

The Taste of Kamigawa Neon Dynasty: Black Intro

Welcome to the third part of this series covering Black in Kamigawa NEO and the respective faction that aligns with said color, the Reckoners. These intro parts are probably going to get shorter and shorter due to more and more overlapping information being covered in the previous parts. Of course if you haven't read the previous parts covering the Imperial Court and the Saiba Futurists you can read those [here](https://douglysium.tumblr.com/post/679785148245573632/the-taste-of-kamigawa-neon-dynasty-imperial)(<https://douglysium.tumblr.com/post/679785148245573632/the-taste-of-kamigawa-neon-dynasty-imperial>) and [here](https://douglysium.tumblr.com/post/683590210069626880/the-taste-of-kamigawa-neon-dynasty-blue)(<https://douglysium.tumblr.com/post/683590210069626880/the-taste-of-kamigawa-neon-dynasty-blue>) respectively.

With that out of the way here is a quick refresher for those who have forgotten. In Kamigawa: Neon Dynasty there is a major theme of tradition vs modernity. This is mainly represented in two ways. The first way is through enchantments and artifacts, with enchantments representing tradition while artifacts represent modernity and, secondly, is the color pie itself. In the second case Green and Blue act as the benchmarks for this conflict with Green being the most traditional and enchantment focused out of all the colors in the set and Blue being the most modern and artifact focused color in the set, from there all the other colors fall somewhere between Green and Blue. From most traditional/enchantment focused to most modern/artifact focused the colors go Green, White, Black, Red and then finally Blue. Which means that in this set Black has an even balance of tradition and modernity as well as caring about enchantments and artifacts equally, as opposed to preferring one over the other.




Black

Black falling smack dab in the middle is honestly probably the easiest to understand and explain. You see in Magic Black philosophy is usually summarized with the phrase “Power Through Opportunity.” The meaning of this phrase is actually quite simple, as Black philosophy is one that champions always putting yourself, your wants, and your needs above that of others. Thus, “Power Through Opportunity” basically just means get what you need through any means necessary, no tactic is too underhanded or dishonorable when it comes to surviving and winning.

Black is a color philosophy that explicitly believes there is no objective morality, unlike White, and thus in its eyes anything and everything is fair game when it comes to winning and surviving, no matter how dishonorable or disturbing the tactic.

From this point, it is pretty easy to figure out why Black is in the middle of this conflict. Colors like White are trying to make sure technology is safe for everyone, Green argues that tradition and the natural order are what's good, and Blue argues that technology and the future are the way to go. However, when Black is confronted with a choice between tradition/enchantments and modernity/artifacts it is not concerned with what is morally good, if what they are using is dangerous to others, or whether it relies on past traditions or the newest technology. Black is most concerned with how these things can help it survive and achieve its goals.

Nezumi Bladeblessor

2 



Creature — Rat Samurai



Nezumi Bladeblessor has deathtouch as long as you control an artifact.

Nezumi Bladeblessor has menace as long as you control an enchantment. *(It can't be blocked except by two or more creatures.)*

"It's not one or the other, kami or technology. Both offer power. I will not limit myself."


3/2

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To Black things like “right and wrong,” “good and bad,” and “natural and unnatural” are all made up concepts and it will use whatever gets it where it wants because at the end of the day it's the victors that right history and power that talks. This is definitely one of the situations where we see how Black philosophy can, at its best, encourage more pragmatic ways of thinking (even if it can encourage selfishness too). If Black comes across an illegal mech or ancient magic from a long-forgotten era its first question is not usually “Is this an enchantment or machine,” “is this natural or unnatural,” or “is it right or wrong to use this” but “can this help me and if so how?”

Okiba Salvage

4 



Sorcery



Return target creature or Vehicle card from your graveyard to the battlefield. Then put two +1/+1 counters on that permanent if you control an artifact and an enchantment.

“Some fool would rather throw a whole mech away than repair one hydraulic actuator? It must be my lucky day.”



Also, while Black is definitely a color that prizes using your head, when in comparison to Green and Blue Black is definitely a color that lives more in the now than the past of Green or the future of Blue. It is trying to build a future that best suits its needs at the end of the day, as opposed to caring specifically about whether the future is one of tradition or modernity. If there's one thing Black argues you shouldn't do it is needlessly restrain yourself.

