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Corpse Dance



Adrian Sullivan · Single-Card Strategies
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I have a very fine-tuned process when it comes to selecting the cards I write about each week. This week is a great example of that process. I asked a bunch of people what card I should cover and then I chose the funnest one. Now I know that “funnest” isn’t a real word, but one of the great things about writing about **Magic** is that a lot of the words in **Magic** aren’t real words (scry, anyone?), so I think you’re actually allowed to get away with it.

This week, I got a bunch of great suggestions from a ton of old-school magicians in the Wisconsin area. In the end, I chose Sam Black’s fantastic suggestion of **Corpse Dance**, not only because it has some really terrific Brian Snoddy artwork, but also because I have a soft spot in my heart for any card that I’ve used in actual constructed decks more than once (especially if they win).



Learning the steps

Corpse Dance is one of those very rare reanimation-type cards that you can actually use repeatedly. There really aren’t that many of them, and those that do exist are generally a lot more cumbersome than **Corpse Dance**. **Coffin Queen** is easily killed. **Diabolic Servitude** and **Recurring Nightmare** require a bit of effort to make use of repeatedly, and they never bring it out in any kind of surprising way.

Corpse Dance can be tricky. Sure, it can only nab the very top creature of your graveyard, but that isn’t such a bad thing. For a card like **Corpse Dance**, there are really two ways to think about reanimating: preparing your deck bodies for reanimation like some kind of Discoing Dr. Frankenstein, or just taking any old dead bodies that died of natural causes and making them dance like they are guest starring in Michael Jackson’s “Thriller”.

A deck that really is looking to exploit the **Corpse Dance** generally favors the Disco-Dr. method. These decks usually have a specific creature or set of creatures that

they want to get out cheaply as an instant. Cards like **Entomb**, **Buried Alive**, and **Intuition** are often used to get a proper set of decent creatures into the graveyard. The Thriller method has a different approach. Generally these decks make **Corpse Dance** into a simple way to complement the cards that are already naturally strong in the deck. These decks expect that the creatures that they are going to use are destined to die (and be reborn, dancing).

Whatever the approach, there are some inherent strengths and weaknesses of the **Corpse Dance**. One big weakness *and* strength is that dancing a creature will remove it from the game at the end of turn. Of course, there is that pesky phrase “at end of turn”... “At end of turn” always opens us up to the cutesy trick of waiting until after that phase has started but before the turn actually ends. At this point, you can still cast instants, and effectively you can find yourself with a creature that sticks around for an extra turn. Combine this with another strength of **Corpse Dance** – the Danced creature has haste – and you can use powerful tap effects *twice* before having to worry about losing the creature to the removed from game zone, if you Dance the creature at the end of your opponent's turn. With a card like **Arcanis**, tapping it twice can be quite a big deal!



This nifty “at end of turn” trick works wonders in another way as well: pacing your threats against a deck with answers. If you have a powerful creature in your graveyard that could kill your opponent, a **Corpse Dance** at the end of your opponent's turn means that even if they answer your **Corpse Dance**, you can untap and try to do some other scary threat on the next turn. Even without being tricky, simply having Buyback means that you can reuse the card again and again until your opponent finds a way to stop it.

Avoiding the removed from game weakness

So, how do we dodge losing our creatures forever? It can be fine and dandy to simply Dance a creature once and then lose it if you have a large supply of creatures in your grave, but that can often be a luxury. One of the major reasons that the card wasn't considered the biggest bomb in the world in limited back when it was first in *Tempest* was that you couldn't really use the card on the offense without a lucky combo of some sort – you would simply run out of creatures in your graveyard unless you were using the **Corpse Dance** to create a blocker that would die. A little martyr, if you will.

In the end, there are basically three good ways to dodge the drawback: make a martyr, make some food, or do a suicide dance. We've already talked about martyr-making. Let's hit the other two.

“Making food” is kind of simple: have some kind of card that will eat your creature before it gets removed from game. There are quite a few of these running around. With everything from **Smokestack** to **Goblin Bombardment** to **Greater Good**, if there is a card you can sack it to for some useful effect, you are making your creature into food. **Goblin Bombardment** and **Phyrexian Plaguelord** are two of the best possible options here because they can be used to hurt your opponent's position. Many of these options are Black, simply because of the nature of the color. Try flashing back your **Cabal Therapy** with a Danced creature sometime... It's fun!


