

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Little Big Black

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Building on a Budget
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Wizards of the Coast is out of the office for the Memorial Day holiday, and will return with new articles beginning Tuesday, 5/29. In case you missed it, what follows is the article that ran in this slot last week. In the meantime, [this week's feature article](#) is already up for your holiday reading pleasure. See you tomorrow!

hey everyone, and welcome back to Building on a Budget! This week's deck takes something old, makes it something new, because it's borrowed, and... black? But before I get into this evolution, I am issuing a call for help from all the Building on a Budget true believers!

10 Decks in 10 Weeks Battle Royale!

Do you want to see a Battle Royale between these 10 decks?

Yes! Which deck will reign supreme?	7158	87.3%
Just get on with building more decks, you budgeteer!	1040	12.7%
Total	8198	100.0%

I need your help! In order to make the best Battle Royale! possible, I want to go all out – play all 10 decks against each of the other ten decks, for a total of 100 playtesting games! This is where you, the reader, come in!

If you would like to help me playtest, I am taking volunteers to spend a couple of hours playing ten straight games of Magic (one against each of the 10 Decks in 10 Weeks) using **Magic Online!** Here's my requirements:

- You must have one of the 10 Decks in 10 Weeks built, unchanged, as per the version at the end of an article. Sorry, you have to provide your own cards for this one!

The decks are:

- Week 1: G/W – [The Two Ladies](#)
- Week 2: G/R – [A Wild Pair](#)
- Week 3: R/U – [Aeon in Flux](#)
- Week 4: U/B – [Grim Outlook](#)
- Week 5: B/W – [Rescue Me](#)
- Week 6: W/U – [A Blink In Time](#)
- Week 7: W/R – [Sheer Pandemonium](#)
- Week 8: B/R – [Madness](#)
- Week 9: B/G – [Profusion Confusion](#)
- Week 10: G/U – [Fungal Behemoth](#)

- You must be able to spend 2-4 hours playing that one version of the deck against all ten of the other decks (including mirror match) from the 10 Decks in 10 Weeks experiment. All games will be best one out of one – anything more than that, and there's no chance that this article would ever get written! Plus, 100 games is a pretty large sample size.

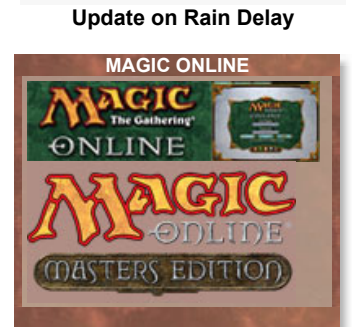
That's it! If you're interested in helping out, please e-mail me at BuildingonaBudget@Wizards.com—include your **Magic Online** screen name, the deck you'd like to play, and the times (day and time, EST) that you'd be available to play within the next couple of weeks. Thank you in advance to anyone who takes the time to volunteer for this grand experiment—let's make the best Battle Royale! that anyone has ever seen!

Little Big Black

A few months ago, Mark Rosewater was gunslinging at a high-level event, and he packed the heat of this Black Weenie deck:

Mark Rosewater Black

Main Deck
60 cards



- Building on a Budget is dedicated to making decks that cost 30 tickets or less on **Magic Online**. Weekly deck testing is done using **Magic Online**
- This week's format? Standard. This includes *Ninth Edition*, *Ravnica*, *Guildpact*, *Dissension*, *Coldsnap*, *Time Spiral*, and *Planar Chaos*.
- I need help playtesting for the 10 Decks in 10 Weeks Battle Royale! See the first section of this article for details!

23 Snow-Covered Swamp	4 Dauthi Slayer	4 Bad Moon
23 lands	4 Plagued Rusalka	4 Phyrexian Arena
	4 Withered Wretch	1 Phyrexian Etchings
	4 Nether Traitor	4 Soul Spike
	4 Rimebound Dead	13 other spells
	4 Stromgald Crusader	
	24 creatures	

This ended up being a really efficient deck, with many built-in synergies. The most among them—the interaction between **Plagued Rusalka** and **Nether Traitor**. With the two of them working in tandem, **Plagued Rusalka** could give any creature -2/-2 for ☠☠☠ —sacrifice the **Nether Traitor**, then sacrifice another creature to bring back the **Nether Traitor**. In this way, you ended up only losing one guy, but giving an opposing creature the ol' **Enfeeblement** treatment.

Even without the Rusalka/Traitor interaction, the deck is set up for some quick beats. Many of the creatures have evasion (**Dauthi Slayer**, **Nether Traitor**, **Stromgald Crusader**), and all of the creatures are fast, efficient weenies. There is one problem for building this deck on a budget:

This deck ain't budget.

