

CZ470: BACKGROUND BREAKDOWN

- 1) UPKEEP STEP
 - 2) MAIN TOPIC
 - 3) TO THE LISTENERS
 - 4) THE END STEP
 - 5) CLEAN-UP PHASE
-

- 1) INTRO JIMMY & JLK

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Commander Legends: Baldur's Gate brings us a new partner-variant. A little bit similar to Friends Forever from the Stranger Things SecretLair, it's the "Background" Commanders. Meant to feel like D&D character creation. Pick a legendary creature, pick a background for it, mix and match for a huge variety of effects. There around 30 of each, so we're talking about nearly a thousand possible combinations of different cards that can now live in your command zone. That's gonna give us a lot to cover, BUT FIRST:

****CHANNEL FIREBALL** **ULTRAPRO #1** **PATREON: MATT HOLCOMB ****

****BEFORE THE STORM - KICKSTARTER****

2) **MAIN TOPIC: BACKGROUND COMMANDERS BALDUR'S GATE**

The new "Background" mechanic in Baldur's Gate is here and there are TONS of possibilities for Commanders! Today we're talking about the mechanic, how it works, and then some of our favorite picks for pairings that interest us.

HOW BACKGROUNDS WORK

Similar to "Friends Forever", Backgrounds are a variant of the "Partner" mechanic, a self-contained ecosystem of mono-colored Commanders that have the text "Choose a Background" allowing you to add a second card to your Command Zone - any of the mono-colored Legendary Enchantments subtype of "Background".

- A legendary creature must have "Choose a Background" in its rules text to be eligible to have a background. You cannot play two creatures with Choose a Background as your Commander, nor can you have two backgrounds.
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For example let's look at: Jaheira, Friend of the Forest + Inspiring Leader (Token-Go-Wide)

What if instead we pair Jaheira with: Folk Hero (Elf/Human Tribal) or Popular Entertainer ("Goad"-Wide)

Now let's lose Jaheira and pair Popular Entertainer with: Alora, Merry Thief (Unblockable/Ninja maybe?)

You can see how this allows you to create all types of different strategies by mashing together the text from two cards and forming a two color combinations (note: you can also do a mono-combination).

BACKGROUND RULES

- Some cards, usually Backgrounds themselves, refer to "Commander creatures." Those don't refer to a Background enchantment that is a Commander (unless it somehow becomes a creature).
- Backgrounds ARE one of your Commanders. If a card refers to your Commander, it applies to both the legendary creature and the Background enchantment.
- You must cast the Background from the Command Zone to have its effects happen - it is not like Eminence where it triggers from the Command Zone.
- You pay Commander tax on your Backgrounds, just like you on creature Commanders.
- Command Beacon can fetch either the legendary creature or the legendary Background.
- Anything that cares about whether you control your Commander (Jeska's Will, etc) will be satisfied if you control one or both of them
- Cards like Command Tower can add mana of either of your commander's color identities.
- Fury Storm counts how many times you've cast both Creature + Background combined.
- Both cards count towards your 100 card total. So you will have a 98 card deck.
- Basically they work exactly like Partners. One just happens to be an enchantment.
- You can play Backgrounds in any Commander deck - and there are lots of Backgrounds that have similar themes to existing deck archetypes. We will cover more on this later and if it's worth it.

WHY NOT PARTNER?

This is very similar to Partner and Partner-With and Friends Forever. Why don't they just make more of those? Why keep designing completely new mechanics?

- Flavor reasons
- Enclosed ecosystems are much safer, less likely to be broken.

960 POSSIBLE COMBINATIONS

Most sets these days have a lot of new Legends but this mechanic creates an INSANE amount of new options, as far as playable new strategies from your Command Zone.

32x Legendary Creatures with "Choose a Background"

30x Legendary Enchantment Backgrounds

= 960 possible combinations. LOTS of opportunity to create unique decks.

