



Attack of the Quirky Common

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

[Three weeks ago](#), I announced the end of the ["Building Blocks" series](#) because of what I perceived as a lack of interest. A couple passionate folks wrote in defense of Building Blocks. A few others wrote to pontificate on why interest might be low, confirming some of my own thoughts. Still no negative mail on the topic, but still relatively little of it. In the end, I remained unconvinced that Building Blocks is a really cool idea. Sorry to those of you who wanted to see it continue.

The result is that I'm missing a regular feature after each set release. Since a new set usually sends people (including me) into a deckbuilding frenzy, it feels appropriate to have some House of Cards series you can expect after each set. Should I do a [Deck Challenge](#) after each release? Highlight my favorite card? A Top 5 list? I'll continue to talk to Aaron the Editor about it, but if you have ideas for something intriguing, please let me know.

Onward to Commons Week! Today I discuss the challenging practice of building a deck around a common card.

Usually when you think of building a deck around a single card, that card is rare. In fact, I think building around a card almost implies rarity. The reasons for this implication speaks partly to [why cards are rare](#) in the first place; rare cards tend to be complex, special, and splashy -- often big in either size or effect. Sometimes people like me take a "bad" rare and challenge ourselves to build around it because there is something particularly fun about it being both bad and rare. "Bad" commons are not only bad, they're kind of boring.

A few uncommons from each set usually stand up as intriguing enough to build a deck around. [Gorilla Titan](#) is a good example, as is [Soulcatcher's Aerie](#). Because they stand in the purgatory between common and rare, it makes sense that some uncommons capture our imaginations with their quirkiness or their potential power just like rares usually do.

Not so with commons. Commons are the workhorses of most decks. They can be the reason a deck is absurdly powerful, a la [Rancor](#). They can provide the engine on which other cards work, a la [Wild Mongrel](#). They usually provide the backbone of utility, a la [Disenchant](#). Commons are essential to most decks.

But common cards are usually *not* the centerpieces of decks. An elf deck's only rares might be [Elvish Champion](#) and [Coat of Arms](#), but those, not the hordes of common elves, are the "feature" cards of the deck. Kind of sad, really. Common cards should form a workers' union.

Sometimes a common is just silly enough to inspire a deck. As examples of this phenomena, below are four *Judgment* commons I think hold great potential as a deck's centerpiece. Seeing my rationale will, hopefully, lead you to some of your own common-based ideas.

Let me be clear: These are not the commons I consider generally useful -- such as [Benevolent Bodyguard](#) and [Ray of Revelation](#) -- and they are certainly not the most powerful commons in the set. Instead, they suggest decks that rely on their particular function or abilities.

All of the decks below include no rares. I have made ["lite" decks](#) for two reasons: First, you constantly request easy-to-afford deck ideas, and I want to allow both beginning and returning players a chance to think creatively about deckbuilding. Second, since rares are usually the focus of deckbuilding, they aren't welcome in our common-centric week. Go home, [Solitary Confinement](#), and come back another day.

Arcane Teachings

[Arcane Teachings](#) has a peculiar blend of abilities. On one hand, it makes a creature huge and better able to attack with a [Giant Strength](#)-like effect. On the other hand, it turns a creature into a [Prodigal Sorcerer](#) -- keeping it from attacking so that it can "ping" an opponent or creature for one point of damage. It is also the only red card I can remember with a scholar in its art.



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Two different kinds of decks come to mind using **Arcane Teachings**. The first is a white/red deck that uses creatures that don't tap to attack, like **Ardent Militia** and **Skyshrroud Falcon**. Heck, you can even use **Tahngarth, Talruum Hero** if you are feeling extravagant. **Arcane Teachings** makes the creatures in a deck like this particularly scary, better able to attack, block, and perform combat tricks.

The second, and slightly weirder, idea is to use **Arcane Teachings** in a wall deck. Who cares if your walls can't attack? The Teachings make your walls more impenetrable and allow you to inflict **Death By Pinging**. This idea becomes even more alluring if the deck is blue/red and can also use **Quicksilver Dagger**:

Death By Pinging <i>Lite!</i>		
Arcane Teachings deck		
		
Main Deck 60 cards		
13 Island	4 Glacial Wall	4 Fire/Ice
10 Mountain	4 Pitchstone Wall	4 Counterspell
23 lands	4 Wall of Air	4 Arcane Teachings
	4 Flametongue Kavu	4 Quicksilver Dagger
	16 creatures	3 Repulse
		2 Blaze
		21 other spells

Book Burning

Book Burning allows you to either immediately reach threshold or punch your opponent in the face, his choice. As with all of the "punisher" cards, the trick with using **Book Burning** is to make both choices equally unpleasant. Thus a deck with the ability to both deal lots of damage and that gets better with cards in the graveyard practically screams for **Book Burning**.