Here's a breakdown of the prices for each of the cards in the deck, using **Magic Online's** seller room as a gauge:

Bad Moon: 1.5 each
Dauthi Slayer: 1 each
Nether Traitor: 1 each
Phyrexian Arena: 4 each
Snow-Covered Swamp: 3 for 1 ticket
Soul Spike: 2 for 1 ticket
Stromgald Crusader: 2 for 1 ticket
Withered Wretch: 2 for 1 ticket

Cost: 6 (**Bad Moon**) + 4 (**Dauthi Slayer**) + 4 (**Nether Traitor**) + 16 (**Phyrexian Arena**) + 7.66 (**Snow-Covered Swamp**) + 2 (**Soul Spike**) + 2 (**Stromgald Crusader**) + 2 (**Withered Wretch**) = 43.66 tickets



Given that our budget for this column is a strict high of 30 tickets, this just won't do. In order to make this deck fit our budget, some cuts are going to have to be made.

The first cut is to remove the **Snow-Covered Swamps**. They are there solely to support **Rimebound Dead**, and seven and two-thirds tickets is a lot of money to pay to support a one/one regenerating common creature. The **Snow-Covered Swamps** are easily replaced by regular **Swamps**, and so the **Rimebound Dead/Snow-Covered Swamps** are out.

Out: 23 **Snow-Covered Swamp** (-7.66 tickets), 4 **Rimebound Dead** (36 tickets total)
In: 23 **Swamp**

This still puts us above budget. There are two distinct ways to go with this deck, at this point:

1. There are a lot of cards that cost 1-1.5 tickets each, such as **Bad Moon**, or **Dauthi Slayer**. If I start yanking out playsets of those, I can replace them with commons/uncommons that aren't necessarily as good but that can fill the role of attackers.
2. I can take out the **Phyrexian Arenas** and come in well under budget.

This is a hard decision, because **Phyrexian Arena** is a really powerful card—the ability to draw twice as many cards as your opponent equals more opportunities to kill them early-on in the game, since Little Big Black is the deck serving up all the threats. Likely your opponent is going to be scrambling to play catch-up with you, so the loss of a little life in exchange for the drawing of a lot of cards is a small trade-off.

In the end, I decided that the **Phyrexian Arenas** should go. While I would love to have them in the deck, I can't justify gutting the creature base of the deck for a card that costs a little over half of the budget of the entire deck. I also took out **Phyrexian Etchings**, since it is kind of slow and cumbersome.

In exchange for the **Arenas** coming out, I decided to try a bunch of higher-end cards that would have a game-swinging effect. If I couldn't overload in the beginning with weenies, I would drop my bombs at the end of the game and try to outright win with one or two different cards. My choices for these slots were all cards that I'd just wanted to play around with:

Roiling Horror: After my success with **Fungal Behemoth** and **Aeon Chronicler** during the 10 Decks in 10 Weeks project, I was itching to get my hands on this guy. Best suited for a mono-black deck such as this one due to a triple-black suspend cost, I figured that **Roiling Horror** would make a great top-of-the-curve creature. If I'm ahead by 5 life, **Roiling Horror** comes down as a 5/5 haste creature that turns into 10/10 almost immediately. In addition, I can suspend him to drain those last few points of life if I hit a creature stalemate situation.

Enslave: It's **Confiscate** for black, except better and worse. Worse, in that it can only grab creatures. Better, in that the point of damage it does is to the *creature's owner*. Yes, I misread it the first time I had it played on me as well—I thought that **Enslave** did a point to me. This is not the case—**Enslave** does a point to whoever physically (or electronically) owns the card, so it adds, as they say, the insult to the injury.

Twisted Abomination: A common out of Scourge—pick up that version rather than the "timeshifted" *Time Spiral* version. Good both for fetching lands in the early game and for coming down on turn seven (don't play it unless you have regeneration mana up!) as a huge regenerating beater in the late game.