The suicide dance is actually one that I prefer to making food. Here, you are bringing back creatures that are going to kill themselves (or at least that can). The classic example, of course, is the Bottle Gnome. I wouldn't be me if I didn't mention that **Ball Lightning**, **Blistering Firecat**, and **Mogg Fanatic** all kill themselves as well. A friend of mine, Matt Baranowski, made a “Disco-Sligh” deck some years ago with burn spells, **Vampiric Tutor**, **Corpse Dance**, and suicide-dancers. With the awesome rules we now have in **Magic**, the neat trick of dancing a **Daring Apprentice** to counter a spell on the stack is now actually legal! **Phyrexian Plaguelord** returns as not just something that can be used to serve food to, it is also a suicide dancer in its own right.

Plaguelord, Dancing, and Worlds – an example of Corpse Dance in action

I spent a lot of time working on decks a few years ago when I sat in the offices of the Dojo (the classic **Magic** website). Oftentimes it was for articles, nearly as often it was for tournaments, and

sometimes it was just for fun. At US Nationals that year, I had nearly worked out all the clunks in a mono-black control deck, and talking to Justin Gary about some ideas really helped. By the time I sat in New York as Managing Editor, I had them all worked out, and our fearless leader Rob Hahn would stay up all night playing the deck (Corrupter Black) in an online tournament, hooting and hollering the whole while. No one I worked closely with was going to Worlds that year, and so I tossed the deck to the Mogg Squad (a team of pros from that time). Here's what one of them, Jakub Slemr, played to an undefeated record to take the top slot in the Standard Portion of that event:

Jakub Slemr		
60 cards		
2 Spawning Pool	1 Bottle Gnomes	2 Corpse Dance
15 Swamp	1 Phyrexian Negator	3 Cursed Scroll
1 Volrath's Stronghold	3 Phyrexian Plaguelord	4 Dark Ritual
4 Wasteland	3 Ravenous Rats	4 Diabolic Edict
22 land	2 Ticking Gnomes	4 Duress
	10 creatures	4 Powder Keg
		1 Rapid Decay
		2 Stupor
		1 Vampiric Tutor
		3 Yawgmoth's Will
		28 other spells

 This deck, which went on to become one of the four commemorative Worlds decks from that year, is a perfect example of deck that uses both suicide-dancers and food-makers.

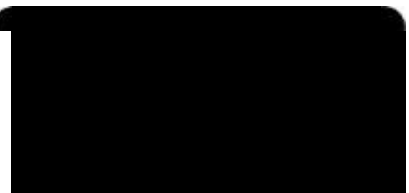
A quick glance at the deck will show you that there isn't a specific plan to plant cards into your graveyard. The creatures that are going to be reanimated are going to get there the good old-fashioned way: they're going to die. When they do come back, the **Bottle Gnomes**, **Ticking Gnomes**, and **Phyrexian Plaguelords** will be able to toss off good effects as they die, and if you happen to catch someone with a surprise **Corpse Dance**, they could be in some serious trouble (block your best guy, shoot another one!). The Plaguelord is the only really stable way to abuse the other creatures with **Corpse Dance**, but it is a good one. Plaguelord makes Negator hardly scary to have out at all, and it turns **Ravenous Rats** into a potential **Ancestral Recall!** (They discard a card, you block an X/1, and you sacrifice it to kill another X/1.) Plaguelord/Dance/Rat also has the capacity of being a pseudo-lock against the right deck – simply wait until their draw phase and then knock a card out of their hand. Sacrifice the Rat before it would get removed from the game, and if they ever get to 0 cards, they better have an instant card drawer or a counterspell if they want to get out of this ungood situation. In more modern **Magic**, there are more solid locks than this with **Rootrunner** or with **Chittering Rats**, but at the time, this was as good as it got.

Card advantage with buyback

Buyback in and of itself can give you a “free” card, but if you get back creatures with decent comes-into-play effects, you can get even more card advantage. **Ravenous Rats** and **Chittering Rats** are good examples of cards like this, but of course there are many, many more. **Flametongue Kavu** is one fantastic example, as is **Eternal Witness**. Scour tournament decklists and you are sure to see a ton of creatures that gain you card advantage when they hop into play, generally either by drawing you a card of some sort or destroying something. Every color has these creatures, and as long as you they are suicide-dancing, being martyred, or are food for something, you can keep doing it again and again. Good times!

