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**W**elcome to the penultimate day of Black Week. Or, to be more accurate (in a less accurate way), Black Week #3. If you've been following along since the beginning, you may have noticed that Black Week popped up later than it should have. I'm partially to blame for that. It was originally scheduled for sometime in November, but I argued that it shouldn't appear so close on the heels of Black Week #2, otherwise known as Halloween Week. Check it out for decks featuring kooky, spooky, and utterly ooky critters. But that wasn't the first time I dedicated a week to nothing but black decks. My first week as a columnist was Zombie Week. Not much \*👁️👁️👁️👁️ action that week.

So that leaves me with a challenging task: Create decks that showcase the diabolical skills of black without stepping on my own toes from before. No Zombie decks. No ghoulish monster decks. Just evil, evil, evil decks (to which you may add a halfway-evil sideboard). I can do that.

"Whoa, Nelly!" you're saying. "But I just learned from Mark Rosewater on Monday that black isn't really evil!" First of all, my name is Mark, not Nelly. And I read that argument too. It seemed really familiar. What did he say? Black isn't actually evil. It just seeks to better itself. It seeks power. It's only evil under the arbitrary code of morality oppressively imposed by white. Why be constrained by those values? Black's values are just as valid. Join me. Join me on the dark side. Think of the power we could achieve if we work together! Nice try, Maro. But I recognize the "black isn't evil" speech from every villain who tries to corrupt the hero. Didn't the Emperor say it to Luke? Didn't Saruman say it to Gandalf? Didn't Mark Rosewater say it to everybody?

(For the record, my belief about the evilness of black—whatever it may be—is dwarfed by my belief that I must rag on Mark Rosewater whenever possible.)

Whether or not black is actually evil, it is clearly sociopathic. It thinks it is above the laws of behavior. Take Raskolnikov as an example. As Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote... oooh, I'm losing the crowd. No Russian literature references today? OK. How about comparative dream-state psychology? No? Freud's theories on the subjugation of the superego? Not that either? Well, what about rats? Can you handle rats? Yes? Rats it is.

## **Aww, Rats!**

Since I began writing for this website, the deck request I've gotten more than any other has been for a Rat deck. I have no idea why. Rejoice, all you Rat fans! The time is now!

It's a bit incongruous to jump from a discussion of evil and selfishness to a deck populated by Rats. They're vermin, and they're icky, but are they malicious? Do they transcend morality? I really can't say that they do. But they are gross and crawling with disease (and I don't care what you say, that includes your pet rat Fluffy), so black they are. **Magic** Rats do pull off some rather nasty tricks when it gets down to it. Many of them (those that Chitter, are Ravenous, and are Earsplitting) strip cards out of your opponent's hand. A couple of them (those that are Infected or live in Crypts) spread some very Pestilence-like pestilence. The rest just gnaw at you.

The nice thing about Rats is they're easy to come by. There's no such thing as a rare Rat. The drawback is that they're tiny. Dirty Wererat is *huge* for a Rat. There are ways to combat this, such as Shared Triumph and Coat of Arms. But I'm saving the rareness for later in this column. Thankfully,

*Mirrodin* block has given weenie decks the gift of Equipment. Since I intend to be sending Rat after Rat right for your throat, I like Banshee's Blade in this deck. And since most of my Rats have 1 toughness, and I'm being evil this week, Skullclamp seems delightfully appropriate. The most evil thing in this deck, Skullclamp is black at heart. Trading toughness for power? Trading creatures for cards? Yup: black.

I couldn't help but include a couple of Soul Links in the deck (and weaken the mana base to accommodate them). They're intended to be slapped on your Crypt Rats or Infected Vermin so that when you set them off, you gain oodles of life. Spirit Link would do much the same thing (at a fraction of the cost), but Spirit Link isn't black, is it?