Out: 4 **Phyrexian Arena** (-16 tickets), 1 **Phyrexian Etchings** (-.5 tickets) — (19.5 tickets total)

In: 4 **Roiling Horror** (.5 tickets), 3 **Enslave**, 2 **Twisted Abomination** — (21.5 tickets total)



Little Big Black 1		
Main Deck 60 cards		
23 Swamp	4 Dauthi Slayer	4 Bad Moon
23 lands	4 Plagued Rusalka	3 Enslave
	2 Twisted Abomination	4 Soul Spike
	4 Withered Wretch	11 other spells
	4 Nether Traitor	
	4 Roiling Horror	
	4 Stromgald Crusader	
26 creatures		

Game 1: Rupes (White Weenie)

I get turn-one **Plagued Rusalka** and turn-two **Stromgald Crusader**. The Crusader ends up going all the way. I do get **Plagued Rusalka** and **Nether Traitor** to kill a **Knight of the Holy Nimbus**, to make sure I can keep racing against a **Serra Avenger** and **Tivadar of Thorn**.

Record: 1-0

Game 2: Vicious Beastie (Mono-Black Control)

Vicious Beastie gets **Persecute** (hitting nothing) back-to-back with **Damnation** (getting my board) and then drops double **Skeletal Vampire** for the win.

Record: 1-1

Game 3: NirokSyn (Black/White Weenie)

He gets **Garza's Assassin**, and I get **Withered Wretch**. He drops **Nekrataal** and puts **Loxodon Warhammer** on it, and I drop **Stromgald Crusader** and take his **Nekrataal** with **Enslave**. He drops **Rathi Trapper** and moves the Warhammer onto it, but I drop **Twisted Abomination**, and then **Nether Traitor** and double **Bad Moon** for the win.

Record: 2-1

Game 4: drethran (B/W Rescue Me)

I get double **Stromgald Crusader**, **Nether Traitor**, and **Bad Moon**. He gets double **Soul Warden**, **Stonecloaker**, **Jötun Grunt**. I run him over with pro-white and shadow guys and finish it with a **Soul Spike**.

Record: 3-1

Game 5: varianalos (Black/Red Tokens)

I get a great draw:

Turn two: **Dauthi Slayer**

Turn three: **Stromgald Crusader** (he drops **Kher Keep**) (18)

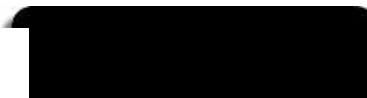
Turn four: **Bad Moon** (12) (he drops **Sengir Autocrat**)

Turn six: **Nether Traitor** (4), **Soul Spike**, win.

Record: 4-1

So far, so good. There were definitely weaknesses in the deck. For one, I have no way to affect my opponent's hand. This allows my opponent to hoard removal spells or late-game bombs, making my race an uphill battle. Since black is the color of discard spells, this is easily solved. In the end, from a list of **Blackmail**, **Coercion**, **Delirium Skeins**, **Nightmare Void**, **Persecute** and **Stupor**, I end up choosing **Nightmare Void** as my discard spell of choice. The reason for this is simple—I want to be able to hit, with 100% accuracy, the exact spell I want out of an opponent's hand. I don't care if I get **Skeletal Vampire** and a **Swamp** with **Stupor** when it's that **Damnation** I need right here and now. The same goes for **Blackmail** and **Delirium Skeins**. **Persecute** is too expensive (ticket price) to fit this deck.

Coercion is a real possibility over **Nightmare Void**—even though I can recur **Nightmare Void** repeatedly, I lose a race to **Wrath of God** if I'm on the draw. **Coercion** lets me take out that **Wrath** on my turn three, before



my opponent can untap and Wrath. Still, I decide to give **Nightmare Void** a shot, and see how it works.

I also have found that **Enslave** hasn't been a great addition to the deck. Sure, I can grab a creature now and then, but if my opponent doesn't have something large on the board, it's a huge wasted slot that could be another fatty. In addition, **Roiling Horror** hasn't worked out quite like I'd hoped. It seems better suited for a deck with a lot more **Consume Spirit/Drain Life** effects, as a lot of my games have come down to races.

In the end, I take out two **Enslaves** (leaving one in the deck for fun), a **Roiling Horror**, and a **Soul Spike**, and add in three **Nightmare Void** and a **Helldozer**. **Helldozer** is a huge, massive beast who can both swing for a lot of damage and set my opponent back from playing their huge bombs.



Little Big Black 2			dec
Main Deck 60 cards			
23 Swamp	4 Dauthi Slayer	4 Bad Moon	
23 lands	1 Helldozer	3 Nightmare Void	
	4 Plagued Rusalka	1 Enslave	
	2 Twisted Abomination	3 Soul Spike	
	4 Withered Wretch		
	4 Nether Traitor	11 other spells	
	3 Roiling Horror		
	4 Stromgald Crusader		
	26 creatures		

Out: 1 **Roiling Horror**, 1 **Soul Spike**, 2 **Enslave**

In: 3 **Nightmare Void**, 1 **Helldozer**

Game 6: nebakanezer0 (W/G Weenie)

He gets **Watchwolf**, **Crown of Convergence** and **Celestial Crusader**. I get double **Dauthi Slayer** and **Plagued Rusalka**, and he drops **Nullmage Shepherd**. I can't outrace him, and he wins.