Obviously, there's no way we can cover this in one podcast episode (or even in 10 episodes!), so what we're going to do now is just talk about 2-3 cool Background combinations that caught each of our eye:

DURNAN OF THE YAWNING PORTAL + PASSIONATE ARCHAEOLOGIST

UNDAUNTED CREATURES You can cast huge things pretty quickly in this deck, so go for the large damage for Passionate Archaeologist and also value spells: Cascade: Apex Devastator, Annoyed Altisaur, Aurora Phoenix; Wulfgar of Icewind Dale (Double trigger);

EXTRA EXILE SYNERGIES Plenty more ways to get this trigger off: Etali, Primal Storm; Laelia, the Blade Reforged; You Find Some Prisoners; Maybe you play Wand of Wonder in this deck...

EXTRA COMBAT + HASTE (Creature + Extra combat!!) Combat Celebrant; Port Razer; Scourge of the Throne; Karlach, Fury of Avernus; (Haste): Urabrask the Hidden; Mass Hysteria / Concordant Crossroads;

MIDROLL BREAK

WILSON, REFINED GRIZZLY

Look, Wilson might be one of the best cards ever printed in Magic.

WILSON, REFINED GRIZZLY + CULTIST OF THE ABSOLUTE

SACRIFICE TOKEN VOLTRON Goal is to get out as many Black Green aristocrats-y value-engines and get your Commander to just smack em a bunch in the air. Callous Bloodmage; Pest Infestation;

Ophiomancer; Izoni, Thousand-Eyed; Beledros Witherbloom; Woe Strider; Protean Hulk; Endrek Sahr;

TOKEN ADVANTAGES Tend the Pests; Village Rites; Plumb the Forbidden; Deadly Dispute

WILSON, REFINED GRIZZLY + RAISED BY GIANTS

HE'S A 10/10!!! Double the power: Unnatural Growth; God Eternal Rhonas; Nylea's Colossus; Fireshrieker; Double the fun: Colossus Hammer; Eldrazi Conscription; Get to 21: Ancient Animus; Forgotten Ancient; Biogenic Upgrade; Blessings of Nature; Other fun things: Witch's Clinic;

ENCHANTRESS You could take this the Enchantress route by playing all of them in Green (Argothian Enchantress, Eidolon of Blossoms, Setessan Champion; Enchantress's Presence.) and then buff up /use the bear with Boar Umbra; Fight Rigging; Predatory Hunger; Mark of Sakiko.

HAUNTED ONE

Does two cool things 1) Undying - GY recursion, aristocrats 2) Untap shenanigans for mass pump.

- Remember this is all tied to tribal synergy though so:

HAUNTED ONE + JAHEIRA

TOKEN TRIBAL Goal is to exploit the undying to make a bunch of tokens that you use for mana until you have enough creatures to attack and then use tap/untap stuff to mass pump: Deep Forest Hermit, Doomed Dissenter; Xathrid Necromancer, Caller of the Claw;

TAP SHENANIGANS Your Commander has to become tapped to get the undying and also the +2/+0 pump. Vehicles (Smuggler's Copter, Mobile Garrison); Springleaf Drum, Cryptic Gateway;

- Also Untap→ Umbral Mantle, Thornbite Staff

EXPLOIT UNDYING Devoted Druid (needs haste→Thousand-Year Elixir), Banewhip Punisher; Yawgmoth, Thran Physician; Cauldron of Souls, Retribution of the Ancients

HAUNTED ONE + VOLO

This gives you access to Blue and Wizards. But really this gives you better access to the "All Tribes/Changelings" build.