THE RECKONERS

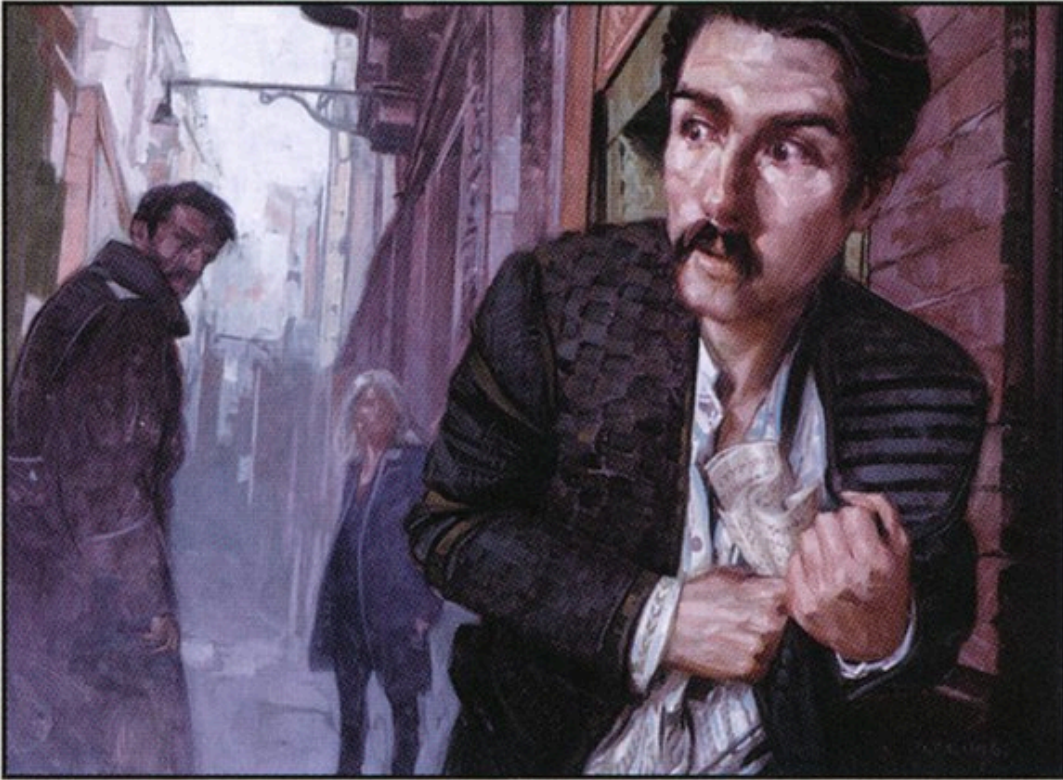
This, of course, brings us to the Black aligned faction of the set, the Reckoners. In “The Planeswalker’s Guide To Kamigawa: Neon Dynasty” they are described as a sprawling loosely connected series of criminal gangs that trace their history to before The Kami War. They typically operate as legitimate businesses but will quickly deal out harsh violence according to a very strict code. Alliance, betrayals, and turf wars between Reckoner gangs occur frequently but they are known to unite against outsiders. The Reckoners are also stated to be the most flexible out of Kamigawa’s major organizations/factions because of the fact that they have no problem relying on both technology and kami powers as long as it gets the job done. They also don’t care about what the future should look like as long as they can profit off it. It is mentioned that this faction attracts members who have grown disillusioned with society and that many embittered and cynical Imperial samurai have ended up joining the Reckoners.



Also, the nezumi-led Okiba Reckoners attract bikers and mechanics. The Reckoners are also stated to recruit poisoners, kami, channelers, and ninjas. Apparently, there's a strong sense of family and fellowship within the Reckoners no matter the person's origin. The Reckoners demand tests of loyalty on a regular basis and every member of the Reckoners is inked with magical tattoos that ensure loyalty and prevent betrayal. As a recruit climbs the ranks they receive additional tattoos, each representing a new binding or connection forged within the gang. Reckoner bosses are usually tattooed from neck to toe.

With that out of the way, we can look at some of the ways that these reflect their color philosophy. First off there's the fact that they are criminal gangs. Now, whether or not you're a criminal doesn't automatically determine your color alignment since there are any number of reasons for one being considered a criminal.

Hunted Witness



Creature — Human



When Hunted Witness dies, create a 1/1 white Soldier creature token with lifelink.

He ferried weapons, spells, exotic animals—but his most dangerous cargo was the truth.

