



Silent Killers (Part 1 of 2)

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Building on a Budget
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hello everyone, and welcome to the first *Morningtide*-online edition of Building on a Budget! As you may remember from [some weeks ago](#), I designed five decks, each pertaining to one of the "lost tribes" of *Morningtide*! I held a poll to see which deck you'd like to see evolved, and the winner was the Assassin deck!

Which deck would you most like to see me evolve in a future column?

Assassins (The Silent Killers)	2924	25.5%
Knights (Good Knight to You)	2578	22.5%
Druids (Land Grab)	2516	22.0%
Archers (What Goes Up...)	1986	17.3%
Clerics (Prevent This!)	1446	12.6%
Total	11450	100.0%

Silent Killers 1.0

Main Deck 60 cards

24 Swamp	2 Big Game Hunter	4 Nameless Inversion
24 lands	3 Cairn Wanderer	3 Phyrexian Vault
	4 Garza's Assassin	4 Tendrils of Corruption
	3 Ghostly Changeling	
	3 Moonglove Changeling	11 other spells
	4 Nekkartaal	
	2 Nightmare	
	4 Scarblade Elite	
	25 creatures	

The Assassin deck is an aggro-control deck. I drop creatures on the first few turns, drop more creatures which clear the way for my early creatures, and hope to keep momentum during the game in order to finish off my opponent. It's not a pure aggressive deck, because many of the cards are reactionary—for instance, *Nekkartaal* is a pretty mediocre creature if you have to play him to an empty board. I wouldn't pay four mana for a 2/1 first striker with no other special abilities. It's not a pure control deck, because there are cards designed for attacking (*Ghostly Changeling*, *Nightmare*), though the deck does skew more towards control than aggro.

Control Elements: *Big Game Hunter*, *Garza's Assassin*, *Moonglove Changeling*, *Nekkartaal*, *Scarblade Elite*, *Nameless Inversion*, *Tendrils of Corruption*

Aggro Elements: *Ghostly Changeling*, *Nightmare*, the fact that almost all of my removal doubles as creatures that can attack

The deck is designed to take advantage of *Scarblade Elite*—with an Assassin card in the graveyard, the Elite can kill virtually any creature in Standard without shroud or protection from black. There aren't ways for me to just put Assassins into the graveyard (either through dredging or discard), so the deck is reliant on either trading Assassins on the board, sacrificing *Garza's Assassin* to kill a creature, or throwing a creature into the *Phyrexian Vault*.

Nightmare is in as a huge finisher. I wanted a creature that, if the game was stalled between me killing everything and my opponent killing my creatures back, would be able to finish my opponent off in a swing or two. *Korlash* is a non-budget card which accomplishes the same goal (5 tickets for *Korlash*—three for a ticket (or .33 tickets) for *Nightmare*). I briefly



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considered **Mortivore** or **Avatar of Woe** for this slot (since I'd be killing my opponent's creatures). I discarded that notion, because if everything is going to plan, I wouldn't have many creatures in my graveyard (thanks to **Garza's Assassin** and **Scarblade Elite**), making both **Mortivore** and **Avatar of Woe** less than optimal.

The big concerns for me going into playtesting this deck were as follows:

- If I got **Scarblade Elite**, would I have a difficult time activating him due to the lack of ways to get Assassins straight into my graveyard?
- If I faced a deck that was light on creatures (such as a heavy control deck with a lot of countermagic), would my high mana curve and (against creature-light decks) inefficient creatures cause me to automatically lose?
- Was my deck too much on the line of aggro-control, and did I want to push it in one direction or the other (either as a more aggressive deck, or as a pure control deck?)

With these questions in mind, I began playtesting

Game 1: atticusfinch (Treefolk Shaman)

He drops **Bosk Bannerets** and a **Leaf-Crowned Elder**, all of which get killed by my creatures that can kill other creatures. I basically chop down all his trees and turn his **Forest** into a **Swamp**, in short order.

Record: 1-0

Game 2: Jeffrey Terhoeve (Blue-Green Control)

He plays **Whirlpool Whelm** on my first couple of Assassins, and then drops **Rootgrapple** on one of my lands. I get down **Scarblade Elite** and **Garza's Assassin**, and this allows me to kill a **Garruk Wildspeaker** the following turn. My hand is filled with removal spells, and I am able to just clear the way to swing with my two 2/2 guys for the win.

Record: 2-0

Game 3: Gambatte (Red-Blue Burn)

He gets triple **Mulldrifter** and quadruple **Keldon Marauders**, but I get a bunch of creature kill, play **Phyrexian Vault** to stymie his burn (it is quite good for stopping **Lash Out**, I might add!), and then drop **Nightmare** backed with **Tendrils of Corruption** to keep him from attacking and to keep out of burn range.

Record: 3-0

Game 4: TheFlash414 (Black-Red Liliana Vess)

He kills my guys one by one and proceeds to wreck me completely with **Void** for three (taking out **Phyrexian Vault**, **Moonglove Changeling**, and **Garza's Assassin** from my hand) and then uses **Liliana Vess** to strip the rest of my hand. He eventually uses Vess to bring five guys into play at once (four of them mine), and I die heinously to my own creatures.

