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The Dark Side

Nate Heiss
Building on a Budget
Friday, January 28, 2005



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

This week, we take a look into the darker side of *Champions*. [A few weeks back](#) I talked about a monoblack Rat deck, but they are not the only cool black things happening in *Champions*. First we have this Spirit/Discard aggressive deck, and once *Betrayers* becomes online legal, I am going to talk about a really powerful Ogre/Demon deck. This week's deck is close to my heart because of one particular card, Jade Idol.



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For those of you who are old school, you will remember the old Jade Statue decks. Those decks would frustrate your opponent by using cards like *Jade Statue* and *Mishra's Factory* to deal damage while evading most of the deck's creature sweeping effects like *Wrath of God*. Since we are building on a budget, I can't make the deck quite as powerful as the old decks, but refer to adding more money to the deck for a hint of what it could be like.

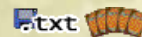
Even though we are forced to use real creatures, it's ok since the black creatures in *Champions* are pretty solid. *Ashen-Skin Zubera* fits right into the theme and is a spirit that will help continually activate the Idol. In many ways, *Jade Idol* is much better than its great-grandfather ever was. With the Statue, you had to pay mana if you wanted to attack. With the Idol you just have to play spells as you normally would.

Other great creatures to include are *Wicked Akuba* and *Kami of the Waning Moon* to help punch a few extra points of damage in. If you can give the Akuba fear it will be great for piling on the life loss with the special ability. Otherwise, *Thief of Hope* is a great candidate for fear since it rarely wants to trade in combat due to its awesome spiritcraft trigger.

This deck also has a discard theme, using cards like *Waking Nightmare* and *Distress*. This will help make sure that your opponent won't have too much to do in the late game, where your *Gutwrencher Oni* can mop the floor with them. Of course, by then your *Jade Idol* may be doing just that.



Building on a Budget: The Dark Side (less than 30 tickets)



Main Deck
60 cards

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|----------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 23 Swamp | 4 Ashen-Skin Zubera | 4 Distress |
| 23 lands | 4 Wicked Akuba | 4 Waking Nightmare |
| | 3 Kami of the Waning Moon | 4 Jade Idol |
| | 4 Thief of Hope | 4 Hideous Laughter |
| | 3 Gutwrencher Oni | 3 Rend Flesh |

This deck plays out by casting some early creatures or discard spells, whichever are available at the time. If you have a choice between creatures or discard, go with **Distress** first, then creatures, and then **Waking Nightmare**. The reason for this is that you want to take the most relevant thing with **Distress** before it hurts you, and you want to wait as long as possible before casting the **Waking Nightmare**, hopefully catching them off guard and getting two good spells when the opponent doesn't have other cards to pitch instead.

The smaller creatures are more used as a distraction for your opponent's removal, while the real damage is done by **Jade Idol** and **Gutwrencher Oni**. You have some creature removal in the form of **Rend Flesh** and **Hideous Laughter**. Don't expect to splice the laughter onto other cards much, but hard-casting it will do plenty of damage at the appropriate times. The basic play of this deck is fairly simple - capitalize on opportunities and distract your opponent with little men until they have a near-empty hand and your heavy hitters can finish the game.

Tips On Playing the Deck

- Use **Distress** to take the biggest long-term threat in their hand, unless you think they won't find enough land to cast it before **Waking Nightmare** will hit it.
- Ashen-Skin Zuberia** is very useful. Don't bother trying to get tricky with double-Zuberia blocking. It rarely works out. Think of these as chump blockers that will buy you time and help empty their hand.
- You can pull off a nasty defensive maneuver with **Rend Flesh**, killing one of their attackers and activating your Idol to block and kill a second attacker. The same thing goes with **Hideous Laughter**, but keep in mind that the Laughter will also shrink your Idol. Since the Idol triggers when you have the spell on the stack, there is no way around this.
- If you don't have many spells in your hand to trigger **Thief of Hope**, don't be afraid to trade it in combat when the need arises, allowing you to retrieve one of your other spirits via soulshift and further enabling your Idol.

Adding More Money to the Deck

This deck can go a more controlling route with access to more expensive cards. Cards like **Cranial Extraction** and **Nezumi Shortfang** would help the discard theme a lot. You could also make great use of **Genju of the Fens** when **Betrayers** is online legal. All of the Genju are really powerful, and I am sure you will be seeing a lot of them in my budget decks over the next few months. Also, with Genju and Idol, you can add **Blinkmoth Nexus** and have a well-rounded creature base that evades removal spells like **Barter in Blood**, **Hideous Laughter**, and the like. Given the opportunity, at that point you might want to consider taking it to the light side with the white Genju, **Jade Idol**, Nexus, and the various **Wrath of God** effects that are always available in White. However, if you are just looking to add a small amount of money to this deck, you can use **Kiku, Night's Flower**. It is a nice controlling card that will give your opponent another tough target while evading discard spells.

In conclusion, this is a decent deck to play if you are just looking for an inexpensive way to ease yourself into playing *Kamigawa* block. It isn't a bad deck, but it isn't nearly as powerful as the [Soilshaper deck from the previous week](#). However, if you are like me and love the monoblack decks, it is certainly worth checking out.

Until next time, wait until **the time is right**.

- Nate Heiss

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