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Bringing In the Dead

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 House of Cards
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

hi folks! From this point on, I'll be filling the shoes of the esteemed and creatively titled Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar, whom I believe has stepped aside to pursue a shadow-of-night, avenger-of-injustice project of some kind. I hope I can bring the same great sense of fun to this column as he did. Who am I, though? I'm a longtime **Magic** player (I started at Beta), and a total **Johnny**. You may have seen my name before on some of the **puzzles** posted here on the website, in the credits of any **Magic** product released over the past two years, or in some of Randy Buehler's articles noting **wacky playtest exploits**. Of course, everything you *really* need to know about me and my approach to the game you can get by looking at the one **Magic** card I ever designed: **Erratic Explosion**.

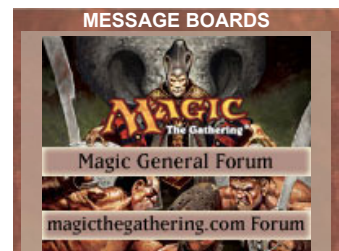
I'll write more about my long-term plans and hopes for this column next week, but for now, I'm just going to jump in and get down to the business of Zombies. I've been fascinated by the scintillating deckbuilding possibilities of Zombies ever since Aaron told me that's what I had to write my first column about. The hordes of walking undead, while legion, can be shockingly single-minded. And I mean that among all of them put together, there's maybe a single mind. The Zombies' focus is very compelling, though. There's so much emphasis on death and the graveyard (especially in the *Odyssey* block) that natural synergy is easy to come by. And while you can argue that there's not enough variety among the creatures in the race, I think their similarities make their slight differences that much more pronounced.



GRAVE DANGER

The graveyard. It's a Zombie's natural environment: its birthplace, its home, its cafeteria. So why are they always trying to tear it apart? Hey, if you were a smelly, goopy, flesh-dripping corpse (and I'm not judging you if you are), you'd probably carry some self-hatred too. Plenty of *Odyssey* Zombies practice picking through the trash: **Zombie Cannibal**, **Crypt Creeper**, and **Famished Ghoul** can all slurp cards out of an someone's graveyard. But they're nothing compared to **Withered Wretch**, the new king of graveyard denial. Since it quickly and cheaply liquefies your opponent's 'yard, it combos very nicely with a few other cards. The **Wretch**{**Withered Wretch**} turns **Carrion Wurm** into a 5-mana 6/5 Zombie with no drawback whatsoever. Even better, it pairs up with the neglected *Odyssey* rare **Gravestorm** to let you draw two cards a turn. With a **UU** and a **UUUU** mana cost at the heart of the deck, monoblack is clearly the way to go. Here's one way to use that engine without investing in too many other rare cards.

Final Wrap-up
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Shallow Grave

Standard-legal graveyard denial deck

Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Barren Moor	2 Carrion Rats	2 Chainer's Edict
20 Swamp	3 Carrion Wurm	2 Duress
24 lands	4 Crypt Creeper	1 Engineered Plague
	2 Famished Ghoul	4 Fade from Memory
	4 Withered Wretch	4 Gravestorm
	2 Zombie Cannibal	1 Mutilate
17 creatures		2 Patriarch's Bidding
		3 Smother
		19 other spells


I think that's a pretty good start to my tenure here: a cross-block combo between an uncommon utility card and a, shall we say, less-than-celebrated rare. If only there were another combo out there that fit the theme... if I could dig it out from wherever it's buried, all that remains... hey! That's right, **Buried Alive** and **Ghastly Remains** go together like peanut butter and marshmallow. It's an awful combo, but how can you resist? Sure, fancy-schmancy graveyard recursion decks use **Oversold Cemetery** (admittedly, one of my favorite cards in the current

environment) and high-quality creatures you can use over and over again like **Krosan Tusker**. But where's the challenge in building a deck out of *good* cards? Anyone can do that.

OVERLOADED CEMETERY

Yes, just as Zombies excel at devouring graveyards, they also shine at popping out of them. A few different Zombies in the set of Standard-legal cards are good at self-recursion: **Ghastly Remains** (while it's no **Squee**, **Goblin Nabob**, it's the closest thing to come out in the last few years) and **Undead Gladiator** refuse to stay dead, and **Aphetto Vulture** can set up your next draw with the previously deceased Zombie of your choice (including itself). In fact, **Buried Alive** interacts with the Vulture, **Gravedigger**, and **Cruel Revival** to set up a "toolbox" Zombie deck. A bunch of one-of Zombies lets you fetch the creature you need for whatever situation you're in. **Cruel Revival** does have a drawback, though: if you play against another Zombie deck, it might wind up as a, um, dead card. That's where **Zombie Infestation** slides on in. It feeds the graveyard, lets you dump those dead cards, syncs up perfectly with **Ghastly Remains**, and is ridiculously thematic. **Soulless One** giggles like a schoolgirl each time you drop more Zombies into your graveyard, and **Corpse Harvester** supports the toolbox angle. Toss in whichever Zombies you have on hand that would help you out. Here's the version I've been playing with.

