

# Get in your opponent's head SCS: Cabal Therapy

Bennie Smith

Monday, August 12, 2002

- 
- 



- [Bennie Smith Archive](#)

"If it ain't broke, why not fix it?"--Cabal Therapist



If [Cabal Therapy](#) ever gets added to the FlavOracle, that's going to be my submission, so be prepared, Ferrett!

When *Judgment* came out, black aficionados everywhere cringed. Black got the shaft--big time. Sure, it was only fair, since *Torment* was the mother lode of black goodness, but looking down that short list of black cards, the outlook sure felt bleak. When my eyes first read [Cabal Therapy](#), I admit to being a bit disappointed; it certainly was no [Duress](#)!

But something about that card buzzed at the back of my mind for a while. It just doesn't get any cheaper to play--one black mana to play initially and zero mana to flashback. Mana efficiency is often the hallmark of a strong **Magic** card. [Cabal Therapy](#) also has the potential of knocking out multiple cards if your opponent happens to be holding more than one copy of the named card. These two factors led me to believe that it was a card worth exploring, so join me as I take a walk on the Cabal side.

## Diagnosis--the Guessing Game

The biggest downside to playing [Cabal Therapy](#) is the risk of "whiffing" it--of calling a card that's not in your opponent's hand. Luckily, there are plenty of ways to turn the guessing game into a sure thing. [Duress](#), [Addle](#), [Mesmeric Fiend](#), [Ostracize](#), and [Unmask](#) all are decent hand-disruption cards that also let you know what else is lurking in your opponent's hand. Dipping into blue gives you the cantrip [Peek](#) and the devastating [Lobotomy](#).

Red gives you [Blood Oath](#) and, along with black, [Void](#).

The *Invasion* Dragon Legends [Crosis, the Purger](#) and [Darigaaz, the Igniter](#) also give you a peek into your opponent's hand--all

*With cards like these, your Therapy will always be successful.*

the while wrecking havoc with their breath weapons. If your opponent is playing creature theme decks, [Tsabo's Decree](#) can devastate his or her game plan, and you can then pick over the remains with some follow-up Therapy. Activating the Planeswalker's cards ([Fury](#), [Favor](#), and so on) and [Scrying Glass](#) also will give you a glimpse into your opponent's plans.

In addition, there are cards that provide a constant window on your opponent's hand: [Revelation](#), [Telepathy](#), [Seer's Vision](#), [Stromgald Spy](#), [Wandering Eye](#), and [Zur's Weiriding](#) all maximize [Cabal Therapy](#) by giving you the information you need. Then there are cards that let you see what's about to go into your opponent's hand, like [Aven Windreader](#), [Orcish Spy](#), [Portent](#), [Booby Trap](#), [Breathstealer's Crypt](#), and [Field of Dreams](#). Oh, and let's not forget our friends the Advocates, which return at least one card to your opponent's hand that you'll know up-front--since you chose the card(s)--giving you a sure hit while you scout for other cards.

## Treatment--Taking One for the Team

[Cabal Therapy](#)'s flashback ability may be cheap in mana to play, but the cost of sacrificing a creature can be a bit pricey. There are cheap creatures out there that sometimes become useless as the game wears on, though; your early-game [Carriion Rats](#) or [Ravenous Rats](#) may not be much more than chump blockers in the late game. Why not sacrifice one of them to flashback the Therapy? Then there are creatures of your own that you sometimes want to hit the graveyard, like [Shambling Swarm](#), [Disease Carriers](#), [Plaque Dogs](#), [Academy Rector](#), [Gamekeeper](#), [Goblin Gardener](#), [Abyssal Gatekeeper](#), or a creature enchanted with [Pattern of Rebirth](#). You may also want to off your [Aura Thief](#), [False Prophet](#), [Liege of the Hollows](#), [Su-Chi](#), [Sylvan Hierophant](#), [Whirlpool Drake](#), [Yavimaya Elder](#), [Aven Fisher](#), [Reliquary Monk](#), or [Rukh Egg](#). *Odyssey* block is actually pretty light on sacrificial effects, so [Cabal Therapy](#) functions nicely if you really need one of your own creatures to die and your opponent isn't cooperating.

The *Apocalypse* Penumbra creatures--[Bobcat](#), [Kavu](#), and [Wurm](#)--can make the sacrifice relatively pain-free. Then there are creatures that don't stay dead even if sacrificed, like [Nether Spirit](#), [Brood of Cockroaches](#), [Ichorid](#), and [Reborn Hero](#). Token-generating cards, such as [Verdant Force](#), [Squirrel Nest](#), [Deranged Hermit](#), [Kjeldoran Outpost](#), and [Firecat Blitz](#), can provide plenty of fodder for sacrifice.

*Balthor takes the sting out of sacrificing creatures.*

Lastly, there are creatures that are going to die anyway due to [Corpse Dance](#), [Dawn of the Dead](#), and [Shallow Grave](#), so sacrificing them first to [Cabal Therapy](#) both maximizes their usefulness and gets around remove-

from-game effects, leaving them available for reanimation later.

Speaking of reanimation, I built the following deck around [Balthor the Defiled](#), and because the critters will be coming back anyway, why not sacrifice them first to plunder your opponent's hand?

## Balthor's Boys



### Main Deck

*60 cards*

4 <a href="#">Bloodfire Ridge</a>	3 <a href="#">Buried Alive</a>
15 <a href="#">Swamp</a>	4 <a href="#">Cabal Therapy</a>
4 <a href="#">Tainted Peak</a>	4 <a href="#">Chainer's Edict</a>
<hr/>	
23 lands	11 other spells

1 <a href="#">Anarchist</a>
4 <a href="#">Balthor the Defiled</a>
4 <a href="#">Carrion Rats</a>
4 <a href="#">Crypt Creeper</a>
3 <a href="#">Laquatus's Champion</a>
4 <a href="#">Mesmeric Fiend</a>
4 <a href="#">Overeager Apprentice</a>
1 <a href="#">Petradon</a>
1 <a href="#">Vampiric Dragon</a>

---

26 creatures



Note: If you happen to own four [Nantuko Shades](#), you should probably swap them in for the Rats, which are decent quick beats but not as good as the Shades.

## Reader Feedback

I got a lot of email from folks who enjoyed my inaugural "Single Card Strategy" [article](#) on [Forcemage Advocate](#), so I wanted to thank all of you who took the time to write in. I especially appreciated those who sent in their own ideas for using the Advocate.

"Cashmere" wrote in saying that after emptying your opponent's hand with the discard effects in a [Megrim](#) deck, your opponent is often able to simply play out what he or she draws to avoid any further triggering of [Megrim](#). The Advocates can feed your opponent unplayable cards to nail with a discard effect for additional damage.

Keith Michael wrote in saying that feeding your opponent high-cost spells from his or her graveyard would increase the odds of hitting big with the *Planeshift* [Planeswalker's cards](#).

And Garcey Yoshida wrote that putting a critical card from your opponent's graveyard into his or her hand right before playing [Lobotomy](#) can be a powerful play.

Thanks to everyone for your ideas! Got some thoughts on [Cabal Therapy](#) that I didn't touch on? You can reach me at [singlecardstrategy@email.com](mailto:singlecardstrategy@email.com).

---

*Bennie may be reached at [singlecardstrategy@email.com](mailto:singlecardstrategy@email.com).*