

# I Want To Suck Your... Actually I Want to Suck

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Vampires are perhaps the most iconic monsters in all the worlds of fancy. They are feral and stomach churning like old Nosferatu. They are both horrifying mass murderers like legend-inspiring Vlad and heroes on paths to redemption like Buffy's onetime beau Angel. They are dead sexy, um, *dead people* like Kate Beckinsale in *Underworld*... or Brad Pitt in *Interview with the Vampire*. Built on equal parts superstition and misdirection, Vampire tales can be so confusing, convoluted, or inconsistent that we sometimes forget who inspired what, if someone lived at all, or what, exactly, is supposed to kill the fearsome aberrations. In the American mind at least, Vampires, Vampire lore, books about Vampires, all media really, are ever present. Vampires seem much more popular than, say, *dragons*, even if they don't necessarily outstrip them in immediate recognizability.



It is well known that Vampires appear on some of your favorite (or least favorite) Black cards... but did you know that they have been defining contributors to competitive decks from the dawn of the Pro Tour?

Let's start at the very beginning. At the very first Pro Tour, Vampires - two copies of one Vampire in particular - showed up proud as anything. It wasn't good enough for our first representative to just fumble about the room... In the hands of George Baxter, Sengir Vampire contributed to a squad that led the Swiss (Baxter and his twin Sengirs made Top 8):

## George Baxter



### Main Deck

60 cards

3 City of Brass  
3 Karplusan Forest  
1 Lava Tubes  
2 Mishra's Factory  
2 Sulfurous Springs  
12 Swamp

23 lands

2 Barbed Sextant  
4 Dark Ritual  
3 Fireball  
4 Hymn to Tourach  
1 Ihsan's Shade  
4 Lightning Bolt  
1 Zuran Orb

19 other spells

### Sideboard

2 Dark Banishing  
2 Ihsan's Shade  
2 Nevinyrral's Disk  
3 Red Elemental Blast  
2 Serrated Arrows  
2 Shatter  
2 Tranquility

15 sideboard cards

4 Erhnam Djinn  
4 Hypnotic Specter  
4 Knight of Stromgald  
4 Order of the Ebon Hand  
2 Sengir Vampire

18 creatures

Baxter's "Good Stuff" was one of the most influential decks of the mid-1990s (I personally patterned many decks off his curve and mana count). His core strategy was to play some of the best, most efficient, threats available, powered by one of the game's most fearsome mana accelerators ever. One of the really cool things about Baxter's deck was his attention to Erhnam Djinn. While Erhnam Djinn was an all-star of the first Pro Tour season, Green players had to suck up the fact that it had even a mild downside. Baxter's deck, though, had not a Forest... so he never had to worry about Forestwalk!

Good Stuff got out of the gates early. Baxter could open on a first turn Hypnotic Specter or a second turn Order of the Ebon Hand... But the format of Pro Tour I was rich in spot creature removal. Most opponents had Lightning Bolt, Swords to Plowshares, or both. It was in the midgame, when the opponent had expended his first wave of defensive cards, that bigger creatures like Erhnam Djinn, Ihsan's Shade, and of course Sengir Vampire shined. These bigger creatures, especially the flying Vampire, played an important role in finishing games after the other guy had been softened up.

Sengir Vampire had an even more impressive finish just four Pro Tours later. While it was a member of the best Swiss deck of the first big dance, in Paul McCabe's "Toronto Deck," twin Sengirs actually wrapped their hands, fangs, and lolling tongues around first place gold.

## Paul McCabe



### Main Deck

61 cards

2 Lake of the Dead  
2 Mishra's Factory  
1 Strip Mine  
18 Swamp

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23 lands

4 Hypnotic Specter  
1 Ihsan's Shade  
2 Sengir Vampire

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7 creatures

1 Black Vise  
3 Contagion  
4 Dark Ritual  
2 Demonic Consultation  
4 Drain Life  
1 Hymn to Tourach  
2 Mind Warp  
4 Necropotence  
4 Nevinyrral's Disk  
1 Serrated Arrows  
4 Stupor  
1 Zuran Orb