Rat-a-Tat-Tat <i>Lite!</i>		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
2 Dromar's Cavern	4 Chittering Rats	2 Aphetto Dredging
2 Mirrodin's Core	4 Crypt Rats	2 Banshee's Blade
16 Swamp	3 Earsplitting Rats	1 Shade's Breath
4 Tainted Field	2 Infected Vermin	3 Skullclamp
24 lands	4 Ravenous Rats	2 Soul Link
	4 Razortooth Rats	1 Specter's Shroud
	4 Swarm of Rats	11 other spells
	25 creatures	

I dedicate that deck to the Albany River Rats, the minor league hockey team of the Stanley Cup Champion New Jersey Devils. See the connection: Rats – Devils – EVIL!!! Go River Rats!

## Harvest Season



I'm a little flummoxed by Greater Harvester's name. Greater Werewolf, from *Homelands*, was a follow-up to Lesser Werewolf, from *Legends*. (Never mind about which one is actually the better card.) Now we have Greater Harvester. Did I miss Crappy Harvester, buried somewhere in *Scourge*?

You may argue that Greater Harvester isn't really a casual card. It seems pretty hardcore, doesn't it? Well, any squeamish casual enthusiasts may want to avert their eyes for the rest of the column. I'm still going to have some oddball combos and a few not-even-close-to-tournament level cards, but it's Black Week and I feel cutthroat. Including Skullclamp in the previous deck was my first ethical violation, since I had already relegated it to my personal banned list for being too good and (soon) too ubiquitous. But this week is about power, right? About getting ahead at all costs? About willingly being corrupted? About running with scissors, ripping tags off mattresses, and microwaving soup for less than the amount of

time recommended on the can? Oh, yeah—I feel the badness! Watch out, world! I’ve got black mana coursing through my veins!

So here comes a deck based around four Greater Harvesters. It’s a wonderfully cruel card, and one of the most compelling black cards in *Darksteel* (out of the whopping 18 to choose from). Heavy black cost, but cheap for what it does. Requires sacrifices from you. Requires even more sacrifices from your opponent. The tricky part is sneaking it through to deal damage, if you can consider a 5/6 creature to “sneak.” If the Harvester is getting chump-blocked, you’re in bad shape. Since it has no evasion of its own, the best plan is to give it some, and I choose Whispersilk Cloak for the job. Neurok Hoversail is cheaper, but not as foolproof (I’ve already run into Darksteel Gargoyles when testing)—but there’s room for both in the deck. Why? Because this is a deck of saboteurs.

A “saboteur” is a creature that has an effect when it deals combat damage. All colors have them. Exalted Angel, Thieving Magpie, Skirk Commando, and Living Hive are all saboteurs. But black’s saboteurs tend to cause particularly macabre things to happen to your opponent. Many of them force discards. Cabal Executioner (which gets phenomenally better when Cloaked) triggers an Edict. The Harvester triggers a double Edict, though it’ll take any permanents. Scion of Darkness resurrects one of your opponent’s deceased creatures. Ebonblade Reaper steals half your opponent’s life. And Phage steals all of it.



Besides the Cloak and Hoversail, I threw in a Fireshrieker and a Loxodon Warhammer. The Warhammer’s trample is a form of evasion (get just one point through and a saboteur’s ability will trigger), and the lifegain will help if you’re riding the Reaper to victory. The Fireshrieker’s double strike will let your saboteur’s ability trigger twice each combat. I know, I know: If the Harvester is dealing 10 damage a turn, the loss of permanents won’t make too much of a difference. I almost wish the Harvester were smaller so you could run your opponent out of permanents before dealing lethal damage, but I’ll take what I can get.

There’s another consideration in the deck: Dealing with your own sacrifices to the Harvester. I threw in some Myr Retrievers to help with that. Sac one and you can get back a Vault of Whispers or Leaden Myr you had sacrificed previously. Get double-Retriever going and you’ve stabilized your sacrifices. And I hate to sound like a broken record, to sound like a broken record, to sound like a broken record, but Grave Pact is perfect for this situation. Turn your loss into your gain (or at least into your opponent’s loss too.) This week, Anthony, Brian, and I have all said that Grave Pact is one of our favorite cards. Maybe it’s not Black Week—maybe it’s Grave Pact Week!