Record: 4-2

Game 7: Tadat (Mono-Blue Suspend)

We both get stuck on two mana, and he suspends double **Errant Ephemeron**. I get **Withered Wretch**, **Withered Wretch**, **Nether Traitor**, **Bad Moon**, and then double **Soul Spike** him for the win.

Record: 5-2

Game 8: Enigma307 (W/G Tokens)

I get **Stromgald Crusader** and ride him for 16 points of damage, with 1 point of **Plagued Rusalka** damage. He gets **Verdant Embrace** and **Shielding Plax** on his **Twilight Drover**, but my pump knight keeps coming in the air, and a hard-cast **Soul Spike** finishes the game off.

Record: 6-2

Game 9: michinmuri (B/W Life Drain)

I decide to keep a one-land hand with a bunch of 2/2 guys and double **Soul Spike**. I don't draw another land until he has multiple **Blind Hunters** on the board. I do get to four quickly after that and **Nightmare Void** out double **Soul Spike** from his hand, along with **Jedit's Dragons**. Unfortunately, he has too much of a start, and I lose.

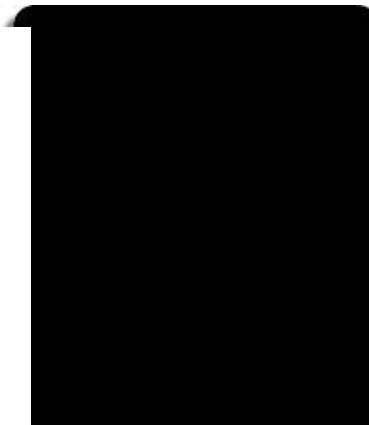
Record: 6-3

Game 10: EndDream (R/W/U Angels)

He gets **Shivan Reef**, **Azorius Signet**, and a **Lightning Angel** on turn three. I get **Dauthi Slayer** and **Nether Traitor**. We swing back and forth, and he drops a morph. I double **Nightmare Void** him. The first gets **Remanded**, and the second gets a **Rune Snag**. He morphs up **Akroma** and hits me for nine with me at nine, and gives me a GG. But hold your horses! I alternate cast **Soul Spike** to bring him to five, and me to four. I then drop **Bad Moon** and kill him.

Record: 7-3

I've taken a few mulligans over the past couple of games, unable to reach two mana early. **Roiling Horror** still isn't working out well, so I decide to kill two birds with one stone—out go two more **Horrors**, and in come a **Swamp** and a **Twisted Abomination** (which can work as both a fatty and a **Swamp**, as previously stated). This should help smooth out my mana problems.





Little Big Black 3		
Main Deck 60 cards		
24 Swamp	4 Dauthi Slayer	4 Bad Moon
24 lands	1 Helldozer	3 Nightmare Void
	4 Plagued Rusalka	1 Enslave
	3 Twisted Abomination	3 Soul Spike
	4 Withered Wretch	11 other spells
	4 Nether Traitor	
	1 Roiling Horror	
	4 Stromgald Crusader	
	25 creatures	

Out: 2 Roiling Horror
In: 1 Swamp, 1 Twisted Abomination

Game 11: leodragonz (Snow-Covered Deck)

I get an early **Withered Wretch** and **Stromgald Crusader**, and get a couple of hits in before the former gets **Gelid Shackled**, and the latter gets tapped down by **Rimewind Taskmage**. He gets **Blizzard Specter**, and I get **Helldozer**, which eats **Chill to the Bone**. Finally, I top deck **Enslave**, take out his **Taskmage** with a **Plagued Rusalka** and double **Withered Wretch**, and beat him with the 2/1 pump knight.

Record: 8-3

Game 12: Acedude (Mono-White Aggro)

He gets triple **Loxodon Warhammer**, but I get **Stromgald Crusader**, **Plagued Rusalka** and **Nether Traitor**. He drops **Story Circle** set to black. My first attempt to circumvent this enchantment is to kill his guys except one, and **Enslave** his guy with multiple **Warhammers** on it. He has **Bathe in Light** to stop that. I then draw and use **Nightmare Void** to take out his hand, and keep his guys off of the board with my removal. I get double **Bad Moon**, and suspend **Roiling Horror** for 6. We go back and forth, until I draw **Helldozer**. I dredge **Nightmare Void**, take out a **Faith's Fetters** from his hand, and then drop **Helldozer**. After nearly a dozen turns, I run him out of mana and run him over with creatures.