Well, okay, the deck doesn't *actually* scream... that would be freaky.

Mystic Fire <i>Lite!</i>		
Book Burning deck		
		
Main Deck 60 cards		
10 Plains	4 Dega Disciple	4 Firebolt
6 Mountain	4 Mystic Penitent	4 Book Burning
4 Barbarian Ring	4 Mystic Visionary	4 Volcanic Hammer
20 lands	4 Mystic Zealot	4 Browbeat
	4 Pardic Arsonist	4 Battle Screech
	20 creatures	20 other spells

Wormfang Drake

I am of the opinion that the new **Wormfang** creatures are all fascinating in different ways. I see **Wormfang Behemoth** and **Wormfang Newt** in a quick-hitting beatdown deck. **Wormfang Crab** wants me to try and revive mono-blue control. **Wormfang Turtle** has really spiffy art. **Wormfang Manta** makes my head hurt with odd, turn-adding possibilities.

And **Wormfang Drake**, most exciting of all, belongs in a deck with lots of comes-into-play creatures. As with all cards that interact well with comes-into-play abilities, you can head in lots of different directions with a deck. A blue/white lifegain deck could use spells like **Venerable Monk** and **Staunch Defenders**. A blue/green deck might use **Ironshell Beetle**, **Kavu Climber**, and **Wood Elves** in combination with **Phantom** creatures. Whatever

combination you choose, the Drake provides the unpleasant choice of keeping a 3/4 flier on the board or using a removal spell to give you another creature and effect.

In blue/black, you can try a lot of wacky discard and bounce tricks with something like:

Play It Again, Sam <i>Lite!</i>		
Wormfang Drake deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
10 Island	4 Ravenous Rats	4 Repulse
10 Swamp	4 Sage Owl	4 Recoil
4 Salt Marsh	4 Cavern Harpy	
	4 Phyrexian Rager	8 other spells
24 lands	4 Wormfang Drake	
	4 Gravedigger	
	2 Nightscape Battlemage	
	2 Stormscape Battlemage	
	28 creatures	

Shieldmage Advocate

Several people, upon seeing the new cards from *Judgment*, wrote me about the possibilities of *Megrim* with the new Advocates. An immensely fun idea, their deck ideas usually involved *Megrim*, an Advocate, and some reusable discard effect like *Blazing Specter* or *Disrupting Scepter*. With all of the pieces on the table, you have a way to quickly whittle your opponent's life away.

Only two common Advocates exist: *Nullmage Advocate* and *Shieldmage Advocate*. *Nullmage Advocate* has an effect that is difficult to use every turn (destroying an artifact or enchantment), and returns two cards to an opponent's hand. *Shieldmage Advocate*, on the other hand, returns a single card -- which is easier to force back into a graveyard -- and an effect that can actually be useful on every one of your turns. Thus *Shieldmage Advocate* seems to make the perfect compliment to *Megrim*.

Grim <i>Lite!</i>		
Shieldmage Advocate Deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
15 Swamp	4 Confessor	4 Cremate
9 Plains	4 Ravenous Rats	4 Duress
	4 Shieldmage Advocate	4 Gerrard's Verdict
24 lands	4 Abyssal Specter	4 Megrim
	1 Earsplitting Rats	2 Disenchant
	17 creatures	1 Recover
		19 other spells

Note, too, that you can make a fun Advocates deck along with *Sudden Impact* for another rare-less "lite" deck.

As with all of the kooky stuff I outline here, these cards are only the beginning of possibilities with common-based decks. *Battlefield Scrounger* and *Nantuko Tracer* offer interesting recursive tricks. *Cagemail* is weird and hard to use, almost begging for a deck. *Venomous Vines* could make a fun Extended deck in combination with enchantments like *Despondency* and *Dying Wail*. Every set has funky commons like these... I encourage you to explore them with deck ideas to see what happens.

Have fun!

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