## Cloak and Dagger




## Main Deck

60 cards

4 Barren Moor	2 Cabal Executioner	1 Diabolic Tutor
16 Swamp	1 Ebonblade Reaper	1 Fireshrieker
4 Vault of Whispers	4 Greater Harvester	3 Grave Pact
24 lands	4 Headhunter	1 Loxodon Warhammer
	2 Hollow Specter	3 Neurok Hoversail
	4 Leaden Myr	4 Whispersilk Cloak
	3 Myr Retriever	13 other spells
	1 Phage the Untouchable	
	1 Scion of Darkness	
	1 Woebearer	
	23 creatures	

## The Blackest Card of All Time

Ooh, what a teaser, huh? But before I get to that, how about a nefarious combo? It involves one of black's bread and butter (moldy bread and rancid butter, of course) strategies: discard. You take a Words of Waste, introduce it to a Geth's Grimoire, and if they hit it off, they'll make sweet sweet love and produce a cute little offspring: Mind Twist. At the beginning of your upkeep, if you have both the enchantment and the artifact in play, you can pay X (where X is less than or equal to the number of cards in your opponent's hand), activate the Words X times, and have your opponent discard X cards on your draw step. Best of all, you still get your draw for the turn! Sadly, once your opponent's hand is empty, this combo isn't very useful anymore. He better immediately play every card he draws for the rest of the game, though! At this point, Necrogen Spellbomb becomes a deliciously vile card for you to draw: Activate it during your opponent's draw step with a Grimoire in play, and that player has to pitch the card after barely getting to look at it... and you get to draw a card instead. It's not fair, is it? Now you're singing black's tune.

So what is the blackest card of all time? I humbly submit that it's a card that uber-Edicts your opponent (thus slaughtering even indestructible creatures), causes heavy discard, makes your opponent lose life, blows up lands, makes you sacrifice your own creatures, takes a nice chunk out of your own life total, and leaves the board in smoldering ruin—and even though it's "symmetric," it's actually massively unfair. Now *that's* a black card. That's *the* black card. It lobs a nuke (not a dart) at the "What can black do?" dartboard and it hits all areas at once. And it has to have  in its mana cost. Ladies and gentlemen, Death Cloud.

Keep in mind this is not what afflicted Tom Hanks in the Oscar-snubbed cinematic masterpiece *Joe Versus the Volcano*. That was a *brain* cloud. Duh.



Death Cloud is not nice. It is very, very wrong. The massive discard interacts repugnantly with Megrin. Blowing up all your opponent's lands means the old-school Howling Mine-Underworld Dreams combo will eat away at her life total as she struggles to rebuild her side of the board. (Underworld Dreams hasn't made a lot of noise since its rebirth in *Eighth Edition*, but it's my personal tech to combat Skullclamp.) Even better, since you should have mana sources remaining, that's a great opportunity to use that Words-Grimoire combo again. With Megrin in play. I'm going to hell for this deck.

## Clouded Judgment



### Main Deck

60 cards

3 Sulfurous Springs

17 Swamp

4 Tainted Peak

24 lands

2 Blazing Specter

2 Lavaborn Muse

4 creatures

4 Death Cloud

4 Geth's Grimoire

3 Howling Mine

3 Megrin

4 Necrogen Spellbomb

4 Talisman of Indulgence

2 Underworld Dreams

4 Words of Waste

4 Wrench Mind

32 other spells

The sickening analog to Words of Waste and Geth's Grimoire is Words of Worship and Well of Lost Dreams, first suggested to me by Zach Davis. Mark Rosewater was right after all: Any color can be evil.

Until next week, have fun with black.

Mark

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