Deep Grave

Standard-legal Zombie recursion deck 


Main Deck
60 cards

<p>3 Barren Moor 18 Swamp 2 Unholy Grotto</p> <hr/> <p>23 lands</p>	<p>1 Aphetto Vulture 1 Boneknitter 1 Balthor the Defiled 2 Corpse Harvester 1 Festering Goblin 3 Ghastly Remains 3 Gravedigger 1 Gravespawn Sovereign 1 Grotesque Hybrid 1 Organ Grinder 1 Skinthinner 1 Smokespew Invoker 4 Soulless One 1 Undead Gladiator 1 Withered Wretch 1 Zombie Trailblazer</p> <hr/> <p>24 creatures</p>	<p>4 Buried Alive 3 Charcoal Diamond 2 Cruel Revival 2 Zombie Infestation 2 Zombify</p> <hr/> <p>13 other spells</p>
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LITENING THE LOAD

While Zombies lend themselves to tricks and combos, they actually don't need a diabolical scheme to be good. For example, **Noxious Ghoul** combos with *every other Zombie*. **Infernal Caretaker** combos with *every other Zombie*. And the list goes on. One of Jay's great ideas was the frequent inclusion of "Lite" decks (decks with no rares in them) in this space, and I'll be continuing that practice.

Rise Up & Beat Down Lite!

Onslaught block Zombie tribal deck 

Main Deck
60 cards

<p>4 Barren Moor 20 Swamp</p> <hr/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>1 Corpse Harvester 1 Deathmark Prelate 4 Festering Goblin 4 Gempalm Polluter 3 Infernal Caretaker 3 Nantuko Husk 3 Noxious Ghoul 2 Shepherd of Rot 4 Skinthinner 4 Wretched Anurid</p> <hr/> <p>29 creatures</p>	<p>3 Dirge of Dread 4 Feeding Frenzy</p> <hr/> <p>7 other spells</p>
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BAD TO THE BONES

Finally, while looking through my **Magic Online** collection for cool Zombies to build decks around, I couldn't help but notice the first one listed alphabetically: the appropriately named **Accursed Centaur**. What a hideous card.

That card is so bad, UPN is airing a sitcom about it. That card is so bad, the Cincinnati Bengals can beat it. That card is so bad, these jokes would have to be even *less* funny to do it justice. So I built a deck around it. Which creatures are the best ones to sacrifice? Either ones with great leaves-play abilities, or—even better—ones belonging to your opponent. So the deck is filled with plenty of ways to steal creatures and plenty of ways to sacrifice them. It won't work all the time, but (amazingly) sometimes it does . . . and beating down your opponent with an **Accursed Centaur** is just about as good as it gets.

Accursed Theft

Standard-legal Accursed Centaur deck

Main Deck
50 cards

1 Barren Moor	4 Accursed Centaur	4 Custody Battle
2 Bloodstained Mire	1 Bloodshot Cyclops	4 Innocent Blood
2 Forgotten Cave	1 Corpse Harvester	1 Endemic Plague
1 Mountain	1 Fallen Angel	1 Malevolent Awakening
2 Sulfurous Springs	4 Festering Goblin	3 Temporary Insanity
2 Swamp	1 Mindslicer	4 Threaten
4 Tainted Peak	4 Nantuko Husk	
14 lands	1 Shambling Swarm	17 other spells
	2 Stronghold Assassin	
	19 creatures	

And on that note, I'll wrap up my first column. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. Until next week, have fun with Zombies.

—Mark

Send questions and comments to editor@wizards.com. We'll get Mark hooked up with a mailbox this week.

Mark Gottlieb is the Magic Rules Manager. He's also the **Magic** tech writer, the **Duel Masters** rules manager, and a member of multiple design teams. He's a contributing editor to *Games Magazine*. He's a three-time winner of the [MIT Mystery Hunt](#) and the captain of [Bay Area Game](#) team Here Be Dragons. He's worshipped as a god by a sect of hyperintelligent wombats. He's completely insane.



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