is the color in **Magic** best suited to recovering its lost cards or otherwise putting its graveyard to use. I'm not saying that blowing black's stuff up isn't a good idea, just buyer beware.

Cards that target black permanents are difficult to use main deck unless you somehow turn opposing permanents black. Usually you are better off just figuring out another way to kill those permanents, although spells like [Major Teroh](#) and [Northern Paladin](#) make this strategy tempting.

Recent cards that kill black stuff: [Major Teroh](#), [Northern Paladin](#), [Repentant Vampire](#), [Wallop](#).

STRATEGY #3: Protect Yourself from Black

Ah, [Circle of Protection: Black](#), we love thee so. There are some spells, usually in white, that don't worry about black playing permanents as long as those permanents never have a chance to hurt you. There is often a funny arms race that happens in matches with these cards, where the black mage is frantically trying to play more threats than you can rebuff, which is a perfect time for [Wrath of God](#). Whee!

The real drawback of protection spells is their inability to do anything except stall. The threat is still there, either in your opponent's hand or on the table – you're just hoping it will behave long enough for you to win the game. If your deck is meant to stall, though, go for it.

Recent cards that protect from black: [Circle of Protection: Black](#), [Radiant Kavv](#), [Sphere of Grace](#).

STRATEGY #4: Benefit from Playing Versus Black

A seemingly better strategy than just neutering black is gaining some benefit from it. Some spells do little or nothing directly against the black mage, but they make your side of the table look *much* better. White tends to give you life to combat your black-minded opponent, while green gives you cards. Here's a hint: Card-drawing is better than life-gain.

Recent cards that give a boost versus black: [Compost](#), [Honorable Scout](#), [Pygmy Kavv](#), [Samite Ministration](#), [Starlight](#), [Throne of Bone](#).

STRATEGY #5: Punish Black Spells

It's all fine and good to give yourself an added boost, but some cards let you play black's game and punish your opponent. These spells tend to be decent cards on their own that get *considerably* better versus black. As a result, they are probably the easiest to use versus non-black decks and the most tempting to use with some kind of color-changing strategy.

Recent cards that punish black spells: [Amphibious Kavv](#), [Bog Gnarr](#), [Hobble](#), [Krosan Constrictor](#), [Nantuko Blightcutter](#), [Urborg Shambler](#).

STRATEGY #6: Punish Swamps

A slightly different strategy is to take advantage of the fact that an opponent is using **Swamps**. There are really two classes of spell here: 1) Creatures who have swampwalk, and are thus unblockable when facing a black mage, and 2) Creatures who proclaim, "Ha! Ha! Swamp, you say? Take THAT!" This second category only contains two cards, but they are arguably the best recent anti-black cards around: **Crusading Knight** and **Stern Judge**. I don't care how much discard and creature removal Amy is packing, her dumb deck just flat-out loses to those guys.



The only problem with this strategy these days is that with **Invasion** block, too many multicolor decks abound. Multicolor means fewer Swamps. With the return of mono-black, however, expect to wow your friends with anti-Swamp technology.

Turning lands into Swamps is considerably harder than turning permanents black. **Tainted Well** and **Slimy Kavu** are all fine and good for swampwalkers, but for widespread benefit, you better have packed your **Zombie Trailblazer** and lots of zombies.

Recent cards that punish Swamps: **Anaconda**, **Bog Wraith**, **Crusading Knight**, **Krosan Constrictor**, **Leshrac's Rite**, **Plague Beetle**, **Slithery Stalker**, **Stern Judge**, **Whispering Shade**, **Zombie Trailblazer**.

Strategy #7: Anti-Discard

Finally, there is a way to hose black that I already discussed during **Madness Week**, so I won't spend much space on it here. Although other colors get some limited discard (e.g. **Skullscorch**), black decks use discard as their primary support strategy. **Dodecapod** and madness spells go a long way toward punishing discard, and self-discard spells can make this an easy maindeck strategy.

Recent cards that punish discard: **Dodecapod**, **madness**, **flashback**, and **threshold** cards.

Those are some tools to make your local black mages cry and ruin all of their fun **Torment** games. In addition, I have briefly discussed some ways to turn some of these strategies into entire deck themes. Below is a particularly evil anti-black deck, along with some kookier ways to use anti-black cards. Hopefully some of these ideas spark new deck ideas in you. Consider, too, how you might turn color-hosers of colors other than black to your advantage.

Have fun, and beware the **Cephalid Snitch!**

-j

Ace of Spades

4 Brushland	4 Basking Rootwalla	4 Wax/Wane
1 Sungrass Prairie	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Sylvan Might
8 Forest	4 Mystic Familiar	
7 Plains	4 Wild Mongrel	
	4 Llanowar Knight	
	4 Nantuko Blightcutter	
	4 Mystic Crusader	
	4 Mystic Enforcer	

Swamped

4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Reef Shaman	4 Peek
12 Island	4 Dream Thrush	4 Shimmering Mirage
6 Plains	4 Stern Judge	4 Worldly Counsel
	4 Crusading Knight	4 Crystal Spray
		4 Collective Restraint
		2 Global Ruin

Nantuko Revolt

4 Llanowar Wastes
10 Forest
10 Swamp

4 Birds of Paradise
4 Nantuko Blightcutter
4 Pygmy Kavu
3 Phyrexian Rager

4 Darkest Hour
4 Duress
4 Harrow
3 Chainer's Edict
3 Tainted Pact
3 Nature's Revolt

Icky

4 Caves of Koilos
11 Swamp
9 Plains

4 Obsidian Acolyte
4 Crypt Rats
4 Infected Vermin
4 Plague Spitter
2 Voice of All

4 Duress
4 Strength of Isolation
4 Gerrard's Verdict
4 Vindicate
2 Death Grasp

North Star

4 Adarkar Wastes
4 Coastal Tower
8 Island
8 Plains

4 Honorable Scout
4 Obsidian Acolyte
4 Meddling Mage
4 Northern Paladin

4 Sleight of Hand
4 Counterspell
4 Hobble
4 Repulse
4 Shifting Sky

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