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Silent Killers (Part 2 of 2)

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Building on a Budget
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Hello everyone, and welcome back to Building on a Budget! [Last week](#), we started the evolution of a Standard-based Assassins deck. When we left off last week, we had evolved into this deck:

| Silent Killers 3.0 | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 24 Swamp | 3 Ghostly Changeling | 3 Liliana Vess |
| 24 lands | 4 Graveborn Muse | 4 Nameless Inversion |
| | 2 Moonglove Changeling | 3 Phyrexian Vault |
| | 4 Nekkaraal | 4 Tendrils of Corruption |
| | 2 Nightmare | 14 other spells |
| | 3 Nightshade Assassin | |
| | 4 Scarblade Elite | |
| | 22 creatures | |

At the end of the last column, I mentioned that we wanted to solve two problems for the deck:

Problem #1: **Scarblade Elite** dies too easily and too often.

This is a good problem to have—it means that people view **Scarblade Elite** as a threat, and they feel that they must strike him down before he starts going crazy and killing everything the opponent drops. For me, it means that I need to find a way to either keep **Scarblade Elite** alive, or to bring it back from the dead.

One problem with a reanimation strategy in this deck is that I *want* my creatures going to the graveyard... as long as I have a **Scarblade Elite** in play. If Elite is not in play, I *want* to bring other creatures back to my hand—**Nightshade Assassin** and **Nekkaraal** have great use if they come into play, kill a creature, die, and then come back again to kill another creature. There is tension between these two, so if I were to go this route, I would not necessarily want to play it as a four-of.

Some ways to keep **Scarblade Elite** alive, rather than bringing it back from the dead, are to give it shroud (**Whispersilk Cloak**, **Cloak and Dagger**), or make it larger (**Bad Moon**, **Gauntlet of Power**, **Coat of Arms**, **Door of Destinies**). In particular, I like the idea of **Door of Destinies**—I have a lot of Assassins in this deck, and an incidental of playing them over the course of the game could be making all of my other Assassins into game-ending threats. This would allow me, in addition, to kill the **Nightmare** slot to focus more on Assassins—if all of my Assassins come into play late-game as 6/5 and 6/6 creatures, it means that I don't have as much need for a card like **Nightmare** to be a finisher.

Problem #2: I'm not taking advantage of **Liliana Vess**'s second ability.

Liliana Vess can tutor up any card in my deck for the cost of 2 loyalty. This means that I can put a lot more one-of cards in my deck—cards that I don't necessarily want to draw every game, but that are in my deck in the case that I do need them, and can tutor for them. This works well with the

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reanimation problem from above—if I have one or two ways to bring a creature from my graveyard into play (or into my hand), I don't necessarily want to draw them every game—but Liliانا will allow me to draw that card if I really need to.

In order to solve problem #1, I decided to add three cards to the deck—**Recover**, **Door of Destinies**, and **Profane Command**. I added only a single **Profane Command** to the deck, as it is a more pricy card (4 tickets), but a very powerful one. When playing on a budget, it is very cost prohibitive to buy a four-card set of a card that runs 4 tickets. My budget each column is 30 tickets, so four **Profane Commands** would run me over half of my budget! However, since I have **Liliana Vess** in the deck (currently running at about 2.5 tickets), I can effectively run four copies of **Profane Command** by only having one in my deck—one at four tickets, and three ways to tutor it at 2.5 tickets each.

In order to solve problem #2, check out problem #1! I've added a single **Recover** and **Profane Command** to the deck, both of which are situationally useful. In addition, I changed out a single **Tendrils of Corruption** for a single **Consume Spirit**—**Tendrils** is generally great as a reactionary spell, or a way to gain quick life as a combat trick, but it can't kill an opponent. Having a single **Consume Spirit** lets me give up a little flexibility (it is a sorcery, and it gains me 2 life less than **Tendrils** on average, thanks to the 1 life startup cost!) for the ability to outright finish off an opponent late game.

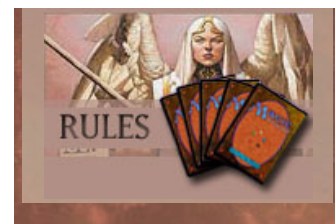
I also decided to add a single **Weed-Pruner Poplar**, to see how well it works in the deck. It is a higher-cost assassin designed to kill smaller-cost weenies, so I'm not sure how effective it will be—but I'm willing to give it a shot. I also add in a single **Mind Shatter** (2.5 tickets) as a way to battle decks that have a heavy control element, and a single **Cruel Edict** as a way to deal with protection-from-Black creatures (such as **Whirling Dervish** or **Chameleon Colossus**).