Record: 9-3

Game 13: The Nabob (B/W Discard)

I get a quick start with double **Dauthi Slayer**, but he kills them both with **Mortify**, plays **Stupor** and double **Blackmail**, and drops **The Rack**. He then puts **Pillory of the Sleepless** on my **Nether Traitor**.

As a frown, I have five mana and draw **Enslave** on his first **Blackmail** and **Helldozer** on his second **Blackmail**. My next card? **Swamp**.

Record: 9-4

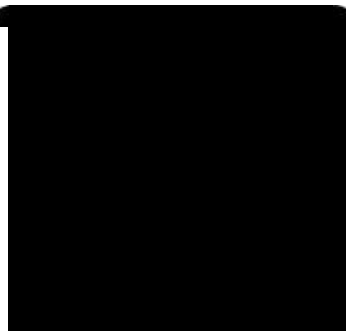
Game 14: Signut (W/U Control)

He counters my second-turn **Dauthi Slayer**, so I wait until four mana to drop **Stromgald Crusader** (in case of **Remand** or **Rune Snag**). It hits once, and then he **Wraths**. I drop another **Crusader**, and this one works him down to 7. I then try to play **Nether Traitor**, and he plays **Draining Whelk**, which I promptly **Enslave**. A **Nightmare Void** also gets **Whelked**, but at this point the **Enslave** damage does enough where I can attack with both guys and win.

Record: 10-4

Game 15: Frankenhooter (Empty the Warrens/Tromp the Domains)

I get a fast start with **Plagued Rusalka**, **Stromgald Crusader**, **Bad Moon**, and **Nether Traitor**. He plays **Essence Warden** and then **Empty the**



Warrens, for 4 life. I attack him down to 4, and he casts **Tromp the Domains**. I sacrifice my **Nether Traitor** to stay alive, and then **Nightmare Void** him to see if he has any tricks (he doesn't), and kill him.
Record: 11-4

This deck ended up being pretty strong, and one of the best things is how customizable it can be at the top end. Don't want to run **Roiling Horror**? Add in more **Helldozers**—or maybe **Korlash**, **Heir to Blackblade** (once **Future Sight** is legal) or **Mortivore** or **Liege of the Pit**. The MVP for this deck was definitely **Stromgald Crusader**. Left unchecked, the damage output on this jump knight is just insane, and he shut down virtually every white deck I faced.

That's all the time I have for this week! Send me those e-mails if you're interested in helping with the 10 Decks in 10 Weeks Battle Royale, and give your thoughts about this week's deck in the forums. Until next week, take care!



Poor sidebar. Should we put it out of its misery?			
I never knew there was a sidebar until now.	1728	39.8%	
I read that sidebar every week, as I know it contains vital information for this column!	1703	39.2%	
Get rid of that eyesore. I hate it, and everything about it!	912	21.0%	
Total	4343	100.0%	

Which of the 10 Decks in 10 Weeks did you like the most?			
Week 9: B/G – Profusion Confusion	677	15.1%	
Week 1: G/W - The Two Ladies	609	13.5%	
Week 3: R/U – Aeon in Flux	515	11.5%	
Week 5: B/W – Rescue Me	500	11.1%	
Week 8: B/R – Madness	485	10.8%	
Week 10: G/U – Fungal Behemoth	484	10.8%	
Week 6: W/U – A Blink In Time	447	9.9%	
Week 7: W/R – Sheer Pandemonium	336	7.5%	
Week 2: G/R - A Wild Pair	241	5.4%	
Week 4: U/B - Grim Outlook	202	4.5%	
Total	4496	100.0%	

Which was your <i>least</i> favorite of the 10 Decks in 10 Weeks?			
Week 2: G/R - A Wild Pair	534	16.7%	
Week 9: B/G – Profusion Confusion	511	16.0%	
Week 1: G/W - The Two Ladies	459	14.4%	
Week 8: B/R – Madness	351	11.0%	
Week 7: W/R – Sheer Pandemonium	315	9.9%	
Week 10: G/U – Fungal Behemoth	287	9.0%	
Week 4: U/B - Grim Outlook	253	7.9%	
Week 3: R/U – Aeon in Flux	195	6.1%	
Week 5: B/W – Rescue Me	164	5.1%	
Week 6: W/U – A Blink In Time	122	3.8%	
Total	3191	100.0%	

*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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