Record: 3-1

Game 5: manxset (Red-Green Burn)

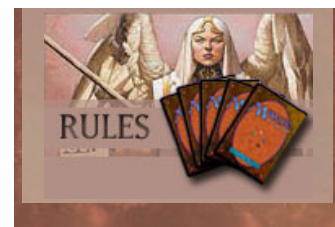
I get down double **Scarblade Elite**, **Ghostly Changeling**, and **Moonglove Changeling**. He hits me with double **Lava Axe**, but **Tendrils of Corruption** on a **Llanowar Elves** puts me at a really healthy life total, sealing this game.

Record: 4-1

So far, I've fared extremely well against any strategy that drops a lot of creatures, which is to be expected—I have 25 cards in my deck dedicated to killing creatures! My loss so far came to **Liliana Vess**, backed with discard and mass-removal. The problem against that deck was that I didn't have enough offense to kill **Liliana Vess** (or drop her loyalty) before I got hit by her big ability.

By the same token... man, wouldn't I like to play **Liliana Vess** in my deck? My deck is filled with answers, and the ability to tutor up one of my choosing is fantastic. Also, I don't really have a way to attack the hand, and **Liliana Vess** is a ticking bomb—a card a turn, turning into a huge **Zombify** for every graveyard. After checking that **Liliana Vess** was a budget card (they are 3 tickets each, easily fitting into this deck under the 30-ticket-per-deck cap that this column has), I added three to the deck.

To make room, I took out one copy each of **Big Game Hunter**, **Moonglove Changeling**, and **Ghostly Changeling**. To be fair, I probably should have taken out all copies of **Big Game Hunter** here—it is great in a deck that can take advantage of it being a rebel (by tutoring it into play for free) or madness (by playing it at instant speed for a single ♣), but it is too situational in a deck that already packs so many answer-anything kill cards.



In: 3 Liliana Vess

Out: 1 Big Game Hunter, 1 Moonglove Changeling, 1 Ghostly Changeling

Silent Killers 2.0		
Main Deck 60 cards		
24 Swamp	1 Big Game Hunter	3 Liliana Vess
24 lands	3 Cairn Wanderer	4 Nameless Inversion
	4 Garza's Assassin	3 Phyrexian Vault
	2 Ghostly Changeling	4 Tendrils of Corruption
	2 Moonglove Changeling	
	4 Nekrataal	14 other spells
	2 Nightmare	
	4 Scarblade Elite	
	22 creatures	

Game 6: Devillion (Black-Green Discard)

I face off against another deck that is light on creatures, and heavy on control—but in this case, the control is in the form of discard spells. I get hit with **Stupor**, **Funeral Charm**, **Ravenous Rats**, **Stupor** again, **Funeral Charm** again—basically, my entire hand gets stripped, and then **The Rack** comes down. I barely know what hits me before I get reduced to zero, without having played nearly any card of consequence—my creatures get **Smallpoxed**, making this an even more vexing experience!

Record: 4-2

Game 7: DACEROM (Red-Green Pyrohemia)

He gets down a couple of early guys, which I kill with **Nameless Inversion** and **Scarblade Elite**. I then repeat this with his next two creatures, but he gets down **Pyrohemia** to control the board, and then faces off his smaller guys plus **Briarhorns** against my **Ghostly Changeling** and **Cairn Wanderer**. Eventually, the game ends when he is forced to take all of the creatures (and **Pyrohemia**) off of the board at the end of my turn. He drops **Hostility**, I hit it with **Tendrils of Corruption**, and then drop **Nightmare** as a 9/9 to win.

Record: 5-2

Game 8: WarEmblem (Blue-Black Rogues)

I get the early momentum by killing his **Latchkey Faerie** with **Nekrataal**, and dropping **Garza's Assassin** on the board. He retaliates with **Morsel Theft**, **Peppersmoke** (killing my 'taal) and by using **Familiar's Ruse** to take out my **Nightmare**. With my board practically decimated, WarEmblem drops a lot of small flyers, and proceeds to peck my life total down to zero.

Record: 5-3

Okay, time for some more changes. **Garza's Assassin** hasn't been great in this deck—once the **Recover** ability triggers, I almost never want to pay half my life to bring it back, meaning that it's not in the graveyard for **Scarblade Elite**. **Cairn Wanderer** has also been a big goose egg—my opponents don't like playing with non-vanilla creatures for the most part, so he's usually either been a 4/4, a 4/4 flyer, or a 4/4 first striker—and while I had him in there because he's cool (and an Assassin, and as a finisher), I figure I can swap him out with something more useful.

In the forums of my initial Lost Tribes article, several people suggested I use **Nightshade Assassin** in a mono-black Assassin deck. This makes sense—I'll almost always have black cards in hand in order to take advantage of him, and he's a **Nekrataal** that can hit black and artifact creatures when my hand is full. I swap three copies of **Nightshade Assassin** straight in for the Wanderers.

I also bring back in a **Ghostly Changeling**, which is a great beater in this deck. I tend to end up with a lot of mana at the end of the game, so he works like a **Nightmare** that I can drop on turn three to start the beats (plus, he's an Assassin).

The last swap-in I make is a threesome of **Graveborn Muse**. I keep running out of cards in hand in the longer games, and I need a way to fight attrition. **Phyrexian Vault** has been fantastic so far (in fact, much more so than I would have given it credit for—there are all sorts of spells you don't want your opponent to resolve on your creatures), but it isn't enough, **Graveborn Muse** works great with Changelings, and **Phyrexian Vault** gives me an out to get rid of **Graveborn Muse** should I get low on life.



Silent Killers 3.0		
Main Deck 60 cards		

profitable conclusion, while getting **Scarblade Elite** back into focus as the most feared Assassin of all! See you all in seven!

*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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