In order to make room for the one-ofs in the deck, I decide that **Phyrexian Vault** is the card that needs to get reduced down to a one-of—it has been decent so far, but the addition of **Graveborn Muse** has allowed me to have more card-drawing power than I had initially started with, so I can afford to lose a little of the redundancy offered by the Vault.

In: 3 **Door of Destinies**, 1 **Recover**, 1 **Consume Spirit**, 1 **Cruel Edict**, 1 **Profane Command**, 1 **Mind Shatter**, 1 **Weed-Pruner Poplar**

Out: 2 **Nightmare**, 2 **Moonglove Changeling**, 2 **Tendrils of Corruption**, 2 **Phyrexian Vault**, 1 **Graveborn Muse**

Total Ticket Cost: 25 tickets



| Silent Killers 4.0 | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Main Deck | | |
| 60 cards | | |
| 24 Swamp | 3 Ghostly Changeling | 1 Consume Spirit |
| 24 lands | 3 Graveborn Muse | 1 Cruel Edict |
| | 4 Nekrataal | 3 Door of Destinies |
| | 3 Nightshade Assassin | 3 Liliana Vess |
| | 4 Scarblade Elite | 1 Mind Shatter |
| | 1 Weed-Pruner Poplar | 4 Nameless Inversion |
| | 18 creatures | 1 Phyrexian Vault |
| | | 1 Profane Command |
| | | 1 Recover |
| | | 2 Tendrils of Corruption |
| | | 18 other spells |

Game 1: Hioo (Green-Blue-White "Comes into Play" Creatures)

He concedes after knocking me down to zero lands with double **Mwonvuli Acid-Moss**. However, I have **Scarblade Elite** on the board with six Assassins in hand, and his attack force was **Civic Wayfinder**, **Masked Admirers** and **Yavimaya Dryad**. I would have been able to start killing off his creatures by discarding down from eight to seven cards each turn, and he would have had to start drawing more threats before I could draw lands. He assumed he had this game won—but I wish he had played it out, because I think that I could have pulled this game out by discarding Assassins until I had all of his creatures dead, and then started playing the lands I drew later.

Record: Does not Count

Game 2: K1_Dna (Five-Color Fog)

I get down a **Scarblade Elite**, and then drop double **Door of Destiny**. He gets down **Mulldrifter** and then double **Doomed Necromancer**. I drop double **Ghostly Changeling**, **Nightshade Assassin** and **Graveborn Muse**, and start trying to break through his board. He has triple **Holy Day** and double **Pollen Lullaby**, making it virtually impossible for me to get through his board. On top of this, he drops **Ajani Goldmane** and starts gaining 2 life a turn.

He can't do damage to me either, since I have **Scarblade Elite** and a **Phyrexian Vault**. I can kill any creature he drops, if I want to. I am drawing three cards a turn (thanks to double Changeling and the Muse), and I have **Tendrils of Corruption** in hand in case I start getting low in life. I finally draw my game-winner: **Mind Shatter!** This allows me to strip every last **Fog** effect out of his hand, and when he doesn't draw one the next turn, he concedes—with double Door on the board, my changelings start at 9/9 and only get larger from there!

Record: 1-0

Game 3: norinobu_k (Mono-Black Control)

We trade creatures and removal back and forth, until I finally get down **Liliana Vess** and start stripping his hand. He drops **Mortivore** when Vess is at seven counters, and I drop **Scarblade Elite** plus put my eighth counter on Vess. He draws removal, and swings in for 6 against Vess. For some stupid reason, I think that **Nameless Inversion** gives creatures -3/-3, and so I make his **Mortivore** a 9/3 (instead of a 3/3 that I thought it would be) allowing him to kill Vess in a single swing. I then draw **Profane Command**, which would have allowed me to bring back **Scarblade Elite** plus allowed me to use Vess to tutor for something useful, and I end up losing the game because I'm one mana behind of being able to bring back a creature plus give his **Mortivore** enough -X/-X to kill it (including taking into account that it would shrink by an additional one by bringing a creature back from my graveyard).



Record: 1-1

Game 4: psicoloko (White Weenie)

This game progresses fantastically for me—I get a second-turn Elite, a fourth-turn **Nekrataal**, trade the 'Taal for a **Benalish Knight**, use the dead 'Taal to kill his **Goldmeadow Harrier**, drop **Graveborn Muse** to keep my hand full, and drop **Liliana Vess** to tutor up an offense—**Door of Destinies**, and then Assassins to pump my board. He drops **Ajani Goldmane**, but I just ignore it, let him gain 2 life a turn, and start hitting him for 7-8 damage each swing. Eventually I overcome him.

