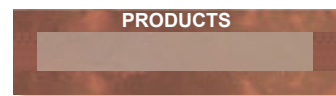


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# Uncommon Deck Incarnations

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House of Cards  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

I love card cycles. Card cycles, such as the *Judgment Wishes*, are like mini-themes embedded in a set. Each card in the cycle tries to capture a single functional mechanic while staying in flavor for its color(s). To me, it's fun to take those cycles and see what kind of decks they make. Like the cards themselves, deck "cycles" have both functional similarities and flavorful differences.

My recent favorite cycle of cards is the Incarnations. *Genesis* and *Glory* are arguably the most powerful of the Incarnations, but they are also slightly less interesting because they don't fill a thematic role. Instead, it is their uncommon counterparts, *Brawn* and *Valor*, that form a cycle along with *Anger*, *Filth*, and *Wonder*.



Let me step back for a moment and smile at the idea behind Incarnations. A creature named *Anger* or *Brawn* with creature type Incarnation is just cool. I understand the need to make cards with flavor, such as *Aboshan's Desire*, but the Incarnations speak volumes to my inner fantasy geek.

When I find a cycle of cards around which I want to make a cycle of decks, I start to get very systematic in my approach to deckbuilding. First, I make one monocolored deck per card. This approach helps me understand how the cards in the cycle are similar in regard to deckbuilding and how each provides its own unique flavor. After that, I start to mix and match the various color combinations to see what happens. Sometimes, if I'm feeling particularly enamored with a cycle, I will make two-color decks for each of the cards before jumping into the mix-and-match stage.

To demonstrate what I'm talking about, what follows below is my exploration of the five uncommon Incarnations. The monocolored decks are slightly more straightforward than those you usually find in this column, because they represent the kind of "testing" I do with new card ideas to see how they work. Doing systematic deckbuilding like this provides the same kind of fruitful information as does playtesting a particular deck. I know of no better way to explore a card's relative worth than to try building a series of decks around it.

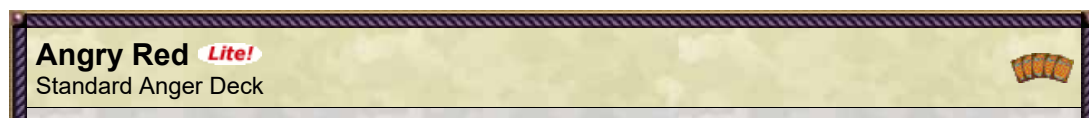
## Anger

I'll start with *Anger*, which feels a little antithetical to my mood. But it's alphabetically appropriate, so I'll go with it.

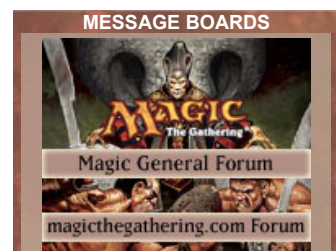
In your hand, *Anger* is strictly worse than *Goblin Chariot* or *Talruum Minotaur*. A 2/2 with haste for 3 is, to put it mildly, a pretty raw deal. Compare it to *Skizzik*, *Suq'Ata Lancer*, *Avalanche Riders*, or *Keldon Champion*, and you start to see its lack of appeal. The good news about *Anger* is that a creature with haste can mess up a lot of math and render bounce a lot less effective.

When *Anger* "becomes" *Fervor*, life gets slightly more interesting. In addition, red isn't lacking for fun cards with discard effects: *Fiery Temper*, *Violent Eruption*, *Reckless Charge*, and *Firebolt* come to mind as cards you don't mind tossing away. With a core complement of *Anger* and madness and flashback cards, red's random discard effects become slightly more bearable.

