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Discard (This Deck)

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Building on a Budget
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True story time: I'm at work a few months back, and I get a call from the guys upstairs that I have a visitor. None other than the great Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar himself is in town visiting family, and has made time in his busy vacation schedule to visit my humble shop. I traipse upstairs to meet and greet, and I'm hit with this stunning gem:

"You're a lot more bald than your picture makes you look."

Well JMS, it's time I told you the truth: I'm bald because of all the deck ideas that are wheeling and congealing in my little noggin'. They're steaming and stewing, and it burns a hole right through the top of my scalp. Unless I wanna end up like pink baby Blei the day mamma Weiss put me out into this big scary world, all bald and crying, it's high time I started getting some of those ideas out.

Before we get started with today's festivities, allow me the luxury of a brief introduction. Those who have been following this site since its beginning will remember me as one of the original five columnists – the writer of [Uncommon Knowledge](#). Today marks my return to [magicthegathering.com](#), and my debut as author of the Building on a Budget column.

Before I go any further, let me allay any lingering fears from you, the reader: the author of the column has changed, but the focus of this column has not. Building on a Budget is about two things – deck building, on a budget. Building. Budget. I have great respect for Jay's work before me, and hope to continue his tradition of fine innovation and tuning with my own twist of lime thrown in.



The question I had to ask myself for today's column was, "Self, which Mox would be best to build a deck around: Mox Emerald, Mox Jet, Mox Pearl, Mox Ruby, or Mox Sapphire?" Then it hit me – why not just start with Black Lotus?

Cough Cough

Trust me, just a little, ok? Baby steps – by the end, you'll like where I've taken you.

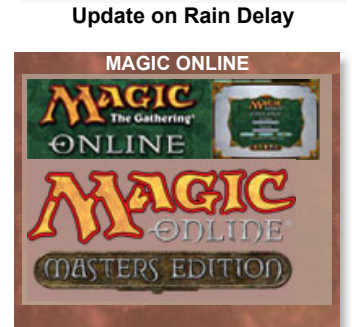
I hope.

The dream of mankind, or at least kind of the dream of this man, has been to make a viable discard deck. By a viable discard deck, I don't mean a deck that utilizes discard to force through other threats – I mean a deck that literally wins by forcing the opponent to discard cards. With the arrival of *Guildpact*, there are now two cards in Standard which can help achieve this goal: long-time favorite *Megrim*, and newcomer *Abysal Nocturnus*.

Megrim and the *Nocturnus* are extremely similar – both are three-mana Black cards which convert an opponent's discard into two points of damage. This sort of redundancy in effect makes it much easier to build a deck around – with only four *Megrim*, it'd be hard to ensure drawing the kill card each game – but with eight copies of *Megrim/Abysal Nocturnus*, drawing at least one copy of the two should happen with relative frequency.

I've fiddled around with heavy-discard strategies before, and so going in to this exercise I knew that discard has three very major weaknesses:

1. Discard cannot deal with permanents. Once your opponent gets something on the board, be it a creature, land, enchantment, or artifact, you're going to have a hard time dealing with it.



- Once you strip your opponent's hand, they are in topdeck mode – everything that they can play, they will immediately play – making any further discard spells you draw (or already have in hand) almost useless.
- Discard does not, in and of itself, kill an opponent. If you devote a majority of your deck to making your opponent discard, you will likely strip their hand – and leave them at twenty life, while you spend the next ten turns searching for your deck's one or two ways to kill them.

Here's what I came up with.

Discard Mark 1		
 		
Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Dimir Aqueduct 7 Island 12 Swamp <hr/> 23 lands	4 Abyssal Nocturnus 4 Dimir Guildmage 4 Lore Broker 3 Okiba-Gang Shinobi 4 Ravenous Rats <hr/> 19 creatures	4 Compulsive Research 4 Distress 3 Honden of Night's Reach 4 Megrim 3 Nightmare Void <hr/> 18 other spells

For the inaugural version of my discard deck, I decided to address problems two and three of the discard strategy. I loaded my deck up with creatures that cause discard effects, so that I would be able to attack and kill my opponent if need be. I also added in **Lore Broker**, **Dimir Guildmage**, and **Compulsive Research** as ways to force my opponent to draw cards. That way, **Megrim** and **Abyssal Nocturnus** aren't dead cards if my opponent is in top-deck mode.

A quick aside: I don't name decks unless I'm happy with the results of the deck. If I'm not feeling the love from my pile o' cardboard, it's not feeling the love from me. Don't worry – Discard.dec has a happy name further down this page. Don't cry for it just yet.

Games #1-4: My early games went pretty horribly. I lost to Pits2541 playing Red/White aggro, as I quickly discover that my deck auto-loses to **Umezawa's Jitte**. Lbj22k smashes my head in with a horde of Red/Green creatures. I do eke out a pair of wins against Conundrum (running Black/White/Green) and Boss4a187 (playing land destruction), but both of those opponents got stuck on three mana most of the game. Ten turns of discarding to **Megrim** with eight cards in hand do not make for great faith in my deck.