Record: 2-1

Game 5: CraigWalsh (Black-Green Treefolk)

I drop **Phyrexian Vault** (which I seem to draw a lot as a one-of) on turn three, and **Door of Destinies** on turn four. He drops **Leaf-Crowned Elder**, which I kill with a (now) 3/2 **Nekrataal**. He plays **Weed-Pruner Poplar**, and I get **Graveborn Muse**. He then uses his Poplar to shrink my **Nekrataal**, and plays **Rootgrapple** to send both my 'Taal and my **Door of Destinies** to the graveyard.

I kill his Poplar back with **Cruel Edict**, and then drop a Poplar of my own. He drops **Orchard Warden**, which I shrink to 3/5 with my Poplar, allowing me to kill it with a **Consume Spirit** for five. This allows me to swing into an empty board, and eventually win thanks to the extra cards drawn by **Graveborn Muse**.

Record: 3-1

I haven't been terribly impressed with **Weed-Pruner Poplar**—every time I've drawn it, it's just pretty much been a 3/3 doof—and that's not great for five mana. My deck is skewing very high on the mana charts (my average mana cost is 3.3, and that doesn't count **Tendrils** needing extra **Swamps**, or the ⓧ in **Mind Shatter**, **Consume Spirit**, or **Profane Command**). Instead of having the Poplar, I decide to add in extra land, to make sure that I can hit a **Magic** number of four (for **Nekrataal** / **Nightshade Assassin** / **Door of Destinies**) each game.

I used to have a lot more black-mana-intensiveness for my deck, due to **Garza's Assassin**, **Nightmare** and **Tendrils of Corruption**. I used to have ten of these three cards in my deck—now I am down to two (two **Tendrils**), so having **Swamps** isn't as important as it once was. Because of all the X spells, having a way to build up mana over the course of a few turns would be great—so I take out three **Swamps**, and replace the **Swamps** and the Poplar with four copies of **Dreadship Reef** (which could also be **Molten Slagheap**—either would be fine, because all I care about it Black mana). This will enable me to build up "X" mana a lot more easily, allowing for a really game-ending **Consume Spirit** or **Profane Command** on the back of **Liliana Vess's** tutoring ability.

Out: 3 Swamp, 1 Weed-Pruner Poplar

In: 4 Dreadship Reef

| Silent Killers 5.0 | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Main Deck | | |
| 60 cards | | |
| 4 Dreadship Reef | 3 Ghostly Changeling | 1 Consume Spirit |
| 21 Swamp | 3 Graveborn Muse | 1 Cruel Edict |
| 25 lands | 4 Nekrataal | 3 Door of Destinies |
| | 3 Nightshade Assassin | 3 Liliana Vess |
| | 4 Scarblade Elite | 1 Mind Shatter |
| | 17 creatures | 4 Nameless Inversion |
| | | 1 Phyrexian Vault |
| | | 1 Profane Command |

1 Recover
2 Tendrils of Corruption

18 other spells

Game 6: bh3ll10m (Black-Red Burn)

He drops **Oona's Prowler** and uses it to madness out **Reckless Wurm** on turn three. I drop **Scarblade Elite**, and he **Incinerates** it off the board. This allows me to use his **Oona's Prowler** to madness out my own **Nightshade Assassin**, killing his Prowler—and then I block his Wurm, stack first-strike damage, and use **Nameless Inversion** to kill his 4/4 trampler. I follow this up with a **Mind Shatter** for three, taking out **Liliana Vess**, **Swamp** and another card from his hand.

bh3ll10m gets right back in the game by dropping a land and **Chandra Nalaar**, killing my **Nightshade Assassin**. He then drops **Reckless Wurm**, and I use **Profane Command** kill his Wurm and bring back the Elite, which he promptly also kills with Chandra. I drop **Liliana Vess** and knock the last card out of his hand on consecutive turns—both times a **Tarox Bladewing**, while he only has two **Mountains** on the board (to be fair, I had double **Nameless Inversion** in my hand, so they were under control).