A rareless "lite" version of an *Anger* deck might look like this:



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Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Barbarian Ring	4 Anger	4 Fiery Temper
20 Mountain	4 Barbarian Bully	4 Firebolt
24 lands	4 Bloodfire Dwarf	4 Violent Eruption
	4 Flametongue Kavu	12 other spells
	4 Minotaur Explorer	
	4 Patchwork Gnomes	
	24 creatures	

With rares, you might want to take a more fattie-esque approach and use cards like **Shivan Dragon**, **Savage Firecat**, **Bloodshot Cyclops**, and so on. You can also try the straight **Balthor the Stout** "Barbarian" deck or the **Dwarven Bloodboiler** "Dwarf" deck. All of these ideas can benefit from a little **Anger**.

## Brawn

**Brawn** is the best (brawnier?) of the Incarnations as a straight-up creature. Although  $3\text{♣}$  for a 3/3 trampler isn't the best stuff that green can muster, it doesn't look completely out of place sitting in your hand. Indeed, usually you have to spend five mana to get a decent green creature with trample these days (**Kavu Titan**, **Gorilla Titan**, **Shivan Wurm**). In addition, a creature with 3 power is a legitimate threat to end the game, meaning your opponent will usually find a way to send **Brawn** to your graveyard.

When **Brawn** becomes a global (for you, anyway) **Primal Rage**, of course, your green fatties start to dominate the board. Green has no problem playing incredibly big monsters, and it loves to pump up those monsters with cards like **Giant Growth**. Add trample, and that horde of fatties is tough to handle. One way to use **Brawn**, then, is to just load up on big, efficient creatures and let them attack with abandon.

Yet green also happens to have the arguably the best madness spells (**Basking Rootwalla** and **Arrogant Wurm**), the best flashback spells (**Call of the Herd**, **Roar of the Wurm**, **Sylvan Might**, **Moment's Peace**), the best threshold spells (**Werebear**, **Nimble Mongoose**, **Krosan Beast**), and the single best self-discard spell ever: **Wild Mongrel**. Why *wouldn't* you try to build a discard-heavy deck?

Brawny Green <i>Lite!</i> Odyssey Block Constructed Brawn deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
2 Centaur Garden	4 Basking Rootwalla	4 Beast Attack
22 Forest	4 Brawn	4 Narcissism
24 lands	4 Druid Lyrist	4 Roar of the Wurm
	4 Phantom Centaur	12 other spells
	4 Werebear	
	4 Wild Mongrel	
	24 creatures	



## Filth

And then there's **Filth**. Poor **Filth**. Not only is swampwalk just a silly ability, the creature itself is strictly worse than **Bog Wraith** and even **Raiding Nightstalker**. Oy. **Filth** is as weak as **Brawn** is strong. This makes some sense--because **Filth** shows up in *Judgment*, green's and white's set--but it's still sad.

**Filth** is so bad there isn't even a global (again, for you) enchantment to mimic its graveyard ability. The best that can be said is that you are able to enchant each and every creature with **Leshrac's Rite**. Um . . . wow?

But take heart, **Filth** enthusiasts. If your friends are slaughtering you with their black-heavy decks, **Filth** might be just the main-deck creature for you to show them who's boss. **Filth** is also fun to use in a deck with **Phantasmal Terrain**, **Shimmering Mirage**, or **Tainted Well**. Sticking with the monoblack focus, **Filth** actually looks worthy of having a deck built around it and **Zombie Trailblazer**. . . .

Filthy Black <i>Lite!</i> Standard Filth deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		

60 cards

3 Cabal Pit	3 Carrion Wurm	4 Addle
18 Swamp	4 Crypt Creeper	4 Chainer's Edict
21 lands	4 Filth	4 Cremate
	4 Grave Defiler	4 Duress
	4 Zombie Trailblazer	4 Zombie Infestation
	19 creatures	20 other spells

Of course, if you're using rares then **Phyrexian Scuta** and **Lord of the Undead** should make an appearance. Heck, **Temp of the Damned** is great fun if you're playing with friends.