“ALL TRIBES” Cheap Changelings→Amoeboid Changeling, Mothdust Changeling,

- True goal is to have Maskwood Nexus or Arcane Adaptation out (You have great tutors in black and artifact tutors in blue) and then you can loop the crazy stuff like Kokusho/Gray Merchant, Agent of Treachery, Peregrine Drake, (Persist) Glen Elendra Archmage, Puppeteer Clique; Aetherborn Marauder, Walking Ballista (but Haunted One is not like Mikaeus, it’s just “until end of turn”)

UNTAP SHENANIGANS Another thing blue gives you is more/better ways to untap your Commander. Namely- Intruder Alarm (Still need a Smuggler’s Copter or something), Aphetto Alchemist (also untap Volos’ Book), Freed From the Real/Pemmin’s Aura; even gives you more ways to TAP Volo→Azami, Lady of Scrolls, Opposition.

VHAL + CLAN CRAFTER

JLK’s deck for Game Knights. This combo seems great because Vhal’s mana can be spent to activate the Clan Crafter ability and it also pumps Vhal, so she taps for more mana next time.

MANA FILTERING Basalt Monolith, Doubling Cube; (Lands) Cascading Cataracts, Treasure Vault

ARTIFACT-O-CRATS Myr Retriever, Scrap Trawler

OUT OF HAND The Reality Chip, Mystic Forge; Foretell is also good (Depart the Realm/Ravenform); Flashback (Snapcaster Mage, Echo of Eons); Cycling (Nimble Obstructionist, Shark Typhoon)); Channel (Otawara, Soaring City); Madness (Welcome to the Fold)

PUMP TOUGHNESS Cathar’s Shield, Commander’s Plate

ACTIVATED ABILITIES Memnarch, Urza, Lord High Artificer; Animation Module, War Barge

UNTAPPERS Thousand-Year Elixir, (new card) Patriar’s Seal, Minamo, School at Water’s Edge; Staff of Domination

BACKGROUNDS IN THE 99?

Are there any backgrounds that seem good enough to run inside deck and not in the command zone?

- Dungeon Delver - There aren’t a lot of dungeon decks but this seems efficient enough to warrant a slot.
- Candlekeep Sage - Brago would draw two cards each time he bounces himself
- Folk Hero - In a dedicated Tribal deck, the rate is good. If you draw 3 cards in a game you’re fine. More and you’re very happy.
- Guild Artisan - Your deck will have to want to attack with its Commander. How many triggers do you need to get to be happy with this card? 2? 3? More?
- Shameless Charlatan - if you have a lot of creatures that you want to copy in your meta or even your own deck, this seems like an interesting effect - Mirage Mirror similarities - BUT you will not be able to change it back to the original...

Be Cautious: Remember that these only work if your Commander is also on the battlefield. For the most part, these will not be worth it in the 99 of a deck for optimization, but there are still fun ways to integrate them since they cover a wide range of strategies.

BACKGROUNDS - FINAL THOUGHTS

So, what do we think of this mechanic? Is it powerful? Do we like it?

Downsides:

- An extra card in your “opening hand” is inherently powerful
- Enchantment starting in the command zone is a little bit scary
 - Good for Enchantress - most difficult card type to remove.
 - (backgrounds only give your Commander an extra ability. None are “standalone”)

Upsides:

- Lots of opportunity for customization, unique deck builds and personal expression.
- It seems like they were very careful in design.. Everything is only one color. Most of it is narrow.

Question: Do we hope they bring back the mechanic again someday? Or should it be a different word so it's within its own ecosystem?

3) TO THE LISTENERS:

What new background pairing are you most excited to build? What sweet tech do you have for our community? Tell us in the comments below.

****CHANNELFIREBALL CALL-OUT #2****

****ULTRA PRO #2****

4) THE END STEP:

Something cool outside the world of Magic. Twelve Carat Toothache!!!

5) CLEAN-UP STEP

Big thanks to our amazing team here at The Command Zone! **Damen Lenz, Shauna Gilles, Arthur Meadowcroft, Ashlen Rose, Ladee Danger, Manson Leung, Craig Blanchette, Josh Murphy, Jake Boss, Patrick Nan, Jordan Pridgen, Sam Waldow, Gaurav Gulati, Truc Thai, Jamie Block, Mitch Trafford, and Evan Limberger.**

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