

# How Good is the Death's Encroach Event Deck from Avacyn Restored?

Death's Encroach is one of two Magic the Gathering Event Decks released to support the Avacyn Restored set. These are 60-card Constructed decks which come along with a 15-card sideboard, and were ready to be taken to a local Standard tournament at the time right out of the box. Compared to the other Event Deck released for the Avacyn Restored deck, the rather pedestrian Humanity's Vengeance deck, this deck is significantly more aggressive, with several solid ways to deal damage quickly.

While the White/Blue Humanity's Vengeance was very dependent on its Soulbond mechanic, the mono-Black Zombie focused Death's Encroach is much more straightforward. Let's take a look at this Zombie deck list:

## **Creatures**

- 1 Cemetery Reaper
- 2 Crypt Creeper
- 4 Diregraf Ghoul
- 1 Gernalf's Messenger
- 3 Ghoulraiser
- 1 Gloom Surgeon
- 1 Gravecrawler
- 4 Highborn Ghoul
- 4 Skinrender

## **Non-Creature Spells**

- 3 Altar's Reap
- 3 Despise
- 2 Dismember
- 2 Doom Blade
- 3 Go for the Throat
- 2 Lashwrithe

## **Lands**

- 24 Swamp

## How Good are the Creatures in the Death's Encroach Event Deck?

The monster line-up is nothing but Zombies. With the exception of Gloom Surgeon, these were all Constructed playable cards when this deck was printed. My primary issue with Gloom Surgeon is, despite being indestructible, having to exile a card from the top of your library for each point of combat damage he would take isn't really worth his mediocre 2/1 body. You would be much better off with another copy of Gravecrawler instead of him. Heck, Gravecrawler is still playable in the year 2022, never mind 2012!

Still, Gloom Surgeon is a better card than he appears on the surface. He'd actually stick around Standard well into 2013 in a variety of decks including Rakdos Aggro, Esper Control, Jund Midrange, and even Zombie Pod. So, while I don't personally care for the creature, and he hasn't seen competitive play since leaving Standard, Gloom Surgeon was a perfectly fine creature in his heyday.

Crypt Creeper is interesting in that he can exile a card from a graveyard, preventing possible flashback or other sorts of recursion. This actually was a reprint from all the way back in 2002, when it was a Limited All-Star. By 2012, it was actually seeing play once again in top-tier Standard Zombie deck sideboards. Again you'd be better off with just two more copies of Gravecrawler, but if you have to go with what's in the deck, these are cards worth having at your disposal.

Gerald's Messenger is a very good card, and definitely a card to acquire more copies to play if you want to upgrade this deck with any real aspirations of competing for a top spot in a tournament. Still, the fact that it's in the same Event Deck as Gravecrawler makes this deck worthwhile to pick up, even a decade after its release.

Cemetery Reaper is yet another familiar Zombie staple. He's a very good lord card for the deck, giving all other Zombies you control +1/+1. The Reaper also has a tap ability for 2B (two generic and one Black mana) to remove a creature from any graveyard, while also giving you a 2/2 zombie; this is essentially a 3/3 Zombie with the Reaper in play. While Cemetery Reaper has been outclassed by better Zombie lords since 2012, this was still one of the best Zombie cards around in 2012.

Besides having three very good rares in Gravecrawler, Gerald's Messenger, and Cemetery Reaper, your real heavy hitters in this deck (if you can call them that) are Highborn Ghoul, Diregraf Ghoul, and Skinrender. Highborn Ghoul has Intimidate, which makes it a problem for most decks out there to handle, as it can only be blocked by other Black creatures and artifact creatures. It was a common sight for many competitive Zombie decks at the time.

Diregraf Ghoul is a 2/2 for a single Black mana, and its only drawback is that it comes into play tapped. But, considering how ahead of the mana curve you can be after playing two or three of these guys, that drawback doesn't matter. Like Highborn Ghoul, it was a staple in 2010's

Zombie decks, but unlike Highborn Ghoul, this Ghoul still sees play into 2022 in Pioneer (plus Historic on Magic Arena).

Skinrender, while just a 3/3 for 4 mana, has the ability to put 3 -1/-1 counters on a target creature when it enters the battlefield. The fact that it does its damage with counters and not simply giving a creature -3/-3 is very important for this deck, as that downsizing is much more permanent. Skinrender can literally render bigger threats into much smaller manageable nuisances. It was also a Zombie deck staple of the time, and thanks to its ability to neutralize or even eliminate creatures when coming into play, Skinrender continued to see play into the early days of Modern. Even in 2022, Skinrender still sees significant play in EDH!

The last creature in the main deck is Ghoulraiser, of which we have three copies. It's the only Zombie in the deck which didn't see any competitive play at the time, although it eventually worked its way into top Pauper decks being only a common. By no means is it a bad card. It's only three mana to cast (one generic and two Black) and a 2/2 body with a good enter the battlefield ability. When it comes into play, you get a random Zombie back from your graveyard.

While the random element is annoying, if you've already cast your Gravecrawler (either from your hand or your graveyard) you're going to get back something useful. Obviously, this makes getting back your single copy of Gerialf's Messenger or Cemetery Reaper back much more easily. For an out of the box Constructed deck, you can understand why these were included. They're also the first creature to go if you acquire more copies of Gravecrawler, Messenger, and Reaper.