## Valor

As a creature, **Valor** is not as good as **Benalish Knight**, **Longbow Archer**, or **Razorfoot Griffin**, just to name a few. We've established that most of the Incarnations outside of the graveyard could be more impressive. I will say, though, that first strike can wreak havoc during creature combat. Throw **Valor** and **Serra Advocate** onto the table and see how many creature-based strategies grind to a halt.

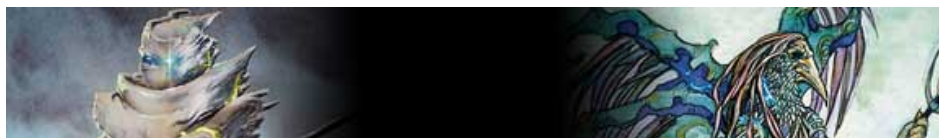
Still, **Knighthood** is generally considered a better defensive enchantment than an offensive one. When all of your creatures have first strike, you can effectively make a super wall on your side of the table. If any of your smaller first-striking creatures try to attack, however, they will probably be destroyed by a larger blocker. If you can find a way to make your creatures large or give them some evasion (flight, protection, and so on), then you can benefit from the defense of **Valor** as you pick away at your opponent.

**Valorous White** *Lite!*  
Odyssey Block Constructed Valor deck



Main Deck 60 cards		
23 Plains	4 Mystic Familiar	4 Battle Screech
23 lands	4 Mystic Zealot	2 Frantic Purification
	4 Patrol Hound	4 Kirtar's Desire
	4 Resilient Wanderer	3 Prismatic Strands
	4 Suntail Hawk	13 other spells
	4 Valor	
	24 creatures	

Of course, rares make a monowhite deck a lot better. Throw **Divine Sacrament**, **Mystic Crusader**, or **Vengeful Dreams** into the mix to improve upon this idea. Make a **Master Apothecary** "Cleric" deck with **Valor** to have the most annoying combat deck in history.



## Wonder

Finally, there is **Wonder**. A 2/2 creature with flying for 3 is horrible, although even **Aven Fisher** is a better deal for the cost. More than haste, trample, swampwalk, and first strike, flying is going to mean that **Wonder** will usually deal some damage before it goes to your graveyard.

Thus it comes as no surprise that, among all the Incarnation effects, **Levitation** is the best enchantment-like effect to have. Many people have already discovered that flying is fun to give Wurm tokens in a green-blue deck. Indeed, with its compliment of card-drawing, card-dumping, counterspells, and **Wonder**, blue is the most attractive color to add to any discard-based strategy.

The problem in a monoblue deck is that most of blue's good creatures already have flying. **Wonder** in a deck with **Air Elemental**, **Wall of Air**, and **Thought Devourer** is a bit redundant. As a result, I've bent the rare-less rule to make a "Merfolk" deck.

**Wondrous Blue**  
Standard Wonder deck



Main Deck 60 cards		
2 Cephalid Coliseum	4 Coral Merfolk	4 Aether Burst
18 Island	4 Lord of Atlantis	2 Circular Logic

20 lands	4 <b>Merfolk Looter</b>	2 <b>Compulsion</b>
	4 <b>Vodalian Merchant</b>	4 <b>Counterspell</b>
	4 <b>Wonder</b>	4 <b>Deep Analysis</b>
		4 <b>Obsessive Search</b>
20 creatures		20 other spells

For giggles, a "Cephalid" deck is also loads of fun using **Wonder**; **Aboshan**, **Cephalid Emperor**; **Cephalid Looter**; **Cephalid Broker**; **Cephalid Retainer**, and so on.

So ends a monocolour view of the uncommon Incarnations. I hope that this approach begins to demonstrate the ways in which the Incarnations are functionally similar yet distinct in flavor. You can try your own monocolour ideas, or use what I have here as a platform for making multicolour decks. Just to show you some wacky directions you can take things, I've included some multicolour deck ideas below.