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31 other spells

### Sideboard

1 Contagion  
4 Dystopia  
3 Infernal Darkness  
1 Mind Warp  
1 Serrated Arrows  
1 Soul Burn  
3 Stench of Decay

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14 sideboard cards

As far as Necropotence decks go, McCabe's was one of the *least* efficient of all time. Most Necropotence decks are all about cheap mana costs so that they can deploy as many threats as possible, draw a *ton* of cards, and then lay out more threats the next turn. McCabe's deck, by contrast, was full of reactive cards and slow two-for-ones. His creatures, including those two Vampires, were slow and ponderous when compared to Knight of Stromgald or other, more conventional, Necropotence creatures.

So why did the Toronto Deck succeed?

Paul anticipated a little thing I like to call "the metagame." It wasn't until I *got* to Pro Tour Dallas, actually, that I learned *just how bad* conventional Knights were against this new (*then-new*) *Mirage* card Hammer of Bogardan. Necropotence decks usually thrived on deploying lots of threats, drawing tons of cards, rinsing, and repeating. The problem was that good burn decks, like Jon Finkel's Counter-Hammer, could really punish that strategy. We couldn't really go for the one threat plan... we'd get Hammer-locked. We couldn't go for the "draw a ton and overwhelm" plan, or we'd eat the burn cards directly. McCabe's deck, for its glacial imperfections, simply didn't play that game. Paul's Sengir Vampires were out of Hammer of Bogardan range; if the opponent wanted to kill a 4/4, he'd usually have to blow *six* points of direct damage - *and two cards* - to do so.

Sengir Vampire left competitive play with Fourth Edition. A quick Gatherer search will tell you that this iconic poster boy for hunger and evil did not return to the Core Set until *Ninth Edition*. Even with their front man gone, Vampires nevertheless continued to appear in top tier decks.

We generally remember Pro Tour Los Angeles 1998 for Dave Price's House of Red; it was at this tournament that perennial PTQ Champion and Fire God Price really came into his own as a beatdown master. LA '98 was the inevitable descendent to Price's undefeated Lava Hounds record at U.S. Nationals 1997 and the prequel to his Top 8 there the next year. Even though Deadguy Red was the top finisher in LA '98, from the Vampire perspective, it is anything but the most memorable deck list.

Adam Katz		
Main Deck		Sideboard
	60 cards	
10 Island	2 Capsize	2 Altar of Dementia
15 Swamp	1 Corpse Dance	2 Cursed Scroll
-----	4 Intuition	2 Dark Banishing
25 lands	4 Living Death	3 Dread of Night
	4 Lobotomy	2 Maze of Shadows
	-----	4 Power Sink
4 Bottle Gnomes	15 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Gravedigger		
4 Rats of Rath		
4 Skyshroud Vampire		
4 Tradewind Rider		
-----		
20 creatures		

New York attorney Adam Katz was Top 8 at Dave's LA with Darwin Kastle's version of Living Death... sort of. "I took Darwin's deck [from the 1998 Invitational] and made it worse," Adam said. "I took out the Horned Turtles from my sideboard, unfortunately. I frequently wished my Tradewinds were Horned Turtles, just so they could get out and block a little quicker."

Katz's deck played many powerful synergies. He could lock the opponent's board with Capsize and Tradewind Rider. He could Intuition into the Corpse Dance + Bottle Gnomes combination against LA's



popular Red Decks, or just use Intuition to fill the graveyard pre-Living Death. How was Skyshroud Vampire good, let alone synergistic, in Katz's version?

If you examine Skyshroud Vampire as merely a smaller Sengir Vampire - with what would generally be an inferior method of increasing in size - then you could be missing the strategic reasons why Skyshroud Vampire is useful in the Living Death deck. Now usually you won't swing with a 3/3 and then pitch your hand to do an extra six damage to the opponent. People call that "card disadvantage" and point to such practices as examples of bad play. But what if you intend to follow up with Living Death? Doesn't it make sense to get extra damage in and then follow up with four free creatures? A polymath among the bloodsucking undead, Skyshroud Vampire made Living Death more lethal, gave Katz's deck a powerful racer in a format defined by great beatdown cards, and deterred the opponent's Living Death in a pre-Survival of the Fittest format.

