

Chandra, Dressed to Kill - A Magic the Gathering Card Review

With the release of the Innistrad: Crimson Vow set, Magic the Gathering fans were excited to see the return of the ever-popular planeswalker Chandra Nalaar to a regular Magic set for the first time since War of the Spark. She did make appearances in both Core Set 2020 and Core Set 2021, but the wedding crasher Chandra, Dressed to Kill isn't just a really pretty card, she looks to also be extremely playable. This Chandra planeswalker has a mana value of just three and comes into play with a respectable amount of three loyalty counters. So, what can you do with her rather modest loyalty?

Her first plus loyalty counter ability is very solid, allowing you to both add a Red mana to your pool and deal one damage up to one target player or planeswalker. That's solid enough to start, but she has a second plus loyalty ability, too. Chandra, Dressed to Kill's second ability exiles the top card of your library, and if it's Red, you may cast it on that turn. Unfortunately, you can't play lands this way, technically even Mountains. It also means that her ability is nearly useless outside of a Mono-Red deck or a deck that happens to play non-land cards with only Red mana in their casting costs.

Chandra, Dressed to Kill's ultimate loyalty ability, which costs the subtraction of a significant but reasonable total of seven counters, is also only good in a deck with nearly exclusively Red casting costs. This ability exiles the top five cards of your library, and you may cast Red spells from among them during that turn. But, the second half of the ability is where this Chandra suddenly becomes a lot more powerful: you also gain an emblem! This emblem says:

Whenever you cast a red spell, this emblem deals X damage to any target, where X is the amount of mana spent to cast that spell.

This is a pretty devastating emblem. While it's probably not at all the best Chandra emblem we've ever seen, and it's narrowly limited to Red spells, it's pretty powerful. Overall, three mana for this Red planeswalker makes for a particularly potent source of card advantage, plus one of her plus one abilities actually produces mana *and* pings for damage.

It doesn't hurt that the art on the borderless version of Chandra, Dressed to Kill is absolutely gorgeous, as she wore literally the hottest dress to Olivia Voldaren's wedding to Edgar Markov. In fact, the borderless art for this Chandra planeswalker has received overwhelming positive reception. While the regular set art is much more cartoonish, it perfectly encapsulates the fact that Chandra truly is on fire during the events of Crimson Vow. It's certainly one of the lesser pieces of art we've seen on a Chandra card, though.

The main issue with this Innistrad: Crimson Vow planeswalker is she really only fits into Mono-Red decks. Of course, there are possibilities of decks where you could play multicolored cards that contain Red mana in their casting costs, which would also be hit by her ability. The upside is that you can easily play four copies of a three-mana planeswalker, especially one who can impact the game as soon as she comes down. While she doesn't directly affect the board, she does essentially mana ramp you and draw you cards. That's a very efficient three-mana walker if I've ever seen one.

The card advantage of this Chandra planeswalker just seems too useful to pass up, although this is not the first Chandra planeswalker to serve as a card advantage engine. Chandra, Torch of Defiance still is strictly better, especially as she has no color restriction on the exiled card you can cast. Even Chandra, Fire Artisan from War of the Spark, a Chandra incarnation we don't really hear much about, does something similar. Where our Dressed to Kill Chandra may prove more efficient is that she both costs

less mana (three vs four) and like Torch of Defiance helps pay for herself by generating mana with a positive loyalty ability.

It's also extremely important to take into account that in formats such as Modern, you can play *both* Chandra, Dressed to Kill and Chandra, Torch of Defiance (and/or Fire Artisan) in the same deck at the same time. We've seen fun Chandra tribal decks work in the past, especially led by the sole Chandra Legendary Creature in Fire of Kaladesh. Also, keep in mind that a planeswalker that can ramp you on turn three versus turn four is a significant tempo difference, even if the four-mana planeswalker rewards you with two mana and not just one.

Chandra, Dressed to Kill is still to come, as we discover through practice whether she is more Torch of Defiance (highly competitive) or Fire Artisan (become relatively forgotten). With borderless artwork like she has in Crimson Vow, she at least deserves a chance to be more than just a gorgeous fashion statement and wedding crasher. On paper, it seemed this Chandra would be a very playable and exciting planeswalker card to cast.

In practice, Chandra, Dressed to Kill indeed showed up in several Mono-Red decks in Standard, including the Mono-Red Aggro deck led by Goldspan Dragon and Manaform Hellkite. But, interestingly enough, the Chandra planeswalker from Crimson Vow made even more waves in Mono-Red Modern decks. There are mid-range Red decks in Modern that play the long game with Chalice of the Void and Fury making it much more of a tempo deck. Paired with Chandra, Fire Artisan, Dressed to Kill even benefits from the deck playing Chandra's Regulator, copying both planeswalkers' already potent loyalty abilities. Clearly, our wedding crasher's strengths are not to be underestimated even in a fast, highly-developed competitive format such as Modern!

Of course, my favorite place to watch cards truly shine is in the Commander format, and Chandra, Dressed to Kill may be efficient enough to see a substantial amount of play in the format. There are plenty of strong mono-Red Commander decks, and other multi-color Commanders willing to sacrifice playing mono-colored cards that aren't red may benefit from building her into their strategy.

While new cards are often notoriously slow to find homes in existing Commander decks, Chandra, Dressed to Kill has seemingly been shut out of many potential homes. It's possible that this is one Chandra planeswalker that proves better in traditional competitive 60-card Magic than in 100-card Commander. But, time will tell if this three mana walker simply hasn't found its best home in the Elder Dragon Highlander format.

What do you think of Chandra, Dressed to Kill?

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