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LD for the Whole Family

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 House of Cards
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

First, a note about [last week's article](#). A very small, but very vocal, minority have written me assuming my point was that white *should* have been in Pro Tour - Osaka. Rereading the article with Regionals fervor in mind, I can see the confusion.

House of Cards is meant to 1) provide deck **IDEAS** to you and 2) remind you of the fun of deckbuilding. I will be barraging you with wacky deck concepts each and every week with these goals in mind.

If your personal nirvana is the Pro Tour, I am guaranteed to frustrate you. Last week was a good reminder to me that a column on deckbuilding -- however irreverent -- runs dangerously close to the crosshairs of a hardcore "strategy" article. Rest assured that I, like all of MagicTheGathering.com, have no mission other than to remind you how fun **Magic** can be.

Now, land destruction... ho!

Land destruction (LD) is second to combo as the most un-fun way to lose. You won't make any friends playing LD, and it is the *worst* thing to pull out of your backpack versus a friend excited about his new deck. Want to quash her enthusiasm? Want to watch his face turn as red as the cards in your hand? Want her to refuse to play you again? Play LD.



For this reason, I'm not the best person to be discussing how to build a solid LD deck. Oh sure, I'll use **Stone Rain** on occasion as disruption, but I rarely go out of my way to dedicate a deck's core strategy to LD. I have this weird hang-up about wanting everyone at the table -- my opponent included -- to have fun during a game of Magic. If I can win with [Nantuko Shrine](#), then my opponent will lose grinning. Big thundering fatties are fun too. LD = not fun. You can probably guess the frequency with which I play pure combo, too.

LD is so frustrating to play against because central to its strategy is denying an opponent mana to play his or her spells. Lose versus a LD deck and you will lose with a hand full of your best spells mocking you.

Deservedly so, red is considered the LD King. It has targeted spells like **Avalanche Riders** and **Pillage**. It doles out widespread carnage with **Wildfire** and **Devastating Dreams**. Very clearly, red is the color most naturally suited to the [LD strategy](#).

But red isn't the only color capable of frustrating an opponent's mana development. Indeed, all five colors can deny an opponent the ability to play spells. Today I'll focus on some of these non-red LD strategies. My hope is that in the future you will begin to think more broadly and creatively when you think LD.

The colors I list below are roughly from most to least natural in terms of building a dedicated LD deck. As you move down to the bottom of the article, your decks are going to require an increasing amount of innovation to make LD work.

The sample decks within each color are built for Extended for no good reason whatsoever. I figure doing so gives me access to a large card pool and that I haven't listed Extended decks for a while. So there.

BLACK

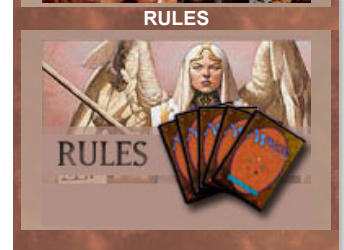
Black was born with the most efficient LD spell ever in **Sinkhole**. More recently, **Sinkhole** has been replaced by the significantly-neutered **Blight**. But black still has a host of **U** spells: **Rancid Earth**, **Rain of Tears**, **Choking Sands**, and **Icequake**, along with some 4cc beauties, like **Befoul** and **Despoil**, to blow up land. Add some weenies or a fattie to go along with black's targeted removal and you have yourself a fine LD deck.

Recurring and widespread LD is something at which black is also proficient. **Desolation**, **Minion of Leshrac**, and **Trench Wurm** can eat land after land. **Desolation Angel** can blow up all land on the table with a little help from white. And the turn-your-land-into-a-creature-and-**Eradicate** has always been a fun trick.

But black's ability to deny mana is surely not restricted to targeted land destruction. **Pox** and **Contamination**, for example, need decks built around them but can be hugely proficient at keeping an opponent from playing good

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spells.

And then there's the newest LD on legs: **Braids, Cabal Minion**. Braids can not only rampantly destroy lands, she can actually *attack*.

(insert evil chuckle here)



Rotting Earth

4 Wasteland
20 Swamp

4 Mesmeric Fiend
4 Ravenous Rats
4 Braids, Cabal Minion

4 Duress
4 Ankh of Mishra
4 Choking Sands
4 Rancid Earth
4 Despoil
4 Spinning Darkness

GREEN

Green is so good at LD that it even has an Extended LD archetype -- Legion Land Loss (LLL). LLL relies on green's targeted land destruction like **Creeping Mold**, **Thermokarst**, **Plow Under**, and **Winter's Grasp**. Certainly such a deck is possible because green has access to as many dedicated LD spells as red and black. Unfortunately for green, it isn't really allowed any widespread or recurring destruction. Still, toss in a few cheap weenies like **River Boa** -- or a big fattie like **Argothian Wurm** -- and you pretty much have yourself a deck.

A few choice artifacts allow you to expand green LD into more creative territories. Imagine, for example, a low-land deck with 1) mana-producing critters like **Llanowar Elves**, 2) supremely annoying tempo-spells like **Fallow Earth** and **Plow Under** and 3) **Ankh of Mishra**. Oooo... scary.