Corpse Dance for a discount on creatures

As a simple reanimation spell for a more dedicated Reanimator deck, **Corpse Dance** is not as cheap as the more commonly used spells like **Animate Dead** or **Reanimate**. Both of these have drawbacks of their own, and they can't be used at instant speed, however. Pretty much any big creature is great here, but the ones that



are most useful to focus on are the cards that have the ability to devastate the game in a single shot.

One good example is a card like **Bosh**. With a decent amount of mana, you can **Corpse Dance** a **Bosh** at the end of your opponent's turn and do an impressive amount of damage by the end of your own turn. Big fliers (or trampers) are also excellent. **Buried Alive** for a **Draco** or three can end the game in a few turns.

One of my personal favorites is still always going to be **Psychatog**. In a protracted control game, Corpse Dancing a **Psychatog** at the end of your opponent's turn is a great way to start a counterspell war. If you win, the **Psychatog** can probably nab you a victory. If you don't, you can try again for some other war on your own turn, and probably with a tapped-out opponent.

A neat blast from the past

Of course, one big deal about **Corpse Dance** is that the whole "buying it back" thing does cost a whopping five mana. Five mana is a pretty big deal. Back when I qualified for the *Tempest*-block Pro-Tour in Los Angeles, I tried to solve that problem with a great card: **Jet Medallion**. With only one out, a **Corpse Dance** was only a wee bit cheaper, but with two or more out, it could get quite ridiculous. My LA deck underperformed at the Pro-Tour (I will still thank Lan Ho for beginning my losing streak), but I did use it to great success in two side events at that Pro Tour (including a fantastic finals match against Olle Rade where he narrowly beat me out for \$500). Here is my decklist from that event:



Sometimes all you need is a good discount...

Jet-Blue		
61 cards		
4 Rootwater Depths	4 Bottle Gnomes	4 Counterspell
4 Reflecting Pool	1 Dauthi Mindripper	4 Dismiss
9 Island		2 Power Sink
7 Swamp	5 creatures	1 Ertai's Meddling
24 land		3 Dream Cache
		3 Whispers of the Muse
		2 Phyrexian Grimoire
		4 Jet Medallion
		2 Corpse Dance
		3 Evincar's Justice
		2 Dark Banishing
		2 Diabolic Edict
		32 other spells

Here, the **Jet Medallions** can certainly help out a few other spells, but they are mostly there to create truly aggravating Dancing Gnomes. Against the aggressive decks that were prevalent at the time, a regular 5 mana **Corpse Dance** with a **Bottle Gnome** could be a major problem. Once you got down to having it cost 3, well, that was usually all she wrote. **Jet Medallion** reduces the cost even for extra costs like **Buyback** or **Flashback**, so it truly works great with **Corpse Dance**.

Wrapping Up

With all of that in mind, here is a fun Extended Corpse Dance deck that uses suicide-dancers, food-makers, the good ol' **Jet Medallion**, and a bunch of Rats.

Rat-Dance!
60 cards

4 Rishadan Port	4 Ravenous Rats	2 Vampiric Tutor
19 Swamp	4 Chittering Rats	3 Corpse Dance
1 Phyrexian Tower	3 Bottle Gnomes	4 Cabal Therapy
	2 Marrow-Gnawer	4 Duress
24 land	2 Phyrexian Plaguelord	4 Chainer's Edict
	15 creatures	4 Jet Medallion
		21 other spells

This deck can seriously wreck an opponent's hand and then follow up with a **Corpse Dance** on a Rat to perform a big lockout (in conjunction with Plaguelord or the Rat-lord). The **Vampiric Tutors** can fetch either more **Jet Medallions**, a **Corpse Dance**, or something really decent to Dance. Dancing Gnomes on the cheap can make it especially hard for an aggressive opponent to be able to recover their early beatdown. Even without the **Corpse Dance**, the deck just packs a lot of disruption and some generally fun cards, but once the **Corpse Dance** gets going, you can expect that your opponent will be in tears.

I hope you enjoyed this week's article. Have a great rest of your week!



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