Baxter's ghost resurfaced in a different Block Constructed format when twin 4/4 Vampires once again lifted conventional cards to the top of the Swiss. Even though iconic Sengir Vampire was once again legal in competitive **Magic** (having been reprinted in *Torment*), Rob Dougherty selected *Stalking Bloodsucker* as his Vamp of choice. Now almost every Mono-Black Control deck ran the full four Nantuko Shades, and many had Shambling Swarm tech... But what would possess Rob to run Stalking Bloodsucker when other players, like Road Warrior Olivier Ruel, went with Laquatus's Champion instead?


Robert Dougherty		
Main Deck		Sideboard
61 cards		
3 Cabal Coffers	4 Chainer's Edict	4 Braids, Cabal Minion
25 Swamp	4 Diabolic Tutor	4 Faceless Butcher
28 lands	1 Haunting Echoes	2 Ghastly Demise
	3 Innocent Blood	3 Mesmeric Fiend
	4 Mind Sludge	2 Skeletal Scrying
	4 Mutilate	15 sideboard cards
4 Nantuko Shade	4 Rancid Earth	
2 Shambling Swarm	1 Skeletal Scrying	
2 Stalking Bloodsucker		
8 creatures	25 other spells	

Osaka was an odd format. When you say "U/G" today, most players just assume you are talking about Deep Dog - *U/G Madness* - because, format after format, that is the most high profile deck to come out of *Odyssey* Block. You think of Wild Mongrel, then you immediately think of Wonder. In two set Block, there WAS no Wonder. The ground would often clog with creatures (Jon Finkel, for example, played a Mono-Green Narcissism/Squirrel deck), and the Mono-Black deck could have

difficulty getting through with its Nantuko Shades... Sometimes it would have to Mutilate its own team. Stalking Bloodsucker, paragon of Vampires, did one thing that none of the competing Shambling Swarms or Ichorids or Cabal Minions of its era could accomplish: Quite simply, it *flew*.

More than that, Stalking Bloodsucker *flew for the win*. This was a creature that would routinely hit for eight or more damage, ending games before U/G could Deep Analysis itself back into the game or a competing Mono-Black deck could recover from Mind Sludge. The quintessential role player, Stalking Bloodsucker batted fourth for Rob, took him to third place overall, and knocked opponents out of the park.

In a tradition as old as Sengir stepping aside for Skyshroud, Stalking Bloodsucker - already bloated to six mana - made way for the next tournament Vampire of note at the same mana cost... and one less power. Mephidross Vampire, and its position in **Magic** history, is one of the most interesting of all the Vampires. It is the only member of the creature type to be featured primarily in decks that could not cast it.

Jeff Garza			
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
4 Cloudpost	4 Electrostatic Bolt	1 Duplicant	
15 Forest	4 Oxidize	1 Mephidross Vampire	
4 Mountain	3 Reap and Sow	3 Mindslaver	
-----	2 Rude Awakening	1 Reap and Sow	
23 lands	4 Sylvan Scrying	1 Sundering Titan	
	4 Talisman of Impulse	3 Tel-Jihad Justice	
	4 Tooth and Nail	1 Triskelion	
1 Darksteel Colossus	-----	4 Viridian Shaman	
1 Duplicant	25 other spells	-----	
4 Eternal Witness		15 sideboard cards	
1 Leonin Abunas			
1 Platinum Angel			
4 Solemn Simulacrum			
-----			
12 creatures			

Jeff Garza won Grand Prix New Jersey utilizing Mephidross Vampire in what would be its quintessential role. Jeff never actually *played* the Vampire (he had not a single Swamp)... it always hit play thanks to Tooth and Nail. The card that showed up *next* to Mephidross Vampire was its best buddy - and some would say the only creature that made the Meph worth playing - Triskelion.

Basically, Mephidross Vampire + Triskelion was a one-sided Wrath of God. Unless the opponent had Darksteel Colossus in play, it was unlikely he would be fielding *any* creatures at all. Every +1/+1 counter spent by the Triskelion would be replaced by the Mephidross Vampire so that when the dust cleared, it would be Garza's board sweeping tag team against essentially nothing; a three-turn clock would follow, if that.