Record: 2-2

Okay, the deck wasn't clicking at all. Half the time, **Megrim** would just sit there while I got run over by **Kavu Climbers** and **Anaba Shamans**. The other half of the time, the opponent would drop a turn 2 **Jitte**, and I would scoop. My deck needed an answer to early threats, and I figured the first place I should look should be bounce. After all, bounce would serve two purposes – getting things off the board to alleviate early pressure, and getting permanents off the board so I could make my opponent discard said permanent.

Plus, I already have Blue in my deck – might as well go with the flow?

In: 4 **Repeal**, 4 **Mark of Eviction**
Out: 4 **Compulsive Research**, 4 **Ravenous Rats**

As much as I liked the Researches in theory, I never wanted to let my opponent draw three cards at once in practice. Also, the Rats were a one-shot discard outlet, and were hard to return to my hand, even with the added bounce.

Games #5-9: I beat Unusable_Signal in back-to-back games as he is running burn, and he needs to burn my creatures to keep from losing his burn. This allows me to beat him with **Megrim** and force drawing/discard. I also defeat Silver mage13 (piloting a Saproling build), as his threats are a little too slow and I am able to run him out of cards and then overrun him with my horde.

Things go straight down south against Angelkyd. I **Distress** him on the second turn, and see a hand of land, land, **Serra Angel**, **Serra Angel**, **Serra Angel**, **Angel of Mercy**. He's already played two lands this game. Four turns later, I'm facing down a Loxodon-Warhammered **Serra Angel**, backed by **Otherworldly Journey**. **Abyssal Nocturnus** and **Lore Broker** can't keep up to the eight-life swing a turn. Robos drives the point home the next game as he dismantles me with a ton of Black/White weenies, lead by the very-unpleasant-to-bounce-Mr.-Blind-Hunter.



Record: 5-4

Discard.dec still wasn't working for me. I'll let you in on a little secret – when a deck is working, it will surprise you by giving you options you hadn't considered when building the deck. For instance, if this deck had been such a deck, maybe **Lore Broker** would have had some amazing interaction with **Mark of Eviction** that I hadn't noticed initially.

Unfortunately, I still wasn't feeling this deck. I felt like I could easily lose the games I won, and I felt like I had no shot at winning the games I lost. In fact, I hit points as early as turn 3 where I knew I couldn't win the game, because my opponent had already played permanents I couldn't deal with long term – such as **Loxodon Warhammer**.

Deckbuilding is all about finding out what works and what doesn't, through tinkering and practice. In the words of someone much more famous and wise than I, it's 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. I removed the Blue from the deck entirely and soldiered on.

Discard Mark 3		
 		
Main Deck		
60 cards		
23 Swamp	4 Abyssal Nocturnus	4 Distress
23 lands	4 Nezumi Graverobber	3 Honden of Night's Reach
	4 Nezumi Shortfang	4 Last Gasp
	3 Okiba-Gang Shinobi	4 Megrim
	4 Ravenous Rats	3 Nightmare Void
	19 creatures	18 other spells

I thought that the Graverobbers would give me an alternate win condition through better discarding – but over the course of sixteen more games, he was never online long enough to grab a single creature! My opponents either burned, bounced, or blocked Nighteyes the Desecrator, though he had his uses in removing dredge cards from my opponent's graveyard.

Games #10-12: I win two of my next three. The wins came against Martigan (**Wildfire**) and Pulsebird (Kitsune Mystic Aura.dec), and were achieved by stripping out their business spells with discard, and then beating with creatures. My game against Martigan was particularly vexing, because I had three **Megrim**s in the board, and basically had to beat him to death by attacking with **Ravenous Rats** over multiple turns, because I could not get him to keep a card in hand for me to make him discard!

My loss against DrProfessorHarmonicaT (Green/Black) was a textbook example of how discard is helpless against the board – he casts a turn 1 **Llanowar Elves**, enchants it on the second turn with **Moldervine Cloak**, and then throws a second Cloak on it for good measure on turn 3, and proceeds to beat me back to a Black and Blue deck.

Record: 7-5





I keep losing to equipment and **Moldervine Cloak** – what card will deal with both of those problems while still furthering my goal of discard? The answer is non-obvious, but one that I've played with before – **Cowardice**! I rebuild the deck to incorporate this *9th Edition* rare, and the deck fails badly.

There aren't enough repeatable creature-targeting effects in Black and Blue to support both a discard and a **Cowardice** theme – you really need to build an entirely deck around **Cowardice** to make it work, and discard.dec isn't that deck. I do hit one card that sticks through the rest of my testing – **Icy Manipulator**. It solves a lot of my board control problems, plus helps my discard theme. If my opponent has no threats for me to tap, I can shut down one of their lands, which can help clog their hand with spells.