Or, better yet, imagine a green deck with **Smokestack**. Like **Braids**, the 'Stack creates an arms race for who can get out the most permanents each turn. Green is not only good at destroying land, it also has the entertaining ability to virtually explode with permanents. For these reasons, I often think of **Smokestack** as a green spell. Observe...

Green Smoke

4 Treetop Village
4 Wasteland
17 Forest

4 Llanowar Elves
4 Yavimaya Elder
3 Argothian Wurm

4 Exploration
4 Greener Pastures
4 Thermokarst
4 Smokestack
4 Creeping Mold
4 Plow Under

WHITE

White has the single best LD spell ever: **Armageddon**. You can pretty much include 'Geddon as your *only* LD spell in a deck and still win through the denial of mana. For those of you keeping score at home, that's pretty good. **Armageddon's** little brothers, **Catastrophe** and **Global Ruin**, are fairly decent alternatives too.

In addition to the almighty 'Geddon, white can use the children of **Balance** -- **Balancing Act** and **Cataclysm** -- to greatly reduce an opponent's resources. Apparently, white has a bit of a "macho" attitude and forgoes all of that

wimpy targeted land destruction for big, splashy effects.

The reason white is so difficult to build around is that apart from the earth-shaking stuff, white is anemic at LD. **Benalish Emissary** is the only “destroy target land” spell in white, and it requires a green kicker. **Limited Resources** is interesting but difficult to effectively build around, as are **Karmic Justice** and **Kismet**. I’ll even lump **Graceful Antelope** in the mix as one of white’s only ways to deny mana. **Graceful Antelope!** It hurts to even think about.

Back to an **Armageddon**-based idea...

MystiGeddon

4 City of Brass	4 Mother of Runes	4 Mox Diamond
4 Savannah	4 Mystic Penitent	4 Tithe
4 Scrubland	4 Soltari Priest	4 Divine Sacrament
4 Wasteland	4 Warrior en-Kor	4 Vindicate
4 Plains	4 Mystic Enforcer	4 Armageddon

BLUE

Let’s face it, blue pretty much stinks at destroying land. It has the Rishadan crew: **Cutpurse**, **Footpad**, **Brigand**, and **Port**, which can go a long way towards eating land... slowly. Blue can also *temporarily* get rid of land with spells like **Parallax Tide** and **Shimmer**. Other than that, though, blue is pretty much out of luck. Relying on **Misdirection**, **Teferi’s Response**, and **Divert** versus opposing LD spells does not count as a LD strategy.

If you extend the idea of LD to **mana denial** -- following the same thinking as **Contamination** in black -- then blue starts to look a lot better. **Stasis**, **Rising Waters**, and **Opposition** are probably the best examples, although considering them LD spells is more than a stretch. In fact, don’t do it.

More appropriately, blue can bounce land into an opponent’s hand (and yes, I rhyme all the time) with spells like **Boomerang**, **Hoodwink**, and **Sunder**. Since each player can usually only play one land a turn, this strategy can be just as frustrating as conventional LD.

Because it isn’t getting rid of land for good, blue LD usually needs to rely on artifacts like **Ankh of Mishra**, **Viseling**, and **Iron Maiden** to make its tempo effects sting. But in the right combination, blue LD can *really* sting...



Blue LD

4 Volcanic Island	4 Mox Diamond
4 Wasteland	4 Ankh of Mishra
13 Island	4 Fire/Ice
	4 Hoodwink
	4 Boomerang
	4 Legacy's Allure
	4 Iron Maiden
	4 Parallax Tide

4 Sunder
3 Sapphire Medallion

What is particularly fun about blue's path towards LD is that it requires the most creativity to use well. Unlike a lot of other strategies listed above, it also can be reasonably made without rares:

The Vice *Lite!*

4 Wasteland
20 Island

4 Man-o'-War
4 Rishadan Cutpurse
4 Viseling
4 Rishadan Footpad

4 Seal of Removal
4 Accumulated Knowledge
4 Hoodwink
4 Boomerang
4 Legacy's Allure

These are merely some mono-colored ideas. Combining two or more colors leads to a near infinite possibility of LD spells and win conditions. I have even seen a very effective 5c "Domain" deck built with land destruction as its core strategy. Opportunities for creative ways to demoralize your opponent abound.

LD decks can be immensely satisfying to play when they work. They are also an interesting deckbuilding challenge because a) the first several turns usually dictate whether an LD deck will win or lose, and b) LD decks can rely on a variety of different win conditions.

Just remember that building a good LD deck is like hanging a sign on your back that says "smack me in the nose, please." *Enjoying* playing LD by cackling with glee is like hanging a sign that says "smack me in the nose HARD, RIGHT NOW!" Many playgroups I've seen frown heavily upon LD unless it is both kooky and inconsistent (the same guidelines usually apply to combo decks). Buyer beware.

And for goodness' sake, don't play against me with your maniacal contraption. If you do, I'll probably read that sign on your back veeery carefully.

Next week: Back to basics.

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