## How Good are the Non-Creature Spells in Death's Encroach?

The removal package is fairly broad for an Event Deck, with two copies of Doom Blade, three copies of Go for the Throat, and two copies of Dismember all in the main deck. Notably, Go for the Throat re-entered Standard in 2022 with plenty of use. Dismember is still one of the best removal cards in Modern, too.

You also have three copies of Despise for hand control. While it's no Thoughtseize, for a ready-made deck, you can dismantle an opposing control or combo deck fairly easily with this one-mana discard spell. Another interesting inclusion is Altar's Reap, which for two mana (one generic and one Black) and sacrificing a Zombie, you can draw two cards. This is obviously combos pretty well with Gravecrawler, and is a nice way to get some card draw besides Sign in Blood, which isn't in the deck. While Sign in Blood was certainly preferred at the time, Altar's Reap was still a card that saw play, albeit mostly in decks that revolved more around sacrificing creatures than in pure Zombie tribal decks.

The sleeper in this deck is the two copies of Lashwrithe. It's a very interesting living weapon Equipment that's only good in mono-Black decks. For four generic mana, you get a living weapon with X/X, with X being the number of swamps you have in play. By turn four, you'll likely

have a 4/4 already that can only get bigger. If the Germ token it comes into play equipped onto is destroyed, you can pay 2 black mana to equip it to one of your other creatures. Highborn Ghoul with its Intimidate ability is an excellent choice.

Not only that, Lashwrithe's equip cost has the Phyrexian mana option, meaning you can instead pay two life and one black mana or four life to equip it instead. Considering that life is a resource you can easily afford to use with this deck, this alternate casting cost comes in handy. If you can get both of these Lashwrithe onto the board, your opponent will likely be in trouble.

## How Good is the Sideboard in Death's Encroach?

One of the neat features of Event Decks was that they came with a 15-card sideboard, so that you could take them to a tournament with a chance to have cards to bring in for certain match-ups. Usually, the cards were very specific to the Standard metagame at the time. How is this lot of fifteen cards going to hold up?

- 2 Appetite for Brains
- 2 Crypt Creeper
- 3 Deathmark
- 1 Despise
- 2 Distress
- 1 Ghoulraiser
- 1 Surgical Extraction
- 3 Triumph of Cruelty

The sideboard offers some more hand control in Despise and two copies of Distress, plus Appetite for Brains, which can discard cards with mana values over four. You also get three copies of Deathmark to deal with White or Green creatures that may give you problems. It's highly specific, but a blowout for your opponent if you're facing decks with threats of those colors.

Triumph of Cruelty is an interesting Enchantment card that forces your opponent to discard a card if you control the creature with the highest or tied for the highest power. With three copies of Triumph of Cruelty here, you could potentially have your opponent discard up to three cards a turn during each of your up-keeps. I don't see this being a winning strategy with this deck, but it's an interesting idea. Also, there were decks at the time, [Black-Red Zombie](#) and [Zombie Pod](#), which each had a single copy of Triumph in their sideboard. So, there was some legitimacy for this card being included, although three copies seems a bit much.

There's also a fourth copy of Ghoulraiser, two more Crypt Creepers for graveyard hate, and a Surgical Extraction. In 2022, Surgical Extraction is still one of the best cards in Legacy and Modern for a couple of reasons. First, it costs only one mana, and that cost can also be paid with 2 life instead. While you have to name a specific card for it to discard, you likely already

have hand information with Despise. Plus, it not only discards those cards from the hand, library, or graveyard, but actually removes them from the game entirely into exile! It's pretty neat to see such an Eternal staple shoved into an Event Deck sideboard from 2012! Granted, Extraction has been reprinted so much that it's no longer worth much more than a few dollars, but it's a great card.

Overall, this deck has a much more straightforward plan of attack than its White/Blue Event Deck counterpart. It can cause a lot of damage quickly and has enough removal and recursion to keep a sustained attack. Plus, the sideboard is built to punish Control decks and White/Green decks which rely on big threats to win the game. This deck definitely has more "bang for your buck" than Humanity's Vengeance. Unless you are bent on playing blue/white humans, this Event Deck was always the better investment.

A decade since its release, Death's Encroach can still be found for sale between \$50 and \$75 on TCGPlayer. Sadly, one look at [MTGGoldfish's Death's Encroach Event Deck price history](#) shows that the total value of cards in this deck are now worth less than \$30. If you'd picked up this deck at the time for an MSRP of \$19.99, you're feeling pretty good today.

At the time, many competitive players bought four copies of these decks, so they could immediately have full playsets of Gravecrawler, Geralf's Messenger, Cemetery Reaper, and Surgical Extraction, plus two playsets of Dismember. Heck, even Gloom Surgeon saw play at the time, albeit rarely in proper Zombie decks.

If you did buy four decks at the time and still own the cards, your \$80 investment today would look like \$100 to \$120. You could even sell the sealed decks or the exact same deck lists for a bit more each if you cared enough. Overall, for a deck that was released in 2012, it's held up extremely well. [DraftSim even ranks Death's Encroach 6<sup>th</sup> out of all 27 Event Decks ever made.](#) While there isn't one big money card in the deck, as a whole, it's still a fun deck to play years later!