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A Dark Cloud

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Learning Curve

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I am really looking forward to playing with Death Cloud. I think it is potentially one of the most powerful cards in the *Mirrodin* block. I can easily see it being played in Mono-Black Control decks in *Mirrodin* Block Constructed, Standard and possibly even Extended. (As for Vintage, *Darksteel* offers other tidbits for the aficionados of that format to chew on). But, before we go any further, you would probably like to get a load of this bad boy...



During my years of **Magic** experience I have come to appreciate that symmetry is not all it's cracked up to be. A symmetrical card is one that generates an effect that affects both players. *Wrath of God*, *Armageddon*, *Pox*, and *Jokulhaups* are all famous examples of symmetrical cards. One of the hallmarks of powerful symmetrical cards is that they were all dismissed after their initial release merely because they affected both players.

I have been playing this game long enough to remember looking at an *Armageddon* that I opened in an Unlimited booster and being disappointed by opening a bad rare. I can recall the days when *Wrath of God* was regarded by most with a puzzled scratch of the head and "Why would they print this? Your creatures die too!"

It wasn't too long before players learned to look for symmetrical cards to exploit in each set. The way you exploit the symmetry is to tune your deck to be better prepared for the effect than your opponent's deck. With *Armageddon* it was by playing cheap efficient creatures and destroying your opponent's land (and your own) before their threats or answers would come online. Having mana producing creatures or mana producing artifacts would allow your deck to operate while your foe's mana was hopefully set back to zero. *Winter Orb* and artifact mana was another great combo for doing an end-around a powerful symmetrical card's effect.

You need only look at the success of the current crop of blue-white and green-white control decks in the Standard environment to understand what makes *Wrath of God* some of the most desirable trade bait in any player's **Magic** binder. The blue-white decks currently popular force opponents to over commit creatures in order to race an unmorphed *Exalted Angel* or push a *Story Circle* beyond its limits. Then the opponent gets punished with a lopsided *Wrath* while another *Angel* or a recurred *Eternal Dragon* is usually waiting in the wings as a follow-up.

Another great example is *Pox*. *Pox* was one of many powerful *Ice Age* cards that took a while to get it's due. There has been much bandwidth devoted to how *Necropotence* was overlooked (and even panned) when *Ice Age* was first printed but it was hardly the only powerful black card to

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receive that treatment when the stand-alone hit the stores. **Demonic Consultation** was also laughed at as the first **Necropotence** decks tore their way through the senior and junior portions of the first Pro Tour and it took even longer for **Pox** to shed the mantle of bad rare.

In fact, it wasn't until **Pox** was reprinted in *Fifth Edition* (and the advent of Extended qualifiers) that it really got its due. There were a number of different decks that used it but it was the version that qualified Chad Ellis for his first Pro Tour that most people remember:



DieselPox		
played by Chad Ellis		
	Main Deck	Sideboard
	60 cards	
4 Mishra's Factory	3 Cursed Scroll	3 Diabolic Edict
16 Swamp	4 Dark Ritual	2 Dystopia
3 Wasteland	3 Demonic Consultation	2 Forsaken Wastes
23 lands	4 Duress	2 Gloom
	3 Funeral Charm	3 Spinning Darkness
	4 Hymn to Tourach	3 Tormod's Crypt
3 Steel Golem	3 Pox	15 sideboard cards
3 creatures	3 The Rack	
	4 Urza's Bauble	
	3 Yawgmoth's Will	
	34 other spells	

Chad's deck was very powerful and cannot be replicated due to the lack of anything even remotely as broken as **Dark Ritual** in any of the non-Vintage constructed formats. But, we can still look at how he took advantage of **Pox** and possibly apply it to the new version of the card. One of the things that was always appealing to me about this deck was its ability to "store" cards on the table with cantripts like **Urza's Bauble**. With **Yawgmoth's Will** the **Urza's Baubles** were like mini-Inspirations.

Getting back to the card at hand, **Death Cloud** is clearly a "fixed" **Pox**. It is more expensive than the original, with an being tacked onto the original's . But the addition of that gives you a degree of maneuverability that **Pox** never had. Plus, there is none of that icky math from the original.

I began to think about the applications of **Death Cloud** for the upcoming *Mirrodin* Block Constructed format and I am very excited about the possibilities. My initial deck—without the benefit of any **Darksteel** cards beside the **Death Cloud**—looks something like this. The idea behind the deck is to develop a post-**Death Cloud** mana base while stockpiling **Spellbombs** on the table to replenish your hand.

Diesel Cloud		
post-Darksteel Mirrodin Block Constructed		
	Main Deck	
	60 cards	
24 Swamp	2 Grid Monitor	4 Aether Spellbomb
24 lands	2 creatures	4 Barter in Blood
		4 Death Cloud
		4 Promise of Power
		4 Pyrite Spellbomb
		4 Sun Droplet
		4 Talisman of Dominance
		4 Talisman of Indulgence
		2 Terror
		34 other spells

One of the other things that **Pox** decks have relied upon in the past that is not present in Chad's version is something we mentioned earlier while looking back fondly on **Armageddon**: Artifact mana. Cards such as **Mox Diamond** or even the **Mirage** diamonds would help ensure that you recover more quickly from the **Pox** than your opponent. The same idea applies to this deck list.

The **Sun Droplets** will get you back any damage your opponent might throw at you early. If you can get two or more in play at the same time you can even start *gaining* life. With the Talismans you can take damage and put a counter on each Droplet and gain one point of life on your opponent's upkeep. I have had solitaire games with this deck where I end up with ridiculous life totals.



Either of the spellbombs could become **Necrogen Spellbombs** quite easily if you needed more discard but I think the two that are in the deck offer you a little more versatility. The **Pyrite Spellbomb** gives you some additional removal and extra damage to finish off your opponent. The **Aether Spellbomb** can return a **Grid Monitor** to your hand end of turn so you can cast **Barter in Blood** on your own turn without losing a creature yourself. Mostly you will want to merely cycle the Spellbombs after a **Death Cloud** to refill your hand once you've wiped out your opponent's entire hand, all their creatures, and most of their lands.

If you don't feel comfortable with all the rares in the deck you might want to consider replacing the card drawing of **Promise of Power** with the uncommon and underrated **Mindstorm Crown**. I don't know exactly what the deck will look like once all of **Darksteel** is revealed. I know the deck would be greatly improved by a **Chimeric Idol** or **Jade Statue** type card. **Stalking Stones** is not going to cut it in this deck but a card that mirrored the mechanics of a **Mishra's Factory** might.

There are certainly other ways to exploit this card. **Rukh Egg** is definitely a fun possibility in a red-black build for Standard. If you wanted to play with more creatures you could also try and exploit **Synod Sanctum** to "store" creatures much the way the Spellbombs store cards in your hand on the

table.

Symmetry is just as much fun as it has always been. One thing has changed about it though: this is one card that won't get overlooked for very long.

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Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



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