<b>Three-Color Incarnation</b>		
Odyssey Block Constructed Incarnation deck		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
18 <b>Forest</b>	4 <b>Anger</b>	4 <b>Muscle Burst</b>
3 <b>Island</b>	4 <b>Brawn</b>	4 <b>Rites of Spring</b>
3 <b>Mountain</b>	4 <b>Diligent Farmhand</b>	
	4 <b>Druid Lyrist</b>	8 other spells
24 lands	4 <b>Genesis</b>	
	4 <b>Wild Mongrel</b>	
	4 <b>Wonder</b>	
	28 creatures	

<b>Four-Color Incarnation</b>		
Standard Incarnation deck		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
18 <b>Forest</b>	3 <b>Anger</b>	2 <b>Chromatic Sphere</b>
1 <b>Island</b>	4 <b>Birds of Paradise</b>	3 <b>Coat of Arms</b>
1 <b>Mountain</b>	4 <b>Brawn</b>	2 <b>Harrow</b>
1 <b>Plains</b>	4 <b>Elvish Lyrist</b>	4 <b>Rampant Growth</b>
	3 <b>Genesis</b>	11 other spells
21 lands	1 <b>Glory</b>	
	2 <b>Valor</b>	
	4 <b>Wild Mongrel</b>	
	3 <b>Wonder</b>	
	28 creatures	

<b>"Super-Monger" (Five-Color Incarnation)</b>		
Standard Incarnation deck		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		
8 <b>Forest</b>	1 <b>Anger</b>	4 <b>Buried Alive</b>
1 <b>Island</b>	4 <b>Birds of Paradise</b>	4 <b>Pernicious Deed</b>
4 <b>Llanowar Wastes</b>	2 <b>Brawn</b>	4 <b>Rampant Growth</b>
1 <b>Mountain</b>	3 <b>Genesis</b>	12 other spells
1 <b>Plains</b>	4 <b>Ravenous Rats</b>	
7 <b>Swamp</b>	4 <b>Spiritmonger</b>	
2 <b>Tainted Wood</b>	1 <b>Valor</b>	
	4 <b>Wild Mongrel</b>	
24 lands	1 <b>Wonder</b>	
	24 creatures	

As a bonus section, I have two notes about the [Transcendence article](#) from Life Gain Week. I was apparently correct about the Cult of **Transcendence**, because you all *flooded* me with mail on the subject.

First, apparently **Transcendence** is indeed too complex for my wee little brain. I actually misinterpreted how the thing works, the evidence of which showed up most glaringly in my **Soulgourger Orgg** example. It's too complicated to go into here, but the article should be correct now. Sorry for any confusion reading the article caused before the changes were made. If you see anything that still doesn't look right, email Aaron at [editor@wizards.com](mailto:editor@wizards.com). In probably about four months of editing, we'll collectively have something that approximates an accurate view of **Transcendence**. Ouch, my head hurts.

Second, Viparas wrote me to note how unnecessarily creature-light my **Transcendence** decks were. Especially when using "the traditional approach" he argued that a black/white beatdown deck could be lots of fun, even sometimes targeting *yourself* with **Laquatus's Champion**. I agree, so here is a bonus deck to make up for that week's errors...

### Ode to Viparas

(Living Dangerously) 

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

12 Swamp 4 Caves of Koilos 4 City of Brass 4 Tainted Field <hr/> 24 lands	4 Foul Imp 4 Putrid Warrior 4 Phyrexian Rager 4 Laquatus's Champion 2 Treacherous Vampire <hr/> 18 creatures	4 Aura Blast 4 Disenchant 4 Phyrexian Arena 4 Transcendence 2 Infernal Contract <hr/> 18 other spells
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Sure, you could use cards like **Death Grasp** or **Gerrard's Verdict**, but you might as well rely heavily on **Transcendence** to save you.

Next week: The quest for the **Mirari**.

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