1/1

However, Black is a color philosophy that believes that there is no objective morality and one that seeks to always put itself first at any cost so it is safe to say that it is probably more likely to commit crimes or be involved in a criminal organization than colors like White or Green. The frequency of constant alliances, betrayals, and turf wars is something that can also be sort of seen to be a notable feature with some of the other black aligned factions in Magic like the Rakdos and Orzhov of Ravnica as well as the vampire faction of Innistrad(An aspect of the vampires that I have mentioned in this article-
<https://douglysium.tumblr.com/post/664656723908362240/the-taste-of-innistrads-vampires>).

Act of Treason

2



Sorcery




Gain control of target creature until end of turn. Untap that creature. It gains haste until end of turn.

Each day uncertainty and rumors spread, and each night attendance at the Juri Revue increases.


— Matt Stewart

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Arrogant Outlaw

2 



Creature — Vampire Noble 

When Arrogant Outlaw enters the battlefield, if an opponent lost life this turn, each opponent loses 2 life and you gain 2 life.

The debased remnants of the Falkenrath bloodline prowl the passes near their ruined castles.

3/2


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The reason these things tend to occur in Black aligned factions is because Black philosophy is one that prizes putting yourself first at any cost while also trying to gain more power. So if you have a faction full of people who follow this philosophy it would make sense that in a lot of scenarios they would end up vying for power all the time, even if it came at the cost of some of the other people within the faction. However, it is also important to remember that Black is not a philosophy that necessarily discourages working together or teaming up. Remember Black is all about gaining power through ANY means necessary, including things like laws and codes and it

is also fine with working together with others so long as said partnership or alliance has a tangible benefit to it.

Village Cannibals

2 




Creature — Human



Whenever another Human creature dies, put a +1/+1 counter on Village Cannibals.

Some have endured the horrors of Innistrad by becoming the worst monsters of all.

 Bud Cook

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2/2

Relentless Rats

1  



Creature — Rat

 25

Relentless Rats gets +1/+1 for each other creature on the battlefield named Relentless Rats.


A deck can have any number of cards named Relentless Rats.

2/2

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Mob

4 



Instant



Convoke (Your creatures can help cast this spell. Each creature you tap while casting this spell pays for 1 or one mana of that creature's color.)

Destroy target creature.

Not all monsters fight with teeth and claws.

This is why a mainly Black aligned faction like the Reckoners can have a strict code or law without losing its Black alignment, this also applies to clearly mono-black factions too. Furthermore, this is also why the Reckoners are willing to team up against outside forces or threats.

Their propensity to operate as legitimate businesses simply has to do with Black's connection to stealth and underhandedness. Since its philosophy is all about doing whatever it takes using betrayal, trickery and stealth are all fair game. Similarly to Blue, Black also takes advantage of useful knowledge and is ready and willing to take advantage of the fact that an opponent can't do much if they don't even know you're there.



The specifically noted flexibility of the Reckoners with both technology and kami powers when in comparison to the other factions ties back into the previously mentioned themes of Black philosophy and the ideals of getting things you need via any means necessary, and this is also why they don't seem to care about what the future looks like as long as they can benefit from it. The fact that the faction draws members who have grown disillusioned with society, such as cynical Imperial Samurai, is an interesting one. An aspect of Black that we sometimes see is a philosophy that has a focus on the harsh truths and realities of the world.

Cruel Reality

5  



Enchantment — Aura Curse



Enchant player

At the beginning of enchanted player's upkeep, that player sacrifices a creature or planeswalker. If the player can't, he or she loses 5 life.

As Gideon watched the initiate murder his crop-mate, his admiration of the city of Naktamun gave way to horror.


084/269 M Story Spotlight 2/5
AKH • EN  KIERAN YANNER



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This sort of ties into Black's any means necessary philosophy. Black is a philosophy that points to the world and highlights the fact that it is unfair. Thusly, trying to needlessly restrain or limit yourself with subjective morals or laws is just shooting yourself in the foot in its eyes. Not to say that everyone who is disillusioned with something is Black aligned but it makes sense why a Black aligned faction or group could potentially attract or take advantage of these people. Another thing to consider is things like poverty and the like. If one lacks resources they will of course usually become more desperate and may do anything they can to survive.

Undercity Scrounger

2 



Artifact Creature — Human Rogue



☞: Create a Treasure token. Activate only if a creature died this turn.
(It's an artifact with "☞, Sacrifice this artifact: Add one mana of any color.")

"That will pay for another arm extension all by itself! Well, as long as it doesn't explode."

1/4

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The presence of the nezumi just ties into Black's connection with the rat creature type.