The popularity of this combination became infectious. Not only were Mephidross Vampire and Triskelion a great squad against any opposing creature forces, they were being piggybacked and expanded upon by new and different decks... incapable of playing Mephidross Vampire. While similar enhancements were accomplished in different decks using Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker and other options, probably the most sophisticated inclusion of this 3/4 came at the hands of a Mono-Blue Control deck.

Neil Reeves		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
21 Island	3 Annul	1 Annul
4 Stalking Stones	3 Boomerang	2 Echoing Truth
25 lands	2 Condescend	1 Mephidross Vampire
	4 Hinder	1 Sakashima the Impostor
	4 Mana Leak	4 Threads of Disloyalty
4 Jushi Apprentice	2 Oblivion Stone	1 Triskelion
4 Spire Golem	3 Rewind	4 Twincast
8 creatures	2 Thirst for Knowledge	1 Uyo, Silent Prophet
	4 Vedalken Shackles	15 sideboard cards
	27 other spells	

Neil Reeves came *this close* to becoming the 2005 US National Champion. While he had to settle for National Team only, he had one heck of a method for beating Tooth and Nail decks. One of the problems with Tooth and Nail was that if the card were cast via Boseiju, Who Shelters All, Mono-Blue decks would be unable to defend themselves. Instead of trying to counter the card, Neil could *win the game immediately* if he had four mana open.

First, the opponent would play Tooth and Nail.

Neil would target Tooth and Nail with Twincast. Now with his own Tooth and Nail, Neil would search out Mephidross Vampire and Uyo, Silent Prophet. With Tooth and Nail still on the stack, Uyo would copy that distinctive finisher a second time. The second Tooth and Nail would bring out Triskelion and Sakashima the Impostor. A final bout of copying would see Sakashima the Impostor would masquerading as Mephidross Vampire.

With *two* Mephidross Vampires in play, Triskelion would get *two* +1/+1 counters for every counter spent shooting at something. Rather than staying at the same size while killing everything in sight, Triskelion would now be able to get positively *fat*. It could shoot down the opponent's team; it could play target practice with the guys next to it; heck, Triskelion could shoot *itself* for fun and profit. All that mattered, ultimately, was that with sufficient +1/+1 counters, it could shoot the opponent *dead*, too.





Most recently, Team Vampire has completely changed gears.

Rather than giving us smaller Vampires for greater costs, *It doesn't LOOK like a vampire...*

**Magic** R&D decided with *Ravnica* Block to produce an aggressive flyer with all-star stats (Moroi).

Moroi hasn't made a big splash on the Premiere Event stage just yet, but this Vampiric love child of Waterspout and Juzam Djinn *did* make quite a few Top 8s at the 2005 Champs tournaments around the world (top finish being a second place in Alberta, Canada to "threat diversity" advocate Jim Roy). Moroi has generally been played as a finisher in BUG behind Hypnotic Specter and Dimir Cutpurse, or in the so-called "Blue Bob" aggro-control decks. Here is a version that Gerard Fabiano played to Top 8 at New Jersey States:

**Gerard Fabiano -**  

<b>Main Deck</b>		<b>Sideboard</b>
<i>60 cards</i>		
4 Island	4 Last Gasp	4 Cranial Extraction
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	4 Mana Leak	3 Keening Banshee
9 Swamp	3 Sickening Shoal	3 Muddle the Mixture
1 Tomb of Urami	4 Umezawa's Jitte	2 Pithing Needle
4 Underground River		3 Ribbons of Night
4 Watery Grave	15 other spells	15 sideboard cards
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23 lands		
4 Dark Confidant		
4 Dimir Cutpurse		
2 Dimir Guildmage		
4 Hand of Cruelty		
4 Hypnotic Specter		
1 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni		
3 Moroi		
<hr/>		
22 creatures		

Look for Moroi and new bat on the block Skeletal Vampire to continue the traditions begun by Sengir ten years and more ago. Now on the subject of ten+ years of **Magic**... I think I'll actually let BDM handle that one tomorrow.