We go back and forth with Chandra and Liliana—I start tutoring up threats (**Graveborn Muse**), and he is forced to use Chandra to kill them, keeping him from his ultimate 8-mana blow-me-up ability. I finally draw a **Dreadship Reef** and start building up counters—and then I use **Liliana Vess** to grab another Vess, so I can start anew. This gives me enough time to tutor up **Consume Spirit**, which takes out his seven-counter Chandra, and I then drop back-to-back **Graveborn Muses** while at 24 life to seal this very long and back-and-forth game!

Record: 4-1

Game 7: Terrax (Blue-White Merfolk)

He gets down **Stonybrook Schoolmaster**, and I kill it immediately with **Nightshade Assassin**. I let a **Fallsage** live for a turn, in favor of dropping **Door of Destinies**. This lets me save a second **Assassin** for a **Drowner of Secrets** the following turn, and then a **Nameless Inversion** plus a **Ghostly Changeling** for a second **Drowner of Secrets** the turn after. He gets **Wandering Graybeard** on the board, but at this point I have a pair of 5/4 first strikers and a 5/5 **Shade**, which allows me to win in two swings.

Record: 5-1

Game 8: Difool42 (Black-Red Goblins)

He starts with **Knucklebone Witch** and **Weirding Shaman**, but gets stuck on two lands with a third-turn **Frogtooser Banneret**. I drop **Scarblade Elite** and kill his **Banneret** with a **Nightshade Assassin**, and then drop **Ghostly Changeling** and **Graveborn Muse**. He draws more lands, and gets a second **Knucklebone Witch** and a second **Shaman**, but I start trading my guys two-for-one thanks to **Scarblade Elite**, and even though I draw eight straight lands with **Muse** plus **Changeling** plus my draw phase, my ninth card is a **Nameless Inversion**—this allows me to kill his freshly played **Wort** and a **Knucklebone Witch** on the same turn with that and my **Elite**, so my guys can push through for lethal.

Record: 6-1

Game 9: lung174 (Black-Blue Control)

I get down **Scarblade Elite**, and he casts double **Telling Time** and a **Diabolic Tutor**. I decide I don't like his **Tutor**, and play **Mind Shatter** for three (with him having five cards in hand), knocking out a second **Tutor**, a **Swamp**, and a **Pyroclasm**. I never see a source of red, and my **Scarblade Elite** knocks him down to eight before he drops **Grave Pact** and **Nantuko Husk** in the same turn. I drop **Door of Destinies** and use **Nameless Inversion** to kill his **Husk**, to get a counter on **Door**. I then drop **Nekrataal** (against an empty board), and he drops **Academy Researchers**. I kill it with **Nightshade Assassin** on my turn (sacrificing the **Assassin** to **Grave Pact**), and swing in for 5. He doesn't draw a way to stop my **Nekrataal**, and it wins me the game on my next turn.

Record: 7-1

Game 10: Sunflair (Black-Red Rogues)

I have to double mulligan, and stick with a hand that has two **Swamps**, two **Nightshade Assassins**, and a **Door of Destinies**. He drops a **Molten Slagheap** and a **Mountain**, puts a counter on his **Slagheap**, and uses it the following turn to play **Prickly Boggart** on turn three. Sunflair ends up without any sources of straight black mana, which allows me to get to eight cards (which isn't for lack of trying to drop a land—I still hadn't drawn one!), and madness out back-to-back **Nightshade Assassins**—one to kill his first **Boggart**, and one to kill a replacement one he dropped on turn six. He concedes after failing to draw a land for the fifth turn in a row, whereas I have two lands, another **Assassin** in hand, two **Nameless Inversions**, and a draw that will explode the second I get a third land (for double **Ghostly Changeling**).

Record: 8-1



Game 11: GusJanitor (Elementals)

He gets two **Primal Beyonds**, a Vivid land and a **Swamp**, but he has to evoke double **Mulldrifter** and an **Æthersnipe**. I drop double **Door of Destinies** (both set to Assassin, of course), and then drop triple **Nekrataal** against an empty board. The first dies to GusJanitor's **Nameless Inversion**, but the other two end up as 7/6 monstrosities over the course of a couple of turns, and win the game on their own.

Record: 9-1

Silent Assassins was an amazingly fun deck to play. The Assassins, the tribal theme, being able to grow my guys to large size with **Door of Destinies**, the control elements, the one-ofs that I could tutor for, and **Liliana Vess** all worked extremely well together. The deck was potent, powerful, fun to play with, and fun to play against (no games were complete blowouts in either direction), and I would very much recommend playing this deck if you're looking for a good time with some black cards that you probably have around!

Next week: The Great Round Robin Experiment—going beyond what you've seen before!

*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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