Games #13-17: The less I say about the **Cowardice** build of this deck, the better. Suffice it to say, Aei_Sedai, Melmoth100, ClericCadderly, and Nomar are in my notes as "I get smashed," "I get served," "I get beaten down by his Graverobber," and "I get beaten down" respectively. My only win comes against EvilNeo, who loses thanks to my triple **Remand/Nightmare Void** on his three **Warp Worlds**.

Record: 8-9

Tired of losing to weenie hordes, I decide to go for the sweet twelve – **Last Gasp**, **Remand** and **Mana Leak**. These are the backbones of many Black/Blue decks, and with good cause – they are cheap (both in cost and casting cost), they buy you a lot of early-game time, and they are extremely effective for their mana cost. I also dump the Nocturnus entirely – since I'm already having **Megrim**-doing-nothing problems, I don't need to exacerbate that situation with an extra set of **Megrim**s.

Discard Mark 5		
 		
Main Deck		
60 cards		

60 cards		
4 Dimir Aqueduct	3 Dimir Guildmage	3 Dimir Signet
10 Island	4 Nezumi Graverobber	3 Honden of Night's Reach
9 Swamp		3 Honden of Seeing Winds
	7 creatures	3 Icy Manipulator
23 lands		4 Last Gasp
		4 Mana Leak
		3 Megrin
		3 Nightmare Void
		4 Remand
		30 other spells

Games #18-20: A dozen and a half games of gnashing and gnawing and fiddling and faddling, and I can see the light! The dual Honden action goes a long way towards giving me options each game. In fact, the five-card swing each turn with two Hondens in play is advantage enough to win me games without much other help. I beat TheRealKnapster (Black/Blue Leyline of Singularity/Hunted Creatures) and Superman316 (Black/Green) behind the power of my Hondens, but then lose to Soulcollecta (Black/White weenie) as he drops a handful of one and two-drop creatures by the third turn, and runs me over.

Record: 10-10

My game against Soulcollecta highlighted one of the initial flaws of my deck – duplication. Ordinarily, you'd want a lot of duplication in your deck. This is to maximize the chance of drawing a given effect in any game (think of burn decks that run [Lightning Helix](#), [Volcanic Hammer](#), and [Flames of the Blood Hand](#)), or to capitalize on an effect that does not lose potency through redundancy ([Stone Rain/Seismic Spike/Demolish](#)).

There are too many cards in my deck that are pretty suboptimal in multiples. If a burn deck draws two [Lightning Helixes](#), then it's drawn two really good spells. If I draw two [Honden of Seeing Winds](#), one of them is likely to be a dead card in my hand all game. Unfortunately, this applies as well to the [Dimir Guildmages](#) and the [Nezumi Graverobbers](#) – one of each on the table is great, two of either on the table renders the second copy pretty much a vanilla creature.

In theory, I loved the idea of using the Graverobbers to grab an opponent's creature, since they'd be discarding better threats than I had in my entire deck! As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, that idea was all bark and no bite. There is a card in Standard that would let me achieve the nefarious goal of beating my opponent about the head with their own fatties.

[Debtors' Knell](#). Why make my opponent simply discard [Serra Angel](#) when Serra could come play for me? The last sacrifice to the deck was the hardest – getting rid of [Megrin](#) entirely.

Debting Megrin		
Main Deck		
60 cards		
4 Dimir Aqueduct	3 Nezumi Graverobber	3 Debtors' Knell
8 Island		3 Diabolic Tutor
11 Swamp	3 creatures	3 Dimir Signet
		3 Distress
23 lands		3 Honden of Night's Reach
		3 Honden of Seeing Winds
		3 Icy Manipulator
		3 Last Gasp
		3 Mana Leak
		1 Nightmare Void
		3 Remand
		3 Telling Time
		34 other spells

This is the version of the deck that finally earned itself a name – and one that memorializes a successful failure. When I first started building the deck, I wanted to build a discard deck build around [Megrin](#) and [Abyssal Nocturnus](#), but instead ended up with a Black/Blue Honden deck built around [Debtors' Knell](#).

That's what I absolutely love about deckbuilding and **Magic** – if you keep an open mind about the possibilities, you never know where your deck is going to take you. Sometimes you get a great deck idea, it clicks, and all you need to do is tune a handful of cards. Other times, you get what we have here – a noble failure at first that twists, reshapes, and changes from an ugly caterpillar into a beautiful [Morphling](#). Would I have liked to have ended up with a deck that won with [Abyssal Nocturnus](#) and [Megrin](#)? Sure. But it was more important to me not to restrict myself to those cards when they weren't working. Maybe one day I'll be able to go back and revisit them – or maybe one day there will be a [Megrin](#) variant that can

damage creatures *and* players so I can play board control with my discard. Until then though, I leave **Megrim** and **Abyssal Nocturnus** behind, and embrace my Honden overlords.



*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by [StarCityGames.com](#), where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



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