The reason Black gets so many rats in Magic the Gathering is not necessarily because rats are Black aligned but rather because rats are commonly feared or seen as scary or dirty. Since Black is willing to win via any means necessary it is totally willing to take advantage of common fears and misconceptions people may have about something in order to gain an upper hand, which is represented in the frequent presence of creature types like spiders, insects, and nightmares in the color. Things that people usually want to avoid or are afraid of. Rats also have a connection to disease and the like which further connects to Black as it is a color that will encourage the use of underhanded tactics like diseases or poisons to win if able, and even though some may point out

that the connection to rats and diseases may be a bit overblown in some cases that only ties into my previously mentioned point about public perception and common phobias. The bit about disease and poison already answers why the Reckoners have poisoners. So what about the bikers, mechanics, kami, channelers, and ninjas?



The bikers, mechanics, kami, and channelers can all be pretty obviously connected to how the Reckoners are willing to use both kami and technology of any kind to get what they want and achieve power. Their use of ninjas is because while ninjas are famous for espionage and intel gathering they are also famous for performing assassinations and the like. Ninjas and samurai are

also often compared with each other a lot and this often leads to samurai being portrayed as the more moral, noble, and straightforward fighters than the underhanded and stealthy tactics of ninjas (despite the fact that this is not always the case and isn't quite as binary of course).

The fact that there's a strong sense of family and fellowship within the Reckoners is also interesting to note within this Black aligned faction and it is once again important to remember something. First off, this ties back into the previously mentioned point about how Black isn't necessarily against things like friendship, laws, and alliances as long as they help it get what it wants. Colors like White see laws/rules as an inherently good thing, assuming the laws are just and fair any way, while Black just sees them as inherently neutral and a means to an end. Secondly, Black isn't inherently against having friends or family nor does it believe those things don't exist, but it would probably argue that friendships and family dynamics are a form of mutually beneficial relationships and that everyone wants something. There is a big difference between putting yourself first and being alone. Black is a philosophy that is just saying if you need to pick between yourself or others you should always pick yourself and your needs first. The fact that the Reckoners don't care about one's origin is tied to Black being willing to use and/or ally with those of any background or place as long as they are useful to them. The frequent tests of loyalty and the use of magical tattoos to insure continued loyalty and to prevent betrayal ties into the whole willingness to use laws and alliances to get what they want thing I mentioned earlier, the same goes for the fact that they receive more of these tattoos as they climb the ranks.



The name of the Reckoners I assume comes from the idea that they are a force to be Reckoned with or something(I'm not 100% sure about this). However, one thing I am sure about is that they clearly take inspiration from the Yakuza, a famous Japanese crime syndicate.



("Tattooed Helper" made by Suzuki Kinsan sometime between 1900 and 1910)

The parallels between them and the Reckoners are most evident with the presence of tattoos, especially full body ones, the strict codes of loyalty and respect, their connection and control over both legitimate and illegal business. The fact that the Reckoners can trace their history to before the Great Kami War parallels how the Yakuza can trace their own origins to the middle of the Edo period. The Reckoners biker gangs are probably based on the fact that the Bōsōzoku subcultures often have illegal modifications on their bikes and some comparisons/traits that they seem to have with the Yakuza. When it comes to their codes of loyalty the most immediate example I can think of for the Yakuza is Yubitsume, a ritual in which one cuts off part of their pinky finger as a form of atonement and to show remorse for some sort of major offense.

Mechanics

Mechanically Black stands out quite a bit in this set because of the prevalence of cards and abilities that reward or require the controller to have both enchantments and artifacts.



The most obvious reason for this is that Black sits smack dab in the middle of tradition vs modernity conflict and thus has an even split between traditional/enchantment means and modern/artifact means. It also reflects the manifestation of Black philosophy on the plane as one that will use any means necessary to achieve what it wants, so it rewards you for using any means possible to get what you want in game. One thing I haven't really had a chance to talk about regarding the gameplay of Magic's color is the symbolic representation of their gameplay and how they are trying to encourage you to act and think like the color would while you play

the game. In Black's case it is trying to encourage you to do whatever it takes to win, sacrifice creatures, pay life, put -1/-1 counters on things, and on Kamigawa it becomes a bit more specific.

Nezumi Bladeblesser

2 



Creature — Rat Samurai



Nezumi Bladeblesser has deathtouch as long as you control an artifact.

Nezumi Bladeblesser has menace as long as you control an enchantment. *(It can't be blocked except by two or more creatures.)*

"It's not one or the other, kami or technology. Both offer power. I will not limit myself."

