



# Black to the Drawing Board

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Learning Curve  
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So how about that **Death Cloud**?

Black Week is coming a little too close on the heels of [my Death Cloud preview](#) for my tastes. I'm pretty excited about that deck right now for *Mirrodin* Block Constructed and possibly even the new Standard format. The deck showcases many of black's finest features. It pays life for cards with **Promise of Power**. It also features hand destruction, land destruction, the forced sacrifice of creatures, and loss of life in one dark little **Death Cloud**.

So what's the problem?

The problem is that I have no deck to write about for Black Week. The columns that bookend each week here at [magicthegathering.com](#) will likely cover all the things that make black tick. If past color specific theme weeks are any indication Rosewater's (I never refer to him as Rosewater but I need to differentiate between him and Gottlieb) column will take a slice of the color pie and explain the philosophy of black and the approach that R&D takes to the color. Randy's Friday column (his last before Aaron Forsythe takes over!) will undoubtedly provide insight into the design of a black card or mechanic.

The columns that hug mine each week—Gottlieb's (see Rosewater comment one paragraph above) and Alongi's (just for the sake of consistency)—cover different aspects of the game than I address in my column. Alongi and I refuse to see eye to eye on how many players should be in a game of **Magic** at the same time. I have no idea what Gottlieb will do but I am sure it will be utterly rogue.

My little island in the middle of each color specific theme week has generally harkened back to the my first column for this site where I would deconstruct a tournament deck from the past that best exemplified the color and then attempt to reconstruct it for the current Standard or Block Constructed format.

Which brings us back to **Death Cloud**. I already took that approach in the preview article by deconstructing a Pox deck that I attributed to Chad Ellis. (Although Ken Krouner wrote me to assert that the deck was designed by Ken and Joe Weber before being 'appropriated' by Chad Ellis.) The **Death Cloud** deck is the only black deck I have been giving any serious consideration to and I don't have any other whole decks on the drawing board.

But, I *do* have a couple of kernels that I have been toying with and I will share them with you today. Perhaps they will inspire you to put a fire under them and pop a deck out. It will also give me an opportunity to talk about some of the aspects of black that I find very satisfying to play with.



Black is usually associated in most people's minds as the color of discard. **Hymn to Tourach**, **Mind Twist**, **Duress**, even the recently minted **Cabal Interrogator** have all given players fits. My favorite "black" discard spell was printed in *Ice Age* and is a pretty good example of the need for a color pie.

While not pure discard **Stunted Growth** forced players to put three cards from their hand on top of their library. Like many of *Ice Age*'s powerful rares this card was overlooked initially and only saw brief periods of tournament play. While green has retained some of the flavor of the card in **Plow Under** and now **Rebuking Ceremony** it allowed the assault on an opponent's hand to go back to black.

The next time anything similar to **Stunted Growth** was printed was during the *Mirage* block. **Painful Memories** and **Agonizing Memories** made their respective debuts in the first and last sets of that block. Like **Stunted Growth** neither card was pure discard. The player who was on the receiving end would still have access to all the cards in

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their hand eventually but they would be deprived of one or two draw steps. They disrupted the tempo of the opponent's game.

Which brings me to one of my favorite tempo disrupting cards to see print in *Darksteel*: **Chittering Rats**. For the same converted mana cost as any generic 2/2 creature you get the bonus of stunting your opponent's hand for one card. I have done a handful of *Darksteel* drafts since the prerelease and I am never happy to pass this common critter up.

One friend of mine recounted locking up his opponent at the Prerelease. His opponent had one card in hand—a **Turn to Dust** that could find no target in play—and my friend had **Crystal Shard** and drew his **Chittering Rats**. The **Turn to Dust** would go on top of his library and my friend could return the Rats to replay it on the next turn. As long as my friend played no equipment his opponent would see no new cards for the rest of the game. The opponent scooped up his cards soon thereafter.



One of the frustrating aspects of black's discard is that it almost always happens at sorcery speed. **Funeral Charm**, **Greel**, **Mind Raker**, and **Necrogen Spellbomb** are the only cards that leap to mind when I think of discard effects that can happen during my opponent's draw step. Thanks to **Soul Foundry** players have their choice of rat tokens to generate—**Chittering** or **Ravenous**—and they can do it any time they could play an instant. They can even do it during an opponent's draw step.

Thanks to the colorless casting cost and activation of **Soul Foundry** anyone can access this ability but I think I like it best in a black-blue deck. It is possible to get a second turn **Soul Foundry** in play thanks to another new *Darksteel* card. **Vedalken Engineer** gives newer players a hint of the power of **Mishra's Workshop**. Powered out on the first turn with a **Chrome Mox** the Engineer is sure to be a power

card in the upcoming *Mirrodin* Block Constructed Pro Tour. A first turn Engineer can mean anything from a turn two **Juggernaut**, **Gilded Lotus** or **Panoptic Mirror** (people are complaining that it is slow but the Engineer turns the speed control up on every card). I will probably be using it to power out a turn two/three **Soul Foundry** with a discard creature imprinted on it.

One of my favorite cards of all time is **Grave Pact**. The card has pretty much sailed below the radar since it was reprinted in *Eighth Edition* but I have had my eye on it since the *Mirrodin* set was released. During **Grave Pact's** initial run I built a deck around it using **Jet Medallions**, **Corpse Dance** and an assortment of creatures with sacrifice abilities. I have been on the lookout for some similarly renewable source of creatures in the current Standard format.



**Nim Devourer** has stood out as he most likely candidate to pair with **Grave Pact**. If you can find a way to get the Devourer into your graveyard then you can combine its return to play ability with **Grave Pact's** triggered ability to turn every two black mana you have available into a **Diabolic Edict**. The Devourer can return to play even if you have no other creatures in play to sacrifice. When it finds no other creatures on its side of the table it shrugs and devours itself. It also says that you can only use its ability during your upkeep and does not specify that it needs to be at the beginning of your upkeep like many of the game's upkeep effects. This allows you to use its ability multiple times during the same upkeep.

I don't have a deck in mind for this yet but I have been keeping it on a back burner waiting for the rest of it to come together. Hopefully my article for Black Week has given you some ideas for new decks cards to try. Feel free to send me your ideas for using either of the kernels I presented today. Who knows, I might write about your ideas in a future Learning Curve—err, a future column. With that cryptic note I will leave you to talk among yourselves.

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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](http://Top8Magic.com), the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



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