3/2

As mentioned in the flavor text of Nezumi Bladeblessor: “It’s not one or the other, kami or technology. Both offer power. I will not limit myself.” This is reflected in the gameplay by having a decent number of cards become the most useful when you control both enchantments and artifacts and if you were to try to limit yourself to picking one or other there is a pretty high likelihood that you’ll feel like the cards are being limited in their potential and you are shooting yourself in the foot by only committing to one, unlike the other colors who are philosophically encouraged to lean more towards artifacts/modernity or enchantments/tradition, since they view those things as the “right way” for the most part. Cards like Nezumi Bladeblessor basically put this philosophical way of thinking in a tangible easy to process card form and gives a clear signifier of what you are missing out on if you don’t approach your Black deck and cards with Black philosophy in mind.



Black and Blue both have a lot of ninjas and thus a lot of Ninjutsu, by the way, Ninjutsu is an ability that for a cost has “Return an unblocked attacker you control to hand: Put this card onto the battlefield from your hand tapped and attacking.” The reason Black gets a lot of ninjas was mentioned previously, ninjas specialize in underhanded tactics and assassinations to get the job done. So Ninjutsu falls into a representation of their underhandedness and willingness to cheat and perform underhanded attacks while someone is defenseless and/or down(i.e. not blocking your creature) in order to get in a free attack in this case(kind of like a deadlier sucker punch). Not to mention that Black also has a decent amount of evasion, sort of like Blue. One of

the most famous forms of evasion Black has is with the keyword Menace, a keyword that reads “This creature can’t be blocked except by two or more creatures.”

Land

Takenuma, Abandoned Mire, is interesting because it doesn’t seem to be a part of the Undercity or a place that is extremely important to the Black aligned faction of Kamigawa.



However, it is at least an important place that is swamp-like and the home of things like nezumi and O-bakemono(which are categorized as ogres in MTG), and those creature types are heavily

aligned with Black. Plus it's where Kokusho, the Evening Star, used to hang out(which is probably where the "Abandoned Mire" epithet comes from, considering that there is no longer a dragon spirit watching over it), so it's definitely an important place and it makes sense that they would choose it as a reference to previous Kamigawa.

Kokusho, the Evening Star

4  



Legendary Creature — Dragon Spirit



Flying

When Kokusho, the Evening Star dies, each opponent loses 5 life. You gain life equal to the life lost this way.

The fall of the evening star never heralds a gentle dawn.

5/5

Now Takenuma, Abandoned Mire, has the ability to add 1 Black mana to your mana pool and its channel ability allows you to discard the card from your hand in order to put the top three cards from your library into your graveyard before returning a creature or planeswalker from your graveyard to your hand, and of course, the ability cost 1 less generic mana to activate for each legendary creature you control.



Its ability to mill and resurrect a creature or planeswalker could easily just be because graveyard recursion and mill are both extremely common abilities in Black and flavorwise I don't doubt that there aren't a noticeable number of Black aligned wizards and beings that would probably be willing to resurrect the dead for any number of reasons. I suppose I should also mention that Takenuma has a strong connection to Shizo.



Shizo, Death's Storehouse



Legendary Land



: Add  to your mana pool.

, : Target legendary creature gains fear until end of turn.

Centuries ago, Shizo was a verdant field of wildflowers. After 891 samurai died in a single battle on its grasses, it became a haunted moor.

 John Matson

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For those who don't know, Shizo is a place on Kamigawa in which two great daimyo fought each other for nothing more than greed and ambition. After 891 samurai died in a single, and extremely dishonorable, battle the meadow where the battle had taken place became a forbidden mire full of mummified corpses in the mud. It is said that the blood of these dead warriors ended up flowing into a neighboring bamboo forest and turned it into a bog that would eventually be called Takenuma. It is also said to be the reason for why the swamp is covered in perpetual dusk and why so many nezumi hang out there, because apparently only nezumi gangs willingly live in its darkness. So what I am saying is that the graveyard recursion could be a reference to Shizo.

Closing

Well, that is all for now. The question for this article is who is your favorite member of the Reckoners? Next time I'll talk about the Asari Uprisers so I'll hopefully see you in a week if not 2-3 months. The question I will leave you with is who is your favorite Reckoner or which Black card from NEO is your favorite and why? Have a nice day.

Happily Ever After

2 



Enchantment



When Happily Ever After enters the battlefield, each player gains 5 life and draws a card.

At the beginning of your upkeep, if there are five colors among permanents you control, there are six or more card types among permanents you control and/or cards in your graveyard, and your life total is greater than or equal to your starting life total, you win the game.



